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PEACE BUILDER STUDENTS
ESTUDIANTES CONSTRUCTORES DE PAZ
Research Report

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Resumen:
Se reporta la experiencia de un proyecto de investigación-formación sobre Comunicación y Cultura de Paz desarrollado a lo largo de cinco años con 785 estudiantes venezolanos con edad promedio de 23 años.
Palabras Clave: Comunicación, Cultura de Paz, Venezuela, estudiantes universitarios

Abstract:
The report shows the experience of Communication and Peace Culture five-year research-training project developed with 785 Venezuelan students with an average age of 23 years-old.
Key Words: Communication, Peace Culture, Venezuela, University students

INTRODUCTION

The following report is a about the advances of a research on Communication and Peace Culture that has been carried out through several years with some groups of Venezuelan students. The main goal of the research has been to explore the perceptions and expectations of students about violence and peace, and their relationship with communication. We intend to determine and explain key factors that enhance young people's participation in reducing violence and building peaceful environments

OVERVIEW

This research integrates partial results from several oficial research projects carried out between the years 2004 and 2008 with the support of institutions such as Universidad del Zulia, Universidad

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Católica Andrés Bello, Fundación Unamuno and Fundapax, all of them from Venezuela.

It has not been a development of several projects in a sequence covering linear stages, neither an institutional mega-project that coordinates or integrates all the projects from a single organization. We have considered both ways to be non-sufficient (and even inconvenient) in a world of violence, and building peace is extremely complicated, variable, inaccurate, paradoxical and in crisis. Linearity may not be broad enough and may leave out many contextual aspects, at the same time that a single coordination may be dangerously violent because of its being excluding

It deals with several spontaneous interrelated projects carried out by the authors in an attempt to account for the following assumptions:1) What do students perceive as violence?, 2)How do they understand it? 3) How do they relate violence to communication?, 4) What is the role that education programs is taking in order to reduce violence? And, 5) How can students contribute to reduce violence and build peace environments?. This shared effort has allowed the inclusion of other research peers from both Venezuela and other countries, within the context of an extended agenda oriented towards building peace as a long-term project.

The subject of violence and peace turns out to be as complex as communication, or education, or social tolerance themselves. However, any attempt and contribution is important for at least five reasons: 1) it is necessary to widen our awareness about the dynamics of violence and piece building, we need broad and dynamic visions, 2) it is necessary to widen the understanding of the relationship between communication and violence, communication and peace building, and understanding and building, on the basis of a dialog with reality and its actors, 3) it is necessary to understand that peace culture is a transversal axis that connects diverse disciplines, especially those having to do with the building of social and cultural realities,) it is necessary to find out what young people perceive and what they expect, since they are the future peace builders, and 5) We need to review the education and research processes in order to determine how

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to enhance change. As stated at the end of the Sevilla Peace Manifesto (1995), “Our ancestors built war, we must build peace”.

FRAMEWORK

Our study has developed along two main ways: 1) a theoretical review on the subject and its contextual aspects, and 2) a field research and direct learning with the actors. Both ways interlock and feedback each other along a period of at least five years. The theoretical analysis enriches the field work and the latter re-orients the search and theoretical interpretation. Cycles and feedback broader and broader each time, in which bureaucracy makes it hard to complete a project per year, in which it is difficult to study and build a complex reality that does not imply a complex work.

The theoretical axis has worked through different perspectives to address peace: 1) peace as spirituality, 2) peace as personal tranquility, 3) peace as empathy and interpersonal cooperation, 4) peace as a consequence of conflict resolution, 5) peace as citizen’s well-being, 6) peace as abolition of abusive authorities, 7) peace as international order, 8) peace by means of dissuasion or armed intervention. Although each perspective is different, we are searching for an integrative vision. Our study is based on the works of Arapé (2008), Barger (1994) Barger and Martín (2002) Galtung (1976), Galtung (2000), Heater (1985). Hutchinson (1986) Huizinga (1984), Rojas (2002 y 2006) and UNESCO (1974)

Field work has been conducted on the basis of the findings from Batenson (1973, 1982), Flick (2004), Galtung (1976, 2000) and Denzin (2005). The field axis has been developed with students in three different cities of Venezuela, two of which are near borderline areas considered as conflicitive zones. In each city, two research encounters per year took place, within a five-year period, including a total of 785 students with an average age of 23 years-old. Each year, the study groups would vary. During field work, a series of research instruments were used: 1) COMPAZ-1 or Peace Builder, and 2) Learning to Dialog. Perceptions and expectations were recorded before, during and after the encounters involving research and education actions. Students

modified their initial vision after the formative workshop. The experience revealed that short trainings based on broad and open dialogs about violence and peace can contribute to improving attitudes and communicational behaviours towards peace projects

DATA AND RESULTS

Global data with variations between the beginning and the end of the workshops are shown below. Data results from averaging the partial results of all the groups in the three cities. Hence, we have: 1) the self-perception as a conflictive person ranged between 43,5 and 33.3%. 2) the perception of conflictivity in other people ranged between 60,1 and 45,6%. 3) The perception of insecurity within the community ranged between 73,6, and 88,9. 4) Communication as an activator of conflicts: between 12 and 66%. 5) The contribution of education to reduce conflicts: from 14 to 73,5%. 6) Need of Training on communication to manage conflicts and violence: from 12 to 76,6%. 7) Influence of mass media to build citizen's conscience: from 9,8 to 75%. 8) the conflict-management culture helps building social tolerance: from 9,9 to 31%. 9) Recognition of conflictivity and agressiveness in communication leaders: from 27 to 91%. 10) Need to incorporate peace culture to formal education programs: from 12,5 to 91,5%. 11) Perception of conflictivity and violence situations in the country: from 77,5 to 95%. 12) Interest to continue participating in peace culture programs: from 18 to 51,5%. 13) Expectations about the role of leaders to reduce violence: from 50 to 88%. 14) Expectations about the role of leaders to build peace. from 33 to 66,5%, 15) Expectations about the public institutions to build peace: from 30,5 a 77,5%, 16) Level of satisfaction about leaders' performance: from 76 to 41%, 17) Level of satisfaction about public institutions: from 45 to 55%, 18) Level of satisfaction about the contribution of education to reduce violence and build peace environments: from 30 to 43,5%, 19) Level of satisfaction about the administration of justice: from 35 to 30%, and, 20) Level of satisfaction about the social tolerance environments: from 41 to 31%.

CONCLUSION

From this study involving the above mentioned groups of students, it can be concluded that: 1) the issue of violence and peace building is important to students, 2) an increase of violence and high expectations to build peace environments is perceived, 3) it is related to communications and its management as a catalyzer of violence, requiring educational components on violence management and peace building, 4) mass media have an influence on violence and peace building, 5) the participation of leaders for reducing violence and building peace is required, and 6) institutional changes are required to reduce violence and build peace. In sum, throughout a long five-year reasearch-training period, students revealed severe social criticism about violence reduction and peace building, pointing out that the latter are not addressed by leaders and institutions at all times.

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