

**Peace Education in Colombia:
The Promise of Citizenship Competencies
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The conference center was full. More than 2,000 teachers and experts from all regions of Colombia enthusiastically shared their experiences and came to learn from the others' experiences. They were all motivated by the same purpose: to contribute to Colombian peace building from their classes and schools. It was the 2004 Citizenship Competencies National Forum, organized by the Ministry of Education. One of the forum's purposes was to gather teachers and school administrators from throughout Colombia to share the initiatives and experiences they had implemented to improve their students' interpersonal relations and democratic skills. In this way, participants from many places in Colombia were able to discover some of the steps that were already being taken to build peace in Colombia by means of education.

Miriam Escorcia de Pallares was presenting one of the more than 100 school peace initiatives.² For more than 10 years, she has been the principal of the largest school in the remote town of Algarrobo, in the province of Magdalena. The school is now a symbol of peace in the community, but it was not like that when she arrived. In fact, her predecessor was shot dead in front of his house. Students were being exposed to a violent confrontation between guerrillas and paramilitary groups, as well as to the activity of youth delinquent groups. But she was convinced that the situation could be changed. Miriam led the creation of several initiatives, among which were a conflict mediation program in which students learn to help classmates and teachers deal peacefully with interpersonal conflicts, a parent training program that seeks to devalue the use of violence and to promote a culture of peace, and a community outreach program in which the model the school developed to promote peace is presented as an example to other schools in the region. Her hope was, and is still, that her students can contribute to peace even if they are growing in such a violent context.

Miriam's efforts are a good example of a large movement currently taking place in Colombia: the promotion of peace through education. This national movement, led by the Ministry of Education, encourages local educational initiatives to promote peace, but also gathers and disseminates information from local experiences that have already been running and that, somehow, have shown to be successful in building peaceful communities. It is the national government leading the efforts of many in the educational sector -schools, teachers, NGOs, Secretaries of Education. The purpose, in the end, is to offer children and youth tools to prevent or cope with violence, to promote peaceful *convivencia*³, to value differences and to empower civil society with participatory competencies that could allow them to transform their communities by means of democratic and non-violent mechanisms.

Although peace building could be seen by some as a goal that becomes harder and farther to achieve every day in Colombia, many examples illustrate the opposite. From

the local experiences of places like Algarrobo, to national initiatives like the Ministry of Education National Citizenship Competencies' proposal, we can find countless examples of actions taken by people who believe in the transformation of Colombian society through education.

In this chapter, we will propose education as a tool with an enormous potential for the promotion of a more peaceful and democratic society. We will present some examples of structured educational programs as well as local and national initiatives seeking to decrease aggression and violence, and to promote peaceful *convivencia*. Finally, we will make a critical analysis about issues that need to be taken into account in the future to turn education into an even more useful tool for this transformation process in Colombian society.

Impact of Violence on Society's Beliefs, Behaviors and Values

Colombians have lived in the midst of violence for many years. On the one hand, we have experienced over four uninterrupted decades of armed conflict. On the other hand, we have had a very high rate of homicides associated with organized crime, common delinquency and interpersonal conflicts. This phenomenon has had visible effects in multiple spheres (*e.g.*, political, economic, social, cultural). Here we would like to focus on the social and cultural dimensions, and particularly, on the influence of violence on beliefs, attitudes, values, habits and behaviors that make the social world.

National and international studies have shown an association between exposure to community violence and children's aggressive behaviors⁴. This change or learning may take place for several reasons. First, beliefs that validate aggressive and violent behaviors are socially legitimized. For example, children who grow up in violent contexts tend to believe more easily that it is okay to hit someone if they hit you first, that victims sometimes deserve the aggression they receive, and that it is okay to use violent ways to obtain goals if there are no other possibilities.⁵ Second, in violent contexts it is likely that some people are socially rewarded with admiration, social recognition and popularity, and this becomes an incentive for some to become even more aggressive.⁶ Third, high exposure to violence may encourage insensitive attitudes towards others, which may lead people to underestimate the negative consequences that violent behaviors have on others and reduce their feeling of guilt when they think about hurting others.⁷

On the other hand, a person who observes aggressive behaviors in others may realize that those behaviors are often useful to achieve personal goals. If, in addition, that person does not perceive a firm social disapproval of those behaviors, she or he may adopt them for personal benefit.⁸ Furthermore, if that person tries using aggression and reach individual goals and/or social approval, then aggressive behaviors get reinforced.⁹

All of this makes us conclude that changing attitudes, values and beliefs that validate violence is necessary in order to promote peace in a society where, for several generations, children have grown up exposed to violence. We believe that education can make a crucial contribution to this transformation.

The Transforming Potential of Education

Education has an enormous potential for achieving the transformation of Colombian society and for the construction of paths toward peace. First, education's fundamental mission is the development of the members of society. This development should be comprehensive, that is, encompassing academic aspects as well as social and cultural aspects. Such an approach emphasizes not only knowledge and information but competencies, that is, the capacity to perform and deal with problems in flexible and efficient ways and in changing contexts.¹⁰ This purpose of education and its well established infrastructure makes it one of the privileged mechanisms for developing attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that promote peaceful *convivencia* and help prevent violence.

Second, educational institutions have high legitimacy and social credibility. In spite of being located many times in violent environments, these institutions are still social organizations in which students, parents, and the community trust. Most parents value the educational system, admit its authority and think of it as a mechanism by which their children can improve their life prospects. Furthermore, while state institutions related with order or with the defense of human rights, like the Police, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Constitutional Court, the Attorney General's Office (*Fiscalía*), and the Prosecutor General's Office (*Procuraduría*) generate low levels of trust in Colombians, trust in educational institutions is still very high.¹¹ Such high credibility of the education system represents an opportunity for developing initiatives that promote peace building in our country.

Finally, besides being settings for academic learning, educational institutions are settings for social learning. Schools are social micro-environments where community-lived interactions are recreated. Social hierarchies and roles are defined, groups and subgroups are generated, shared attitudes and behaviors are established, individuals' behavior regulation mechanisms exist, different types of conflict occur, people get affectively connected to each other, a group identity is built. Students' experiences in those environments generate basic learning about what social life is about. Thus, schools have the potential to become environments where legitimacy of attitudes, beliefs and values that encourage violence could be modified, and where peaceful behaviors and attitudes could be promoted.

It is thus that education's developmental mission, schools' credibility and the fact that schools are social micro-environments are basic aspects that sustain education's great potential to promote some of the social and cultural transformations required to confront our country's violence.

It's worth clarifying that this is just a potential which we cannot assert that is currently being exploited in educational settings. In fact, this potential is probably being wasted, or worse, schools may be contributing to reinforcing violence and to maintaining violence-related attitudes, abilities and behaviors. For instance, violence, authoritarianism, abuse of power, and negligence are very frequent in many Colombian schools today.¹² That is why it is important to think about ways through which this potential can be used in a positive way for the construction of peace in Colombia.

Making the Most of the Transforming Potential of Education

There are at least two ways in which the school's potential to generate societal transformations could be used: first, they can be turned into more democratic and pacific contexts therefore exposing students to less violent and more participatory environments; second, pedagogical interventions may be developed to promote individual competencies, those required to develop peaceful and constructive relationships with others, and to face in critical, assertive and safe ways the violence and conflicts in their communities.

Schools can be organized as democratic social contexts, where each individual respects and takes care of others, and where social regulation mechanisms facilitate a better *convivencia* among everyone. In such cases, students may have the experience of living within a social system that works differently than their violent environment, and may realize that this alternative system actually works and has benefits. Certainly, this type of school context may positively influence students' development given that it provides opportunities for them to adopt peace related attitudes and skills and to practice them in real and effective ways. In fact, several studies show that positive classroom setting characteristics (*e.g.*, care and respectful relationships among students where authority is managed in democratic ways) are related to positive behaviors and competencies in students.¹³ Some of the mechanisms that schools can implement include activities to promote caring and respectful relationships between teachers and students and among students, collective norms building and decision-making, establishing clear, firm and non-authoritarian teacher styles for managing established rules or agreed norms in classrooms, and generating collective discussion moments for the constructive resolution of interpersonal conflicts that emerge in the everyday interaction among the members of the school community (*e.g.*, students, teachers, school administrators and parents).

In addition to these contextual changes, schools may also, through different pedagogical tools, directly promote the development of knowledge, attitudes and abilities, related to peaceful *convivencia*. These are what we call *citizenship competencies*. Some examples are the capacity to stop aggression, critical thinking, conflict resolution and democratic participation. In order to *stop aggressive behaviors*, one has to use different strategies to avoid hurting others (*e.g.*, regulation of one's own anger, appropriate expression of emotions) or to intervene as a third party in situations where other persons are being hurt with aggression or violence (*e.g.*, asking them in a non-violent way to stop or reporting the situation to an authority).

Critical thinking allows the individual to analyze the information that he or she receives, that is, to comprehend the source of the phenomena described by that information and to realize that it might be biased depending of the source that is transmitting that information. This citizenship competency facilitates, for example, that people think critically about the discourses or actions that legitimize violence.

The capacity to *deal constructively and peacefully with conflicts* is one of the most important citizenship competencies in order to prevent violence in society. This capacity requires several specific competencies that can be promoted through educational programs such as the capacity to take the perspective of others and to understand their points of view, to comprehend how emotions may interfere in the resolution of a conflict, to have the disposition to listen with interest to the other, to assert one's personal positions without invalidating the others', to generate multiple alternative solutions to a

conflict, and to evaluate critically and with equity the different options to solve a conflict and to identify those that may fulfill everyone's interests.

The *capacity to participate in democratic ways* is also a very important tool that should be developed in students to empower them to transform their environments by non-violent means. For example, this competence helps a person develop and use non-violent mechanisms to state disagreements, to reject situations in which human rights may be being violated, and to propose and promote positive changes in their social settings.

Implementing pedagogical strategies to develop competencies that will stop aggressive behavior and promote critical thinking, conflict resolution and democratic participation is, without question, a crucial way to contribute to peace building in our country. These competencies bring the possibility of generating long-lasting societal changes through democratic and pacific ways.

Structured Educational Programs

Colombia has a long history of pedagogical innovations. The most well-known internationally is *Escuela Nueva*¹⁴, a nation-wide strategy that has been applied in rural public schools throughout the country. *Escuela Nueva* emerged in the 1970s as a pedagogical alternative to traditional rural schools. In many rural areas, population density is so low that students from different grades have to share the same classroom with only one teacher. In traditional schools, the teacher needed to divide his/her lecture time among the different grades and subjects, which meant that many students spent large periods of time without any guided learning. In *Escuela Nueva*, students work at their own pace with individual booklets. Teachers concentrate on helping the youngest ones in learning to read and on solving unresolved questions. Older students support younger ones in their learning too. In this way, *Escuela Nueva* promotes certain citizenship competencies such as cooperation among classmates. *Escuela Nueva* also promotes student involvement in issues about their own school and communities. In addition to having a very active student government, students get involved in community projects which allow them to understand better real-life problems and to apply what they are learning in their own contexts.

Several rigorous evaluations of *Escuela Nueva* have consistently shown better performance in math and language compared to more traditional rural schools.¹⁵ More interesting for the topic of this chapter, recent evaluations have indicated that students in *Escuela Nueva* report more peaceful and democratic attitudes and behaviors.¹⁶ These results give strong support to the potential that schools have in promoting peaceful interactions and commitment to democratic participation. In addition, they reinforce the pedagogical orientation of learning citizenship competencies by doing things, that is, learning about cooperation, peaceful interactions and democratic participation not by talking about it but by being involved in activities where students have to put their cooperative, peaceful and democratic competencies into practice.

There are several other structured educational programs for the promotion of peace and democracy in Colombia with varying degrees of levels of consolidation and scale of geographical coverage. Some of them are *Proyecto Ciudadano* (Citizenship Project) from Fundación Presencia¹⁷, *Habilidades para la Vida* (Life Skills) from

Fundación Fe y Alegría¹⁸, *Jóvenes Constructores de Paz* (Young Peacebuilders) from the International Center for Education and Human Development CINDE¹⁹, *Proyecto Hermes* (Hermes Project) from Bogotá's Chamber of Commerce²⁰, *Ética con Inteligencia Emocional* (Ethics with Emotional Intelligence) from Asesores de Proyectos Educativos²¹, *Convivencia Productiva* (Productive *Convivencia*) from Corporación Empresarios Convivencia Productiva²², *Cultura de la Legalidad* (Culture of Legality) from the Anti-Corruption Office of the Colombian Presidency²³, and *Aulas en Paz* (Peaceable Classrooms), our own program for the promotion of citizenship competencies among elementary school students²⁴. These programs are based on research and on conceptual and pedagogical backgrounds, have support from different institutions or organizations, and have been -or are in the process of being- evaluated. Although rigorous research about the success of these programs is still preliminary, these programs are advancing our knowledge about how to promote *convivencia* and democratic behaviors within the schools and communities. Some, like *Proyecto Ciudadano*, promote the development of citizenship competencies by creating a social setting where students study problems within their communities and propose projects that could bring social transformations by democratic means. Others, like *Habilidades para la Vida*, are based on curricula that seek to develop specific competencies. In any case, most of them share a similar pedagogical assumption: that learning citizenship competencies could be more effective if children are provided with opportunities to practice these competencies, either in hypothetical or real-life situations.

Local School Initiatives

In addition to the structured programs, hundreds or thousands of teachers, school administrators, parents and students throughout the country have been developing classroom or school-wide strategies for the promotion of peace among their students and/or the school communities. One example of these initiatives was developed in Medellín by faculty members of the school *Institución Educativa La Esperanza*. This large school is located in the *Comunas Noroccidentales*, a violence-torn area of the city which in recent years has seen an open military confrontation between urban guerrillas, paramilitaries and the Colombian militaries. In such a violent context, children are learning peaceful ways of dealing with their own conflicts.

In response to an increasing incidence of aggression, intolerance and norm violations among the students, a group of teachers and academic coordinators decided to create a peer mediation program. Instead of promoting adult interventions in children's conflicts, the basic idea was to help the students deal with their own problems themselves. With the support of a team of teachers and coordinators, more than one hundred students from third- to eleventh-grade are trained each year as peer mediators. These include every class representative elected by the students in a yearly voting process as well as some student volunteers. Whenever his/her classmates get involved in conflicts, the peer mediator offers the possibility of helping them deal peacefully with those conflicts. The initiative is not without limitations. For example, not all students are willing to accept that some classmates get involved in their conflicts. In any case, from very early in life the initiative is empowering many children as peace-builders. If

successful, they may end up contributing to peace not only within their schools but also in their families and communities.

Until recently, most school initiatives like the one of *Institución Educativa La Esperanza* had received little pedagogical or conceptual support and there has been little communication and coordination among them. There are many initiatives, but most have been isolated. This seems to be changing with the coordination of a national initiative: the Colombian Citizenship Competencies program led by the Ministry of Education.

A National Initiative: The Colombian Citizenship Competencies Program

The Colombian General Education Law allows every school to decide its own curriculum and pedagogical orientation. This promotes autonomy and creativity among the educational community, and many teachers and school administrators are making great use of this possibility. However, so far their efforts have mostly been isolated, uncoordinated and have received little support. Furthermore, most schools have given a higher priority to traditional academic areas such as math, language or science. The National Citizenship Competencies program is bringing more coordination and orientation to the efforts being done on issues related to education for peace and citizenship. At the same time, it is giving citizenship education the same level of priority that traditional academic areas have.

Within the last five years, the Ministry of Education has promoted the creation of national standards and national tests that seek to provide guidance, coordination and feedback to the academic work of the schools. The *standards* indicate a minimum level of quality that the Ministry expects of each school for different grade levels (3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th grade) and the *test* evaluates whether and to what extent these standards are being accomplished. In order to make citizenship education as important as the other areas, the Ministry decided two years ago to make it one of the five areas (together with math, language, social sciences and natural sciences) for which there are standards and tests. The national standards and the national test on citizenship competencies provide the basis of the Citizenship Competencies program.

The national standards on citizenship competencies indicate what the Ministry expects as the minimum level of performance on issues of *convivencia* and peace, democratic participation, and diversity.²⁵ They include knowledge (*e.g.*, knowledge about mechanisms for democratic participation), cognitive competencies (*e.g.*, the capacity to take other people's perspectives), emotional competencies (*e.g.*, the capacity to identify and manage one's emotions even in stressful situations), communicative competencies (*e.g.*, the capacity to listen accurately and with interest to others), and integrative competencies which integrate in action all the other competencies (*e.g.*, peaceful and constructive resolution of conflicts).²⁶

The national test evaluates to what extent some of these competencies are being met. This test is taken by all fifth- and ninth-grade students in every public or private school in Colombia. Students report on their own responses to particular situations and on their classmates' behavior. For example, empathy –the capacity to feel something similar or compatible with what others are feeling- is measured by asking students about how they usually feel in particular situations in which something bad happens to others. Other competencies, such as the capacity to manage their own anger, are measured in similar

ways. Their reports about their classmates' behavior (e.g., how often they get into physical fights) serve as an indicator of their classmates' integrative competencies. School's results are based on the average of their students' reports.

The program is complemented by local, regional and national workshops and conferences like the one mentioned at the beginning of this chapter which allow teachers, school administrators, institutions related to education, and national and international researchers to share experiences, concerns, insights, research results, and in general, learn from each other. The program also provides resources and materials by different means such as publications and a widely consulted Internet portal.²⁷ Finally, the program is starting to promote the implementation and evaluation of pilot programs, some of which have been adapted from internationally developed innovations.

Risks and Opportunities

The citizenship competencies program of the Ministry of Education has not been fully implemented. In fact, it is still only in the beginning stages. Most schools in Colombia are probably still not conscious of its potential, or if they are, they probably do not have the pedagogical tools or institutional support to implement it. The following are some of the possible risks related to the implementation of the program:²⁸

Risk 1: Limited information about the program. One possible risk for the program is for teachers and schools not to receive enough information about the proposal and especially about how to implement it. There has been a large-scale diffusion of the program. Every school in Colombia received a copy of the National Standards of Citizenship Competencies, has taken part in the two national tests of citizenship competencies and has received the results of their school performance in these tests. Furthermore, workshops have taken place in all Colombian states and the program has had a strong presence in the media, including newspapers, Internet, radio and television. However, even if most teachers and school administrators now have some knowledge about the program, this might not be enough for them to implement it accurately in their classrooms and schools. To be sure, this task does not depend only on the Ministry of Education but also on local institutions such as Secretaries of Education, non-governmental organizations, and universities which have a more regular contact with schools.

Risk 2: Information received but ignored. It seems likely that many teachers and schools received information about the citizenship competencies program, but decided to ignore it. There are several reasons for this. The first is that the program could have been perceived as an imposition by the national government. The first drafts of the national standards were evaluated by a large group of teachers and researchers throughout the country. However, the large majority of the teachers and school administrators heard about them for the first time when the standards were already decided and published. Additionally, for issues of validity and confidentiality only the group of researchers that created the national test knew about its content before students took this test. This may have created resistance to the program.

Resistance may also come from the perception that autonomy may be lost with the national standards and tests. As mentioned above, the Colombian educational system is highly decentralized and grants to schools a large degree of autonomy, including

decisions about what and how to teach. The new proposal is not a mandate. However, results on the national tests are one of several indicators considered in the evaluation of performance of school administrators. In addition, the results of these tests are public and this creates social pressures which many resent.

One of the most common criticisms of the program is that it ignores the large regional diversities found throughout the country and for this reason the basic idea of a national standard is called into question. At first glance, this criticism seems reasonable since local realities vary so much throughout the country. However, a closer look at the proposal shows that the particular competencies are sufficiently broad to account for regional diversities. For example, it is clear that the particular strategies for dealing peacefully with conflicts need to be culturally relevant and for this reason they need to have variations from region to region. However, skills for peaceful resolution of conflicts are necessary throughout the country since conflicts occur in any social context, and this is what the standards related to conflict resolution are trying to promote.

A similar criticism is that some contexts in Colombia are so violent that it does not make sense there to try to promote competencies related to peaceful social interactions since these skills are not adaptive in such contexts. Apparent in this argument is a belief that children living in violent contexts need to learn to be aggressive in order to survive. In fact, the proposal is based on two very different conceptions: that survival is actually increased by learning to deal constructively and non-violently with social problems, and that these competencies are especially needed in the most violent environments because otherwise those environments would never have long-lasting changes. In any case, resistance related to these criticisms may continue until many more realize that the proposal is sufficiently broad to account for regional diversities and that it is applicable in the most violent regions of the country. Continuing local, regional, and national debates and sharing of successful experiences could be an effective way for local actors to identify what is most useful of this national proposal in light of their particular local conditions.

Different educational initiatives have been promoted from the Ministry of Education in the last two decades.²⁹ These have included proposals about academic achievements (*logros*), objectives (*objetivos*), lineaments (*lineamientos*), and now standards and competencies. These may have created the sense that the new proposal is actually equivalent to previous ones but with a different name. In addition, some may consider that the current program would only last until a new government comes with a new proposal so they might as well as continue doing what they have been doing.

All of this may have created a paradoxical situation in which even if the content of the program has strong potential benefits for the schools, many may have decided to ignore it completely before really getting to know and understand what the proposal is about.

Risk 3: Proposal implemented incorrectly. Even if some teachers and school administrators get to know the citizenship competencies proposal and decide to implement it, there is still the risk of doing it in ways that seem inconsistent to the development of these competencies. This risk is especially likely if they do not count on the support of institutions like local Secretaries of Education, non-governmental organizations or research centers and universities which have access to more conceptual or pedagogical resources.

This seems to be the case of schools which consider that their Values Transmission Program is actually developing citizenship competencies. In Values Transmission programs, schools organize activities around certain values which are usually defined by adults. Common activities include “the value of the day, week or month” where students are reminded of the relevance of a certain value by means of posters, songs, texts and slogans. The student who best demonstrates that value is rewarded with a prize offered in public (*e.g.*, the most honest student of the week prize). Other Values Transmission programs involve students in the creation of magical portraits of ideal figures (*e.g.*, all students in a classroom drawing human figures with hats of wisdom, shirts of tolerance, gloves of love and peace, belts of faith, pants of effort, socks of humility and shoes of truth³⁰). These programs may actually hinder the development of certain citizenship competencies, as has been argued by Alfie Kohn.³¹ For example, they do not prepare students to deal with real-life situations where different values frequently confront each other. They may also affect the development of critical thinking skills since students are taught to conform to the values chosen for them. Citizenship competencies are developed not by reminding students about what is good or by talking about it, but by confronting students with situations where they need to put those competencies in practice.

Schools may also have difficulties integrating the proposal into the curriculum, and especially into the academic areas (*e.g.*, math, science, language, physical education, arts). The proposal states that the whole educational community, including all teachers, school administrators and parents, need to be involved, and that citizenship competencies should be promoted in every class from every academic area. In this way, it breaks with the belief that citizenship education is a responsibility of only a few, for example, the social science teachers. However, it is possible that responsibility could get diffused within the educational community. In addition, there are so far very few strategies about how to do this integration and it is possible that in some schools it is not done appropriately.³²

The three types of risks outlined above should not be understood as a prediction of failure of the program. Instead, they confirm that the task is not easy and it is only in the beginning phase. Additionally, they help identify issues that need to be taken into account in order to make full use of the potential of the program. For example, it seems crucial to work closely with those institutions that may, at local levels, support interested teachers and school administrators such as Municipal or Departmental Secretaries of Education, NGOs, or regional universities. That is, it seems essential to support the supporters. The success of the program may depend to a large degree on the level of coordination between local initiatives, structured programs, and the national initiatives.

An additional issue to be taken into account is to guarantee stability of national priorities. Resistance to national proposals may be lower if the educational community finds that they are not just something that will change once the governmental officers are replaced. For this reason, relative stability and continuity of the current initiative should be prioritized and protected from abrupt changes.

Finally, a strong opportunity for the proposal seems to come from the training of future teachers. Students of education and pedagogy may have high levels of motivation to learn new concepts and pedagogical tools as well as the time that the extremely busy practicing teachers usually do not have. If all those studying to be teachers receive

training about how to promote citizenship competencies in their classrooms and schools, the educational system will be a strong promoter of peace in the future.

Conclusion

We have seen plenty of creativity and motivation among members of the educational community, especially at the local level. However, we have not seen enough conceptual background and pedagogical tools in order to make the best use of all that creativity and motivation. For example, the Values Transmission programs described above sometimes reflect lack of knowledge about their limitations in their capacity to promote changes in the students' behavior. Guidance and support to schools and teachers seems necessary to make full use of the social transformation potential of education.

Colombia has become a leader internationally in citizenship education. In a recent review of civic programs in Latin America, Fernando Reimers and Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, from Harvard University, concluded that the Colombian program of citizenship competencies is one of the most innovative and comprehensive proposals in the region.³³ The program differs from common practice in other countries in that it emphasizes competencies, not only knowledge and values, it focuses on peaceful *convivencia*, democratic participation, and pluralism (not only civics), it promotes the development, pilot testing, and dissemination of pedagogical tools, and it includes a large-scale evaluation.

Although the program is only in its beginning stage and its success depends completely on its integration with local actors and with ongoing school initiatives, it seems to have an enormous potential to transform our society. In the end, the success of the program should be measured not only by the number of peace initiatives implemented in schools, but by whether and how much these initiatives actually help students develop their own citizenship competencies (something which can be evaluated directly with the national test of citizenship competencies) and become more empowered to transform their society by peaceful and democratic means.

Many years of living in a violent context require substantial societal transformations in the way we relate to each other and education seems to hold the key to such transformations. Not taking this into account may imply that any other peace initiative will run the risk of having only short-term and limited effects.

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² Carlos Mauricio Vega, "En Magdalena: Los trece apóstoles de Algarrobo" *Quince experiencias para aprender ciudadanía... y una más* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Fundación Empresarios por la Educación, 2004): 35-41.

³ *Convivencia* is a Spanish word with no precise translation into English. It means peaceful interaction and coexistence among members of a social group. We will be using this Spanish word in this document.

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⁵ Enrique Chauv, Cycle of violence and education for peace in Colombia: The role of citizenship competencies. Paper presented at the Colombian Colloquium. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005). Guerra, Huesmann & Spindler op.cit.

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⁷ Chauv (2003) op.cit. Chauv (2005) op. cit. Parra op. cit.

⁸ Albert Bandura, Aggression: A social learning analysis. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Carlos Eduardo Vasco, Estándares básicos de calidad para la educación, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, unpublished document, 2003.

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