



**Engaging high school students in the development
of more peaceful communities: a case study in
Honduras**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis herewith submitted for the Master of Public Administration – Peace Studies at the Durban University of Technology is my original work and has not been previously submitted for a degree at any other university.

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ABSTRACT

Honduras is a country fraught by inequality and injustice, which has a detrimental effect on all spheres and socio-economic sectors of the population. According to the World Bank, Honduras has registered the second highest economic growth rates in Central America, only behind Panama, yet the country is still steeped in high levels of poverty and inequality. This is not helped by the high levels of criminal activity spearheaded by organized crime, gangs and aided by high levels of systemic corruption. This research is a participative approach with 10th and 11th grade students in order to evaluate the need for peacebuilding actions at a school level.

A participative action research approach was used ensuring that the youth were fully involved in analysing the different aspects and levels of conflict and violence in their communities. The process involves using surveys, interviews and discussions in order to collect the necessary data. Although numerous events impeded the implementation of the experience gained there was an opportunity share some of which was learnt with students and observe a change in their outlook on conflict and violence and their appreciation for peacebuilding.

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DEDICATION

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Chapter 1. Context, research problem, aim and objectives

1.1 Country context

Honduras is a mountainous country in Central America bordered to the north by Guatemala and Belize to the west by El Salvador and the south by Nicaragua. The country has an estimated population of 10.2 million people of whom 57 percent live in urban areas. This region of Central America is also referred to as the Northern Triangle and is marred by constant conflict and violence with principle elements responsible being delinquent and organized crime, especially those linked to the drug trade. It is a region bathed in high rates of violence which causes a lot of migration especially towards the United States of America, where the majority of affected people look to for safety.

Within this Honduras is considered one of the most violent countries, and not just in the region but also in the world especially among those not experiencing civil war. For decades, the country has been fraught by violence and although the levels have decreased over the past few years, they are still very high. Before the military coup of 2009, the country has had innumerable problems with violence, especially in the context of criminality and delinquency both with ties to organized crime and 'maras' (gangs). In terms of homicide rates, Landa-Blanco et al. (2020) show that between 2008 and 2018 Honduras was one of the most violent countries in the world. At one point, it reached the unenviable status of the most violent country in the world. Subsequently, the rate has risen from 64.6 homicides per 100'000 population to 89.0 in 2012 and then tapering down to 39.1 in 2018. In 2020, the homicide rate, as reported by the United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs (UNODC) data base (2022) was 36.3 per 100,000 people, the seventh highest in the world.

The section of the population that suffers most under the weight of homicides are males between the ages of 15 – 59, with the highest number being for the group comprising

30 – 44 years. The youth do seem to be caught in a difficult situation as a significant number, especially from poor neighbourhoods, are forced under threat and coercion or enticement of riches and power to join gangs. Many of them are just looking for ways to help their families acquire the necessary means to live or at the bare minimum survive.

Human Rights Watch (2022) explains that “the criminal justice system justice system regularly fails to hold accountable those responsible for crimes and abuses.” This due to the fact that judges face political interference, harassment and threats from within government and private actors with governmental connections. This combined with the fact that the ineffectiveness of the government’s Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, makes it difficult for organizations charged with humanitarian activities to diligently do their work.

Berg and Carranza (2018) look at different reasons for the existence of violence in Honduras and the levels to which it is employed. The reasons behind the violence enacted by organized crime and delinquent groups are diverse and does not seem to necessarily adhere to a specific model. From territory disputes to profit generation through extortion. Organized crime and delinquents in cahoots with corrupt officials. The main use of violence by these individual and organizations is for strategic purposes in order to control territories and market access. The violence also serves specific purposes within these fields as outlined by the study - “*competition - to protect territory from rivals; coercion – to secure the cooperation of residents or state official, and exploitation – to extract revenue from the public.*” Exploitation and coercion, which seem to go hand in hand. A so-called ‘war tax’ is levied against businesses in Honduras, whereby organized crime organizations and the more audacious of the delinquents exact a fee from businesses for ‘protection.’ The authorities seem incapable of curtailing such activities, and by accounts from some individuals, report back to the delinquents organized crime elements when these are reported, thereby heightening the distrust that the civil society has towards the authorities.

According to Berg and Carranza (2015) and Barrachina Lisón (2016), the highest levels of homicides can be attributed to specific cities in the country: the principal urban

centres of Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, and Comayagua combined with the provinces (Colón, Atlántida, Cortés and Yoro) on what is known as the ‘*corredor de drogas*’ drug passage on the north coast. Then there are the border contact cities (Copán, Santa Bárbara y Ocotepeque) of the drug passage with Guatemala. According to the document, contract killings linked to organized crime is the principal cause of violent deaths followed a distant second by ordinary criminal activity and then interpersonal violence. The study shows that in some neighbourhoods it is the gangs and organized crime organizations that maintain the violence at low levels through coercion.

Other measures of citizen insecurity such as robberies, femicide, and domestic violence have increased or remained static in this same time interval. Citizen perception of public insecurity remains high with 89.9% of the population considering the country to be insecure.¹ The political instability caused by the coup in 2009 and the 2017 post-electoral crisis, alongside high impunity rates and corruption, has led to significant levels of distrust between citizens, the government, and governmental institutions to respond to violence in the country.

The Honduran State has been categorized as an electoral autocracy due to its use of force, weak rule of law, limited checks and balances, lack of transparency and corruption, fraudulent elections, among other factors.² Similarly, international media has categorized the Honduran State as a narco-state, due to the close relationships between high officials in the executive and legislative branches, state security personnel (i.e. armed forces, national police), drug-trafficking and organized crime.³ This

¹ University Institute for Democracy, Peace, and Security, “Encuesta de Percepción ciudadana sobre inseguridad y victimización,” (Survey of citizen perception about insecurity and victimization) Tegucigalpa, 2019.

² Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2020 Country Report – Honduras*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020, 3.

³ This is best exemplified with the case of Juan Orlando Hernandez Alvarado, former president of Honduras who is currently awaiting trial for drug trafficking and his brother Juan Antonio “Tony” Hernandez Alvarado, former Congressman, who was sentenced to life in prison on March 30, 2021 in the Southern District Court of New York in 2018. BBC, “Honduras drugs: President's brother gets life in prison,” *BBC*, Mar. 31, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56589088>; see also: Sara Kinosian, “U.S. prosecutors say Honduras has become a 'narco-state',” *Reuters*, Mar. 9, 2021.

represents a particularly worrying dynamic where high ranking State officials are actively colluding with organized crime while simultaneously trying to “tackle” the violence caused by these illicit organizations.

The coup of 2009, according to many, has caused detrimental effects to democracy in the country. The Honduran military, in collusion with the Supreme Court and the majority of Congress, deposed the democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya on June 28, 2009. While the coup was condemned by the majority of the international community, the United States supported the post-coup regime, ensuring its permanence and validating its violence. Many scholars have noted the detrimental effects that the coup has caused, Frank (2018), Ruhl (2010). However, according to Xatruch⁴ although the coup caused political instability the reality is that criminality by organized crime and government incompetence the situations of violence pre-coup and post-coup is largely the same. What has changed according to him is that there has been a radicalization of social thought in the Honduran psyche causing people to think more critically about different aspects that affect their lives. But fear prevents them acting on it.

Democratic governance was further weakened in 2017 when President Juan Orlando Hernandez ran for a second term, despite a constitutional ban on re-election. The election was wrought with irregularities, marred by allegations of fraud, and characterized by repressive, militarized violence. This resulted in 31 murders of demonstrators by security personnel. When protests arose in 2019 in the context of a decree that would privatize health and education, a similar repressive strategy was used by the government. Military and police officials killed and wounded Honduran teachers, students, health workers, and other citizens.⁵ The former government’s response to popular demonstrations and citizen discontent remained violent, noting the extent to

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-corruption-honduras/u-s-prosecutors-say-honduras-has-become-a-narco-state-idUSKBN2B207W>

⁴ Gerson Manuel Velasquez Sánchez – Honduran historian and Social Studies teacher.

⁵ CEJIL, “To the Honduran Government: Stop Killing and Injuring Protesters,” 2019.

which the government went to ensure the permanence of oppressive structures that limit democratic participation and advance the interests of a few.

The World Bank Group (2020) calculated that in 2018, 48.3% of the population lived under the poverty line, with 22.9% living under extreme poverty. While there are inconsistencies in these measurements, poverty is a significant factor that influences and creates barriers in the lives of many children and youth in Honduras as it limits the access and realization of rights such as access to health, water, food, education, among others.

The education sector in Honduras is marred by insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, and outdated teaching methods. In 2019, only 44% of the school-aged children and adolescents were matriculated in the education system FOSDEH (2021). Many children and youth are forced to leave the education system due to issues of insecurity, difficulty in accessing educational facilities, additional costs (i.e., purchase of desks, chairs), among other factors. As a result, many opt to work, migrate, and to a lesser extent, join criminal organizations.⁶ The limited access to education is alarming given that it is one of the primary spaces where children develop intellectually, emotionally, and physically. In conditions where institutional violence is rampant, state neglect defines relationships between the State and citizens, and access to democratic institutions is limited. Many children and adolescents are forced to live in precarious situations.

1.2 Research problem

In my initial long term visit to Honduras I was able to hold conversations with many individuals ranging from senior citizens to youth and all age groups in between. My thoughts and questions in these questions always revolved around how they manage to live so seemingly content in a country viewed as one of the most dangerous in the world. Of course this topic was of interest to me as I had already started making plans to do my research on the basis of conflict, violence and peacebuilding. In these accumulative long hours of informal 'chatty' conversations I

⁶ Obed García, "Análisis de la deserción escolar," FOSDEH, March 2021.

was drawn to the thoughts, opinions and understanding of concepts of the youth. The youth were acutely aware of the violence and conflicts that existed in their community but through lack of knowledge were unable to identify the different forms of these and hence the inability to deal effectively with them. My thought at that time was that if they have a better understanding of the different forms of violence and conflict existent in their society they may be able to better address these through peaceful means. In other words, in order for them to become effective peacebuilders they need to have a fuller understanding of the issues they are contending with in their daily lives.

1.3 The city of Siguatepeque

Siguatepeque located in the department of Comayagua, is one of cities that has up until recently been spared the high levels of violence inflicted by organized crime and delinquency witnessed in other cities mentioned previously. According to the National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas), in 2013, which is the most recent census year, Siguatepeque had a population of 95'121 inhabitants with a current projected population of approximately 112'632 inhabitants. Until just a few years ago, the city was very peaceful compared to the other cities mentioned above which made it a lovely place to live. Although there is not any current statistics to lean on, there has been a substantial increase in violent crimes in the city, although it is still far from the levels experienced in other cities. A lot of the crime is not reported in the news and on occasion information filters through non-official sources that highlight this. There is also a very profound distrust of the authorities so a lot of criminal activity goes unreported and in many cases people would rather solve problems amongst themselves, usually in violent ways, than involve the authorities.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

Based on the above description of nature and extent of violence in Honduras, the aim of this research was to assess the potential of training youth in peacebuilding as a way of building more peaceful communities. The specific objectives were

1. Drawing on the insights of students, teachers and other professionals, to explore the nature, extent and consequences of conflict and violence which they experience in the city of Siguatepeque in Honduras.
2. Using a participatory action research approach, to design and implement a training programme in peacebuilding involving students from two high schools from different ends of the social class structure.
3. To evaluate the short-term outcomes of the training programme on the students and schools.

1.5 Overview of the thesis

This chapter has provided a detailed explanation of the violent context in which the research was carried out.

Chapter 2 reviews the academic literature relevant to the topic, culminating in a discussion of the potential of youth to act as peacebuilders.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methods as they were initially planned, the impediments which prevented the objectives being fully met and the alternative strategies which were attempted.

Chapter 4 reports the exploration component of the research.

Chapter 5 reflects on what has been learned and accomplished as result of the research project.

Chapter 2: Review of relevant literature

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the key peace concepts which underpin the research project. First, the key concepts of conflict, violence and peace are defined and explained. Then I examine peace education and the wider concept of educating for peace. Then I consider the potential role of youth as peacebuilders and how peace education can be used to enhance this potential. These concepts and theories form the backbone of the research as they are permeated throughout the very fabric of society. It was important for the participants to have a clear understanding of each of them as they are engrained in the combined social consciousness.

I first look at conflict in the context of what it is and how it manifests itself. To this end I made efforts to understand the thought that there is always conflict in our everyday lives and how it manifested itself and affected our interactions. It also became essential to understand that conflict in and of itself is not negative but one could rather say that it is neutral, the expression of conflict in the form of violence is the negative and when conflict leads to open discussion and consultation we could say that it is positive.

Next I look at violence and its various manifestations in society and the daily lives of individuals. I look at the different forms of violence and its expressions and the possible reasons for its occurrence. I look at direct or interpersonal violence trying to understand how violence works at this level as it seems to be the most basic form of violence present in society. Direct violent violence seems to be the most common form as it is very visible and clear when it occurs. I then move on to structural violence as I feel that it is permeated throughout Honduran society and although people are conscious of its existence they do not know the term for it. To my eyes there seems to be a myriad of elements of structural strewn throughout society,

influencing people in negative ways. I then move on to cultural violence which seems to also be far reaching in this society especially in the context of ideology, and empirical and formal science. It seems to conspire with structural violence into various groups which is also accepted as normal.

I then look at the various aspects of peace theory including positive and negative peace, peace education, conflict transformation as an important part of peacebuilding, and the role of youth in building peace. Peace is a broad subject and there are many facets to it which is why it is necessary to look at all these different theories surrounding it. All the elements of peace are of special interest to me when looking at the potential of the youth. To me it is clear that youth have an important role to play in peacebuilding on a global scale. Their potential is limitless as is their energy and it becomes a definite benefit if it is directed in a positive manner aimed at ensuring the progress of humanity as a whole.

The literature reviewed in this thesis gives an understanding of all the relevant theories and also their impact on society especially in the context of the capacity of youth.

2.2 Conflict

According to Adams and Chang (2009), inner and outer disagreements, or conflicts, are a necessary and inevitable part of our developmental phases as human beings. It is necessary for children to disagree with parents and individuals to disagree between them as this exercise of individuality helps develop their character. How far, though, do we have to go in our disagreements in order achieve personal growth? Is it necessary then to disagree for the sake of disagreeing? Is it possible to agree and still achieve personal growth?

In the various classes I teach at secondary school level in Honduras, we discuss some of these issues in the context of ever learning and progressing as individuals. Gibson (2015) shows us a world where everything is entrenched in conflict, which almost forces us to choose sides, to be either in favour of or against something. This does seem to be the norm of society when we look at the everyday entertainment of people. TV shows and computer games frequently have an antagonist, thus creating a situation of us versus

them, and there are few games where the plot is cooperative. This sense of conflict elicits a realistic but narrow-minded outlook in people, as it does not consider the possibility that there may be points of confluence and agreement, even within divergent ideas, ideals or thoughts. In contrast, Gallo (2013) shows that conflicts tend to be more complex than what is ordinarily accepted and unless we appreciate them as such, achieving lasting peace through different interventions is virtually impossible.

It seems necessary to guide individuals to understand that it is important to appreciate differences of ideas and opinions and learning that these can exist in the same space. It is important here to mention that as we conducted these exercises, the students came to realize that many of their apparently conflicting opinions and ideas were actually very similar and that the reason for the apparent differences is that we are taught that there must always be two or more sides, and that they are different.

Marcantonio (2017) proposes that conflict is negatively linked to happiness. When observing the interactions between individuals in different contexts and relationships, there seems to be credence to what he says. People in conflict, it is assumed, experience a definite sense of unhappiness or discontent. However, conflict may not necessarily mean unhappiness. There can also be conflict when choosing between two positive elements. This is why it was important for the students to learn about consultation as this provides a tool whereby the best solution could be found and implemented for any given situation.

One element that surprised many of my students was that once they detached themselves from an idea or thought it was easier to look at it from a distance and accept any form of critique about it. This highlighted the level of importance that an idea held for them: the more important it was, the more difficult it was for them to be detached and acceptant of critique.

2.2 Violence

2.2.1 Direct or interpersonal violence

The World Health Organization's *World Report on Violence and Health* (2002) defines violence as 'The intentional use of physical force or power, whether threatened or actual, be it against oneself, or another person, against a group or a community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation'. It also emphasizes the importance of prevention of violence rather than repair and recovery after the fact. This is evident and visible in all societies without exception. Everywhere we look we are constantly confronted by violence when people resolve to address their conflicts in a negative manner. In very few cases from my observations of interactions and views expressed by the participants of this research has violence been used in an unintentional fashion.

In looking at violence from a sociological and anthropological perspective, Lee (2016) views violence as both a social and individual phenomena but emphasises that violence at an individual level does have social implications.. For the purpose of this research, we will look at interpersonal and collective violence as it relates to youth and their environments. Although there is a broad range of violence and causes of these we will focus on those forms and causes that are mentioned and highlighted by the participants in the research group. The importance of this is that it is more relatable for them and therefore easier for them to grasp the theories as it applies to their communities and society.

2.2.2 Structural violence

Structural violence is also an element that influences the levels and forms of coexistence and interactions in society, according to Lee (2015), it constitutes the most lethal form of violence as well as being a potent cause of other forms of violence. One of the founders of peace studies, Johan Galtung (1969), explains structural violence as programmes and policies which advantages some members of society and, at least in relative terms, disadvantages others. It is frequently measured by the degree of economic inequality in a society. Resistance to structural violence can take the form of direct violence, as can the response by those who promote structural violence in order to protect the status quo. During the research it became evident that structural violence in its different manifestations is ever present in the society where the research took

place. When looking at Honduran society and speaking to individuals from various social strata and walks of life, it becomes clear to me that structural violence is ever present in society. The interesting aspect for me is that people are acutely aware of its existence and influence yet very few people know the term by which it is called. In daily parlance the phrase “Así es como son las cosas aquí porque así es”⁷ is a veritable acceptance of the structural violence present in society.

2.2.3 Cultural violence

Galtung (1990) further explains cultural violence as those aspects of culture – religion, ideology, language and art, empirical and formal science – that are used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. This places a direct connection between cultural violence and structural violence which is therefore the suppression of that which can improve the lives of many in order to favour the desires or wants of a few. Direct and structural violence then, being legitimized through cultural violence, becomes acceptable in the eyes of society, a simple case of this is how things are and this is how it has always been. All activities where direct or structural violence is promoted by a government, organization or society and veiled behind the hallowed halls of culture, in any of its forms, can therefore be grouped under cultural violence.

Structural violence is both structured and structuring. It constricts the agency of its victims. It tightens a noose around their necks and this garrotting determines the way in which resources— food, medicine, even affection—are allocated and experienced. A current example is the imposition of economic sanctions against some countries which are justified by the desire to bring about regime change. The negative consequences of sanctions, however, are felt most by the poorer members of society and not the regime itself. As Farmer et al (2004) have noted, the collapse of the public health system as a result of sanctions affects the poor and not the regime leaders.

2.3 Peace

2.3.1 Negative peace

⁷ This is how things are here because they are.

One of Galtung's earliest writings (1964) introduced the concepts of negative and positive peace, the former being the absence of violence and war. It follows that in striving to create truly peaceful societies, it is necessary to make sure that we establish environments where there is not only an absence of war but rather where violence or war is not on the list of possible responses to conflict.

2.3.2 Positive peace

If violence and war are not available as responses to conflict, what is available? The answer is positive contributions to peace. The Institute for Economics and Peace (2016), for example, identifies eight pillars of positive peace:

- A well-functioning government
- A sound business environment
- An equitable distribution of resources
- Acceptance of rights of others
- Good relations with neighbours
- Free flow of information
- High levels of human capital
- Low levels of corruption.

These align with Tilahun's (2015) posture that lasting positive peace begins with negative peace in the sense that the former needs to be established in order for the latter to come about and flourish. However, in order to create lasting peace we cannot be content with just achieving negative peace. "To create a peaceful world, humans have to strive for positive peace, a condition brought about by establishing standards of justice, human rights, and sustainable development in beloved communities" Harris* (2004).

2.4 Conflict transformation

Conflict can be managed (e.g. by physically separating the parties involved) or by resolving the conflict to the satisfaction of the parties involved. However, as

Lederach (2006) notes, resolution can still leave the parties involved in a resentful, angry and untrusting state of mind so that the conflict – and perhaps violence - may recur in the future.

Accordingly, Lederach developed the 'higher' concept of conflict transformation, which he has defined as follows:

... to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and responds to real life problems in human relationships' (2006, p. 16)

The central point is that the parties build or rebuild their relationships so that the trust and care for and want the best for their opponents – a high bar indeed. Of course, the underlying causes of a conflict – often structural violence – have to be addressed at the same time; 'there can be no peace without justice', as the saying goes. Lederach further suggests that conflict resolution is concerned with quick solutions to immediate problems, whereas conflict transformation looks at the underlying elements as well and go beyond the resolution of particular problems. This definition is key as it looks at not only reconciling differences after a violent conflict but to reducing those factors that lead or can lead to violent conflict.

Taking into account the above stated, I believe that education is the key tool for conflict transformation as a means for the prevention of violent conflict and establishing long lasting and transformative bonds coexistence in a community. I consider education not only as a means of instruction but as a way of releasing all the potential that lie hidden within each individual. According to Fountain (1999), an education based on peace promotes knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that we need in order to bring about behavioural change that will enable the prevention of overt and structural conflict and violence.

According to Lederach and Maise (2009), a transformational platform is an on-going and adaptive base at the epicentre of conflict from which it is possible to generate processes

that create solutions to short-term needs and provide a capacity to work on strategic long-term constructive change. Conflict transformation requires that we look at conflict from different perspectives and take into consideration different variables in order to ensure lasting peace and not just the satisfaction of current or immediate needs.

In his book *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Jean Paul Lederach (2003) goes into detail as to what constitutes conflict transformation. For him the idea of conflict transformation stems from a religious-ethical framework in which nonviolence as a way of life and work is advocated. According to him conflict transformation conveys the idea of constructive change better than conflict resolution or management. This signifies that it includes but goes beyond seeking the resolve specific problems. An interesting reference he makes is to look at conflict as normal in human relationships but also as vehicle of change. I find this interesting because when we think of a life without conflict, there is no change no forward movement. Conflict therefore invites change to ensure forward progress.

As a way of differentiating conflict transformation from conflict resolution and conflict management, he uses the imagery of topography seeing the hills and valleys of a mountain range as conflicts. Conflict resolution and management may look at these in an individual context focusing for example only on the hills equated to successes or the valleys representing failures. Conflict transformation on the other hand looks at the mountain range as a whole and each of hills and valleys as an important part of the change that needs to be taken into account true peace to be established. He further likens it to the difference between looking and seeing where the one is relatively superficial and the other deeper. Conflict transformation takes into account and therefore both looks and sees, in other words it is aware of the details of the conflict and the broader picture which could include historical elements that influence the conflict. Conflict transformation therefore does not look at resolving an immediate issue or conflict but looks at the conflict in all its facets looking not only at the immediate scenario but also to the past and to the future. It tries to not only resolve conflicts in the moment but looks to the future as well to ensure that the conflict is well and truly put to rest.

An important aspect he delves into about conflict transformation is to view conflict within the context of relationships. He places great value on the quality of relationships as a necessity for effective peace. In his own words "... in conflict transformation relationships are central". He further postulates that "The issues over which people fight are important and require creative response. However, relationships represent a web of connections that form the larger context, the human eco-system from which particular issues arise and are given life". When looking at viewing conflict within this context of relationships it become clear then that it implies looking beyond immediate elements of the conflict but to also take into account the context in which the conflict is taking place. I find it interesting when looking at this aspect as relationships can cause a lot of friction but can also be very soothing within a society. One element he does highlight is the fact that usually within the context of conflict there seems to be only two sides, white and black, them and us, yes and no which could mean short term success for conflict resolution or management. But when looking deeper at the complexities of relationships and transformation we realize that complex connections exist between individuals and groups.

During an interview, Lederach (2012) expounds more on the topic of conflict transformation by looking at some experiences he has had over the years. The interview also gives us another insight into how the theory of conflict transformation came to be, from his first experience where the question of "how do you create change?" came about. Some interesting takeaways from the interview is the importance of being able to view oneself in a relationship with one's enemy, understanding that there is not only one or two options when resolving a conflict, pursuing the pragmatic avenue is not always the best, not necessarily joining sides, understanding those who do not understand us. When I look at these elements within the context of consultation as a viable tool for conflict transformation, I see endless possibilities. When we consider that consultation is a means to discover the best option for any situation by eliminating the self and ego from the equation it becomes a worthy tool for conflict transformation. We are not the only looking for the best outcome for us or our group but rather the best outcome for all parties involved in the conflict. It also becomes clearer to me that this

theory truly seeks to create a condition where we do not just tolerate the one, or group we are in conflict with but rather to wish for them what we wish for ourselves. It is evident that building peace through conflict transformation is not just about the visible immediate results but rather about the long term effects on society. In summary, while conflict resolution focuses on finding a solution that is acceptable to both parties, conflict transformation goes deeper and seeks to build the relationship between the parties involved. In all of this the role of education in building peace is critical and this brings us to two concepts - peace education and education for peace.

2.5 Peace education and educating for peace

In a classic article, Ian Harris (2004: 6) suggests that peace education has five main postulates:

- It emphasises that conflict is omnipresent
- It explains the roots of violence
- It teaches alternatives to violence
- It covers different forms of violence
- It teaches that peace is a process that varies across contexts.

To this list I would add that learned habits which promote violence can be subject to unlearning and relearning.

Peace education and educating for peace are frequently used interchangeably (e.g. Page (2014); Middleton (2013)) but the former is increasingly used to refer to the subject matter or curriculum which is followed while educating for peace also includes the pedagogy or teaching methods which are used and the environment in which it takes place. This last might include, for example, the discipline practices which are used.

Transformative learning theory provides a theoretical foundation for the pedagogy of peace studies. This theory, devised by Jack Mezirow, argues that a key goal of learning is to 'transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives) – sets of assumption and expectation – to make them more inclusive,

discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change' (2003: 58). Reflection is central to Mezirow's learning theory: through reflection, a person can construct new understanding of beliefs and assumptions, which in turn can lead to a change in behaviour. In discussion groups, inmates are given the opportunity to hear different experiences and perspectives from their own.

In terms of subject matter, Ian Harris (2004: 7-16) identifies five separate types of peace education:

- International education
- Human rights education
- Development education
- Environmental education
- Conflict resolution education.

Studying these types, according to Bar-Tal (2002), can significantly influence beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. (Wintersteiner, 2009) asserts that "A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems; have the skills to resolve conflict constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality; appreciate cultural diversity; and respect the integrity of the Earth. Such learning cannot be achieved without intentional, sustained and systematic education for peace"

Salawu and Aina (2017) define these concepts in a similar fashion in that peace education is a process that deals with conflict, whether at community, national or international level whereas education for peace is the knowledge required for removing hindrances from the path of focus which existing policies might have programmed. This requires a change in outlook and action which leads to consideration of how to educate to create a change in mind-set. So Ndura and Nimuraba (2013), for example, state that education should foster collaboration between students, educators, parents and government leaders, promote youth engagement and enhance women's participation in people-to-people conflict mitigation and reconciliation.

In explaining education as a process, Lauritzen (2016) refers to education that seeks to empower pupils and students with the necessary skills to achieve a society where sustainable peace values are upheld. In conjunction with this understanding, it is also necessary to look at cultural violence (see section 2.2.3) as a motivating factor in conflict and violence and interrogate its components.

As Middleton (2013) explains, students are living in a society that glorifies violence through television, movies, music, video games and other sources. She suggests that schools put a system in place that help students to deal with these images in a positive constructive manner. This means that they need to learn the skills to deal with and eventually overcome and replace these negative images. Two examples illustrate this. *Deadpool 1 & 2* are films filled with extreme violence and foul language and carries an age restriction of 18+. Yet the theatres were filled with pre-teens in the company of their parents. And then there is the case of the movie *IT*, which is a gruesome horror film that also carries an age restriction of 18+. In both cases the apparent lack of responsibility on the part of the parents was and still is worrisome. Although the students do not act out overtly what they see in the movies, they show a lack of empathy towards others.

Another element that adds to this are the kind of video games that the students play, which teach the opposite of peacebuilding and cooperation. The games that the students play on Xbox and Play-station would be considered illegal in the real world. (Wintersteiner, 2009). Even apparently harmless car games can be filled with actions that demand that you run others off the road, crash into police, steal cars and commit murder to get a car. These games are addictive and many students forgo other activities, such as academia and interaction with others in order to play them.

We can counter this by teaching skills that can help solve local conflicts and build sustainable peace from an early age at school (Yemenici, 2016). This assumes that children are forming their perceptions of life and learning to coexist with others different to themselves. Childhood is an ideal time for them to learn how to deal with conflicts using nonviolent means. In a class called Character Education, which is imparted to students from 5th to 9th grade, we have been able to mitigate what students learn from

films by dealing with topics such as service to others, empathy and spiritual and material progress for all. Some of the students have become more critical about what they watch and play.

The education of children in peacebuilding, including the unlearning and relearning referred to earlier, can thus be seen as instrumental to establishing sustainable peace in society. As an illustration, Salomon (2013a) looks at research with Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian youth to highlight the value of peace education but also some pitfalls in carrying it out. The various programmes attempt to change the minds and hearts through learning to understand the opponent's side of the argument (their different needs, aspirations and motivations) and emphasising our common humanity. Salomon affirms that it is easier to affect attitudes through peace education than the much strongly held convictions. His views are a clear indication that it is the transformation and not just conflict resolution which provides better foundations for lasting peacebuilding processes (see section 2.4).

I end this section with the following quote which has been a guiding light for me. I have come to equate the treasures mentioned as those capacities that allow us to be good and decent human beings and strive to better ourselves in service to mankind:

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom (Bahá'u'lláh, 1935).

2.6 The role of youth in building peace

According to Danesh (2008), there are four discourses about youth that currently frame global policy.

1. Youth have rights and should be protected

Youth have served for military and political ends since a long time. They've become an emotional sphere against which to normalize and legitimize violence (social 'cleansing' of street children in Latin America, India, Kenya...long global history of use and abuse of

children/youth and human reproduction, etc.). Children's rights are highly politicized and failure of their rights protection is more noticeable than their successes.

2. Youth are a development asset

The image of "youth as a resource" has traditionally emphasized the potential that youth have to steward the growth and stability of their countries and the roles they will have as the next generation. Education systems and interventions also operate according to the belief that youth are our future resources and need to be prepared for the real life they will grow into. Thinking about youth as a social, cultural and peace resource in the present, with rights to participation and value for society even though they are stuck in transition, may help.

3. Youth are a threat to security

The UN view was that young people are disproportionately affected by violent conflict, both as victims and as active participants. Another concept - "youth bulge" - has the negative side-effect of over-emphasizing youth as a threat.

4. Youth are agents of change

Youth have the capability to effect change independent of outside actors. Though outside actors can have considerable impact on young people depending on how well they complete the key "transition functions" of protection, reintegration, and empowerment.

In building the capacity of youth to be peacebuilders, study should be made of topics which inform and motivate them; and they should be taught using a transformative pedagogy which helps them make sense of their own attitudes and experiences. This can be illustrated by two case studies.

2.6.1 Two case studies

Case study 1. School peace clubs in South Africa

The study was an outcome evaluation to assess the performance and outcome of 13 school peace clubs in the city of Pietermaritzburg (Moyo 2022). Of the 13, three primary schools and three high schools were selected as being fairly typical of their type. Data

was collected from club facilitators (who were employed by an NGO), learners who volunteered to become club members and teachers. It is important to note that the content and learning methods used in the clubs were largely driven by the learners themselves.

Learners faced a range of conflicts and violence in their daily lives – at home, at school and in the community - and violence was the main way they dealt with these conflicts. The peace clubs provided a safe space and sense of group belonging, where they were able to share their experiences of conflict and violence and to learn how to resolve conflicts peacefully. Role plays were an effective tool in this respect. The learners took the initiative to act as peacemakers and peacebuilders in the school e.g. by acting as peer mediators in the playground. Teachers confirmed the beneficial effects from the peace clubs and reported an increase in harmony in the overall school environment.

Case study 2. Peace education with Israeli and Palestinian youth (Salomon (2013b)

In- and out-of school peace education programmes took place between groups of young Jewish Israelis and Palestinians Israelis from the occupied territories. Such encounters lasted several days. During the dialogues, differences surfaced, such as mutual blaming and legitimization or acknowledgement of the contribution of one's own side to the conflict. Joint projects also happened, like pairs of schools, townships or joint committee work.

According to Salomon (2013), the study provided six lessons for peace education:

- Socio-political forces can override the positive impact of a short educational intervention. When peaceful views are confronted with political realities, they fall in line with the less peace oriented, prevailing narrative.
- Short term interventions usually yield short time effects. To change the minds and hearts need continuous reinforcement. But there is room for hope. Two main methods have been shown to restore impacts - role-playing and peer instruction. These are of reflective nature. One may not like the adversary's

arguments but reflection makes aware that ignoring, evading or resisting them conflicts with one's self image as an intelligent and open minded individual.

- Studying other conflicts can be helpful in understand your own. A group of Jewish students (the experimental group) studied the Northern Ireland conflict from both sides and then analysed the Israeli/Palestinian conflict afterwards. The students from a control group refused to see the Palestinian perspective, whereas the experimental group were more objective.
- One size does not fit all. When asked to define peace, Israeli participants very largely thought of it as negative peace, the Palestinian participants were more likely to see it as redress from structural violence. Effective peace education requires addressing the different needs, aspirations and motivations of all involved.
- Dialogue is not the only method for peace education. An alternative is to carry out joint projects with a common goal for all. The goal may not be directly educational; most are designed to attain academic, athletic or business goals. Acting jointly can move ethnic or national tensions into the background while dialogue alone does not.
- While attitudes can be changed, convictions are much harder to shift. Investments in peace education will yield a higher return if they are directed at changing attitudes.

The above cases have identified the potential benefits of peace education programmes with youth. They indicate the importance of incorporating them as active participants in the peacebuilding discussions.

2.7 Reflecting on the potential of youth peacebuilders

Co-existence can be defined as *“To live in peace with each other especially as a matter of policy”*. Bar-Tal (2004) and Pérez-Jorge et al. (2017) accept coexistence as a minimal

state of intergroup relations. It is a state where the parties involved start recognizing each other and the value that the other holds as a legitimate participant in processes.

We can identify harmonious coexistence and tolerant coexistence. In the former, coexistence is a state of acceptance of the other to the extent that they see each other as brothers in arms. In the latter it may be that they are needed in order for a process to go forward, therefore their acceptance may last only for the time it is needed.

This brings us to the important question of why focus on youth for peacebuilding. This follows from Danesh's (2008) insistence that both peace and conflict can be learned (see also the addition to Ian Harris' list in section 2.5). Most of what we learn in terms of social skills and interactions take place during our formative ages and as youth we start acquiring the necessary abilities to rationalize, analyse and scrutinize concepts and societal structures. It is interesting that we always refer to youth as the future leaders of a society but are more concerned with training them to become members of a labour force rather than educating them to aspire to the highest ideals of peaceful coexistence.

Danesh (2008) goes on to highlight important aspects which youth bring to peacebuilding as compared to adults - that they are more open to new experiences, they have a desire to change, they demonstrate traits of creativity and more energy than older generations. In a similar fashion, Kester (2010) asserts that "The inclusion of youth in peacebuilding initiatives brings vibrancy and creativity to peacebuilding efforts". Danesh identifies two axes around which current activities and approaches to peacebuilding might be conceptualized: preservation/transformation of the status quo and internal/external orientation. There is a clear distinction between the two elements of the former axis in that the first is conducive stabilizing the present and the second looks towards the establishment of future peace. The latter axis is a parallel process between the two elements because we cannot limit youth to focus only on reflecting on changes within their immediate environment of personal relationships, schools and families. At the same time, they must also explore their influence in the broader society, both now and in the long term. Many students initially perceive the concepts dealt with in peace education as unrealistic and utopian in a culture based on an economic system that demands the sale of one's time and labour in order to maximise personal income.

Finally, Cromwell (2019) documents the positive effects that peace education has on motivating youth peacebuilding in a setting where there were clearly defined opposing groups involved in violent conflict. These illustrate that youth do have the capacity to overcome difficulties and look for a brighter future not only for themselves but for others as well.

Chapter 3 Research methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the research plan which was devised to meet the research objectives which were outlined in section 1.3:

1. Drawing on the insights of students, teachers and other professionals, to explore the nature, extent and consequences of conflict and violence which they experience in the city of Siguatepeque in Honduras.
2. Using a participatory action research approach, to design and implement a training programme in peacebuilding involving students from two high schools from different ends of the social class structure.
3. To evaluate the short-term outcomes of the training programme on the students and schools

In the event, it proved impossible to meet the objectives in total, for reasons explained in section 4.4.

The various parts of the chapter deal with the elements which were necessary to carry out the research, although it did not all go according to plan. The action research part looked at the significance of action research for the purpose of practical applications and involvement of the community in research. The second part is a detailed outline of the research including dates in which specific activities were done with the group. The third part looks at the roles of the researcher and participants in the research process. It highlights the importance of involving the students as an integral part of the research where they were not just the subjects of the research but in a sense co/researchers during the project. The fourth part gives an overview of the research design and the approach used to achieve it. The fifth part looks at the two institutions where research took place and their composition. This part is important as it highlights interesting difference between public and private educational institutions while both fall under the

same guiding rules and principals emitted by the Ministry of Education. The sixth part goes over the process used to select the participants including the difficulties that arose during and after this step. The seventh part takes a look at all the methods used during the data collection phase. It looks at the methods used and why these were chosen. Part eight is very short and deals with the fundamentals of the training module that was to be used during the implementation phase of the research. Part nine deals with the analysis of the data collected during the research phase. It emphasises the use of qualitative methods as I deemed these more compelling than quantitative methods due to the fact that I was dealing with peoples' feelings, understandings and social surrounds. The tenth and eleventh parts deal with the validity, reliability/trustworthiness and the ethical considerations taken into account during the research. These were very important as the participants were all school going minors and it was therefore important not only to protect them but also to create an environment where they felt safe to express themselves without constraint.

3.2 Participatory action research

I decided to use Participation Action Research (PAR) as the focal methodology for my research. PAR was the most appropriate approach to use as it involved the participants directly in learning, understanding and acting on aspects of peacebuilding and community building processes. This approach can be used as a tool of empowerment by allowing people to become active participants in the changes they wish to see in their communities. In different fields PAR has proven to be very effective, and we can see evidence of this when studying different fields of research where this approach has been used such as Taylor, Braveman and Hammel (2004).

Costello (2003) cites various authors to define Action Research (AR), all of whom indicate that it is a process of reflection and action carried out by professionals in their distinctive fields in order to improve their performance. According to Diessner (2000), the purpose of Action Research (AR) is to change the behaviour, causing development to take place both in the concern that is under study and in the researcher. This is important as it implicitly involves a close collaboration between the researcher and the issue being researched. In short, PAR values, respects and gives importance to the thoughts,

experiences and spirituality of the participants by empowering them and creating an atmosphere of collaboration between participants and researcher allowing all parties involved to benefit from the process (Datta et al., 2015).

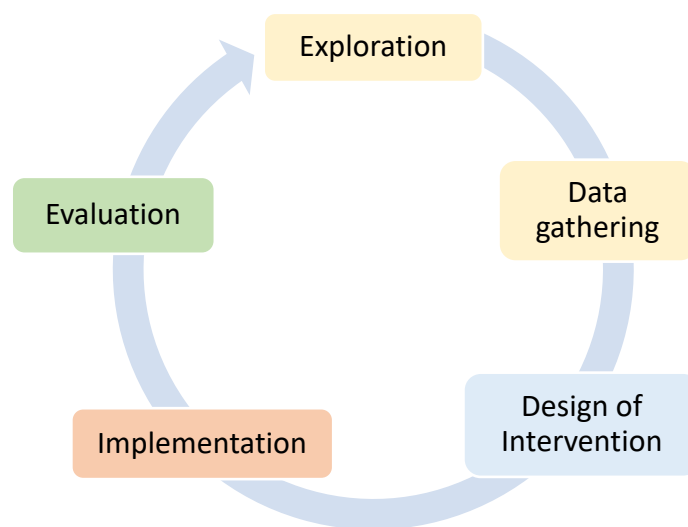
According to texts such as Diessner (2000) and Kaye and Harris (2019), AR typically has stages:

1. The exploration phase is done as with the other phases in close collaboration with the participants to ensure a well-grounded understanding of the problem faced. Together with the participants I delved into the nature, extent, causes and consequences of conflict and violence in their community and what it means to them.
2. The design of the intervention was also done in close collaboration with the participants as they will ultimately continue to live in their communities. It was therefore important for me that they did not just have a passing understanding of the intervention but their input guides the design of it. I believed that this would ensure not only better acceptance within the community of the intervention but a positive outcome in its application.
3. The participants, as the principal actors, were at the forefront of implementing this intervention.
4. The outcomes of the research are evaluated.

The following diagram is an adaptation of one in Kaye and Harris (2017: 126) and helps to better understand the process of empowerment the participants went through. The different stages in the process helped the students come to grips with the fact that problems exist in all societies and that it is up to the individuals within that community to become active and willing participants of change in order to transform their social environment. An important part of this was to understand not only that there is a problem but also what that problem is and how it affects the community. Ideally, AR follows a cyclical process as interventions are planned, implemented and evaluated. In this research project, various constraints prohibited some of the stages from being completed. On the one hand the research became stuck in a cyclical loop where the participants changed almost every two months causing a repetition of the initial steps

over and over during almost one year. A core group of five students was finally established and was able to continue beyond the data gathering phase and partially through the intervention design phase. The materials used to design the intervention were drawn from different sources. The students were a key part of the process of evaluating which elements from the materials should be included and they also gave input in terms of what they deemed important information to be added to the materials.

Diagram 1. Stages in action research (Kaye and Harris 2017: 126)



The exploration in this research was planned as two phases. The first was an individual personal exploration done by the researcher and the second phase conducted after the initial data gathering stage, which was carried out through observation and non-formal interviews and discussions, included the participants.

As with any research it was important to identify the problem to be researched, and to this end it was necessary to review the objectives. The first objective which deals with the exploring the nature, extent, causes, and consequences of conflict and violence, became the starting point for the exploration. In order to broaden my knowledge it was obviously necessary to refer to authors who examined these elements previously such as Lee (2016) who looks at why we commit acts of violence, and during this phase the participants familiarized themselves with the terminology used to identify the different

forms of conflict and violence to ensure that they had a clear understanding of the elements to be studied and consulted. As part of this phase, they read excerpts from documents and held group discussions in order to ensure a consensus on the understanding of the different concepts. Their own understanding of concepts related to the objective became clearer and an element of interest was that they mentioned that they were aware of the existence of various forms of conflict and violence but they did not have the adequate vocabulary to single them out with the appropriate terminology.

The design of the planned intervention was divided into two principal activities: consulting about the groups with which the intervention would be done and the design and layout of the actual material to be used in the intervention. This part took some time to resolve as there was a constant back and forth in terms of which grades the intervention should be conducted with. Initially it was planned to do the intervention with grade ten and eleven students. The consultation then went into the possibility and importance of doing it with lower grades, 6th to 9th grade and possibly primary school. In the end it was decided to start the intervention with 9th, 10th and 11th grade students. The idea was that the 9th and 10th grade students would be trained as facilitators so that they could then work with the lower grades, including primary school, and the 11th graders, taking into account that they would be graduating, would hopefully be able to facilitate groups in their neighbourhoods. For the design of the materials to be used in the intervention the following sources were consulted and reviewed by the group:

The implementation phase was not realized to any extent due to unforeseen delays and difficulties (see section 4.4). Initially it was difficult to establish the groups with which to work as the curriculum of the students was already saturated which made it difficult to establish a space during regular classes for programme to be conducted. There is no peace programme as yet contemplated in the curriculum but this may change as there is talk of peacebuilding programmes being incorporated in future. At the same time, it was next to impossible to set a time outside of school due to family and other obligations in which the students were involved in; taking care of siblings, working in order to supplement family income etc. When we were finally able to establish a working

schedule during regular afternoon academic classes, the COVID19 pandemic made its appearance and all academic activities at schools were cancelled for almost two years, moving to an online modality. An attempt was made to do the implementation online but it was not feasible as the majority of the students from the public school had insufficient and random access to internet combined with a very deficient internet provision system in general.

The timetable of my various research activities, before it was ended by Covid-19 in early 2020, is summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 The timetable of the research

Activity	Dates	Location	Participants
Questionnaire	May 2018	Public School	11 th Grade Students
	May 2018	Private School	10 th Grade Students
Interviews	August 2018 – July 2019	Public School	Teachers
		Private School	
		Public School	Administrators
		Private School	
Various locations	Other Individuals		
Interviews	August 2018 – June 2019	Private school	Students
		Public school	Students
Informal discussions	January 2018 – August 2019	In various cities around the country	Various individuals
Classroom observation and discussions	October 2017 – May 2021	Private school	10 th and 11 th grade students
Design of training module	October 2018 – February 2020	Private School	Participants
Secondary plan of action	March 2020	Review of intervention plan. Alternative plans for online continuation.	

3.3 The role of the researcher and the role of the participants

Smith et al (2014) clarify that PAR projects incorporate goals that relate to the wellbeing of students in different domains. The active participation and opinions of the students was very important to me from the beginning as the primordial purpose was for them to be able to review, evaluate, analyse and act upon the situation of conflict in their own community and environs. The participants were reluctant at first to share ideas and voice opinions, and it took a few sessions for them to realize that it was in fact important for them to do so. The reason behind this seems to be that when projects are designed for student participation, they are never included in the planning phases and are usually just told what to and how to do it. I must stipulate here that this took longer for the students from the public school to fathom than those from the private school. One possible explanation for this differentiation could be that at the private school there were and still are teachers who actually challenge the students to think beyond what they just receive from the teachers and to analyse, whereas at the public school students are expected to just replicate what the teachers tell them without any aspect of analysis or individual thought, to do otherwise would be considered disrespectful.

I also used consultation with the participants as a means of discovering the best way to proceed. It was therefore necessary to study with them what consultation is and how it is applied as a means for discovering the best solutions or ideas. Consultation in my experience has been the most appropriate way of finding the best solution or answer to a situation as it involves the active, impartial and selfless expression and acceptance of ideas. In his writings, Abdu'l-Bahá (1912: 4) explained the clear purpose of consultation as a tool to arrive at the truth and the proper way in which consultation should take place. It is a tool that allows a group to arrive at the truth, or the best solution or answer for any particular instance on the merits of the ideas given and not that of the individual that gives it. When done in the appropriate spirit, consultation eliminates ego and personal desires and agendas from the solution seeking process.

At first it was difficult for the participants to grasp the concept of sharing an idea and not holding firmly on to it. The society in which we live is one in which a personal opinion is of great value and should be defended at all costs. It took a couple of sessions for them to realize how exactly consultation works and to start putting it into practice. Letting go

of their inherent desires to defend their ideas above those of others was not easy. As they got a grasp on how consultation works, exerting effort to apply its principles, the sessions became much more enriching as the students were able to truly listen to each other just consider while looking with understanding at the validity of what each person was saying.

Consultation goes hand in hand with PAR as participants feed off each other to create a space where ideas can freely flow without judgements, and thus allow the most appropriate actions to surface. As stated previously, PAR is a research method that allows for the active involvement of the participants in shaping the research. This is difficult to achieve when dealing with individuals of different temperaments where some have more forceful personalities than others and can overwhelm their fellow participants. Consultation creates an environment where each individual is not only free but encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions without fear of being ridiculed or marginalized within the group. It also allows for all the members to truly listen to each other and evaluate each suggestion, opinion or thought on its own merits and not on that of the person who gave them. This is what eventually helped the group to be able to start looking at the different elements under discussion in a new light and determine the best solutions and way forward.

Usually, students are just informed of a project and how it is to be done or executed and the expectations of their reactions and levels of participation. This was the first time their feelings, thoughts and opinions were of such importance in the development of a project. As their role in the process became clearer and clearer it slowly eliminated or minimized their shyness and hesitation in participating fully in the process.

3.4 The research plan

The research was divided into four phases (see Table 3.1). The first phase consisted of two weekly sessions, one with the students from the public school and one with the students from the private school. During the first phase we spent most of our time getting to know each other and allowing the participants to get comfortable with me and the idea of freely sharing their thoughts

and ideas. For the students from the private school this phase was a lot easier as they already knew me and were comfortable from the start in sharing their thoughts and ideas.

I planned a mixed methods with a stronger emphasis on the qualitative aspects. As Kothari (2004) states, qualitative research aims to discover underlying motives and desires, which fits in well with understanding why people do the things they do. Since the idea was to find the best way to implement a process of peacebuilding with students from two different schools and different social standings from the same community, it was important to have a deeper understanding of their motivations for participating in the process as this was an element that had a valuable effect on the outcome. I believed that this approach would strike the best balance for what I had hoped to achieve with this project. The design took into account the characteristics of the larger population and the dynamics of the specific target group selected for the research.

3.5 The two schools

3.5.1 The public school - Instituto Genaro Hernandez Muñoz

This school was established through a desire of a group of parents who saw a need for an institution to provide a high-school education to the children in the city. They started by forming an association in February of 1955 after which the first classes were promptly started in April of the same year. Although classes started in the year that school was founded, it was not until the following year that they were able to purchase a piece of land which is now part of the downtown area of the city and started construction of classrooms and other facilities that school would come to need. At present the school has a student population of more than 3600 students attended by 102 personnel members comprising teachers, administration, and support staff. The students for the most part are from middle to low income class sectors of the population. It is one of only two public educational institutions that has high-school and since the other one is a technical school it is the only academically oriented institution. The density of the classroom population is usually more than 30 and can easily reach above 40 students per classroom.

The school schedule is divided into two daily schedules, the first starting at 7 a.m. and finishing at 12 noon. The second starts at 13:00 p.m. and ends at 17:00 p.m. One of the reasons, which was explained to me by a teacher from the school, that contributes to the desertion rate is that students can be changed from the morning schedule to the afternoon schedule. In and of itself this does not seem like a big deal but for those students who live in neighbourhoods that are far from the school it is a determining factor as they tend to walk to and from school and the danger factor increases exponentially in the evenings, especially for girls. There is no transport system for the school and those students who are able to afford it have to rely on public transport; the last buses actually stop circulating at around 17:10 in the evening.

3.5.2 The private school - Escuela e Instituto Bilingüe 'El Alba'

The private school is located in another neighbourhood in the same city was founded in 1976. It currently has a population of 452 students and a staff population of 52 including teachers and assistants, administration, and support personnel, which leads to average classroom sizes of 20 students. It is the first bilingual school established in the city and it came about as an act of love and need. An immigrant couple from the US established themselves as Bahá'í pioneers⁸. When their daughter was about to turn six, they realized that they wanted her to receive a bilingual education. Since there were no institutions that could accommodate their wishes, they decided to create a school. The guiding principles of the school from the outset were based on Bahá'í principles which is why it was possible for me to tie in almost all of my classes with topics on peacebuilding as matter of course.

El Alba is the only school in the country that offers what can be termed 'character education' classes and they were specifically implemented with the objective of teaching students about unity, cooperation and service to humanity. Even though these are not covered under the national education curriculum, the school has to abide by

⁸ Bahá'í pioneers are members of the International Bahá'í community who leave their countries of origin and establish their homes in other countries where they promote the principles of the Bahá'í Faith (unity of mankind, equality of men and women, elimination of all forms of prejudice, to name but a few).

ministerial guidelines which require all courses taught at schools to have an academic grade to measure their learning and proficiency in the subject.

Both schools have had a positive impact on the education of the population. Genaro Muñoz is considered the best public high school in the city and 'El Alba' is considered the best bilingual school in the city. Lecturers from various universities who always extoll the work ethic of the students from these schools. Unfortunately, due to the high levels of economic inequality, only a small number from Genaro Muñoz continue with higher education, whereas virtually all El Alba students go on to university. When looking at the difference in classroom sizes it becomes clear that it is easier for the teachers at the private school to give more attention to individual students.

3.6 Sampling

The groups I planned to work with were 20 students from 10th grade divided equally between the two institutions. This number and the participants changed during the course of the research for various reasons, including migration due to deaths in the family, violence in the community and a search for better economic possibilities, except for the five students who joined the project from the start and the other four who joined at various moments and then stayed with the project until it was halted due the global COVID19 pandemic.

After the selection process had taken place and the first phase was complete, in discussions with the participants it became clear that for the public school students their participation was to comply with an academic requirement which they had to complete in order to graduate to 11th grade. My initial feelings were of disappointment, but as we went into the second phase, where the two groups were joined it dawned on me that for at least half the group from the public school it had become more than just a question of fulfilling a requirement. By the end of the first phase there were some difficulties as the yearly calendars for the two schools were different which meant that they had activities that took place at different moments during the year, such as exams and holidays. Although this was contemplated when the process started it meant that at certain times the participation of the students from the public school waned as they

entered exam weeks and at other times it was the students from the private school who were occupied with exam weeks. It also became clear that other familial and individual pursuits and needs were more pressing and important than participating in the research. This was highlighted when six of the students from the public school and four from the private school abandoned the project for various reasons ranging from other activities like sports taking precedence to taking care of siblings after school. It also indicated to me that they had joined the group, in a sense, because they had nothing else to do instead of a true interest in the topic of research.

Convenience sampling falls under the category of non-probability methods (Cohen et al., 2013) and allows for participants to be chosen from a specific grouping of a determined population. However, from within this grouping there was an element of probability as the participants in terms of the specific population (10th grade students) from the schools were known, some by me personally (private school students), and the others by the counsellor at the public school, who helped me in selection process. The final group was random as it was based on a volunteer basis in that the students had a choice in whether to participate or not. Convenience sampling was therefore be used as I had relatively easy access to both institutions due to their locations. The convenience also resided in the fact that I had access to other groups and assistance from the schools during the whole project.

The purposeful method was also used in terms of the group of participants. This method was essential as we looked at availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Palinkas et al., 2015). The group consisted of 10th grade students from both schools, 10 students from the private school and 9 students from the public school. The reason for this was that since the school system in Honduras goes up to 11th grade, working with 10th graders allowed me to continue with activities with the participants which should have allowed for greater feedback on the research process at the schools. The hope was that the participants, after the project, when they were in 11th grade, would continue with processes of peacebuilding at their respective institutions and communities.

3.7 Data collection

The purpose of the data collection was to assess the knowledge of the participants and others in the community about the topics of conflict and violence in their society and the need for peace and how this was reflected in the media and accepted by the outside world. This was necessary as Honduras is frequently panned as the most if not one of the most violent countries in the world, which in turn creates a stigma against Hondurans as violent by nature. For data collection, I used questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation. I also tried to use diaries and journal entries, however these last two were not successful due to certain cultural aspects that I did not realize at the start.

3.7.1 Questionnaires

I initially used a questionnaire as a data collecting tool (see Appendix 2) which I applied with the help of the school counsellors at both institutions, in order to gain a broad appreciation of the students' understanding of the main issues that we dealt with during the research. Since the questionnaire was done in Spanish and to avoid difficulties, at the time of translation with nuances between languages, I kept it simple and straight forward. I pre-tested the questionnaire and interview guides with the aid of individuals from the fields of education and social studies who were not affiliated in any way with the schools or individuals who participated in the research. Most of them are also bilingual, in order to establish coherence in the questions between the two languages. This method allowed me to gain insight into the level of existing knowledge that participants had about peacebuilding and peace and reconciliation processes. This was completed by all the 10th grade students at the private school and approximately 40% of the 10th graders from public school handed theirs in.

After the questionnaires were handed in, the students were selected based on their willingness to participate, availability of time, and recommendations from the counsellors who worked closely with them. The questionnaire definitely illustrated what Zohrabi (2013) elucidates in that questionnaires are an efficient means of data collection

on a large scale, with the added value of anonymity allowing participants to freely answer the questions without the worry of possible reprisals.

3.7.2 Informal interviews

I also carried out interviews with teachers, administrators and other individuals on the subjects of conflict, violence and peace as it relates to Siguatepeque specifically and Honduras in general. I also had around 40 informal discussions about these topics with friends and acquaintances from around the country to get a feel for the general feeling in the country as Honduras is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world and I wanted to know how people live with this concept. The interviews were carried out in various locations according to the wishes of the interviewees. Some took place at the schools, some in coffee shops and some in parks. This was done to make the participants feel at ease and relaxed, allowing them to express themselves freely and without reserve. The informal discussions were done in similar surroundings to the interviews as I took advantage to do these when travelling to different cities for various reasons and met new people who became friends. It was difficult for people to open up to someone they do not know as there is always the fear of reprisals against their persons or families for what they may say.

These discussions revealed that there is a certain consensus as to the state of the country and where people feel the country should head. The most accepted understanding by the people with whom I interacted is that it is a narco-state where the state is run in a similar fashion to organised crime. The fact that many people feel that the state and many of the individuals employed in the different areas of government service, are involved in organised crime highlights this.

3.7.3 Student interviews

Once the student participants were selected, I conducted interviews with the individual students to gain a more comprehensive insight into their level of commitment and willingness to be agents of change for their community. With both schools being in the

same city and functioning within the same daily schedule⁹ it was possible for me to conduct interviews personally on a one on one basis with each of the participants, with limited assistance from the counsellors and other teachers.

There was a high level of distrust and fear of reprisals in the community in general which makes it difficult for people to openly voice their opinions and feelings about specific topics. The topics under which they were supposed to write in their diaries included personal experiences when dealing with different types of conflict and their feelings towards the opposite side of the social structure in which they live. During this phase I noticed that few young people have a culture of journal or diary keeping and tend not anything other than the most necessary assignments for school. Therefore they did not comply with the request to keep diaries.

The interviews allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions that people have of the conflicts and violence in their community and the reasons or perceived reasons behind them. I must admit though that the answers from individuals varied and changed as they got to know me and realized that there were no ulterior motives other than those stated by me for the reasons behind the research. The interviews were conducted in different settings in order to make the participants feel comfortable and at ease, to that extent they were conducted in café's, offices, homes and parks. The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner with guideline questions established by me in order to make sure that I asked relevant questions. The conversational aspect also allowed me to ask follow up questions and clarification in order to avoid misinterpretation of intention from the individual being interviewed.

3.7.4 Classroom observation and discussions

The classroom observations were conducted in two different ways. The first was once the two groups had been joined into one and held discussions on the various concepts that we had dealt with in the individual groups. The second way was during my regular

⁹ It is necessary here to clarify that the public school has what we call a double-day schedule which means they have students that go to class in the morning, 7 a.m. to 13:00 p.m. and then another group of students go in the afternoon, 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

classes with 10th and 11th grade students where I had the opportunity to introduce some of the concepts of my research as part of the course material and sustain insightful discussions with the students. This is where consultation became a very handy tool in that it provided the students with a new instrument which allowed them to voice opinions freely and without holding onto them. It was enlightening to see them share ideas and come to conclusions as a group, especially from two very different backgrounds in the same city. They were able to discuss the concepts without making each other feel guilty or offended and, as they mentioned later on, they learnt a lot from each other. When discussing the concepts of conflict and violence, violent conflict, as they started referring to violence, there were many more similarities than difference as to what they considered as violence. The differences related more to interfamilial violence as the family structures are fairly different. More of the students from the public school come from single parent homes, and although this true for some of the students from the private school, it is more common in the private school. Another difference is also the level and forms of conflict and violence present at the schools. At the public school there are many cases of physical violence between students, although this is more common among students belonging to different gangs or 'maras' as they are called in Central America.

The only time that recording devices were used was during some of the interviews and the classroom observations. In all of these cases it was strictly done with the approval of all parties involved. With the classroom observations the students were asked at the start of every session if they could be recorded so as not to take for granted that if they agreed once that it was always valid.

3.8 Design of the training module

The design of the training module started while the research sessions were ongoing with the participants. It became an ongoing process where there were constant revisions and consultations which were influenced by the participants' increased knowledge and understanding of the topics being researched. It was during these sessions that the participants decided that instead of proverbially redesigning the wheel we could look at

and review modules that already exist and adapt them for our training module according to our needs and purpose.

3.9 Data analysis

I used thematic content analysis for the qualitative data. Under this method, some themes – those based on the questions asked – were obvious; others that emerged were not expected but came out during interviews and discussion sessions. I employed the assistance of the school counsellors and co-workers, who are from the same society to gain a better understanding of what the participants said, how they said it and the context in which it was said. This was necessary as there are distinct differences in the meaning of certain words and expressions between the Spanish that is spoken in Honduras and that which I learnt in Colombia. It was and still is, during the analysis, important for me to clearly understand what the students are saying for the purposes of relevance and trustworthiness of the data.

To help with the data analysis, it was necessary to identify patterns that emerge from the different elements from which the data is collected as shown by (Miles et al., 2013) when they state that the important thing is to be able to see more evidence of the same pattern and at the same time be open to contradictory evidence when it appears. The analysis of qualitative data also involves the ability to codify and categorize the information collected, as shown by Seers (2012). Although this article is in relation to the medical field, the principles it elucidates are valid for other areas of research.

I started comparing answers given by the students from the two different schools specifically to identify patterns that emerged. It became evident that on certain aspects there was difference in how the students from the two different sectors of society viewed life in the city and other aspects where they had a similar outlook. The interesting element here is not that geographic location which was problematic for the students but rather other people from different societal strata. This is due to the fact

that neighbourhoods in Siguatepeque, unlike major cities in Honduras and elsewhere, is not strongly divided by economic strata. People from different social strata live in the same neighbourhood, so there is a mix of people from borderline poverty to middle and upper class living in many cases on the same block, in the same street. The only neighbourhoods where it is possible to say that the majority of people belong to one class are those on the periphery of the city, which are marginalized and prejudiced against and considered the origin of dangerous individuals by those living within the perimeter of the city, irrespective of social strata.

There is a general distrust of local and national authority institutions such as the police force, governments (local, regional and national), which is also extended to a distrust of unknown individuals and by extension foreigners. This is also exacerbated by the apparent lack of punishment of members of organized crime in the different cities, who are involved in various criminal activities and who are known to the authorities. One example is the so called 'War Tax' which charged to business owners. Organized crime organizations charge this on the pretext of protecting businesses but in reality it is extortion and racketeering. A number of informants referred to the involvement of police and government officials at various levels in these criminal activities.

3.10 Validity and reliability/trustworthiness

As stated previously, different data collection methods were used in order to gain a better appreciation for the feelings and understandings of the participants in terms of the concepts explored in this research. Using different methods also helped to ensure the validity of the information and that the data collection process was done in a transparent and systematic fashion.

In order to help ensure the reliability of data the participants had discussions on the same topics on a rotational basis at different stages. This allowed me to capture any differences in opinions and feelings on the various topics discussed expressed by the same individual. More importantly, where variations did surface it was possible to explore why the opinions and views had changed.

3.11 Ethical considerations

All the participants knew what data was being collected and why it was collected. The students were also constantly assured that their anonymity was guaranteed as the information collected will not be connected to any individual name. This helped assuage their fears of reprisals against their person for saying something that may be considered as cause for punishment. We also agreed that no one other than me and the person transcribing the audio recordings of our sessions would listen to said recordings and during the transcriptions the names mentioned during the sessions would be omitted. This allowed me to consider the information shared by the participants to be valid and truthful as they had the freedom to speak their minds. It did take time for them to trust me and believe that what we agreed upon would be upheld.

The question of anonymity, as mentioned before, was extensively discussed with the participants and it was done on a continual basis, not just at the start of the project. The purpose was to make sure that they understood they did not have any danger assigned to them for participating. It was also reiterated to them that what they mentioned and opined in the sessions would not be discussed with others outside the group and that in the thesis itself it will be referred to but without assigning names or views to any specific individual. The same measures were taken for the interviews and expressed to the interviewees. As already mentioned above, participation was completely voluntary and all participants had to have a permission signed by their parents or guardians. After the signed documents were returned the parents were contacted to ensure that they had signed and given permission for their child to participate. There were students who wanted to participate but whose parents did not give permission and unfortunately they could therefore not take part in the project. Later on some parents did give permission but in some cases the students had lost interest by that time.

Chapter 4: Planning and implementing the intervention

4.1 Introduction

It will be recalled that the specific objectives of the research were

1. Drawing on the insights of students, teachers and other professionals, to explore the nature, extent and consequences of conflict and violence which they experience in the city of Siguatepeque in Honduras.
2. Using a participatory action research approach, to design and implement a training programme in peacebuilding involving students from two high schools from different ends of the social class structure.
3. To evaluate the short-term outcomes of the training programme on the students and schools.

For reasons explained in section 4.4, it was not possible to complete these objectives. I made a series of attempts to cope with the various obstacles and these and the consequent findings are reported in this chapter. The chapter delves detailed into the planning phase of the research, including the preliminary matters, the selection of the group the design of the programme. Of special interest may be the selection of the group as it was composed of students from two different schools from two different social strata. This was an interesting challenge as the students in both cases were eager and willing (for different reasons) to participate, but there were interesting differences in how the parents initially reacted to their progeny forming part of the research group. It also looks at obstacles that were encountered and how they were dealt with during the whole process.

4.2 Preliminary planning matters

The planning phase of the research started in 2017 in South Africa while preparing for my emigration to Honduras. While in Honduras during the 2015-2016 school year, I realized that the country had interesting aspects that would facilitate my research, in particular the culture, which outside of the country is constantly portrayed as violent and very conflictive.

On my return to Honduras in August 2017, I took steps to officially gain permission from the schools where the research took place. Both institutions gave permission without reserve and showed great interest in the research project. With all the relevant information in hand in terms of the differences and similarities of the schools, my attention turned to the objectives of my research as the next element in preparing my planning. Initially the idea was to include the students in the planning stage as I felt it important for them to be a part of this. Many of the aspects of the research was limited due to the availability of time on the part of the participants as they had many other activities to which they were committed. Due to this limitation, it was not possible for them to participate as actively as I had hoped, including the planning phase.

The first steps I took was to speak to teachers and administrators of the two schools where the research was conducted in order to get an idea of the similarities and differences that existed between the institutions. Some of the major differences came to light right away in terms of number of students per classroom, level of competence in different subjects and the level of dedication to studies on the part of the students. At the private school there is an average of 22 students per classroom whereas at the public school that number is 38. In total the private school has a student body of 480 and the public school has a student population of between 2300 and 4000. The discrepancy in number at the public school is due to the fact that there is a programme that provides for working people to study on weekends to earn their high-school diplomas. This turned out to be an interesting insight into the social structure which some students would later reflect on as a factor in the levels of violence.

The first idea was to have a couple of sessions of a few hours on some weekends during the first semester of the year but when speaking to the students it became clear that

weekends would not work for any of them. They then came up with the idea of meeting once a week for between 40 minutes and an hour. Initially this was complex as there are various differences in the day to day operations of the two schools. One of the biggest differences is in the schedules that the schools manage in terms of class time, length of classes and the school day. The private school has classes from 7 a.m. until 2:45 p.m. in what they call a single session day where each class is 45 minutes (generally considered and academic hour) long, whereas the public school has a double session day that goes from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m. and then from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m. with classes being 40 minutes long.

The school years are also different, which presented difficulties during the research. The public school year starts in February and ends in November with a two week vacation in June. The private school starts in the middle of August and ends at the beginning of June with a two week break in December-January.

The similarities between the two schools are limited to the subjects that students have to take, as these are all determined by the National Ministry of Education, with some allowances for the private schools to add subjects that are not necessarily a part of the national curriculum. One example of this is that at the private school has a subject called Character Education from 5th grade to 9th grade; it is the only school in the city that has this class. The other similarity is that all schools, both public and private go up to grade 11 except for international schools which go up to grade 12 (and some to grade 13), but there very few of these.

Although the two schools are in the same city and attend to students from the same population, they are quite different especially in their approach to dealing with cases of conflict and violence. There are teachers that work at both institutions, which is fairly common in Honduras. According to the teachers, children at the private school are much more dedicated and focused on academia than at the public school. The vice principal postulated that this could be due to the fact that there are more students per class at the public schools which makes it more difficult for them to receive the attention they need.

4.2 Establishing the two groups

The above are all factors I had to take into consideration when organizing the planning for the research. As outlined by Kitzinger (1994: 3), the groups I worked with started off with individuals who shared similar characteristics in terms of socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects, including age group. I initially worked with each group separately in their respective schools, over a four-week period. But once the initial stages of the research were over the two groups who internally shared characteristics were different in those same aspects, originating from different social strata in the same community. Therefore, the final research group was not completely homogeneous in terms of sharing the same characteristics but rather, as stated above, a fusion of two groups, which although having their origins in the same city, manifested marked differences in their interactions and socio-economic conditions of life. This invariably influenced how they perceived and lived their surrounding societal environment. Part of the joining of these two groups into one was to appreciate the different perspectives of the two groups and discover where commonalities enter in order to facilitate the peacebuilding process. Throughout the research it did provide valuable elements for the construction of knowledge, not only for them but also for me personally as there was open sharing in the focus group sessions of experiences, understanding and knowledge of their social environment. The focus group also helped the participants to reflect on new perspectives of looking at their interactions from the points of views of others which as per Breen (2006: 5) is important for the generation of new ideas.

To establish the schedule with the students at the public school, I had a meeting with the participants and the counsellor. The students decided on Tuesdays at two o'clock in the afternoon (2:00 p.m.) when they finished class; this was fine as my schedule at the private school was somewhat flexible which allowed me to leave the premises earlier than usual on some days, with the blessing of the principal. At the private school, I had the meeting to establish the schedule with the participants during recess and we established the session time at two fifty (2:50 p.m.) on Thursdays on account that they have class until 2:45 p.m. In both cases these were the days on which the participants

did not have other extracurricular activities. The sessions were planned taking into account the objectives of the research, as listed in section 1.3.

4.3 Designing the programme

In designing the training programme, it was necessary to closely examine the findings under the first objective in order to gain a better understanding of the concepts of conflict, violence and peace and their respective influences on society and individual existence. The sessions were therefore organised chronologically starting with discussions and consultations on these central concepts. The first series were of sessions were conducted in the two schools with the participants of the respective institutions.

The idea was to get them accustomed to expressing themselves without reserve so that when they sat down as one group they would be bolder in sharing their thoughts and ideas. After these first sessions it was possible to arrange for the participants to have combined sessions at the private school. The private school was selected as the centre for the combined sessions as they had no afternoon schedule like public school. Another reason was that a number of the parents of the participants from the private school were apprehensive about allowing their children to go to sessions at the public school. Public schools have a, not necessarily validated, reputation for engendering violence. The first semester sessions were developed as shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Group activities during the first half of 2018

Group activities during the first half of 2018				
	Place: Public School	Observations	Place: Private School	Observations
Date	20/02/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	Students seem reluctant/shy in their participation. They seem unsure of themselves and wary of the researcher.	8/02/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	Students are somewhat playful and not showing seriousness in the discussions of the topics.
# Participants	10		8	
Activity	Introduction		Introduction	
Date	27/02/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	3 of the girls are more relaxed and interacting with less reserve. Two girls and one boy speak and the other students agree without voicing their own opinions.	22/02/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	Students are settling down and showing more seriousness. They all participate in the discussion and show agreement in their view of what conflict is.
# Participants	9		8	
Activity	Discussion on Conflict		Discussion on Conflict	
Date	06/03/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	The same students that spoke in the previous session are the ones who spoke now and the others are still only agreeing with them without voicing their own opinions.	01/03/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	The discussions flow more freely and the students show no restraint in sharing their thoughts.
# Participants	10		9	
Activity	Discussion on Violence		Discussion on Violence	
Date	13/03/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	Students reveal the real reasons for their participation. (to comply with	08/03/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	The students are participating fully and giving each other a chance to

# Participants	8	a Ministry of Education stipulation that they participate in a community building activity)	8	speak although they seem to not be listening as there is a lot of repetition of ideas.
Activity	Discussion on Peace		Discussion on Peace	
Date	20/03/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	Although the participation is for compliance with a stipulation, five of the girls and one of the boys seem to be getting invested in the research.	15/03/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	The group is functioning fairly well with the students expressing themselves freely and enjoying the discussions.
# Participants	10		8	
Activity	Discussion on violence		Discussion on violence	
Date	27/03/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	The group has now gained more trust in the researcher and are expressing themselves more freely. There are some differences about the forms of violence that exist.	22/03/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	There seems to be consensus on the different forms of violence that exist in society.
# Participants	9		8	
Activity	Are there different forms of violence? Which is the most prevalent		Are there different forms of violence? Which is the most prevalent	
Date	03/04/2018 2:15 – 3:15 p.m.	The group agrees to having the joint sessions with the other group on Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m.	29/03/2018 3 – 4 p.m.	The group suggests Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. after looking at different day and time options suggested by the public school group.
# Participants	10		9	
Activity	Organisation for the joining of the two groups.		Organisation for the joining of the two groups.	
		Place: Private School		Observations
Date	11/04/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Group Workshop on Conflict	17	The two groups seem to be wary of each other and are sitting in their respective groups. One girl from the private school is sitting between the participants from the public school and quickly gains their trust and friendship. Only one girl from the public school is actively participating while all of the students from the private school are participating actively.
# Participants				
Activity				
Date	18/04/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Group workshop on violence	17	The dynamic is the same as the previous week. The girl from the private school that sat with the other participants suggests that they all sit interspersed and pair up, one student from one school with a student from the other school, for the days' activity.
# Participants				
Activity				
Date	25/04/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Continuation of group workshop on violence	15	The participants automatically sit in the arrangement of the previous week, interspersed, and they all seem more relaxed with each other.
# Participants				
Activity				
Date	02/05/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Group workshop on peace	16	The discussions have been flowing freely but are mostly led by the students from the private school with only three girls and one boy from the public school participating actively in the discussions.
# Participants				
Activity				

From the table, some of the activities that were done with the groups during the first half of 2018 can be appreciated. The information is taken from the log kept for every session that was held. As shown initially the work was done with the groups in separate sessions in different institutions, this was done for two reasons; the first was to get the participants to be active in their participation in preparation for working with another group as one and the second was a logistical issue as it took time to find a transport provider that would not charge an exorbitant amount for their services.

The table focuses on the reactions of the participants during the sessions held both as individual groups and as one cohesive group. It also tries to highlight the difficulties that were encountered when working with students who have been treated all their

academic lives as mere spectators in the development of activities that only involved them but was aimed directly at their development as individuals, especially in the private school.

As can be noted the topics that were discussed with the two groups were the same to ensure consistency in responses and to ensure that all the participants were at the same level in terms of their level of knowledge and amount of information about the different concepts.

When the two groups were joined into one, we had discussions on the same topics that we had previously discussed separately to see if there were any major differences in how the participants from different sectors of society viewed and lived aspects of conflict and violence. Although I had already gained some insights into this, having worked with the individual groups, it was interesting to see how they interacted on the discussions of these topics as a whole. Thanks to three individuals within the group, two from the private school and one from the public school, the participants basically took one day to become acclimated to each other and start sharing their thoughts, ideas and understandings freely and openly.

During this vacation period, I was able to evaluate the outcomes of the sessions with the research group and plan for the continuation of the research. It was clear that we needed to start working on the necessary elements to start designing the training programme that could be used as a teaching tool in the creation of peaceful communities. From the elements that were discussed with the participants in the first semester of the year it became very clear that is in fact a great need to establish programmes that would help students not only learn about peaceful coexistence but also how to put it into practice.

An interesting elements that I encountered were the reasons for the participation of the students from the two schools. In the case of the students from the private school the reason for their participation was varied. For some it was something to do after school to keep busy, for others it was an escape from family issues and for some it was out of

a true interest to be agents of positive change in their community. At the public school, all the participants joined for the same reason. All the 11th grade students in Honduras, irrespective of whether they study at a public or private institution have to participate in the (TES)¹⁰ Social-Education-Work. The students from the public school registered late for their participation in this national programme and the councillor agreed to validate their participation in the research as compliance with the requirements for the TES.

4.4 Obstacles and challenges in the research

4.4.1 Dropouts

On returning to the research group after the vacation period we experienced our first significant changes in the group and the process we had established this far. Five of the students from the public school left the group and no other students took up their places. From the private school six students left the programme but four new students from the same school joined the group. This change of participants created a great setback for the research as the new participants had to be brought up to the same level of understanding of the topics we had been discussing in the group. The reasons for leaving the group were varied. One of the students from the public school had left the city, three had to get jobs after school to help supplement the family income and one had to take care of her younger siblings after school. At the private school, the students also got involved in other after school activities, like Math Bowl training, extreme fitness training and the MUN (Model United Nations) group in which the school participates. A lesser change was moving the day of the meetings from Wednesday afternoons to Thursday afternoons.

This setback, however, evolved into an interesting opportunity as I was able to take a backseat and observe as the ‘veteran’ members of the group discussed and consulted with the new members on the topics and shared and gained new insights in them. It became clear that the experienced members of the group not only had a clearer

¹⁰ TES is a Social-Educational-Work which is done on a national by 11th grade students. Its primary focus for the past few years has been on literacy programmes where the students have to go into the communities and provide literacy programmes aimed specifically at adults and young adults.

understanding of the different elements of conflict, violence and peace, but they were also capable of expressing themselves more clearly on these topics than when we started. The new members of the group also added new insights into themes under discussion. The newly integrated members came up to speed with the research elements fairly quickly and by the fourth week we were ready to move on to the main aspect of the research which was to design a training programme to be used in schools in Siguatepeque.

The following table outlines the sessions during the second semester of the school year. We did not meet in the first two weeks of September (03 – 14) as all the schools were preparing for the Independence Day¹¹ parades. And the first week of October we also did not meet as the whole country celebrates what is called *Semana Morazanica* (Morazanic Week)¹².

Table 4.2 Group activities during the second half of 2018

Group activities during the second half of 2018		
	Place: Private School	Observations
Date	22/08/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	The veteran students take the lead on discussing all elements of conflict including different forms of conflict with the new members.
# Participants	13	
Activity	Conflict and all its aspects	
Date	29/08/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	The veteran students take the lead on discussing all elements of violence, its nature, extent and influence on society.
# Participants	13	
Activity	Violence and elements related to it.	
Date	19/09/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	The veteran students talk and discuss the topics of consultation and peace with the new participants and look at the role they as young people have to play in these areas.
# Participants	13	
Activity	Consultation and peace	
Date	26/09/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	The participants decide that it would be best to work with 6 th and 7 th grade students and that the training manual should be designed for this age group. Later there would be a change in the target population for the training manual.
# Participants	13	
Activity	Consultation on which grades should the training manual be used with	
Date	10/10/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	The process of structuring the training manual starts, taking into account other documents that have been designed by other groups in other parts of the world.
# Participants	13	
Activity	Workshop on design and structuring the training manual	
Date	17/10/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Activities paused due to preparations for final yearly exams (public school) and final partial exams (private school)
# Participants		
Activity	Consultation on elements to be included in the training manual	
Date	24/10/2018 : 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Activities paused due to preparations for final yearly exams (public school) and final partial exams (private school)
# Participants		

¹¹ Independence Day in Honduras is celebrated on the 15th of September

¹² The Chamber of Commerce of Honduras organized three public holidays (03 October- Honduran Soldiers Day, 12 October- Hispanic Day and 21 October-Armed Forces Day) into one long week which falls in the first week of October and all work related activities are suspended for three days in that week. The schools close for the whole week.

Activity	Research on existing materials that exist for training manuals.	
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4.4.2 Different school schedules

This table is a continuation of the activities done by the groups during the second half of 2018. Due to the different schedules that schools use their vacation times differ, which means that when the students from the private school are on holiday the public students are still in class and vice versa. This provided an opportunity to observe how the veteran participants made the newcomers feel at ease and brought them up to speed on the concepts and topics we had been discussing with very little input from me. As can be seen in the table this period was dedicated mostly to the outline and organization of the training manual. Various elements related to the training manual are discussed including the target population which was then related to the purpose of the training manual.

4.4.3 Exams

Towards the middle of October, we experienced another setback when the remaining participants from the public school refrained from participating as they were involved in preparations for their final exams which were to take place from the beginning of November. We continued with the participants from the private school for two more weeks until the end of October when they too started preparing for exams, although in this case it was for semestral exams. I took this opportunity to start working on the transcription of the recordings of the sessions we have had up to this point and the interpretation of the data collected.

4.4.4 Ongoing implementation challenges

We resumed our group sessions in February of 2019 but with only three of the participants from the public school and six from the private school. The other participants from the public school had failed the year and were moved to the afternoon schedule of the school. The students from the private school who left did not give reasons for not continuing. We started with a review of decisions made in our last group session where all participants were present and decided that the groups with which we would use the training manual was 6th and 7th grade. We therefore continued with the

development of the training manual with this in mind. At the same time, I approached the headmaster of the public school to implement the training manual. It took a month before I could meet with him as he was travelling constantly to Comayagua¹³ for meetings with the Secretary of Education for the department.

In my meeting with the headmaster, when I was finally able to meet with him, he suggested that we work with a group of 10th grade students from the afternoon programme as it would be easier to organize a schedule for them during one of their civics classes. The research group was a little flustered by this for two reasons: they were apprehensive as to whether students in their grade and age group would take them seriously, and they felt that we needed to re-design the training manual as we would be dealing with a totally different group. The reason for not planning it at the private school was that because of extra courses in the private school, there was not a space in which it could be done. Also, all the participants would be in class at the time as the private school only had the one schedule from 7 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

There was still interest from the principal of the private school, however, to investigate the possibility of having a peacebuilding programme incorporated into one of the classes at the school in future. On further consultation with the participants, it was decided that the change in group was actually fortuitous since the training manual would then be aimed at training students to be peacebuilders who would then serve as facilitators to the lower grades previously selected.

During the design phase of the training manual the participants decided to look at what materials already exist and is effective for this purpose and look at adapting it accordingly for our training manual. The students used various books and websites that they found to put together the training manual, adding to it elements that they thought would be important for the process. As work on the training manual progressed, we faced continued setbacks in starting the implementation phase at the public school. Students were falling behind in some subjects, according to their own testimonies,

¹³ Comayagua is one of the departments (Provinces) of Honduras (18 departments in total) and it is the one under which all educational institutions from the region reports to, including those in Siguatepeque.

because teachers would not show up for class or would not explain topics causing the students to be unable to miss classes which were being programmed for the research group. It necessary to continue postponing implementation phase, but with continued contact with the principal who showed his un-wavered support for this phase and the project as a whole, and continued to try and find a way for it to take place.

4.4.5 A horrific incident

In February 2019 we suffered another setback when one of the stalwarts of the group, a girl from the private school, lost her father in a gruesome high-jacking, an action which left the participants very distressed and caused some of the parents to rethink allowing their children to participate although the action had nothing to do with the group or the research. After a two week pause, the group reassembled and continued. By now it was clear that it was going to take longer than anticipated to start the implementation phase at the public school as there was some reorganisation taking place in the education structure in the country.

4.4.6 Strike action by public school teachers

Public school teachers called for a national strike as there was a motion in government to privatize all education and healthcare. During this period, it was difficult for the group to meet so process of analysis of data collected continued.

4.4.7 Loss of computer data

During this process of analysis, the hard drive on my computer was damaged beyond repair and all the data collected on digital media was lost. I had to start the process of recreating the lost data from memory and with the help of some of the participants from the private school who had been involved in the process from the beginning.

4.4.8 Advent of Covid-19, early 2020

The schools in the country were effectively closed for two years although some learning still took place for students with computer and data access.

When the school year for private schools started in August 2019, one of the participants that had been involved in the process since the beginning approached me and asked if we could continue with the research, stipulating that because of the loss of data it would be a good idea to collect more data and continue pushing to implement the training programme at the school. The three remaining participants from the public school did not continue as they no longer lived in the city permanently. One of them moved to another place in Honduras and two left for the United States in a manner known as “mojado” (meaning illegal) and were stranded somewhere in Mexico. A new group was formed with seven students from the private school including one the participant that had been involved since the start, and two that had joined during the second half of 2018.

In consultation with the longest standing participants, it was decided to use the new member of the group as a sounding board for the training manual, which is included in the Appendix. The group therefore decided not to spend much time going over the different concepts or dealing in detail with them but rather to use the training manual as a basis to see if the concepts were clear and valid.

4.5 Reflections on the planned intervention with students

The process by which the idea for the research and training model came about can be divided into two moments. The first was a realization, after informal discussions with various individuals from different walks of life, about the strains of living in a society where conflict is constantly present and the fear that it could escalate very quickly into violence. The second came about after specific discussions with students from one institution and the counsellor and headmaster of another exploring the need for a training programme to allow students to learn different elements related to promoting peace as a possible dynamic within their communities. As previously stated the students had a hand in the design of the materials to be used in the implementation and were looking forward to seeing their handiwork put into practice.

As stated in a previous chapter, there were many difficulties that appeared during my research, to which I had to find solutions and adapt constantly. The biggest of all the difficulties was without a doubt the inability to execute the implementation phase of my research. It started a couple of months before the pandemic hit and lockdowns were implemented on a global scale. The first sign of the difficulties to come manifested itself when participants started leaving the group. The first three students to exit the group were from the private school, who left because they started participating in other activities dealing with physical fitness and training and the scheduled times began to clash. One of their classmates talked to them and tried to convince them of the importance of what we were doing but for them their fitness training was more important.

The next two students to leave the group were the only two boys from the public school. In one of the cases the youth had to take care of his siblings as his parents could not leave them alone when they found employment. The other participant left because an after-school job opportunity that he had to take in order to contribute to the family income. This turned out to be a very common occurrence, especially among students from public schools, where more often than not they have to find ways to help supplement the family income. In extreme cases, it is to the point where students drop out of school and hope to find an opportunity later in life where they can finish their schooling, either by studying at night or on weekends. The next big change came when three of the students from the public school left due to a schedule change. They had not reached an acceptable grade level in their classes and were therefore moved to the afternoon schedule at the school, which automatically precluded them from continuing their participation in the group. During this time there were four new people that joined the group, all of them from the private school, and we had to revisit the topics we had previously studied and discussed in our sessions. Their initial excitement was great but within the first two weeks one of them started missing some sessions due to issues with transport. All of the above mentioned caused some setbacks in the research which in turn caused a pushback in the timeframe for the implementation phase by a significant amount of time.

Despite the dropouts, the group continued with the research, delving into the ins and outs of conflict, violence and peacebuilding. This took place during 2018 and, starting 2019, there high hopes for the group to finally find its true rhythm and complete the research and move on to the implementation phase. Life it seems is not without its true challenges as we had more difficulties to confront. The first of these difficulties arose in the form of the last members of the group from the public school leaving. They never gave reasons. I discovered later that several of them had formed part of the caravan¹⁴ and were no longer in the country. This left the group with students solely consisting of students from the private school. Efforts were made to recruit new participants from the public school but to no avail. It must be noted that during this time the principal of the public school was very helpful and supportive but alas he could also not obligate students to participate as it would have been morally unacceptable to do so.

The group which now consisted solely of students from the private school continued in a stable fashion for once weekly sessions during a two and a half month period when another difficulty arose. One of the stalwart participants lost her father to a violent crime on his way home from work and she and her family relocated to another city. This left only one member of the original group of twenty participants, the other 7 having joined at various stages. With this group we were finally able to conclude the research phase and plan for the implementation phase which was set to start in August 2019. In consultation with the principal of the public school it was decided to push back the implementation to the beginning of 2020 due to scheduling issues with classes as this phase would take place during school hours. During the last months of 2019, the group continued meeting and planning in preparation for 2020. Then the global pandemic started and everything came to a sudden and unexpected halt and change of direction.

Initially the group contemplated doing the implementation phase online, using the virtual environment to do so. It quickly became clear that this would not be possible due to the lack of access to technical equipment on the part of public school students. The majority of students from the public school come from lower income households where

¹⁴ An en-mass exodus of Hondurans to the US through Guatemala and Mexico, mostly on foot.

they do not have access to computers and use cell phones to connect to the internet. To compound the problem, many of them do not have internet at home and use data plans in order to connect and were therefore limited to the number of times they could access the internet for school work and could definitely not connect for long sessions of classes. It was for these reasons that the public school systems implemented a dynamic where the students would download the material needed for each subject and have limited weekly online sessions with their teachers to clarify concepts. The private school was much luckier as we were able to access educational platforms that allowed us to conduct classes on a daily basis virtually, although our time in class was reduced. During the first month and half of online classes the research group ceased to meet and the whole process ground to a halt. It was now impossible to continue the implementation phase as there was no way to meet with the target group of students from the public school, not virtually and not in person.

4.6 Alternative interventions

4.6.1 Seeking different groups to work with

Given the shrinkage of the student groups and the advent of time, in early 2021 I began to look for other groups to work with in order to complete the implementation phase. In view of this I made some adjustments to the planned implementation as it would no longer be with high-school students but rather with adults.

The first group I approached was the military base located in the city. It is an engineering battalion whose primary duties during times of peace is to assist in the maintenance and improvement of the infrastructure of the country. Also due to the fact that the country is located in an area which is prone to hurricanes and tropical storms, they are also tasked with assisting with logistics during times crisis brought on by natural disasters. Over a two month period, I had a series of meetings with the commander of the base to look at the possibility of doing the implementation with a group of soldiers from the base. The initial meeting in which I explained my area of study and research was very positive and the commander was very enthusiastic as a way to boost a positive image for the military as the population has an ingrained sense of distrust towards this entity and law enforcement in the country. In our last meeting, after detailing the schedule,

the materials to be used and outlining and expected outcomes, the commander informed me that his superiors did not accept the programme.

During the same period, I set up a meeting with chief of police to present the same proposal to work with police officers. As before, the chief of police agreed to a meeting and showed great interest and we set up a starting date for the implementation. The agreement was for me to contact him two days before in order to confirm and start. That was the last time I was able to speak to him as I was unable to communicate with him further. I called his office on the agreed upon day without an answer and every time I went to the station to speak to him in person he was either not there or in a meeting.

My next attempt was the fire brigade of the city. The commander accepted a meeting with me and expressed his interest in the programme but immediately also confirmed that it would not be possible for two reasons: first he was certain that his superiors would not agree and second, since the fire brigade consisted mostly of volunteers they did not have enough the manpower to be able to do a project like this.

It should be remembered that at this time there was a national lockdown in effect in the country and the schools were still not doing in person classes which is why I could not do it at the school.

After the various failed attempts to do the implementation with different institutions and organizations, I held informal conversations with individuals speculated on why the institutions were reluctant to participate. One suggestion was that they did not want to start new projects in light of possible command changes after the presidential elections in 2021, thus leaving another individual to gain credit for a project.

4.6.2 Incorporating peacebuilding into other courses

During all of these difficulties in trying to do the implementation, I was able to have regular conversations on conflict violence and peacebuilding with my students from ninth, tenth and 11th grade during our regular scheduled classes giving credence to Zelaya (2022) who postulated in an article that a peacebuilding curriculum is not only

for social studies class, which is what people may generally think, but it can be used in any class. I was fortunate enough that the classes I teach made it relatively easy to incorporate the topics of peacebuilding.

Ninth grade Character Education

In this class, we use a book titled *Drawing on the Power of the Word* in which a group of youth from a village discuss and make plans to help their community progress both materially and spiritually. A central theme of the book is unity, and it follows the youth through different processes of learning that help them understand the importance of unity as a core element to progress. With my students we were then able to discuss different topics that could be an impediment to unity and hence progress for a community. The elements the students came up with were different conflicts, although they initially used the terms violence and conflict interchangeably. During the course of the classes, we were able to look at the difference between conflict and violence and the different forms of violence that exist although this was limited to physical and emotional violence. Some of the students were able to make a connection to unity as a necessary element for peacebuilding and the benefits it would bring. The process was very enlightening for me as I have continued with this dynamic in this class. During the year as we talk more and more about community progress, unity and peacebuilding I ask the youth to think of what they can do as individuals to help their communities, street or neighbourhood to progress and become more peaceful.

Ninth grade Social Studies

I was able to incorporate elements of peacebuilding as part of my classes. In specific sections of this class, we look more closely at violent conflict and the toll it takes on human societies. The sections where we are able to do this is when we looked at the industrial revolution and the modern day economic systems it heralded and the various conflicts, global and regional, that have afflicted the world in the past century. Here it was interesting to see how the students were able not only to grasp the need for peacebuilding in the world but the role that they may be able to play. In many instances they question the 'stupidity' of humanity to repeatedly become embroiled in such actions of human destruction.

There were some simple projects that we sometimes do based on questions and interventions from the students. At one point a group of students did an activity called what if where they put themselves in shoes of those at the forefront of armed conflicts and tried to determine how they would have done things to avoid the levels carnage and bloodshed that was caused. One of the final elements we discuss in the last partial, together with a project they is: What is my role as an individual to create peace in my everyday surroundings? This question goes hand in hand with a project where the students design the perfect city taking into account not only the infrastructure but also the social structures and human interaction.

Tenth grade Vocational Orientation

Although this subject deals mainly with helping students get ready for university and deciding what and where to study, I was able to continue discussions on peacebuilding. After the basic orientation about factors that influence our decision making process when choosing a career and university (internal and external factors), we started delving into what to expect when going to university. During this class they did research on the topics and we have discussions about it in class. At the beginning we came to an agreement that anything discussed in the class stay in the class and is not to be discussed outside with others except if they wish to have discussions with their parents, as some of them do, but without naming individuals in specific comments. This was done to ensure that the students feel at ease about sharing their thoughts and feelings about the topics being discussed. It was and still is surprising to me that in general the students are concerned with three types of violence on campus; direct physical violence, psychological violence and GBV. We also looked at who perpetrates these forms of violence and in many cases the students talk to relatives, siblings and cousins who are at university and have experienced or noticed these forms of violence.

The most concerning violence issue to my students, and this was the case for the two groups I taught during the pandemic, was GBV. They were especially concerned with the fact that Honduras is a chauvinistic society so that many forms of GBV are considered not only as normal but acceptable. The students then started looking into what they

could do as individuals to address these issues and make efforts to exert their influence in a positive manner towards others. I noticed that students' understanding not only of the different forms of violence but also the difference between conflict and violence became more manifest. At the end of the year, some students mentioned that after coming to a greater understanding of the topics discussed they had become more assertive and not always accepting of societal behaviours and actions as normal.

Eleventh grade Professional Ethics

In this course, we discussed the same topics in the light of broader society. Here there were clear signs of growth in terms of knowledge and reported behaviours. When we discussed conflict and violence in society and the workplace the students are generally more aware of the different forms that exist in society. As one student pointed out which has been echoed by many of their classmates:

Mister, you know it's funny that there are different forms of violence but before I could not identify them because violence was just violence and it just seemed a normal part of life. Now I see it and I can differentiate and put a name to them. Also I now realize that even in my house we are guilty of participating in some these forms of violence.

Another student expressed a similar thought:

Mister, you know I now realize that my father is, machista, chauvinist but when I try to point it out he looks at me and says 'mijo, asi es como son las cosas' son this is how things are, and my mother nods and agrees with him.

These two sentiments were shared by most of the students especially as we started delving into their personal experiences with conflict and violence. The girls especially become very vocal concerning what they endured in terms of GBV because it is accepted by society. They actually started outlining the different forms of GBV and harassment they experienced on a daily basis and the fact that have always just accepted it. One said:

Mister, I don't go cycling anymore because almost every time I cycle some 'pendejo' idiot, will slap my backside and just smile and when I try to stand up to them everyone looks at me as if I am being irrational.

Another mentioned "And when you report it to the authorities, they just brush it off and say, he was just admiring you."

4.7 A note on perceived outcomes

4.7.1 General observations

As the implementation phase could not be fully realized, a formal evaluation of outcomes was not possible. I can comment, however, on the changes that occurred within the group since the start of the research. The most important group on which I focused were three students who accompanied the process for the longest period and with whom I was still able to communicate.

There are various elements to take into account during the evaluation of outcomes for this research which I will delineate and expound upon more in detail - the reaction of parents to their children participating in the research; the purpose of students in participating in the research; and the involvement of institutions in the processes of research.

I will start with the parents and their reactions at the start of the research and the observable changes in them as the process progressed. At the start of the research the biggest fear of the parents of the students attending the private school was the safety of their children. To a large degree they were more concerned with the actual physical safety than the any other elements. This fear was and is still based on actions that take place in the larger cities where some people have to contend with kidnappings for profit, especially of school aged children. There is also a registered case of an attempted kidnapping at the private school where the research took place, although this was many years ago and it is the only reported case. For some parents it was more of a concern than for others.

To put this last statement into context, there is a family that lives a block away from the school but the parents would never allow their son to walk to school although the gate to the house is visible from the main gate of the school, and vice versa. They would drive

him to school or call a cab service to drive him a distance that takes no more than 3 minutes to cover on foot. When these parents were asked why they did that, they answered that they had a genuine fear of him being kidnapped on his way to school. On the other hand we had a student at the same private school whose parents allowed him to cycle to school from the other side of the city, a journey that took him on average 30 minutes on his bicycle. The important aspect here is the fact that the two families form part of the same upper class socio-economic sector of society. Although only one of these students participated in the research it is none the less an interesting contrast in the perceptions of the parents.

Another element of fear was the fact that the intervention was to be carried out at the public school and this also caused the parents a lot of discomfort. This was caused by the apparent level of physical acts of violence that took place at the public school. Later we discover, as with many reports, that although there were acts of violence that took place, these were greatly exaggerated giving them greater intensity and degree than what they had. In the end we had to agree that their children would participate in the research as long as it was carried out at facilities of the private school.

The parents of the participants from the public school did not have this same fear of their children being kidnapped for ransom. As one of them stated at one point *"We do not have anything they may want and our parents do not have the economy to pay for ransoms, so they leave us alone."* Their fear was geared towards a fear of kidnappings for the purpose of child slavery and sex trafficking. At the same time the fear of violence was less apparent in parents from these participants as for them, by their own account, this was just how things were. They also felt that they did not have any alternatives as private education was too expensive and that public school was therefore the only that they could ensure an education for their children.

As the research progressed, the participants from the private school started looking at their role in promoting peace and consulted on how they can do this if they are afraid to interact with members of society from other socio-economic strata. The parents learnt from their children that being agents of change meant that they need to be able

to interact with others in different spaces irrespective of socio-economic standing. By the end of 2018 the parents were ok with the idea of allowing their children to participate in the implementation phase at the public school. Some of the parents offered to provide the participants with transport to the public school for the implementation phase, and although they denied it, the participants felt that this was their way of keeping an eye on the situation.

At the start of the research, the participants from the public school at the start of the research did not participate actively and were restrained in sharing in their opinions. This was due to the fact that they felt that they did not have the same level of understanding as the participants from the private school. As time went on, they started participating more freely. By the end of 2018, those participants from the public school that were still in the group had developed into individuals who made their voices heard without trying to drown out the voices of others.

The participants from the private school started the process with an understanding that they were not superior to their counterparts, this was in large part thanks to a subject called Character Education that they receive from 5th grade through to 9th grade, where there is a strong emphasis on virtues and values. For them the biggest challenge was to overcome the fears they had inherited from their parents. At the start of the research, they were fearful of doing the implementation at the public school but at the same time they wanted to do it. They also initially considered that their roles during the implementation would be that of teachers where they would just go to the public school and teach the students what they had learnt. As time went by there was a visible change in them. They started focusing on how they could share their new found knowledge in a participatory manner, constructing with the students the needed guidelines and skills to establish peace groups in different neighbourhoods. They reached an understanding of what it meant to be active, participative agents of change in their communities.

Some of them started participating in a socially oriented project organized by a teacher from the private school where they acted as tutors for children at an afterschool care centre for underprivileged children. I was able to observe them during this process and

discovered that beyond just helping the students with homework and tutoring them, they also added an element of empathy that I had not seen before in the group. When I asked some of the participants about this, they informed me that as agents of change they had to start looking at peacebuilding not only as a post conflict exercise but as an active process of sharing what they can of themselves with those who do not have.

The institutions themselves also experienced certain changes, at least in understanding and acceptance of their roles in peacebuilding in their community. At the start of the research the public school had allowed organizations that worked with conflict resolution processes to do projects at the school. By accounts from the headmaster these were usually in the form of lectures given by individuals who had received training from the organizations. When discussing this research project with him he was interested to know what the long terms implications could be and how the process could benefit the students. Together we devised a plan to organize a peace conference in which the participants from the research would participate actively as speakers. We also looked at establishing a long term process whereby there would be periodic peacebuilding training programmes for 9th and 10th grade students that would be facilitated by 11th grade students who had passed through the training programme. In the view of the headmaster this programme should be designed so that the students are able to establish peace groups within their neighbourhood.

There are also the distinguishing features between students from public schools and private schools which, according to the participants, results from the fact that public school students acquire responsibilities from a young age in terms housekeeping and taking care of siblings. Those from private schools tend to either have one of their parents or a nanny at home to deal with siblings and they usually have domestic workers that takes care of what would be chores. The participants recognised that students from private schools to be more academically advantaged as they have more time to dedicate to their school work.

When discussing these differences, the participants started highlighting the reality of the existence of structural violence in Honduran society. As they explained they knew

that there was structural violence but they did not know what it was called. In their own words they described the system as one that exists to make sure that many people in society cannot uplift themselves from these conditions of poverty. This was highlighted when we spoke about the education system in Honduras. According to the Honduran Constitution (1982) in article 171, public education is free and basic education, which is primary school, is obligatory. However, parents still have to pay school fees and other costs which makes it prohibitive for many to send their children to receive even basic education beyond the first grades of primary education. Another problem that compounds education is the fact that outside of the urban areas of cities and towns, there is usually no institutions for high-school education which forces the students who live on the peripheries of cities and towns to mobilize to the central urban areas where high-schools are usually located. This creates a situation where a large number of school-going aged young people are excluded from the education system perpetuating the continued proliferation of academically uneducated individuals in the country who are unable to aspire higher paying jobs in order to provide for their families.

4.7.2 Insights from student essays

Finally, I have included below extracts from just four of the more than 30 essays written over the past three years by 11th grade students from the private school on different aspects of peacebuilding. They are representative of the participating students.

On gender equality and peacebuilding

... gender equality is important not only in peacebuilding, but in every aspect of our life. We grow up in a society divided by stereotypes, roles and sexism. Since we are little kids, we are taught which roles correspond to what gender, but in reality it's just us, the ones who create this world full of gender inequality, roles, stereotypes and sexism. Unfortunately, many individuals think that women should just do house work, be a wife, a mom, and cannot do what she wants; if she does, she would be criticized. While men, they should only work, and bring money to the house. Without gender equality we would never have peace. Because we are so used to how we are living, that we don't look for a change. It doesn't matter what gender we identify with, we should all be respected, and treated equally.

On peacebuilding:

Everyone has something special, and we are all necessary for the development of our society. Peacebuilding helps people understand the causes of conflict, helping them to resolve their differences peacefully and prevent future violence. Understanding why people are fighting is key to reducing violence and increasing gender equality. Addressing every problem would help us live in a peaceful world, it doesn't matter if the problem is in a community, society or between genders, it is our duty to fix them. In order to achieve peacebuilding we should achieve gender equality. Achieving it will then bring us security, we won't be scared to go out, or freely talk about what we like, because we would be living in a peaceful world. Traditional society hasn't allowed women and men to equally participate in society.

Achieving peacebuilding isn't easy, if we want to obtain it, we should consider ourselves no more, no less than others, but equal. This is because many times, we feel superior to others, that we start manipulating and controlling them, which isn't right. Everyone has the capacity to do the same job, yes, for some it would be easier, and for others it won't, but that doesn't give us the right to avoid, or mistreat them. It is more than clear that gender equality is important in peacebuilding because it creates a better community, and efficient development, creates stability, security responding to the need of both genders, and offers social justice and social cohesion to the community.

On equality

Finding the true meaning of equality and with that building a peaceful society is a very difficult job. This is because the true meaning of equality means something different for every individual that has thought about this question before. However, they can all agree that every single true meaning we find is a piece necessary to build a peaceful society. We could define the true meaning of society as a society without prejudices, a society made up of individuals in a community instead of an organization. The importance of equality in building a peaceful society is that a society raised from inequalities will end up with inequalities. The society built with equalities will end up having everyone happy. Working with each other will make a successful teamwork that will end up in the community. The true meaning of equality is a society without a vicious circle of stereotypes. A society that will not limit your potential just because you have characteristics that goes with a certain group.

On the role of youth:

The energy they offer and the unlimited imagination they have, will create a sense of support from the ones who planned to act but never gave the first step. The support and collaboration from both parties, the energetic youth and the wise grownups, is going to create a solid base for the

structuration of peace-building. By having the systemized organization of experienced labourers and the spontaneity of creative teens, a great system of collective work will arise ...

Everything is created twice in this universe, in the world of our imagination, and in reality. We are still not fully able to imagine peace in our minds, so how can we start to create it without an action plan, a reference. As the tides of people start to educate themselves in the efforts for collective enlightenment and action, deep inside a new flame will burn, a desire to unify will sprout, and people will gain hope not because they want it, but because they will be able to grasp the true possibility of peace occurring in this world. When hope is achieved and not artificially, the youthful excitement becomes unstoppable.

When looking at the excerpts from the essays of the students it is clear that they have an understanding of conflict, violence and peacebuilding beyond what some adults may expect from them. They are conscious of the gender inequalities that exist and the hindrance that this possess to the development and progress of humanity as a whole. They understand that in order to establish real peace there needs to be true equality between the genders that is not based on gender roles but rather on human capacity. They also understand that peacebuilding is not an isolated, gender, social class or status affair but rather an enterprise in which every individual has a role to play.

Finally they understand and appreciate the role of youth as an important aspect of peacebuilding. Not only because they will inherit the future but also because they have the drive and energy to make it a reality. They understand the that life is ever moving forward and at the same time the world is getting smaller meaning that we need to find common ground if we are to progress. Their role is one of great importance s they can truly move the world towards a state of betterment for all.

The difficulties experienced during the research were very educational for me personally as it highlighted the difference between reality and planned procedures when dealing with individuals in a social context. What I have learnt from this is that when working with individuals, especially youth, there are many uncertainties for which one cannot prepare adequately except to be prepared for the unexpected. Combining this with

other difficulties where individual egos and institutional bureaucracy are present it becomes truly challenging. It is however a credit to the participants that endured with the process that the research was able to continue, and although not reaching its desired outcome was able to come to a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Overall reflections and future hopes

5.1 Introduction

I have explained in detail why the original objectives of the research could not be fully attained and the steps I took – some more successful than others - to deal with this. In section 4.7, I explained some of the outcomes of the project on the participating learners, their parents and the schools. In this chapter, I draw the research project to a close with some broad reflections. Of note should be that I was able to and still continue to be in contact with some of the participants of the research and they all confirm that they learnt a lot. Of course I am referring to the participants from the private school as I have lost all contact with the public school participants. In a few cases the students have shared with me that their experiences in the research has given them the impulse and drive to participate actively in extra-curricular activities with a social impact at their respective universities. They have also expressed that what they learnt has provided them with the necessary tools to deal on a more human level with people from all walks of life by understanding that although we are from different backgrounds and social standings we all have a role to play in the development and progress of our communities.

5.2 Key learnings

5.2.1 The connectedness of people

After an arduous period of research and education of youth in peacebuilding processes that was fraught with difficulties it is clear to me that youth have a vitally important role to play in future peacebuilding programmes and projects around the world. It is very important to help them realize their potential and direct it towards what will benefit humanity if we are to ensure a society where positive peace becomes the norm. As Aristotle famously said “Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human”. It falls upon the institutions within a society, charged with guiding the individuals, to ensure that everyone cannot only reach their full potential as individuals, as humans, but that

they can use their abilities and attributes for the betterment of society. The progress of a community does not depend on one individual or group but rather on every member of the community no matter how small their contribution may be. There is an activity that I do with my students as a process of realization of the importance of the effect of a person vying for the wellbeing of another: We go around the classroom and postulate that every individual is responsible for the other in front or to the side of them. At the end when I ask if they need to worry about their own wellbeing they say no because someone else has their 'back' so they can focus on watching out for someone else.

It is to the credit of the participants, especially considering their age, that they have an understanding of the influence we have on each other as individuals and that our treatment of each other can have far reaching effects. As mentioned before there was a clear distinction between the different groups in their perception not only of the type of violence and their causes but also the degree to which they are present and exert an influence in society. Towards the end of the participation of the students from the public school it was interesting to note that there were some forms of conflict that the youth from different social strata experience not only in the same form but to the same degree. This highlighted the statement of one of the initial participants from the private school when she said *"We do not choose who or what social class we are born to, but we all have the same duty and responsibility to make sure that we all receive equal treatment and opportunities"*. This puts the whole idea of our individual contributions to the progress and wellbeing of society into perspective.

It does not mean that it is easy to do, but then again if it was it would probably not be worth doing. Developing peaceful communities requires the participation not only of people in positions of power or authority but rather of every member of the community. It therefore falls upon different agencies, especially groups involved with peacebuilding to ensure that every individual member of society has not only the opportunity to aid in the construction of peace but that they also have the tools to do so.

5.2.2 The potential of youth as peacebuilders

Having spent time with students at the private school from 7th through 11th grade with subjects dealing with character and human interaction, allowed me to be witness to their growth in understanding of both topics and their responsibility towards humanity. It put my own upbringing into perspective as I travelled and lived in different countries where there always seem to be higher levels of violence than the usual dream environment that we all wish to live in. It also became clear to me during this process that in many cases data can be eschewed in favour of a desired outcome and when speaking to individuals in a day to day informal setting and just having conversations about conflict, violence, peace and the perceptions of these one learns what is not necessarily found in books or journals or in some cases contradictory. People do not read articles or books to determine how they interact with each other in their communities they do it through actual interactions. My research showed me this as there is an apparent aversion to reading in our current societies where people are more drawn to receiving their information in a visual auditory format instead of actually reading. One of the elements that highlighted this for me was the fact that when I gave the research participants documents to read at home in preparation for our different sessions they would find all manner of excuses not to do so. When I asked at one point why they do not like reading as a form of gaining knowledge both groups mentioned the tediousness of it and that they read for school subjects because they had to. But when I read with them during the sessions they would do so to the best of their abilities but with obvious lacklustre. However when we made the sessions interactive where they were able to share their knowledge based on their own personal experiences the sessions became much more vibrant. An example of this is the level of enthusiasm displayed by the participants when we discussed the education system there is huge chasm between what policy states and what happens in reality, reflected in the number school-age children outside of educational institutions during school hours.

This to me indicates that there needs to be a re-orientation in the way we educate so that students feel inspired to not only read out of obligation but out of a desire for knowledge. Combining this with the daily challenges that many individuals in any given community faces it does make peacebuilding challenging. The participants all had personal issues that they dealt with and the only way that they discovered that others

shared similar hardships and difficulties was when they found a space where they were able to share it with others in an environment where they were not judged or belittled for their thoughts and ideas and daily struggles. This shows the importance of viewing conflict within the context of relationships as delved into by Lederach, explored in chapter 2.

As noted these struggles were constant and ever present as the students had to deal with family issues, school and societal pressure and inconsistencies. This is important to look at as peacebuilding does not take place in a vacuum, it is a process that deals with real people who have real problems and concerns. A fact that showed this was that all the participants from the public school left the group due to familial and social obligations that were beyond their control. Even participants from the private school left the group under similar conditions.

People want to live in peace and harmony but there are underlying factors that makes this difficult and make it almost seem utopic. The current principal of the public school has been a great believer in the abilities of the youth to achieve greatness in their pursuit of progress for their community, despite the many structural and organizational hurdles that have to be overcome. Over the past year it has also become apparent that there are various neighbourhood organizations that are becoming more systematic in their approach to involving youth in community building projects which opens the door for peacebuilding projects as part of these. One element that is still troubling is that some organizations are still under the impression that because they are the experts they can come in and just dictate to the youth what should be done and how it should be done. I have share the knowledge I have gained during my research with some individuals from organizations working with youth, highlighting the positive learning effects of actively involving the youth and not just dictating procedures and processes to them. It remains to be seen whether they will listen and start involving the youth in manner that will allow them to actively participate in the processes or not. My research has clearly shown that by actively involving the youth in processes that are beneficial to the progress and wellbeing of a community is an asset. However, one of the biggest hurdles in Latin

society still seems to be that youth do not have the mental faculties to make positive changes that can benefit society.

Another unfortunate element is that the idea that whoever speaks the loudest still seems to hold true. From my experience in consultation with the students I am trying to show others that if we allow a space where true discussion is not based on defending an opinion but rather on discovery of better outcomes it is more probable to find solutions that are worthwhile to a particular problem. The participants of the research showed this when started using consultation during our sessions in order to determine what would be positive course of action to be taken. When discussing this with one of my colleagues he stated that consultation was a good idea and it could also help the youth look at the past from a different perspective so as not to just continue historical actions and participations for the sake of tradition, but to rather look at history as a learning experience in the context of what not to do.

Youth definitely have the potential to be a major asset to the wellbeing of society especially in the context of peacebuilding. It requires a change in attitude from adults in all the different socio-economic spheres and strata to allow the youth to engage in a consultative peaceful environment and not in a competitive us against them scenario. When provided with the proper tools in the correct environmental setting, youth can and will move the earth in positive manner.

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Appendix

Module of six lessons for the peacebuilding programme, Siguatepeque

The research group compiled this module using the *Él Poder de las Acciones Puras* (The power of pure deeds) ISBN 978-958-95781-7-9. This book was first published by Editorial Nurani in 1984 in Cali, Colombia. <https://isbn.cloud/en/9789589578179/el-poder-de-las-acciones-puras>

They chose this as a first step as they felt that it helps to establish a strong character for the participants and would help them understand more clearly the need peacebuilding in their community. Some of the questions from the document were changed to fit the population that it is aimed at.

The programme consists of one lesson per session and includes discussions on both the main topic and the exercises.

Lesson 1.

Purpose of lesson: To help participants the importance of developing spiritual qualities as an aspect of service to others.

To help the participants gain a better understanding of who they are

Man's identity

Reflection: Who am I?

Today there is an identity crisis in all parts of the world. This means that many wonder, ... what is truly a human being? To this we do not find an adequate response, without giving a dependency on commercial prices that we see in the press, radio and television. Being forced to answer this question by saying that man is a material being who must satisfy all his tastes by buying new things every day. We therefore consider the human

being only as a consumer of products, while others think that man is a more developed animal and as such, he should only worry about calming his hunger, his thirst and his animal appetites. Man must fight during his earthly life to accumulate as much wealth as possible, and thus achieve the long-awaited happiness that exists within us. However, the feeling that man is more than just a material being can be verified when we feel joy when we see a child smile, when we contemplate the beauty of a rose, or when we love our loved ones. These feelings come from the spiritual nature of man.

The following quote, taken from the book *The Wisdom of 'Abdul-Bahá* enlighten us on the subject of the two natures of man: ***“In man there exists two natures: his superior or spiritual nature and his inferior or material nature. Through the first one he approaches God, with the other he lives the world only. Signs of these two natures are found in men. In its material aspect it shows falsehood, cruelty and injustice; These are all consequences of their inferior nature. The attributes of his divine nature are demonstrated in love, mercy, goodness, truth and justice; One and all are the expression of his superior nature. All good habits, all good qualities belong to the spiritual nature of man, while all his imperfections and sinful actions are born from his material nature. If the divine nature of man dominates his human nature, then we have a saint. Man has the power to commit good and bad actions; if his power for good predominates and his inclinations to evil are overcome, then man can be called Holy. But if, on the contrary, he despises the things of God and allows his negative passions to dominate him, then he is no better than any animal.*”**

We also read in the same book:

“Man, the true man, is the soul, not the body; even when man physically belongs to the animal kingdom, the soul elevates him above the rest of creation.”

Dialogue

At a round table and coordinated by the teacher, each one express their opinions about the following statements: The material life of man begins at the moment of conception and ends with death. The spiritual life of man begins at the moment of conception and lasts forever. During my earthly life I have to worry mainly about developing the qualities of the spirit.

Within me there are potentialities that I still don't know; knowing myself means, then, how to discover those potentialities. I can easily know how much I should swim, run or resist underwater in a pool, but knowing how high a spiritual development I can get requires more effort and a desire to reach those heights.

If my aspiration in this life is only to seek the delights that momentarily satisfy me, I am like the animal, only attending to the needs of my material nature and I am wasting the opportunity to develop my spiritual nature.

If I do not exercise the latent spiritual qualities in me, these are stunted, weakened and ultimately incapacitated. If I exercise only the material qualities, these become powerful and I become more savage, more unjust, crueller and more malicious, I become inferior to the same animals.

Purpose

From now on I have decided to do the following to develop my spiritual qualities:

Research

I will speak to 5 friends outside of school about the identity of man and I will ask them what they think of their spiritual nature. How deep then is the identity crisis in our society?

Lesson 2.

Purpose of lesson: Participants will be able to analyze what true happiness is and we can aspire to achieve it.

Happiness

Reflection: What is happiness? How do I find happiness?

To answer this question, we must first make a distinction between what is a moment of happiness and a state of happiness. The good news that a friend brings us shows the

appreciation that we receive from some people, the goal we reach after looking for it with great effort, give us moments of happiness. In the same way we have moments of happiness when we calm our hunger or our thirst. Throughout his life, man is constantly looking for these moments of happiness. However, these are fleeting, very often we hear "nobody is completely happy" and, in truth, if we only look for moments of happiness, we can never be really happy.

A state of happiness, on the contrary, is a permanent condition of the soul. This comes when man meets his Creator and a permanent relationship of love and unity is established. Through this love, man begins to acquire the qualities of the spirit and these are in turn provide him with permanent happiness. Remember that man has a spiritual nature and another material. The moments of happiness belong to the physical nature while a state of spiritual happiness is the basis of man's life. Therefore, every man is able to live in complete happiness.

The following quote from the book *The Divine Art of Living* tells us about happiness.

"Happiness is life, and sadness is death. Spiritual happiness is eternal life. It is a light which is not followed by darkness ...It is a life that is not followed by death. It is an existence that is not followed by annihilation. This great blessing and precious gift man has only through the guidance of God ... "

A question that arises in the mind is the following: If happiness is a permanent condition of man, why then does suffering exist? Suffering is of two kinds: It can be brought upon us by our own actions. If, for example, we eat too much, we are very likely to have stomach disorders. And if we take poison we will get sick or die. All these sufferings will be caused by our own actions.

Another kind of suffering comes to us without being caused by ourselves. A merchant can lose his business in a fire, an employee can be fired and suffer misery and a farmer can have a bad harvest and suffer economic needs. We can also get sick or have a serious accident that causes us intense physical suffering, a loved one can die and therefore cause sentimental sufferings, or we can fail in our work, a failure that even without

causing us economic harm causes us to suffer morally. All these types of suffering are part of our life and we will never be free of them. We can largely avoid the sufferings caused by our own actions and employ those inevitable sufferings to strengthen our spiritual condition.

In spite of all the sorrows we must remember that the spiritual world always brings us joy and that our condition of permanent spiritual happiness will be affected only superficially when those sorrows come. These rather should serve us to achieve greater perfection. Recall that the most pruned plant is the one that will have the most beautiful buds and the best fruit. Farmers plough the land for a more abundant harvest.

We should not confuse a state of spiritual happiness with the moments of happiness that material joys provide us with. If we concentrate all our efforts on achieving only the moments of happiness, when they disappear we will feel down, sad and dissatisfied. True happiness is of spiritual origin!

Dialogue

Express your opinion about the following affirmations:

- a) When only moments of happiness are sought, after they are achieved, moments of depression and anguish come. One way to avoid this is to seek a spiritual state of happiness that is not altered either by moments of happiness or by moments of anguish and depression.

- b) The propaganda of the press, radio, cinema and television, continually incites me to look for moments of happiness; for this reason, to be happier I must buy more, dress in the latest fashion, smoke cigarettes of a certain brand and have a certain social behaviour. One way to avoid this influence is to set goals for my spiritual development through which I will find a true state of happiness.

PURPOSE:

To search for a state of true happiness, I will try from now on to do the following:

Research:

I will speak to 5 people and ask them what happiness means to them. How many of them are searching for happiness? How many of them look for states of happiness? What conclusion can you draw from this?

Lesson 3.

Purpose of lesson: To understand the importance of justice when dealing with others and our expectations of them and ourselves.

Justice: Essential in my relationships with others

Reflection: Why is justice so fundamental?

In the previous lesson it was said that love is the basis of relationships with others and that it is this love that generates the spiritual forces that maintain peace and Concord among human beings. However, for love to develop in relationships with our fellowmen, it is necessary that it be accompanied by the elementary principles of justice.

It is a very broad topic and it would take many pages to discuss it in detail. For now let's meditate a little on some of the many aspects related to it.

Justice is the most fundamental of human virtues, because it depends on the correct evaluation of all things and allows us to give each one according to his merits.

Through justice we can see with our own eyes and not with the eyes of others and we can know by our own knowledge and not by others. In that sense it is a true light for man and we must always have it before our eyes.

Justice implies that under no circumstances can the limits of moderation be transgressed. It is necessary to manifest justice by action and to act justly ask to count yourself every day.

Only when there is justice in society can the union between men really arise.

Dialogue

Discuss the following statements.

a) The straight path is the path of justice.

- b) we are fair to ourselves.
- c) favour It is different from justice.
- d) If you seek justice, choose for another what you choose for yourself. "
- e) Be fair in our judgment, "O men of understanding heart! He who is unfair in his judgment lacks the characteristics that distinguish the position of man!"
- f) "The light of man is justice, do not turn it off with the opposite winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the emergence of union between men."

Purpose

To act with justice in my relationships I propose to do the following:

- a) Bring myself to account every day.
- b) Try not to transgress the limits of moderation.

c)

d)

Research

- a) identify some of the qualities that man must develop so that in his relations with others justice stands out.
- b) Read the newspapers of the last week and identify some facts in society, both national and international, in which justice is not met.
- c) Talk to 5 people outside of school about what concept they have of justice.

Lesson 4.

Purpose of lesson: To allow participants to make a determination on whether they wish to live in society engulfed in peace or steeped in conflict.

War or peace

Reflection: What happens in a world where there is neither love nor justice?

The answer we see daily both in our relationship with others, in relationships between different peoples of the earth. The wars and conflicts between nations that we hear about daily are only a reflection on an international scale of life and relations between members of a nation, a city with more than one social nucleus or a family. Wars between nations reflect injustice and lack of love among the inhabitants of the Earth. Men fight over a piece of land, the strongest wants to take advantage of the weakest, some live in palaces enjoying all the skills that human ingenuity has created while others barely find a roof to protect themselves from rain and sun and a piece of bread to feed on. Vices and moral degradation have people mired in ignorance seeking only the pleasure of the senses.

What can you expect then, from a society, a country and a world formed by such individuals? We see the result daily in the newspapers. Every day, a new warlike conflict explodes in some part of the globe; some fight for political vindication, others for a piece of land, others for ownership of the resources of the land and there is no lack of conflicts created on purpose, a solution to the economic difficulties of weapons manufacturers. The human talent used to make new and sophisticated weapons is impressive. The financial resources used to keep the arsenals ready to destroy human life could easily and in a short time be used to end the scourge of hunger in the world. What is hope then? Is the question asked by a perplexed generation?

The only solution to the conflicts and wars, despair and hatred in which the world is plunged is the unification of all peoples around a common ideal. The spiritual transformation of each individual will create new societies where love and justice reign and a world formed by these peoples can become a world of peace and love. Who does this job correspond to? To each of us; the spiritual transformation must begin in each individual and little by little, with the spiritual forces released, the total transformation of the world will come. That day is not far; its proximity depends on the efforts of each one of us. Let us do it now before it is too late; before we miss the opportunity. Let us turn the world into a paradise for the good of our children and the generations to come.

Let us read the following quote from the book *The Wisdom of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*:

"I encourage all of you who listen so that you concentrate your thoughts and feelings on Love and Unity. When a thought of war arises, oppose it with a stronger one of Peace. A thought of hate must be destroyed by a greater thought of Love. The thoughts of war bring with them the destruction of all harmony, well-being, tranquillity and happiness. The thoughts of Love bring with them the construction of true brotherhood. Peace, Friendship and Happiness.

When Soldiers of the world draw their swords to kill, God's soldiers must join their hands! For the barbarism of men to disappear by the mercy of God, you must work with purity of heart and sincerity of Soul. And do not think that the peace of the world is an ideal that is impossible to achieve! Nothing is impossible for the Divine Benevolence of God.

If you really want friendship with all races of the earth with our spiritual and positive thinking, how will it be spread; it will become the desire of others, growing in strength more and more, every day, until reaching the minds of all men "

Dialogue

With the teacher as a guide, everyone expresses their opinion about the aspects dealt with in the reflexion and the following statement:

The day will come in which ***"the sovereigns of the world must establish an obligatory treaty and sign an agreement whose dispositions must be clear, inviolable and definite. It must be announced to the whole world and gain ratification by all of humanity..."***

All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this greatest agreement ... The fundamental principle that underlies this solemn act must be so firm that if any government violates it, then any of its provisions, all the governments of the earth must rise to reduce and subdue it, what is more, the human race in its entirety with all power at its disposal must decide to destroy that government'.

Purpose

My contribution to the process of the spiritual transformation of the human race, which will finally bring peace, is:

Research

Search in the newspapers of the last week for comments and news about the conflicts and wars that exist in the world today. Summarize the causes of each conflict in light of the news stories. Do you find anything in common between them?

Lesson 5.

Purpose of lesson: To help participants look at their own prejudices and the roots thereof and determine whether to hold onto them or let them go.

Prejudices or love

Reflection: What does today's world expect, prejudice or love?

In my relationship with other human beings, 2 fundamental questions arise in general: How did I see others and how do they see me? If I think they are my Rivals in the fight

for survival, it is very likely that they will think of me in the same way. As a result, a continuous struggle will arise between us with losers and winners. If, on the contrary, I think that all human beings form a great family the whole of humanity will benefit and the result will be love, solidarity and unity. If I looked only at the spiritual qualities in others I will find similarities, closeness and love. If I looked only at the defects, feelings of pride and superiority will be born in me and that will ultimately be the cause of division and disputes.

“The only difference that exists between the members of the human family is of grade. Some men are like ignorant children and must be educated until they reach maturity. Others are like sick and should be treated with care and affection. None is bad and perverse. We should not feel repulsion for those poor children. We must treat them with great kindness, teaching the ignorant and carefully caring for the sick.

A symptom of the fact that we do not look at each other as members of a single family are the numerous prejudices that exist today in relationships with our neighbours. There are prejudices of race; some believe themselves superior to others because they come from this or that race; there are prejudices of nationality, some feel with greater privileges for being born in this or that country; there are prejudices of religion as many say: I am a believer, that person is unfaithful, I am close to God, and that person is wayward, I am saved, and that person is doomed; there are social prejudices, some are considered superior because they have more money with more knowledge or more influence; but who are we to judge others especially when nobody knows what their own end will be?

Prejudices are the cause of division among men and prevent us from looking at ourselves and our neighbours as members of the same family. The construction of a better world requires the abolition of all kinds of prejudices so that free of all mental and emotional barriers we can consider the world of humanity as a whole without divisions of race, nationality, religion, political parties or social classes.

Dialogue

- a) Comment on the following statements and identify what kind of prejudices they manifest:
- b) Who are you talking about, that black guy?
- c) I always buy my groceries in that market, because there you can buy from poor peasants at a cheaper price.
- d) My religion is the only true one, the others are useless.
- e) What political party do you belong to?
- f) This is a job for men.
- g) All Chinese look the same to me.
- h) What a bad driver. It is surely a woman.
- i)

Purpose

I propose to do a profound examination of myself to try and discover which prejudices I have towards others and proceed to eliminate them.

Research

Speak with many people outside of the school, look at the newspapers, listen to the radio, watch television and try to identify the most common prejudices that exist in our environment.

Lesson 6.

Purpose of lesson: To aid participants in understanding the importance of integrity as a good character trait and understand the implication of corruption not just at an institutional level but also at an individual level.

Corruption or Integrity

Reflection: What is the destiny I want to forge for myself?

The stage of youth is extremely important because it is the time of formation and preparation to one day become a useful instrument for the development of society. The

responsibility of young people, therefore, is very great because society in the near future will be a reflection of what today's youth are.

At some point in their life, every young person has to decide between two attitudes that in today's society are in conflict: corruption or integrity. To resolve this conflict it is necessary to think about our own destiny. What do we want our greatest honour and distinction to be, achieving a prominent position in society no matter at what cost or becoming a source of social welfare among men?

We are forging the future now. Do we want to be a source of harmony, peace, love, guidance, for a society in pain or do we want to abandon ourselves to an easy life in search only of our own well-being and wealth? If we want the first, it is essential to strive to acquire the attributes of spiritual and material perfection.

The first of these attributes of perfection is the acquisition of knowledge and the development of the mind. This is achieved when you have a deep knowledge of the complex and transcendental realities that refer to God and those regulations and procedures that contribute to the progress and civilization of the country itself.

A second attribute of perfection is justice and impartiality. It means not taking into account our own personal benefit and our selfish advantages, but rather considering the welfare of the community as our own benefit. "It means, in short, to consider humanity as a single individual and our own self as a member of that bodily form and to know with certainty that if a penalty or an insult afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest. "

Other attributes of perfection are the fear of God, the love of God expressed in the love of his creatures, the exercise of self-denial, of calm, sincerity, clemency and compassion, having resolution and courage, being generous, loyal, without malice, having zeal and a sense of honour, being magnanimous, having elevated thoughts and having consideration for the rights of others.

Dialogue

At a round table discussion and coordinated by the facilitator, express your opinion about the attributes of perfection which in the previous paragraphs it is proposed that an upright man should acquire.

Purpose

What do I intend to do from now on to achieve the attributes of perfection and become a forger of the society of the future?

Research

In conversations with people outside of school and looking at the daily news, decide which trend has the greatest strength in today's society: corruption or integrity.

Ask several young people your age, who do not belong to the school, their opinion about integrity and corruption.