The Role of Citizenship Education in Achieving Peace in Colombia

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Abstract

The article starts with a reflection of the major social ills afflicting our country: violence and corruption, as well as the historic opportunity that unfastens if the Colombian government can implement the peace accord with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolutionaries de Colombia (FARC) and sign a peace accord with Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). It shows the importance of the development of the ethical dimension in citizenship education, pinpointing some of its features. The text also mentions some regulatory elements within the national and international contexts that address the horizon which we can, and must, head towards as a nation. In addition to, the author highlights some examples of concrete contributions in the field of civic education for peace, with an emphasis on the various dissertation projects developed by some students of the Master on Pedagogy program at the Universidad Industrial de Santander. These investigations have had a positive impact on the education of students, in the communities of the educational institutions and in their respective municipalities, all belonging to the department of Santander, Colombia.

Keywords: Ethics, democracy, citizenship, civic education for peace, sustainable development, pedagogy.

Violence is one of the most endemic Colombian social ills. Violence affects the way we live and perceive internally. Also, outwardly, we appear as one of the most violent countries in the world, considering our place in the Global Peace Index: Position 147 among 163 countries[1].President Juan Manuel Santos won the Nobel Peace Prize 2016 and his government signed a peace agreement with FARC. Also, he is negotiating with ELN guerrilla group. However, there was a plebiscite regarding the peace accord with FARC and the "no" option won. The government made a renegotiation that took into consideration some of the objections from the political sector that represents the "no". However, there is a great division in the public opinion around the peace agreement with the FARC and the future agreement with ELN. In spite of these facts, the peace agreement indeed constitutes the starting point towards a less violent and more just, equitable, and democratic society. The road won´t be easy. It will require deep structural reforms in key cultural fields such as politics, economics, and above all social values. It will be necessary to seriously address the issue of corruption. Our country has long suffered this misfortune. Colombia does poorly in the rankings: last year it won in the Index of Corruption Perception a rating of 37 on a scale of zero to one hundred and was ranked 90 among 176 countries, according to Transparency International[2] Democracy cannot exist without citizens. To build a more honest and peaceful society without subjects that embody these and other important values is not possible. This is where the education of the ethical dimension, inherent to all human beings, acquires its importance.

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[1]The Global Peace Index (GPI) is produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, a think tank dedicated to the understanding of peace as a tangible measure of human welfare and progress. The Global Peace Index 2016 Report is available at: www.economicsandpeace.org

[2]The report is available at the following link : http://cpi.transparency.org/

As Adela Cortina says: "Ethics is similar to what happens to height, weight or color, you cannot live without them. All human beings are more or less tall or short, all are brown, blond or red hair, all weigh more or less, but none lacks height, volume or color. The same happens with ethics, a person can be more or less according to certain moral codes, but all have some moral stature.

It is what some philosophers have meant when they say that there are no amoral human beings, located beyond good and evil, but we are inexorably constitutively moral" (Cortina, 2013, pág. 11)[3] Cortina's words remind us of the importance of educating in the ethical dimension so that there are good people and citizens, people with character and skills required to manage peace, to substitute violence by cooperation, fear by confidence, people who know how to properly use the resources previously spent on war, for inclusive development; people who can make economy serve people, especially the poorest. We are a very conservative and contradictory country. On the one hand, we have a modern Constitution, quite liberal, which consecrates the rule of law, pluralism and respect for human dignity. On the other hand, we went out marching against the former Ministry of Education and her decision to use booklets seeking to combat sexual discrimination but we do not speak out against violence in its many manifestations; we dream of the calming sense of security that would bring peace with the guerrillas, but we rejected the peace agreement with FARC, creating serious obstacles to give a second chance to those who have decided to lay down their arms. The above just to cite a few examples of our contradictions. As a conclusion, Colombia has a divided and polarized society where all kinds of pre-modern, modern and post-modern trends don´t coexist but collide.

Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize citizenship education based on ethics, civility, not religion, but not anti-religious either, inclusive, where everyone fits, that promotes justice but also forgiveness, that promotes the rule of law but also reconciliation and civilized and peaceful coexistence. We need an education that recognizes the sacred rights of the individual, and combines them with the duty to cooperate cordially with everyone, especially those who are and think differently, and especially the victims of different kinds of violence. An ethical reflection in philosophy, proposes human principles and values, and broadens the scope of citizenship education. The focus of training in citizenship skills, which arises mainly from psychology, is necessary but not sufficient to educate the citizen. It is required to show the relationship between ethics and political culture, mediated by educational processes. In this regard it is interesting to read the prologue from Antanas Mockus to the book of Enrique Chaux titled "Educación, Convivencia y Agresión Escolar". I quote: "Now the academic tradition defers action and by so doing, it raises the possibility of an action on the action (one meta action). Through reflection, rational discussion (reading and writing, argumentation and deliberation), it prepares and supports transformative action, an action with a specific purpose. The academy, even at the school level, resists a simple knowhow. In short, the academy needs skills but is not limited to them, and invites an explicitly reflexive relationship with them" (Chaux, 2012, pág. 25)[4]

The contribution of ethical reflection to the education of peaceful, civilized, and tolerant citizens is urgent and necessary to consolidate a Colombia where coexistence will win over violence. Therefore an explicit space should be kept in the curriculum for the development of reflective thinking and ethical reasoning, not to be confused with other respectable but different courses, such as religious education or social sciences, to cite two examples. Fortunately, our country, even in the midst of violence, has been consolidating a legal path to peace education. The rules are not enough, but they are necessary and they head start a trend in the right direction:

- The Constitution of 1991: Education is seen as a human right and a public service that has a social objective: This is to educate Colombians, among other things, on respect for human rights, peace and democracy (Constitución Política de Colombia, article 67.)
- The Ley General de Educación or Law 115: In Article 5, related to the aims of education, states as an important objective to achieve "education in respect for life and other human rights, peace, democratic principles of coexistence, pluralism, justice, solidarity and equity, as well as the exercise of tolerance and freedom"(Ley 115 de febrero 8 de 1994 o Ley General de Educación). Law 115 was complemented with a series of decrees and regulations attempted to turn schools into laboratories of democratic participation, favoring the education of true citizens.

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[3]Freelance translation of quote made by the author of this article.
[4]Freelance translation of quote made by the author of this article.

- Almost 20 years later, and in response to the problem of school violence, Law 1620 of 2013 was issued, whose purpose "is to contribute to the education of active citizens who contribute to building a democratic, participatory, pluralistic and intercultural society, in accordance with the constitutional mandate and the Ley General de Educación -Law 115 of 1994- by creating the National System of School Conviviality and Education for Human Rights, Sexual Education and Prevention and Mitigation of School Violence ..."(Ley 1620 de marzo 15 de 2013, article 1)[5].

- This school law created the National System of School Conviviality, which still awaits its full implementation, according to the Constitutional Court judgment T- 478 from 2015 that ordered the Ministry of Education to implement the National System of School Conviviality and review the Conviviality manuals of all Colombian schools.

- The Master Class for Peace was established by Decree 1038 from May 25, 2015, and it is obligatory in public and private schools in the country. Nevertheless, laws and decrees alone will not produce the changes needed in education, but they are necessary, noting a path that should be followed by educational communities. To us as teachers, intellectuals of Pedagogy, agents of cultural change, The Master Class for Peace behooves us to go further.

At the international level, despite wars and especially terrorism, the international community has taken steps in building a fairer, greener and more prosperous future for all. The concept of sustainable development began to take shape since 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development, from the United Nations (UN) published a report entitled " Our Common Future" or Bruntland Report where it is stated: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations Organization , 1987). From 1987 until today "a lot of water has flown under the bridge" and the fact is that the concept of sustainability has taken the global agenda in all areas. Nowadays, in the field of business, the approach of Corporate Social Responsibility inspired by the Global Compact is a reality, the UN initiative for companies concerned with their stakeholders in the social, economic and environmental fields[6]. In 2015, within the framework of the United Nations General Assembly held in New York City September 25th, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015 – 2030 were enacted: 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at giving a new impetus to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), incorporating the protection of the planet and, specifically, the fight against climate change. Education is taken into account in objective 4: "To ensure inclusive and equitable education quality, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"[7]

On the issue of peace, the international community supports the direction our country is taking and does it through accompanying peace and reconciliation processes, especially the negotiation that took place in Havana (Cuba) and the negotiation table that is taking place in Ecuador. Also, the Nobel Peace Prize 2016 was awarded to Juan Manuel Santos, the President of Colombia "for his resolute efforts to bring the country's more than 50-year-long civil war to an end"[8] In citizenship education, a lot has already been done, but still there is much to be done. As for processes for peace education from various fields, here are some examples worth noticing: The first one is the case of the Citizenship Culture Program of Bogota's former mayor Antanas Mockus. It was innovative because it designed and implemented pedagogical processes on a large scale, beyond the classroom, showing how the city is also able to educate, how the state can support self-regulation based on standards that are consistent with the common good. The goal is for the citizens to regulate themselves from ethical principles (the main, according to Mockus: Life is Sacred!), consistent with a social culture and legal norms. Here the law is the last resort, the ultimate deterrent if the individual doesn´t follow high ethical and social standards. During Antanas Mockus' two mayoral terms violence rates fell and there was a verifiable increase in participation and empowerment of citizens in public affairs. The definition of its program of Citizen Culture is well summarized in his words: "the sum of habits, behaviors, actions and minimum common rules that generate a sense of belonging, facilitate harmony among citizens, and lead to respect for shared property and heritage and the recognition of citizens' rights and duties." (Bajaj, Cislaghi, & Mackie, 2016, pág. 58). The second one is the case of Medellin's former mayor, Sergio Fajardo. His mayoral term was in the period 2004 – 2007.

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[5] Freelance translation of quote made by the author of this article.
[6] More information on the Global Compact can be found at the following link : https://www.unglobalcompact.org
[7] A detailed information about the SDGs can be found at the following link : https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment
[8] The official web site of the Nobel Prize. Available at: https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2016/

While in office, he built his own version of a Citizen Culture initiative from a pedagogical perspective. His motto "Medellin, the most educated" was the engine of a transformation that institutionalized formal and informal mechanisms for citizen participation and inclusion. The next Mayor, Alonso Salazar, continued this path and, comparing the social dynamics of Medellin from the late 2003 with the current ones, a significant improvement is noted in many respects as a decline in violence, inequality and poverty, as well as an improvement in the quality of life of the population and an increase in the city's global reputation in areas such as innovation, technology, and sustainable development. These two mayoral initiatives weren't perfect, and Bogotá and Medellin haven't definitively eradicated their evils, but they exemplified how the state can enhance its educational role, of course with the help of family and school.

At the University level, much is being done and can be done around citizenship education for peace. One example of this is a project carried out by Universidad del Norte[9]. The project is called "UN Caribe". This is a research and intervention initiative that seeks to make pedagogy for peace through different activities carried out by students, faculty, and other members of the academic community[10] A clear example of an initiative at a university level is the Pedagogy and Citizenship Education research line within the Atenea Educational Research Group at the Universidad Industrial de Santander: "The main purpose of the research line is to contribute to the production of pedagogical knowledge that enables understanding and intervention in processes of citizenship education through various kinds of education (formal, non-formal and informal)" (Franco Serrano, 2013, pág. 149).[11]

Within the framework of the research line and the Masters in Pedagogy program at Universidad Industrial de Santander (UIS), several research works have been carried out on the education of citizens and the construction of a culture of peace in the school. The research projects in recent years have been aimed at understanding the problem of social violence and its manifestations in each educational environment. They have also sought a pedagogical approach to the problem of school violence from the design, implementation and evaluation of educational proposals aimed at educating at school, citizens able to live in harmony with others. In that sense, the research line seeks to generate an academically and socially relevant knowledge that can serve the national and regional educational institutions which are interested in citizenship education and the construction of a culture of peace.

The director of the research line has been the dissertation advisor of several students of the Master in Pedagogy program who have conducted their dissertations in the field of education for the coexistence at school. The list of researches is the following:

- Propuesta pedagógica participativa de transformación escolar para la autorregulación de la convivencia y la resolución de conflictos por las vías no violentas, (Díaz, 2009).
- Propuesta pedagógica para la resolución de conflictos en una institución oficial del municipio de San Gil, (Rincón Zárate, 2011).
- Diseño de una Propuesta Pedagógica para la Formación en Resolución de Conflictos a nivel de la Educación Básica Secundaria de una Institución Educativa Rural del Municipio de Lebrija, Santander (Casadiego Torres, 2012).
- Propuesta Pedagógica para la Educación en Convivencia Ciudadana y la Resolución de Conflictos en el Aula de Clases (Martínez Gil, 2012).
- Nuevos espacios de convivencia en una institución educativa del sector oficial del municipio de Piedecuesta (Hernández Salazar, 2015).
- Propuesta pedagógica de formación en convivencia escolar y competencias ciudadanas en una institución educativa oficial del municipio de Girón, (Martínez Torres, 2016).
- Propuesta pedagógica para fortalecer la convivencia y la formación ciudadana en los aprendices de una institución de formación para el trabajo, (Torres Jaimes, 2016).
- Propuesta pedagógica para la formación ciudadana, desde la convivencia escolar, en una institución educativa oficial, jornada de la mañana, del municipio de Barrancabermeja, Santander, (Chamarraví, 2016).

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[9] Universidad del Norte is an accredited, private, non- profit university located in Barranquilla, the capital of Atlántico department, on the Caribbean coast.

[10]All information on this initiative is available at: www.uninorte.edu.co/uncaribe

[11]Freelance translation of quote made by the author of this article.

- Caracterización de una propuesta de formación para el ejercicio de la ciudadanía y la convivencia escolar en un una institución privada de Bucaramanga, (Cáceres Hernández, 2017).

From the epistemological point of view, a critical perspective is assumed: "Critical science thinks that the aim of research is not only to describe and interpret educational phenomena, but mainly consider how it can modify their constitutional processes."(Cardona Moltó, 2002, pág. 29)[12] These investigations are guided by an emancipator intra theoretical interest, which seeks to uncover and break social ties, according to the classification proposed by Habermas and Vasco.[13] Regarding the methodological approaches, the predominant one has been the qualitative research framework. Most studies use either ethnographic or Participatory Action Research (IAP)methodologies.

IAP is defined as "a form of educational research conceived as a critical analysis that is aimed at the transformation of educational practices and social and institutional structures that define the framework for action" (Cardona Moltó, 2002, pág. 29)[14] These designs are useful in answering key questions such as the following: ¿How to articulate different educational spaces in school (the term "school" includes in it all levels of education, from preschool to university) and the various stakeholders of the educational community in citizenship education processes that lead to the improvement of school coexistence, peaceful negotiation of conflicts and, consequently, a reduction of school violence? The research projects within the research in Pedagogy and Citizenship Education line have achieved a collective awareness of educational communities around their problems and an empowerment that has led to the joint construction of solutions. Educational communities have gained an improvement in their school climate, cases of bullying have declined significantly, and are expected to have a lasting impact on the subjectivity of students. I think this is a concrete contribution that is made and must continue being made to build peace in Colombia from school settings. Let me conclude this reflection with an allusion to the Greeks. As it is known to all, the idea of democracy emerged in classical Athens of the V and IV centuries BC. It was a radical democracy, supported on participation, deliberation, and direct decision-making by citizens. There, the power of logos, or the communicative reason as Habermas philosopher would call it today, was evident in the power of citizens to speak out about what they considered true, beautiful and good. And from the Greeks to the present day, with different nuances, Western Culture has considered that these three ideals, values or qualities (Truth, Beauty understood as harmony, and goodness) must accompany every good human being and, therefore every good citizen. Colombians, mestizos by biological nature and cultural identity, we participate in our own way from Greek heritage. So, when I consider the role of citizenship education in acquiring the peace in Colombia, I think we should educate human beings who have the curiosity of the researcher and the aesthetic sensibility of the artist ... also human beings who have the consciousness of one who knows how to live in society, promoting civilized and peaceful coexistence.

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[12]Freelance translation of quote made by the author of this article.

[13]In this regard, it is worth reviewing the text of Vasco, Carlos Eduardo (1990). Tres Estilos de Trabajo en las Ciencias Sociales: Comentarios a propósito del artículo "Conocimiento e Interés" de Jürgen Habermas. Bogotá: CINEP.

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