Media literacy through audiovisual production: three Colombian experiences

Óscar Gilberto Vesga Pérez [CV] [🆔] [🅖] PhD Candidate in Education Sciences.
Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia (Colombia) - oscar.vesga@uptc.edu.co

Abstract
Introduction: This article examines three media literacy and production processes carried out in three Colombian departments. The article identifies the factors that led to the creation and development of these media literacy experiences. **Methods:** The study adopts a qualitative approach based on biographical research. It describes, through the life story of three founding teachers, the Colombian context in which these projects emerged and evolved, highlighting their edu-communicational and community contributions. **Results and conclusions:** The results confirm the primacy of human relations over ICT; the ability of the selected projects to promote audiovisual production and research in students and communities as effective tools for reflection and expression; and the perception of violence as a surrounding reality in the lives of teachers.

Keywords: Audiovisual education; Media Literacy; Social conflict.

Contents:
1. Introduction. 2. Methods. 3. Case studies. 3.1. Juan Mora, from chasing cyclists to consolidating a media literacy method. 3.1.2. Juan Mora's training as educator. 3.2. Alirio González, from son of settlers to precursor of a memory at the gate of the Amazon. 3.2.1. From orality to audiovisual production. 3.3. Óscar Vesga, from war to peacebuilding. 4. Narratives for peaceful coexistence. 5. Discussion and conclusions. 6. References.

Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos**
(PhD, University of London)

1. Introduction

Multi-screen content consumption at the global and intergenerational levels has made media literacy an overriding need in school and community contexts. Since the 1980s, UNESCO has asked "political and educational systems to recognise their obligations to promote in their citizens a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication" (UNESCO, 1982, p.2). Masterman (1993) identified seven reasons for incorporating media literacy into society (p. 26) and argued that media literacy began in Britain in 1933, with a book that warned teachers of the dangers of the media for social values and norms (p. 56). As Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) became incorporated in society, concepts such as media literacy, digital literacy, new literacies, educommunication and multi-literacies emerged (Gutiérrez and Tyner, 2012, p. 34; Marta-Lazo and Gabelas, 2016, p.99). All of these concepts agreed on the need to advocate for the promotion of critical thinking and creativity, the reduction of social gaps, the promotion of values and the formation of competent citizens.

In Colombia, national and departmental governments have equipped schools and colleges with the technological devices needed to undertake media literacy processes. However, in reality, these experiences remain a privilege of the few. The problem is not that education ignores the languages that converge on multiple screens, but that schools do not provide students with the tools they need to face their reality.

Colombia's High Court Sentence T-779 (2011) framed *adaptability* and *acceptability* as two of the four dimensions attended by the Colombian educational service. The first dimension "refers to the fact that education must be adapted to the needs of the users of the service and that continuity in its provision must be ensured", while the second, "refers to the quality of education that must be provided" (p.13). One of the purposes of the ten-year Education Plan (2016-2026) is to "form citizens prepared to critically and consciously take on the changes and challenges arising from technological development, the expansion of global networks and the globalisation of the economy, science and culture" (*Ministerio de Educación Nacional*, 2017, p.18).

The three experiences of media literacy that are addressed in this article have assumed this educational and social challenge and, at the same time, represent three different contexts in Colombia. The first one was developed in and around Bogota at the Bertrand Russell School in Chía, Cundinamarca; the second one emerged in the midst of the armed conflict, in the south of the country, in Belén de los Andaquíes, Caquetá; and the third one has taken place in an Andean territory that overcame a two-decade-long war: Barichara, Santander. The objective of the study is to understand, through their protagonists, how these processes were conceived, developed and funded, and how they have been articulated within their communities, and to identify the contributions they have made at the educational, artistic and social levels. Although the processes have developed in different territories, they share Colombia as space-time referent and use pedagogy and audiovisual communication as tools for the understanding and recognition of their culture, through narratives where social harmony is a central concept for a country seeking to put an end to its internal war.

2. Methods

The analysis of the selected audiovisual schools required the examination of the lives of those who

built them. The experiences under study have in common that their supporting pillars are teachers and communities, not heteronomous policies or projects. The life story uncovered the paths that these people have taken since their childhood and explained why some individual educators, among thousands, have placed the media at the centre of their activity. Since March 2017, direct communication was established with seven audiovisual schools, which had been previously identified at community film and video festivals, where they shared findings and results. Three experiences were selected as case studies, seeking to address different contexts: urban and rural; zones affected and not affected by the armed conflict; peasant and urban communities; and all socioeconomic groups. The three schools were visited to collect data by means of in-depth interviews with the administrative staff, teachers, students and the community. Relevant documents were reviewed and their audiovisual productions were analysed.

Ruíz Olabuenágana (2012) has proposed four objectives that justify the use of the life story as a research method. Two of them are the following:

- Discover the keys of interpretation of many social phenomena of general and historical scope that only find adequate explanation through the personal experience of specific individuals.

- Capture the totality of a biographical experience, in time and space, from childhood to the present, from the intimate self to all those who come into meaningful relation to the life of a person, including (...) an individual's inclusion and marginalisation in his or her surrounding social world. (p. 280)

Life story differs from the biography. Deslauriers (2004) explains that:

The biography tries to document the development of a person's life; the emphasis is placed on his or her circumstances, the choices the person has made. The person is at the centre of the project. The life story uses similar information but for the purpose of getting to know society and better capture its evolution. (p.41)

In the life story, the subject-event pair is a requirement. "It teaches us the practice of the subject, how the person has reacted to such situations, the lessons the subject has learnt from experiences, his or her projects, but it also teaches us social history through individual experience" (Deslauriers, 2004, p.42).
For Puyana and Barreto (1994)

The life story corresponds to a concept that seeks alternatives to those research processes that favour data quantification and assume statistical information as the only or decisive criterion of validity and that, based on the pretence of objectivity, turn subjects into passive objects and ignore their context. (p.187)
The work of Nobel Prize-winner Svetlana Alexiévich has become a reference from two perspectives: the way she approaches historical and social phenomena through anonymous protagonists and the narratives that navigate across the threshold of art and science. "The documents I work with are living testimonies, they do not solidify like clay when they dry up. They do not become mute. They move besides us" (Alexiévich, 2015, p. 27). As this article was being developed, it was necessary to investigate the historical context of each of the territories where the audiovisual schools operated and to maintain constant communication with the people who found them. The three selected schools are

consolidated projects in their communities. They have gained important national awards for their audiovisual productions, social contributions and pedagogical proposals. Although they have developed separately, they share similar findings and conclusions.

3. Case studies
3.1. Juan Mora, from chasing cyclists to consolidating a media literacy method

Juan was born in 1969, in Sogamoso, Boyacá, a municipality that began to extend to the fields, farms and haciendas of the Suamox Valley. His peasant origin kept him on the ground, until the urban hurricane exiled his family. His father became a well-known radio and newspaper journalist. Juan grew up in the universe of a professional journalist, and as a little shepherd boy. One day he was his grandma's messenger and brought snacks to the workers, and the next day he was traveling by helicopter next to the Governor or accompanying his father while writing a report that was published in the columns of national newspapers, or broadcast by radio stations.

Juan grew up keeping pace with his responsibilities as communicator. He was an unpaid assistant to his father. He archived radio programmes and was a camera assistant. He did commercials with his sweet boy voice and travelled on the broadcasting van documenting the cycling routes around Colombia. He travelled in the hatch, chasing cyclists between valleys and mountains. His friends were journalists, announcers, photographers. He moved better in the worlds of written journalism and radio than at school. His nomadic life forced him to change friends and teachers several times, to contrast teaching methods and to repeat school years.

On his fifteenth birthday, Juan began working in regional television, writing news for mainstream media, interviewing politicians, entrepreneurs and celebrities. He witnessed a frightening moment in Colombia's national life: the political genocide of the Patriotic Union (National Centre for Historical Memory, 2018). Juan spent his teenage years exploring the country through journalism, during a decade where all kinds of violence converged in Colombia: State violence became installed with The Security Statute of President Turbay Ayala (Guzmán, 2014), drug trafficking became consolidated, guerrillas expanded and paramilitary groups were formed (p. 43).

3.1.2. Juan Mora's training as educator

Juan was seduced by the now defunct Arco Academy, famous for its training in radio broadcasting, out of the traditional teaching cannons. Juan graduated from this institution in Radio and Television and later became a teacher.

In 2000, a former student called him and got him in touch with the Bertrand Russell School [1], founded in 1974 in Bogotá, inspired by the thinking of the English mathematician. María Teresa Salamanca, the school's current rector, received control over of the school from her parents in the 1990s. She proposed curricular reforms, included bilingualism and media studies, because according to her, "the time and reality in which students were immersed could not be overlooked" (M. T. Salamanca, personal communication, 26 February 2018).

Juan was linked to a chair in radio and television. At the school, there was already a history of reportages produced in 1998 and 1999, very close to those produced in commercial television and radio. "They were experimental projects, guided more by the intuition of teachers than by the

curricula" (J. Mora, personal communication, 26 February 2018). The training he had received from his father was in the area of research. He encountered an active and interdisciplinary teaching body. Students had already received interdisciplinary knowledge: theatre, photography, video editing, painting and even web design. Juan proposed placing the media at the centre of the curricula to emancipate them from their auxiliary role.

María Teresa led the school to the Project-Based Learning model. *El agua* was the title of their first production. It was developed from the worldview of the Muisca culture **[2]**. To this end, they organised field trips and visited nearby lakes. Maria Teresa narrated jokingly: "We went on a trip, we went camping. It was three buses with teachers and students, followed behind by 100 cars with parents" (Salamanca, 2018). The school travelled to the lakes of Guatavita and Iguaque, located in emblematic mountains of the Muisca culture. These lakes were the main material for an interdisciplinary research. Juan and his team produced an environmental magazine, a newspaper and some videos.

They proposed an innovative newspaper, a sensory-based experience, a tour across an Indian village built by students, teachers and parents. It was a collective work they called *Cucurumcuca.***[3]** Schedules disappeared, students, teachers and parents worked by day, night and on holidays, consolidating a dialogical relationship in which they were peers in a multimedia project. They built an Indian village of 30 meters in diameter. In it, the audience found several scenarios: photography, oral and written narrations, audiovisual content, and theatre plays. It was the product of their immersion in the subject of water, of their exploration of Muisca culture and its territory, the relations of this community with its pre-Hispanic neighbours and *the conquest.* The exhibition raised questions about indigenous and European heritage, about colonialism and violence, which raised questions about the time they were living in Colombia.

From 1999 to 2002, there was an upsurge in the Colombian armed conflict (Ibáñez, 2008, p.10). In 2002, President-elect Álvaro Uribe Vélez proposed the "Democratic Security Policy", seeking the insertion of the Colombian armed conflict into the international counter-terrorism crusade led by the United States (Tickner and Pardo, 2003), which led to an avalanche of state violence that resulted in hundreds of thousands of internal human displacements and state crimes (Cárdenas and Villa, 2012). On the other hand, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and other insurgent groups were continually attacking towns and roads, while paramilitarism terrorised camps and cities.

The proposals and dynamics generated by the first project impacted the academic community so much that it led them to rethink the Institutional Educational Project (PEI, according to its initials in Spanish) and the way to implement the guidelines of the Ministry of National Education. Juan proposed that audiovisual media should be cross-curricular and applied to pedagogical practices. To include audiovisual media in the Institutional Educational Project they had to make a diagnosis, develop a proposal at a theoretical and practical level and train the entire academic community. "Building a model of education was like picking up things from an orchard: you take the Active School from here, the Project-Based Learning from there and some traditional elements from over there" (Mora, 2018).

The implementation of the project year after year led the Bertrand Russell School to include audiovisual media in elementary education, based on a ludic approach; in secondary education, as a process of experimentation, and in high-school education, with more a technical and aesthetic

specialisation. This experience caught the attention of Colombia's National Learning Service (SENA, according to its initials in Spanish). Based on the work of instructors and methodologists, they developed a pilot project of technical training in audiovisual media for vocational education under an agreement **[4]**. They established a *training chain*. High school graduates can be technicians and with year and a half more study in the SENA, they can graduate as technologists with the possibility of pursuing their university studies. They can validate and homologate their modules up to fifth semester at the Great Colombian Polytechnical Institute to study Audiovisual Production. Based on the Bertrand Russell School's proposal, the National Learning Service shares with vocational school students a media literacy programme in several regions of Colombia.

Audiovisual media are the central element of four projects, of which the most consolidated one is called *Ser* and is bimonthly. Students research and pre-produce the project and produce it for a week during the trip. The Bertrand Russell School's rector notes that:

These are life projects and their approaches are in line with children's interests for university. We propose, for example, transculturation, sustainability, river navigability, economic development and post-conflict. Teachers make a strong and complex package while children form television groups, which are called *patrols* and include directors, producers, cameramen, photographers, researchers and everything. They lead, manage and make the whole audiovisual proposal. (Salamanca, 2018)

In 2017 the theme was the Magdalena River. Elementary school students travelled to the Magdalena Medio region, secondary school students went to the birth of the river and high school students to banks of the Upper Magdalena River. The Magdalena is considered the main river of Colombia.

The *Film Imagination Festival* was an initiative of Juan Mora and the elementary school's coordinator that sought to strengthen bilingualism and creative processes through audiovisual production. The *Life Fest* is a two-month long project that combines media literacy and citizenship, ethics and values, and seeks personal growth, emotional intelligence development and teamwork. Juan points out: "research and people's education are the goal. If the audiovisual production is not good for that, then it is better that it does not exist" (Mora, 2018). In the *Proyecto Vocacional* ("Vocational Project") students investigate their future job prospects and life after school.

At the Bertrand Russell School in Chía audiovisual media have been an effective tool to study the Colombian territory. Students travelled with their families to the sea or the jungle, but going out on the lookout for an interview, a report, an audiovisual production, has immersed them in the transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary study of specific topics, allowing them to live and analyse the contrasting realities of the country. In the audiovisual productions of these students, the armed conflict loses prominence. Their narratives have shown that war cannot overshadow the beauty, aesthetics and richness of the Colombian territory. They have not evaded the issue but have given more visibility to the Colombia that the communities inhabit, highlighting their biodiversity and the resources that this South American country has to overcome any kind of deprivation. Resilience is depicted as a requirement and creativity and generosity as common factors of these regions.

At the end of the process, the Bertrand Russell School rents out a screening room in Bogota while parents, family and friends buy tickets for the premier of their annual productions, which is organised and carried out by the students. It is a ceremony that reflects 20 years of continuous work.

3.2. Alirio González, from son of settlers to precursor of a memory at the gate of the Amazon

Caquetá is one of Colombia's 32 Departments. It was an indigenous territory located in the south of the country. The first settlers arrived in the late 19th century, attracted by the exploitation of rubber, quinine and furs. Subsequently, the war against Peru produced a second wave of migration in 1932 and partisan violence caused a third wave between the 1940s and 1960s. Alirio's family arrived in Belén de los Andaquís in 1964, coming from Santa Maria, Huila. Luis Evelio, his father, worked as a blacksmith, stretching slats and making shotguns. His mother, Zunilda, was a housewife. Alirio was three years old when his mother taught him to read and write, supported by Radio Sutatenza, a national public radio station aimed mainly at the peasantry. Next to his mother, Alirio listened to the adventures of *Kalimán,* the incredible man, and *Arandú,* and silently imagined the characters of radionovelas, hummed songs and learnt from radio shows.

When Alirio enrolled in elementary school, studying was easy, but he did not adapt well to traditional education models. He describes himself as "a fighter, a hyperactive man, a sportsman, a talker, and a good student" (A. González, personal communication, 3 March 2018). The school bored him. He preferred to stay at home to talk with his parents; go to the river; hear the stories told by the elderly on the corners and by drunks in bars; read Dickens and Rómulo Gallegos; and help his uncle Virgil, who was a carpenter and an amateur inventor.

When Alirio turned eight, the National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC), created in support of the Agrarian Reform by President Carlos Lleras Restrepo (Ferro and Uribe, 2002), arrived in the region. Don Luis Evelio was aware of what was going on with social movements, so Alirio helped him make banners to go out and protest. He chanted slogans next to his father. On his 12th birthday, he broke off his relationship with formal education. Alirio was an activist. He did not shut up in the face of what he felt was unfair or trivial. He left school and the village and wanted to be a pilot. In Belén, he could only become a bricklayer, farmer or butcher, so he left in search of another education.

He moved to Bogota and enrolled in the Boys Republic, a school with a pedagogical approach. He studied Piaget, Freinet, Makarenko and Freire. One of his teachers was Germán Mariño who, together with Fals Borda, worked on the development of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method. According to Alirio, "the PAR was tested at the school before sharing it with the communities" (González, 2018). "One of the characteristics of this method, which differentiates it from all others, is the collective way in which knowledge is generated, and the collectivisation of that knowledge" (Fals and Rodrigues, 1987, p. 18). He received classes until ninth year. The next two years he did internships as a teacher in elementary and high school. In parallel to his pedagogical training, he began his musical training. His desire to become a pilot changed to become a saxophonist. When he left school, he devoted himself to music, reading, karate and cinema. He studied Juan Coltrane and Charlie Parker, salsa singer Richy Ray, the classics Beethoven and Bach. He read Twain, García Márquez and Cortázar until he was caught in compulsory military service. He spent 18 months in the military. On leaving, he studied Accounting Technology at Colombia's National Learning Service and worked as an accounting assistant at Cundinamarca's Ministry of Health.

In 1987 he returned to Belén de los Andaquís, where he worked as an accountant and took the opportunity to reveal his musical training. He returned to Bogotá, where he became part of several

orchestras, studied screen printing and photography. In 1993, he was asked to run the Community Centre of Belén de los Andaquís. He came back to stay. Two decades later, his childhood friends became part of the drug trade, the guerrillas, had left or were dead. Alirio returned to a town he did not know: the war had settled. The region was plagued with coca crops, guerrillas and paramilitarism.

He was the protagonist of the production of Radio Andaquí station, a project that years ago was managed by social organisations, the city council, the church, the communal action groups and the cultural sector. They agreed that the people needed a space to express themselves, a radio as a stage for participation. He spent two years managing resources, equipment, and licensing. On 21 April 1996, Alirio experienced "one of the most important moments" of his work: technically, everything was ready to broadcast on Radio Andaquí, but they did not have the legal permits that he had managed several months ago. That night, driven by his rebelliousness and a couple of drinks, he decided to turn on the station and played the vallenatos and rancheras that he had on hand. People were excited and tuned in. Since that day the station is on the air and the permits arrived months later (González and Rodríguez, 2008, p. 72).

"Wings for your voice" is the slogan of Radio Andaquí: it was configured through conversation with the people, to open a space for dialogue and discussion, always with respect. Enemies were avoided, although they were in the middle of war. Alirio firmly believes in conversation. It is his usual way to undertake any project. They stayed away from direct violence and there was no room for armed men in the station. They did not read pamphlets, nor communications from any army. Talking about war was forbidden. So, what was this community channel for?

War is a reality in Colombia, but it is not the only one. Alirio began the morning broadcast with a child greeting his family. He set up a microphone in the street so that all citizens could express themselves. Alirio adapted the station to a bicycle that offered the microphones in the streets: the *radiocicleta* ("radio bike")*.* Radio Andaquí was, to some extent, a school of communication:

We set up a sound lab. We captured the sound of rain, birds (...) We gave equipment to people and they recorded in their stables and we put those sounds as soundtracks for the radio shows: the dialogues, the newscasts, it was a strange radio where the people was always been felt. Radio became a spectacle, a debate; the concept was that everyone could talk, so someone would come and talk bad about the mayor but within five minutes the mayor came to say that it was not like that. I had a lot of fun listening to the pep talks from both sides. This finally allowed people to learn to participate a little more. They became participatory in public debates. People started to attend meetings more and ceased to be indifferent towards the committees, the government plans. They became talkers in this town (González, 2018).

"One of the main findings of this community radio is how, by appropriating its environment, it detected very organic forms of weaving technology as just another fiber of the social fabric" (González and Rodríguez, 2008. p, 90). The station was a space for debate and confirmed that issues can be solved by talking. The inhabitants organised themselves and produced their own reports and shows.

The social conflict escalated in the 1990s in southern Colombia. The state implemented aerial fumigations with glyphosate. The protests of coca growers (*marchas cocaleras*) revealed the

problems of the peasantry (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia strengthened their militarily force during the period of negotiation with President Pastrana. The Caquetá Department became one of its forts. On other hand, the Central Bolivar Block of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia installed a school of service and terror in Puerto Torres, a path of Belén de las Andaquíes (CNMH, 2014).

As the war progressed, the station grew. Alirio relied on three guidelines: experimental and collective production, own narratives and self-recognition. On 31 December 2001, at 7:00 p.m., Alirio was broadcasting carols when rifle shots were fired. It was a guerrilla raid. He used the microphones to ask listeners to be cautious and not to leave their homes. Listeners used the station as a call centre. They called in and shared ideas. They agreed to turn up the volume of their radios to turn the village into a loud Christmas crowd. They asked the priest to call mass and the church bells rang. The rifle bursts calmed down. The guerrillas withdrew. Alirio pulled out the radio bike and went to the park to broadcast live. People took to the streets, gathered and talked (González and Rodriguez, 2008, p.129).

3.2.1. From orality to audiovisual production

One afternoon of leisure in 2005, Alirio González, Mariana García and Raúl Sotelo did a role play: a man watched his drunk wife arrive and decided to leave home. They took some pictures, made a slide show and projected at night on Alirio's house. The whole neighbourhood saw it. The next day a dozen children approached Alirio. They wanted to make movies. This role-playing game gave birth to the Children's Audiovisual School (*Escuela Audiovisual Infantil-EAI*).

Faced with children's demand for the only camera they had, Alirio came up with the only rule that exists in the Audiovisual School: "No story, no camera". Whoever wanted to use it had to have a story. The children began to narrate, paint and write. Bermudez (2016) carried out a study of the process, unveiling orality as one of the central pillars. "All videos of the Audiovisual School are constructed with knowledge related to orality, with knowledge typical of daily life, with the affections of children, with traditional knowledge, with their ways of feeling, with ways of inhabiting, celebrating and playing in Belén de las Andaquíes" (p.56).

Conceiving an audiovisual school was a suggestive challenge, so much so that Alirio gave up the station's management. Radio Andaquí had been taken over by adults, and he now had the option to create an exclusive space for children (González, et al, 2007, p. 212). He started studying with tutorials, invited audiovisual filmmakers, and trained simultaneously with the children who arriving home invading the afternoon with ideas, stories, questions and tricks. Alirio clung to what he considers a certainty: "teaching techniques and concepts without a project was wasting time" (González, 2018). He helped them write, structure and improve the projects, but did not take over the leadership. The children had to face their responsibility. He taught them to trust themselves. He introduced them to universal music so that they had options in the editing of their videos and, above all, encouraged them to work as a team.

The Children's Audiovisual School functions as a matryoshka: within the school every child has a creative project and within each project there are others. Consolidating the School as the container of the project has meant defining a method, an aesthetic and a content. "Pastiche is one of the forms of

production in the School. This feature allows the combination of multiple styles such as intimist photography, school drawings, video expression, home video." (Bermudez, 2016, p.116).

From 2008 they got the first financial aids to form and produce various videos. One NGO made the documentary titled *Sin historia no hay cámara* ("No story, no camera") **[5]**, which presents the universe that the Audiovisual School has given to children and the community of Belén. This project inspired *Telegordo,* an eight-episode documentary series that won the 2010 Call for Aids for the promotion of children's production of the Colombian Ministry of Culture and the National Television Commission. In 2013, they won the India Catalina Award for Best Community Television Production, a prestigious national distinction.

With public and private aids, they have carried out media literacy projects, short films, series and tours, screening films in villages and rural areas; they have developed strategies to keep the Audiovisual School active. Children do internships and attend conferences and festivals in different regions. In 2018, the International School of Film and TV of San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba, invited seven children to an internship. The Children's Audiovisual School is always open. Students have no schedules, grades, or pressures; they have projects that they develop with the help of Alirio, peers or guest teachers. Several of the projects that start at the Children's Audiovisual School end up capturing the attention of the community. An investigation into clean energy at the headquarters ended with the installation of street lighting in the central park of the municipality, which is now powered entirely by solar energy.

Alirio is a restless man. In 2017, he felt that children had lost exploration and wonder as a horizon. He proposed the "lab platforms". They managed machines and tools, set up workshops to learn while making things, from planting orchards to managing solar energy; they make wooden toys, screen printing, distil alcohol and study chemical processes. Everything is documented with videos that are shared through a local channel or YouTube channels. Audiovisual production is still the focus of the Children's Audiovisual School, but gradually it is losing prominence. For now, it is the main tool that brings them together, but they know there are many more tools to discover. Alirio intends to grow plants again. In front of his house, he made a hole in the pavement and planted a banana tree. He wants to propose to the community to make orchard walks **[6]**, and practice clean agriculture. He claims that war made people neglect farming, but also that "here the projects are discussed first".

3.3. Óscar Vesga, from war to peacebuilding

Óscar grew up between the fear of the agonising war and the pleasure of a nascent peace. His aunt Zoila was 80 or 90 years old, they never knew her actual age. She had raised his brothers, nephews, children of widows and showed the Óscar generation that the war was over. She prepared a bottle with lemonade and took a group of children to walk in the mountains and explore the streams. She taught them to dance, play and laugh. "After an afternoon with her, our feet were yellow, are cloths were torn and our souls were brimming with happiness" (Vesga, 2014, p. 92). When Óscar join the school, he felt the classroom took him away from the world. He used to run away to take care of goats, make tree houses, fish in the ravine and watch television. He did not like school, but her mother stopped him from dropping out. She was a teacher, who believe education was a path away from violence.

His dad lived two wars. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, his family participated in the founding of a village to escape from partisan violence, but in 1962 a conflict arose between families, which fragmented the social fabric of the new municipality, producing dozens of violent deaths and displacements. Óscar was born in 1980, on a par with a peace building process that gave his generation the opportunity to choose a fate without war **[7]**.

His family had been protagonist of the conflict. Óscar grew up hearing stories of pain, bullets and prisons. If the war were to came back, he was willing to face it, but against all odds, he remained in school. The school offered new horizons, not just to him, but his entire generation. He left the village and started higher education. He studied languages at the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia, which caught him with its alternate spaces. There, he learnt about film, theatre and oral storytelling. He divided his time between the academia, acting training and the organisation of a video forum. "Theatre and oral storytelling provided me with effective tools as a pedagogue, the acting training complemented my teaching training. As an actor and teacher, I faced an audience, my tools were my body, my voice and my creativity" (Óscar Vesga, Personal communication, 18 October 2017).

As a teacher he worked at an urban school with 45 students per classroom. Some of his students were older than him and liked to exasperate their teachers. Some of their teachers came out of the classroom crying. He appealed to oral storytelling. He had handled difficult audiences on the streets, and had comments and gags reserved for every occasion, which helped him attract the public's attention and put the distraction or sabotage in favour of the show. It worked for him in the classroom, but it was a tiring experience and at the same time decisive to decline teaching and focus on theatre for a decade.

He joined The Sun Traveling Theatre (*Teatro Itinerante del Sol-TIS*), an artistic group led by Beatriz Camargo. He studied with Santiago García, Carlos José Reyes, Jaime Barbini and other Latin American experts that Camargo shared with him frequently. Theatre brought him to know several countries in America and Europe. In Cuba, at the Havana Theatre Festival 2003, he saw *La Colmenita*, a group of 50 children that opened the event. The artistic quality of this children's group challenged his traveling theatre to emulate the experience in Colombia. They selected schools in Villa de Leyva, Boyacá, the municipality of the group, and focused on giving theatre and music workshops. Óscar opted for a rural school.

The works of the traveling theatre have been characterised by their own research. Their repertoire does not include works written by third parties. Based on this premise, Óscar worked with the children, under the challenge of exploring their context and local issues that motivated them. They did a theatre play based on two stories and an environmental problem that affected the territory: the few trees that had been being devoured by an epiphytic plant. They rehearsed without restraint, but the distance between the Cuban reference and his students was abysmal. In front of the audience they forgot the texts, the characters faded, the actors were embarrassed.

The traveling theatre bought a video camera to record its processes. Óscar took it to school to record evidence from the workshop and the works of students. They acted fluently and found a confidante in the camera. When they made a mistake, they had the right to repeat the scene. He decided he was not going to make a play but a movie. The play was adapted into an improvised script. Óscar studied through YouTube tutorials and made the first film of his life: "The Desert's Fishing girl" (*La*

pescadora del desierto)**[8]**. He found in the audiovisual language the conjunction of all his paths: storytelling, acting, exploration of the territory, creativity, pedagogy and screens.

The desire to join the audiovisual world overshadowed the love for theatre. Óscar obtained a scholarship from the Colombian Ministry of Culture to study screenplay and, at the same time, a film director asked him to star in his first film titled *Canción de Iguaque* **[9]**. Shooting lasted three months, during which he immersed himself in the world of film. Óscar left The Sun Traveling Theatre in 2010, to dedicate himself exclusively to audiovisual production. It applied to calls from the Film Development Fund, the Ministry of Culture and the Government of Santander, but did not receive any positive response. He understood that he was entering a complex, competitive path. His experience in audiovisual production was short, his possibilities were minimal. He appealed to his professional degree. He worked as a teacher in a multi-grade classroom at a rural school in Gámbita, Santander. The school had a very poor library but had a sound and video beam equipment. Cinema became a source for critically viewing and analysing the subjects they studied. He proposed an audiovisual workshop to address cross-curricular contents. He got a camera and the experience was immediately consolidated. The videos made by the students interpreted the context, inquired about their own culture, and the town became a space of appreciation and audiovisual production. In 2013, his work won the Teacher's Share Award for the best educational proposal in Santander.

With Emilce González they created the *Ojo de Agua Cultural Foundation*, and managed resources through the National Cultural Concertation Programme of the Ministry of Culture to carry out the Audiovisual School for Childhood (*Escuela Audiovisual para la Infancia -EAPI*) with the purpose of replicating Gámbita's educational experience in different rural schools in Santander. It was tested in seven rural and urban schools in Barichara, Óscar's hometown. The first module started in February 2014.

Audiovisual School for Childhood proposed intangible cultural heritage as a theme. They listened to the sources of each community: the elders. Emilce and Óscar toured the territory with students interviewing parents and grandparents, learning ancient professions, hearing stories. The rectors and teachers gave up a couple of hours of class each week for this activity. Óscar and Emilce got the students together on weekends, afternoons and vacation periods.

Since 2014, they have worked one module per year. The first one was dedicated fire professions, which included, for example, cooking. Along with local experts they learned how to prepare local drinks and meals, documented each process, connected arguments based on interviews and through writing workshops. In four months, they produced nine audiovisual products. *Saravita,* for example, is a short film that answered the question "Why is there no *bocachico* in the river? The year they did the film, the Isagen company closed the floodgates of Hidrosogamoso, obstructing the shoal of this endemic fish that for millennia fed the territory's population **[10]**.

Each module of the Audiovisual School for Childhood lasts a semester. In 2015 students worked on water professions and explored the problems, mythologies and worldviews associated to this resource. In 2016 they investigated the knowledge of the land (agriculture, construction in rammed earth, pottery). That year, Colombia was experiencing a historic moment, one of the main players in the conflict, an insurgent group with 52 years of existence, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), surrendered the weapons after a five-year negotiation. The agreements would be endorsed in a plebiscite, but on 2 October 2016, 50.26% of Colombians did not approve them. In

2017, the Audiovisual School for Childhood focused on air knowledge, represented in the voice of the elders. They found out how the partisan and family wars were overcome, which inspired the making the documentary *Paz Anónima* ("Anonymous Peace") (González and Vesga, 2018), in which Óscar explored a taboo for the village and above all his family. He felt a responsibility to share the successful experience of a peace building process.

The search for peace and social harmony are central concepts in the Audiovisual School for Childhood. Several short films are clear evidence, as they address children's and community problems, confront the cultural and structural violence that according to Galtung (2003) underpins direct violence. The classes constantly analyse the contents consumed by children on screens. From 2017 they rely on health professionals, experts in conflict resolution, seeking the reconstruction of family, community and school relationships. On the other hand, the stimulation of imagination and creativity as one of the primary objectives of the Audiovisual School for Childhood allows students and communities to face the challenges of the surrounding reality. Lederach (2016) states that recognising and nurturing the capacity to imagine and create is "the ingredient that forges and sustains authentic constructive change". He wonders "How do we transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them? How do we put into practice the aesthetics of peacebuilding?" and replies that "Like art itself, there is no single technique by which to it can be pursued and at the same time it cannot be created without discipline" (p.146).

4. Narratives for peaceful coexistence

The three experiences have been developed between 1996 and 2019, in a country with an internal war that in 2016 signed a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, an insurgent group with more than five decades of continuous military operations throughout Colombia. Three years after the signing, the implementation of these agreements is still under legislative debate. Juan Mora became a communicator as a child while the genocide of the Patriotic Union and a wave of permanent violence caused from drug trafficking were taking place. He was trained as a pedagogue at a time when paramilitary violence became visible to the world through massacres and mass and continuous displacements, and the insecurity and horror faced by Colombian cities. Alirio González began the communication process when the Caquetá Department was already at war and Belén de los Andaquís was contested by legal and illegal armed groups. Óscar Vesga grew up amid war stories, believing that one day he would assume that legacy, ignoring the fact that he was the very cause of the peace accords signed between the families of Villanueva and Barichara so that their children could enjoy their right to life.

The paths of Juan, Alirio and Óscar converge in the fields of education and communication and also in the construction of narratives that in all three cases seek to become a cultural, social and historical memory of the territory. On this path everyone has a significant experience that reflects the principles they have found, which exhibit common characteristics.

In 2005, Juan Mora took with his students a trip to the Department of Córdoba, in the heart of the paramilitary area. They made an audiovisual product on a space where victims, criminals, parties and cumbia coexist. They concluded that art opens doors and allows them to become observers. The camera lens provokes the recognition and understanding of war. Extended to all of their experiences, this principle makes them confirm that their relationship with peace is a relationship with only part of it, with the construction of narratives for social harmony, which will document through chronicles,

fictions, magazines, one-minute-long films, short films: the resilience of the victims; the love for one's territory; the capacity to see and include all points of view, including the one that said "no" to the implementation of the peace agreements; the ability to build spaces for intercultural dialogue; the recognition of culture and nature as narratives that are in themselves points of views. These narratives for coexistence are present in the Bertrand Russell School's edu-communicational proposal and continue to be thought and develop in parallel to the reality, challenges and direction proposed by the country and the planet.

In the case of Alirio González, his experience in the *Alas para tu voz* radio station started in 1996 in the midst of war. His founding principle was to build spaces of dialogue for understanding, emphasising the narratives of peace that remained in the territory. He built a space for permanent reflection, fought for the freedom of expression in a place where silence was the law. This remained present and developed at the Children's Audiovisual School, as processes for social harmony and participation, through the development of a centre for the creation of community life labs, supported by images of the local aesthetics. In 2019, the Children's Audiovisual School continues to expand and has set food security and climate change as its main objectives.

For Óscar Vesga, the making of the Audiovisual School for Childhood in 2016, revolving around the themes of war and peacebuilding, made the mirror created by the children to reflect him, making him the object-subject of study. He had to address what was a taboo for his village and his family. For the first time, he felt that the war that his ancestors went through could provide guidelines to understand the mechanisms that helped consolidate peace on his territory. These narratives were ignored and remained anonymous. The resulting feature film, *Paz Anónima* ("Anonymous Peace"), reveals that peace was a collective and interdisciplinary construction; culture, education, work and spirituality gave him the right not to inherit war. The Audiovisual School for Childhood, which began as a space to study the cultural heritage of the region, has raised questions to discuss the challenges of peacebuilding at the national level. When he interviewed witnesses and protagonists of the war that took place 50 years ago in this small territory, he discovered that fear and mistrust still existed. How much will it cost to lay the foundations for peacebuilding in a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation?

In the three experiences, the lens allows them to document the reality to use it as a mirror, as narratives that build, from the worlds of pedagogy and communication, tools for participation and social harmony, because war is not in the agenda of the communities.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Margaret Mead explains that we are part of a co-figurative and pre-figurative culture where the new generation finds no referents in their grandparents or parents, but in their peers and in technology (Martín Barbero, 1996, p.10). The three media literacy processes that were addressed in this article privilege human relations, investigate social issues that allow students and teachers to rebuild an intergenerational bridge in their communities to restore human relations, denying ICTs the leading role and placing them as tools for creation, documentation and research. Thus, defining instrumental competence as a means, not an end.

Project Based Learning has been commonly used as a method in these processes, as projects enables a horizontal education where school managers and teachers engage at the creative, academic and human levels. Teachers have not only been mediators, but also protagonists, and have created their

own films based on the research they carried out with students, demonstrating a dialogical relationship.

Each experience essentially replicates the training received by the founding teacher. At the Bertrand Russell School, Maria Teresa and her team have managed to multiply the educational process that Juan received next to his father, traveling and building a vital school of reporters. Alirio has shared Participatory Action Research (PAR) with children, always focusing on local and community needs, on collective productions, and on being part of the subject of study. Óscar has travelled the territory with students, rebuilding the intergenerational bridge, trying to replicate the experience he lived with his aunt Zoila: surprising himself and loving his environment, understanding his present by learning about his past.

The three teachers have witnessed different types of violence that have affected Colombia but have put audiovisual media at the service of educational processes based on critical readings of their context, using pedagogy and communication to create spaces for participation, dialogue and recognition of their own culture.

The three processes have enjoyed continuation thanks to the suitability of audiovisual production as an educational tool. The resulting audiovisual products reflect the balance between pedagogy and rigour in audiovisual production, which has been recognised through national awards in the three experiences at the educational and creative levels. The videos are immediately shared with the public and are constantly displayed on different platforms, to which participating communities enjoy permanent and free access.

The economic resources received to support the projects addressed here come mainly from institutions dedicated to the promotion of culture, not education. None of the projects was the result of government initiatives.

Notes

1 http://www.colegiobertrandrussell.edu.co/
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFlyx4m9D75ZKe0vBPodWKA

2 Pre-Hispanic community that inhabited the Colombian altiplano cundiboyacense, the vast high plains that extend over the departments of Cundinamarca and Boyacá.

3 A house of learning.

4 Agreement 000006 of 7 April 2011.

5 Raising Awareness Foundation (7 May 2014) [Video File] Retrieved from
https://youtu.be/Kzi0UTgHDlE

 6 Available at https://www.youtube.com/user/eaudib

7 González, E. (Producer) & Vesga, O. (Director) (2018). Paz Anónima. [Documentary], Colombia:
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8 Vesga, P. O. (Director and Producer). La pescadora del desierto (2007) (Short film) Colombia.

9 Thiel, A. & Romero, D. (Producers) and Benavides (Director) (2017). Canción de Iguaque. [feature
film] Colombia: Arbórea Foundation.
10 González, E. (Producer) and Vesga, O. (Director) (2014). Saravita. [Fiction] Colombia: Ojo de
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