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Education Between “Peace” and “Justice” in Times of Armed Conflict and Reconciliation – the Colombian Case

Summary: This article deals with the role of education for peace building in the context of the Colombian post-conflict. It locates the former in the context of pragmatist and legalist approaches to post-conflict phases and analyses its “buffer role” between the two. A brief introduction to the history of the Colombian conflict is followed by theoretical considerations about educational aspects of the armed conflict and the educational requirements for successful “phases of transition”. The problem of the fragile balance between “supporting the victim” and “reintegrating the victimizer” is seen as a systemic challenge to the community, but also to society at large. Conclusively, the problem of “pedagogical stagings” is discussed in this context.

Keywords: Colombia, political conflicts, “buffer role” of education, peace building, prosecution and reconciliation, reintegration

Резюме (Маркус Д. Мейер и Мануэль Паес: Образование между «миром» и «справедливостью» во времена вооруженных конфликтов и примирения – пример Колумбии): Данная статья рассматривает роль воспитания в деле достижения мира в рамках колумбийского пост-конфликта. Она находит свое место в рамках дискуссии о прагматических и легальных концепциях в фазах пост-конфликта и анализирует его «роль буфера» между обоими. Краткое введение в историю колумбийского конфликта дополняется теоретическими размышлениями о педагогических аспектах вооруженного конфликта и педагогическими предпосылками для успешных «переходных фаз». Проблема хрупкого равновесия между «поддержкой жертв» и «реинтеграцией преступников» рассматривается как системный вызов для сообщества, а также для общества в целом. В заключение в этой связи рассматривается проблема «педагогических инсценировок».

Ключевые слова: Колумбия, политические конфликты, “роль буфера» образования, достижение мира, обвинение и примирение, реинтеграция

Zusammenfassung (Bildung zwischen “Frieden” und “Gerechtigkeit” in Zeiten bewaffneter Konflikte und Versöhnung - der kolumbianische Fall): Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Rolle von Erziehung für die Friedensförderung im Rahmen des kolumbianischen Post-Konflikts. Er verortet sich im Rahmen der Debatte um pragmatische und legalistische Ansätze zu Post-Konflikt-Phasen und analysiert seine “Puffer-Rolle” zwischen den beiden. Eine kurze Einführung in die Geschichte des kolumbianischen Konflikts wird durch theoretische Überlegungen zu pädagogischen Aspekten des bewaffneten Konflikts und zu pädagogischen Voraussetzungen für erfolgreiche “Übergangsphasen” ergänzt. Das Problem des fragilen Gleichgewichts zwischen “Unterstützung der Opfer” und “Reintegration der Täter” wird als systemische Herausforderungen für die Kommunität, aber auch für die Gesellschaft als Ganzes gesehen. Abschließend wird das Problem “pädagogischer Inszenierungen” in diesem Zusammenhang diskutiert.

Schlüsselwörter: Kolumbien, politische Konflikte, “Puffer-Rolle” der Bildung, peace building, prosecution and reconciliation, reintegration

Peace building as a challenge for internationally oriented pedagogy and its reflection in educational science – chances and limits

Educational science and pedagogy in a national but more so international perspective are increasingly seen in the context of the outcomes of formalized educational processes, measured by standardized tests and providing data for a sort of never-ending educational Olympics (see Bos / Schwippert, 2002; Adick, 2005; Grek, 2009; Hornberg, 2010). These perspectives are focusing on pedagogy as a sub-category of the production of an adequate human capital for an evermore competitive international labor market within the "knowledge society" (Eickelmann, 2010).

This should not obscure the fact that in an international perspective there are important areas of work outside these educationally “schooled” areas, areas requiring educational expertise and its reflection in educational science. We talk about peace education in political post-conflict contexts, where the reconstruction of destroyed basic social trust, victim-offender compensations, community building, mourning, and the recovery of individual and collective future perspectives pose pedagogical challenges well beyond formalized comparably measurable standard learning processes. The scientific educational reflection of these procedures of pedagogical peace building has to be applicable to new contexts, able to recommend, support, evaluate and improve them with comparative and melioristic intentions and in international and comparative perspectives. Methodically it must point out and structure possibilities and limitations of peace-building educational procedures and test their applicability and improve them, if necessary (for an overview of state-of-the-art and current challenges: Wisler, 2012; for Northern Ireland: McGlynn, Niens, Cairns & Hewstone, 2004; comparatistically: Ben-Nun, 2013; for Yugoslavia see recently: Meernik, Golcevski, McKay, Feinberg, King & Krastev, 2016).

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The following text deals with the post-conflict peace-building work which by necessity is emerging for Colombia in South America. The “social and organizational system” of peace education between “legalistic” criminal formalization and persecution and “pragmatic” political amnesty is to be tested for its “Anschlussfähigkeit”/connectivity (Niklas Luhmann) to these latter legal and political semantics. An outline of the history of the Colombian conflict, focusing on its international connectedness with first the Cold War, then drug trafficking will illuminate the necessity for and capability of “connectivity” to our subject matter from an international historical perspective. The fragile balance between (criminal) legal and pedagogical aspects in “phases of transition” requires a balancing act not only for victims and victimizers, but for the entire rural community and society at large as well as for international professionals involved. Are reparations – be they symbolic and/or material – and formal disarmament and reintegration already “reconciliación”?

The Colombian conflict – a historical overview

To describe the Colombian armed conflict is neither an easy nor an unambiguous endeavor. Multiple competing interpretations of the social and political roots and actors of the conflict reflect and actually cause the polarization characteristic of Colombian society even today. The conflict was/is fought between four main parties, whose exact boundaries are often hard to distinguish:

- The Colombian state and its executive power, namely its Armed Forces and police;
- The self-proclaimed Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces – People’s Army (FARC-EP) and minor

Marxist guerrilla groups such as ELN, EPL, and M-19;

- The United Self-Defense of Colombia (AUC) – politically right-wing “self-defense” paramilitary groups against the FARC, caused and even promoted in part by the absence of state security institutions;
- The *Bacrim* (*bandas criminales*) – criminal groups involved in drug-trafficking, illegal metal mining and other “ordinary” and heavy crimes, sometimes recruiting ex-members of the above groups.

The labeling of the conflict as “rebellion”, “armed conflict”, “civil war”, as “(narco-)guerrilla”, “banditismo” or “proxy war” already implies the announcement of an author’s standpoint and rejection of another. We will not further this tendentiously empty and irrelevant argument here, but instead rely in our narrative on two reports by the National Center of Historical Memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica) “*¡Basta Ya! Colombia: memorias de guerra y dignidad*” (Enough! Colombia: memories of war and dignity) of 2013, and *Contribución al entendimiento del conflicto armado en Colombia* (Contribution to the understanding of the armed conflict in Colombia) by the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims (Comisión Histórica del Conflicto y sus Víctimas) of 2015. Both publications are authored by academic scholars of different methodological (and political) backgrounds and were ordered by the Colombian government as a “public report on the reasons for the emergence and evolution of illegal armed groups” (Law 975 of 2005, known as the Law of Justice and Peace, Article 51) or an agreement signed on August 5, 2014 between the National Government and FARC spokesmen in the Table of Dialogue Havana (Cuba) respectively. Its purpose was to serve as technical input for understanding the complexity of the conflict and to facilitate progress of the peace process by clarifying the “historical truth”. They are referred to here *in extensu*, because as such they constitute a very important pedagogical approach to peace building: Establishing the truth about what happened *from multiple perspectives* with the aim of differentiating and democratizing knowledge about the dynamics of the conflict as a mechanism to prevent its continuation. Furthermore, their temporal proximity (2013 and 2015) offers contemporary interpretations of the international, national, but also local level.

However controversial in detail, both publications provide agreed-upon information on some key issues, such as the formal origins of the confrontation, its evolution and its consequences concerning quantitative and qualitative aspects:

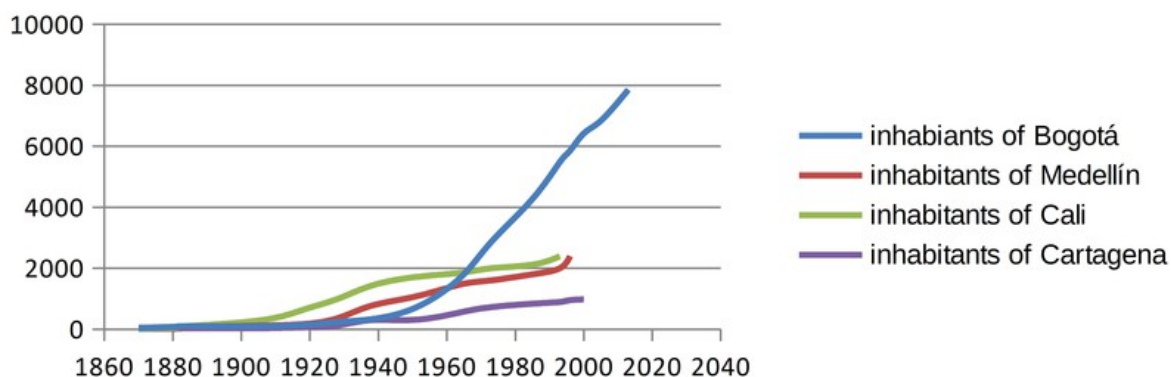
As for the origins of the conflict, the authors point to the confrontations over access to economically essential land (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 21; Gutiérrez Sanín, 2013, p. 8-9) and the struggles caused by political exclusion (Duncan, 2015, p. 1-2), which encouraged taking up arms against an often weak and even absent state in often difficult geographical and climatological territory not densely populated (rain forest, mountains, periods of inundation, etc.), the Colombian conflict was and is a rural conflict:

The war in Colombia has not been deployed with the same intensity nor at the same time throughout the country, [instead] does it show how a conflict of national order refracted and acquires its own dynamic at the regional level depending on the actors, power disputes and alliances produced there.” (Wills, 2015, p. 32)

In this context, clashes between members of the then irreconcilable liberal and conservative Colombian political parties (that themselves had a long tradition) are typically identified as a starting point, which led to the formation of peasant self-defense groups (not to be confounded with the AUC!) in the 50s (from a Marxist point of view see Estrada Álvarez, 2015, p. 26). A certain “mentality typical for the Americas” to “not hesitate to take things into one’s own hand” certainly played a role also. The terms “liberal” and

“conservative” were defined in those days mainly by the adhesion to “progressive”, sometimes Marxist ideas or to clerically backed convictions of naturally existing but threatened social orders, respectively. They were embedded in the context of the intensifying Cold War, during which all of South America served as a battlefield for proxy wars between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the next decade, these armed groups became “revolutionary guerrillas”, sometimes popular not only among sections of the rural population but also among young students and academics in a national and also international context – in the capitalist as well as the socialist North, iconized by Ernesto “Che” Guevara. They adopted their own Marxist “liberation” rhetoric and had strong ties with Latin American communist movements (e.g. Cuba, seat of the peace talks today; see Nubia Bello, 2013, pp. 115-118).

During the 1970s subversive groups were present in the peripheral rural areas of the country, with only sporadic and incipient urban terrorist actions (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 127). Setting up a limited political truce between the two traditionally inimical political parties, alternating in power in the so-called *National Front* (Frente Nacional), secured a period of relative stability and economic growth at the beginning of the 1970s, but this disintegrated into social unrest marked by high population growth, especially the growth of urban mega-cities, social inequality, inflation and unresolved land distribution problems, destabilizing the country and becoming a breeding ground for illicit drug cultivation and trafficking (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 132). The global North started to develop a drug problem; Colombia started to develop a war-on-drugs problem. In an international context, phenomena such as the German *RAF*, the Italian *Brigate Rosse*, or the French *Action directe* and their coherence with the Cold War come to mind and the fondness of a “hippie”-generation for trying out drugs.



Graph 1: Population of major Colombian city territories since 1870 (in 1000). Source: DANE

Around this same time, numerous private armed self-defense groups emerged, created partially with the acceptance or even support of the Colombian state, based on the idea that they constituted appropriate and legitimate partnerships to ensure the rights of the civilians affected by Marxist terrorist groups, as evidenced by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in several judgments against Colombia (IHRC, 2006). These groups soon transgressed its original *raison d'être* and started to commit crimes as “retaliations” themselves. A new actor had entered the scene of the Colombian conflict.

The growing volume of the international trade in cocaine, heroin and marijuana, among other drugs, its criminalization and prosecution, led to a substantial change in the logic of the conflict in the early 80s.

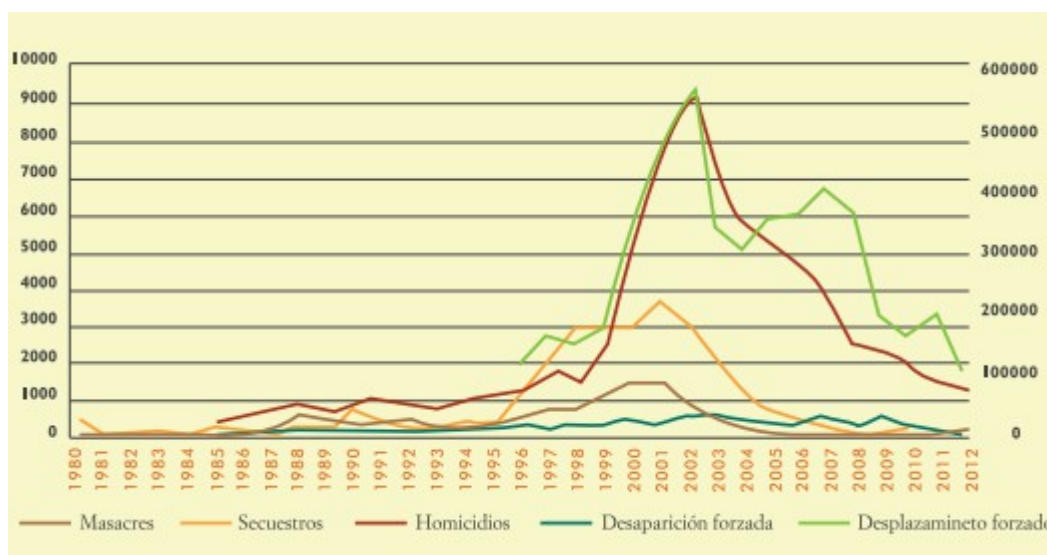
New alliances between the different guerrilla groups and the paramilitary groups negotiated and often exchanged power relations in the local context. The financial attractiveness of the illegal drug business permeated many sectors of Colombian society, especially local politics (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 143), and injected resources to the different armed groups and beyond, far into civil society.

For many observers and even political sympathizers, these new alliances blurred the apparent legitimacy of the guerrillas’ political and historical demands and put them in the context of mere criminals serving the drug business (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 143; see also Moncayo, 2015, pp. 58-59). The conflict during this period was marked by the unsuccessful peace talks between the FARC and the state under B. Betancourt, interrupted by the takeover of the Palace of Justice (Palacio de Justicia) in November 1985 by the M-19 guerrilla group, along with the subsequent recapture by the National Army: The latter simply set the building on fire, cremating the population of about 100 persons inside, among them all M-19 members, eleven Justices (*magistrados*), and the rest of unsuspecting employees and visitors. This event significantly affected civilian life (Moncayo, 2015, p. 52), involved the otherwise unaffected urban population and left a legacy of general bitterness and an unprecedented intensification of violence. The Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica- UP), the political arm of the guerrillas, faced political murders and persecution, the state suspended parliamentary control and ruled by “state of siege” (*Estado de Sitio*).

The confluence of drug trafficking, guerrillas, paramilitaries and state security forces, led to the bloodiest period in recent Colombian history, seemingly on the road to inevitably becoming a “failed state” at the turn of the millennium. The 90s saw the largest number of clashes, attacks on civilians and violations of Human Rights: 14,000 violent deaths were reported between 1996 and 2002, annually.

“[T]he war reached its peak, extent and levels of victimization. The armed conflict became a dispute with blood and fire for land, territory and local power. The relationship between the armed actors and the civilian population changed in that period: Instead of persuasiveness, intimidation and aggression, death and exile settled in.” (Nubia Bello, 2013, p.156)

The Colombian tragedy became marked by the frontal and systematic attack of all armed groups against civilians, mainly rural civilians, in order to gain their loyalty, use it as a service provider or weaken opponents (*ibid*), those who were *not* carrying rifles were (and still are) loot, weapon and conflict victims at the same time. For the period between 1985 and 2012 approximately 220,000 violent deaths (out of which 81.5% were civilians and only 18.5% combatants; Nubia Bello, 2013) were reported, many of which involved massacres, selective and forced disappearances, kidnappings, assassinations, terrorist attacks, forced recruitment (often of minors, see below), destruction of civilian property and torture.



Graph 2: Evolution of the main forms of violence of armed conflict in Colombia by number of victims 1980-2012 (taken from Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 61 – with sources).

Some quantitative data may illustrate the deeds: 46,041 missing, 1,754 victims of sexual violence, 6,421 children and teenagers recruited by armed groups (Nubia Bello 2013, p. 33); 27,023 kidnappings associated with the armed conflict between 1970 and 2010 (ibid, p. 64), and 6,849,277 people forcibly deprived of their homes or territories in a country with approximately 48 million inhabitants (Red Nacional de Información, 2016). However, these data also have to be seen in the context of the restructuring and industrializing Colombian agriculture (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 71): The setting up of vast palm plantations run by globally active agro-companies, the ping pong of cultivation and eradication of the coca bush and poppy flower, even the installation of teak-wood plantations to “save the rain forest” by investors aiming at “good-conscience” consumers in the North (Tenthoff, 2011; Osorio, 2011) have yielded a “matter-of-fact land reform” inextricably intertwined with the armed conflict; critics have therefore hinted at the methodological demographical problems of identifying and labeling “victims” and “victimizers” in the context of the armed conflict, globalization and ongoing social change and modernization:

“The Government (...) Santos has two macro-projects that sooner or later will end up crashing. On the one hand, the government wants to boost commercial reforestation as one of the spearheads of the agro-industrial locomotive. On the other hand, it has promised to restitute lands to five million victims of forced displacement. The problem is that on several of the lots subject to dispossession there are already large reforestation projects being installed. What will be priority for the government? Teak trees or restitution titles?” (Osorio 2011)

It should be agreed upon in any case that the “narrative background” of the conflict was economic insecurity, a tradition of social exclusion, and an increasing general marginalization of “the rural” in a regional, national and globalized context (Giraldo Ramirez, 2015, pp. 10-19). A tradition of pride in “taking things into one’s own hand”, coupled with the absence of participatory democratic traditions and techniques, a weak state, high levels of concentration of land in the hands of few owners, illegal economic activities (such as the cultivation of coca, poppy or illegal mining) and the expansion of agribusiness

models characterized and characterize the Colombian countryside (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 178).

President Uribe (2002-2010), backed militarily by the US administration under G.W. Bush, sought a “military solution” to the conflict in the context of the latter’s “war on drugs” and attempts to generally prevent political instability in “backyard” Latin America; the US invested more than 10 billion US\$ into the “Plan Colombia” (Restrepo et. al., 2016). Internally it was also a direct response to yet another failed peace-negotiation process in El Caguán at the turn of the millennium: The FARC had used a ceasefire and the handing over of a territory of the size of Switzerland solely to strengthen its military position and extend its drug cultivation and trafficking. A clear majority of voting Colombians were obviously tired and angry that advanced trust had again not been reciprocated. Increased military actions by the army intensified the conflict, but also enabled the reinstallation of security institutions in many rural areas, the (partial) disarming of the AUC and other paramilitary groups and severe military blows to the FARC. Uribe’s minister of defence Santos took office in 2010 and soon after initiated peace negotiations himself, which came to a formal end by the signing of a treaty between the FARC and the state recently in La Havana/Cuba. From the beginning, the peace talks had been focused on the post-conflict period – the reintegration of ex-combatants, the reparation of the victims and their mutual reconciliation in local and national contexts. Obviously, this had pedagogical implications, which will be the focus of the subsequent discussion.

However, it is important to point out that the current negotiated peace will presumably be fragile as long as the international drug trade, which has fueled the conflict for decades, remains an economically attractive opportunity for “easy money” in an otherwise structurally weak rural area. The perspective that a large portion of the former combatants will leave the ranks of the FARC only to join *bacrim*s is empirically based on experiences with the disarmament of the AUC, and theoretically founded on the consideration of the absence of major economically attractive employment opportunities in that very region.

The "buffer role" of education in post-conflict contexts between criminal prosecution and general amnesty – some comments on the educational policies and political implications of peace building through education

Pedagogical peace-building procedures for reconciliation must be seen in the Colombian context as mediating between two extremes which permeate the civic society and will in fact be determined by a nationwide plebiscite soon: They can be labeled as “legalist” and “pragmatist” approaches to the question of how to deal with the atrocities and violations of numerous rights, laws and norms during the 50+-year Colombian conflict period. Both positions are literally personified in the current president Santos and his predecessor Uribe respectively: Santos advocates a “pragmatic” approach, holding the chance to open the door for a fresh start for a conflict-torn country, he hints at the dead-end position in which the conflict has maneuvered the country and the complexity a purely legal treatment constitutes; he builds “bridges” with the FARC and refuses to block the prospects of a political solution to the conflict by insisting on the strict application of existing laws – accepting the limitations to his approach in the context of international criminal prosecution of “crimes against humanity”. Uribe on the other hand advocates a “legalistic” approach, insisting on the illegality of the FARC from their beginning, their entanglement with the international drug trade and consequently the impossibility of legitimate “peace talks” with mere

criminals; he emphasizes that the state monopoly on violence cannot be discussed, less so *a posteriori*, and reminds that gestures of trust advanced by the state in former peace talks have never been reciprocated but instead exploited by the FARC, debilitating civic trust in state institutions even more.

<p>“PEACE” Position of extreme pragmatism</p>	<p>Pedagogical peace building: symbolic reparation, reintegration and (regionalized and personalized) reconciliation as a compromise</p>	<p>“JUSTICE” Position of extreme legalism</p>
<p>Argument: After 50 years of armed conflict, there is no way to logistically process the past in terms of criminal and civil law. "Leave the past behind," the metaphor of a "big cut" and an "hour zero for the new beginning" are ideal starting points for a new orientation towards a better future, the prevention of further bloodshed and "a better country for and with everybody" – practically it is the only way to convince the armed rebels to sign a peace treaty, it saves public money for endless criminal procedures that can be better spend</p>	<p>Argument: To establish pedagogical acts of <i>symbolic reparation and reconciliation</i> allows to head into a better future without forgetting the past, permits tailor-made solutions to often complex victim-offender-relations in a regionalized and personalized context, de-criminalization facilitates better cohabitation and less stigmatization for the ex-combatants to be reintegrated.</p>	<p>Argument: The application of the law does not allow exceptions or transition periods in which it is not applied, less so on past events, some crimes against humanity will otherwise be prosecuted by International Human Rights institutions, it does not allow a politically desired, arbitrary change of its execution policy, a general amnesty opens the door to the future crimes, it violates the rights of the victims and debilitates the (already weak) trust in state institutions and cannot even secure its success, without a recognition of the past there will be no peaceful future, because unresolved conflicts tend to reappear.</p>

Graph 3: Pedagogical peace building between “legalists” and “pragmatists”

These approaches are consistent with the so-called "peace vs. justice" debate, characterized by scenarios of armed conflict, where none of the actors has the ability to win nor even permanently oppress its opponent(s). In such circumstances, some authors express that the application of criminal justice and imprisonment is the only legitimate way to restore social order. On the other side, political pragmatists point out that peace is an end in itself and its achievement justifies granting widespread amnesties even to those who committed serious crimes under standards of international law. However, both positions have been labeled extreme and even ingenuously romantic (see Akhavan, 2009, p. 625), because according to the specific circumstances of each conflict, the prosecution may be impossible for the high number of crimes committed, for they discourage peace negotiations or may even represent "political suicide" for the new and fragile democracy (Robinson, 2003, p. 495). Similarly, the absolute absence of investigations or criminal penalties can make peace unsustainable in the long term, to the extent that it could be interpreted as an incentive to acts of private vengeance and a sign that the authorities are unable

to guarantee the rule of law to the citizens, which would prevent the State from regaining public confidence (Van Zyl, 2005, p. 211).

“From Bosnia to Rwanda to Darfur, the international community has used tribunals more as a *substitute for* rather than a *complement to* forceful measures to protect civilians against mass murder. In the post-euphoria phase of global justice, it has been increasingly argued that local solutions, such as amnesties in El Salvador and Mozambique, have been “highly effective in curbing abuses when implemented in a credible way”, and that, combined with truth and reconciliation commissions, these measures have achieved better results than international prosecution. Most notably, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been praised for ensuring a peaceful transition from apartheid to a multiracial democracy. In this light, the so-called “*peace versus justice*” debate has assumed a broader systemic dimension as it grapples with the gradual permanence of tribunals (...) *where the pursuit of justice often competes with the imperative of a peaceful transition*. What then is the context in which to assess the interrelationship of tribunals with peace negotiations and their impact on preventing future atrocities? Beyond speculative assertions, whether of judicial romantics or political realists, how can the experience of institutions like the ICC inform an increasingly complex and vital debate on accountability as an ingredient of global governance?” (Akhavan, 2009, p. 627, italics added)

In this context, public institutions, academia, state-run and non-government agencies of national and international scope have joined forces to help in the analysis of armed violence and provide technical input to design new public policies or adjust existing ways that are appropriate for the reconciliation of Colombians. One of these concepts is “symbolic reparation” by pedagogical procedures.

The concept of “symbolic reparation” has an innumerable variety of meanings, but Colombian legislation decided in 2011 to define it as “a benefit (action) made in favor of the victims or the community at large that tends to ensure the preservation of [1.] historical memory, the [2.] non-repetition of the victimizing events, [3.] public acceptance of the facts, the [4.] request for public forgiveness and the [5.] restoration of the dignity of the victims.” (Gobierno Nacional, 2015). As always with the articulation of political perspectives, there will be very few people contradicting this proposal, but the question that arises is “how”?

The decree gives no hint as to how to achieve this. However, two entities with valuable experience accumulated at the local level are specifically designed by the Colombian state for the proper management of the issues arising from the conflict and the “post-agreement” period: The Unit for Attention and Reparation for the Victims (Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas – UARIV) and the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración – ACR) of the former illegal combatants. Symbolic reparation thus institutionally involves mainly two actors: The ex-combatants in the process of reintegration into civic society (whose legal charges begin with joining illegal armed groups and challenging the state monopoly on violence, and often extend to atrocities and crimes against humanity, depending on each case). And secondly, the respective victims of these crimes, mostly otherwise uninvolved community leaders and sheer peasants, *campesinos*. After 50 years of conflict, it is obvious that identifying either group beyond doubt is an ambitious mission as such.

The political purpose behind the concept of symbolic reparation is all too clear: It releases the state from the logistic impossibility of prosecuting an accumulated 50 years of criminal offenses without the

necessity to apply the legally and politically difficult concept of (general, or otherwise defined) amnesty, and it saves public resources that can be spent better on concrete actions to improve communities. As with most compromises, it will not satisfy either one of the two parties completely.

Its chances are still obvious: Pedagogical procedures and techniques can be adjusted much more flexibly to the specific regional, local and even personal context than the enforcement of criminal laws with their imperative of “person indifference”. They make room for ambiguities and doubts that do not have to be judged in terms of guilt/innocence. They make time for the – potentially painful – restructuring and reformulation of beliefs and identities, as prospective new biographic cornerstones. Ideally, they can provide a scene for exchange, transformation, understanding and ultimately forgiving between the actors involved – processes that are admittedly seldom achieved in the context of formalized jurisprudence (for the context of international post-conflicts see Van Zyl, 2005, pp. 211-212). Another aspect should not pass unnoticed: they are often less costly than law enforcement (see Gartzke, Li, Boehmer, 2001).

Educational aspects of the armed conflict

Generally, the armed conflict severely affected education on the scale of civic values and collective mentality: “Drug trafficking modified the behavior of Colombians and their collective imaginary, intensified anomie in everyday behavior and undermined the idea that hard work and education were the best means for social advancement.” (Giraldo Ramirez, 2015, p. 21) That meant a fundamental and sharp change from traditional Colombian values like honor and respect, self-sufficiency and family orientation, customarily fostered by educational institutions mainly supervised by the Catholic Church, and more so in rural areas.

The war did not spare schools or children, sometimes using their vulnerability and trustfulness for terrorist attacks. “In fact, children and adolescents are the principal victims of [landmines], as 995 of the 3,885 civilian casualties belong to this age group. This means that one of every four victims are children and adolescents, a proportion that is not registered to that level of any other form of violence, although targeted killings and massacres are more lethal.” (Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 95 with sources and numbers taken from Human Rights Watch)



Photo 1: A farmer shows a landmine on the playground of the local school in the village of La Mirandita. (©Jesus Abad Colorado 2010, with kind permission from Nubia Bello)

In other cases schools have become disputed military targets themselves, as in the case of the San Francisco municipality.

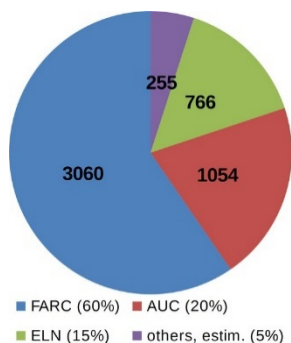


Photo 2: School building destroyed by a guerrilla attack (©Jesus Abad Colorado, 1999, with kind permission from Nubia Bello)

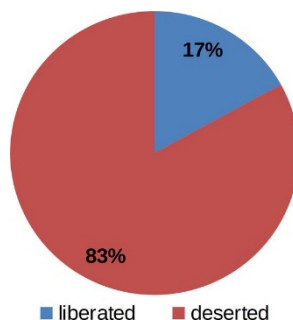
Here, ELN guerrillas committed a dynamite attack against the population of San Francisco to force the police to evict the school that had become its base, after the destruction of the original Police command centre four months earlier by the FARC.

Another issue that affected education in the rural areas was the recruitment of children and adolescents below the age of 18 years, leaving many of them illiterate or with severe educational gaps at the start of the post-conflict period.

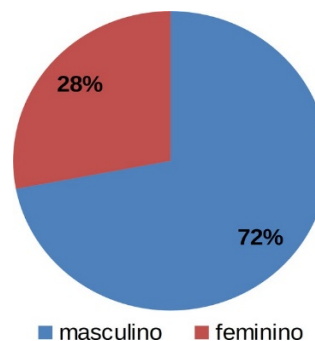
Cases of recruited minors who deserted or were liberated as minors, by affiliation to armed group



Proportion of deserted vs. liberated minors in armed groups



Gender proportion of recruited minors, liberated or deserted



Graph 4: Recruitment of minors in the Colombian armed conflict (Nubia Bello, 2015, 84; with further source indications)

The number of 5135 children who deserted or were liberated refers only to those minors who *left* the armed groups still being minor. As a “career” in these groups can last years or even decades, the actual number of minors recruited is estimated to be much higher. Different methods and time frames have produced different estimates between 6000 (Defensoría del Pueblo), 11.000 (Human Rights Watch) and 18.000 (Natalie Springer report) recruitments, the proportion of adults vs. minors recruited being slightly higher in the FARC (5 out of 10) than the AUC (4/10; numbers cited from Nubia Bello, 2015, pp. 84-85 with sources). The legal status of these recruited minors under 18 years of age was ruled by the Constitutional Court of Colombia as being victims of the conflict in any case, regardless of their personal perspective: “The violent context in which illegal recruitment occurs eliminates any consideration of this as a voluntary or consensual act. These children are recruited, detained and forced to become victimizers. They are not entitled to leave the ranks or to express their opinions.” (Nubia Bello, 2015, p. 86)

Some of the reasons for these recruitments of minors in the Colombian context are (ibid, p. 87):

- The sheer geographical proximity of the armed conflict to where minors live;
- Minors as cheap labor for armed groups, e.g. as illegal miners or drug traffickers;
- Abusive family situations and violence, abandonment and orphanhood, absent fathers, partially as result of the conflict itself;
- Lack of educational and employment opportunities in poor areas;
- Armed groups as “an opportunity” for minors, providing identification and comradeship with *guerreros* as “machista” modes of “growing up to be a real man”, especially in the absence of fathers;
- Children and adolescents are more easily impressed by and less resistant to military socialization processes and indoctrination; also their agility and docility makes them a favored target for recruitment, their family status – without spouse or own children – makes them feel they “have nothing to lose”.

The above-mentioned aspects pose a challenge to the post-conflict process, as these ex-combatants to be

reintegrated lack socialization in “normal” civilian circumstances; they do not know the functioning of the social codes outside military groups and are culturally extremely insecure, accustomed mainly to communicative codes of order and obedience. Their formal school education is negligible to non-existent in many cases, their economic prospective “on this side of the law” frail. Family and community support would be central to the reintegration process, but they are often seen as having “voluntarily” joined the armed groups out of juvenile devilment, rather than having been forced and having lacked sufficient resistance and support on the part of family and/or community (Nubia Bello, 2015, pp. 84-87).

A mother’s report in a very rural Colombian slang not easily translated into English highlights the different aspects of this recruitment of minors: Sexual perspectives, juvenile strive for adventure and heroism, presumably drugs, acts of emerging, but weak community solidarity and collective resistance, ambivalent family ties with presumably absent fathers and the prospective of a “home” with a clear military-hierarchical order, a preparedness to suffer and resign on the part of parents, weak institutions, little education and economic perspectives, combined with lethal threats to the family by “the boss” in case of “rebellion” can be identified as pull-and-push factors for the recruitment described (Nubia Bello, 2015, p. 87).

(T)he guerrilla group was complicating all. Some adult/elderly people came conquering youth. They put a [female] secretary to conquer the boys, making them see things, presenting things. She called young people to convince them to get involved in that group. A friend of mine told me: "Watch out for your children!" and I asked her why, and she answered: "Because there is a person conquering the youth". When I went down to [the town of] La Sonora, I saw my son there and asked, "What are you doing here?" – "Nothing, just talking to her." – "What is it talking?" – "Nothing, personal things." – "There is nothing for you to talk about, because you're under age. If you are going to include my son in something strange I'll put a denouncement" – "If you denounce we'll order them to kill you and all of your family". That was the threat. I got angry, I do not care that it was guerrillas, there is nothing for which they should conquer my children. My son had not completed fifteen years. "I do not accept that, I'll talk to the boss." – "Well, you can, talk to him", they told me. "The boys are still going to school, how is all this possible." That lady there had already two entirely and others more [sic]. So all of us parents went and you know what they did? They threatened our children, "if you do not come with us, your parents will die." My son told me "Mom, what do I do? I do not want to go there." And I said, "What for you messed with those people? Well, you do not go there." – "No, I have to go, if we are not going they'll kill you." Then came these gentlemen and they told me: "OK, OK." – "Go ahead." – "We need to talk to you, you rebelled." – "No, it is just that I am angry, imagine, some boys so small you force to go, it is not justified. One fights for one's children. One doesn't want to lose them. You are a danger." – "No, it's that we are setting up a school [!]" – "Well, I'm sorry, but it hurts me to let my children go there." – "Well, lady, the group is already there and it's a large group". One lady was crying to see all those guys being forced to go over there [to the guerrilla camp on the mountain].

An impact less visible but no less devastating of this “out-lawing” of children and young men and women is the stigmatization and criminalization that divides families and breaks up communities, destroys the social and community fabric and sows a seed of bitterness, anger, fear and distrust, as “they from us” leave to engage in armed conflicts. The recruitment of minors is not a major topic in the scientific coverage of the conflict, as it is ambivalent and blurs the division of victim and victimizer to the point of dissolution, yet it has its most powerful effect on another scene: It is estimated that one of the most

important motivation for families to leave the rural areas and show up in the cities as “displaced families” is actually to prevent recruitment of their children, especially their sons. “Facing the risk or even threat of unlawful recruitment or linking to armed groups, families choose to leave their lands and take the path of displacement as a protection strategy. (...) (T)he Constitutional Court marks the illegal recruitment as a direct cause, and a major one, of forced displacement.” (Nubia Bello, 2015, 86)



Photo 3: Recruited minor in San Lucas (Bolívar) – victim or victimizer? ©Jesús Abad Colorado, 2000 (with kind permission from Nubia Bello)

A different facet of the conflict with strong pedagogical implications is acts of sexual crimes against minors, mostly females and homosexuals, perpetrated by the armed groups. These acts are strongly related to the one situation discussed above. As well as the recruitment of minors, it is a crime that is not

admitted and communicated very easily in many social and cultural contexts of rural Colombia, but which pertains very closely to the highly self-aware and self-conscious discourses of international Human Rights organizations who are often professionally involved in post-conflict matters, fostering feminism and LGBTI rights. Five reasons have been identified as causes for sexual crimes as “military strategies” in the context of the armed conflict (see Nubia Bello, 2015):

- 1) to attack women with a leadership status, such as teachers, midwives or health experts, especially women of indigenous ethnicity, desecrating their bodies as “conquered territories” and destroying traditional social textures (ibid, p. 80)
- 2) to destroy the affective circle of those regarded as enemies, especially civilians seen as “collaborators”
- 3) to “punish” transgressive or ignominious behavior (from the perspective of armed actors) and establish a social climate of “social purity” (*limpieza social*) and law-and-order by employing strong social control
- 4) to commit sexual violence as an articulated and accepted cultural practice condoned by the majority (from the perspective of the armed actors/the professionals respectively)
- 5) to generate cohesion among members of armed groups and strengthen their violent identities by visibly and ostentatiously committing sexual crimes.

The testimony of a minor girl shall serve to mark the divide between legitimate pedagogical approaches to educate for the post-conflict era and the necessity for individual psychotherapeutic professional treatment presumably beyond the reach of “ordinary” education (ibid, p. 83):

My father refused [to permit to recruit my brothers] and commanded us, my brother and me, to [the town of] Minca. Again, the commander sought him and threatened him. He had to bring us back, if not, he could not guarantee for what could happen to my brothers and my dad could leave from there, but in a coffin. The problem is that he was interested in me. The commander said I had to be his wife. They called him the “Negro/Black”. My dad had to send out to seek us. One day, the commander returned accompanied by two guerrillas to persuade me. That day he took me and took me by force. He told me my virginity would only be for him. He was like all blue this horrible black/negro. He appeared to me like a devil.

The educational requirements for successful “phases of transition” and the problem of “pedagogical staging” for/by different actors – a fragile balance

There are two major aims for the “transition policies” in Colombia (García-Godos, Lid, 2010, pp. 487-488):

- Doing justice to the victims of crimes committed in different material and/or symbolic manners, including truth, justice, reparation, coexistence and non-repetition.
- Reintegrate ex-combatants into civil life and prevent their falling back into illegality, but also assuring

their security and protection.

Both aims imply legal issues of severe complexity, which cannot and need not be discussed in our context, but also wide-ranging educational techniques which are to play a major role in the transition period. We will also discuss aspects of power relations between professional helpers and local communities in the context of “pedagogical staging”.

The results of the reintegration of the ex-members of the AUC may provide some prospective orientation: The Colombian Agency for Reintegration (Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración – ACR) has reported that by April 2016 it had attended to 49,155 demobilized persons out of a total of 57,996 registered nationwide since 2003 (ACR 2016). 76% of them had legally remained in the process of reintegration, 74.2% had found employment and 90% of them reported that their life had improved “compared to the time when they belonged to the illegal armed group” (ACR 2016). Is the glass $\frac{3}{4}$ full or $\frac{1}{4}$ empty? The numbers hint at the opportunities but also risks of the reintegration project, under the conditions of “easy money” available from an ongoing international illegal drug trade.

From the perspective of the victims, the creation of “the world’s most complete victims record” (as UARIV summed up the evaluating Harvard University Report, 2015) has to be highlighted. Also the disbursement of monetary compensation to about 506,100 people (as of August 2015), psychotherapeutical efforts of different scopes and schooling for 82,156 people in domestic, ambulant and stationary settings, the delivering of the bodily remains of relatives to 1,400 families, processes of return and/or relocation to 80,000 households, and the participation of 43,000 victims in a strategy of emotional recovery and reconstruction of the social fabric called “Interlacing” point out the magnitude of the procedures employed to achieve reconciliation in a conflict-torn country (UARIV 2015). “Interlacing” has qualified as the most successful program of the UARIV, it consists of five consecutive pedagogical steps and will be discussed in detail in the context of a publication in preparation, which will inform about the evaluation of three affected Colombian communities visited.

For the immediate post-conflict period, acts of “public repentance” have been proposed as acts of recognition of collective and individual responsibility, whereby ex-combatants repent publicly and ask forgiveness for the damage done to civilians *prior to* – and as a condition for – the issuance of court rulings that sentence their participation in criminal acts (Mesa de conversaciones, 2015). It also links the granting of “special treatments” (that is: *favorable* legal treatments) in legal matters to the execution of concrete, controllable and visible actions contributing to repair, with emphasis on the rebuilding of civilian infrastructure, location and removal of land mines and explosives, participation in replacement projects of illicit crops, contribution to the search and retrieval of remains of assassinated people during the conflict and restoration of the environment with exercises such as reforestation (Mesa de conversaciones, 2015). Other pedagogical approaches are the participatory formulation of plans for collective redress of territorial issues, and the psychosocial rehabilitation of communities affected by conflict, by way of teaching methods to strengthen dialogue, and to restore trust between individuals, families and communities, and between those and the State. In general, these procedures are aimed at promoting a positive social imaginary, creating shared future scenarios and promoting cohabitation agreements at the local level, avoiding a victim/victimizer-dichotomy. Social reconciliation involves not only the victims and victimizers of the armed conflict but also effects and has to be supported by local communities and society in general. It must display the necessary mechanisms to (re)articulate the community as part of society as a whole with the victims and ex-combatants, but the rest of the

community must be involved in the reintegration process also. Empathy, not guilt and punishment, is the key concept for the development of social reconciliation, and the lack of empathy by acts of negation, omission, silence, or shying away for self-protection has to be seen as “indirect involvements in violence” and an obstacle to reconciliation. However, empathy may be in the way of balancing the asymmetric power relations stemming from the victim’s experience and that of the victimizer, more so as these two are painfully related. A fragile balance has to be tared between the legitimate prospect of the victim to be protected by a professional in a moment of intense and painful memory work on the one hand, and on the other hand of the prospect of the victimizer to be accepted and reintegrated in spite of the memory of power balances grossly distorted by him. Empathy cannot afford to be in danger of being morally equidistant between victimizer and victim, nor can it leave either one excluded. It has to aim to allow moments of transition to occur, starting points for reintegration from renewed and restructured relations between the protagonists. Only then can the challenges of social reconciliation lead to the recognition that different layers of society and subsequently society as a whole have a responsibility as “background” of the conflict, into which the protagonists are able to be transformed in renewed roles. We will further this argument in our report on three highly affected rural communities we visited in a publication in preparation.

Here it should suffice to hint also at the problem of “pedagogical staging” in the context of the involvement of professional helpers, because pedagogical techniques must also cover and reflect the role and interest of professional helpers and the respective organizations which finance them. These professionals are often academically educated, urban (in our case also international) actors “from outside”, with familial, social and cultural background, educational and biographical trajectory “worlds apart” from their clients, their “small world” and their individual experiences in the conflict. Their educational ambition can count with a large academic database and experience both of national and international origin “with” the conflict, but not “in” it. Nevertheless, they act within moments of transition, pursuing their proper aims and ends. They should be aware that their pedagogical means are always part of the negotiation of power relations and therefore can be manipulated, far from ideals of “altruistically revealing solutions to the otherwise ignorant”.

Pedagogical staging has a long tradition in the context of the armed conflict, we have hinted at the “pedagogical” character of violence against minors. Indeed much of the daily violence, inconspicuous but highly repetitive, occurred against people who were important to their communities. Threats against them, banishment, kidnapping, disappearances or deaths were “staged” to hit the organization of the community, weaken its autonomy from and resistance to the armed actors and to prevent the manifestation of dominant civil actors in a region – to visibly and inevitably “teach” fear and terror to the population. They were intended to end the symbolic values, social fabric, and traditional coherence, replacing them by generalized mistrust and a sense of diffuse obedience and self-silencing. The murder of a teacher, a doctor, a nurse, but also that of a popular school bus driver, a (maybe/maybe not politically active) fisher or shopkeeper, caused a blow to the communities, who considered them important for coherence and development. Community leaders, union activists or ordinary peasants, journalists, or priests left a void difficult to fill, because they meant losing years of training and tradition in the struggle for social development. The traditional dynamics of small-scale rural social interaction came to an end (see Nubia Bello, 2013, p. 273).

Furthermore, pedagogical staging has been used to influence public opinion and foster sympathy and favorable opinion building – both successfully and unsuccessfully. The famous case of the longhaired

young girl in FARC military uniform with a berette, posing next to a sign asking the reader provocatively to “not abuse children, they are the future”, shows how actors have used pedagogical staging on different semantic levels of communication during much of the conflict. The facial expression of the portrayed girl oscillates somehow undecidedly between shyness and coquetry, anger and disgust, as do possible interpretations of this staging. The photo obviously wants to teach the reader about the conflict, but what exactly is its message?



Photo 4: “Don’t abuse the children, they are the future – FARC-EP”, pedagogical staging of a recruited minor; San Vicente del Caguán, ©Jesús Abad Colorado, 2000 (with kind permission from Nubia Bello)

Summary, conclusions and outlook

Educational sciences have a broad field of work ahead in which to develop, apply, evaluate and meliorate pedagogical techniques for peace building in countries and areas struck by armed conflicts. In an international context, they should be aware that there are issues more pressing, maybe even more rewarding than to rise a step on the PISA-podium. We described the “buffer function” of education in the Colombian context between a purely legalistic approach of “wrong is wrong – and right is right and mixing the two only weakens institutions”, and a purely pragmatic approach of “let’s leave these things behind now for a fresh start”, disregarding the expectations of the victims and the majority of communities and society at large, that the wrong that was done is to be atoned. “Peace” and “justice” are opponents in times of armed conflict almost by definition and cannot be “set right” *a posteriori*. However, education can help prepare a stage for moments of re-articulation and reconstruction, transition and reconciliation, maybe even of repentance and forgiving – framed by legal actions of repair and even criminal prosecution, far from “Never mind...”-attitudes, with which it may commonly be associated.

The Colombian conflict is the largest continuing conflict of recent times, spanning over a period of more

than 50 years. It started from political and ideological fractions and disputes over resources, was fueled by a tradition of “proudly taking arms” in the context and with the involvement of the actors of the Cold War. Weak state institutions in rural areas could not prevent its spread, but led to the emergence of tolerated, even promoted armed opponents by this very state, which brought the country to the brink of becoming a “failed state” at the turn of the millennium. The “disputed grounds” of the conflict shifted from the political and ideological to the economical and criminal, centering around the international drug business and corrupting regional community politics, but also parts of civic society as a whole. A subsequent military approach to the problem intensified the conflict first, but pacified the country later and developed the perspectives for a negotiated peace, which is being elaborated currently.

From an educational point of view, the conflict has left the country with a legacy of minors being drawn into the lines of the armed groups, ready to regress to civil life after years, often decades of life under the military’s social, organizational and communicative codes. These men (and women) mostly lack continuous and structured schooling or education because of their very recruitment, they lack a network of family and community ties that could help them to reintegrate; instead they are on the contrary often stigmatized and marginalized, even threatened and attacked as “one of them”. In the context of the victim-victimizer dichotomy, we also discussed sexual violence against minors and their effects. Educational peace building with pedagogical techniques has to strike a difficult balance between empathy for the “double-blind” situation of the victimizers, with about half of them recruited as morally and legally “innocent” minors, and the necessity to protect and strengthen the victims and to respond to their moral and legal demand to be “repaired”. To develop the capacity for empathy is a key concept in this context, which must extend to the community, but also to the professional helpers involved. The aim is to dissolve the biographical victim/victimizer-dichotomy and reinstall both actors into the community with renewed social roles. We discussed some of the proposed and applied procedures and pointed to the potential dangers of mere “pedagogical staging”.

Peace building through education is not an easy endeavor, less so, when the different actors – be they “legalist” or “pragmatist”, “justice” or “peace” – that delegate their responsibility to education will surely expect to be rewarded by results convincing everybody, but less so also because pedagogy has a tradition to easily assume these societal delegations “with transfigured faces”, understanding them as reverences, rather than realistically rejecting “missions impossible”. The same mix of extrinsic overload and intrinsic temptation might menace educational science at times.

This being said we do reiterate that symbolic repair, reintegration of ex-combatants and reconciliation are aims that are successfully achieved by the pedagogic techniques proposed and applied in the context of the Colombian post-conflict – even if incipiently and partially. The theoretical preliminaries exposed so far in this publication will be supplied with empirical data collected on an evaluation journey to three municipalities in different geographical regions of Colombia (Turbo/Antioquia near the border to Panamá, Leiva/Nariño in the extreme south-west Andes, and Carmen de Bolívar/Bolívar near the Magdalena valley) in a subsequent article we hereby announce. We will try to show how peace building through pedagogical means does (and in some cases does not) work in the context of a country looking for alternatives after 50 years of arms and violence.

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