Chapter 19
Literacy Practices for Peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT

The effects of the pandemic, natural disasters, wars, and economic distress at the turn of the second decade of the 20th century are a call to strengthen peace education around the world. In this chapter, the authors argue that intentional social practices of critical literacies offer opportunities for peacebuilding, understood as a dynamic process which includes the development of harmony in different life dimensions. After providing an overview of peace research and peace education in the Colombian context, the authors provide a conceptualization of critical literacy and its relation to peacebuilding. Finally, the chapter offers a set of practical strategies to promote peacebuilding through critical literacies based on research experiences across the Americas. The strategies include the use of children's literature to understand social reality and to develop empathy, critical literacies to develop critical intercultural awareness, and connecting with families and communities through literacy practices to make peace.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has widened inequality gaps around the globe (Schleicher, 2020). Increased poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, and lack of access to quality education have generally been considered as sources of direct and structural violence in different contexts around the world. Colombia is not the exception. After the peace agreement between the government and the FARC-EP guerilla group in 2016, there was a period of lower criminality and a sense of hope (Rico & Barreto, 2022). However, in the last two years, with the pandemic and the lack of governmental commitment with the implementation of the peace agreement, the effects of the armed conflict and structural violence have deepened (ACAPS, 2022). This renewed conflict dynamics represent a backlash in the country's search for durable peace, understood not only as the absence of direct violence, but also as the realization of a more just society, with equity, empathy, and solidarity. Peace starts in the micro interactions among people and the comprehension of how violence, in its multifaceted dimensions, operates to make social transformation possible. Since "reading the word is reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987), in this chapter, we make the connection between critical literacy and peacebuilding. We argue that a peacebuilding pedagogy needs to consider the central role of dialogue and the power of literacy to foster critical citizenship from an early age. We asked, why and how does critical literacy promote peacebuilding? What literacy practices foster peacebuilding?

We will first provide an overview of peace and peace research. Second, we discuss Peace Education in general and in the Colombian context. Next, we provide a conceptualization of critical literacy and its relation to peacebuilding. Finally, we offer a set of strategies to promote peacebuilding through critical literacies from our research experiences working with schools, families, and communities across the Americas.

PEACE STUDIES

The emergence of Peace Studies marked a conceptualization of peace as the absence of war (Wright, 1942). Later, Galtung (1964) incorporated a definition of peace and peace research from two perspectives: *negative peace*, which he described as the absence of violence; and *positive peace*, which is the integration of human society, a state closer to what he also defined as a utopian 'general and complete peace' (GCP). Galtung (1969) further elaborated on his bifocal perspective on peace, by including the notion of absence of *direct violence* in his definition of *negative peace,* and absence of *structural violence* in his positive peace definition. The latter refers to the violence that emerges from society's structural division and problems of race, gender, religion, among other sources of discrimination and unrest.

More recently, Jiménez (2014) contributed a third perspective on peace research: *neutral peace*. He argues that neutrality is the foundation of every social relation, and that respect for 'the other' can help devalue the diverse forms of violence (direct, structural, and cultural and/or symbolic). Neutral peace seeks to neutralize violent elements and scenarios that are embedded in social patterns and relations among individuals, groups (i.e., family, school), and nature. This view of peace recognizes the potential of egalitarian dialogue and acknowledges that violence is rooted in everyday encounters; therefore, neutral peace can be strengthened in everyday relationships by fostering values such as empathy, tolerance, diversity, and solidarity.

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