



## HUMAN AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL MEDIATION

MARTINA SPANN<sup>1</sup>, JUAN CARLOS TORREGO SEIJO<sup>2</sup>, CARLOS MONGE LÓPEZ<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universidad Camilo José Cela, Spain

<sup>2</sup>Universidad de Alcalá, Spain

<sup>3</sup>Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

---

### KEY WORDS

*Children's rights  
Conflict resolution  
School climate  
School mediation  
Social changes*

### ABSTRACT

*There is common understanding among the member states of the UN on Human and Children's Rights and that everyone has a right to life, liberty, and security of person. Children are entitled to special care. Social changes caused by migration or armed conflicts affect families and may have negative consequences on children's welfare. Violent family structures are often transported into the schools. Evidence on school mediation and conflict resolution programs between peers seems to be a good method to teach children how to resolve conflicts peacefully. This paper also researches how such programs can contribute to a more conflict-free society.*

Received: 02/ 12 / 2021

Accepted: 02/ 12 / 2021

## 1. Introduction

Human Rights are guaranteed through the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations*. Children's rights are particularly protected by the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly of the UN. Yet, reality looks different. Armed conflicts, and the resulting migration, represent a huge problem. It is also documented that children caught in emergencies are often abused and exploited. According to UNICEF and the International Labor Organization, in 2016 over 168 million children were engaged in child labor, sometimes working hazardous jobs. The mining industry or plantations, where dangerous pesticides are used without any protection, are among the most dangerous examples. To abolish all kind of violations of children's rights is on the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals and it is hoped to achieve this particular goal by 2025<sup>1</sup>.

By June 2020, the number of people forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, human rights violations, or violence in general, reached a historic record, with more than 79.5 million worldwide, of whom 26 million were refugees, 45.7 million were internally displaced people and 7.8 million were displaced abroad without refugee status. More than half of the world's refugees are children. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, Colombia remains with 7,816,000 people, and after 52 years of armed conflict, the country with the largest number of internally displaced people globally, ahead of Syria<sup>2</sup>. To give a better idea of the dimension: This number is higher than the total number of inhabitants of Costa Rica<sup>3</sup>, with a disproportionate impact on the Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations (Morales-Manzur & Morales-García, 2016).

Most Colombians have known war in their country, and Colombia still has to face high levels of violence which penetrates all levels of society, and leaves children particularly vulnerable. Even

if in many cases there is no active violation of children's rights, the mere presence of grievances over the injustices that happened, and the widespread aggression and conflictive behaviour that are a result of what has happened over five decades of armed conflict, can have negative impacts on families and their children. In the face of growing violence in all sectors of Colombian society, the "Amor por Medellín Foundation" has started the school mediation project *Hagamos las Paces* (Translation: *Let's Make Peace*) which teaches young children how to approach conflict in a democratic and non-violent way, and how to use the new capacities in other life situations which will hopefully transport these skills into overall society long-term. These approaches are grounded in the concept of *peace* in all its meanings and in the deep respect for other world-views and opinions.

A research carried out among 2,257 students and 760 staff members from 17 secondary schools suggests that school climate has an effect on pupil's academic achievement. As effective learning is of interest to governments and international bodies, an immense body of work on school climate has emerged, investigating the social characteristics and effects on learning that values and norms, and relationships between students and teachers have (Maxwell et al., 2017). Participants in a study that investigated school experience and happiness among 268 students (104 females, 39% and 164 males, 61%) found that perception of school experience predicts happiness, and that interpersonal competence predicts perception of school experience (Baytemir, 2019).

## 2. Education, conflict and bullying

Conflict exists in many different forms, from international armed conflict over power fights in companies to little children arguing over a toy. There is basically a consensus that conflict is intrinsically neither good nor bad, but different points of view, different values and interests that different people may have, can potentially lead to conflict and, if badly managed, to violence. In general, understanding conflict, and its origins, offers the opportunity to understand each other through difference, pluralism and democratic practice, and offers a chance to learn something

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/ten-things-you-didnt-know-about-child-labour>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://eacnur.org/blog/dia-mundial-del-refugiado-2019-tc\\_alt45664n\\_o\\_pstn\\_o\\_pst/](https://eacnur.org/blog/dia-mundial-del-refugiado-2019-tc_alt45664n_o_pstn_o_pst/)

new (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

The world which we live in is changing rapidly. The Internet, and more specifically social networks, offer a kind of communication in which people's interaction has become less personal, but at the same time this virtual world has opened doors to the abstract and to anonymity where aggression and violence can be lived without the consequences that would apply in the real world. Children play video games, sometimes very aggressive ones, that lack reality, and in which they do not have to take responsibility for their own actions, and also without having to communicate with other children in the way it used to be just over two decades ago, when it was common for a child to pick up another one to ride a bicycle, or to go skating.

In Colombia, and in other parts of the planet, this changing world gives a lot of potential for conflict because of new and faster technologies, and other rapid changes of life patterns, but also due to situations our society is not used to, such as the coexistence of many different cultures in limited space and with limited resources, a situation which was recently exacerbated by the pandemic. These are situations in which people from different parts of the world, or from different parts of the same country, people with different realities in their lives, different mentalities and social backgrounds, and the corresponding socially constructed points of view. They are obliged to live together without having chosen to do, something that is often caused by forced migration like in the case of Colombia.

The times when schools were merely concerned with teaching their students intellectual knowledge (Moral, 2011), and everything else took place in the families, and in the private sphere that the school did not interfere with, belong to the past. It is known that the relationship between students and teachers play a crucial role and that students' results depend on this relationship. Students' motivation and if they are more or less active and take active part in school life and in the class depends highly on the feedback they receive from their teachers. Negative experiences in teacher relations can even cause students to

drop out of school and have negative implications on their future life (Akin, 2015). In the last decades, schools have worked to improve school climate and to create positive environments in order to foster well-being and optimal learning conditions (Elmore & Huebner, 2010).

The General Assembly of the United Nations found that bullying in schools, and the stress related to it, has reached levels of global concern, and that it affects emotional wellbeing, academic work and even physical health, and therefore comes at a high cost for society. In September 2015, the Secretary General addressed concrete commitments and targets in the agenda for the *2030 Sustainable Development Goals* to build a violence-free environment for all, and underlines the importance of knowledge on human rights which relate to children, and the promotion of peace and non-violence, and a just and gender-sensitive and inclusive education which is designed to tackle and end violence against children, and all sort of exploitation and abuse (United Nations, 2016).

Educating children to help them become responsible citizens is a central task of our society and thus also of our school systems. Children later become adults and their world views and values will be the pillars of society. They will shape the economy and politics and thus set the path for their country and determine its fate. Their upbringing, and the transmission of values, must therefore be based on the principles of human rights, democracy, responsibility, tolerance, compassion and integrity, which will later ensure political stability and economic progress, as they both go hand in hand. In view of the clear evidence of difficulties, problems, discord and conflicts in schools, it is necessary to train the skills to tackle these problems, and to facilitate and promote creative, considered and conciliatory solutions to the conflicts that occur on a daily basis. Peer mediation projects seem to be an adequate way to facilitate these capacities.

### **3. School mediation in the context of Colombia**

In the aftermath of the armed conflict and during the peace negotiations between the Colombian

Government and the Revolutionary Cells FARC, the “Amor por Medellín Foundation”, which serves citizens since the 1970’s to promote human and civil rights, decided to create a project together with the “Rotary Club of Medellín” to teach children from an early life on how to solve their conflicts in a peaceful and democratic way. To grow up in a violence-free environment is not only a human right but also facilitates the capacity to develop a more peaceful behavior towards others, as childhood conditions people for their adult life.

Didier Vélez, president to the Foundation, finds that in view of the clear evidence of school difficulties, problems, discord and conflicts, it is necessary to train school mediators to facilitate and promote creative, democratic and conciliatory solutions to the conflicts that occur on a daily basis. She highlights that the *Hagamos las Paces* project will allow the participating parties to contribute with knowledge and experiences to build a culture for peace, and to help schools to recreate and strengthen pedagogical, didactic and curricular experiences that support learning values necessary for a healthy coexistence in school and other areas of life, and for a violence-free and respectful solution of conflicts. She furthermore argues that these experiences could serve as a paradigm and an example for the entire school sector (Fundación Amor por Medellín y Antioquia, 2014).

According to this foundation, Colombia embodies a problem of widespread violence, which is growing in all social spheres, which is why the construction of coexistence projects is a priority, from the democratic perspective of citizen training, which generates possibilities for the individual and to the community transformation that the country needs. Peer mediation projects seek new dynamic of relationships. They are centered in negotiation and dialogue, and the creation of spaces for reconciliation and forgiveness. Such projects will, through pedagogical practices, offer new educational directions and alternative forms of coexistence and human training. These skills can be transported into overall society on the long-term, and help building sustainable peace in Colombia. The Foundation has worked in

development, particularly in building communities and defending human and civil rights for over four decades, and draws on this knowledge within the peer mediation project.

Mediation programs are aimed at the resolution of conflicts in a respectful and tolerant manner, and at peace-building. The philosophical roots of educational mediation derive from a positive vision based on the culture of non-violence. They emphasize alternative conflict resolution and believe in human and children's rights and their application through the school curriculum (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Their concepts are basically the same as those of mediation in general.

Peer mediation projects are based on the assumption that pupils are more likely to discuss their conflicts more openly with their peers than with adults, especially if they are in a hierarchical structure above them. A study from Australia that investigated 492 students in grades 7 to 10 (53.5% were males) indicates that strong predictors of bullying and victimization were whether a pupil had group and academic support, or not (Turner et al., 2014).

Evidence from a study among 2,273 high school students from 3 public schools in Kenya on bullying suggests that situations improve when teachers get involved and protect the student, and that positive school climate can clearly be associated with bullying and victimization (Mucherah et al., 2017). Classmates usually use a language that is closer to those affected and therefore leads to better understanding and conflict resolution (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Iriate-Redín and Ibarrola-García (2018) also state that today's schools have become “a hotbed of conflict” because of the superficiality of the interpersonal relationships that adults develop, the frenetic pace of life that we lead, and the instability that goes with it, and not least because of the flood of information that reaches us every day, which seems to overwhelm young people. School and private life should also be seen in their entirety, as one area influences the other. A reduction of disciplinary cases in school does not automatically mean an improved situation, if the bullying of a student continues in the social media after school hours.

A meta-analysis of 10 studies found that aggressive behavior can be addressed through a number of variables, yet no variable was essential in influencing the outcome. Further evidence suggested that interventions lead to good outcomes and to reductions in aggressive behaviors when student's skills acquisitions and social-cognitive processes are targeted (Dymnicki et al., 2011). A study from 2013 finds that research done on school climate can contribute to better policies and hence to better quality of schools and emphasizes on the necessity of educators that guarantee this quality for now and for future generations (Thapa et al., 2013).

The *Hagamos las Paces* project is based on pedagogical tools that will enable children and young people to learn how to resolve their differences through dialogue and open communication, supported by an environment of tolerance and respect for others, where different personalities are seen as an opportunity for development. It conveys values based on the Kantian imperative and works with 12 core principles according to this motto.

The aim for students is to develop mediator skills that contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflicts in school and in their daily lives, and facilitate the prevention of bullying. In addition, it transmits a mentality that contributes to the respectful treatment of the environment, other beings, and the belongings of others.

Schools cater, even within the same school, to all different kind of people from different backgrounds with different values and views, which makes education a complex task. The project teaches children to understand and respect differences, and to recognize that other opinions and world-views are a chance to learn something new in life, instead of perceiving them as a threat and rejecting the difference in peers and other people.

52 years of civil war in Colombia have created violation of human rights, deprivation, grievances and suspicion among the population. It can be partly seen as a result of unsolved grievances that the Colombians rejected the Peace Accord between the Government and the FARC Revolutionary Cells in 2016. It is a challenge to rebuild relationships and trust

among people in order to achieve lasting and sustainable peace building. Relationships can only be rebuilt if grievances are addressed and aggressors from all sides of the conflict recognize the harm they have inflicted on the victims.

The integrative method of peer negotiation draws on the negotiation approach as "back-and-forth" to reach an agreement which is much easier achieved when some interests are shared. *Hagamos las Paces* is based on the notion that conflict creates opportunities for human development and changed behaviors, enables dialogue by questioning own thoughts, belief systems and world-views which leads to healthy communication, and healthy communication leads to peaceful communities (Fisher et al., 2012).

Although the project is designed as a peer mediation/conciliator program, teachers are also trained in mediation and closely involved in the project, also for those cases where the pupils are overwhelmed with the task. The pupils accept the integrative project well, as it has a youth-friendly design. It works with comics and age-appropriate manuals to guide the students, posters, a song of their own, and a kind of "passport" that identifies the students as "agents of peace" (this relates strongly to the peace building process in Colombia, and could be adapted accordingly in other countries).

The term *school coexistence* makes us think of bullying, as well as of violence in schools, but it encompasses much more. School coexistence is the peaceful coexistence of the members of the educational community. It promotes educational objectives in a climate that favors the integral development of students. Positive interrelationships improve school coexistence. Wang and Holcombe (2010) find that students' perception of the school environment had direct implications on their academic results. Furthermore, they influenced their participation and their identification with school. Learning takes place through social adaptation, which is the social interaction between children and more competent people, who can be adults or peers (Tzurriel & Shamir, 2007).

Sellman (2011) also sustains that *conflict resolution projects act* as a unifying factor among



students and that it has clearly contributed to improve school coexistence. This suggests that seeing the coexistence of the school community in a holistic way, seems to benefit its members in different ways, not only in terms of better interpersonal relationships but also academically, and as it seems also in relationships outside of the school because it is assumed that the skills learnt in conflict resolution programs in school, can be transported to other areas of life. In addition, a more positive and peaceful environment could influence the emotional well-being of everybody involved through good coexistence at school where pupils and teachers spend many hours in a day. It is assumed that positive school coexistence creates emotional balance, and this balance is transmitted to other relationships with other people in other contexts.

Children often find it entertaining to bully a classmate. They are not aware of the severe psychological consequences that the victim may suffer from for a lifetime. The report of the Secretary General of the United Nations on bullying shows the statement of an eleven-year-old boy who tells that the teacher asked them to take a piece of paper, to crumble and stand on it, and then try to get it back to its original shape which was impossible. She told the pupils that it was the same with bullying (United Nations, 2016). When the harm is done, the emotional scars persist, and the victim will never be the same person again. Safety of the person is a basic human right. Therefore, it is a key objective of conflict resolution projects in schools to teach children a holistic understanding of a culture of peace, and to understand the consequences of their actions and to be responsible for them. Peer mediation programs teach children to listen to the opponent, and to reach an agreement and a solution that everybody involved can live with.

#### **4. Effects of peer mediation programme**

Findings suggest that even over 30 years after implementing the first peer mediation programs in schools, there is still little empirical data available on conflict resolution programs, especially those which are measuring the long-

term effects of school mediation programs on behavioral changes, real effects of resolving conflicts and the possibilities to transport skills from mediation projects, based on communication, negotiation, and democratic values, into the wider communities. Yet evidence suggests that strategies chosen during conflict can have both positive or negative implications, depending on the theoretical approaches to explaining and dealing with peer conflict (Rinaldi & Cheong, in press).

Silva and Torrego (2017) stress that students find that participation in mediation programs showed them capabilities like empathy and the capacity to listen. They also underline that they learnt through games and almost “without wanting to learn”. According to Davidson (2003) most of the research, evaluating school mediation programs reflect a high success rate of between 80% and 95%. In this study conducted in elementary schools in New Jersey, the results showed that coexistence was improved in the schools in general, and that the number of disciplinary cases and violent acts decreased. The number of absences as a result of fear of being attacked also declined. The interviewed students reported that they have developed higher self-esteem, and that their sense of responsibility and self-respect has also been increased. Although his own study was undertaken in primary schools, the study indicates that in surveys carried out in five New York City high schools, the number of expulsions could be reduced by 45% to 70% in the first year of the implementation of a peer mediation program.

Other results highlight that programs that focus on conflict resolution through peers, rather than adults, lead to more positive outcomes and an increased willingness to intervene in cases of bullying. These results are based on a meta-analysis that investigated findings from 12 conflict resolution programs in elementary and secondary schools in the United States and European countries, involving 12,874 students. The research focused on the bystander phenomenon and found that it seems a successful method to focus on peer group behaviors to mitigate individual bullying, and to get a bystander to support their peers when they

are bullied. Findings furthermore suggest that the mere sense of injustice does not prevail as a reason to intervene, and that children are much more willing to help the victim if he or she is a friend (Polanin et al., 2012). A study on bullying shows that there are bullies who are themselves victims of harassment, and also that many bullies are not rejected, sometimes they are even surprisingly popular among their peers. The research further stresses that some bullies are essentially rather friendly and want to be accepted, whereas others show high social-cognitive deficits (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003).

Turnuklu et al. (2010) find in a study, conducted in secondary schools, in which conflict resolution and peer mediation projects were used, that 92% of the mediation processes were successful, and that the conflicts could be resolved or transformed with non-violent methods. In a study in primary schools, 93% of the students were satisfied with the results of the peer mediation program. They conclude that conflict resolution projects in schools and peer mediation training do not only decrease student's aggression and behavioral violence, but can also lead them to use more constructive and peaceful conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, interpersonal conflicts in schools should not be considered as undesirable incidents to be avoided, nor should they be resolved in a destructive manner. Rather, they should be seen as opportunities for socialization, for social and emotional growth, as tools for developing or transforming interpersonal relationships, and as a natural part of school life. They highlight that training in peer mediation projects can help students develop the skills necessary to manage their interpersonal conflicts through non-violent strategies at an early age. Furthermore, it will also lead to making them more resilient for the future, and enable them to withstand more serious conflicts in their adult lives. This could in the long-term benefit overall society by avoiding aggression and conflicts that can lead to war and bring misery, poverty and human rights violation over generations.

Finally, Torrego (2018) stresses that students are assets in society, capable of thinking and expressing themselves freely and critically,

so that they can contribute to a positive transformation of a more peaceful society.

## 5. Children, conflict and peace

It can be said that armed conflict and all its implications has many negative effects on the population and especially on children. War brings about human and children's rights violations in every possible sense. It does not only jeopardize the security of individuals but also influence life flow as such. The lack of security may not only keep children away school. It influences nutrition because the provision of food in stores may not be guaranteed, it can lead to child work as the father is in combat and cannot provide for the family, and these are only a few of all negative consequences that exist for children in war situations. Approximately 9% of all Colombian children are born with signs of malnutrition, a clear indicator for poverty (Colombian Ministry of Health, 2013).

Social issues, e.g., unemployment, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, social tensions and crime have been recognized as subjects that challenge peacebuilding. Human security, particularly the protection of individuals and social groups like children have gained special importance in international peacebuilding. Top-down approaches have to be recalibrated, and ownership of projects, designed as bottom-up approaches, have to be given to local groups who know best what their needs are. The 2001 Responsibility to Protect principle of the United Nations highlights concepts like "local participation", "local ownership", "local empowerment" and "locally led" (Lee et al., 2016).

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding must start at the grassroots level, and projects like *Hagamos las Paces* do not only combine all the advantages mentioned above, but also apply them to the youngest members of society with a great potential to positively influence and change progressively towards a more peaceful mentality within overall society.

All human societies possess characteristics that contribute to maintaining peace. These can be their institutions, policies or their culture itself. They translate into unspoken norms of interaction and social values. Often

these capacities are not documented and hence forgotten, a fact which could have a negative effect even on the most peaceful societies in the future. Therefore, it is recommendable that all States document and apply a sustainable peace agenda which maintains social cohesion, human security, the rule of law and inclusive development, which all contribute to peaceful societies. Peace is not so much the absence of conflict and war, but the capability to transform conflict in a positive and constructive way.

Mediation programs are nowadays already quite advanced in some schools. There are extensive peer support programs in the educational field, such as the *Student Helpers* projects, as it is recognized that “the human being is the only living being unable to survive and subsist without the help of another being” (Torrego, 2018, p. 13). Throughout evolution, the humans have sought the support of others. Not only does this condition characterize mankind, it has also ensured survival for millennia. Social support networks within a group are built in a natural way, they provide both emotional and instrumental help, and at the same time express values such as respect, appreciation, acceptance and cooperation. The processes of conflict resolution favor personal development on an emotional, socio-cognitive and moral level. They help building self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, a sense of responsibility, moral reasoning and empathy and support an interpersonal problem-solving thinking (Ibarrola-García & Iriarte-Redín, 2014). This contributes to a person’s overall development as these skills can even support future relationships in their adult life.

Sánchez-Porro and González-Ortega (2017) furthermore argue that training all students in communication, conflict resolution and emotional skills, something that is not done in most school mediation programs, prevents that only selected students will be able to enjoy the benefits of the program. In addition, to include all students makes the program more flexible, and consequently enables much better to address the different forms of conflict that arise among adolescents in an optimum way. This flexibility provides the school with a wide variety of possible ways to organize itself, and is

ideal for meeting the needs of the students. The study also emphasizes that this holistic format provides an opportunity to involve all school agents: students, teachers, management and administrative staff as well as parents of students. It underlines that involving adults not only helps the mediation program function, but can also save resources (time and money) by not having to hire external personnel. Different countries have already reacted by establishing laws and regulations. Colombia has done so with a compulsory school and university subject, providing education on peace.

## **6. *Hagamos las paces* project**

The topic of conflict resolution is very complex, as each person reacts to a problem differently, and therefore the range of responses can only be known through asking, listening and analyzing the participants in the project. It is important to know first-hand how they transfer theory into practice, and how they adopt and assimilate the newly learnt skills and knowledge, transmitted by mediation and conflict resolution projects, into the routine of their daily lives (Flick, 2007). Furthermore, these findings help to find out whether it is true that the post-war context strongly influences the behaviors of people who have been or are directly or indirectly affected by the armed conflict. It is assumed that listening to the members of a mediation program provides more in-depth information on qualitative designs and also allows modifying and optimizing the program accordingly.

Chambers (2014) states that we learn more when we see things through emotions than through analysis, and that a whole concept a researcher had prior to the investigation, can change in a single day. He emphasizes the importance of conversation and observation, citing as an example an experience he had in India when participants in a project taught him their own water conservation measures that he, although an expert on the subject, had never thought about before. He recommends that the researchers “disempower” themselves and learn to listen and to remain open to any unexpected findings. He even suggests planning extra time in case unexpected experiences arise that need to be investigated in more detail, and recommends



moving physically around the project environment to gain better impressions of what it is all about.

A school mediation project has to be implemented at least two if not five years in order to be evaluated and to show results, as both students and teachers need about two years to adapt to it (Schellenberg et al., 2007). This suggests that evaluating *Hagamos las Paces* six years after being first implemented should show representative results. The peer mediation project which is designed to contribute to positive peace and inclusive development seems to be adopted well by the children, and there is justified expectancy for good long-term developmental and educational results. It still has to be fully researched and evaluations through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are underway.

A first qualitative and experimental pilot study has been carried out two years after the program had been first implemented in the pilot school of *Hagamos las Paces*, although the sample was not representative. Thirteen pupils, whose ages were ranging between eight and eighteen years, two mothers and the head teacher of the mediation project have been interviewed. All students reported that the skills learnt at the project helped them and that through the capacities from the program they found it easier to deal less aggressively with conflictive situations. Three students between 17 and 18 years old stressed their belief that peer mediation programs have a potential to contribute to peacebuilding and positive behavioral changes, and that society could become more peaceful over time through changed behaviors.

An 18-year-old male student told us that his father had been in jail several times. The boy had to live with relatives and described that he was full of hate when he first came to the school. The peer mediation program taught him to deal with stress and grievances, and he learnt about tolerance and forgiving. He underlined that the project has changed his life. The head teacher reported that some children had to leave their homes and families. Some of teachers felt special responsibility towards them and almost treated the children as if they were their own, giving

them a sense of belonging. She highlighted that in case this sense of belonging is missing, the children often do not come to school, which increases the chances to drift into criminality. Children, who do not finish their school education, later have little to no chance to find employment and to escape poverty. Furthermore, she stressed that children showed more positive behavioral changes in cases where the parents supported the mediation project. This observation supports evidence from other peer mediation evaluation which found the lack of parents' participation among the most negative indicators (Moral, 2011).

We also found evidence of how important the processes of mediation themselves are, and having them well implemented within the school's core structure from the beginning. In addition, we observe that it is the people involved in this process on whom the program's success clearly depends. These findings are confirmed by Smith et al. (2002), who found that a project depends on the processes, implementation and importance given to the project by the people involved, and the emphasis they place on making it a success. Torrego and Galán (2008, p. 26) consider the involvement of student mediators in the central structures of the schools to be important, since they conclude that a "project as ambitious as the incorporation of mediation teams in the schools cannot function in an isolated manner and without regards to the school's curricular policies". Furthermore, they stress that all sectors of a school, teachers, the principle, and even the administration staff, should be involved to make a conflict resolution project work at its best.

We also conclude, like Lacuesta and Traver (2019), that a conflict resolution program must become part of the school culture itself, something that the *Hagamos las Paces* project seems to have well achieved. Our findings also clearly confirm the importance of participation with an emphasis that it has to be voluntary, and we agree with García-Raga et al. (2016) who find that process and participation are both fundamental because helping, listening and caring enable people passing their personal limits which helps to improve school coexistence. School mediation programs can benefit school

reform initiatives in holistic ways if these achieve to link program design and student achievement (Good & Mccaslin, 2008). Furthermore, we believe that education in all its senses is more successful, and gives better results, if the person being educated is open to learning, and that students accept learning better when they feel heard.

## 7. Conclusion

Evidence on violations of children's rights, and of human rights in general, is a clear indicator that actions have to be taken. Colombia embodies this problem in a very prominent way due to having had one of the longest civil wars in modern history and its implications like overall violence and strong grievances.

Keeping peace in this world seems to be a complex and difficult task as many different factors play a role. It seems to be indispensable to start with changing towards a more peaceful mentality in society by strongly involving its youngest members. "Participatory development can be applied in the reconstruction phase of post-crises development, to achieve the goals of equal distribution of humanitarian aid and uplift the socio-economic conditions of crises-affected people" (Elahi et al., 2015, p. 1).

Peer mediation and conflict resolution projects in schools seem to be an adequate and effective method to teach young people in an inclusive, bottom-up approach to identify conflicts and its origins, and to tackle them in a democratic, respectful and peaceful manner. It can be considered that "what goes within a

person can have [...] influence on global events" and it is suggested to undertake "active involvement in social justice or peace projects [and] peace education" (Gan, 2019, p.4).

An attractive argument in favor of peer mediation programs is the fact that they seem to have positive influence on children's overall conflict resolution capacities. They enable children to think differently about other people's world-views and opinions, and to see these diverging opinions rather as an opportunity to learn than as a threat. Therefore, chances are high that they will be capable to apply their newly learnt skills from the mediation project in their adult lives and hence become more resilient. If these effects were confirmed in long-term studies, it could be deduced that peer mediation programs in schools also have positive effects on creating more peaceful societies in agreement with the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1945: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed" (p.1).

A further conclusion is that steps have to be taken to guarantee functioning institutions and a more equitable distribution of resources as guarantees for peace and a more conflict-free society. All States should have policies and frameworks in place that make them capable of acting in case the political and security situation requires it. It would even be recommendable to think about the implementation of international strategy plans and policies, which States could draw on, in case it was needed.

## References

- Akın, U. (2015). Do school experiences predict life satisfaction in Turkish college students? *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 7, 87-96.
- Baytemir, K. (2019). Experiences of school as a mediator between interpersonal competence and happiness in adolescents. *Annals of Psychology*, 35(2), 259-268. <https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.35.2.320311>
- Chambers, R. (2014). *Into the unknown. Explorations in development practice*. Practical Action.
- Colombian Ministry of Health (2013). *Análisis de situación de salud según regiones*, CMH.
- Davidson, T. (2003). *Evaluating the effectiveness of a peer mediation program in an elementary school setting*. Rowan University.
- Dymnicki, A.B., Weissberg, R.P., & Henry, D.B. (2011). Understanding how programs work to prevent overt aggressive behaviors: A meta-analysis of mediators of elementary school-based programs. *Journal of School Violence*, 10(4), 315-337. <http://www.doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2011.602599>
- Elahi, N., Nyborg, I., & Bahadar, N. (2015). Participatory development practices: A critical analysis of gender empowerment and development in pre- and post-crises Swat, Pakistan. *Forum for Development Studies*, 42(2), 333-356. <http://www.doi.org/10.1080/08039410.2015.1025828>
- Elmore, G.M., & Huebner, E.S. (2010). Adolescents' satisfaction with school experiences: Relationships with demographics, attachment relationships, and school engagement behavior. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47(6), 525-537. <http://www.doi.org/10.1002/pits.20488>
- Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (2012). *Getting to yes. Negotiating an agreement without giving in* (2nd. ed.). Penguin Books.
- Flick, U. (2007). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage.
- Fundación Amor por Medellín y Antioquia (2014). *Proyecto Hagamos las Paces*. FAMA.
- Gan, P. (2019). Can mystical peace contribute to global peace? *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 26(2), 1-26.
- García-Raga L., Chiva, I., Moral, A., & Ramos, G. (2016). Strengths and weaknesses of the school mediation from the perspective of students in secondary education. *Journal of Research in Social Pedagogy*, 28, 203-215. [https://doi.org/10.7179/PSRI\\_2016.28.15](https://doi.org/10.7179/PSRI_2016.28.15)
- Good, T.L., & Mccaslin, M. (2008). What we learned about research on school reform: Considerations for practice and policy. *Teachers College Record*, 110(11), 2475-2495.
- Ibarrola-García, S. y Iriarte Redín, C. (2014). Desarrollo de las competencias emocional. y sociomoral a través de la mediación escolar entre iguales en educación secundaria. *Curriculum*, 27, 9-27.
- Iriarte-Redín, C. y Ibarrola-García, S. (2018). Capacitación socioafectiva de alumnos y profesores a través de la mediación y la resolución de conflictos. *Padres y Maestros*, 373, 22-27. <https://doi.org/10.14422/pym.i373.y2018.003>
- Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (1996). Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools. A review of a research. *Review of Educational Research*, 66(4), 459-506. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543066004459>
- Lacuesta, D. y Traver, J.A. (2018). Yo, contigo. El Programa de mediación entre iguales desde la perspectiva de un ejemplo de vida. *Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 16(1), 53-71. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15366/reice2018.16.1.004>
- Lee, S.Y., Ginty, R.M., & Joshi, M. (2016). Social peace vs. security peace. *Global Governance*, 22(4), 491-512.
- Maxwell, S., Reynolds, K.J., Lee, E., Subasic, E., & Bromhead, D. (2017). The impact of school climate and school identification on academic achievement: Multilevel modeling with student and teacher data. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1-21. <http://www.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02069>
- Moral, A.M. (2011). *Una aproximación a la evaluación de programas de mediación para la mejora de la convivencia en los centros escolares*. Universidad de Valencia.
- Morales-Manzur, J.C. y Morales-García, L. (2016). Colombia y la situación de los desplazados y refugiados: consideraciones teórico-jurídicas. *Aldea Mundo*, 42, 1-31.

- Mucherah, W., Finch, H., White, T., & Thomas, K. (2017). The relationship of school climate, teacher defending and friends on students' perceptions of bullying in high school. *Journal of Adolescence*, 62, 128-139. <http://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.11.012>
- Polanin, J., Espelage, D., & Pigott, T. (2012). A meta-analysis of school-based bullying prevention programs. Effects on bystander intervention behavior. *School Psychology Review*, 41(1), 47-65.
- Rinaldi, C.M. and Cheong, C. (2021). Peer Conflict Resolution. In S. Hupp and J. Jewell (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development* <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171492.wecad402>
- Rodkin, P.C., & Hodges, E.V. (2003). Bullies and victims in the peer ecology: Four questions for psychologists and school professionals. *School Psychology Review*, 32, 384-400. doi: <http://www.doi.org/10.1080/02796015.2003.12086207>
- Sánchez-Porro, D.G. y González Ortega, E. (2017). Los programas de mediación escolar como herramientas para la promoción de unas relaciones de pareja saludables en la adolescencia. *Revista Española de Orientación y Psicopedagogía*, 28(1), 72-85. <https://doi.org/10.5944/reop.vol.28.num.1.2017.19359>
- Schellenberg, R., Parks-Savage, A., & Rehfuss, M. (2007). Reducing levels of elementary school violence with peer mediation. *Professional School Counselling*, 10(5), 475-481. <https://doi.org/10.5330/PRSC.10.5.Q7866077L3V5Q044>
- Sellman, E. (2011). Peer mediation services for conflict resolution in schools: What transformations in activity characterize successful implementation. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 45-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903419992>
- Silva, I. y Torrego, J.C. (2017). Percepción del alumnado y profesorado sobre un programa de mediación entre iguales. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 6(2), 214-238. <http://www.doi.org/10.17583/qre.2017.2713>
- Smith, S., Daunic, A., Miller, D., & Robinson, T. (2002). Conflict resolution and peer mediation in middle schools: Extending the process and outcome knowledge base. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 142(5), 567-586. <http://www.doi.org/10.1080/00224540209603919>
- Thapa, A. et al. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(3), 357-385. <http://www.doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483907>
- Torrego, J.C. (Coord.) (2018). *La ayuda entre iguales para mejorar la convivencia escolar. Manual para la formación de alumnos ayudantes* (2ª ed.). M Narcea Ediciones.
- Torrego, J.C. y Galán, A. (2008). Investigación evaluativa sobre el programa de mediación de conflictos en centros escolares. *Revista de Educación*, 347, 369-394.
- Turner, I., Reynolds, K.J., Lee, E., Subasic, E., & Bromhead, D. (2014). Well-being, school climate, and the social identity process: A latent growth model study of bullying perpetration and peer victimization. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 29(3), 320-335. <http://www.doi.org/10.1037/spq0000074>
- Turnuklu, A., Kacmaz, T., Gurler, S., Sevkin, B., Turk, F., Kalender, A., & Zengin, F. (2010). The effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation training on primary school students' level of aggression. *Education 3-13*, 38(1), 13-22. doi: <http://www.doi.org/10.1080/03004270902760668>
- Tzuriel, D., & Shamir, A. (2007). The effects of peer mediation with young children on children's cognitive modifiability. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 143-165. doi: <http://www.doi.org/10.1348/000709905X84279>
- United Nations (2016). *Promotion and protection of rights of children. Protecting children from bullying*. UN.
- Wang, M.T., & Holcombe, R. (2010). Adolescents' perceptions of school environment, engagement, and academic achievement in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(3), 633-662. doi: <http://www.doi.org/10.3102/0002831209361209>