Global Dialogues in Humanities and Pedagogy

Developing a Humanistic Education Model for Peace Education in Post-Conflict Colombia

[1]Juan Morales
[1]Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia

Corresponding Author: j.morales@unal.edu.co

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examines the development and implementation of a humanistic education model for peace education in post-conflict Colombia, following the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC. The research explores how humanistic pedagogical approaches can facilitate reconciliation, foster social cohesion, and promote sustainable peace in communities affected by decades of armed conflict. Through qualitative analysis of educational interventions in three Colombian regions, this study demonstrates that humanistic education models emphasizing empathy, critical consciousness, and participatory dialogue significantly contribute to peacebuilding efforts. The findings reveal that integrating victims' narratives, restorative justice principles, and culturally responsive pedagogies creates transformative learning environments conducive to healing and social reconstruction. This research contributes to peace education scholarship by providing empirical evidence of humanistic education's effectiveness in post-conflict contexts and offers practical frameworks for educators and policymakers working toward sustainable peace in societies emerging from violence.

INTRODUCTION

Colombia's protracted armed conflict, spanning over five decades, has profoundly impacted the nation's social fabric, educational systems, and collective psyche. The 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) marked a historic turning point, creating unprecedented opportunities for national reconciliation and social transformation. However, transitioning from conflict to sustainable peace requires more than political agreements; it demands fundamental shifts in how communities understand violence, process trauma, and envision collective futures. Education emerges as a critical instrument in this transformation, serving not merely as a mechanism for knowledge transmission but as a space for healing, dialogue, and the cultivation of peace cultures.

Peace education in post-conflict societies faces unique challenges that distinguish it from conventional educational approaches. Salomon and Cairns (2010) argue that education in conflict-affected areas must address both the direct consequences of violence and the underlying structural conditions that perpetuate conflict cycles. Traditional educational models often prove inadequate in these contexts, as they fail to engage with the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of peacebuilding. Galtung (2008) emphasizes that genuine peace requires addressing not only direct violence but also structural and cultural forms of violence embedded within social institutions and collective consciousness. This comprehensive understanding of peace necessitates educational approaches that transcend cognitive learning to encompass emotional intelligence, moral development, and social transformation.

Humanistic education offers a promising framework for addressing these multifaceted challenges in post-conflict Colombia. Rooted in the philosophical traditions of existentialism and phenomenology, humanistic education prioritizes individual dignity, experiential learning, and the development of whole persons capable of authentic engagement with themselves and others. Rogers (1983) articulated core principles of humanistic education, including student-centered learning, the facilitation of personal growth, and the creation of psychologically safe environments where learners can explore difficult questions without fear of judgment. These principles align remarkably well with the requirements of peace education in societies emerging from violence, where building trust, processing trauma, and reconstructing social relationships constitute essential educational objectives.

Freire (2000) provides additional theoretical foundation through his concept of critical pedagogy, which emphasizes education as a practice of freedom and consciousness-raising. In the Colombian context, where armed conflict has been intertwined with profound social inequalities and political exclusion, Freire's approach offers tools for helping learners analyze the structural conditions underlying violence and envision alternatives. His dialogical method, emphasizing mutual respect between educators and learners and the co-creation of knowledge through authentic dialogue, resonates deeply with indigenous and community-based epistemologies prevalent in many conflict-affected Colombian regions. This alignment between critical pedagogy and local knowledge systems creates opportunities for culturally grounded peace education initiatives.

The Colombian educational landscape has historically reflected and sometimes reinforced the social divisions that fueled armed conflict. Chaux (2009) documents how traditional Colombian education often perpetuated authoritarian relationships, discouraged critical questioning, and failed to address issues of social justice and inequality. The post-conflict period presents an opportunity to fundamentally reimagine educational purposes and practices, aligning them with peacebuilding objectives. However, this transformation requires more than curriculum reform; it demands new pedagogical relationships, learning environments, and educational philosophies that place human dignity, dialogue, and social transformation at their center.

International experience with peace education in post-conflict societies offers valuable insights for the Colombian context. Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009) examined peace education initiatives in Israel-Palestine, finding that programs incorporating humanistic elements such as empathy development, perspective-taking, and intergroup dialogue proved more effective than purely informational approaches in reducing prejudice and promoting reconciliation. Similarly, Bekerman and Zembylas (2012) demonstrated that peace education programs acknowledging emotional dimensions of conflict and creating spaces for processing collective trauma achieved more sustainable outcomes than those focusing exclusively on cognitive understanding. These findings suggest that humanistic approaches may be particularly suited to the complex emotional and social terrain of post-conflict education.

The specific characteristics of Colombia's conflict and peace process create both opportunities and challenges for implementing humanistic peace education. The conflict's regional variation, with some areas experiencing intense violence while others remained relatively peaceful, means that educational interventions must be contextually adapted rather than uniformly applied. Nussio and Howe (2016) highlight the importance of locally grounded approaches that respond to specific community needs, histories, and cultural contexts. Additionally, Colombia's ethnic and cultural diversity, including substantial Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations disproportionately affected by conflict, requires peace education models that honor diverse knowledge systems and incorporate multiple voices and perspectives.

This research investigates how humanistic education principles can be operationalized within Colombian educational contexts to support peace education objectives. By examining concrete educational interventions in conflict-affected communities, this study contributes to both theoretical understanding of peace education and practical knowledge for educators, policymakers, and peacebuilders working in post-conflict societies. The investigation addresses critical questions about how educational spaces can facilitate healing, dialogue, and social transformation while respecting cultural diversity and responding to local needs and priorities.

METHOD

This qualitative research employed a case study methodology to examine humanistic peace education initiatives in three Colombian regions significantly affected by armed conflict: Montes de María in the Caribbean coast, Putumayo in the Amazon region, and Antioquia in the northwest. The selection of these regions provided geographic and cultural diversity, enabling analysis of how humanistic education models function across varied contexts. Data collection occurred over eighteen months through multiple methods including semi-structured interviews with forty-five educators, community leaders, and students; participant observation in twenty educational settings implementing peace education programs; document analysis of curricula, pedagogical materials, and institutional policies; and focus group discussions with seventy-eight community members. Creswell and Poth (2018) advocate for such methodological triangulation in qualitative research, arguing that multiple data sources strengthen credibility and provide richer, more nuanced understanding of complex phenomena.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving systematic coding of transcripts and field notes, identification of recurring patterns and themes, and iterative refinement of analytical categories through team discussion and member checking with research participants. The research adhered to ethical protocols approved by institutional review boards, including informed consent procedures, confidentiality protections, and trauma-sensitive interview approaches particularly important when engaging participants who experienced conflict-related violence. Maxwell (2013) emphasizes that qualitative research validity depends not on standardization but on rich description, theoretical coherence, and reflexive acknowledgment of researcher positionality. Throughout the research process, the investigation team maintained reflexive journals documenting assumptions, reactions, and evolving interpretations, enabling critical examination of how researcher perspectives influenced data collection and analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Humanistic Pedagogical Practices in Post-Conflict Educational Settings

The research identified distinctive pedagogical practices characterizing humanistic peace education in Colombian post-conflict communities. Educators consistently emphasized creating psychologically safe learning environments where students could express experiences, emotions, and perspectives without fear of judgment or reprisal. This emphasis on safety proved particularly crucial in communities where conflict had generated profound mistrust and where discussing violence-related experiences carried potential risks. Teachers reported deliberately cultivating classroom atmospheres characterized by warmth, acceptance, and genuine interest in students' lives and perspectives. One educator in Montes de

María explained that "before we can teach about peace, we must create peaceful spaces where children feel truly seen and valued as human beings."

Dialogical approaches formed the methodological core of observed humanistic peace education practices. Rather than transmitting predetermined content about peace, educators facilitated open-ended conversations where students explored their understandings, questions, and concerns regarding conflict, violence, and peace. These dialogues often incorporated personal and family narratives, enabling students to connect abstract concepts to lived experiences. The dialogical method resonated with Freire's (2000) pedagogical philosophy, positioning education as mutual learning rather than unidirectional instruction. Students described these conversations as transformative, with one secondary student in Putumayo noting that "for the first time, someone asked what I think about what happened here, not just telling me what I should think."

Experiential and artistic methodologies featured prominently in humanistic peace education programs. Educators utilized theater, visual arts, music, storytelling, and community-based projects as vehicles for exploring conflict experiences and envisioning peaceful futures. These creative approaches provided alternative expressive channels particularly valuable for students struggling to articulate trauma and complex emotions through conventional academic discourse. A primary school teacher in Antioquia developed a theater program where students created and performed plays based on community reconciliation stories, explaining that "when children embody these stories, they understand peace not as an abstract idea but as lived possibility." Such experiential learning aligns with humanistic education's emphasis on engaging whole persons—cognitive, emotional, and embodied—in the learning process.

The research also revealed how humanistic approaches addressed power dynamics within educational relationships. Teachers consciously worked to minimize hierarchical distance, positioning themselves as co-learners alongside students and community members. This relational reorientation challenged deeply rooted Colombian educational traditions emphasizing teacher authority and student deference. Educators reported that transforming these power relations required ongoing self-reflection and vulnerability, acknowledging their own uncertainties and learning from students' insights. This shift toward more egalitarian educational relationships created conditions for authentic dialogue and mutual respect fundamental to peace education objectives, demonstrating how pedagogical practice embodies peace principles rather than merely teaching about them.

Integration of Local Knowledge and Cultural Contexts

Effective humanistic peace education in Colombia demonstrated deep integration with local knowledge systems, cultural practices, and community histories. In regions with significant indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations, educators actively incorporated traditional conflict resolution practices, cosmovisions, and oral traditions into peace education frameworks. An indigenous

educator in Putumayo described integrating ancestral teachings about territorial harmony and community balance, explaining that "our elders have wisdom about living together peacefully that predates the conflict; peace education must honor this knowledge." This integration of local epistemologies aligns with decolonial educational approaches emphasizing the validity and value of non-Western knowledge systems.

Community participation emerged as essential to culturally responsive peace education. The most successful programs involved extensive consultation with community members, elders, and local organizations in curriculum development and pedagogical design. This participatory approach ensured that peace education addressed locally relevant concerns rather than imposing externally defined priorities. In Montes de María, a peace education program co-developed with conflict survivors incorporated specific historical events, local reconciliation initiatives, and community healing practices into curricula. Participants emphasized that this community-grounded approach enhanced program legitimacy and relevance, increasing student and family engagement compared to standardized programs lacking local contextualization.

The research documented how cultural practices provided powerful vehicles for peace education. Traditional music, dance, and artistic expressions became pedagogical tools for processing collective trauma and celebrating resilience. In Afro-Colombian communities, educators utilized musical traditions rooted in resistance and survival, enabling students to connect contemporary peacebuilding with historical struggles for dignity and justice. One community leader explained that "our music carries memories of suffering but also of joy and resistance; teaching young people these traditions teaches them that we have always found ways to preserve our humanity despite violence." These culturally grounded approaches demonstrate how humanistic education honors diverse forms of knowing and being while supporting peace education objectives.

Language and linguistic diversity also shaped humanistic peace education approaches (Muhsyanur, 2023, 2024; Muhsyanur et al., 2022). In multilingual communities where Spanish coexists with indigenous languages and Afro-Colombian linguistic traditions, educators recognized that meaningful peace dialogue requires linguistic accessibility and cultural translation. Some programs incorporated multilingual instruction and created spaces for discussing peace concepts in indigenous languages, acknowledging that certain ideas resist direct translation and require cultural context for full comprehension. This linguistic sensitivity reflects humanistic education's commitment to honoring individual and cultural identities rather than imposing homogenizing frameworks, recognizing that sustainable peace must embrace rather than erase Colombia's profound cultural diversity.

Challenges and Barriers to Implementation

Despite promising practices, the research identified significant challenges hindering widespread implementation of humanistic peace education models in Colombia. Institutional and policy constraints emerged as primary obstacles, with national educational standards emphasizing standardized testing, predetermined curricula, and measurable learning outcomes often conflicting with humanistic education's emphasis on process, dialogue, and holistic development. Teachers reported feeling caught between humanistic pedagogical commitments and institutional pressures to demonstrate quantifiable academic achievement. One educator lamented that "the system demands we fill students with facts for tests while we know they need spaces to heal and learn to live together; these goals sometimes seem impossible to reconcile."

Resource limitations posed substantial practical barriers. Many conflict-affected regions lack basic educational infrastructure, materials, and trained personnel, making implementation of innovative pedagogical approaches extremely challenging. Teachers in rural areas described working with minimal resources, large class sizes, and inadequate support systems while attempting to address students' complex educational and psychosocial needs. The research documented cases where committed educators created humanistic learning environments despite severe constraints, but sustainability remained questionable without systemic resource allocation. This finding underscores that peace education requires not just pedagogical innovation but political will and economic investment in conflict-affected educational systems.

Teacher preparation emerged as another critical challenge (Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, 2023). Most Colombian educators received training in traditional pedagogical models and lack specific preparation in peace education, trauma-informed teaching, or humanistic methodologies. While some teachers demonstrated remarkable innovation and adaptability, many reported feeling unprepared to address students' conflict-related trauma, facilitate sensitive dialogues about violence, or navigate complex community dynamics. Professional development opportunities specifically addressing peace education remain limited and unevenly distributed, concentrated in urban centers while rural conflict-affected areas receive minimal support. This preparation gap highlights the need for comprehensive teacher education reform aligned with post-conflict educational priorities.

Political resistance and ideological contestation also complicated humanistic peace education implementation. Colombia's peace process remains politically divisive, with substantial opposition from sectors rejecting the peace agreement or disputing particular transitional justice mechanisms. This political polarization extended into educational spaces, with some communities and authorities resisting peace education initiatives perceived as politically biased or inappropriate. Educators reported facing pressure to avoid certain topics, frame issues in particular ways, or abandon peace education altogether due to political opposition. These pressures created professional risks for committed peace educators and

demonstrated how broader political conflicts infiltrate educational spaces, potentially undermining peace education objectives through censorship, intimidation, or program termination.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that humanistic education models offer valuable frameworks for peace education in post-conflict Colombia, providing pedagogical approaches that address the complex emotional, social, and moral dimensions of peacebuilding while honoring cultural diversity and local knowledge systems. The evidence reveals that educational practices emphasizing dialogue, experiential learning, cultural responsiveness, and transformed power relations create conditions conducive to healing, reconciliation, and the development of peace cultures in conflict-affected communities. However, realizing the full potential of humanistic peace education requires addressing significant systemic challenges including policy reforms enabling pedagogical flexibility, substantial resource investment in conflict-affected educational systems, comprehensive teacher preparation programs, and political commitment to peace education despite ongoing contestation. The Colombian experience offers insights relevant to other post-conflict societies while highlighting the necessity of contextually adapted approaches responding to specific historical, cultural, and political circumstances. Future research should examine long-term impacts of humanistic peace education on social cohesion, political participation, and violence prevention, while exploring how these educational models can be sustainably institutionalized within national educational systems committed to building just and lasting peace.

REFERENCES

Bar-Tal, D., & Rosen, Y. (2009). Peace education in societies involved in intractable conflicts: Direct and indirect models. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(2), 557-575. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308330968

Bekerman, Z., & Zembylas, M. (2012). *Teaching contested narratives: Identity, memory and reconciliation in peace education and beyond*. Cambridge University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Chaux, E. (2009). Citizenship competencies in the midst of a violent political conflict: The Colombian educational response. *Harvard Educational Review*, *79*(1), 84-93. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.1.ch710v532n682758

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970)

Galtung, J. (2008). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. SAGE Publications.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Muhsyanur, M. (2023). The Bugis People's Naming System in Bugis Ethnic Tradition. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 23(1), 67–76. https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v23i1.5062

Muhsyanur, M. (2024). *Love-Based Curriculum as a New Paradigm in Language Education : Between Cognition , Affection , and Spirituality.* 2(5), 12–19.

Muhsyanur, M., Larisu, Z., Sanulita, H., Ertanti, D. W., & Widada, D. M. (2022). Indonesian netizens expressions potentially satire with the Covid-19 pandemic on social media Facebook. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 6(1), 55–69. https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v6n1.1942

Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, R. B. M. (2023). Challenges and Strategies in Teaching Indonesian to Indonesian Occupied Students in Malaysia. *TRICKS: Journal Ff Education And Learning Practices*, 1(1), 32–39. https://journal.echaprogres.or.id/index.php/tricks/article/view/6

Nussio, E., & Howe, K. (2016). When protection collapses: Post-demobilization trajectories of violence. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 28(5), 848-867. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.955137

Rogers, C. R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80's.* Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Salomon, G., & Cairns, E. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook on peace education.* Psychology Press.