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## **POLITICS AND EDUCATION FOR PEACE: UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTINGS IN VALLE OF CAUCA IN COLOMBIA**

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**Abstract:** Citizenship competencies are part of the education policy for peace in Colombia. Educational emphasis strengthened after the signing of the peace agreements between the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP armed group in 2016. More than the emergence of powers in that period, it shows how politics integrates continuity and antecedents from periods previous politicians. Thus emphasizing that the way in which legislation is legislated does not correspond to the way in which the political guidelines are understood and put into practice from members of two educational communities in two municipalities of Valle del Cauca. Under the ethnographic approach, the comparison between the scenarios is presented, highlighting that the construction of citizenship would be one of the multiple aspects that integrate education for peace depending on the contexts and particularities of the educational communities where it is implemented.

**Keywords:** Education for peace, citizenship competencies, educational policy, construction of citizenships.

## **EDUCATION FOR PEACE: ACTIONS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN COLOMBIA**

Just like peace, education for peace is not a new issue at the national level in Colombia. The initial studies carried out from the academy, with events, meetings and symposiums to share reflections on the subject, analyze and debate the concepts of peace, education and education for peace show their presence from earlier times (Bermúdez, 1996). In formal and informal education, pedagogical strategies and school problems, coexistence, aggressions, relationships between teachers and students, etc. were considered.

Applied research is found, from social intervention and research carried out by

NGOs, research centers and private entities, as well as the initiative of school institutions (Chaux and Velásquez, 2016). All with a view to generating practices of citizen coexistence in accordance with the institutional trends of education for peace from the Ministry of National Education-MEN (Méndez and Casas, 2010; Salamanca, et al, 2009).

Other documents refer to their own organizational processes and social movements that do not call themselves education for peace, developed from popular education, the community, mediated by institutions such as the Catholic Church, Mennonite or other self-management (Alvarado et al, 2018; ACODESI, 2003). The panorama is broad depending on the focus of the work that is addressed, the multiplicity of actors, contexts and understandings, beyond the formulation of the institutionality mediated by the academy or the State.

After the signing of the Peace Accords, with the arrival of Gustavo Petro to power in 2022, peace is a present issue at the national level. This despite the adverse political outlook for its implementation during the period of Iván Duque (Zapata, 2016). Education, in addition to peace and equity, were two of the three focuses for the realization of public policy in the National Development Plan (2014-2018). The educational spheres became visible as spaces for the construction of peace from the State. This vision does not emerge in the indicated political period, it is prior to it, continuing with previous legislation in line with international standards. The state vision mediated by the institutionality of schools, mainly public at the national level, establishes the perspective of building peace from citizen competences.

According to Arias et al (2019), talking about educational policy and peace links the Political Constitution of 1991, in which education and peace are rights. For its part,

General Education Law 115 (1994) integrates peaceful and just coexistence as a regulator of the educational exercise. Peace is not an element only in charge of the State, but also of “society, the educational institution, the family and the students”. The individual aspect becomes relevant, since training goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and integrates the vision of the students (Uribe, 1996, p. 155).

In formal educational institutions, the school government links the guarantee of participation. However, both the State and society are in charge of organizing, regulating and protecting the school system (Arias, et al, 2019, p.19).

Since 1994, the guidelines of the MEN, the Ten-Year Education Plans and the other planning levels consider the school curriculum and quality standards in line with the Institutional Educational Projects-PEI or Community Educational Projects-PEC created by each educational institution.

Starting in 1998, the curricular guidelines of the MEN integrate the themes of “education in ethics, values, democracy and citizenship” (Arias, et al, 2019, p.19). In 2001, they were articulated to the evaluation standards of the new Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education-ICFES. The regulations of basic quality standards promoted by the MEN include: Human rights, coexistence and peace, democratic responsibility and appreciation of differences (Arias, et al, 2019, p.19).

In 2004, the MEN published the Basic Standards of Citizen Competencies. from four pillars that govern public education in preschool, basic and secondary education and:

“they define what students are expected to know how to do in different grades with respect to Coexistence and peace; Participation and democratic responsibility; and Plurality, identity and valuation of differences” (Chaux and Velásquez, 2016, p.

12).

In addition to the evaluation and improvement plans, quality education is configured (MEN, 2006, p.9). The basic standards of citizen competences establish their implementation based on three axes:

1. Citizen Coexistences
2. Participation and Democratic responsibility
3. Plurality, identity and valuation of Differences (MEN, 2006, p.170-171).

For Chaux and Velásquez (2016) from citizen training, the achievement of peaceful coexistence is sought, relations between citizens to strengthen democracy and the State by following the norm, respect for the public, for differences from the rights humans and respect for the environment. Emphasis is placed on peaceful coexistence inside and outside of school environments. Thus, citizen training is a basic and independent standard from those of the three competencies presented. From Restrepo (2006) the vision of citizenship as an element for the achievement of education for peace provokes debate by setting a single orientation of being citizens linked to the notion of competence and evaluation by achievements that refer to quality and educational evaluation. The argument of the MEN establishes that the approach of citizen competences “promotes peaceful relations, even (or especially) in contexts of high levels of violence” (Chaux, 2012, p.500).

The articulation between quality, citizenship competencies and evaluation crystallized in 2003 when the competencies were evaluated in the Saber Tests in grades 5 and 9. For the MEN, the results allowed us to conclude that the students did not have the necessary knowledge and it was worth instructing in said competences (Restrepo, 2006, p. 160).

In 2013, Law 1620 on School Coexistence was issued, regulated by Decree 1965 of 2013, which promulgated in 2014 Law 1732 on the Chair of Peace, established by Decree 1038 of 2015 as mandatory for all public and private institutions nationwide. at all school levels including higher education, under the implementation of its university autonomy. In this law:

“b) Education for peace: it is understood as the appropriation of citizen knowledge and skills for peaceful coexistence, democratic participation, the construction of equity, respect for plurality, Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law” (Article 2).

It establishes the creation and strengthening of a culture of peace and creates the National System of School Coexistence and Training for the exercise of human rights, education for sexuality and the prevention and mitigation of school violence.

The model of citizen competencies continues and emphasis is placed on citizenship for peace based on quality and educational coverage. Thus, these policies do not refer to the period of the signing of the peace accords, but were already found as antecedents.

In 2016, the new Ten-Year National Education Plan (2016-2026) was published, based on educational quality and equity, establishing that the “consolidation of peace also requires an education that contributes to forming good citizens, resolving conflicts peacefully, strengthening the reflection and dialogue, as well as stimulating healthy coexistence” (MEN, 2016, p. 9). It proposes “strengthening citizen training to ensure a healthy and respectful coexistence, so that all schools in Colombia become territories of peace” (MEN, 2015, p.53).

This way, regardless of the political periods of government, there is continuity and intertwining between educational regulations.

There are differences due to the emphasis in each political period, but the fundamental axes are the same: quality, coverage, evaluation and training in citizenship. In tune with international policy and measurement models is the evaluation of teachers, teacher administrators and academic curricula with programs such as The International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) of 2009 carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Vivas and Valencia, 2014) and the Regional System for the Evaluation and Development of Citizen Competences (SREDECC) launched for Latin America (Chaux and Velásquez, 2019).

The implementation of the Chair of peace, citizenship training and the implementation of education for peace in educational institutions is articulated to the existing educational policy regulations. For example, the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies-CEA, regulated by Decree 1122 of June 18, 1998, is articulated with Decree 1038 that regulates Law 1732 of the Chair of Peace and allows a link to the extent that it establishes two articulating axes for the implementation of peace education in educational institutions:

C. Protection of the Nation’s cultural wealth

F. Diversity and plurality.

Thus, education for peace politically contemplates the existence of diversities in school environments that not only refer to the ethnic, but also to the racial, social conditions of class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, among others. Elements that contemplate the need to establish relations of coexistence, respect, tolerance and the rejection of actions of racism and discrimination.

## **UNDERSTANDINGS OF EDUCATION FOR PEACE FROM EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS**

In practice, the education policy for peace is

executed from the guidelines of the MEN with projects such as, for example, Classrooms in Peace or curricula for peace. There is didactic material and pedagogical booklets for peace with methodologies, times of activities, professionals in charge, transversal forms of work in the curriculum, etc.

However, how the policy is understood and implemented by the various educational communities is a broad issue. With this objective, the subject was investigated with two public educational institutions of socioeconomic stratum 1 located in the Districts of Buenaventura and Santiago de Cali. Both, municipalities of the department of Valle del Cauca, main social and economic centers of the department due to their sociodemographic composition, their ethnic diversity and enclaves of regional production.

In the District of Buenaventura, 86.7% self-identify as black, mulatto, Afro-Colombian or Afro-descendant; 1.5% as indigenous and 11.7% state that they do not belong to any ethnic group (DANE, 2018). All the groups come together in Comuna 5, an area of port expansion that has caused disputes over the territories, with problems of violation of human rights and forced displacement (CNMH, 2015, p.64). The focused educational institution is located in this town.

Cali, departmental capital, historically a recipient of the migrant population, the majority of its population (84.8%) does not register any racial ethnic self-recognition, 14.6% state that they are black, mulatto, Afro-Colombian, Afro-descendant and, to a lesser extent, indigenous (0.5%) (DANE, 2018). It is one of the capitals of Latin America with the largest Afro-Colombian population. According to Urrea (2012) it expresses the inequalities of opportunities and social mobility according to the various sectors or communes of the municipality. This diversity is concentrated in 4 communes of

the Aguablanca District: 13, 14, 15 and 21. Socioeconomically classified as strata 0,1, 2, and 3. The educational institution addressed is located in commune 13.

Although both institutions are of a public nature, the sociodemographic composition, the characteristics of the municipalities, the location of the schools, their school days and the actors that integrate influence the different conceptions of peace and peace education that were known.

Both educational institutions have two locations distributed among the school grades of preschool, primary and secondary. In Buenaventura, when students, some teachers and principals were approached through semi-structured interviews, it was found that the conceptions of peace were diverse but are based on ethnic recognition linked to the black or Afro-Colombian particularities of the municipality's population, highlighting the specificity of its people, its cultural aspects and traditions of the region that are related to its territory and traditional practices as a means of work and economic survival. Although the particularities are wide and varied with the presence of economic informality in the urban area and in which the majority of the parents of the students work. Peace is not necessarily articulated in terms of citizenship at school, nor with improvements in coexistence or respect for others in it, but with recognition in a country environment in which there is recognition and respect for being different ethnic and racially black.

When talking with the students, education for peace is also perceived as an element to cope with the conflicting aspects that are visible both inside and outside the educational institution. Education is seen as a channel for promotion and social mobility that makes it possible to visualize a better future that is different from the adversities that most of them live in their day-to-day lives in an environment of violence

and the few opportunities they would have upon graduating from high school.

For their part, the teachers and principals, most of whom are appointed by the State, know, some more than others, the national educational guidelines regarding peace, the Peace Chair, and highlight the Afro-Colombian Studies Chair as important for their work and in relation to education for peace. They say they know or have heard about education for peace through the various talks they have attended, but they are critical of how to carry out what is requested by the government and the District Education Secretariat due to the times and the lack of materials and infrastructure available for it. The number of students is another aspect that also makes their work difficult and even more so when family problems and violence are transferred to the educational institution. Aspects they raise get 'out of hand' and are sometimes obstacles to solving conflicts since they clash between what is preached at school, in terms of coexistence and respect among classmates, and what is practiced in students' homes.

Some teachers stated that from the State there are demands, but little is given to carry out what is requested, for this reason the issue of peace in the school is for some of them an additional burden to the work that they already have accumulated by the absence of teachers for some school grades, as could be verified. In general, it could also be commented that the existing ideas of peace in the institution are also articulated in relation to a religious ethic, perhaps due to the weight that the evangelical churches and their affiliation have for some of the students interviewed, selected by the teachers and who stood out for being disciplined, diligent and 'judicious' students. However, the participant observation exercises allow us to affirm that

not everyone behaved in the same way<sup>1</sup>.

For its part, in the educational institution of Cali located in one of the communes with the largest black or Afro-descendant population in the municipality, the ideas of peace and education for peace, unlike what was found in Buenaventura, are broad and transcend ethnicity. There is no consensus in this regard, but they do articulate more with the national educational policy. Peace arises in terms of respect for others, coexistence and acceptance of differences. As well as the management and resolution of conflicts in a 'healthy', non-violent way. In the vision that is presented, there is a need to abide by and follow the rules, at least within the educational institution.

The institution has a greater administrative organization, its teaching directors as coordinators of headquarters and rector know in greater depth the subject and practices around education for peace. By 2019, PEI had been reformulated and the Coexistence Manual updated, both articulated around peace, strengthening restorative and non-punitive justice. By their own management, they had students of Social Work and Psychology from a private university in the city who linked their professional practices to the school and, even initially, they made possible joint lines of work that were not glimpsed in the Buenaventura institution.

When inquiring about the implementation of peace education in their day-to-day work, in their teaching work, they agree with their colleagues from Buenaventura that carrying out transversal projects is difficult to implement, even more so when it is available to the teachers who want to do it and not as something mandatory as required by national educational regulations.

The confluence between the two scenarios is the difficulties of external violence that arrive in educational institutions because

1 The interviews with the students had the informed consent of their parents and guardians, when they were minors, in Colombia, under 18 years of age.

they are also problematic for students in the environment close to where they live: drug addiction, sale of narcotic substances, teenage pregnancies, gangs, etc. However, in this institution, conflicts around the routes and protocols established by Law 1620 of 2013 or School Coexistence Law, ratified and socialized by the Cali Municipal Education Secretariat with the My Community Project, are treated. es School and the Pedagogical Project for Coexistence and Construction of Citizenship within the framework of which training was given regarding the treatment of conflicts that began to be applied later in the institution, in Buenaventura no such aspects were found.

For both institutions, education for peace is an important aspect, recently emphasized even more by educational policies in the country, which demonstrates the interest of some of their teachers in training in this regard. It was observed that it is difficult to achieve its implementation when there are difficulties in the functioning of the same institution due to the absence of teachers, lack of work inputs, and the minimum coverage in public and infrastructure services, as well as the receipt of serious problems suffered by the students.

Although education for peace is known by students and teachers, its implementation is seen as an additional burden for social science teachers, despite the fact that the law establishes that it must have a transversal treatment. This does not happen, and even less without inter-institutional support that can facilitate the work, as occurs in the educational institution in Cali, different from the one in Buenaventura, which, although it integrates the presence of private companies as foundations and NGOs, works disjointly, there is no link of teachers and work is done from various sources without any apparently visible or foreseeable impact in the future.

To talk about education for peace, the debate is open about which definition is integrated, what is necessary to achieve peace and how from educational spaces it is possible to learn about it. Elements that will entail activities, wills and processes that imply the presence of members of educational communities, fathers, mothers, caregivers and other social and institutional actors. The issue is on the table and integrates elements of respect and coexistence, citizenship, youth, agencies, attitudes, knowledge and policies.

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