

Building citizenship at the University: A proposal for coexistence and conflict resolution

Construyendo ciudadanía en la universidad: Una propuesta para la convivencia y resolución de conflictos

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Chávez Ponce Daniel Fernando¹
and Norzagaray Benítez Claudia Cecilia²

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¹ Corresponding author. Bachelor's degree in Psychology, specialized in Educational Area, and Master's degree in Educational Innovation, both from Universidad de Sonora. Currently a part-time professor at Universidad Kino and Universidad Vizcaya de las Américas.

Email: ps.edu.dfcp@gmail.com ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7261-6897>

² Bachelor of Psychology, specialized in Clinical Area at Universidad de Sonora; Master's degree in Educational Development from the Research Center in Virtual Education and Doctorate in Education from the National University of Distance Education. Currently a full-time professor in the Department of Psychology and Communication Sciences at Universidad de Sonora.

Email: cecilia.norzagaray@unison.mx ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4695-112X>

Abstract

Higher Education Institutions have the commitment to provide comprehensive education to students, which means that quality education cannot be achieved without including the development of citizenship competencies. These competencies are grouped into three areas: coexistence and peace, democratic participation and responsibility, and plurality, identity, and appreciation of differences. Since conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction, it is essential to develop skills that allow for peaceful resolution.

Therefore, this paper presents a proposal to promote citizenship competencies through coexistence and peace, by teaching conflict resolution through the development of collaboration skills. The proposal is structured around two main components: a needs assessment conducted with a sample of university students, and a theoretical foundation based on the constructivist approach, using collaborative learning as the method. From this approach, creative, meaningful, and integrative teaching strategies are derived.

The objective of the proposal is to develop skills for collaborative conflict resolution, emotional management, improvement of interpersonal relationships, and assuming leadership roles without authoritarianism an essential aspect for students' academic performance and their future role in society. The conclusion highlights the need for universities to provide students with opportunities and spaces that encourage participation and interaction with various educational stakeholders, with the primary goal of building citizenship.

Keywords: citizenship education, coexistence, conflict resolution, university students.

Resumen

Las Instituciones de Educación Superior tienen el compromiso de formar integralmente al estudiantado, por lo que no es posible aludir a una educación de calidad si no se contempla la formación de competencias ciudadanas. Estas se agrupan en tres ámbitos: convivencia y paz, participación y responsabilidad democrática y pluralidad, identidad y valoración de diferencias. Dado que el conflicto es



inevitable que se presente en la interacción de los individuos, es relevante desarrollar habilidades que permitan resolverlos de manera pacífica. Por ello, el presente trabajo presenta una propuesta para promover competencias ciudadanas a través de la convivencia y la paz, enseñando la resolución de conflictos a partir de la promoción de habilidades para la colaboración. La propuesta se estructuró a partir de dos aspectos: un diagnóstico de necesidades en una muestra de estudiantes universitarios, y teóricamente se retoma el enfoque constructivista, teniendo como método el aprendizaje colaborativo de las que se derivan estrategias didácticas creativas, significativas e integradoras. La propuesta tiene por objetivo el desarrollo de habilidades para resolver conflictos de manera colaborativa, el manejo de las emociones, la mejora de las relaciones interpersonales y asumir el rol de liderazgo sin autoritarismo, aspecto fundamental para el desempeño del estudiante y su futuro rol en la sociedad. Se concluye que es necesario que las universidades ofrezcan a los estudiantes instancias y escenarios para promover la participación y la interacción con los diferentes actores educativos, con el fin principal de construir ciudadanía.

Palabras clave: formación ciudadana, convivencia, resolución de conflictos, universitarios.

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have a significant commitment to the comprehensive training of young professionals. This means equipping them not only to solve problems but also to develop generic competencies that enable them to function in professional, personal, and social spheres.

Citizenship Education (CE) is an integral part of this training process because, in addition to being considered a life skill, it strengthens attitudes, values, and skills related to individuals' interaction with their environment. It encourages an active, participatory, and dynamic role within the university and broader society. Good academic performance alone is not enough to be considered a good citizen; rather, active, transformative, and critical engagement is required (Venet, 2019).

Many of today's problems stem from a lack of

respect for diversity, exclusion, intolerance, and violence. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a stance opposed to these attitudes, which contradict public policies advocated by organizations like UNESCO (2015) and national development plans such as Mexico's 2019–2024 National Development Plan (PND, 2019). As Martínez (2006) states, a quality university education cannot be claimed without including learning about and for citizenship.

Although CE is often included in institutional documents at the university level, there is a lack of real formative actions. This is because, as León (2020) argues, universities have traditionally been tasked with producing disciplinary knowledge and practical problem-solving skills, with less emphasis on attitudinal components. Citizenship is not built naturally; HEIs must create interactive spaces that prepare students to live together with others, respect individual differences and human rights, and actively practice citizenship. Thus, citizenship education can be understood as “disciplinary technical knowledge in the service of community development” (p. 377) in other words, any process that teaches individuals to live in community with the aim of integrating and participating, considering elements such as commitment, communication, knowledge of rights and responsibilities, and their exercise.

At the university level, this involves spreading, defending, and exercising human rights as the foundation for peaceful coexistence, participating in political life, and critically understanding society, its institutions, and its norms. It is essential that university students adopt values that enable them to practice behaviors and comply with norms that improve daily interactions within educational institutions. This includes involving students in decision-making processes, the creation of rules, and awareness of the main issues affecting their educational community so they can engage peacefully in efforts to improve coexistence (Ortiz & Lemus, 2020).

Practicing citizenship in and from school presents various challenges. In response, Colombia's Ministry of National Education (MEN, 2011) proposed a set of citizenship competencies, defined as an integration of attitudes, knowledge, emotions, and cognitive skills necessary for participatory citizenship. A study by Mescua, Ramos, Ramírez, Cruz, and Caycho (2020) among university students found that they

scored at average levels in these areas, highlighting the need to emphasize learning strategies and the development of emotional skills. They point out that today, teaching involves not only the transmission of knowledge but also emotional components.

When exploring the competencies universities seek in their graduates, a consensus emerged around the importance of knowledge for practicing citizenship such as intercultural awareness, understanding the consequences of decision-making, empathy, reflection, critical thinking, and emotional skills like assertiveness, constructive dialogue, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation (Hamra, 2020). These are essential for building participatory and democratic competencies.

Citizenship competencies are divided in three areas: 1) peaceful and constructive coexistence with others who may have different or even opposing interests, goals, or objectives 2) the creation of agreements and consensus around rules and decisions that govern people and aim to promote the common good, 3) the practice of citizenship itself, which involves building a society based on mutual respect. In this sense, citizenship competencies are the abilities that help individuals constructively face each of these challenges (Murillo y Castañeda, 2007; Ruiz y Chaux, 2005; MEN, 2014.).

For the purposes of this work, the focus is on the area of education for coexistence and peace, which is understood as the ability to work with others, resolve differences, and manage conflicts that arise in school interactions within educational institutions (Fierro, 2011, in Verdeja, 2013). These elements are interconnected, as coexistence provides a practical component and social harmony to democracy in the school environment. It promotes collaborative work through respect and non-discrimination, mutual support, the promotion of human rights, dialogue, appreciation and acceptance of others, and even ecological awareness in interactions with the environment (Montoya, 2008).

According to Chaux (2012), there are eight competencies for peaceful coexistence: anger management, empathy, perspective-taking, generation of options, consideration of consequences, critical thinking, active listening, and assertiveness. Three of these are related to emotions (anger management, empathy, and assertiveness), while the rest are integrative competencies that help guide emotional motivations, serving as a cognitive

counterbalance to emotions. This shows that in building citizenship, we also build coexistence and sustainable security through the reduction of aggression, conflict resolution in schools, and the reduction of bullying.

In this regard, Chaux (2012, cited in Zuta, Velasco, and Rodríguez, 2014) proposes five pedagogical principles for achieving civic learning:

1. Learning by doing: This means that conflict resolution is learned by actually resolving differences and trying to do so when necessary not just by hearing about it.
2. Meaningful learning: Refers to designing situations in which students can relate the content to real life and find meaning and usefulness in their surroundings, either through real or simulated situations.
3. Progressive increase in learning complexity: When teaching civic competencies, challenges should gradually increase in complexity, but always be solvable and attainable.
4. Self-efficacy: Giving students confidence that they are capable of solving the problems they face in everyday life, which closely relates to the previous point.
5. Intrinsic motivation: It is important that students value the use of these skills in their daily lives and are not forced to use them; they should perceive the benefits in their lives, in how they relate to others, and in their commitment to a more just society.

One of the goals of Citizenship Education is for individuals to coexist peacefully and constructively. This does not mean that harmony or the absence of conflict must always prevail, as in any social group with diverse interests, goals, and ideals, it is complex to avoid disagreements. Instead, the expectation is that conflicts be resolved without aggression and in a way that benefits all parties, and that individuals assert their rights and those of others and turn to regulatory bodies when necessary (Mejía and Perafán, 2006).

A conflict arises when there is incompatibility between individuals who, due to their differences, are unable to reach agreements this is inherent to human interaction (Pinilla and Mendieta, 2013). Conflicts should not be viewed as negative but



rather as opportunities for learning and personal development within society, offering the chance to promote different types of learning that support students' development by creating spaces for reflection (Baldovino and Reyes, 2017).

In light of this, it is extremely important to recognize the skills students have to resolve conflicts, which are developed daily in school interactions and are known as Conflict Resolution Styles. These are defined as an individual's tendency to behave in the face of incompatibility in thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes with another person, aiming to find solutions that satisfy all parties involved (Holst, Galicia, Gómez, and Degante, 2017).

Thomas and Kilmann (2014) categorize these styles using the intersection of two variables:

1. Assertiveness, understood as the ability of a person to address and resolve conflicts.
2. Cooperation, referring to the willingness to resolve conflicts with the support of others.

Based on the level of these traits in individuals, five styles are identified:

1. Competing: High assertiveness but low cooperation, where the person acts to satisfy their own interests at the expense of the other party.
2. Collaborating: A balance between assertiveness and cooperation. This can be considered the ideal style, as it focuses on teamwork to resolve conflicts by exploring disagreements and seeking creative solutions (Luna, 2018).
3. Compromising: A moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation, aiming to find a timely and mutually acceptable solution by establishing a middle ground.
4. Avoiding: Neither assertive nor cooperative; the individual avoids the conflict, postpones its resolution, or simply withdraws.
5. Accommodating: Low assertiveness and high cooperation; the individual yields to the desires and interests of the other party, often obeying or acting altruistically.

Carreño and Rozo (2020) conducted a systematic analysis to identify strategies developed to foster

coexistence and peace through education, which are organized into four categories: 1) prevention, including actions to manage emotions, strengthen values, and promote dialogue, tolerance, and respect, 2) participation, involving projects to raise students' awareness of their democratic responsibilities, such as organizing pedagogical assemblies 3) intervention, referring to actions taken to reduce acts of violence and 4) use of technology, which acts as a cross-cutting element to support the creation of digital and virtual spaces focused on peace within instructions.

In light of the perspectives on conflict resolution as a set of skills to improve school coexistence and peace within educational institutions, and as a foundation for students' participation in their educational environment, a program has been designed to promote conflict resolution through dialogue, collaboration, empathy, leadership, and affective engagement. The proposal is based on the pedagogical principles of constructivism and collaborative learning.

2. Foundation of the proposal

Two aspects guided the formulation of the proposal:

1. An evaluation of conflict-resolution styles and a description of how students perceive school coexistence at the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and 2. Once areas needing improvement were identified, a theoretical foundation was established to understand the best way to teach these skills to university students. Both elements are described below.

3. Evaluation of school coexistence and conflict resolution

A needs assessment was conducted using a mixed-method research approach. Quantitative data, which allow for generalization to other populations, were gathered and supplemented with qualitative perceptions from students regarding coexistence and conflict resolution, deepening the understanding of the subject (Creswell, 2009).

For the quantitative component, the Thomas and Kilmann (2014) "Modes of Conflict Handling" instrument was administered via a Google Forms survey to identify students' predominant conflict-

resolution styles. Data were analyzed with SPSS, scoring raw responses to determine percentages for each style. Results showed that the compromise style predominates, along with a tendency to avoid conflict; collaboration scored in the mid-low range, indicating that students seldom work in teams to resolve issues affecting school coexistence.

Qualitatively, a two-hour focus group was conducted via Microsoft Teams to explore students' perception of school coexistence and conflict resolution at the HEI, based on their experiences. Analysis in Atlas.Ti v.9 identified two major categories: school coexistence and conflict resolution. Students perceived generally pleasant interactions with peers and some faculty, crediting institutional spaces for interaction. However, they cited the need for accessible protocols for resolving conflicts and extracurricular activities that enhance institutional participation. They also pointed to how emotions influence conflicts and a lack of teamwork leadership skills. Differences in thought, beliefs, and ideas on social issues were reported as sources of conflict between students and teachers (Chávez, 2021).

In conclusion, students need to participate in extracurricular activities that build better interpersonal, emotional, and leadership skills, enabling effective conflict resolution and contributing to their comprehensive development and the construction of citizenship in HEIs.

4. Learning approach and method

Constructivist principles provide a solid foundation for integrating relevant elements into the teaching-learning process. The core idea emphasizes the social relationships students form within educational institutions, which strengthen and refine the skills they've developed academically (Schunk, 2009).

The aim is to empower students to take charge of their own learning process, guided by a teacher, fostering critical thinking and enabling reconstruction between new information and prior knowledge (Aparicio & Ostos, 2018). The teacher's role becomes one of systematically organizing didactic content to create conditions conducive to the effective achievement of learning outcomes.

According to Ortiz and Hincapié (2019), content organization should meet four essential criteria: 1) logical sequencing of topics and activities; 2)

motivation to participate; 3) a clear focus on the skill being taught 4) explicit articulation of the learning objectives. These elements shift the learning paradigm away from traditional methods, aiming to show the practical relevance of skills being developed and their application to real-life situations.

Constructivism supports structuring contexts that center on socialization, as opposed to traditional models that no longer suit students' current needs. Educational institutions often provide many social spaces where knowledge related to professional training should be shared. Dialogue helps give meaning to knowledge.

Supporting this with collaborative learning as an alternative teaching method aligns with constructivist ideals. When creating a didactic sequence, the following features based on Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (1999, cited in Iborra & Izquierdo, 2010) should be included:

1. Positive interdependence. Deriving goals and purposes in collaboration with students, helping to define the group's identity and recognition, while providing the necessary guidance for students in the strategic distribution of the resources available in the classroom, specifying the role and tasks that each one must carry out during their time in the educational institution.
2. Face to face interaction. Promoting student interaction through group techniques, in which they collaborate with one another to achieve the objectives set by the teacher, fostering empathy, solidarity, respect, and effort.
3. Individual accountability. Establishing activities where students identify their own scope and limitations, supporting them when necessary to overcome the obstacles they consider important for their learning, and reinforcing the knowledge they have already developed.
4. Emphasis on the development of social skills. Enhancing behaviors such as communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, leadership, assertiveness, among others, by encouraging the expression of ideas among students.
5. Group-self reflection. Providing a space for reflection at the end of the session so that the group of students can analyze and compare the learning they had before the session with



what they developed afterward, identifying and describing the strengths and areas for improvement that need to be addressed.

Under this logic, the didactic sequences structured for the educational program must promote constant interaction among students. To achieve this, the learning strategies aligned with this perspective include: interactive games, which allow the development of collaboration skills within educational settings, including activities that promote reflection, comprehension, and analysis of the didactic sequence's content (Padilla, 2011).

Role-playing also encourages student participation by having them interpret situations linked to real-life contexts, making explicit the characteristics of the individuals being portrayed, providing the necessary logic to represent the skill that is intended to be developed (Urbina, Medina, and Calle, 2010; Holguín, 2018). On the other hand, case studies contribute to the development of students' critical thinking by analyzing real situations, allowing them to understand the origin of various problems, the variables involved, as well as the possible solutions they can offer based on their knowledge (Tamayo, 2011).

Encouraging student participation in debates, discussion forums, as well as the creation of didactic workshops and study groups aimed at developing skills related to a common issue faced in their educational institution raises student awareness about the importance of teamwork and peer collaboration to achieve shared objectives (Scagnoli, 2006; Betancourt, Guevara, and Fuentes, 2011; Andrés and Labrador, 2014). Based on this analytical logic, an educational innovation program was developed, aiming to train university students in collaboration skills when offering solutions to conflicts within the educational community.

5. ConVive: Learn to resolve conflicts by collaborating with others

To promote students' holistic development, this educational innovation program was developed to build conflict-resolution skills among university students with the primary aim of improving school coexistence in HEIs. It follows the proposal by Torrecillas, Martínez, Olmos, and Rodríguez (2016), which outlines the logical sequence needed for developing these skills:

1. Identification of conflicts and resolution styles.
2. Management of personal emotions during conflict.
3. Management of interpersonal relationships within the institution.
4. Cultivation of collaborative environments in the institution.

The program is structured into eight sessions; two per module lasting between 1 and a half and 2 hours. Through role-play, case studies, interactive games, and forum participation, students develop the following expected learning outcomes:

1. Identifies the elements that constitute a conflict in university school coexistence through a role-playing activity, within a space for reflection on the conflicting situations experienced in school life.
2. Describes the characteristics of the collaborative conflict resolution style through a case study, stating alternative solutions to conflicting situations that occur in school coexistence.
3. Interprets the sensations experienced in their body when facing a conflict through an interactive game, mentioning the emotions felt.
4. Practices the techniques for regulation and expression of affective states by Steven Hayes ("Say Yes," "Impossible Game," "Simple Meditation," and "Moving in Slow Motion") through an interactive game, to establish skills that allow effective control of emotions and feelings.
5. Analyzes the interests and lack of interest of their classmates through a case study that fosters positive interpersonal relationships within the educational community.
6. Selects the main characteristics that allow them to trust their classmates through a role-playing activity, in order to distinguish the actions that promote better school coexistence.
7. Presents the personal traits that make them a leader when collaborating with other classmates through an interactive game that promotes better collaborative environments among students in the university community.

Each activity is monitored and evaluated through qualitative instruments such as checklists, rating scales, and evaluation rubrics, allowing the identification of the cognitive processes that students have gone through in the construction of their learning.

For the evaluation of the program, it is proposed to use a battery of instruments (see Table 1), which allows the quantitative measurement of the students' skills before and after implementation, obtaining relevant information regarding the functionality of the program to promote and develop alternative solutions to conflicts among university students.

Table 1. Instrumentalization battery for the pre- and post-evaluation of participants in the “ConVive” Program.

Name of the Instrument	Author	Dimensions	Number of Items
School Coexistence Questionnaire	Nicolás, 2015	“Coexistence and Satisfaction within the Educational Institution”	13
		“Behaviors that May Generate Conflicts in School Coexistence”	10
		“Conflict Resolution in School Coexistence”	7
Conflict Management Modes	Thomas and Kilmann, 2014	Assertiveness Cooperation	15 15
Difficulties in emotion regulation scale (DERS-Spanish)	Marín, Robles, and Andrade, González 2012.	Capacity to regulate affective states	8
Leadership styles survey	Castillo, 2010, in Reyes, 2012.	Decision-making processes.	5
		Communication systems.	5
		Interpersonal relationships.	5
		Systems of rewards and punishments.	5

Additionally, two work manuals are provided: one for the student, which explains in detail the informational content related to the skills to be developed throughout the program's implementation, reinforcing the learning process; and another designed for the instructors, explaining

the logic of each didactic sequence, offering guidance on how to locate the relevant information in each presentation used, as well as how to implement each designed activity.

6. Conclusions

Building citizenship through the proposal of an innovative educational program that contributes to the formation of university students toward horizons beyond those specified in academic curricula strengthens the idea of fostering a more critical, understanding, empathetic, supportive, and collaborative society, in which professionals maintain a stronger social awareness of their impact on the community where they developed.

Taking coexistence into account within the logic of Civic Education makes it possible to understand how citizens can feel connected to their community and thus promote unity to achieve shared goals that benefit everyone. It also emphasizes that conflictive situations will always be present in daily interaction, making it relevant to learn alternatives focused more on collaboration than competitiveness.

The results of the program's foundation show the importance of reinforcing in university students a set of emotional skills for conflict resolution, which, as Chaux (2012) states, are pillars for building citizenship.

Even though these are fundamental, they are not the only components for constructing citizenship, given that students reported difficulties regarding the existence of clear procedures at their institution for resolving conflicts in other settings, particularly when agreements cannot be reached. Therefore, it is not only necessary to work on the individual but also on institutional levels to create spaces for coexistence and conflict resolution through clear norms and attention protocols, as mentioned by Mejía and Perafán (2006). Institutions must thus have mediation spaces where institutional actors can go when needed.

For this reason, the inclusion of innovative educational programs that support the realization of this idea among university students represents a significant advance in how diverse spaces can be created in Higher Education Institutions. These spaces should offer sufficient conditions for dialogue, reflection, participation, and the



involvement of individuals within their university community.

The proposal presented in this work was designed to fulfill that purpose. Each work session was structured so that the student would be an active agent in constructing their own learning, considering their constant participation both individually and in collaboration with classmates through games, case studies, creation of forums or workshops, among other elements, positioning them as peers. In doing so, a proposal is put forth based on consistent principles, competencies, and methods aimed at promoting citizenship within a culture of peace.

Therefore, offering these spaces in the form of extracurricular workshops, or as official components of degree program curricula, will contribute to the achievement of the institutional goals of each Higher Education Institution, while also aligning with international and national recommendations regarding the transformations that education must consider going beyond the traditional threshold that has long prevailed in the educational system.

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