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Artisanos de Paz: Promoting Everyday Peacebuilding among Children and Youth through a Participatory Theatre-based Intervention in Colombia: Lessons for Northern Ireland

There is increasing attention being drawn from the literature to build peace from the ground up. Critical studies expose the inadequacies of liberal peace regimes advocating for an everyday peace in the peacebuilding regime. Peacebuilding is future orientated and thus calls for a focus on children and youth in the research. Qualitative, participatory, arts-based methods allow for creativity, hope, and change for the future. This article presents qualitative data from 75 children and youth between the ages of 7 and 18 across three urban settings in the post conflict state of Colombia, highlighting potential implications for Northern Ireland 25 years on from the Good Friday Agreement.

Keywords: children, youth, peacebuilding, performing arts, sustainability.

Artisanos de Paz: spodbujanje kolumbijskih otrok k izgradnji trajnostnega miru prek gledališkega udejstvovanja: Lekcija za Severno Irsko

Strokovna literatura vse več pozornosti namenja izgradnji miru od spodaj navzgor. Študije namreč kažejo na neustreznost liberalnih mirovnih režimov in poudarjajo pomen vzpostavljanja trajnostnega miru. Ker je izgradnja miru usmerjena v prihodnost, se morajo raziskave osredotočati zlasti na otroke in mladino. Metode, ki zajemajo aktivno sodelovanje udeležencev na umetniškem področju, spodbujajo ustvarjalnost, ponujajo upanje in omogočajo spremembe in napredek. Članek predstavlja kvalitativne podatke o 75 otrocih, starih med 7 in 18 let, iz treh urbanih okolij post-konfliktne Kolumbije. Ugotovitve so lahko pomembne tudi za Severno Irsko ob 25. obletnici sklenitve Velikonočnega sporazuma.

Ključne besede: otroci, mladi, vzpostavljanje miru, uprizoritvene umetnosti, trajnost, Irsko.

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1. Introduction

Sixty percent of ethnic conflicts going through a peace process are set to relapse highlighting that the seeds for future violence are being produced at present (Gates et al. 2016). Thus, there is a need for research into sustainable approaches to peacebuilding in the sojourn to reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Such peacebuilding approaches have been grounded in Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace involving more than the absence of violence, and what Lederach (1995) has termed as bottom-up approaches, involving those local actors that have previously been neglected. This demonstrates the need to build sustainable peace as advocated through the bottom-up approach (Galtung 1969; Lederach 1995). This approach has been catalysed by the involvement of children and youth in peacebuilding practices and further reinforced by United Nations Resolution 2250 (2015), UN Secretary-General Report (2018), and Resolution 2535 (2020), recognising the essential role of children and youth in peacebuilding practices especially in countries like Colombia trying to transition out of a violent past.

Colombia is a country that has experienced over fifty years of conflict and is now a state in transition from conflict, following the signing of the Havana Peace Accord (2016). Colombia's Law 1732 (2014) enforced the mandatory establishment of a peace core subject in every educational institution in the country. The research has shown the disconnect in its implementation advocating for further research into the expansion of peace education with children and youth to create a culture of peace founded within the everyday and bring about sustainable peace in settings of protracted conflict (Caro 2020). Colombian children and youth have some involvement in theatre projects.

Therefore, this article extends the growing body of research that is arts-based methods for peacebuilding. Increasingly, research is demonstrating the transformative power of children and youth in building peace, challenging the dichotomy of youth as victims or preparators (Pruitt & Jeffrey 2020). Engaging children and youth through arts-based methods, allows for participatory meaningful research through the acknowledgment of their agency as actors. Valladares and Berents (2022) highlight how children and youth are mobilising in the everyday to promote peace in society. Often these acts go unnoticed for their larger societal impact. There is a need to acknowledge the active role children and youth are already playing in promoting peace in the everyday as well as the need to invest further in peace interventions with children and youth to bring about peace dividends.

The article builds upon the growing research involving children and youth in the peacebuilding process, both in the immediate post peace accord environment as well as on an ongoing basis. This research involved adopting performing arts-based methods across three disadvantaged areas of Bogotá (capital city of

Colombia) and Soacha (a neighbouring municipality to Bogotá). Consequently, this article presents the findings of a creative peace education program from both the views of the children and youth and the adult stakeholders involved, as well as the possibilities of implementing effective actions for peacebuilding through the performing arts. Young people are also neglected and excluded from the Northern Ireland peace process so the article also draws some conclusions that are relevant to youth involvement in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

1.1 Children, Youth and Peacebuilding

The literature demonstrates that a dichotomy often exists between the view of the child as a victim or perpetrator of violence (Pruitt & Jeffrey 2020). A view reinforced by youth bulge theory (McEvoy-Levy 2011). Marijan (2017) highlights a similar finding, as youth workers in Northern Ireland stated that young people are misrepresented and judged, not viewed for their possibility to contribute to the peace process but instead seen as posing a risk to it. It is this very concept that solidifies a continuation of a culture of war as the youth workers discussed the resulting lack of opportunities for youth resulting in their antisocial behaviours ultimately caused by disillusionment with the state (Marijan 2017).

On the contrary, child and youth involvement offers the best means for sustaining peace, because “a peace agreement’s endurance depends on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, and their perceptions of what that peace process has achieved” (McEvoy-Levy 2011, 5). Taylor (2020) highlights the future orientation of peacebuilding and calling for the involvement of children and youth in the peacebuilding agenda, allowing children and youth to be seen as part of the solution instead of contributing to the problem. That is why it is important to know the perspectives of a group of children and young people who are committed to a program of peacebuilding and reconciliation through the arts, such as *Artesanos de Paz*.

The ways children and youth contribute to building and sustaining peace are multifaceted like finding work to feed their families, looking after elderly citizens among others and, in many cases, ignored for their contribution and impact on building sustainable peace. Ideas of local ownership, peace from the bottom up and child and youth involvement, while widely accepted in theory continues to be neglected in practice (Donais 2009). Yet, studies have and are continuing to show that children and youth play a vital part in building and maintaining peace. They may be involved politically in the peace process (McKeown & Taylor 2017). Alternatively, Taylor’s (2020) Developmental Peacebuilding Model (DPM) suggests a psychosocial aspect to the involvement of children and youth in peace processes. While Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) promote the ways children and youth contribute to building peace in the everyday resistance they adapt in the face of adversity.

This intervention adapts both the DPM as well as the Everyday Peace Theory to explain how the use of theatre-based intervention can contribute to building peace in Colombia, and how the results could offer food for thought in the Northern Ireland context. Examples of child and youth involvement have been gaining traction in Northern Ireland's peace process (see Marijan 2017; McEvoy-Levy 2011; McKeown & Taylor 2017; Taylor 2022). Yet, as witnessed by newer studies mentioned below, division continues to be a problem in Northern Ireland, as Marijan (2017) found that while there may be peace, the communities of Northern Ireland remain divided. This finding relates to Mac Ginty's (2006) argument of "no war, no peace". This article aims to discuss the findings of a performing arts-based intervention in the immediate post war context of Colombia, discussing implications for Northern Ireland 25 years post peace agreement.

1.2 Performing Arts and Peacebuilding

The relationship between the arts, peacebuilding and educating for peace is established within the literature (Foy 2018; Lopes Cardozo et al. 2015; Moschou & Anaya 2016; Pruitt & Jeffrey 2020). For over fifty years, theatre and the performing arts have been used around the globe to promote peace. In the 1960s, for example, Augusto Boal founded a community theatre to give a voice to the oppressed. Peacebuilding itself, has been described as an art (Lederach 1995). Grassroots, locally produced plays, poetry, and pictures inspired and informed the formal peace process in Mozambique in the 1980s (Mitchell 2020). An increasing number of scholars are recognising the potential of the creative arts for contributing to peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes (Mitchell 2020). The performing arts have been cited as forming or transforming messages in a unique social space, where people learn through doing and may at the same time confirm or transform their identities, views on the world, and connections with others (Moschou & Anaya 2016). The arts are a potent tool for communication across psychological, emotional, and physical boundaries. The creative acts involved in the arts hold the potential to break the silence, mainstream the voices of the voiceless, and give full expression to the moral imagination of divided communities (Arai 2011).

Freire (2010) believed in the political dimension of art and aimed to unify the audience and the actors through addressing oppression with the intention of leading to greater social change (cited in Moschou & Anaya 2016). However, McGrath (1981) stated that theatre can never cause social change, it can only circulate pressure towards change, help people celebrate their strengths and build their self-confidence, above all it can be the way people find their voice, their solidarity, and their collaborative determination (cited in Burbridge & Stevenson 2020). Viewed through this lens, the arts can be seen as contributing to the peace education paradigm. Freire believed in the pedagogical aspect of

theatre (Burbridge & Stevenson 2020), promoting the idea of arts as education. This is further reinforced in the policy as UNESCO highlighted the crucial role of alternative means in peace education (Falt 2021). Learning is “intended to prepare the learners to contribute toward the achievement of peace” (Reardon 1982, 38). The parallels between theatre, pedagogy and creating a culture for peace can be seen when viewing the performing arts as giving a voice to the oppressed, providing them with a space to address the psychosocial aspects of war and conflict, and acting as a transformative space. This considered, the arts are not without its critique in its efforts to contribute to the peacebuilding field. Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) argue that the arts can be regressive as well as progressive fuelling conflict while also solving it. It is about a process to engage conflicting parties and provide a space to overcome the conflict. Adopting the use of performing arts for peacebuilding involves a slow process of building peace sustainably, it is not a quick fix often resulting in critique of this approach.

That said, research into the transformative power of the arts is needed in the current post COVID-19 climate, as studies indicate the fragility facing the arts and culture sector as well as the uncertainty of funding directed toward this sector in the future (McCallion 2020). Arts-based interventions are capable of nourishing capacities required for everyday peacebuilding. These capacities involve empowering children and youth by giving them a voice and providing them with necessary life skills to promote prosocial behaviour.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted theatre-based methods as a form of peace education, providing the children and youth the space to engage creatively with their emotions, with their communication and conflict resolution skills, to furnish them with life skills in the hope of creating a culture of peace both now and in the future. This study involved four months of ethnographic fieldwork in Colombia's capital of Bogotá. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in *Projecto de Vida* foundations located in three barrio communities on the outskirts of Bogotá-Usaquen, Ciudad Bolivar and Soacha. Qualitative data was gathered in the form of observations, notetaking, focus groups with the children and youth, informal conversations with the children and youth recorded by the researcher, as well as taking photographs and videos, and conducting semi-structured interviews with the adult stakeholders involved in the intervention. Access to the theatre teachers and researchers was granted through a memorandum of understanding between the theatre group and Konrad Lorenz University in Bogotá. Findings were produced through a process of thematic analysis (Cohen et al. 2018).

2.2 Methods and Data Generation

The *Artesanos de Paz* performing arts-based intervention was conducted over a nine-month period with the final show presented in April 2022. This article focuses on semi-structured interviews conducted with children, youth and adults involved in the theatre-based intervention. The theatre-based workshops were conducted three days a week across the three municipalities of Usaquen, Soacha, and Ciudad Bolivar. Toward the end of the intervention, interviews were conducted with five key adult stakeholders that included one male and one female theatre teacher, one male and one female auxiliary researcher, as well as one female foundation leader. Ethical consent was received through the bioethics committee at Konrad Lorenz University. Interviews were also completed with 20 children and youth ranging from seven to 18 years of age. Consent forms were provided to the parents of the children that were signed and returned to the foundation to allow the children to participate.

2.3 Procedure

Data was gathered three days a week over the four-month period, that is one day a week for each foundation. Each day spent in the foundation involved partaking in the theatre-based workshop and focus groups, taking photographs, videos, recording observations and taking detailed notes on the conversations and interactions with the children and young people. Semi-structured interviews with key adult stakeholders were concluded toward the cessation of the intervention. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The plurality of methods used and recorded allowed for the researcher to return to the data on numerous occasions, and analyse it as needed. Each stand of data was intertwined, informing, and complimenting each other rather than following a linear data analysis (Berents 2013).

2.4 Data Analysis

A process of thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the interviews. Cohen et al. (2018) argued that analysis for this type of data should involve organizing and describing the data before developing an understanding of the participants perspectives by noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities. The data analysis involved reflecting on the data, listening to the interview recordings, transcribing, and making notes on emergent themes. An inductive approach was utilized by the researcher when analyzing this data. This approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory (Creswell & Creswell 2017). This path is closely aligned with qualitative and interpretive methods, as is the intention of this research design. It involved making specific observations throughout the fieldwork to identify

recurring themes and patterns, as well as listening, transcribing, and making detailed notes of the interviews conducted in a process of identifying recurring themes. A process of manual thematic analysis (Cohen et al. 2018) was adopted, to identify emerging themes as well as the clustering of themes and subthemes. Initially, preliminary themes were decided upon and grouped into a table format, before deciding on final themes relating to peace.

3. Results and Discussion

This study investigates the role of the performing arts for peace education in Colombia, which can provide useful insights for the Northern Ireland context. Qualitative analysis revealed a perspective of theatre as a form of peace education, shifting the narrative from those formal practices often associated with traditional forms of peace education and instead advocating for what Reardon and Snauwaert (2015) highlighted as the informal sites of education. Second, the theatre workshops allowed for the emergence and further development of an everyday peace among children and youth, showcasing their resiliency and ability to navigate the challenges in their everyday lives, demonstrated by their hope for change. Finally, this study revealed implications for the contribution to the sustainable peace agenda through the engagement and empowerment of youth viewing them as active agents in the peacebuilding agenda both now and in the future.

3.1 Educating for Peace

The findings from the study highlight implications for peace education, through providing the children and youth with vital life skills and prosocial behaviour. Peace education is central to the building and sustaining of peace in countries affected by conflict and becomes further nuanced in countries emerging from conflict as highlighted by law 1732 in Colombia. Despite this, the research is demonstrating the disconnect in its implementation, highlighting the need for the expansion of peace education to include those informal sites of education as well as the expansion of the means in which we educate for peace (Bajaj 2015; Caro 2020; Reardon & Snauwaert 2015). Implementing creative means to peace education, such as *Artesanos de Paz*, in both schools and community organisations, showcases how the performing arts can be used as a vehicle for peace education. Countries such as Colombia and Northern Ireland have experienced periods of prolonged war and violence. Advances in the field of neurobiology demonstrate the intergenerational impact of such adversity on the individual so that any peacebuilding efforts need to be constantly engaged with to maintain and sustain peace in the everyday and for the future (Taylor 2022). It was evident at the beginning of this intervention that the child and youth participants presented with challenging behaviour.

There are some days when I leave so completely destroyed you know. These kids have so much energy and it is difficult (Theatre teacher 2).

Everyone comes here, and they just give up, because it is difficult, the kids can be difficult (Foundation leader 1).

Yet, the theatre provided the children and youth with an environment to transform their energy and frustrations into something powerful.

And at the same time their enormous capacity for resilience bringing to humour his personal, family and community tragedies. That is HIS POWER to transform and not replicate in their lives the harmful (Theatre teacher 1).

The findings from this study are consistent with the literature suggesting the need to broaden the scope of research on peace education. This was evident in the sample as the children portrayed negative narratives of their schooling experience.

We are only educated in obedience (Luis, 11, Ciudad Bolivar).

Instead, they viewed the theatre methods as giving them a space to learn skills to help them develop positive behavioral attributes in their everyday lives.

[The theatre] is teaching us to understand ourselves. Teaching me to be the best person (Andres, 12, Ciudad Bolivar).

The theatre is teaching me to respect my friends and family and other people, which is important to know forgiveness (Paula, 13, Ciudad Bolivar).

It is not necessary to truncate the cognitive training of the child [...] to isolate him from a reading because it is difficult for him to read, rather we must motivate him and give him confidence so that he can practice freely in the workshops what is difficult for him (Theatre teacher 1).

Many studies suggest that often peacebuilding efforts fail because they don't provide meaningful avenues for agency by their participants (Hancock 2017). Agency, rather than just the more limited idea of local ownership, is key because it is a satisfier for a range of psychosocial needs, which include identity, dignity, role-defense, self-determination, or self-actualization (Hancock 2017).

A clear dichotomy was presented between the type of learning they were exposed to through the theatre as opposed to the learning in their schools. The children and youth were aware of the learning they were experiencing throughout the intervention, helping them to develop their prosocial skills. When comparing this to past research by Taylor (2020), it is possible to see how prosocial

behaviour as a form of peace education for children and youth with wider societal implications can be. Thus, these findings have potential implications for policy, particularly concerning peace education in post accord societies. The literature calls for the need to expand our understanding as well our acceptance of where peace education can occur, something reflected among the view of the children and youth in this study. The children and youth were aware of the learning they were experiencing about themselves and their relationships, helping them to become better people and to claim their voice, empowering them, and allowing them to claim their agency resonating with Reardon and Snauwaert's (2015) theory of peace education as human rights education.

3.2 Everyday Peace

This findings from this study supported previous research advocating for an understanding of peace located in the everyday (Berents 2013; Mac Ginty 2021). The findings demonstrated the children and youth's ability to acknowledge the everyday violence in their lives but contest them and hope for better in the future, highlighting ways children and youth are already engaging in peacebuilding processes. The children and youth emersed themselves in a process of change and transformation, often feeling shy but engaged none the less to inspire change in their surroundings.

The children found in very difficult to speak at the start because they live in an environment where they don't speak much (Theatre teacher 1).

Laura, she was too shy, she would stand in the corner and even though she would come to the workshops she wouldn't partake (Theatre teacher 2).

Studies such as Berents (2013), found that children in Colombia often navigate many challenges in their everyday lives, demonstrating resilience and a form of resistance to survive. This form of peace may often go neglected as it is founded in those bottom-up approaches toward peace and in the local context of their communities and foundations (Mac Ginty 2021). Parallels between Colombia and Northern Ireland can be drawn from Halliday and Ferguson (2016), as they discuss the hope amongst the young people in Northern Ireland. One youth talked about this hope being within them all stating:

I want to be a beacon, a lighthouse, so I can save all the others (Ruis, 15, Soacha).

Yet it is important to note the perils of finding a state of contentment with everyday peace, especially in the context of the in betweenness of war to peace (Marian 2017). While it is important to acknowledge everyday peace in a post accord

context, the question of quality must be addressed. Marijan (2017) discusses participant comments stating, “we live in peace, but we live apart.” An outlook of everyday peace could be founded in this comment, yet it brings into question the meaning of true peace or an inclusive peace (Taylor 2022), whereby integration occurs, and peace can be sustainable. As argued by Marijan (2017) everyday divisions can be interpreted as peaceful but are they truly transformative and that is where the theatre can come in. Again, similarities can be drawn between the two contexts as the child and youth participants in the Colombian study voiced their frustration with their surroundings and the levels of inequality and corruption present in their lives.

There is a lot of violence in our community, and sometimes I am scared (Janet, 10, Soacha).

You know us youth, here, we have a lot of problems, no water, drugs, sexual abuse, drinking and violence (Christopher, 12, Ciudad Bolivar).

The police they are corrupt in this country, but is that ok, what can we do about it? (Jon, 12, Ciudad Bolivar).

These reflections from the children and youth bring into question the durability of the current state of peace. The natural optimism and hope present within children and youth needs to be listened to, invested in, and encouraged otherwise there is a risk that they too become disillusioned with the process and resort to disengaging with the peace process.

3.3 Sustainable Peace

This article addresses the topic of sustainable peace, engaging with the literature that necessitated children and youth's involvement in bottom-up peacebuilding approaches. Previous research has suggested that the post accord generation are in a key position to carry forward the sustainable peace agenda (Taylor 2020). Despite the post accord branding of children and youth in Colombia, the findings demonstrate that they are still facing the repercussions of a tumultuous past. Studies in Northern Ireland showcase similar findings (Marijan 2017; McKeown & Taylor 2017). This demonstrates the need for continuing forms of peace education in Northern Ireland, as stated by Taylor (2022) because war that last decades takes decades to heal.

You can see the change in them, and you want to help the change and maybe in 15 years [...] I hope they will have the memories and they will be strong, because theatre is a long process, but I hope it will stay with them. [...] we can see the change without own eyes (Theatre teacher 1).

The problems that these kids have – we cannot solve these problems overnight – it is a process (Theatre teacher 2).

Time is a great healer (Anna, 15, Usaquen).

Previous research has suggested that in a post accord society the everyday violence's of poverty, drug abuse, sexual violence, and lack of infrastructure remain evident threatening the longevity of peace (Scheper-Hughes & Borgois 2004). It is necessary to engage all members of society including those most marginalised to achieve long lasting peace (Lederach 1997), and to find ways that allow these members to address and challenges the status quo as suggested previously in the findings. This considered, Donais (2009) argues that local perspectives are more often viewed as hurdles to be overcome or obstacles to be avoided than as potential sources of sustainable solutions, becoming further complicated when involving children and youth. This perspective needs to be challenged for sustainable peacebuilding to be fully implemented.

The study addressed the topic of sustainable peace in two ways. First, it engaged in bottom-up approaches with children and youth, acknowledging them as key actors in the peace process. The findings showcase the ability of the theatre to create a safe space for the children and youth to claim their voice and know they were being listened to and respected. These findings demonstrate important implications for the implementation of the United Nations peace agenda, highlighting that sustainable peace is only possible if children are provided with a safe space promoting their agency and respecting their decision-making abilities. Moreover, this study supports previous research which claims that young people's exclusion from negotiated peace processes is therefore counterproductive to sustaining peace, since the frustration associated with this exclusion is "one of the principal reasons groups resorts to violence and protests" (Paffenholz 2015, 1). Youth are transgenerational guarantors of the durability and transformative potential of peace agreements and the arts can be a favourable factor in this sense as art can be fundamental for a transformative education, not only in academics, but also in socioemotional aspects, since it favours people to see the world in new ways, and it also contributes to the development of empathy and compassion, as well as facilitating the expression of deep feelings (Chapman & O'Gorman 2022). Others also suggest that arts-based interventions can favour the development of emotional self-regulation (Williams et al. 2020).

Second, this study sought to build the prosocial peaceful behavior of its participants. The findings indicate the positive developments in the sample's behavior from both the narratives of the children and the adult stakeholders.

What we have learned [...] that helps us to become better people (Christopher, 9, Ciudad Bolivar).

The theatre has helped me to talk about pain in a positive way (Sophie, 9, Soacha).

I have more respect for my friends and my family [...] I learned to put myself in their shoes from the theatre classes (Anna, 15, Usaquen).

You can see the change in them, and you want to help the change and maybe in 15 years [...] I hope they will have the memories and they will be strong, because theatre is a long process, but I hope it will stay with them. [...] we can see the change with our own eyes (Theatre teacher 1).

This study empowered children and youth, providing them with skills that better allowed them to manage emotions, dream of better futures, and challenge the sites of everyday adversity in their lives. This study demonstrated the ability of children and youth to address and challenge the injustices in their environment, while providing them with the necessary skills to deal with this in creative ways which can contribute to building sustainable peace. This is consistent with the literature which suggests that the development of children and youth's prosocial behavior on the micro level can have wider societal impact and thus contribute to sustainable peace (Taylor 2020). This finding has important implications for the Northern Ireland context, as the theme of issues remaining unresolved and festering 25 years on is ongoing.

As argued by Wallis (2017), relative peace is not enough. For peace to be truly sustainable attitudes and legacy of the past also need to be dealt with more effectively than is currently the case. More time is needed for old wounds to heal and reconciliation to take place, as found in Marijan's (2017) research, participants stated that it would be difficult to change perceptions in one generation, with their belief that it would not happen in 30–40 years. These perceptions then contribute to the sense of what one local community worker describes as an "interim peace" and constant worry about how long this peace will last (Marijan 2017). This study has demonstrated the power of the arts for its contribution to peace education, which is vital in the current post COVID19 climate that has witnessed considerable funding cuts to this sector (McCallion 2020).

A limitation of this study is its lack of ability to test the longitudinal impact of such an intervention. Such a limitation relates to critique of performing arts in peace education, as it is future focused and necessitate process (Taylor & Lederach 2014). Therefore, immediate effects for peacebuilding cannot be guaranteed. Yet Donais (2009) highlights the preoccupation of peacebuilding outcomes advocating instead for peacebuilding processes. In other words, the goal of peacebuilding should not be simply to erect the central institutional pillars of a liberal democratic state as rapidly as possible in the aftermath of conflict, but rather to ensure that these pillars rest upon solid foundations, are adjusted to local conditions, and develop not only through a genuine and collaborative partnership with war-affected communities, but also in ways that are supportive of the broader goals of sustainable peace (Donais 2009; Taylor & Lederach 2014).

4. Conclusion

The topic of peace remains ambiguous and multifaceted. The importance of the local in each context proven by the imminent failings of the neoliberal peacebuilding approach. This research has highlighted implications for peacebuilding and peacekeeping using creative arts-based methods. However, Donais (2009) writes that to be sustainable, post-conflict settlements must be firmly rooted in domestic social realities. Therefore, while lessons can be taken from this research it does not seek to reach an unambiguous or definitive solution to building and sustaining peace. Further, no amount of training or institutional development will produce positive results where domestic actors are not really interested in changing the status quo. Each war context and pathway to peace is different. Yet, there are lessons to be learned that should be applied in any peace pathway and that is the agency of children and youth, as they continue to be an underexploited peace resource. Their contribution to peacebuilding regimes has been proven in a range of contexts throughout the globe and in this research's findings. As shown in this study a combination of empowering children and youth to claim their agency, acknowledging their contribution to everyday peace and investing in creative means of peace education in both education and community facilities is needed for children and youth to be meaningfully engaged in peacebuilding processes.

As demonstrated in both theory and practice, the psychological impact of war and violence remains deeply entrenched in a population. Therefore, parallels can be drawn between Colombia and Northern Ireland, both states suffering through decades of internal conflict. Taylor (2022) draws attention to the fact that generations of war take generations to heal, and this needs to be considered in the context of Northern Ireland despite it now entering its 25th year anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The research based in Northern Ireland, as well as the tensions that arise in news reports every year, demonstrate the fragility of peace in any post accord milieu.

As an international community, we continue to make mistakes when approaching the topic of peace. New and continued wars remain an imminent threat, with old wars threatening to relapse with mounting tensions (Gates et al. 2016). Yet rather than adopting a what works approach much of the literature remains focused on what has failed in peacebuilding efforts (Donais 2009). Colombia is in the early stages of forging a pathway to peace compared to the Northern Ireland context that now finds itself 25 years down the road of a post peace agreement. Therefore, it remains an impossible task to foresee the path that Colombia will take to peace. This considered, the involvement of children and youth in building and sustaining peace is an essential component of this journey and is becoming better established within the research and literature, offering potential learnings to the context of Northern Ireland.

While this series focuses on the successful 25-year anniversary of the GFA, it is evident that tensions still exist across Northern Ireland (Marijan 2017). Adding to this, Northern Ireland is no longer split between a Catholic/Protestant divide, but now hosts a multitude of cultures and ethnicities. Therefore, peace education efforts need to be ongoing to deal with the structural root causes of violence that continue to permeate the generations, as well as the new tensions that could arise. If we are to see another 25-year anniversary of the GFA, time and investment will have to be directed toward children and youth with their ongoing and potential contribution to the success of peacebuilding more widely acknowledged.

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