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SPACES FOR PEACE: CONTRIBUTIONS OF AGROECOLOGY TO THE SCHOOL AS A TERRITORY OF PEACE

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Abstract: This is an experience in development that arises from the reflection on the social, cultural, pedagogical and didactic problems identified in relation to the teaching of Social Sciences and Humanities in the Laguna Departmental Rural Educational Institution, Peñas branch of the municipality of Cucunubá, Cundinamarca, located in a territory characterized by mining, agricultural and livestock exploitation. The aim is to contribute here with the analytical development of the theoretical, methodological and pedagogical contributions that agroecology can make to the school, and the role of the school as a fundamental scenario of socialization and learning in which the identity of children and adolescents is configured. The objective of is to promote, from agroecology, pedagogical practices that allow high school and middle school students to develop citizenship competencies aimed at the appropriation, care and defense of the school as a territory of peace . With this, to generate awareness of the responsibility and care that must be taken to confront and resolve, from a local perspective, the global crises that loom over us. To this end, agroecological practices have been incorporated from the school garden, contributing to the care of the land, water, peasant knowledge associated with agriculture and traditional medicine, which involves the development of activities related to the production and conservation of soil, the manufacture of fertilizers through composting, biodigester bales, the collection and final disposal of organic waste from the school restaurant and families. Thus, incorporating theoretical elements of active pedagogy and peace education, methodologically from a qualitative approach, the action research made possible the emergence of a fundamental discussion: How can agroecology help to move from the school as a space to the school as a territory of peace? The answer to this question is a challenge because it has

become evident that forgetfulness has eroded the peasant culture, leading young people to disregard their roots, to abandon the countryside and the productive, social, economic and environmental possibilities that exist there. However, progressively it has been possible to involve different actors, making students more receptive and open to change, developing leadership skills, collaborative work and conflict resolution, moving towards interdisciplinarity, networking and territorial appropriation.

Keywords: Identity, territoriality, coexistence, action-research.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION AND THE ORIGIN OF THE EXPERIENCE

This experience, which is under development, was born in January 2024, as part of a pedagogical intervention led by two teachers from the Departmental Rural Educational Institution Laguna, Peñas headquarters in the municipality of Cucunubá, Cundinamarca, who evidenced, from their work in the context, problems around the appropriation, care and defense of the school as a shared space in which peace is built (Arenas-Villamizar et al., 2019).

Within this framework, during the first school term, the planning and structuring of the project began; the objectives were set and the working group that would lead the process was established. Together, it was decided to strengthen the exercise of citizenship through the development of the students' environmental awareness, taking advantage of local peasant knowledge, the theoretical and methodological contributions of agroecology, peace education and Action Research, seeking to restructure pedagogical and didactic practices, fostering the development of citizenship competencies and making efficient and sustainable use of school resources, contributing to the development of critical and creative

thinking, interdisciplinarity, situated learning and, above all, the construction of a collective identity around the care of water, land and nature as common goods.

With this in mind, the objective of the experience is to promote, from agroecology, pedagogical practices that allow high school and middle school students to develop citizenship competencies aimed at the appropriation, care and defense of the school as a territory of peace. Consequently, it seeks to solve problems associated with conflict, coexistence, the rupture of the social and community fabric, as well as to raise awareness about the local and global crises we are witnessing as humanity.

Now, during the second quarter, the experience mobilized different actors of the educational community, among them, teachers, directors, parents and neighbors, facilitating the construction of work networks, intergenerational communication, the approach to local problems from the knowledge and practices of the community, contributing to the transition from school as a space to school as a territory of peace.

As shown in Figure 1, “excluded” spaces were used to store garbage and discarded items. There, the first agroecological practice was implemented for the elaboration of compost in biodigester bales, which would later be used as part of the soil of the school garden:



Figure 1. Before and after. Production of biodigester bales. Personal file.

It is important to note that the experience takes place in a rural, peasant and mining context. Mining, agriculture and, to a lesser extent, cattle raising, are the main economic activities in the region. In other words, they are the most common sources of work and social projection for the students and their families. The institution has a migrant population that comes from both the country and abroad, students with disabilities or whose family nucleus is broken. Culturally, the community privileges conflict and waste, making it very difficult to generate caring mentalities and actions. Therefore, this experience seeks that, progressively, students develop new ways to assume nature, to assume themselves within it and to understand the power that their citizenship gives them to generate positive changes in their community and thus, contribute to the defense of the territory and the construction of a culture of peace and nonviolence.

Accordingly, there is support from the municipal administration, the Regional Autonomous Corporation -CAR-, the directors, other teachers, parents and, above all, the students. As can be seen in Figure 2, each actor is a piece of a puzzle, i.e., according to the work axis, each one is freely and autonomously in charge of a process related to the agroecological school garden (waste collection, composting, seed collection and care, characterization of what is planted, care and maintenance, beautification, etc.).



Figure 2. Agroecological practices of spatial transformation. Personal file.

In summary, within the Action Research framework, the process is divided into two stages. In the first stage, a collective reading of the context, its problems and the possibilities and challenges offered by the implementation of the experience was carried out. Initially, interdisciplinary work, review and projection spaces were generated, documentation, sensitization, construction and delimitation of the project, its objectives, scope and those of the working group, as well as the management and articulation with other agents were carried out. During this stage, it became evident that agroecology was a fundamental axis, as it transversally enables the articulation of actors and knowledge, conscious action and the sustainable projection of the experience (Mateus, 2016).

In the second stage -currently underway- the project is being implemented. Teachers and students from Tenth and Sixth grades, from different lines of work, and with the participation of other institutional and community actors, have intervened the spaces, since as mentioned before, from Action Research (Miguélez, 2000), education for peace (Cabezudo, 2013) and agroecology (Sarandón and Flores, 2014), they seek the exercise of citizenship, participation, articulation, collaborative work, problem solving, inclusion and respect for otherness and nature.

In other words, it seeks to propose a dialogue of knowledge from which to reflect on the pedagogical, ethical, political and environmental stakes that facilitate territorial appropriation, new ways of teaching and learning and of being in school. It is hoped that young people will be more receptive and open to change, that they will recognize their roots, stay in the countryside and see the productive, social, economic and environmental possibilities that exist there.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results so far can be expressed in three ways. The first, as shown in Figure 3, is expressed in the aesthetic transformation of the school. Thanks to the intervention, the building has been progressively beautified, generating positive perceptions and expectations, achieving changes in the way the school is experienced. The process generated in teachers, students and parents an atmosphere of wellbeing and renewal, and as part of a fabric, they give stitches that strengthen the process. In other words, the perceived space has begun to be assumed as a lived space worthy of care, in which things work if the educational community is committed, nurturing justice, inclusion, identity and sense of belonging.



Figure 3. Beautification of school infrastructure.
Personal file.

Secondly, scenarios of convergence and inter-institutional work have been favored. The management of the teachers and the commitment of the students have been decisive in joining efforts to strengthen the process. As shown in Figure 4, with the support of the municipal mayor's office and the CAR, technical training has been strengthened in the implementation of the agroecological school garden, the environmental management of resources and the material consolidation of the experience. This has been fundamental in the implementation of actions associated with the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, mainly those of quality education, gender equality, peace and justice, with this, the students have progressively appropriated the process, developing transversal citizenship competencies to the whole formative process that takes place in the school.



Figure 4. Composting and seedbed workshop led by CAR. Personal file.

Thirdly, the students have gradually improved in terms of care and management of the school territory. That is, although the culture of waste and carelessness predominates, having involved agroecological practices in the pedagogical training has allowed them to gradually develop an awareness of care that materializes, as illustrated in Figure 5, in the proper disposal of waste, its use and recycling in the biodigester bales, water saving and, above all, in working putting the general interest before the particular. In other words, students have begun to understand that taking care of their school is equivalent to taking care of themselves, which implies managing their personal relationships and relationships with nature in a different way, minimizing differences and conflicts (Sales et al., 2019).

Finally, although the experience has been developed for a very short time, it has contributed to the construction of spaces for peace in which the different actors of the educational community find the opportunity to be together. The school, in this sense, as a large environmental classroom, has gradually allowed, from the teaching of Social Sciences and English, to promote diversity, joint creation, exchange of knowledge, efficiency practices, resilience and human and social values for the collective construction of nonviolent ways of being that crystallize in a culture of sustainable peace.

As shown in Figure 6, these peace spaces, based on the pillars of agroecology, promote security, trust and social well-being as the basis for coexistence and peace, in addition to generating deep reflections on the care of nature, production systems, cultural practices associated with the use of land and water, and the implications that human actions have on the territory and the community.



Figure 5. Building spaces for peace. Personal file.





Figure 6. Spaces of peace. Personal file.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of the experience has taught those of us who are part of the process that the school is not only a physical structure. It transcends the classroom and unfolds in human mentalities and practices; it is part of who we are as citizens and is the place where we constitute a large part of our identity.

Making the school a territory of peace implies that from the teaching and learning practices we try to rethink together what we are, what we want to be and the relationships we weave among ourselves and with nature.

We conclude that the agroecological school garden and all the processes that precede or derive from it represent a substantive opportunity to teach and learn in different ways. That is to say, knowledge, practices, values and inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches that can enhance what is learned, giving it a practical and vivid character, are put into dialogue. That agroecology, brought to the school through Action Research, allows the development of more democratic practices, that is, it encourages students to exercise their citizenship by actively participating in the planning, execution and evaluation of the processes. In other words, agroecology enables the construction of new ways of being and being in the school, a territory of peace.

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