

**INVESTIGATING THE PEACEBUILDING
POTENTIAL OF CONTEMPLATIVE
APPROACHES IN EDUCATION:**

**INSIGHTS FROM A SCHOOL-BASED
MINDFULNESS PROGRAM
IN COLOMBIA**

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is substantially my own original work and has not been submitted in any form for an award at any other academic institution. Where material has been drawn from other sources, this has been fully acknowledged.

Abstract

Contemplative practices like mindfulness, meditation and yoga are increasingly the subject of scientific studies assessing impacts to brain structure and function, cognitive and emotional development as well as psychological wellbeing. This emerging evidence base suggests promising implications for peace, especially in the field of education. Yet to date contemplative approaches have not been systematically investigated through a peacebuilding lens, nor has literature examined their utility for peace education programs specifically. This exploratory study offers an initial contribution towards filling this research gap, bridging varied areas of inquiry to assess the peacebuilding potential of contemplative approaches in education, and the usefulness of such approaches in conflict-affected contexts specifically. It looks at a school-based mindfulness program implemented in conflict-affected areas of southwest Colombia (Tumaco and Tambo), with a special focus on understanding the experience of teacher participants. It incorporates qualitative data gathered in interviews with program beneficiaries (teachers), program staff and complementary informants. Considering insights drawn from the Colombian case study as well as existing evidence from secondary sources, especially in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, it suggests contemplative education interventions can contribute to holistic models of educating for peace that prioritize the development of intrapersonal peace and emotional wellbeing. It advocates for further cross-disciplinary research to understand the full potential of contemplative approaches as concrete mental training strategies that may strengthen peaceful dispositions, resilience and psychosocial healing, offering a complementary tool in post-conflict recovery efforts.

Key words

education, peacebuilding, Colombia, contemplative practice, meditation, mindfulness, yoga, emotions, intrapersonal peace, violence, conflict-affected, post-conflict recovery, resilience, psychosocial healing, neuroscience

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Introduction

“Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way”
His Holiness the Dalai Lama¹

The Dalai Lama’s reflection on peace echoes the wisdom of Buddhist perspectives and suggests the importance of each person’s inner journey to cultivate love and compassion as a fundamental basis for societal peace. To date such a perspective has not garnered prominence in mainstream peacebuilding discourse nor in academic discussions of peace and conflict, and there is very limited research around the inner dimensions of peace.

Peace psychology is perhaps an exception; it aims to emphasize the attainment of peace at multiple levels – including the inner or intrapersonal domain, and is concerned with the sphere of the psychosocial – such as the effects of violent conflict and psychosocial conditions conducive to sustainable peace. This work is promising yet limited, with its focus still predominantly on international and intergroup relations, and barely any literature to date on peace experienced within a person (Sims et al, 2014: 2). The same can be observed of peace education, which tends to prioritize knowledge-generation about peace and conflict, and even when more experiential approaches are employed, these tend to be grounded in skills-building addressing the management of conflict within the interpersonal sphere². Post-conflict peacebuilding too, with its emphasis on institutional and economic reforms under the liberal peacebuilding model, pays insufficient attention to the micro-level and ‘soft’ aspects of peacebuilding,

¹ In Nhat Hanh (1991) – foreword.

² Although there have been some exceptions, including the National Peace Academy’s holistic transformative model of peace education, with five interdependent spheres of peace that include the personal, social, political, institutional and ecological. See: Jenkins (2013).

such as the psychosocial health of individuals and relational dimensions³. To date, a discussion of peace has appeared something of a puzzle lacking the important inner dimension – a missing puzzle piece critical to a holistic and transformative view of the whole.

“Our chief fault,” as Adam Curle understood it, “is failure to recognize that conflict is often largely in the mind and to that extent must be dealt with on that level; and that even when it is less so, as in the case of political oppression or economic exploitation, emotional factors exacerbate what is already serious” (Curle, 1971:15). Curle recognized the importance of investigating emotions in the cultivation of sustainable peace, seeing underlying causes of conflict as somehow bound up with the emotional experience. This provides a complementary addition to Galtung’s (1976) understanding of peacebuilding, which underscores the importance of structures and root causes of violence, as well as local capacities in promoting sustainable peace. Curle (1971, 1972) encouraged psychological self-awareness as a key element in peace, and related this both to “the inner life of the individual and to his consciousness of society” (1971: 215). Self-awareness supports the formation of a secure and resilient identity, contrasting with the more limiting ‘belonging-identity’ human beings fabricate to define ourselves in our social worlds.

Self-awareness is not a core value exalted in modern Western capitalist societies, which seem to thrive on a non-stop pattern of work and consumption. To stop and contemplate in purposeful ways can be extremely

³ Some exceptions include the holistic transformative model of peacebuilding advocated by IAHV Peacebuilding Unit - an NGO holding consultative status with UN-ECOSOC (<http://www.peaceunit-iahv.org/>), and work by Lambourne and Gitau (2013) on psychosocial interventions and peacebuilding in Rwanda.

radical, although this may be changing. Contemplation is a tool for self-awareness, and more recently there is a growing understanding of meditation-based contemplative practices as highly relevant systems of mental training that can support constructive thought patterns and emotional health. Far beyond limiting connotations with the 'new age' movement or fitness-focused yoga routines adopted by mainly affluent women in the West, contemplative practices have become integrated into the Western scientific community in a serious and substantive way. Over the past decade, a growing interest in contemplative approaches has sprung up within medical, psychotherapeutic, educational and even prisoner rehabilitation⁴ spheres, with a growing evidence base suggesting a range of benefits. This is especially true for mindfulness, now well established in both medicine and psychology⁵, with several dozen peer-reviewed articles published every month⁶, and multidisciplinary scholarly works published on the topic⁷. Despite its prominence in programs and scientific research, especially in the U.S. and the U.K⁸, to date mindfulness and other contemplative approaches have not widely reached peacebuilding and peace education circles.

What, if any, potential do such contemplative practices have in the realm of peace? Can they enrich peace education? Can they support the soft aspects of peacebuilding? Much of the existing research highlights outcomes

⁴ While prisoner rehabilitation is beyond the scope of the present investigation, several interesting studies can be noted by Landau and Gross (2008), who compare reincarceration rates of participants in yoga and meditation; and Perelman et al (2012), who assessed emotional and behavioural changes in long-term offenders after meditation.

⁵ Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) are among the most well-known and integrated approaches.

⁶ The American Mindfulness Research Association compiles a monthly bulletin of peer-reviewed articles: <https://goamra.org/publications/mindfulness-research-monthly/>

⁷ See for example the double-volume Wiley-Blackwell Handbook on Mindfulness (Le et al. 2014) with chapters incorporating multidisciplinary scholarly work.

⁸ Mindful Nation UK, a recent report by the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group (2015) recommended mindfulness across several public policy areas, including health, workplace, education and criminal justice. See http://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/images/reports/Mindfulness-APPG-Report_Mindful-Nation-UK_Oct2015.pdf

that have much to do with a discussion of peace and peace education – such as how they may shape more peaceful, less aggressive, and compassionate individuals, as well as the usefulness of such practices in supporting psychosocial recovery. Yet to date, a systematic analysis of the specific relevance of contemplative approaches to peacebuilding⁹ is lacking, as well as an investigation of their potential utility in conflict-affected contexts¹⁰.

This investigation aims to bridge these varied areas of inquiry, offering an exploratory study on the relevance of contemplative education for peacebuilding, with a case study examining contemplative education interventions in conflict-affected areas of Colombia. It will be considered that when approaches like mindfulness or yoga are integrated as mental training tools in education, they present strong potential avenues for positive wiring of emotional competencies that nurture peace and support psychosocial health, which may have a special relevance in conflict-affected contexts.

a) Research question and rationale

The dissertation investigates the peacebuilding potential of contemplative practices, with a particular emphasis on education interventions that integrate contemplative approaches. In doing so, it aims to contribute to filling the research gap concerning the relevance of

⁹ However various initiatives training aid and peace workers in contemplative approaches have emerged. For example since 2014, the Garrison Institute implements the *Contemplative-Based Resilience Project*, training aid workers in skills to strengthen resilience in the face of stress and trauma. <http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/transforming-trauma/contemplative-based-resilience-training>, and the 2016 Summer Peacebuilding Institute by the Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University will include *Body-Mind Practices for Building Resilience* <http://www.emu.edu/cjp/spi/courses/#session-four>. Elicitive Conflict Transformation first introduced by Lederach (1995) is also associated with a range of methods including yoga and meditation based techniques among tools for the conflict worker (see Dietrich, 2013 and 2014).

¹⁰ Related work has been emerging. See for example Datzberger's (2014) analysis of yoga's transformative effect on peacebuilding in war-torn societies, and Srbova's (2015) examination of yoga for peace. Also, Salomon (2014) investigated mindfulness in peace education in the context of conflict, however here the focus is on a cultivated disposition contrasting with mindlessness, rather than mental practice involving a contemplative approach.

contemplative education to peacebuilding and its utility in conflict-affected contexts.

The primary research question posed is: *“What is the peacebuilding potential of education interventions that incorporate contemplative approaches?”* Within this broader analysis, evidence and mechanisms linking contemplative approaches with peacebuilding will be assessed, while gauging the relevance of contemplative approaches to peace education initiatives in particular. Specific research questions include: 1) *“What does existing research demonstrate about the benefits of contemplative approaches, and how is this relevant to peace?”*; 2) *“Can such approaches contribute toward peacebuilding in educational settings and should peace education integrate such approaches in a more active way?”*; and 3) *“What do existing experiences of contemplative education approaches in violence- and conflict-affected contexts suggest about their usefulness in these contexts?”*

As part of this analysis, a case study of the experience of contemplative approaches in Colombian schools will be included. This will primarily examine a school-based mindfulness-training program that is being implemented in conflict-affected areas of Colombia, while complementing this with insights from a school-based yoga initiative that shares similar aims and approaches. The extent to which experiences and perceptions related to these approaches resonate with existing evidence of contemplative education will be examined. The inclusion of this case study will offer insights into the potential strengths and applicability of similar approaches for innovative peace education initiatives.

b) Structure

This dissertation includes three core chapters. The introductory chapter introduces the area of inquiry and main research questions, along with the structure, methodology, scope and ethical considerations concerning the study. The first core chapter *introduces contemplative approaches more generally*, with an emphasis on mindfulness and yoga, and examines how contemplative practices can contribute to peace. It draws on theoretical concepts from psychology – social psychology, peace psychology and Buddhist psychology – as well as empirical evidence highlighted in applied psychology, neuroscience, and education literature. The second chapter examines the value and limits of school-based contemplative interventions *for peace-oriented education more specifically*, introducing the case study of Colombia to understand where contemplative education programs fit within a larger peace education agenda, and why they are relevant and potentially replicable. The third chapter further expands on the case study, reflecting on the value of a mindfulness program *in conflict-affected contexts in particular*. In synthesizing findings of qualitative research with program staff and beneficiaries, it highlights key themes related to personal peacefulness, psychosocial healing and transformation of cultures of violence as areas of particular resonance. The conclusion summarizes key findings of the study and its contribution to literature, and highlights recommendations on future research and work within this emerging area.

c) Methodology and analysis

The methodology combines qualitative analysis of both secondary sources as well as primary data. Assessing findings of previous studies on contemplative approaches from secondary sources is a critical starting point. Given the paucity of research interlinking contemplative practice and peacebuilding, as well as a general absence of such approaches in peace education discourse, it is necessary to draw on literature outside the area of Peace Studies, especially psychology, neuroscience, and education. In doing so, the research is situated within a theoretical understanding of healthy psychosocial development and its relation to conflict mitigation and peaceful coexistence, examining themes such as prosociality, emotional regulation, brain plasticity, and trauma healing. Analysis of secondary sources also serves to introduce mainstream peace education approaches and contextual data related to Colombia's armed conflict.

With the approval of the Chair of the Humanities, Social and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel at the University of Bradford, this dissertation incorporates qualitative analysis of primary research gathered in Colombia between June and August 2015. The primary research component supports a case study examining contemplative education in Colombia, principally investigating a school-based mindfulness training program called RESPIRA implemented in conflict-affected areas by Colombian organization Convivencia Productiva in collaboration with Save the Children. The primary research includes qualitative data on perceptions and experiences gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a sample of

teacher participants¹¹; interviews with RESPIRA staff and complementary informants; and participant observation of program sessions. The RESPIRA program employs an innovative approach to promoting peaceful school climates and is one of the only programs of its kind currently being implemented in conflict-affected contexts¹². It thus presents an important opportunity to study the usefulness and applicability of contemplative educational approaches from a peacebuilding lens. Additional primary data gathered through interviews, conversations and participant observation of a Colombian school-based Yoga for School Coexistence initiative implemented by Colombian organization Dunna, will be woven into the analysis, leveraging insights from these interventions and what they may indicate of the wider applicability of contemplative approaches in peace-oriented education.

The initial goal was to interview 5-10 teachers who have been participating in the RESPIRA program since 2014, as well as each of the 7 facilitators responsible for implementing the RESPIRA program. This was later expanded to include two focus groups with teachers, as well as a series of complementary interviews with academics and practitioners with expertise in the areas of mindfulness and peace education. Through the course of the study, I learned of Dunna's Yoga for School Coexistence initiative, and further expanded the scope of the study to incorporate comparative insights. In total, 22 interviews were undertaken (see *Appendix 1* for interview details and *Appendix 2 and 3* for interview questions).

¹¹ Portions of this research involved collaborative work related to RESPIRA's evaluation activities, which the researcher supported whilst undertaking a field placement with Convivencia Productiva from June-August 2015. I facilitated focus groups as part of RESPIRA's process evaluation, and undertook interviews independently. Collaboration with the RESPIRA team took place at all stages and in particular for teacher interviews. These were seen to complement the organization's evaluation efforts, thus a joint consent form was developed for this portion of interviews (see *Appendix 5*).

¹² See *Appendix 6* for a summary of similar initiatives identified linking contemplative approaches and peacebuilding.

Teacher samples were selected by RESPIRA facilitators and depended on the availability of teacher participants during a limited timeframe whilst visiting field sites in Tumaco and Tambo in southwest Colombia – localities deeply affected by Colombia’s armed conflict (of which an overview is provided in Chapter 2). RESPIRA personnel facilitated entry to the sample respondent group for observations, interviews and photographs¹³. Tumaco is an appropriate site for data collection since teachers have been participating in the RESPIRA program since its inception and thus have more than one year of experience. Data from focus groups in Tambo offer complementary insights from cohorts of teachers more recently integrated into RESPIRA.

Interviews were carried out in person and via Skype, in Spanish or English. Each was audio recorded, and subsequently transcribed¹⁴. Qualitative analysis of primary data serves to identify salient themes and interesting comments highlighting the perceptions and experiences of teachers, staff, and complementary informants¹⁵.

As part of the research process, I considered it interesting and relevant to deepen my own experience of contemplative practice. To do so, I participated in a weeklong mindfulness retreat¹⁶ incorporating sitting and walking meditation, mindful eating and working, among other components. This provided a deeper understanding of the concepts and benefits

¹³ The document includes selected photos of teacher and student participants; formal permission for their inclusion by participants and their parents (where applicable) has been facilitated through RESPIRA staff.

¹⁴ The main purpose of transcription was to recollect key points and quotes, rather than to prepare a complete verbatim record of each interview dialogue. As such and in order to maximize efficiency, audio recordings were loosely transcribed and compared with field notes.

¹⁵ Including peace education practitioners, mindfulness trainers and researchers, social and emotional learning experts, among others.

¹⁶ At Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Centre in southern France.

associated with mindfulness-based approaches, and personal insight to help shape the direction of the study.

d) Key considerations: bias and ethics

Bias

It is acknowledged that bias may influence the process and results of the research, especially interviewer bias, given my personal interest and optimism in this area of inquiry. I have attempted to minimize its likelihood in data collection by ensuring neutral explanations during interviews, rather than making explicit reference to results expected from the research.

Inclusive sampling bias is also acknowledged. Selection and scheduling of teacher interviews was coordinated without my involvement and was based on teacher availability within a limited timeframe. Thus it is not certain that the sample provides a balance of perspectives among teacher participants and there exists a risk of exaggeration in interview responses. For these reasons, and also given the small sample size of teacher beneficiaries (5 in total), it is not possible to generalize the results to a larger population.

Ethics

A key area of ethical concern involves approaches utilized to understand teachers' perceptions of the challenges of living in a conflict-affected zone – a valuable potential contribution of the research. The risk of upsetting teachers or stirring up past trauma or difficult memories was considered with care. In order to mitigate risks and maximize sensitivity, interview questions were reviewed and refined in collaboration with RESPIRA staff and an emphasis was placed on program-related questions.

Information about the study and use of data was communicated verbally to interviewees, while consent to participate was confirmed through signed forms (see *Appendix 4 and 5*). To maintain the confidentiality of respondents, codes are used in lieu of names, accompanying quotes and observations (see *Appendix 1*).

While the RESPIRA program also engages students (from kindergarten to grade 5), given the special care required to ensure sensitive and ethical administration of interviews with children, for practical reasons it was decided to focus strictly on adults beneficiaries (teachers).

e) Scope and limitations

This dissertation is interested in the relevance and applicability of contemplative approaches for peace-oriented education. Rather than provide a comprehensive account of contemplative practices and their associated benefits, it attempts to synthesize key findings on mindfulness and related meditative and yogic practice, identifying possible links to peacebuilding. Because the synthesis draws on evidence and insights from several disciplines, an inherent challenge is ensuring sufficient coverage of relevant theories, assumptions and themes while maintaining focus and balance in terms of the larger analysis. Given robust scientific research around mindfulness and other contemplative approaches in schools is still emerging, it is acknowledged that further testing is needed to arrive at conclusive evidence.

The study is not representative of all teacher participants in the RESPIRA program, nor does it claim to provide conclusive evidence of the relevance of contemplative approaches in education in violence- and conflict-

affected contexts more generally. Notwithstanding, it is considered that the perceptions and experiences from teachers and staff involved in the RESPIRA program can offer rich insights on existing practice as an important potential contributor to future theory development. Data will be leveraged to highlight interesting themes that have emerged in the Colombian case, positioned within an exploratory study that may help inform methodology for future research on this topic.

Other limitations involved barriers in understanding language nuances (especially colloquialisms used by communities in Colombia's Pacific coast), challenges coordinating interviews given security concerns in field sites, and working within a limited timeframe for data transcription and analysis.

Despite these limitations it is hoped the dissertation can contribute initial steps toward a more comprehensive understanding of the potential of contemplative approaches to peacebuilding, and their relevance in conflict-affected contexts. It is hoped that this contribution to the literature may be useful in the research, design, and implementation of holistic peace-oriented education programs that leverage experiential contemplative approaches to support peacebuilding, coexistence, and post-conflict healing.

Chapter 1: Why are contemplative approaches relevant to a discussion of peace?

Introduction

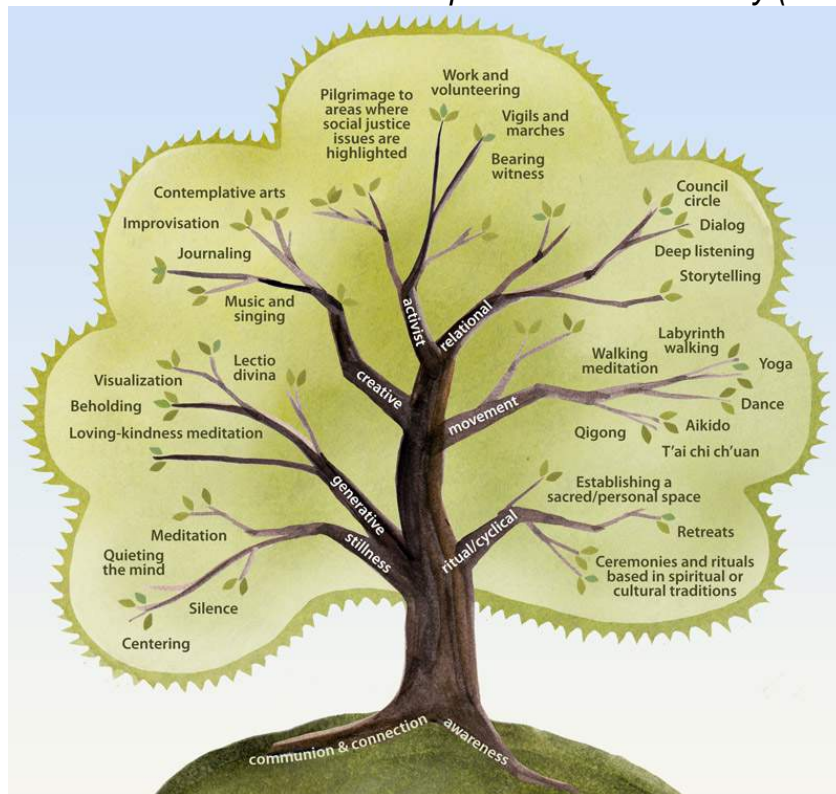
While contemplative practices have existed for thousands of years, they have recently become the subject of scientific studies, focusing predominantly on secularized contemplative approaches like mindfulness. Findings from psychology, education and neuroscience studies suggest interesting implications for education and peacebuilding, though this is not yet an area examined in peace research. This chapter introduces contemplative practices and summarizes current research to identify the way such practices are relevant to a discussion of peace. It aims to draw connections between the characteristics of peaceful persons and outcomes resulting from contemplative practice, suggesting that mindfulness and other contemplative approaches can be useful in nurturing peaceful citizens. It introduces theoretical assumptions underlying the investigation, scientific evidence on contemplative practice, and specific research related to contemplative education programs.

Overview of contemplative practices

Contemplation can be understood as a “third way of knowing that complements the rational and the sensory” (Hart, 2002: 28) and is thus distinct from the dominant rational-empirical approach reflected in education and societal institutions. Contemplative practices emphasize “capacities for deep concentration and quieting the mind in the midst of the action and distraction that fills everyday life” (Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society,

2015); they are found in all major faith traditions as well as secular practices, and include exercises as varied as different types of meditation, prayer, movement, rituals, and music, among others (see *Figure 1* below). While varied contemplative techniques have distinct goals, they share several common elements including an emphasis on gaining self-knowledge, strengthening concentration, and improving emotional regulation skills (Greenberg and Harris, 2012: 162).

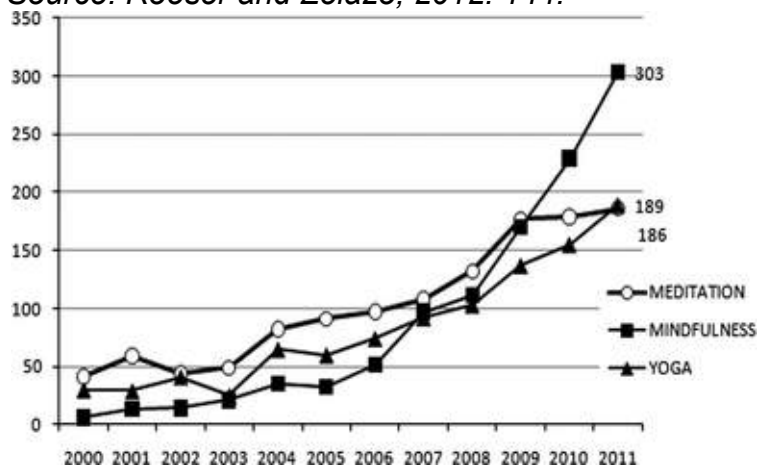
Figure 1: Tree of contemplative practice
 Source: *The Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society (2015)*



This investigation focuses mainly on mindfulness-based practice, including meditation and yoga (the latter typically incorporating mindful attention to breathing, movement and body sensations). Mindfulness and yoga are among the contemplative traditions rooted in Eastern spiritual traditions that have gained the most mainstream and secular popularity in the West, and for which a growing body of literature exists (See *Figure 2* below).

Figure 2: Peer reviewed research publications on contemplative practices, 2000-2011.

Source: Roeser and Zelazo, 2012: 144.



Mindfulness can be defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003: 144). While it forms a core element of Buddhist practice, it is understood as a universal human capacity that can be developed by anyone, regardless of one’s religious or spiritual beliefs. Numerous scientific studies have linked mindfulness practice to a host of positive outcomes including improvements in physical health, mental health and well-being, behavioural regulation, and increased satisfaction with relationships and social interactions (Keng et al, 2011; Chiesa and Serretti, 2010, 2011; Davis and Hayes, 2012; Brown et al. 2007; Ziedan et al. 2010). Mindfulness meditation often involves focusing attention on the breath or another “anchor,” which may include a sensation or feeling.

Loving-kindness is a meditative practice complementary to and often described alongside mindfulness, that is a form of intentionally concentrating on feelings of kindness and compassion in order to actively cultivate such capacities. Loving-kindness meditation has been shown to positively impact

attitudes toward self and others (Kang et al. 2015; Frederickson et al. 2008); it can be used to increase self-compassion as well as compassion toward others (including those toward whom one feels warm, neutral, or difficult emotions).

Yoga – meaning “union” in Sanskrit - is an ancient discipline originating from India, which typically combines physical postures (*asanas*), with meditation and breathing exercises. Originally developed as a spiritual discipline emphasizing union with the divine (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 2007: 1), yoga has become popular in the West as a secular practice where it is used to promote health and wellness. It has been linked to multiple therapeutic effects, especially through its interaction with both the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems¹⁷ promoting calmness, bodily repair and psychological wellbeing; and positive effects on brain structures involved in emotion and motivation (Sivilli and Pace, 2014: 9; van der Kolk, 2014: 1-21). Yoga incorporates mindful breathing and movements, and is frequently integrated into mindfulness-based programs.

While some meditative approaches focus attention on mantras, external images or metaphysical concepts, mindfulness-based meditative approaches are rooted in human experience and present-moment reality. They encourage recognition and observation of feelings, thoughts, and perceptions, including unpleasant ones, in order to understand them in their full complexity and loosen their often unconscious grip (Nhat Hanh, 1991: 66). It has been suggested that such meditative approaches are powerful in raising awareness of the factors that cause stress and suffering, while

¹⁷ Yoga positively stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system (associated with rest and digestion), and modulates the sympathetic nervous system (associated with alert systems when facing stress).

nourishing a sense of equilibrium and peace among practitioners (Stahl and Goldstein, 2010:36). The observation of the internal experience during meditation – beyond metaphysical subjects – is especially important to ensuring a grounded practice that is useful in solving real issues (Nhat Hanh, 1991: 67).

Examining theoretical linkages between outcomes of contemplative practice and peacebuilding

Emotions, peace and contemplative practice

Emotions play a highly influential role in issues conflict and peace, with negative emotional states associated with conflict and positive emotional states associated with peace. For example, various studies have demonstrated links between positive emotional states and strengthened interpersonal peacefulness, through increased levels of kindness, helpfulness and reduced interpersonal conflict (Isen, 2009; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

Although psychologists may easily recognize an intuitive connection between emotions and conflict, limited research has been carried out to date in this area (Tint and Zinkin, 2014:162). A chief interface between emotions and conflict relates to the fulfillment of needs. Rooted in Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, human needs theory – a core building block of peace psychology – suggests that the fulfillment of fundamental physiological and psychological human needs is crucial to the wellbeing of both individuals and societies, nurturing more cooperative and peaceful relationships and communities. While there are many connections between the deprivation of

needs and conflict, especially in relation to protracted communal conflict (Azar, 1990), and structural peacebuilding (Galtung, 1980), this investigation is interested in how a deprivation or fulfillment of emotional needs at the individual level may influence personal peacefulness, and how contemplative practices interact with these processes.

While emotional needs fulfillment typically corresponds with a state of personal growth (Staub, 2003:64), unmet or threatened psychological needs challenge personal peacefulness (Nelson, 2014b: 161). Frustrated emotional states arising in the face of unmet needs become additional barriers to personal peacefulness, and may lead to aggressive behaviour (Berkowitz, 1993), and violent responses by individuals or groups when conflict arises (Nair, 2008). Although causality is challenging to determine, Tint and Zinkin (2014:162) note that “it is clear that frustrated and thwarted needs satisfaction leads to emotional states and social conditions that make violence and aggression more probable.” If unresolved, these negative emotional states can contribute to the intractable and cyclical nature of social conflicts, as suggested in studies related to fear, grief and rage (Montville 1993, 2001); shame (Retziner and Scheff, 2000); guilt (Miron and Branscombe 2008); and humiliation (Lacey 2011). “Negative emotions are like a fist tightly closed around the heart,” as Curle (1995:119) described it.

The way that contemplative practices interact at the emotional level is at the core of their value from the perspective of peace, especially with respect to regulating difficult emotions. Mindfulness-based interventions are associated with reduced anger expression (Fix and Fix, 2013; Robins et al. 2011) and aggression (Borders et al. 2010; Heppner et al. 2008). Studies on

yoga have shown decreased verbal aggressiveness (Deshpande et al. 2008), reduced negative emotions and increased positive emotions (Narasimhan, et al. 2011). A recent study by Peters et al. (2015) demonstrates the significant role of anger rumination¹⁸ in the relationship between mindfulness and aggression, suggesting that non-judgment and present-centered awareness promoted via mindfulness training reduces anger rumination, in turn reducing aggression levels.

Mindfulness can be viewed as a “skillful approach for managing challenges to unmet needs and difficult emotions” that helps to see the “workings of the judging mind...that identifies the “other” as “enemy” which can lead to violence and warfare” (Tink and Zinkin, 2014: 165). Evidence suggests that mindful meditation and mindful yoga have similar benefits, especially in relation to improving emotional regulation (Sauer-Zavala et al. 2012)¹⁹.

Personal peacefulness and contemplative practices

What characterizes a peaceful person? And why do contemplative practices matter? In Brenes’ model of peaceful selfhood (1999), inner/intrapersonal peace comprises a core element and is expressed through love and compassion, self-realization, inner harmony and enlightened self-interest. In his synthesis of various research on peaceful persons, Mayton (2009: 74) highlights that peaceful persons are

¹⁸ Rumination is a cognitive process involving the repetitive reflection on negative thoughts and their meaning. Ruminative thought patterns have been associated with aggression, including anger rumination in particular (Vasquez et al. 2013; Peled & Moretti, 2009; Anestis et al. 2009).

¹⁹ Although noting common benefits, the differential study by Sauer-Zavala et al. (2012) suggests the particular strength of mindful yoga in improving psychological wellbeing, while sitting meditation was found to be particularly effective at increasing a non-judgmental stance toward stimuli.

characterized by their ability to manage anger, restrain impulsive action, empathize with others and act in kind and helpful ways (Ibid: 74).

Nelson (2014b: 94) identifies mindfulness as an enabling factor for personal peacefulness, helping to facilitate peaceful states, attitudes, and behaviours²⁰. As demonstrated through a growing body of scientific studies, contemplative practices emphasize and indeed appear to influence the development of many of these same core characteristics of peaceful persons – at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. Research by Brown and Ryan (2003: 844) concluded that mindfulness plays a key role in mental health and well-being enhancement, and promotes a balanced emotional life. Mindfulness and other meditative practices were found to improve anxiety, stress and negative emotions, promote positive emotions, self-realization and psychological wellbeing (Sedlmeier et al. 2012: 1157). These suggest contributions towards intrapersonal peace.

Mindfulness has also been linked to peace at the interpersonal level. In addition to its interactions with negative emotions and aggression as highlighted in the preceding section, studies have shown positive correlations between trait mindfulness and psychological nonviolence (Mayton 2012: 352-353), as well as negative correlations with hostile behaviour (Saavedra et al. 2010: 380) and verbal aggression (Barnes et al. 2007: 482). Loving-kindness meditation has been shown to decrease inter-group bias, fostering community bonds (Kang et al. 2013).

²⁰ Along with several other important factors, including social problem-solving competency, perspective-taking, self-regulation, open-mindedness, optimism and hope, and trust in others.

Intra, inter and societal peace

Intrapersonal and collective levels of peace and conflict transformation are interconnected, however the relationship between individual (micro) and societal (macro) elements of peace is not well understood. The limited research to date on personal peacefulness as documented by Nelson (2014a: 28-33) has investigated links between different levels of peacefulness – including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and international levels: People who experience greater inner peace tend to be more peaceful in their interpersonal relationships (and vice versa), while interpersonally peaceful people also have more peaceful attitudes concerning international relations (and vice versa).

Authorities from the Buddhist tradition, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh maintain that there is a direct relationship between inner and outer peace – with at least two related but distinct aspects of this understanding. The first is that peace at the societal level requires intrapersonal peace and inner change as a precursor to social change (Mayton, 2009: 80). Inner awakening, nurtured through mindfulness, is linked to engaged compassion, which creates social change. The second relates to an understanding of how individual consciousness influences the collective, whereby the consciousness of every individual is made of and also directly affects the larger collective consciousness.²¹

As Nhat Hanh describes it:

²¹ It should be noted that the concept of inner peace influencing outer peace is not limited to Buddhist philosophy but expressed in a wide range of traditions, including indigenous philosophies as well as Western authors. See for example O'Dea's (2012) *Cultivating Peace* and Brown's (1989) *The sacred pipe: Black Elk's account of the seven rights of the Oglala Sioux*.

“If we transform our individual consciousness, we begin the process of changing the collective consciousness. Transforming the world’s consciousness is not possible without personal change. The collective is made of the individual, and the individual is made of the collective, and each and every individual has a direct effect on the collective consciousness.” (Nhat Hanh, 2003: 56)

From this understanding, practicing mindful living is a powerful tool for peace since each individual’s inner peace influences the collective expression of societal peace. As Tint and Zinkin (2014: 174) have described it:

“If the numbers of people practicing mindfulness in conflict zones grew enough, there could be a collective response to the conflict that was more rooted in compassion rather than hatred, action rather than reaction, and clarity rather than confusion.”

To date, few experimental studies have supported the logic that there is a reciprocal relationship between inner peace and interpersonal peacefulness (Nelson, 2014b: 72). As Mayton (2009: 244) notes, empirical assessment is needed to gauge the role of intrapersonal peace to interpersonal and societal peace; this should include a wider and more diverse sample of research participants²² and an examination of causal factors that lead people to develop nonviolent dispositions.

Emotions and consciousness - Buddhist and yogic perspectives

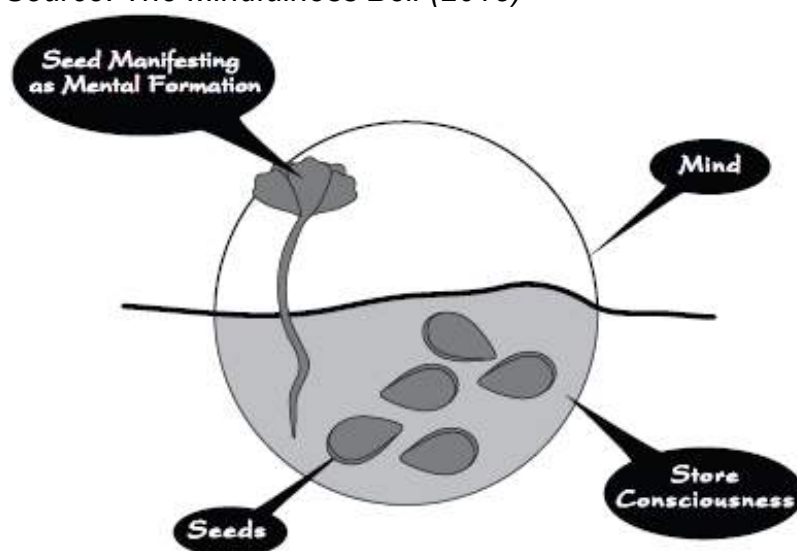
The Buddhist understanding of consciousness sheds much light on the relationship between emotions and peaceful qualities of mind, and implications regarding the role of contemplative practice in cultivating these.

Nhat Hanh (1991, 1999) has explained consciousness in terms of two levels: a ‘store’ consciousness housing multiple seeds, which become manifest in ‘mind’ consciousness as mental formations, such as anger or

²² Mayton (2009:244) notes that most research to date has been conducted on young adults, especially college students, with important demographics left out of the picture, including children, adolescents, middle-aged adults and the elderly.

love (see *Figure 3*). The mere recognition of mental formations through mindfulness is powerful in the sense that “if it is wholesome, mindfulness will cultivate it. If it is unwholesome, mindfulness will encourage it to return to our store consciousness and remain there” (Nhat Hanh, 1999: 74). To practice mindful living is to nourish the wholesome seeds in our store consciousness, like compassion, which works to counteract and neutralize the manifestation of unwholesome seeds, like anger or agitation (Nhat Hanh, 1991: 73-77; Nhat Hanh, 2005: 60-62).

Figure 3: Diagram depicting ‘store’ and ‘mind’ consciousness.
Source: The Mindfulness Bell (2015)



The concept of mental formations has a similar meaning to the Sanskrit word “samskaras” in yoga philosophy, which refer to deeply rooted tendencies that drive behaviour, built up through “thought-waves” that exist in the subconscious and unconscious areas of the mind. As described in yogic text:

“Expose the mind to constant thoughts of anger and resentment, and you will find that these negatives angerwaves build up anger-samskaras, which will predispose you to find occasions for anger throughout your daily life...Let us never forget, however, that, just as a sandbank may shift and change its shape if the tide or the current changes, so also the samskaras may be modified by the introduction

of other kinds of thought-waves into the mind” (Prabhavananda & Isherwood, 1953: 4).

The introduction of new thought-waves, or the cultivation of wholesome seeds like compassion through meditation, follow a similar mechanism and potential to release oneself from the grip of negative or even violent emotions. In this way, meditation becomes a powerful tool and mindful living an important strategy to minimize the manifestation of negative emotions and violent actions at an individual level. Buddhist and yogic understandings of emotions and consciousness also mirror Western clinical psychology perspectives on anger rumination and the role of mindfulness in reducing these harmful thought patterns, which correlate with expressions of aggression (Peters et al. 2015).

Attachment Theory

Early experiences are also important to a discussion of personal peacefulness. The extent to which a person feels emotionally secure in their relationships and social environments – referred to as attachment security in Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988) – is an important influencing factor on interpersonal peacefulness (Nelson, 2014:73), one that has interesting implications for the investigation on contemplative practices and peacebuilding.

Mikulincer and Shaver (2005) – conducted experiments where feelings of attachment security were “primed” among participants either through instructions to imagine a scenario of feeling secure and safe, or by including subliminal exposure to words that trigger feelings of attachment security such as ‘love’. Interestingly, the priming with attachment-related imagery or words resulted in reduced negative reactions among members of

the study's in-group (Israeli Jews) toward members of the out-group (Israeli Arabs), as well as less discriminatory responses toward homosexuals, and strengthened compassionate responses when presented with the suffering of others.

How does this relate to contemplative practices and peace? It has been suggested that contemplative practices may be useful as a form of mental training that enhances or 'primes' a person's sense of attachment security, similar to priming noted above, with potential linkages to enhanced compassion and altruistic behaviour (Begley, 2009; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005). So far, empirical testing in this area is still limited, and the nature of the association between contemplative approaches and attachment remains unclear, although studies suggest it is mediated through emotion regulation processes (Pepping et al. 2013; Caldwell and Shaver, 2013).

While findings of the few existing studies are not consistent²³, a study of an intensive mindfulness-based intervention with experienced meditators highlighted improvements in attachment security indicators among participants (Sahdra et al. 2011: 306). This intervention incorporated loving-kindness and compassion meditation, which overlaps with attachment security priming (Pepping et al. 2015: 2). Further empirical testing to understand the nature of the relationship between contemplative approaches and attachment is worthwhile, and could provide an evidence base to shape the design of future interventions that use specific contemplative approaches to strengthen healthy emotional attachment.

²³ For example Pepping et al. (2015) observed that a short mindfulness intervention with non-experienced meditators revealed no direct causal links between state mindfulness and attachment security, contrasting results of more intensive mindfulness-based interventions with experienced meditators including Sahdra et al (2011).

This can be particularly relevant in contexts of conflict where patterns of healthy emotional attachment between caregivers and children may be disrupted, as may be the case in conflict and post-conflict environments where trauma has been experienced. As such, interventions that work to repair attachment systems in such contexts may be particularly supportive of a sustainable peacebuilding process (Fox, 2007). Although further research is required, if contemplative practice can be shown to support healthy forms of attachment as some initial research suggests, it may prove highly relevant in conflict-affected and post-conflict peacebuilding contexts.

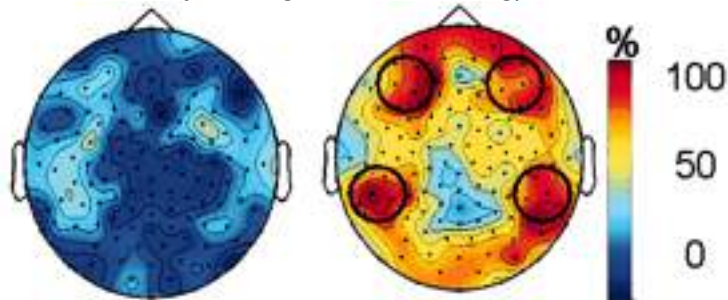
Meditation, neuroplasticity and peaceful behaviours

Neuroplasticity refers to changes in the brain that occur as a result of experiences (Davidson and Lutz, 2008: 1) and recent research has suggested that meditation has an impact on brain plasticity, both in terms of its function and structure. Applying neuroimaging with meditation provides insight on the plasticity of brain circuitry and cognitive functions (Slagter et al. (2011: 4).

Research from Lutz et al. (2004) analyzed gamma activity in the brain during periods of meditation and resting states and found an increase of gamma signals with meditation, suggesting meditative mental training may lead to short- and long-term neural changes (refer to *Figure 4*). Initial findings from Lazar et al. (2005: 6) testing differences in the thickness of the cerebral cortex show a relationship between cortical plasticity and meditation, suggesting an association between meditative practice and “structural changes in areas of the brain that are important for sensory, cognitive and

emotional processing,” with other forms of meditation and yoga likely to yield a similar impact.

Figure 4: Gamma brain wave activity during meditation - for control group (left) and meditation practitioners (right) (color scale indicates percentage of subjects in each group that had an increase of gamma activity during mental training). Source: Lutz et al. 2004

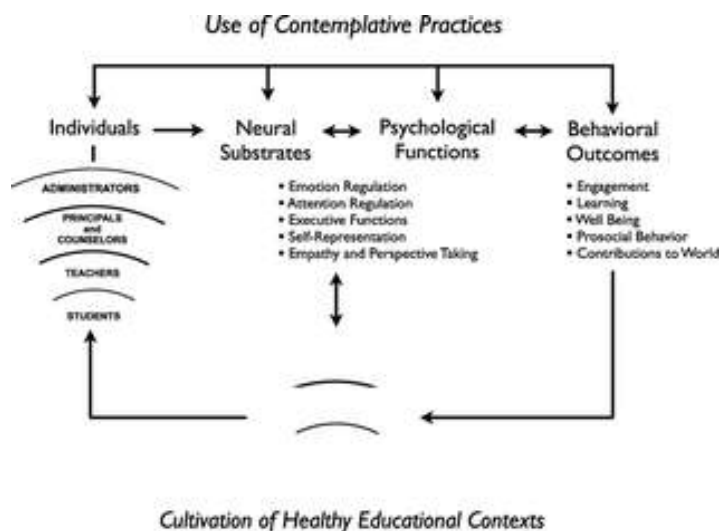


A controlled longitudinal study that examined changes in brain gray matter among participants in a Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program found changes in the concentration of gray brain matter in the regions of the brain involved in emotion regulation, learning and memory, perspective-taking and processing beliefs related to self-identity (Hölzel, 2011: 1). The cognitive and emotional changes studied in clinical research thus resonate with neuroscience findings.

Studies on brain changes during meditation hint at numerous possible implications towards a discussion of peace, especially in the behavioural realm. For example, Brefczynski-Lewis et al. (2007) studied brain activity of experienced meditators after 3 months of concentration meditation and found that emotional sounds provoked less activation of the amygdala – a region of the brain that activates alert systems during stress and is associated with processing fear and aggression. With novice meditators too, several studies have linked mindfulness with a reduced activation of the amygdala, as well as enhanced activity in the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain involved in

reasoning and decision-making (Tang, 2015: 218). This further strengthens suggestions of potential linkages between meditative practice and reduced emotional reactivity, as well as an easing of the cognitive and emotional mental processes that exacerbate stress – each important for promoting peace in self and society. *Figure 5* below provides a framework to understand the relationship between contemplative practices, brain functions and behavioural outcomes.

Figure 5: Framework for understanding how contemplative practices may affect neural systems, psychological functions and behavioural outcomes. Source: Davidson et al. 2012: 147

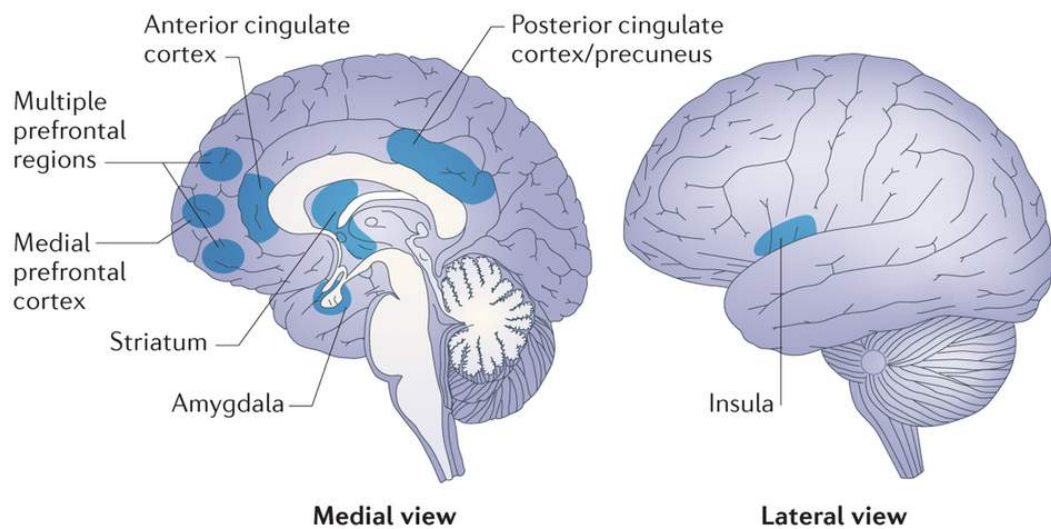


Although an understanding of the mechanisms underlying the effects of meditation is still in its infancy, Tang et al. illustrate emerging evidence of how mindfulness meditation may cause several structural and functional changes in regions of the brain involved in self-awareness, emotion and attention regulation (Tang, 2015: 222 – refer to *Figure 6*). This may be particularly beneficial in countering negative affects to children’s brain structure and functions (and related interference with healthy emotional regulation) associated with prolonged adversity and maltreatment (Kim and Cicchetti, 2010: 713), as in highly violent contexts or situations of armed

conflict. A study by Lutz et al. (2008) suggests that compassion-based meditative practice has a direct effect on mental circuits involved in empathy through a voluntary regulation of emotional responses. This resonates with the idea of meditation as a mental practice that primes compassionate behaviour.

Figure 6: Brain regions involved in the components of mindfulness meditation.

Source: Tang et al. 2015: 217



Legend of key functions and associated brain regions:

- **Attention control** – the anterior cingulate cortex and striatum
- **Emotion regulation** – multiple prefrontal regions, limbic regions including amygdala, and the striatum
- **Self-awareness** – the insula, medial prefrontal cortex and posterior prefrontal cortex/precuneus

Findings from Desbordes et al. (2012) suggest that the impacts of meditation training on mental function and emotional processing may endure in daily life, not just during meditation. This supports the hypothesis that relatively short-term meditative states can support the longer-term development of traits (Slagter et al. 2011) – important to the present discussion on peace and the cultivation of peaceful qualities.

Research in brain plasticity demonstrates that with mental practice like meditation, neural networks associated with cognitive and emotional

structures can be strengthened to support positive habits of mind, regardless of one's early experience: "The emerging science of neuroplasticity has the potential to bring radical changes, to both individuals and the world, raising the possibility that we could train ourselves to be kinder, more compassionate, less defensive, less self-centered, less aggressive, less warlike" (Begley, 2009: 28).

Contemplative education and existing research from school-based programs

In supporting plastic changes in brain function and structure, contemplative practices in an educational setting are seen to support the development of positive qualities and prosocial behaviour (Davidson et al. 2012:146). Such educational interventions have been gaining traction in schools around the world, especially in North America, as well as in the United Kingdom²⁴. In its database of North American contemplative education programs²⁵, the Garrison Institute (2014) lists 21 yoga and 28 mindfulness programs in K-12 settings²⁶, with several integrating both yoga and mindfulness simultaneously or additional contemplative philosophies²⁷. Yoga and meditative practice are the primary platforms for contemplative interventions with children and youth, typically promoting common outcomes including increased self-knowledge and present moment awareness, focused attention, and emotional regulation (Greenberg and Harris, 2012: 162) and

²⁴ See Mindfulness in Schools Initiative: <http://mindfulnessinschools.org/>.

²⁵ Including 12 categories of contemplative philosophies: breath awareness, contemplation in nature, contemplation through music, contemplation through visual arts, contemplative movement/dance, guided visualizations, indigenous knowledge, MBSR, mindfulness, qigong, tai chi, yoga <http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/contemplation-and-education/contemplative-education-program-database>.

²⁶ Current numbers of programs may be far more numerous since the database does not yet reflect newer initiatives.

²⁷ See also the Garrison Institute's Contemplation and Education Mapping Report (Schoeberlein et al. 2005) – now dated, but provides an overview of the field, defines programmatic categories identifying the breadth of experiences.

generally associated with the promotion of prosocial behaviours among youth (Rempel, 2012: 210). Research around contemplative education is growing, and there is an emerging evidence base drawn largely from North American programs. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) review benefits drawn from 14 studies of mindfulness programs with elementary and primary school-aged students – including improvements in attention, social skills, emotional regulation, self-esteem, and stress; as well as research on teacher training initiatives that promote improved well-being, classroom management and supportive relationships with students.

Studies with teachers have shown that mindfulness training is effective at lowering psychological symptoms of stress and burnout (Flook et al. 2013), increasing resilience and wellbeing (Flook et al. 2013; Jennings et al. 2013: 387), promoting self-compassion (Roeser et al. 2013: 792), and improving recognition and regulation of emotions that decreases reactivity in the classroom (Jennings et al. 2013: 385). Existing research has also highlighted the protective effects of mindfulness and its particular relevance for teachers in high-risk/high-stress environments (Abenavoli et al. 2013: 66).

While an array of programs are being implemented in schools²⁸, rigorous research with children and youth has been limited, and well-designed studies to strengthen a quality evidence base are needed (Greenberg and Harris, 2012:162-166). Pilot studies over the past five years have begun to contribute towards an emerging evidence base. A recent meta-analysis of school-based mindfulness programs (Zenner, 2014: 18) and related studies (Kuyken et al. 2013; van de Weijer-Bergsma, 2014: 243-244)

²⁸ See Meiklejohn et al (2012: 299) and Felver et al (2015) for a summary of sample mindfulness-based programs for children and youth.

indicate such interventions are particularly promising at improving resilience to stress and wellbeing. Research indicates that mindfulness training among children and young adolescents can strengthen executive function (Flook et al. 2010: 79; Oberle et al. 2012: 582) – key to social and emotional learning and linked with planning and implementing tasks, reducing impulsive responses and strengthening focused attention. An evaluation of a meditation-based program among high school girls showed decreases in negative emotions and increases in self-acceptance and calm (Broderick and Metz, 2009: 42), while improvements in positive emotions, optimism and social-emotional competence was observed in a mindfulness program among 4th to 7th graders (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010: 147). An evaluation of yoga-based intervention among inner city children found decreases in stress, rumination, intrusive thoughts and emotional arousal (Mendelson et al. 2010: 991), while another in a rural high school showed substantive mental health improvements including increased anger control and resilience (Khalsa et al. 2012: 88).

A recent randomized controlled trial study of a mindfulness-based program in social and emotional learning²⁹ demonstrated improvements among 4th and 5th grade students in several measures including cognitive control and stress physiology, well-being, empathy, emotional control, perspective-taking, as well as lower peer-rated aggression and higher peer-rated prosociality (Schonert-Reichl et al. 2015). This study suggests the relevance of mindfulness as a value-add in classroom-based interventions

²⁹ Developed by the Hawn Foundation, MindUP includes three minutes of mindfulness practice three times daily including focused breathing, attentive listening, mindful smelling and tasting, social-emotional learning, positive mood learning and lessons involving acts of kindness (Schonert-Reichl et al. 2015).

that help children thrive, supporting the cultivation of peaceful and resilient dispositions. The potential for such interventions within peace education curriculum will be explored in the following chapter, as well as their relevance in the Colombian context.

Conclusion

This chapter has served to introduce contemplative practices and investigate possible linkages in cultivating personal peacefulness. To do so it has examined theories of personal peacefulness, human needs, Buddhist psychology, Attachment Theory, and neuroplasticity, making a case for the peacebuilding potential of contemplative practices more generally. The chapter also introduces contemplative education programs and includes a summary of early research findings from school-based contemplative programs. The chapter that follows will take a closer look at the value and limits of school-based contemplative interventions for peace-oriented education in particular.

Chapter 2: School-based contemplative interventions for peace-oriented education: Examining the case of Colombia

Introduction

Contemplative education interventions show promising results toward peace and psychosocial wellness, yet it remains a challenge locating programs that connect these approaches with peace-oriented education more explicitly³⁰ (*Appendix 6* includes a summary of related initiatives). Given this still emerging area and under-explored line of research, it is noteworthy that in the city of Bogota, Colombia, two organizations are integrating contemplative approaches to support peacebuilding aims and promote psychosocial wellness. RESPIRA is a mindfulness-training program for teachers and students implemented by Convivencia Productiva in collaboration with Save the Children, first operational in areas affected by the armed conflict. Dunna is an organization that implements yoga programs for trauma healing with ex-combatants; emotional recovery with victims of the armed conflict; and to support peaceful coexistence in schools (Yoga for School Coexistence)³¹. The mindfulness and yoga programs are distinct yet share commonalities in their approach including mindful breathing and movement, present-moment attention, and awareness of the body, thoughts, and emotions. Each emphasizes creative approaches to educating for peace.

Peace education is “both a tool of prevention and of social reconciliation” (Annette Isaac Consulting, 1999: 4). This chapter examines

³⁰ Related initiatives include yoga for trauma recovery in Rwanda (Project Air) and Uganda (Mandala House); mindfulness and yoga with refugees in the West Bank (Niroga Institute); and brain training with children in violence-affected areas of El Salvador and communities in post-conflict Liberia (International Brain Education Association). See *Appendix 6* for a summary of these and other related initiatives.

³¹ See <http://dunna.org/en/> for a comprehensive summary of Dunna’s various yoga-based and dance-based programs.

the value and limits of contemplative interventions in both strands of peace education, investigating its usefulness in educating for peace more broadly as well as in promoting psychosocial recovery in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts. It examines Colombia as a case study, focusing on RESPIRA's mindfulness program, with complementary insights from Dunna's yoga programs. Primary data from interviews in Colombia is introduced to consider the place of contemplative approaches within Colombia's education priorities, and the replicability of such approaches in peace-oriented education.

Overview of the nexus between contemplative approaches and peace education

In its broadest sense, peace education refers to teaching for peace (Harris and Morrison, 2003: 29), however various streams of peace education reflect diverse conceptual underpinnings and practical implications (Toh Swee-Hin, 1997; Mayton, 2009). How we understand the goals and methods of peace education varies across cultures, societies and types of violence being addressed (Harris, 2002:16) and also depends on whether educational interventions are applied in areas of relative tranquility, contexts affected by intractable conflict, and those facing interethnic tensions (Salomon, 2002: 6). Peace education should be contextually relevant and experiential (Bar-Tal, 2002, 32-33; Staub, 2002: 74).

Among the milieu of conceptions and corresponding strategies, approaches that prioritize inner development are rare, mirroring the broader gap in peace discourse. While intrapersonal dimensions are included in

UNICEF's widely accepted definition of peace education³², few related programs appear in peace education literature. Swedish-based 'The dream of the good' is one peace education program that uses mind-body methods including meditation, yoga and qigong as key components within a holistic toolbox of approaches supporting peacefulness among students, with positive results in measures of psychological distress and self esteem (Somerfelt and Vambheim, 2008: 15).

Peace education pioneer Betty Reardon (2012:13) advocates the pedagogic use of contemplation through a form of reflective inquiry³³, but cautions against incorporating meditation or other spiritual/religious practices into the public educational realm, appealing to the principle of separating church and state. However, the recent surge of mindfulness-based educational interventions may prompt a reframing of what is understood as secular and spiritual. While practices like mindfulness have a spiritual origin, they offer evidence-based secular approaches to strengthening cognitive and social emotional development. The emphasis is much more about learning healthy mental practices, than of promoting particular spiritual expressions. Contemplative educational interventions described in the Colombian case study, for example, are explicitly secular (as detailed later in this chapter).

From the neuroscientific level, the implication of learning to understand our emotions and the mental software that influences actions and experiences – whether as students or teachers – is powerful. It suggests that developing inner capacities through contemplation may better equip people

³² "The process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international" (Fountain, 1999:1).

³³ Reardon discusses contemplation/rumination, a form of reflective inquiry with an inward subjective gaze.

to acknowledge unconscious repetition of ineffective or even violent mental patterns, belief systems and emotional reactions that shape human behaviour. Experiential strategies of mental practice, as discussed in the previous chapter, are promising in nurturing peaceful qualities of mind such as compassion; in regulating negative emotions like anger; and in promoting spaces of wellness and peaceful coexistence in schools. Integrated into holistic peace education programs, contemplative approaches may aid in prompting inner transformation and promoting peaceful and compassionate orientations among teachers and students.

In conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts specifically, such approaches can be highly complementary to peacebuilding interventions. Education's role in post-conflict peacebuilding ranges from supporting protection and reconstruction initiatives (most often highlighted in programmatic literature) to supporting post-conflict transformation (most often highlighted in academic literature) (Smith et al. 2011: 7, Kagawa and Selby, 2014: 9). Education programming that integrates contemplative approaches may be particularly transformative at the social level, especially in terms of psychosocial recovery efforts after conflict and violence. Such education programming typically aims to strengthen student wellbeing and learning ability by reducing stress and improving concentration, as well as supporting teacher self-care and identification of stress-related behaviours (Smith et al. 2011: 37). It thus resonates closely with the summary of outcomes of school-based mindfulness and yoga programs highlighted in the previous chapter, as well as insights from the case study that follows.

A recent UNICEF report highlights the “transformative orientation of peacebuilding education” and calls for “socio-emotional nurturance of children and a fostering of qualities and traits that bring positive energy to processes of renewal, reconciliation and reconstruction.” (Kagawa and Selby, 2014: 9-10). The report incorporates a framework on basic needs that appears useful for assessing the value of contemplative approaches in peace education from the perspective of emotional needs fulfillment and prosocial development (see complementary analysis included in *Appendix 9*).

Case study: Contemplative education in Colombia

Overview of context

Colombia has been affected by armed conflict for more than 50 years. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail associated grievances and evolving interests, salient contextual points are summarized below.

The Colombian State and main guerrilla group FARC-EP³⁴ have been locked in an internal armed conflict since 1964, initiated largely in response to political exclusion and inequality³⁵. Additional conflict actors include other rebel groups, paramilitaries and criminal narco-trafficking groups, whose collusion with paramilitary forces (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013a: 52) resulted in ever more gruesome manifestations of violence (R3). Close to 220,000 people have been killed in the armed conflict between 1958 and 2012, 81% of them civilians (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013b). The armed conflict has also resulted in one of the highest numbers of internally

³⁴ Known by its Spanish acronym representing “Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo” (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army).

³⁵ Colombia continues to be one of the most unequal countries in the world with the latest Gini index measured at 53.3 (World Bank, 2015).

displaced people in the world,³⁶ many originating from rural Indigenous or Afro-Colombian communities where armed groups have taken land from peasants to further their own interests (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013:28).

Peace negotiations between the FARC-EP and the Colombian government have been underway in Havana, Cuba since 2012, with rollercoaster-like developments in 2015: After breaking their unilateral truce in May 2015, the FARC-EP's clashes with Colombian security forces made June 2015 the most violent month since the start of the peace talks (CERAC, cited in El Universal, 2015). However, since the latest ceasefire was put into place on July 20, 2015³⁷, historically low levels of offensive actions have been witnessed on the part of both FARC-EP and public security forces³⁸, renewing optimism in reaching a peace agreement for the March 2016 target.

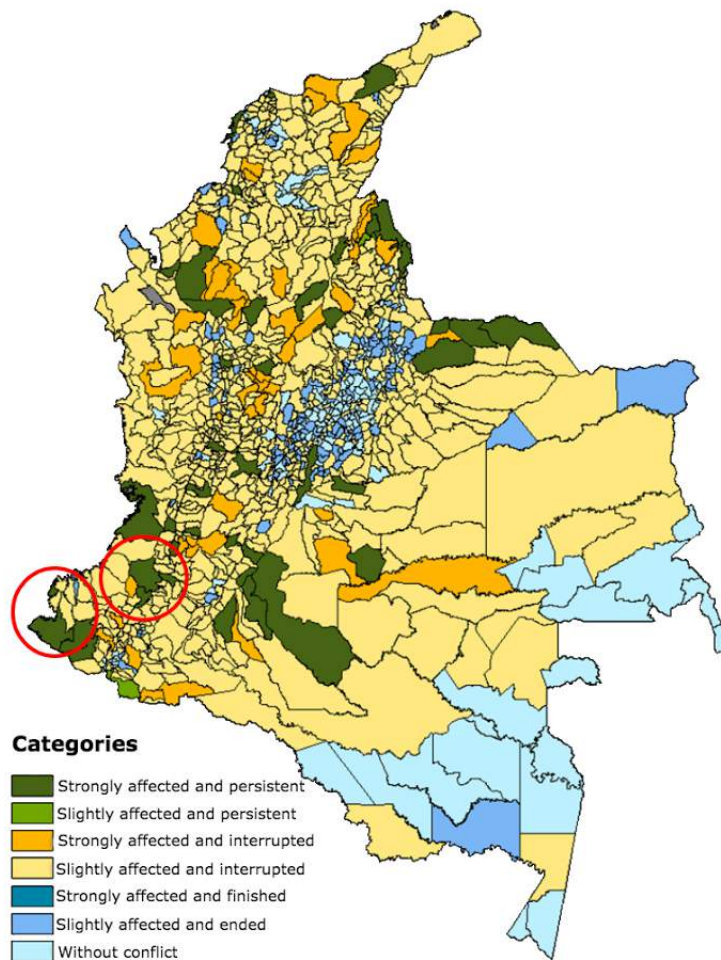
The country pulses with a palpable hope for peace, visible in centers for memory and reconciliation, museum and art gallery exhibits, street banners and graffiti. While the conflict is no doubt etched into the psyches of Colombians, a visitor spending time in Bogota or other major urban centers in 2015 may feel very little, if any effect, of this decades-long conflict. It is a conflict whose impacts are most pronounced in rural, peripheral regions of the country (see Figure 7 below), where the realities and interests on the ground may not resound with those being negotiated in peace talks.

³⁶ As of December 2014, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR:2015) estimates 6,044,151 and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC:2015) estimates 6,044,200, based on estimates provided by the government's Integral Reparation and Assistance for Victims Unit. This places Colombia's IDP count second after Syria.

³⁷ Put into place by the FARC-EP and matched with substantive government de-escalation commitments. See: Comunicado Conjunto #55 (2015).

³⁸ Lowest levels of offensive actions on the part of the FARC in 40 years and on the part of public security forces in the history of the conflict, as reported by conflict monitoring think tank CERAC. See: Correal, 2015.

Figure 7: Map of Colombia's municipalities by conflict category
Circled in red are the municipalities of Tumaco (bottom left) and Tambo where RESPIRA is implemented. Image source: Centro de Recursos para el análisis del conflicto (CERAC) 2014³⁹.



The municipality of Tumaco on the Pacific coast in the department of Nariño is one of the areas deeply affected by the armed conflict, and a principal site of data collection (via teacher interviews) for the present case study. It is a place of contrasts – with its tranquil tropical panorama and warmth of local residents starkly juxtaposed by a frightening backdrop of crime and the armed conflict – which is categorized as severe, persistent and

³⁹ Image adapted slightly with translated (English) legend and circles to denote municipalities where RESPIRA programs are implemented.

intense⁴⁰ (CERAC dataset, 2014). Like many conflict-affected zones of the country, Tumaco faces extreme marginalization, with high multidimensional poverty and illiteracy rates at more than twice the national average (Consejo Municipal de Tumaco, 2013: 26-28). It is also one of the municipalities most affected by narco-trafficking⁴¹ – a key aggravator of the conflict since people facing socioeconomic exclusion may see it as one of the only viable ways to make a living.

This toxic mix of conflict and crime has left the largely Afro-Colombian population vulnerable to violence from a range of actors – guerrillas, paramilitaries, criminal groups and security forces (Human Rights Watch, 2014), and a homicide rate nearly three times the national average (INMLCF, 2015: 96). Residents describe the local context in terms of the violent crime, bribes, “narco-culture”⁴², assassinations and impunity that characterize it (T1-T5). As one teacher related: “It’s the only place in the world where people know that in x house lives this person who is an assassin, and *who* he has killed. And they know where he lives. And nothing happens” (T5).

Colombia’s protracted conflict has placed children at risk of recruitment and sexual violence, as well as attacks against schools (Watchlist, 2012). Schools in Tumaco are sometimes visited by armed groups (T3) – who typically seek to recruit children for use as spies, messengers, arms transporters or to run illicit drug business inside schools (GCPEA, 2014:18).

⁴⁰ A recent wave of violence in June 2015 saw rebel groups taking to the offensive against state security forces, resulting in damage to electricity infrastructure and the bombing of oil pipelines, leaving residents managing an unprecedented environmental catastrophe due to a riverine oil spill.

⁴¹ UNODC reported a 36% increase in coca cultivation in Tumaco in 2014 – the highest in the country. See: UNODC, 2015:19.

⁴² Refers to a powerful subculture that has grown in the Americas with the influence of narco-trafficking groups.

Education in Tumaco is frequently interrupted due to the armed conflict, strikes and roadblocks (T1, T2, T3) and quality education is a major challenge, with levels of academic performance among the lowest nationally (MEN; Lizarazo, 2015). Teachers also cite school violence – including bullying, reactive students, sexual assault, and violence on the part of teachers – among key issues facing school communities. This reflects a larger national issue: a recent study on school aggression put Colombia at the top of the list among 15 other Latin American countries, indicating more than 60% of 6th graders were victims of school violence and more than 70% were aware of a classmate that had been victimized (Roman & Murillo, 2011: p.44-45).

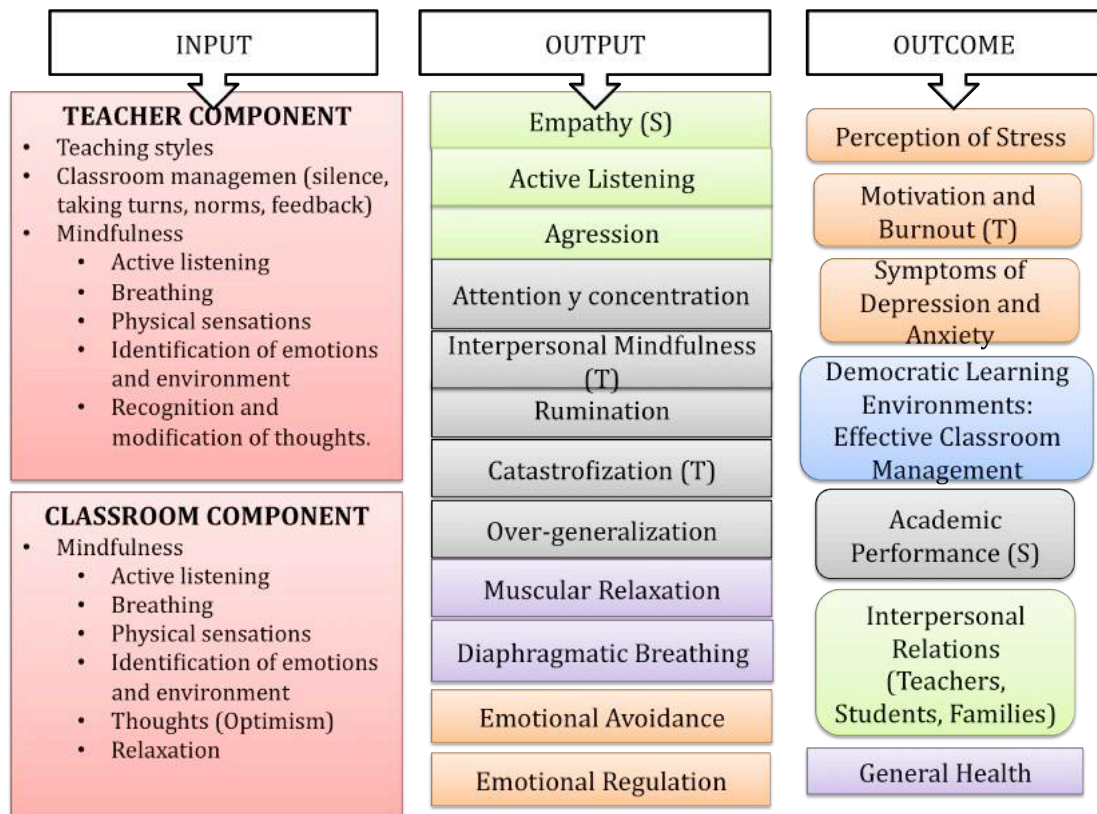
RESPIRA program

The RESPIRA program was born out of an understanding of the alarming levels of violence facing communities in Colombia, which manifest in the school through victimization among students and place extra psychological burdens on already overworked and undercompensated teachers. At its core it was conceived as an innovative peace education program that aims to introduce mindfulness to Colombian public schools to support wellbeing among teachers and students, to promote peaceful coexistence and to strengthen academic achievement. It was first piloted by Convivencia Productiva in Tumaco in collaboration with Save the Children as part of a larger education project implemented in conflict-affected areas of

the country⁴³, and is currently operational in rural conflict-affected zones of Tumaco and Tambo, as well as high-risk urban districts in Bogota and Cali.

Figure 8: Theory of change – RESIRA program

Source: Convivencia Productiva (2015a:1) Note: Outputs and outcomes are measured with both students and teachers, except where marked with S denoting students only, and T denoting teachers only.



The program’s Theory of Change (see *Figure 8* above) emphasizes outcomes in physical and mental wellbeing, academic performance, interpersonal relations and democratic learning environments – in line with its promotion of social and emotional learning competencies⁴⁴, a core component of education in citizenship competencies mandated by the

⁴³ Vive la Educación is a 5-year education program funded through the Canadian government (Global Affairs Canada; formerly the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; and prior to that the Canadian International Development Agency) and Bvlgari, that is co-implemented by Save the Children and the Norwegian Refugee Council in conflict-affected zones within the departments of Nariño and Cauca in Southwestern Colombia.

⁴⁴ Such as the key social and emotional competencies identified by The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) including self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2015).

Colombian government to which the program aligns. Although it identifies specific cognitive, emotional and behavioural outputs that have much to do with promoting peaceful individuals and cultures – such as emotional regulation, decreased ruminative tendencies, aggression, empathy, and active listening; the links between these outputs and their contributions towards more peaceful individuals or cultures has not been an explicit focus of program evaluations. The present investigation works within this gap to explore linkages.

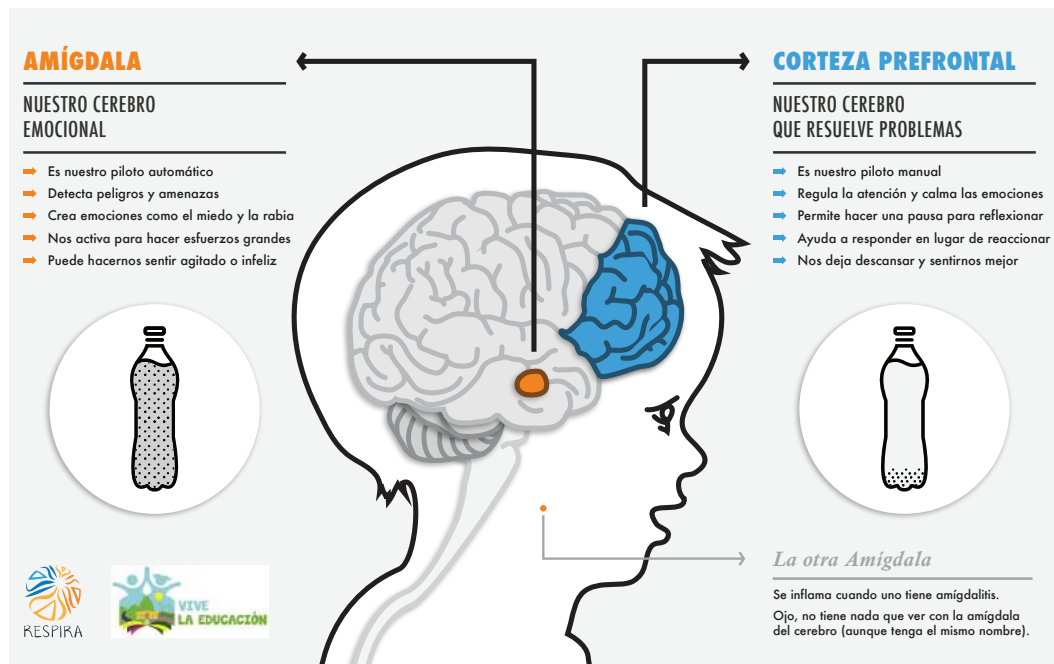
The essence of the program is transformative in nature. It involves training teachers in mindfulness practice (Teacher Component), a process that nurtures self-discovery. Trained teachers build a personal practice and go on to introduce classroom-based mindfulness exercises to their students (Classroom Component).

Through a series of six sessions, RESPIRA facilitators work with groups of primary school teachers to introduce mindfulness and its relevance in the teaching realm, guiding participants in formal mindfulness practice that includes short exercises in mindful movement, breathing, listening, observation of thoughts and emotions, physical sensations as well as loving-kindness and gratitude. In addition to these experiential elements, curriculum incorporates thematic workshops in social-emotional learning, understanding brain functioning and emotional regulation (see *Figure 9* below), as well as mindful teaching and classroom management approaches.

“Circle processes” are a main pedagogical feature and offer teachers a safe space for mindful listening, reflection and sharing to support deeper comprehension of mindfulness, identify links with their profession, and attend

to group needs⁴⁵. The environment is welcoming, trusting, and serene (O2-O4; see *Appendix 7* that describes RESPIRA sessions based on participant observations).

Figure 9: RESPIRA program handout on brain regions and functioning used with older students and teachers
Source: Convivencia Productiva (2015b)



Trained teachers implement the Classroom Component with accompaniment from RESPIRA facilitators; this includes short developmentally appropriate mindfulness exercises with students between preschool and grade 5. Curriculum targeting younger students is organized around a storyline with animal characters, while older students engage in more complex themes. A core and effective child-friendly tool across all student segments includes a water bottle filled with water and sand, which

⁴⁵ RESPIRA facilitators are encouraged to maintain an open space during sessions in which mindful listening and attention to the needs of participants takes precedence over the fulfillment of pre-planned curriculum content. In some cases this means enabling teachers to share their realities and present concerns in an open and trusting way, especially important in conflict-affected contexts where it may be challenging for teachers to find alternate outlets to address associated emotions and fear.

when left unshaken represents a calm mind and when shaken represents agitated internal states of mind.

RESPIRA aims to develop students' capacity for attention and concentration in class, positive attitudes towards learning and school life, recognition and regulation of emotions and behaviour, and harmonious relations with classmates. Among teachers it aims to develop capacities to manage pressure and reduce stress, improve motivation and commitment towards their profession, learn and integrate effective classroom management strategies, and build harmonious relations with colleagues and students.

While a scientific evaluation of RESPIRA's impact is underway, early evidence from a pilot evaluation of the Teacher Component shows a statistically significant reduction in levels of stress⁴⁶ (Bustamante and Vargas, 2014: 11). Teachers cited improvements in emotional regulation, tranquility, interpersonal relations, and self knowledge/self-love/self-care (Ibid, 2014: 35). More than 90% of teacher respondents attributed the program to a change in their manner of living or manner of being (Ibid, 2014: 20).

Teachers, peace education and contemplative approaches

Skilled and motivated teachers are critical – yet underemphasized – agents in successful peace education (Bar-Tal, 2002; Reardon, 1988). Since stress and emotional negativity of teachers has been linked to behavioural issues among students (Yoon, 2002), ensuring teachers have effective tools

⁴⁶ A 4% reduction on average was found among 27 teacher participants between pre- and post-test measures of stress.

to manage stress and build resilience is highly relevant in supporting peaceful classrooms, though effective tools to help teachers do so have been lacking (Meiklejohn et al. 2012: 292). The RESPIRA program is an interesting educational approach because it prioritizes teacher development and wellbeing first, relying on teachers' embodied practice of mindfulness for effective replication with students; Dunna's yoga programs in schools apply a similar model. This is consistent with research showing contemplative interventions with teachers may be just as effective – or even more so – at influencing positive behavioural developments among students (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al. 2012) than student-focused programs alone.

In situations of crisis, teachers are perceived as key care-givers outside the home who can potentially support children in addressing psychosocial trauma by providing a safe and calming space and modeling effective resolution of conflicts (Horner et al. 2015:21). Yet in conflict-affected contexts teachers themselves may be in need of psychosocial support (Horner et al. 2015; INEE 2013), evident in schools where RESPIRA works. Nurturing self-awareness is key to this process (Horner et al. 2015:45); resonating with RESPIRA's and Dunna's approach. In emphasizing psychosocial wellness among teachers and students, these programs serve to support peaceful environments and strengthen peaceful pedagogies – a crucial ingredient to any attempt at teaching about peace (Harris, 2002: 20).

In their emphasis on teachers' own development and incorporation of peaceful classroom management methods, programs like RESPIRA and Dunna resonate with key education priorities acknowledged in conflict-

affected countries; for example Save the Children identifies teacher professional development, non-violent pedagogies and peace-promoting curricula – among its recommendations in such contexts⁴⁷ (Save the Children, 2010: 59-60).

Loving relationships to nurture peacebuilding

Strong caring relationships between facilitators and teachers are understood as key ingredients in RESPIRA, whereby facilitators “embody the love” that trained teachers will eventually pass on to their students (R4). This resonates with Jiddu Krishnamurti’s (1954/1981) emphasis on the need to integrate love and emotional understanding into education systems, which he saw as overemphasizing rational knowledge acquisition. Reflecting on Krishnamurti’s work on nonviolent education, Harris (2003: 162) notes:

“Teachers can instruct youth about alternatives to dysfunctional violent behaviours. They can teach the importance of listening, caring, tolerance, cooperation, impulse control, anger management, perspective taking and problem solving skills. They can also try to make students aware of their own biases...the goal of these instructional activities is to provide students with communication skills and to help them be empathic. But love cannot be taught. It must be “caught” and this comes about through the persistent affection a teacher shows to each student within a particular classroom environment.”

The RESPIRA program is as much about “heartfulness as it is about mindfulness,” (R4) and works to promote feelings of wellbeing and love between both teacher and student participants, thus reflecting the vision of a love-infused education that Krishnamurti advocated. This is arguably even more important in fragile, conflict-affected contexts in Colombia where

⁴⁷ Following the Rewrite the Future campaign, a three-year Save the Children initiative (2006-2009) that emphasized education for children in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

complexities in the domestic arena may challenge parental figures in providing the early emotional nurturance to ensure children thrive and have healthy emotional attachment patterns.

Where do contemplative approaches fit within Colombia's education and post conflict transition priorities?

RESPIRA's mindfulness-based program and Dunna's Yoga for School Coexistence initiative contribute toward the social and emotional learning aims promoted by Colombia's Ministry of Education through its 2004 guide on citizenship competencies standards in education (Guia No.6), and further emphasized through the 2013 Law of School Coexistence (No. 1620). The Law of School Coexistence highlights among its priorities the prevention and mitigation of school violence, including addressing and preventing multiple manners and routes of aggression and intimidation in the school – student to student, teacher to student, student to teacher (Colombian Congress, 2013). In the absence of prior national peace education priorities, Colombian peace education programs over the years have actively aligned themselves to this focus on citizenship education (C3).

More recently and in accordance with a new law (No. 1732) passed September 2014 known as the *Catedra de la Paz (Chair for Peace)*, the government has explicitly prioritized education for peace for the first time in history, mandating all schools to include peace education subject matter into their plans of study by December 2015 (Colombian Congress, 2014). It is thus a transformational moment for peace education in Colombia, and practitioners have been working to ensure this new emphasis manifests

beyond the mere memorization of peace education content towards the incorporation of innovative methodologies in classrooms. Teacher training was highlighted by Colombian peace education professionals as the key priority moving forward, ensuring teachers are equipped to teach themes of peace and can promote constructive and peaceful classroom climates (C3, C5). This is especially true since priorities for citizenship competencies target students exclusively (R3, C3).

Approaches like RESPIRA's mindfulness and Dunna's yoga programs are well positioned to support the new move towards peace education given they work to nurture peaceful coexistence in schools and also – importantly - emphasize teachers' learning and wellbeing as linked to an embodiment of peaceful pedagogies in the classroom. Furthermore, the experiential nature of learning methodologies mirror effective models of peace education that go beyond mere cognitive understanding of themes towards an understanding and awareness of thought processes and emotions, nurturing concrete capacities relevant for coexistence (C3, C5).

Many interviews highlighted the special place of contemplative approaches for peace education, since they work to integrate intrapersonal elements of peace in a realm that has traditionally emphasized interpersonal and societal dimensions of peace (R3-R7, C2, C3, C5). As one RESPIRA facilitator notes:

“They can give me all the tools they want about conflict resolution, human rights and so on. But if I am not at peace with myself, if I don't have internal tools that enable me to feel genuine peace, then you are sowing seeds in a dead field” (R3).

Combining contemplative approaches with citizenship competencies

Several informants commented on the usefulness of mindfulness approaches when combined with more traditional citizenship competencies programs that have been successful in Colombia⁴⁸; intrapersonal approaches that work to nurture profound consciousness of oneself and one's emotional processes are complementary to those employing more traditional techniques for social emotional regulation including anger management, perspective-taking and role playing for conflict resolution (C2, C3, C5, C6, R3, R6). Contemplative approaches may be particularly complementary in the area of metacognition⁴⁹ (thinking about thinking) – recognized as a component of citizenship competencies in Colombia (Chaux et al. 2004: 22), since meditation strengthens metacognitive skills and an ability to choose where to focus attention, with positive implications for resilience building (Sivilli and Pace, 2014; C5).

One informant hypothesized the role of mindfulness in providing students with a foundation from which to “soak in” and be ready to integrate a prosocial value orientation and increase empathy, suggesting this is most promising when coupled with collective action-oriented classroom activities that benefit other human beings (C6), echoing Staub's (2003) work on altruism. This touches on connections between intrapersonal peace and social justice, and several respondents highlighted the importance of awareness and action with respect to structural violence, ensuring that inner peace through contemplative education does not signify passivity in the face

⁴⁸ Such as Aulas en Paz <http://aulasenpaz.uniandes.edu.co/> and Juegos de Paz <http://juegosdepaz.net/>.

⁴⁹ Metacognition – or thinking about thinking, implies active control over cognitive processes, and is key to an ability to observe the workings of the mind and change course when needed (Wallace, 2006: 224).

of unjust policies and violations of rights (C3, C4, R3). This resonates with the Buddhist perspective that increased awareness works to nurture compassionate action. These reflections offer interesting ideas of how mindfulness and other contemplative approaches can be relevant to a holistic model of peace education, especially when coupled with complementary evidence-based approaches that nurture social emotional learning and altruistic tendencies.

Psychosocial recovery priorities in Colombia's post conflict transition

Contemplative approaches also offer interesting complementary contributions to post conflict peacebuilding processes, working from the inside out to change the way violence has affected people⁵⁰ – introducing healthier ways of dealing with thoughts, emotions and overcoming trauma. This may be especially useful when integrated into education, given noted gaps in public spending on mental health in Colombia (C9, R4, T5). While RESPIRA is exploring such potential applications for its mindfulness programs, Dunna's programs have been grounded in these areas since their inception. They have been introducing yoga to members of demobilized illegal armed groups to successfully reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as hypervigilance and paranoia, nightmares and re-experiencing traumatic events (C9).

Although it may be more urgent for trauma survivors to fulfill practical needs than deal with emotional issues, such as securing financial assistance

⁵⁰ Alongside other important processes like the documentation of Historical Memory of the country. A focused awareness of the present alongside efforts to narrate a painful past can be potentially useful in preventing re-victimization and repetition of past pain – a risk associated with reconstructing collective memory (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica and the University of British Columbia, 2013).

in order to support a return to normalcy (Ehrenreich, 2003: 20), Dunna’s experience elucidates how trauma-related symptoms can pose deep barriers to reintegration that affect multiple areas of life. For example, one yoga program beneficiary and former combatant struggled to complete elementary education, a prerequisite for accessing material assistance through the government. Lack of sleep attributed to sleep avoidance was an underlying problem: Each time he closed his eyes he saw fellow combatants getting killed and re-lived the trauma. This in turn affected his concentration in waking life and ability to do basic tasks. Participating in the yoga program “helped him close his eyes and see something different”(C9). With regular sleep restored, he was able to focus again, accelerate learning, and finally graduate elementary school.

According to Dunna staff, research findings⁵¹ from work with victims of the armed conflict shows yoga’s effectiveness in reducing feelings of anger, fear, sadness, and angst (C9). Similar decreases in depression, anxiety and aggression were also observed in the Yoga for School Coexistence pilot program (C9)⁵². Improving emotional recovery is especially crucial for victims of conflict since they get “overcome by these feelings and cannot function properly in their regular daily lives”(C9). Being able to manage negative emotions is a highly relevant benefit of yoga in post-conflict reintegration efforts among Dunna’s program participants.

This resonates with research around posttraumatic growth that suggests trauma survivors who experience growth after trauma engage actively with emotions and memories and create new cognitive narratives

⁵¹ Research findings pending publication, anticipated in 2016 as per Dunna staff.

⁵² Research findings pending publication; anticipated in 2016 as per Dunna staff.

(Tedeschi, 1999: 333). One informant made links between how mindfulness and yoga can support the internal capacities needed for such engagement with emotions and the restructuring of experience that is particularly critical for reconciliation and sustainable peace (C2).

Relevance and replicability of mindfulness-based approaches in peace-oriented education interventions

RESPIRA's mindfulness interventions and Dunna's yoga programs in Colombian schools have thus far shown that contemplative approaches are highly relevant and can be adapted to suit a wide range of contexts – whether rural Afro-Colombian communities or inner city environments. Some informants suggest potential applicability in other Latin American contexts where urban violence is an issue, like Central American countries (C1, R6).

Religious pushback associated with introducing meditative practices – a controversial theme among Christians⁵³ - into a deeply Christian country was initially anticipated and there have been a few cases of resistance from very conservative Christians⁵⁴. Yet RESPIRA program designers have ensured all program contents are secular and relevant regardless of a person's religious or spiritual tradition; the same is true for Dunna⁵⁵.

RESPIRA's short meditative exercises are referred to not as meditation but as mindfulness practice, and are explained as evidence-based mental

⁵³ Possibly stemming from earlier Vatican-issued communication distinguishing between eastern forms of meditation and Christian prayer. See for example the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation (Ratzinger, 1989).

⁵⁴ This has applied to some Catholic as well as Evangelical Christian target beneficiaries. RESPIRA staff noted two cases of non-acceptance due to religious reasons (R5, R7), while Dunna has also experienced a few cases of resistance from conservative Evangelical participants who believe that emptying thoughts and practicing yoga keeps God far away and makes room for the devil to come in (C9). See Jain (2015) for a thoughtful examination of what is referred to as the *Christian yogaphobic position*.

⁵⁵ Dunna's yoga programs have been intentionally designed without devotional aspects sometimes associated with yogic practice, although they retain personal and social aspects of good conduct (*yams* and *niyams*), which are perceived as universally applicable within any religion or spiritual practice (C9).

training techniques, or as strategies for introspection and self-discovery

(Ramírez and Rüst, 2015: 40). As one RESPIRA staff member explains:

“The capacity of being mindful is inherently human. There is no Jewish breath or Hindu breath or Christian breath – breath is breath. Same with anger. There is no Jewish anger, Christian anger, Muslim anger. Anger is anger, you have anger – that’s human. So being attentive to that cannot be Buddhist or Jewish, it’s just a very human way of being. It’s just being human and paying attention to it” (R4).

Another informant observed that mindfulness can be developed to build a stronger structure on existing spiritual or religious foundations, “without having to come into conflict with your own heritage” (C4), and two teachers in Tumaco described the ways that mindfulness practice strengthens their prayer practice (T1; T4).

Beyond religious or spiritual concerns, the main limits of applying a similar approach elsewhere pertain to emotive interactions within circle processes – integral to RESPIRA’s pedagogic approach in Colombian schools but unsuitable to contexts where expressions of feelings or displays of affection within school environments are culturally inappropriate (R4). This is a question of adaptation, which many RESPIRA facilitators noted is necessary, even within the Colombian context. As one notes:

“I have to adapt RESPIRA in Tumaco. It’s not the same in Bogota. If they want to start with music from the Pacific, we start that way. We play drums, and from there we arrive at mindfulness exercises. So I believe it can be applied in any continent but you need to be very careful with the adaptation to ensure it fits well with the specific contexts and needs” (R3).

Another facilitator in Tumaco mentioned working with movement as an entry point to the mind; whereas this may resonate with Tumaco’s largely Afro-Colombian community members, approaches within Indigenous communities may look very distinct (R2).

The short nature of interventions with children makes RESPIRA's approach especially appealing and potentially complementary with other peace education approaches, however a certain degree of autonomy within the national education system – as is the case in Colombia – is also necessary in order to feasibly replicate such program models⁵⁶.

In terms of psychosocial recovery in particular, the experience in Colombia indicates the effectiveness and relevance of mindfulness and yoga in communities not traditionally accustomed to such approaches (with further insight on RESPIRA's experience described in the next chapter). Mind-body approaches may offer alternatives to Western psychotherapeutic approaches to trauma for conflict-affected populations, which have been criticized as inappropriate and ineffective when exported uncritically to non-Western contexts⁵⁷. The group-based and relational nature of contemplative activities carried out in carefully structured and loving environments – reflective of both RESPIRA and Dunna's program models (O1-O5) – resonates with Machel's (1996:43) recommendations integrating child-sensitive psychosocial considerations in post-conflict programming. Yet the efficacy of mind-body approaches is not assumed to be universal for every conflict-affected population; their usefulness as psychosocial tools entails resonance with existing healing and coping strategies – diverse among traumatized populations of the world.

⁵⁶ It may be more difficult, for example, to implement a similar program in a country where curriculum is highly structured and less flexible.

⁵⁷ See Bracken et al. (1993) and Ehrenreich (2003) for a summary of the limitations and main critiques of the Western approach to trauma.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 examined the potential of contemplative practices in peace education more broadly, as well as in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts more specifically, introducing a case study of mindfulness and yoga programs in Colombia. Chapter 3 turns to an examination of findings from interviews with RESPIRA teacher participants and facilitators to gauge the program's potential contribution towards personal peacefulness, and perceptions on its value in conflict-affected contexts.

Chapter 3: Findings of qualitative research with teachers and staff of the RESPIRA mindfulness program in Colombia

Introduction

This chapter presents findings of qualitative research including interviews and focus groups with RESPIRA facilitators and teacher beneficiaries in conflict-affected areas of Tumaco and Tambo, Colombia. It is primarily concerned with perceptions among teachers and staff about the peacebuilding potential of mindfulness approaches as implemented through the RESPIRA program in Colombia. The analysis aims to highlight salient themes identified through discussions; observations related to teacher and student populations; and perceptions on possible mechanisms of action. It begins by examining perceptions on RESPIRA's potential to positively influence the development of personal peacefulness, specifically in relation to emotional regulation and prosocial capacities – two key benefits of contemplative approaches identified in Chapter 1⁵⁸. It continues by investigating perceptions related to the utility of RESPIRA's mindfulness-based approach in supporting positive coping mechanisms and cultures of peace in contexts affected by conflict and violence. It is suggested that such an approach is relevant to educating for nonviolence as well as promoting the human dimensions of peacebuilding.

⁵⁸ The current chapter integrates a selection of quotes from teachers and RESPIRA staff. Additional quotes from teachers and RESPIRA staff related to emotional regulation, prosociality and peace are found in *Appendix 8*.

Contributions to personal peacefulness of program participants

Perceptions on the regulation of emotions and aggressive tendencies

Violence and aggression was highlighted as highly present within the school system in Tumaco and Tambo, with a great need to tackle issues of student bullying and aggression (T3, T4, T5), as well as corporal punishment and the need for teachers to be more tolerant and gentle to students (T3). There is a widespread consensus among teachers and staff interviewed of the potential for RESPIRA's mindfulness-based approach to support nonviolence through healthy emotional regulation and impulse control. As one teacher described RESPIRA: "it contributes to having control of emotions and control of violent reactions, which can interfere with learning. Students become more sensitive, they learn to concentrate and manage their emotions" (T1).

Teachers within the sample highlighted the ways that mindfulness supported them in regulating their own emotions and calming flared tempers within classroom contexts as well as in their personal lives (T2, T3, T4, F1, F2). Teachers also observed students strengthen dominion over their emotions and have described reductions in verbal and physical aggression levels among students (T1-T5). One teacher recounted the positive transformation that was witnessed in a student coming from a difficult family situation (living with a brother who is a suspected assassin) attributing the decrease in the student's aggressive and intimidating behaviour in large part to the success of the program approach (T5). As another teacher described it: "There was an evolution among them, with the practice. Because they learned to be more tolerant, less aggressive and more communicative

amongst themselves.” (T4) Indeed, all teachers interviewed perceive RESPIRA as helping to improve aggression-related conflicts with students to varying degrees.

Emotional awareness is understood by teachers as key to supporting emotional regulation and positive action “because by becoming conscious of emotions, we are strengthened...If I can calm myself, I can manage my temperament, I can manage my anger...this helps me become more positive in my action.” (T5) The RESPIRA program emphasizes learning about human emotions, especially in relation to cerebral processes and education about the brain as noted in the previous chapter. This fills an important niche not currently addressed within the educational system, which program participants have found particularly empowering.

Through child-friendly activities that incorporate concrete visual tools like a bottle filled with water and sand (which, when left unshaken represents a calm mind and when shaken represent agitated internal states of mind), students acquire a new emotional language to express the fluctuations in their internal sensations. They have adopted these with enthusiasm, such as referring to their “dirty bottles” to describe feelings of internal agitation or a “blocked amygdala” to denote strong emotional reactions. Senior staff members have observed that having access to an emotional language has been fundamental to students’ learning, helping them to identify the commonalities in human experiences of emotions as well as common potential solutions to tackling situations of emotional difficulty (R3, R4). One teacher also highlighted the way that the ability to understand and regulate emotions can increase students’ self protection mechanisms in terms of

helping them make more active decisions about actions, avoiding impulsive reactions that can expose them to danger, as well as the ability to avoid risky situations and pressures of criminal activity (T5), which are plentiful in Tumaco and other conflict-affected areas of Colombia.

RESPIRA facilitators highlighted the role of emotional regulation in reducing violent tendencies (R1, R3, R6) and suggested mechanisms through which participants can become less aggressive and impulsive through practice. Drawing on neurologist and psychologist Viktor E. Frankl's notion of stimulus and response⁵⁹, one facilitator theorized that mindfulness helps to widen the space between stimulus and response:

“When you breathe you take notice of your breathing and begin to discover and explore your internal world, you have a greater capacity to respond. When a stimulus comes your way – someone threatening or insulting you...if you don't practice mindfulness the space to respond is very short and you respond immediately. The response could be to return the insult or to push back or something worse. But in practicing mindfulness, you have a much wider field of responses available to you...You can remain silent observing that which is occurring in the moment. But someone more advanced can also in this silence respond in a loving way at the insult or the push. And this loving response deconstructs violence, and this is what is missing in Colombia.” (R1)

Another facilitator emphasized the importance of comprehension at both the cognitive and somatic levels – strengthened through activities emphasizing mind and body awareness – as an influencing factor in minimizing violent behaviour:

“When a student understands the mechanisms of his brain...and understands that when he gets an attack of anger...it can be regulated, that there is another part of his brain that can be tapped into through respiration...this concretely lowers violence” (R3).

⁵⁹ “Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom” (Frankl, 2004).

In RESPIRA, such comprehension is facilitated with students through the bottle exercise that provides a symbolic visual representation of emotions and their effect on the mind, as well as the power of attention and breathing to shift mental states. Student participants have described moments of realization when they are fighting in the playground and become aware that their ‘bottles are sandy’ and that they need to calm down and breathe to avoid situations of conflict (Rüst et al. 2015b: 17). Understanding that there are options available to them in order to ‘clear their bottles’ has been observed as highly empowering to students at the 4th and 5th grade levels (R4).

The power of the bottle analogy in helping students deal with anger and aggressive mental states is not that they are able to control their emotions through cognitive understanding, rather that cognitive understanding nurtures the internal awareness needed to identify the emotional state and then shift gears in attention so as to diminish its grip. This echoes Buddhist philosophy and also resonates with nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2003) in which identification and understanding of emotions and perceptions is key to empowering one to “change their habitual and automatic responses to life’s conflicts and demands and recapture their humanness” (cited in Mayton, 2009: 95).

Perceptions on the development of prosocial capacities

A clear theme that emerges in analysis of interview data is the role of RESPIRA’s mindfulness-based approaches in supporting the development of harmonious relationships (T2-T5) and nurturing prosocial capacities of cooperation and empathy. Teachers in the sample commented on improved

classroom dynamics amongst their students including improved listening and attention, and an atmosphere of tolerance and sharing (T2, T3, T5). While teachers generally perceive a high potential of the program to nurture empathetic orientations among students, either through increased self awareness (T3), tolerance (T4) or self esteem and self love (T2), several noted the difficulties in achieving this and that it requires much time and attention (T1, T3).

Interestingly, teachers expressed the ways that their own learning through the RESPIRA program had nurtured greater empathy towards students and more attentive, compassionate teaching approaches (T1, T3, T4, T5). A more conscious understanding of the situation of students and an ability to put themselves in their positions was mentioned (T1, T3, T4), as well as a greater ability to understand their learning needs and provide responsive teaching approaches (T4, T5). One teacher described her learning process through mindfulness training as “trying to adapt myself more to the present moment in which we are living and to understand them (students)...in order to...see how it’s possible to help these kids improve” (T1).

The role of self-awareness among teachers in nurturing greater understanding of students and heightened sensitivity and gentleness in their interactions was highlighted. One teacher encapsulates this sentiment eloquently, explaining the role teachers play in navigating the complex dynamics of community-family-school life with students:

“Our zone has been one of the places hit hard by violence. Multiple situations deteriorate the environment and generate negative impacts in adults, teachers and children. Unfortunately without wanting to it is we teachers who are charged with navigating these situations in the

classroom and at times with awareness and other times in ignorance of what goes on in the home...Practicing these exercises oriented toward the RESPIRA program is to begin to liberate a little our tensions and begin to focus our attention more on these students in the classroom...Unfortunately, our students suffer multiple tensions apart from their academic performance which at times is quite low. It's not an unlinked situation, it's the result of multiple pressures that they live and that perhaps we are ignorant of. To begin to understand all of these situations is to improve in some ways their individual personal situations and to create spaces that are much more friendly, much more pleasant, much less tense. Our country needs this very much" (F2).

The potential strength of RESPIRA's mindfulness-based approach in nurturing positive emotions is that it moves beyond learning about kindness or empathy in abstract or purely cognitive ways towards experiential tools that help young people (and teachers) cultivate capacities through inner experience and mental training. Depending on age, short meditations on loving-kindness (grades 3 and 4) or thought exercises using child-friendly animal characters (preschool to grade 2) are incorporated into RESPIRA classroom sessions⁶⁰. Students are encouraged to think of someone they love and send them good wishes; and to identify something they are grateful for and focus on the thought of gratitude. As one facilitator noted this practice helps to emphasize the importance of kindness and empathy, strengthening students' understanding of and access to these emotional states and capacities (R3).

In commenting on the capacity of RESPIRA to support empathy and kindness among students, another facilitator drew metaphorical links between states of being and the extent to which our personal "jars" are either filled with or lacking love and kindness:

⁶⁰ RESPIRA's Classroom Component curriculum provides further detail and instruction, as included in three versions of the curriculum guides (preschool; grades 1-2; and grades 3-5). See Ramírez and Rüst, 2015; Ramírez, Rüst, and Bustamante, 2015; and Ramírez, Rüst, and Valencia, 2015.

“We are not empathetic, we are not kind, because our jar is not full. So if we get this kindness, if we get this stillness, both from the inside and outside (hugs, attention, teacher is more aware, doesn’t yell as much and gives a bit more love to recharge my battery)...we get this jar full so we are better able to be with others and help them because our jar is already full” (R4).

This resonates with the discussion on emotions in Chapter 1, where the frustration of basic needs may influence hostile and aggressive tendencies while the fulfilment of needs support one’s development of caring and altruistic tendencies (Staub, 2003: 52). It also resonates with Mikulincer and Shaver’s (2005) research on the relationship between emotional security and prosocial behaviour, in which one’s capacity to be sensitive and respond to the suffering of others is connected to one’s sense of emotional security. It is only in restoring our own security and comfort that attention and energy can be feasibly turned toward others (Begley, 2009: 240). It could be hypothesized then, that RESPIRA activities with teachers and students, which work to strengthen the fulfilment of psychosocial and emotional needs while proactively tapping into positive emotional states like kindness and gratitude, serve as positive “priming” of attachment security, with the potential to activate mental circuits for secure attachment that can support compassionate and altruistic tendencies.

From the perspective of Attachment Theory, initiatives like RESPIRA may be especially relevant in peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts since “primed environments” generated through program interventions directly counter the negatively primed environments of conflict, violence, crime and insecurity that comprise teachers’ and students’ daily lived realities. Such environments make it that much more difficult to cultivate altruistic behaviours in schools without addressing critical emotional levels of

meaning embedded in the experience of the violent context. In this way contemplative approaches like mindfulness, especially when focused on nurturing positive emotions, could be particularly useful tools in breaking cycles of violence: insofar as they work to transform destructive emotional dynamics commonly passed down generationally (Bombay et al. 2009), they can revitalize mental circuits and enable greater receptivity towards nurturing prosocial capacities.

However, a potential limitation of RESPIRA's approach is that loving-kindness activities with students are focused on positive feelings towards persons with whom one already feels love and warmth. While this is a foundation of the practice and powerful in its own right, an even more transformative exercise in empathetic development could involve generating loving-kindness to persons outside one's existing circle of concern. As one informant noted, the challenge with empathy is that our "circles of empathy" are limited and focused only on those in our immediate families/circles of friends and not to other people, so the challenge is to work in order to widen these circles (C5). Meditative practices have been noted as potentially useful in educational settings for their ability to enlarge this circle of concern (Chaux, 2010: 152; C5). While an existing randomized controlled trial on a similar mindfulness-based education program described in Chapter 1 showed increased measures of empathy and prosociality among students (Schonert-Reichl, 2015), the program incorporated social and emotional exercises in combination with mindfulness. Without differentiated results, the increase cannot be attributed to contemplative approaches alone (C6), but instead may highlight the strengths of incorporating contemplative techniques

with established social and emotional learning approaches. This reinforces informant observations noted in the previous chapter.

Value of contemplative education in conflict-affected contexts and implications for peacebuilding

Perceptions on stress, trauma and psychosocial healing

Although ensuring teacher and student psychosocial wellbeing is important in any measure of high quality education, it is especially so in contexts affected by armed conflict and violence where stress and tensions are intensely amplified. Teachers in Tumaco recounted experiencing consistent fear related to the violent context (T1-T4), as well as a sense of impotence and anxiety (T1-T5), each of which are associated with emotional and psychological trauma (Sieff, 2015). Explosions, bombs and grenades comprise part of the common sensory landscape (T1-T3), serving as triggers of psychological stress and anxiety:

“As soon as I hear an explosion I think: ‘Who could have died there?’ It’s a human being, mother, son, father...the heart pulls me, it scares me, it destabilizes me.” (T1)

“Just because you hear a boom, the first thing you ask is, ‘how many died?’” (T2)

RESPIRA facilitators perceive mindfulness as a tool or way of being that can help people work through the negative emotions that accumulate during armed conflict, such as fear, anger, impotence, helplessness, frustration and sadness (R2, R3, R4, R5, R7), helping to heal trauma and strengthen resilience. Experiential education that goes beyond thought to feelings and engages people’s experience, helping to address past wounds, is relevant to contexts in which children, young people or adults have been exposed to trauma from high levels of violence, or abuse (Staub, 2003: 544).

For teacher participants in Tumaco, RESPIRA's experiential training focused on emotional and cerebral processes is distinct from other teacher training and professional development approaches available to them, which typically emphasize technical teaching skills or education planning. RESPIRA's mindfulness-based approach is perceived to fill a critical gap focusing on the emotional and "human part" of one's job as a teacher (T3, T5). As one teacher notes: "Not all of us teachers have extensive training on human relations, because they prepare us to teach classes but in our universities they don't provide ample space to say, "let's train the human part"" (T3). Within the RESPIRA pedagogical model there is an "implicit call for positive human connection, and this is healing in itself" (R4).

Supporting healthy stress regulation for students is an aim of the program, achieved through mindful activities that quiet the mind and promote relaxation such as mindful breathing, attentive listening and body relaxation techniques. Mindfulness helps students deal with the sensation of fear. As one facilitator from Tumaco recounted: "Students tell you, 'I practiced in my house the day the bomb sounded in Barrio Panama.' This is very beneficial" (R3). The inclusion of short classroom-based exercises incorporating a silent mountain pose⁶¹ and the striking of a gong (see photo in *Figure 10* for a depiction) have been noted by teachers (T2, T3, T4) as especially useful strategies in facilitating states of calm among children. As one teacher described: "They practice with the gong, they learn to control themselves, immediately they calm themselves. This is a very good exercise, with this instrument" (T2).

⁶¹ Typically using a seated posture in a chair, with lower body grounded, spine straight and upper body stable and relaxed.

Figure 10: Photo depicting introductory session of the Classroom Component in an urban school, Tumaco.
Photo credit: RESPIRA/2015/ILjubic



Calming and centering classroom activities like these can also aid in providing children respite from stresses experienced in their home environments that are exacerbated by violent contexts and economic struggles. This was identified as a particularly salient theme in zones where RESPIRA operates, and many teachers and staff have drawn connections between children's violent behaviours and their domestic spheres, which can involve maltreatment. For example some commented on parental involvement in guerrilla or paramilitary groups, which normalizes violence in children's lives and contributes to bullying behaviour (R3, R2); while others

connected domestic violence to parental stress linked to economic challenges (F2). Either way, children become vulnerable to stresses in the home that they may download in the school environment:

“This child may leave in the early morning to school for example and if he was yelled at at home or hit or something, he will carry that problem of stress with him to school. He will arrive in a bad mood, and when someone rubs him the wrong way he will react because he is already carrying stress from home. So I consider that a program like this could really help oneself to better understand how to manage stress in such situations, which is useful for parents, students, as well as the community” (F2).

Warmth and affection are critical to raising caring and nonviolent children (Staub, 2003). Even where children grow up in situations of extreme adversity, research on resilience indicates that the presence of loving or supportive people in a child’s life is a critical factor in determining a child’s resilience and ability to function well (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1987). In a context like Tumaco where teachers lament that the problem behaviour of children originates in the domestic realm and where children grow up encircled by violence, this means the role of teacher – discussed in the previous chapter – is even more crucial in the development of peaceful, healthy and resilient children.

All five teachers (T1-T5) interviewed in Tumaco and all focus group participants in Tambo (F1, F2) cited management of stress and pressure as a major outcome of their own participation in RESPIRA. Teachers noted how they feel increased “tranquillity”, “maintain equilibrium,” and “manage stressful situations in improved ways” (T1-T5). Teachers made special emphasis that RESPIRA’s mindfulness-based approach helps them address fear and maintain calm in insecure situations arising from the armed conflict and violence. For example, one teacher described how approaches learned

through RESPIRA helped her stay calm when armed groups visited the school (T3), while another mentioned that RESPIRA helped him increase a state of calm when travelling through violent, insecure neighbourhoods (T5). Recounting to a facilitator, another teacher noted: “Now when a bomb goes off, I understand what is happening to my brain, I know how to regulate this, I breathe, I take my kids and I put them in a safe space and we all breathe” (R3). Instead of becoming overwhelmed or paralyzed by stress and fear, the teacher was able to think clearly and act decisively ensuring she and her family members were safe. It’s not that mindfulness creates a false sense of contentment with any given emotion or situation, rather that it enables a person to be in touch with one’s emotions, assess the real risks of situations and take thoughtful action (R5).

Such findings suggest that beyond helping to regulate stress that teachers as professionals commonly face, mindfulness-based approaches may be particularly useful in supporting positive coping strategies in stressful situations specific to conflict- and violence-affected contexts. For RESPIRA staff too, a personal practice of mindfulness has enabled them to cultivate calm in insecure operational contexts where they have felt a strong sense of fear (R3, R5), suggesting the relevance of such approaches not only for people living in conflict-affected contexts, but also humanitarian professionals working in these areas for whom mindful approaches may support increased resilience and positive coping mechanisms.

While the RESPIRA program does not involve therapy, teachers have noted its positive therapeutic effects in terms of strengthening their overall mental health (T1-T5). In a way the program addresses deficiencies in the

provision of psychotherapeutic and psychosocial support in Colombia. As one facilitator describes:

“There’s so much broken in this country you could have therapy for every single child...but there is no capacity, there is no consciousness that this would be necessary...we want to offer a tool on how they can work on their own without a therapist.” (R4)

The inclusion of circle processes into the program structure with teachers is one particularly powerful element of the approach, which mirrors therapeutic group structures like Alcoholics Anonymous and others (R1). In explaining the importance of these circles to RESPIRA’s approach, one facilitator notes that:

“Everything that happens with mindfulness has to do with observing inward. You begin to reflect about a lot of things, about yourself, how you are in the world. And the idea is that people can share that a little bit in circles. You understand much more the experience you are living. Also you have a group that understands you and is going through the same thing.” (R3)

Such an approach can lessen an individual’s tendency to catastrophize⁶² while also generating an “atmosphere of solidarity and closeness, bonding with others, a sense of shared humanity” (R2).

While teacher workshops take place in caring and secure environments – subsequently replicated in the classroom, the emphasis on personal reflection can be risky especially in vulnerable contexts like Tumaco since there is a chance of awakening past traumas. As one facilitator notes: “To see inside oneself is not only butterflies and little birds. It’s complicated, and we are touching the human emotional fibres of experience” (R3). While the majority of RESPIRA facilitators have not encountered challenging situations to date, the acknowledged potential risk associated with

⁶² Thought pattern involving exaggerated belief that a circumstance is far worse than it is.

contemplative approaches suggests that strategies to avoid re-awakening trauma, and handling situations that do arise effectively, is of paramount importance for personnel and teachers involved in these interventions.

Perceptions on shifting cultures of violence

Interviews with teachers, staff and complementary informants revealed the extent to which a perceived culture of violence has enmeshed communities throughout Colombia after more than 5 decades of war, and especially in active conflict zones. Respondents cited manifestations ranging from quarrels in the transit systems; violent stories dominating the media; narco-trafficking and its associated violence; criminal activity; and corporal punishment in schools. In Tumaco, a particularly poignant dimension relates to children's interactions during play and conversation, reflective of the violent context in which they live. Examples include classmates teasing another classmate for living in a home where bazookas are made, or a young child expressing a desire to be a guerrilla fighter when he grows older and kill his classmates (R2), or playing a game of 'gangs' in which children in the neighbourhood belong to one of two gangs and play to symbolically kill one another. As recounted by a RESPIRA facilitator:

“They make their arms with pieces of wood, or parts of pipes, like this they make their weapons, and each time more elaborate. So it's an environment that demonstrates to them that violence is natural and it's through violence that you solve problems. This is played among the kids, they play to kill” (R7).

Reality of life in Tumaco, like other conflict-affected zones, is permeated by a harshness that impacts even those most innocent and playful moments of childhood.

Peace education is seen to have a crucial role in helping to transform cultures of violence in Colombia, especially during this pivotal time in the country's history (C3). Can contemplative approaches in education contribute towards this transformation? Perceptions among RESPIRA facilitators and complementary informants suggest optimism and potential mechanisms. One facilitator described it in terms of shifting the way in which power is exercised, from highly normalized violent means towards non-violent thought, words and action: "Mindfulness, with its simple instruction to attend to each moment without judging...is the counterposition to the form of relating in violent ways, which is to exercise power over another" (R1). Another facilitator explains that educating children in nonviolent means is crucial to avoid reverting to violent patterns of the past. Commenting on the place of contemplative approaches within broader national peace negotiations and disarmament plans, she highlights the crucial role of relational peacebuilding and the need to ensure that:

"...political decisions being made truly have a real impact, not simply that this group of men bring their weapons and the other group of men leave, but that people who are eventually the ones to take the decision whether or not to arm themselves have other options, have experienced other types of sensations and things to say, 'no, let's think of another alternative' " (R5).

As Colombia prepares to sign a peace agreement in 2016, plans to reconstruct the social fabric are arguably as important as other peacebuilding interventions. Mindfulness-based approaches like RESPIRA can provide an interesting complementary approach to post-conflict recovery, since they attend to the emotional experience of conflict that people and communities will deal with long after a peace agreement is signed. As one facilitator reflects:

“Connections are broken everywhere, there are lines, obstacles everywhere, people cannot connect as human beings. So this is a way of how we can reconnect, of how we can be together. And how we can be well together” (R4).

Reflecting on the role of mindfulness in supporting sustainable peacebuilding, one informant noted:

“A country where people have developed their capacity for mindfulness is a country where people will not let themselves be carried so easily by their first impulses. When they are very angry, when they are in conflict, they will not jump so hastily to an aggressive or violent response, they will likely have a greater capacity to forgive and reconcile. They will probably think twice before doing something that can cause harm to another. All this is fundamental in a country that has experienced so many years of violence like this one.” (C5)

Conclusion

Findings from interviews with RESPIRA program staff and beneficiaries in Colombia suggest that contemplative education interventions like mindfulness may have a powerful role to play in violence- and conflict-affected contexts. The experiential educational approach emphasizes intrapersonal peace and its nexus with harmonious interpersonal relationships, emphasizing an understanding of emotions and mental patterns in order to nurture nonviolence and prosociality. It infuses a needed human element to education, filling an important niche in the education system that benefits students and teachers alike. Furthermore it supports psychosocial healing and resilience against stressors and traumatic events associated with violence and armed conflict, crucial in efforts to meaningfully transform conflict dynamics at a relational level and support sustainable peace. While the sample is limited and generalizations cannot necessarily be made, the case study provides relevant insight and could serve to inspire future areas of investigation.

Conclusion: Summary, key findings and ways forward

“Isn’t it ironic that we teach students about everything except themselves?” This question, posed by a San Francisco school district Superintendent – and advocate for a transformative meditation program introduced in high-risk urban schools⁶³ – encapsulates the essence of the present inquiry on the peacebuilding potential of contemplative approaches in education. Learning about ourselves – how to acknowledge and regulate emotions and thought patterns – is a critical and transformational form of education largely missing from mainstream education systems. As this investigation has demonstrated, mental training may hold an important key to healing and breaking free of the grip of emotions on human action, while unlocking new potential for peaceful relationships.

The **first section** of this paper established strong links between the outcomes of contemplative practices and the cultivation of personal peacefulness at a general level. It examined the role of emotions in peace and conflict and the powerful role that contemplative practices can play as mental training tools to promote the recognition and effective management of emotions, as well as the development of prosocial capacities. It examined evidence from emerging scientific studies on the brain’s capacity to grow and change in ways that support the cultivation of peaceful qualities of mind and summarized related evidence from school-based contemplative education programs.

⁶³ Quiet Time program. See David Lynch Foundation (2012).

In introducing the case study of contemplative education in Colombia, the **second chapter** demonstrated the important added value that contemplative interventions can bring to peace education specifically - especially in their potential to complement social and emotional learning interventions as well as to strengthen crucial psychosocial components of post-conflict recovery efforts. This section highlighted lessons from the RESPIRA mindfulness program and the Dunna yoga program in Colombia that suggest such approaches can be relevant and replicable in a wide range of contexts in future peace education initiatives.

The **third chapter** proposed the relevance of mindfulness education programs in violence- and conflict-affected contexts in particular, based on a deeper analysis of the experience of the RESPIRA mindfulness program in Colombia. Interview data with the sample of teachers and staff of the RESPIRA program points to the power of mindfulness-based approaches in strengthening emotional regulation and prosocial competencies; promoting positive coping mechanisms of individuals experiencing violence and conflict; and reflects on how such approaches may also play an important role in transforming cultures of violence.

In investigating the peacebuilding potential of contemplative education interventions, this dissertation concludes that the potential is immense, whilst acknowledging that significant work is necessary to deepen understanding around the topic and arrive at conclusive evidence. Rather than point to clear generalizable conclusions, the present investigation highlights findings within an exploratory study of an under-investigated line of research, which it is hoped may help inform future studies on the topic. It provides a unique

contribution to existing peacebuilding and peace education literature given the absence of previous systematic analyses related to contemplative education and peacebuilding. In assessing data from diverse fields of study through a peacebuilding lens, while weaving in qualitative insights from a mindfulness education program implemented in conflict-affected areas of Colombia, the dissertation presents an initial exploration of the intersection between contemplative practices, education and peace, and suggests the importance of articulating holistic models of peace education that incorporate intrapersonal dimensions.

A summary of the study's key findings and recommendations, as well as suggested areas of future work and research, are included below.

Key findings and recommendations:

- The right kind of education is crucial to building more peaceful societies. Education that infuses love, self-awareness, emotional understanding, and mental training can support peace and is needed in education systems. The incorporation of contemplative approaches is promising, given their potential to promote personal peacefulness (via emotional regulation and prosocial capacities) in a broad range of learning environments.
- Psychosocial wellness is a crucial ingredient for sustainable peace. Initiatives that invest in the inner lives of human beings can be deeply transformative, and it is where contemplative educational approaches may play a particularly important role. Their ability to promote stress

reduction and positive coping strategies make them highly relevant in violence- and conflict-affected contexts, as well as in post-conflict peacebuilding, as tools to strengthen resilience and healing.

- Teachers are key agents in education for peace, not only in *what* they teach about peace but also *how* they teach it. Contemplative approaches are useful in equipping teachers with concrete tools to improve their own wellbeing and to inspire strategies that support more peaceful learning environments.
- Mindfulness-based contemplative approaches are secular in orientation and evidence to date shows they are widely adaptable to diverse cultural contexts. They are based on common human capacities rather than specific spiritual expressions. For this reason, such approaches appear promising as replicable elements of holistic peace education initiatives.
- Mindfulness and other contemplative practices can change the brain and positively influence cognitive and emotional development in ways that deserve attention from peace researchers. There exists an expanding body of literature and scientific studies on contemplative practices, prompting the recommended integration of such approaches in wide-ranging public policy arenas⁶⁴. The same research suggests striking implications for peace, though studies testing explicit links with peacebuilding are required. The time is ripe to incorporate systematic

⁶⁴ See Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group (2015) for a recent example from the U.K.

studies on the applications of contemplative approaches for peacebuilding and peace education⁶⁵.

- Mindfulness-based approaches highlighted in this investigation are clearly not stand-alone remedies to societies ills⁶⁶, but can be powerful complementary components of education interventions promoting peace and psychosocial wellbeing, especially when combined with more traditional social and emotional learning interventions. Further testing to understand the differential impacts of various approaches⁶⁷ is needed.

Suggested areas of future work and research to advance knowledge generation:

- 1) Establish cross-disciplinary academic and programmatic partnerships to advance understanding and applications of contemplative research for peacebuilding more generally, as well as peace education and post-conflict recovery more specifically, prioritizing this emerging research area among peace researchers.
- 2) Map existing organizations implementing contemplative education in support of peacebuilding aims, synthesizing their impact to date.

Appendix 6 includes an initial list that could serve as a starting point. This

⁶⁵ This is especially so given that peace is recognized within the new UN Sustainable Development Goals as critical to quality education. Contemplative approaches may be a promising contribution to this area. Target 4.7 under the Quality Education Goal states: “By 2030 ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (UN General Assembly, 2015: 4). See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>.

⁶⁶ Interventions at multiple levels are required to achieve sustainable peace, including addressing important underlying systemic factors related to structural violence that are outside the scope of the present paper.

⁶⁷ For example distinguishing the specific benefits of mindfulness versus other forms of meditative practice, or versus social and emotional learning approaches in school interventions. In conflict-affected contexts specifically, testing differences in impact between contemplative approaches and other art or play-based therapeutic approaches could be worthwhile and provide inputs for the design of innovative and effective psychosocial programs.

may entail, for example, a cross-organizational collaboration or platform to compare results of program evaluations and related research, and to draw out common successes, challenges, and opportunities.

- 3) Review of existing evidence on mindfulness and other contemplative approaches by key organizations involved in peacebuilding, child rights and education (including peace education practitioners and program designers), to explore their value and potential integration into future education interventions, innovative program models or related signature frameworks⁶⁸. Potential applications in diverse programming areas spanning education and child protection (including transformative life skills training and youth empowerment) and humanitarian interventions (including Education in Emergencies, and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programs that nurture resilience and trauma recovery) appear highly relevant.
- 4) Discussions among education policy makers and curriculum designers to consider themes of mental training and psychosocial wellbeing as legitimate learning areas to be streamlined into standard curriculum or incorporated as extracurricular offerings⁶⁹. With future buy-in at institutional levels, alternative resourcing models could be instituted to maximize sustainability of contemplative education programs, which

⁶⁸ For example in UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools model, which emphasizes safe and protective environments including promoting emotional and psychological wellbeing (UNICEF, 2009:3); or Save the Children's Quality Learning Environment global indicator, which emphasizes the emotional and psychological needs of learners (Save the Children International, 2012:23). Also refer to *Appendix 9* for a related analysis.

⁶⁹ However it is important to stress that such offerings should be completely voluntary for all participants, a point also emphasized through teachers and informants of the RESPIRA program.

often function through a train-the-trainer approach relying heavily on teachers⁷⁰.

The present investigation concludes with a reflection on humanity's seeming incapacity to overcome cyclical violence, which Lederach (2005) suggests has something to do with a stunted imagination. "Our challenge," he reasons, is how to invoke, set free, and sustain innovative responses to the roots of violence while rising above it" (2005:172). This dissertation has investigated one such potential innovative response to addressing violence, and the key rests in the human mind itself. It inquires about the possibilities of the mind to be oriented toward peace and considers practices that have shown striking promise in helping human beings develop these capacities. A crucial component of this process necessitates self-discovery and deeper engagement with the emotional side of human experience, to understand its relation to dynamics of peace and conflict. This has been an investigation into human emotional wellbeing and its importance for peace, examining the contemplative approaches that can be used as tools within the educational sphere to nurture peaceful citizens, working from the inside out to promote sustainable peace.

⁷⁰Currently many contemplative education interventions are program-based and rely on trained teachers to carry forward activities with students - a challenge given the specialized skill required to teach approaches like mindfulness and yoga effectively, and also given many teachers are already overburdened. Future models of more regular resourcing (through wide-scale institutional support) could explore, for example, specialist teachers or facilitators who have a regular presence in schools leading and accompanying students and school staff in mind-body training approaches.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS, AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Interviews with RESPIRA program staff

Code	Personal background	Professional background	Interview details
R1	Colombian, Male	RESPIRA Facilitator, Bogota	16 June 2015, Bogota
R2	Colombian, Female	RESPIRA Facilitator, Tumaco	16 June 2015, Bogota
R3	Colombian, Female	RESPIRA Facilitator, Tumaco	30 June 2015, Bogota
R4	Non-Colombian, Male	RESPIRA Facilitator, Bogota	03 July 2015, Bogota
R5	Colombian, Female	RESPIRA Facilitator, Tambo	28 July 2015, Popayan
R6	Colombian, Male	RESPIRA Facilitator, Cali	30 July 2015, Skype
R7	Colombian, Female	RESPIRA Facilitator, Tumaco	01 August 2015, Tumaco

Interviews with RESPIRA program beneficiaries

Code	Personal background	Professional background	Interview details
T1	Colombian, Female	Teacher, Tumaco	01 August 2015, Tumaco
T2	Colombian, Female	Teacher, Tumaco	01 August 2015, Tumaco
T3	Colombian, Female	Teacher, Tumaco	02 August 2015, Tumaco
T4	Colombian, Female	Teacher, Tumaco	03 August 2015, Tumaco
T5	Colombian, Male	Teacher, Tumaco	03 August 2015, Tumaco
T6	Colombian, Female	Youth Leader, Tumaco	02 August 2015, Tumaco

Complementary interviews with thought leaders and issue experts

Code	Personal background	Professional background	Interview details
C1	Colombian, Female	Education Staff, Save the Children	10 June 2015, Bogota
C2	Colombian, Female	Academic and Researcher - Education, University of the Andes	18 June 2015, Bogota
C3	Colombian, Female	Peace Education Expert	18 June 2015, Bogota
C4	Non-Colombian, Female	Mindfulness in Education Expert	22 June 2015, Bogota
C5	Colombian, Male	Academic and Researcher – Citizenship Competencies, University of the Andes	24 June 2015, Bogota
C6	Non-Colombian, Female	Academic and Researcher - Social and Emotional Learning, University of British Colombia	01 July 2015, Bogota
C7	Non-Colombian, Male	MBSR Facilitator, University of California San Diego Centre for Mindfulness	01 July 2015, Bogota
C8	Non-Colombian, Male	MBSR Facilitator, Costa Rican Centre for Mindfulness	01 July 2015, Bogota
C9	Colombian, Female	Research Staff, Dunna	02&17 July 2015, Bogota and Skype

Focus groups evaluating RESPIRA program implementation

Code	Participants	Focus Group Details
F1	Colombian Male and Female Teachers Participants (18)	22 July, 2015, Quilcace, Tambo
F2	Colombian Male and Female Teachers Participants (15)	23 July, 2015, Pueblo Nuevo, Tambo

Participant observation of contemplative education sessions, Colombia

Code	Participants	Program	Details
O1	Colombian Male and Female School Staff/Teacher Participants (33 total)	Dunna/Yoga for School Coexistence	31 July, 2015, Bogota
O2	Colombian Male and Female Teacher Participants (15 total)	RESPIRA	29 July, 2015, Pueblo Nuevo, Tambo
O3	Colombian Male and Female Teacher Participants (10 total)	RESPIRA	01 August, 2015, Tumaco
O4	Colombian Female Teacher Participants (5 total)	RESPIRA	02 August, 2015, Tumaco
O5	Colombian Male and Female Student Participants (25 total)	RESPIRA	03 August, 2015, Tumaco

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER BENEFICIARIES

Can you tell me how you got involved with RESPIRA? What has been your experience with the program?

How long have you been living in Tumaco? How would you describe life here?

Please tell me a little bit about the advantages of living in Tumaco.

What disadvantages do you think are associated with living in Tumaco? *If the participant describes activities related to the conflict:* Would you like to share something from your experience that you remember?

How would you describe the educational institutions in Tumaco?

Are bullying and school violence problems in the educational institution where you work? If yes, do you think that mindfulness practice can help in addressing these types of issues. Why or why not?

What are the advantages that you think a program like RESPIRA can have in a place like Tumaco? What are the challenges in implementing a program like RESPIRA?

How easy or difficult has it been to participate and integrate the program activities in your daily work planning?

Do you believe your participation in this program has generated any inconvenience, risk or uncomfortable situation? If yes, what type?

What do you see as the most positive aspects of the RESPIRA program for you as a teacher, and as a person?

Would you say that the practices learned through the program have helped you in any way to address difficult situations related to security in the city? If yes, how?

Can you explain in your own words: what does mindfulness mean to you? Would you like to share an example from your experience?

Have you been able to apply mindfulness practice in your daily life? If yes, how? In which moments? With what frequency? Have you felt that mindfulness practice has been useful in any particular moments of daily life. If yes, how?

Based on your experience, do you believe that mindfulness practice has the capacity to help in promoting nonviolent behaviour among students. If yes, how?

Do you believe it has the capacity to influence empathy, kindness or compassion among students? If yes, can you think of an example from your experience?

Now I would like to explore your perceptions around some specific types of changes...

Physical: Have you noticed any change in your physical health since participating in RESPIRA?

Cognitive: Have you noticed any change in your attention and concentration in daily activities? Have you noticed any changes in your manner of thinking in the face of difficult situations?

Emotional: Have you noticed any change in your sense of security as a teacher after implementing the program? Have you noticed any change in the way that you relate with your emotions when you are faced with an adverse situation? Have you noted any change in your feelings towards other people or living things? Have you noticed any change in levels of

stress in facing daily difficulties? Have you noticed any change in the motivation you feel towards your work?

Behavioural – teachers: Have you noticed any change in your relations with students? If yes, would you like to explain what kind of change you noticed? Have you noticed any change in your personal or family relations after participating in the program? Have you experienced any change in the manner in which you listen to others? If yes, please describe. Have you noticed any change in the strategies that you use to manage the class after implementing the program?

Behavioural – students: Have you noticed any change in students' behaviour after implementing the RESPIRA program? Have you noticed any change in the manner in which your students relate to their fellow students after implementing the program? (ie. more/less aggressive with their fellow students, understand the position of their fellow students better, employ new tools when feeling strong emotions). Have you noticed any change in their capacity to connect and listen to each other?

What do you believe your students have appreciated in participating in this program?

Is there anything more we still haven't covered that you wish to share?

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RESPIRA STAFF AND COMPLEMENTARY INFORMANTS

Could you tell me how you became involved (or connected) with the RESPIRA/Dunna program?

Understanding contemplative approaches

What is mindfulness?/What is yoga?

How is it different to other contemplative practices?

I have understood that part of mindfulness's broad relevance is its secular approach. Does spirituality have a place in this approach? Please explain.

What are the key benefits (ie. neurological, psycho-social, social-emotional, community) of mindfulness practice/yoga that you are aware of?

Do you think there are possible connections between these benefits and the promotion of peace? If yes, how?

Do you think mindfulness/yoga play a role in sustainable peacebuilding?

Understanding peace education in Colombia

What has been the experience of peace education in Colombia?

Where do mindfulness-based approaches/yoga-based approaches fit?

What do you consider to be the strengths and opportunities of such approaches to peace education in Colombia?

What do you consider to be the weaknesses of such an approach to peace education in Colombia?

What do you feel are the most central priorities for peace education in Colombia today?

Understanding experience of the RESPIRA program/Dunna program

What does program implementation consist of? How does it work?

How easy or difficult has it been for teachers/schools to integrate program activities into their work plans?

What do you see as the most positive aspects of the program for teachers? For students?

What do you see as the challenges of participating in the program for teachers? For students?

Are you aware of any barriers to accepting the program by school staff, students or families? If yes, what kind of challenges and how have these been dealt with?

Do you face personal risks participating in this program? If yes, what type of risks and how do you deal with them?

Applicability of mindfulness-based/contemplative approaches in areas affected by violence and conflict

Do you think the program helps program participants (teachers/students) deal with challenges in their lives related to conflict and violence? If yes, in what ways?

Do you think a program like this has special usefulness in places that are affected by conflict and/or violence? Please explain.

If yes, do you think this type of approach is applicable in other countries and continents? Why or why not?

Do you think program beneficiaries (teachers/students/families) face any risks when participating in a program like this or whilst practicing mindfulness/contemplative practice? Would there be any particular risks for those in violence or conflict-affected areas? If yes, what kind of risks?

Potential mechanisms towards peacebuilding (at individual and social levels)

Have you observed any evidence that teachers and/or students have experienced changes in social and emotional competencies as a result of their participation (emotional regulation, resilience, harmonious relationships, prosocial behaviour, active listening, aggression vs. non-violence?)

Based on your experience, do you think that mindfulness practice offered through RESPIRA (yoga through Dunna) has the capacity to help promote non-violent behavior among students? If yes, how?

Do you think the practice has the capacity to influence empathy, kindness or compassion among students? If yes, how? Can you think of any examples from your experience?

Do you think educational interventions like these can help build more peaceful classroom environments? Please explain.

Is bullying or school violence a problem in the school you work with (or in schools in Colombia more generally)? If yes, do you think the such practices can help in addressing these types of issues? Why or why not?

Is there anything else not yet covered that you wish to share?

APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT FOR DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPATION

Title of Project: Mindfulness and Peacebuilding through Education

Name of Researcher: Ivana Ljubic

I am a graduate student undertaking a Master of Arts in Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, United Kingdom. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project investigating the peacebuilding potential of contemplative approaches in education. I am interested in understanding the perspectives of staff and beneficiaries of the RESPIRA program, as well as peacebuilding, peace education and mindfulness practitioners.

Your participation will include being interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to one hour by the researcher. The interview will be audio recorded by the researcher (unless otherwise specified by the interviewee).

Data will be accessed solely by the researcher, as well as a research assistant who will support data transcription. All data will be anonymised; the use of anonymised quotes may be integrated but no identifying information will be included in the written dissertation.

Ethics approval has been granted by the Chair of the Humanities, Social and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel at the University of Bradford. This study will be shared with members of the University of Bradford academic community, and the dissertation will be published and housed in the library of the University of Bradford.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Thank you for offering your time to contribute to this study. If you have questions, please feel free to call me at 3214440067 (Colombia) or email me at i.m.ljubic@bradford.ac.uk.

Thank you,
Ivana Ljubic

Please sign below to confirm you understand the aims of the research and are willing to participate in the dissertation research project outlined above.

Signature
Name and Title
Date

APPENDIX 5: SAMPLE INFORMED CONSENT FOR DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT PARTICIPATION (TEACHERS ONLY)

RESPIRA: Consentimiento Informado Docente

Estimado(a) Docente:

Usted está invitado(a) a participar en la evaluación del programa RESPIRA.

Los objetivos principales de esta evaluación son recoger información que permita conocer el proceso de implementación y aplicabilidad del programa en diferentes contextos. Su participación consistirá en responder de manera voluntaria a una entrevista y/o grupos focales en el espacio y tiempo acordados con los investigadores, asesores y/o coordinadores del programa RESPIRA, la cual tendrá una duración aproximada de 30 minutos a una hora y media.

La información recolectada en el estudio de evaluación del programa será utilizada únicamente con fines investigativos y para documentar la implementación del programa RESPIRA. Es decir que tanto en las entrevistas como en los grupos focales su información de identificación será anónima.

Adicionalmente, como un mecanismo de seguimiento y registro de la evaluación del programa, se realizarán algunas grabaciones y/o videos, los cuales tendrán un fin investigativo en primera medida. Es posible que algunas de las tomas realizadas sean usadas en publicaciones académicas.

Si tiene dudas o inquietudes adicionales con respecto a los procedimientos de implementación o evaluación puede contactar a Paula Andrea Pineda e Ivana Ljubic a los correos paula.pineda@convivenciaproductiva.org y i.m.ljubic@bradford.ac.uk, respectivamente.

Cordialmente,

Equipo Evaluación RESPIRA
Convivencia Productiva

Entendido lo anterior, yo _____ (nombre y apellido), con cédula de ciudadanía No. _____ de _____, docente de la institución educativa _____ (nombre), estoy de acuerdo con los términos y condiciones para participar de manera voluntaria en la ejecución y evaluación del programa RESPIRA en el año 2015.

Firma: _____.

APPENDIX 6: PROGRAMS IN CONFLICT/POST-CONFLICT OR VIOLENCE-AFFECTED CONTEXTS UTILIZING CONTEMPLATIVE APPROACHES

Name	Contemplative Approach	Target Beneficiaries	Geographic focus
RESPIRA http://convivenciaproductiva.org/respira/pdf/General_Presentation.pdf	Mindful breathing, movement, meditation	Teachers and students (K-grade 5) in conflict- and violence-affected areas to support wellbeing and coexistence	Colombia
Dunna http://dunna.org/en/	Satyananda yoga (integral practice)	Former combatants to support trauma healing, victims of the armed conflict to support emotional recovery, children and teachers to support coexistence	Colombia
Project Air http://www.project-air.org/	Yoga	Girls and women in Rwanda, supported to overcome genocidal rape, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS	Rwanda and Eastern Congo (planned)
Mandala House http://mandalahouse.org/home.html	Trauma-sensitive yoga and breath awareness	Self-directed healing support to post-conflict and conflict-affected populations in Gulu	Uganda
International Brain Education Association (IBREA) (Consultative Status with UN Economic and Social Council - ESOSOC) www.ibreaus.org	Brain-based holistic education (including meditation and mindful breathing and movement)	Students	El Salvador and Liberia
Anahata International http://www.anahatainternational.org/	Yoga and meditation	Populations affected by conflict and trauma	Palestine (West Bank) and Rwanda
IAHV Peacebuilding Unit (Consultative Status with UN ESOSOC) – works with sister organization Art of Living http://www.peaceunit-iahv.org/projects.php	Breathing exercises and yoga practice incorporated	Trauma relief to war-affected populations and ex-combatants	Various
Niroga Institute http://news.psu.edu/story/299756/2014/01/09/research/research-partnership-brings-mindfulnessyoga-practices-schools	Transformative Life Skills incorporating mindfulness and yoga	Students in refugee camps and training for educators, health professionals, social workers and refugee providers	Palestine (West Bank)

APPENDIX 7: RESPIRA TEACHER COMPONENT SESSIONS: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS, JULY AND AUGUST 2015

It's 3:30pm on a Saturday in early August. Ten teachers are gathered in an open-air rooftop conference room in Save the Children's Tumaco office. The space is breezy and overlooks the Pacific Ocean. Nearby wind chimes, tropical birds and construction sounds envelop the soundscape. Participants are invited to make themselves comfortable and remove their shoes. The session begins with the sounding of a gong and a short mindfulness practice in observing the body. Participants reflect on the previous week's session, before engaging in an activity and discussion about teaching styles, and an introduction to mindful teaching techniques. A stuffed animal the group affectionately calls Horacio is passed around during the circle space, in which participants are invited to share and listen while the facilitator asks questions encouraging deeper processing of experiences. The atmosphere is calm, welcoming and enthusiastic.



It's mid July and 15 teachers are gathered in a humid classroom in Pueblo Nuevo, Tambo after the end of the school day. This is the final session of the Teacher Component, split into several parts including a holistic mindfulness practice, a reflection component, and a ceremony involving the gifting of small papers with inspiring quotes to each participant. Teachers actively engage in the activities and reflect and share with enthusiasm their experience over the past 6 weeks. Their voices are frequently interspersed with the sounds of chickens and roosters, who periodically enter the classroom and go unnoticed. Some teachers are moved to tears when speaking. There are hugs, loving gestures, and an energy of warmth in the room. Teachers describe how useful the RESPIRA sessions have been in helping them manage stress, pressure and uncertainty, and in reflecting on kinder more harmonious ways of being inside and outside the classroom. The atmosphere is intimate, warm and serene.



APPENDIX 8: ADDITIONAL QUOTES FROM TEACHERS AND STAFF

Additional quotes from teachers involved in the RESPIRA program:

“RESPIRA educates about the emotions – a totally distinct approach to that which we’ve been taught” (T5)

“Mindfulness is the capacity to be conscious of my emotions, and to find an appropriate response – for example instead of simply scolding a student or reacting negatively, trying to listen attentively to what they are saying and maintaining calm even if I am angry. RESPIRA has helped me greatly” (T5)

“Although I’ve never been violent, there have been moments when I’ve lost my temper. But today before I speak or act, first I think, I breathe deeply to be able to act. These are things that have helped me” (T2)

“In the classroom with students, my patience and tolerance with them has increased as well as my capacity to be at the level of each of them and understand what they are experiencing. In this way RESPIRA has influenced my job as a teacher, as a community member and most of all with my family” (F1)

“When one begins to see the other more as a person, one begins to understand them and to feel for them. To see that they have problems as I do, sometimes more serious, that they also hurt, that they also laugh” (T5)

“Insofar as we become more tolerant, we become people in solidarity, we feel the pain of our companion as our own. We learn to say, ‘forgive me, I’m wrong’. We become more sensitive and try not to hurt our companions...” (T4)

“I learned to better know my students and to put myself in their positions” (T4)

“...with the exercises with the kids, they begin with self esteem, to love each other and to love their companions” (T2)

“They (students) enjoy sitting still, the process of trying to concentrate and the ability to be attentive. They themselves ask me sometimes, ‘Miss, let’s do RESPIRA,’ so we do it, and we do it with much enthusiasm, the whole class.” (T1)

“With the program they (students) learn to be more tolerant, to control themselves. Instead of responding with a punch they will give a hand” (T4)

“Kids like to defend others now, to separate kids when they are fighting to make peace” (T2)

“What I like about RESPIRA is that it contributes to having control of emotions and control of violent reactions, which can interfere with learning. Students become more sensitive, they learn to concentrate and manage their emotions, which is helpful for academic learning as well as discipline.” (T1)

“One of the advantages is that people learn to control themselves, because they are very intolerant. I mean, they don’t have tolerance for anything with their neighbour, with their colleague. So the RESPIRA program teaches people how to control their minds...the program has a lot of potential; people begin to understand how to control their anger, their emotions.” (T2)

“Imagine with the violence we live in Tumaco, and not only in Tumaco but also in the country, you can imagine if this program was applied, we would live in a country at peace...we would have better human beings, in our actions” (T4)

“...while the program is not perfect, it’s a grain of sand that we need to coexist in peace, to maintain a healthy coexistence” (T4)

Additional quotes from RESPIRA staff:

“We kind of see it in the schools that there is such a latent need for this... Many of them pick it up so fast, so enthusiastically, that even us, we’re surprised. We know this is good, but it can’t be that good. This is amazing, very encouraging. I think society wants this, needs this and it doesn’t take so much to get into it. That is something very positive and very surprising.” (R4)

“For a long time now I have been working with groups of women, children and youth in the promotion of human rights, leadership, laws and norms that protect rights, but there was little reflection on individuals themselves. There was a lot of emphasis on a person in relation with the outside world, but little attention paid to what is happening to individuals. So for many years I have been searching for the manner in which to build intrapersonal peace. How is peace born of one’s own self? So for me mindfulness is using a basic tool to promote peace from the individual level” (R7)

“Peace depends on many things but the sustainability of peace comes from within... In a country such as this one, how does a person like this return to himself if not through profound internal experiences that enable them to understand much more... Not only in Colombia but in Latin America, peace education lacks this inner element” (R3)

“I think that peace often times requires perspective, of my position in the face of another’s. Mindfulness helps to give this perspective to understand that the experience of all is equal. And that there are ways to regulate cerebral mechanisms that at times are difficult: understanding of the amygdala during violence or when receiving a hit. If one has a way of training oneself and coming closer to one’s mind, they will be much more flexible in this sense and for sure this has something to do with peacebuilding. Of course there are other critical areas, peacebuilding does not only depend on mindfulness or mental training. In Tumaco, institutionally, politically, there are other supports required. But it is a very important basis” (R3)

“Conflict and violence generate many emotions, they generate extreme states of the human experience. For example, fear, sadness, anguish and many emotions that if one has tools at their disposal to help manage and promote equilibrium, which can be cultivated through this practice, it’s easier and less rough to face these emotions... Its not about anesthetizing against experience. In this context, reality is really tough and one begins to see this from another way. It’s not that mindfulness takes away your emotions and leaves you blank, but that it enables you to observe the emotions and act consequently in the appropriate way” (R5)

“The work that is done in schools related to peace education actually is very deficient on the one hand because it maintains pedagogical practices that are very traditional and still focused on the generation of knowledge or understanding, from the theory/knowledge end.” (R6)

“You can receive all the curriculum about peace education to comply with citizenship competencies but it will not function if the teachers are not right. I feel peace education has been very important in Colombia and its peacebuilding process, and it is why citizenship competencies emerge in the agenda in a country like Colombia. But it’s missing the whole inner part.” (R3)

“If relationships are improved between people... it has a bearing on peacebuilding. Because peacebuilding is not a decision made by leaders/rulers. It’s a change in the way in which we relate to one another. And for sure, having greater awareness of each action and to begin to react less and to have much more compassion towards oneself and towards the world will generate that each time there is less chance of pursuing violent options.” (R5)

APPENDIX 9: FRAMEWORK CONNECTING EMOTIONAL NEEDS AND PROSOCIAL DISPOSITIONAL OUTCOMES

The framework below is from a UNICEF Report on Child Friendly Schools (Kagawa and Selby, 2014:10), which draws on Staub's work (2003:56-64) around basic human needs. It highlights emotional needs, their relevance for socio-emotional wellbeing and corresponding prosocial dispositional outcomes anticipated through the inclusion of relevant educational interventions. Such a framework is useful in understanding the value-add of mindfulness and other contemplative interventions for peace education, which are effective tools for nurturing the emotional needs of students and teachers, supporting socio-emotional wellbeing and thus helping to cultivate prosocial tendencies, especially when combined with traditional social and emotional learning approaches. All of these are important for peace-oriented education more generally, with critical significance for conflict and post-conflict contexts more specifically.

Taking the RESPIRA program as an example, it can be observed to promote security (through a sense of psychological security); effectiveness and control (through a capacity for self-protection); positive sense of identity (through self-appreciation and self-awareness); positive sense of belonging (through abilities to enjoy and draw energies from other people); independence and autonomy (through competencies in dealing with emotions and choosing responses) and transcendence (through relating oneself beyond one's personal reality). Following this basic needs framework, some possible anticipated prosocial dispositional outcomes may include enhanced self-esteem, minimization of fear, trust in one's capacity to transform oneself, and moral courage, which resonates with qualitative findings of the case study.

