



Implementation of the classroom pedagogical project 'Managers of Coexistence and Peace' as a strategy for fostering a culture of peace in children in the department of La Guajira

Aplicación del proyecto pedagógico de aula "Gestores de convivencia y paz" como estrategia para la formación de la cultura de la paz en los niños en el departamento de La Guajira

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ABSTRACT

The research focused on coexistence and school peace as part of a scientific project framed within the quality of early childhood education. The experience aimed to contribute to the establishment of a culture of peace through the execution of a psychoeducational program in the child population of the department of La Guajira. The study was conducted with a mixed descriptive approach, based on an action-research design. The results suggest that the implementation of recreational activities and the establishment of pleasant and safe environments promote harmonious coexistence, encourage dialogue in peacebuilding, and reaffirm values. Furthermore, the study revealed that through psychoeducational resources, constructive experiences are generated that allow children and their educators to resolve conflicts peacefully, which strengthened educational communication and contributed to mitigating violence.

Keywords: educational environment; peace education; pedagogical research; child psychology; peace consolidation.

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INTRODUCCIÓN

Education, in addition to being a central institution in a country's social, cultural, and economic development, is the ideal process to contribute to constructing a national identity where peace is a fundamental element (Harvey et al., 2021). In contexts where armed conflicts condition territorial cultures and favor the perpetuation of violence, promoting harmonious coexistence and peace constitutes an imperative (Tolera, 2019; Schultze-Krafta, 2022; Wibowo, 2022).

The early stages of human development, both for their plasticity and the benefits of primary socialization, constitute the fundamental periods for offering quality education, in which peace is channeled as a key notion and objective (Ríos-



González et al., 2019). This implies that state and educational policies must provide the necessary support for educational institutions to design and implement viable alternatives for the fulfillment of the goals of peace education, but based on critical and solidly supported designs (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013).

In this sense, social institutions must guarantee the indispensable conditions to contribute to the integral formation of people through the realization of their social responsibility. Citizenship education for harmonious coexistence strengthens the future of the nation, a fact that is expressed in aspects such as preparation for the exercise of democracy, respect for and safeguarding of human rights, among others (Bellino et al., 2022).

The ideal context for the social realization of these processes is the educational institution, where classrooms constitute favorable spaces for the analysis of coexistence, inclusion, and interculturality (Dietrich, 2019; Giovanni, 2021). Consistent with the above, the teaching process offers varied curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for addressing these concepts in addition to the relationships and synergies between community, school, and family. In addition, it is necessary to recognize the space that is constructed and resignified so that not only the school institutions have an educational and preventive task but must also favor the resolution of conflicts, disagreements, and inequalities (Giovanni, 2021), and most especially, build from the difference under the mantle of respect. Therefore, remedial attention to cultural, social, and educational differences is also crucial in constructing a culture of peace.

Educational institutions in the department of La Guajira, especially those that host children in numerous educational communities, have distinguished themselves by presenting constant difficulties associated with a broad spectrum of conflicts. These, both nationally and internationally, have a complex etiology to apprehend, as they are expressed in phenomena such as domestic violence, bullying, communication breakdowns, and discrimination, among others (Alguacil et al., 2022; Kurian & Kester, 2019). These phenomena are socially reproduced and perpetuated in the imaginaries and practices of infants, parents, and teachers (Möller & Bellmer, 2023).

The aforementioned implies that education for peace must occur in several dimensions, from the macro-social to the micro-social and from the preparation for cultural transformation to the modification of habits, representations, and norms that favor the phenomena above (Cromwell, 2019; Skinner, 2020). Then, education aims to build pedagogically designed spaces to promote harmonious coexistence, with the formation of citizenship competencies as the instrument for achieving a better future (Emanuela, 2020).

In this context, a critical pedagogy that responds to the needs of school institutions according to their resources and real possibilities is essential (Zembylas, 2018; Kester et al., 2019). The construction of peace education should start from local and national referents and not from international lines that govern discourses and policies in contexts that do not share the characteristics of the national context, which is why the decolonization of peace education is vital (Hajir and Kester, 2020; Vélez, 2021; Zembylas, 2018).

Given the above context, the researchers considered that the formation of values, social and educational inclusion, tolerance, and celebration of differences represent key aspects to be included in early childhood education. The study is framed in a context characterized by multiple efforts to bring values of peace and democracy to the education of infants in Colombia (Skinner, 2020). In this sense, the experience was aimed at strengthening the culture of peace and harmonious coexistence in a child population.

METHODS

Design

A mixed approach supported the present research. According to Johnson and Christensen (2019), selecting this type of study implies awareness of a research worldview that goes beyond methods. In the study, conceptions, procedures, and analytical schemes were integrated, favoring the richness of the results. The study, of a descriptive type, had two designs and a concurrent research strategy since quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed in a triangulated manner (Creswell, 2009).

The fundamental design that guided the program's implementation was participatory action research, as the authors assumed a community and ecological stance as agents of change through social intervention in the field (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The fieldwork was divided into three phases. The first was aimed at diagnosing needs. The program was implemented in the second, and its results were evaluated in the third.

Population and sample

In order to meet the objectives proposed in the research, the population was identified as students and teachers of primary schools in the La Guajira department. The sample, of an intentional type, was designed as a function of mixed studies. In the first study, the sample consisted of 100 participants to whom a survey was applied. In the second study, two samples were designed. One sample consisted of five school principals to understand their representations of peace education. The second sample, of a mixed nature, was composed of infants and teachers participating in the program's implementation.

Data collection and processing instruments

The following techniques were used for data collection.

- Observation sheet.
- Semi-structured interview.
- Teacher surveys.

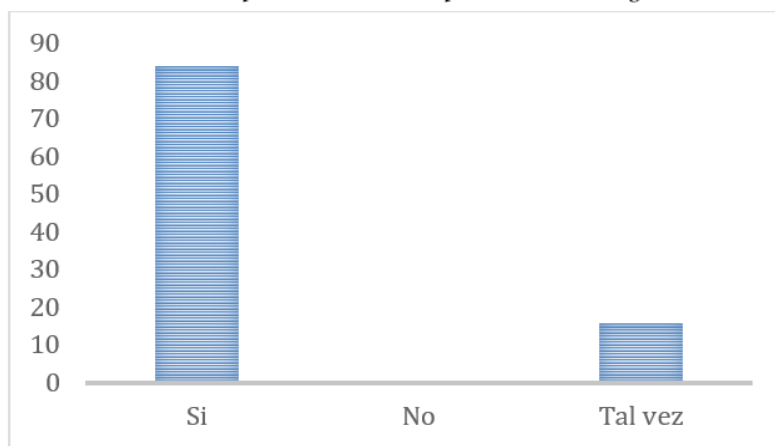
Quantitative data analysis was based on the study of frequency distribution. Qualitative analysis was based on coding and categorizing the raw data, their contextualization, and refinement. Concurrent analysis was based on the triangulation of the results of the techniques, the authors' analyses, and the contrast with the data collected in the observation sheets and field diaries.

RESULTS

Diagnosis of the conditions of educational centers.

In response to the question, "Do you believe that the role of the school is fundamental for peacebuilding?" as shown in Figure 1, 84% of those surveyed stated that the school is fundamental for peacebuilding, and the other 16% considered that the school may be fundamental for peacebuilding. In the contexts studied inadequate representations about the role of the school, its social responsibility, and possibilities in constructing a culture of peace can be appreciated. Although these representations do not appear significantly in the respondents' answers, they were observed in the pedagogical and cultural practices in the institutions. Nevertheless, the data suggested that the context was conducive to raising awareness of these issues and their inclusion in the discourse of principals and educational leaders.

Figure 1.
Role of the school in peace building



Source: own elaboration.

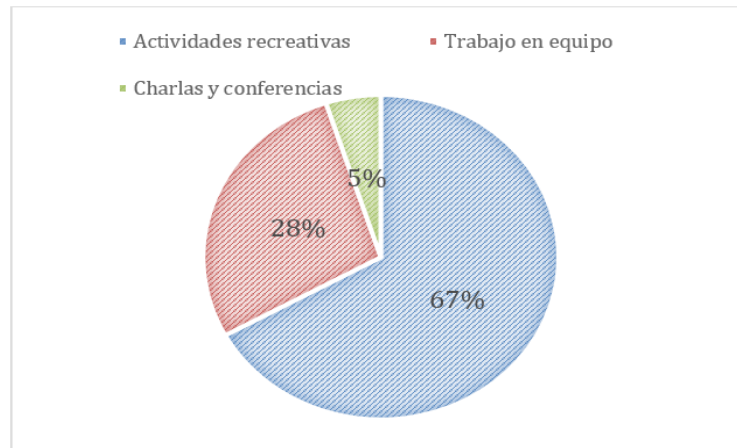
Note: the figure appears in its original language.

When asked how they consider that peace can be implemented in the classroom, as shown in Figure 2, 67% of the respondents stated that the development of meaningful recreational activities for children favors the construction of a culture of peace. Both "magical" and "pleasant" are the most frequently used adjectives. In the contexts studied, there was a greater appreciation of the socioemotional aspects to be incorporated for adequate peace education

compared to collaborative learning and teamwork (28%).

Other data collected suggest that the ideal space is the classroom, although it should be transformed to favor games and gamification. Finally, it was noted that lectures and discussions, although appreciated as resources, should be represented as ways to achieve lasting changes. In this sense, it was observed that communication should be conceived as a way through, but not the exclusive vehicle for educational transformation.

Figure 2.
Strategies for classroom implementation.



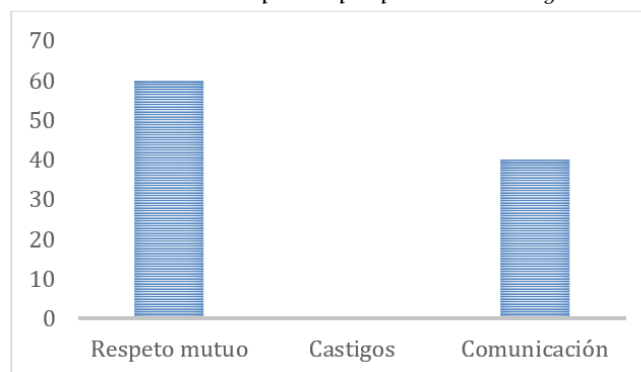
Source: own elaboration.
Note: the figure appears in its original language.

Figure 3 shows the results of the question "What aspects do you think should be reinforced to build peace?" where 60% of the respondents stated that mutual respect should be reinforced to build a culture of peace. This suggests the importance of supporting a training or values education strategy (both terms were used) within educational institutions.

In addition, the importance of achieving a link with the master strategies designed by social and community institutions, which should be adapted to the needs and possibilities of the department's children, was pointed out. As aspects to be improved, civic and legal education (adjusted to children), the deconstruction of social representations associated with the legitimization of violence in conflict resolution, and acceptance and tolerance as the basis for a truly inclusive education were found in the context of civic and legal education.

Forty percent state that communication is a process that must be strengthened in order to build peace, an aspect that was evaluated in all contexts. In this scenario, communication is recognized as a way to settle conflicts and consolidate peaceful social relations. Finally, the absence of behaviorist approaches to mitigating violent behavior stands out.

Figure 3.
Elements required for peace building



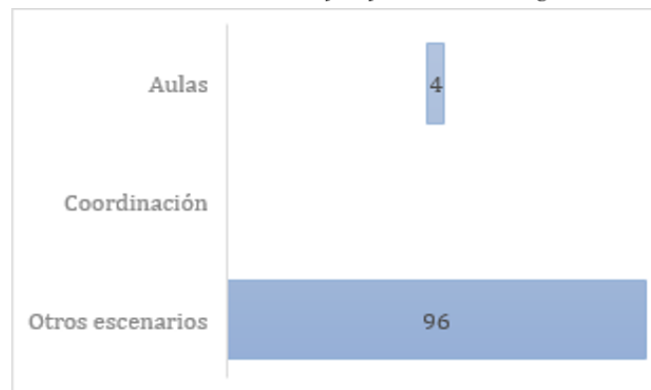
Source: own elaboration.
Note: the figure appears in its original language.

Consequently, the question was asked about where in the school peacebuilding strategies can be practiced, and in this item, a result was found that reinforces the analyses already presented. Only 4% of the respondents stated that the ideal place to develop peacebuilding strategies is the classroom. This does not mean that the classroom, as a physical space, is the least appropriate, but rather that it could be verified in the contexts studied that this raw data refers to the symbolic space. In this sense, the participants think that "didactic processes" should be transcended; that is, peace education should be more than a content or an objective in the curriculum.

In this regard, most respondents (96%) stated that the other areas of the institution are important for building peace. This implies not only expanding the processes but also legitimizing inclusive practices, attenuating violent behavior, and making harmonious coexistence another quality of the daily life of the educational community, especially in the school (see *Figure 4*).

Figure 4.

Ideal scenarios for peace building



Source: own elaboration.

Note: the figure appears in its original language.

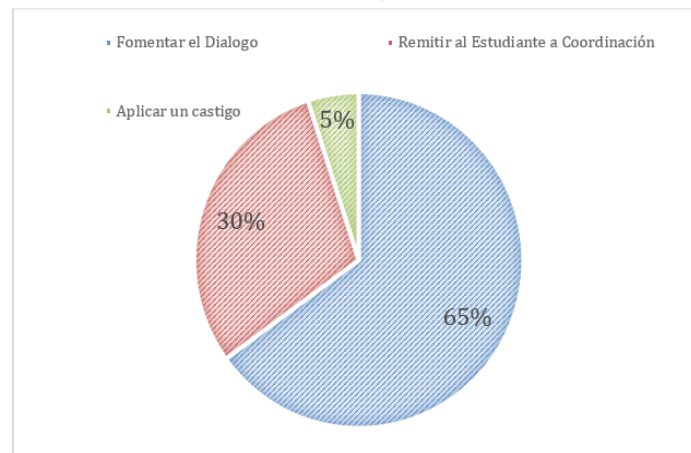
Finally, as shown in *Figure 5*, we inquired about What you usually do when you perceive conflicts or violence within the institution. This indicator yielded contradictory data. However, it is well representative of the reality studied. When pointing out these divergences, the raw data obtained suggests an important gap between discourse and practice. Sixty-five percent of respondents stated that children try to encourage dialogue when there is a violent conflict. In practice, it was observed that this behavior produced a communicative context tinged by what the respondents themselves dismiss as a way to implement peace. This occurs because communication usually flows from the adult to the children rather than between peers, being less effective.

Thirty percent of those surveyed exhibit a conflict resolution strategy that moves from avoidance and postponement to dependence on others. This is typified by sending the children to the coordination instance so that the pertinent measures or actions can be taken there, representing the loss of an educational and symbolic space fundamental to promoting a culture of peace. Finally, although no participant considered punishment as an instrument to promote a culture of peace, 5% applied it in situations of conflict or violence. Although the frequency is not alarming, the observation suggested the need to explore the conceptualization of the term punishment in the organizational culture of educational institutions.

The interviews made it possible to obtain the necessary data to deepen the understanding of the current school situation in the different schools about constructing a culture and education for peace. The main results showed that there is little information regarding the categories to be considered to achieve real attention to this process, so it is necessary to improve the process. In the international literature, among other alternatives, the use of public libraries appears (Abumandour, 2021).

The subject is of utmost importance from the interviewees' perspective, but they consider it more a matter of customs and transmission of values than a scientific and pedagogical problem. Although, in effect, the construction of a culture of peace necessarily involves its naturalization in the practices of educational agents, in order to achieve this, it is first necessary that the institutions assume this process as worthy of study.

Figure 5.
Reactions to conflicts



Source: own elaboration.
Note: the figure appears in its original language.

For those interviewed, implementing the most basic educational principles by them and their teaching staff is enough to guarantee learning these good habits. Contradictorily, the centers have a compulsory peace chair, but its application guidelines are unclear. When asked about this, the discourse was almost unanimous in favor of factors understood as extra-school.

Community culture, family education, and the community-family-school link were mentioned. In this regard, no mention was made of research or teacher training processes to achieve these goals. Even so, the principals recommended the inclusion of all educational agents in the process of teaching peace education, which, from their perspective, would contribute to achieving the desired effects.

High expectations were evaluated about the impacts that can be generated by implementing the classroom pedagogical project. The directors emphasized that, since the children are of very early school and biological age, the results tend to be more effective since their teaching and learning processes tend to obtain better dividends in comparison with populations of older ages.

Finally, difficulties in social interactions, poor resources for emotional regulation, and conflict resolution were also mentioned in the interview. This result suggested the need to implement a program that would not only favor education for peace and coexistence but also contribute to satisfying these educational needs.

Design of the culture of peace program

The program was designed as a baseline to strengthen the deficiencies observed and the deficiencies in teachers due to lack of information and reparation. While the peace professorship is relatively new, it was aimed at raising awareness of the importance of self-improvement and self-preparation among teachers and managers through workshops and discussions. As a support, we advised on the design of training policies, mainly through educational forums aimed at managers, teachers, and the community.

In the work with students, violence was approached from the perspective that it is a learned behavior to denaturalize it as a conflict resolution strategy, avoiding its normalization. Actions were designed to promote harmonious language, central to constructing emotional scenarios that foster peace, as it is understood as a unit of thought and behavior.

Similarly, workshops and dynamics were designed with groups of students' families as a fundamental aspect of the joint work to eliminate violence and promote peace. Similarly, with the support of a multidisciplinary team, public policy proposals were designed and submitted jointly by schools, families, and society to government agencies. These proposals allowed the processing of the demand for implementing specialized teams to deal with these problems.

The construction of a culture of peace in the school is a constant process involving the entire educational

community, so the activities addressed the following indicators:

- Human rights
- Peace awareness.
- Acquisition and reinforcement of ethical and moral values on peace.
- Culture of coexistence and peace.
- Peaceful resolution of conflicts in society, in the classroom and in the family.

Discussion of the main results

The implementation of the main actions of the program began with the awareness-raising stage. The actions carried out made it possible to provide the main fundamentals and tools to favor the construction of a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence. The main aspects addressed were the cultural changes to prevent violent behavior and achieve adequate treatment once identified. Acceptance was positive, mentions of the main concepts increased gradually, and a better understanding of them was appreciated. The importance of peace education in mitigating violence in social contexts was contrasted in the literature (Smidt, 2020).

Positive attitudes towards the program proposal were evaluated, and infants and adults perceived a greater involvement. However, the need to enhance the participatory aspects over the informative ones was appreciated, a fact related to Kester et al.'s findings (2019). The impressions left by the participation and collaboration of the participating subjects were expressed in motivation and positive emotions. However, it was appreciated as necessary to explore the affective relationships of teachers with the concept of peace education and the imposition of the professorship, which has been considered relevant in studies on peace education delivery (Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021).

Finally, regarding the results of the proposal and the actions implemented and to be implemented, the teachers assured that it was the ideal way to manage the comprehensive early childhood education in the department of La Guajira. The directors highlighted its importance in terms of promoting lifelong learning, the consolidation of civic education and values in the post-conflict era, which coincides with the results identified by Águeda and Casais (2021).

The educational leaders expressed a high degree of collaboration, which allowed the joint design and implementation of the pedagogical project. Based on the results obtained in the diagnosis regarding the necessary guidelines and initiatives, it was perceived that they assumed the program with enthusiasm, with emphasis on the arguments offered about the importance of the subject matter for the country (Bellino et al., 2022; Schultze-Krafta, 2022; Skinner, 2020; Vélez, 2021). In the same way, it could be seen that the children of the different institutions progressively increased their voluntary participation in the activities. This made it possible to move from activities where recreational aspects had greater weight in the design to group dynamics involving games, knowledge contests, guest participation, and other designed alternatives. This result is a strength for systematizing the experience, as pointed out in other studies.

In this process, more basic and essential tools for conflict resolution were provided. The developmental approach of the design allowed both to address the most common conflicts and to enter in an informed way the preparation for future conflict resolution. This decision obeyed a preventive and developmental principle since, although the difficulties in coexistence may seem simple due to the characteristics of this stage of development, the purpose is to prepare for future life. In this sense, typical situations were used, with a children's language and aided by didactic resources that facilitated the infants' understanding, to offer the opportunity to "solve" conflicts that will arise in the rest of their lives.

Dialogue, teamwork, and communication through games, talks, mimics, and gestural workshops favored children's relaxation. Other factors that yielded positive results were ensuring a safe environment, even when asking an adult to leave the activity was necessary. Freedom and protection facilitated disinhibition and the strengthening of bonds among them and with the school. The program results suggest the need to favor the naturalization of peace education as a fundamental pillar of the development of people and as a tool in the construction of peace. In this way, its benefits are not restricted to the interpersonal, group, and family levels but are extended to broader communities and social sectors.

Similarly, the need to deepen the gender approach within peace education was identified. These results appear endorsed by the findings of Adjei (2019), so it is assumed that this perspective could favor girls, mothers, and

teachers. Another positive aspect was decreased sanctions and corrections in response to bullying, indiscipline, or discrimination. These procedures are counterproductive and, for some participants, even antagonistic to the peace-building process, as they need to prepare children to achieve significant learning that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

Evaluation of the program and recommendations for its continuity

The results of the formative evaluation of the program were favorable in terms of results and process. Significant progress was noted concerning the initial state. Although the program is far from being a definitive solution to the shortcomings diagnosed, its course could contribute to the objectives of the peace chair. The main results obtained were synthesized and used to base the following proposals for governmental entities at the departmental level, as well as for educational institutions, based on the experiences derived from the experience:

Raising awareness of education for peace and harmonious coexistence is a fundamental process so that the efforts made are not seen as imposed but as an internal response to the needs of the educational community.

Design educational and state policies to regulate and strengthen education for peace.

Develop integrated programs for teaching and management staff to improve emotional education, guidance, and helping relationships.

Promote harmonious language, empathy, and socio-educational inclusion processes through all available channels.

Promote workshops and dynamics periodically that strengthen the school-family-community link as a fundamental aspect to mitigate violence and foster peace.

Conduct frequent coexistence campaigns through the media and social networks, as well as the use of logos in the headquarters of educational institutions.

Conduct workshops and talks on topics such as dignity, welcome, acceptance, trust, respect, dialogue.

CONCLUSIONS

The program was designed to respond to a latent need for developing a project with pedagogical purposes that would contribute to mitigating the effects of the mandatory mandate of the peace chair in each institution. The initial context was characterized by a need for more clarity in the guidelines and procedures to extract the best results from the implementation of the chair.

The study's results ratified the need for peace education, not only as a chair but also its integration into educational styles, so that it becomes a life example more than being evaluated. Education for peace and harmonious coexistence should become a model for children, an aid in conflict resolution, and a guide throughout life.

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