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# TOWARDS A TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO A PEACE CURRICULUM IN RURAL CONTEXTS

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## ABSTRACT

This article offers a theoretical review concerning curriculum, with particular emphasis on approaches that foster the construction of a culture of peace within rural Colombia. To this end, Tyler's (1949) theory of technical rationality is presented alongside González Velasco's (2013) proposal for a transdisciplinary curriculum. These are situated within the state of the art regarding traditional and socio-critical curriculum approaches in Colombia and internationally. Simultaneously, the article addresses the concept of peace through a historical analysis of the term and traces an overview of violence in the country. This overview encompasses Colombia's civil wars, the Thousand Days' War, bipartisan violence, the establishment of the National Front, the emergence of the FARC and the ELN, culminating in the Peace Accords signed by the State and armed groups in recent history. In addition, the article examines the impact these developments have had on national education and on the curriculum in rural schools. Finally, it proposes a curriculum-for-peace model linked to transdisciplinarity in rural educational contexts.

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**KEYWORDS:** curriculum, peace, rural education, transdisciplines

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The education system requires reflection on the curriculum to incorporate the various social, political and cultural realities that are specific to the context. Although there is a large literature on the curriculum, it is essential that the school assumes a clear position regarding the changing local and global realities, defining a series of adjustments for the school that allow it to address questions such as "why is it taught, how is it taught, and what is taught" (Correa, 2013, p.19), in an environment that privileges sustainable development and the generation of territorial identity. In this context, education must face the continuous transformations of today's society, emphasizing the promotion of dignified living conditions and promoting a culture of peace. In view of this responsibility, education is a vehicle to energize relationships and coexistence, promoting that people assume interdependent roles, aimed at the multidimensional development of children and adolescents.

Following this purpose, it presents a review of literature and research related to the curriculum, transdisciplinarity and the culture of peace; highlighting the relationship between these categories and the dialogue of knowledge as a strategy to promote social transformations towards the construction of a curriculum articulated to the conditions of the context as a result of a doctoral research called *Peace Curriculum Associated with Transdisciplinarity for Rural Educational Communities*.

In the words of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), a panoramic review of the literature is used to synthesize and communicate discoveries, as well as to point out manifest gaps in the existing literature, without making value judgments about the quality of each work. In this sense, this review exposes significant elements of the main approaches in the historical evolution of the curriculum, in order to guarantee a relevant and contextualized education.

The results obtained are organized into two main themes: on the one hand, the literature that links the *Curriculum with Transdisciplinarity* is analyzed and, on the other, the literature that interrelates the categories *Curriculum* and *Culture of Peace* is examined. In a complementary way, notions of the curriculum are presented from the technical rationality and considering the multidimensionality of the human being.

## 2. CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Understanding the curriculum involves the study of different positions that evolved historically and

transformed the term. In Latin, for example, the word *curriculum* refers to an orderly sequence of steps to achieve a goal (Morelli, 2005). In contrast, the concepts that emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century led to Tyler's (1949) technical curricular rationality, which is characterized by a vision of the curriculum associated with political interests or demands to control and segment society. Its central idea was what Freire (1970) would later call *Banking Education*, that is, an education for the transmission of content in a physical space called a school, and where the curriculum determined what content should be taught based on defined instructions. The teacher was the protagonist and the student a passive being who received and replicated information. Years later, Kemmis (1988) lays the foundations for the discussion around education in *praxis*. His critique of the instructional technical curriculum and transmitter of information was based on a conception of the school as a space of ideological struggle. Here, pedagogical practice was based on teachers who were well informed about nature and culture, and on people trained for an evolving society.

The critical curriculum then emerges as one of the fundamental elements in Latin American education. Authors such as Díaz Barriga (2003) consider that the curriculum is not exclusive to rational-technical training, but that it is a dynamic and transformative element of power relations. In addition, the author recognizes the importance of the sociocultural context and the interests of communities to promote the integral development of changing societies. Zemelman (2005) also thinks about the curriculum from a critical approach, considering the subjectivities, interests, and realities of the students. From his perspective, without critical and emancipatory thinking there would be no true learning process.

In Colombia, the curricular guidelines of the Ministry of National Education (1998) presented the curriculum under notions of flexibility and relevance, with the purpose of providing comprehensive training and contributing to the cultural identity of the territories. Ironically, there are realities in the territories that demand approaches opposed to the standardization of the curriculum. Therefore, it is not enough to evaluate through the results of the Saber 11 tests or international tests such as PISA (Icfes, 2024), but by considering a broader vision of the curriculum and the context. Precisely, UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021), in its report with a projection to the year 2050, poses three questions to broaden the

conception of the curriculum: *what should we continue to do, what should we stop doing, ¿and what should be creatively reinvented?*

Answering these questions requires approaching the curriculum from a transdisciplinary and complex approach such as the one presented by Correa (2013). The author, through the questioning of state policies, proposes the collective and contextualized construction of the curriculum. In this action, transdisciplinarity is key for an integral, ethical and

holistic education, committed to the social transformation of communities and the care of the planet. In turn, González Velasco (2013) proposes the theory of the *Transcomplex Curriculum*, integrating Nicolescu and Morin as epistemological bases. Thus, transdisciplinarity is based on pillars such as human multidimensionality, organized knowledge – not in isolated disciplines but around the world's problems – and complexity (Figure 1).

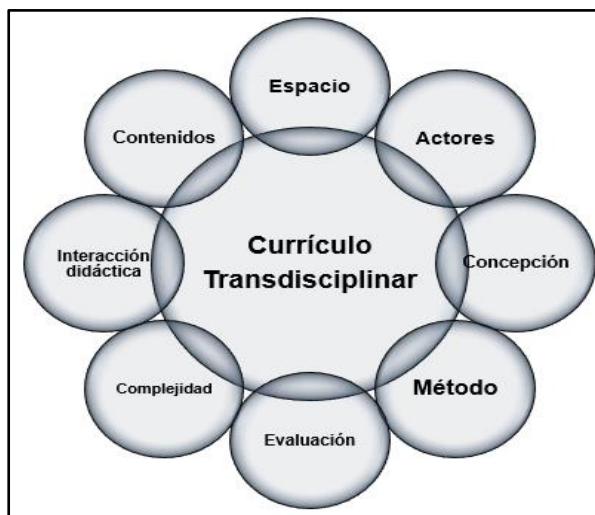


Figure 1: Transdisciplinary curriculum outline

Note. Authors' elaboration, adapted from González Velasco, 2013. In original Spanish language

Following his proposal, González Velasco (2013) establishes the following components of the transcomplex curriculum: *infinite time and space, transdisciplinary contents, religation, and curricular emergencies*. Each of these components, in turn, is characterized by complex structures such as method, evaluation, complexity, actors, space, content, and didactic interaction. In this way, he conceives the curriculum as the central instrument of education.

### 3. CURRICULUM AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

Currently, the isolation of disciplines and the homogenizing curriculum requires a process of critical evaluation in order to offer dynamic spaces for the construction of knowledge with transdisciplinary approaches. In this framework, Estrada-García et al. (2021) support the need for a transition to educational practices with an intercultural and transdisciplinary approach, with epistemological, methodological, and ontological elements that resignify training processes. The disciplinary fragmentation and traditionalism that prevails in universities must be overcome. According to the authors, *transdisciplinary curriculum* consists of vindicating ancestral knowledge to develop systemic thinking that favors global understanding and a

planetary education. Esteban et al. (2021) also validate the transition from a disciplinary curriculum to a transdisciplinary one that guides, in an articulated way, academic programs. The key to its approach is the solution of contextual problems, the dialogue of knowledge, and collaborative work aligned with the challenges of today's society.

Considering these challenges, Salinas and Méndez (2021) specify the urgency of developing pedagogies based on a *new decolonial epistemology*. This vision incorporates interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary processes permeated by complexity that integrate science with other knowledge. An example of this integration is offered by the STEAM perspective in education. In this regard, Lage-Gómez and Ros (2021) observe a transdisciplinary proposal where art dynamized the teaching and learning processes in elementary school. Based on what they called a *great idea*, the proposal enhanced positive attitudes, experiences, and significant learning in the group of students.

Soto and Martínez (2021) developed another transdisciplinary methodological proposal, this time, designed to achieve a holistic perspective of education. Daguer (2023) also presented a paper on pedagogy based on transdisciplinarity. In this case,

leisure was the device to generate collective actions aimed at school coexistence. Following the author, pedagogical praxis that manages to harmonize different disciplines, knowledge and realities, generates formative experiences in all human dimensions. Finally, the contribution offered by Acuña (2024) highlights the need to address the planetary crisis through an educational system that considers eco-training and transdisciplinarity as paradigms of coexistence.

In summary, the above survey shows progress in the construction of transdisciplinary curricular processes. The fragmented approach that has characterized the school curriculum has decreased, however, barriers are still observed in the daily life of practices. In relation to the culture of peace, the challenge is to build transformative curricula, whose vision is to train students in increasingly just, inclusive and peaceful scenarios.

#### 4. CURRICULUM AND CULTURE OF PEACE

Understanding peace begins with the etymological roots of the term. In Latin, *pax* refers to an agreement that puts an end to the conflict between two parties (Royal Spanish Academy, 2024). For Arabs, it is *salam*, a state of balance and respect rather than the absence of conflict (De Sousa Santos, 2009). In the Roman Empire, what was called *pax romana* had a connotation of military order and control (Galtung, 2003). This polysemy reflects the need to approach peace from a complex and transdisciplinary conception, taking into account its ethical and sociocultural implications. In addition, it is necessary to maintain the discussion around instrumental peace and its effect in educational environments.

Precisely, in the approach to peace, violent behaviors or conflicts in school, a traditional technical curriculum is still in force. This is evidenced by the study carried out by Villalba (2017), who presents a contrast between negative peace characterized by intolerance towards conflicts (considering them difficult to manage problems or generating repressive responses that promote more violence), and curricular practices – much more significant – focused on positive coexistence that promotes values such as solidarity and respect for human rights. Prada (2021) also reflects on conflict and its approach, and identifies a gap between the curriculum and training needs in school contexts. She mentions that the necessary elements for the construction of sustainable societies, committed to social justice and respect, are not taken into account. This requires transforming curricular processes to contribute to the consolidation of lasting peace through equity and

reconciliation, especially in the Colombian post-conflict.

Regarding peace education scenarios, Salas (2023) presents four challenges to consider: sustaining the infrastructure of the culture of peace, promoting the coverage of peace education, critically understanding the conflict, and compiling existing practices. It proposes a vision that takes into account the planning of the course of justice, the affective reactions generated by violence, and the retribution or reparation of the victims for the effective construction of a pedagogy for peace.

For its part, the study carried out by Morales (2021) presents a detailed review of the Chair of Peace, an initiative in Colombia that seeks to generate more peaceful environments from the classroom, promoting and strengthening a culture of peace. The work shows advances in normative and conceptual terms; however, it makes visible the fragmentation between the curricular design of the chair and its implementation in the territories, especially in rural contexts where violence persists or political and social conditions are limiting. Its recommendations include the articulation between the realities of the communities and the curricular guidelines for peace; adequate teacher training; and the need for a deep dialogue of knowledge. In this sense, Benavides (2022) shows that there is a lack of greater articulation between pedagogical discourses and their implementation in school practices. From a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective, her work presents peace education as an articulating axis of social transformations. Undoubtedly, the school not only transmits knowledge, but also marks the development of affective, ethical and civic competencies that consider human rights, sustainable development, gender equality, conflict prevention and respect for diversity.

Calderón (2022) also contributes to this interdisciplinary vision and points out the importance of recognizing conceptions of conflict in the discourse of teachers and students. He considers that the complexity of these discourses influences pedagogical practices and recognizes the efforts of teachers around peacebuilding. However, he points out the gap between what happens in the classroom and curricular planning. To reduce it, it is necessary to maintain teacher training and generate sufficient spaces for curricular planning. Ultimately, for the curriculum to promote a true culture of peace, it is necessary to integrate in a transversal way the understanding of conflict, the practice of human rights and coexistence.

However, in the review of international literature, curricular rigidity and lack of funding are observed, aspects that limit the emergence of models in harmony with the context. According to Lozano-Bohórquez (2021), peace education in Latin America cannot continue to be an isolated component of the curriculum. This education requires transforming practices under a political and ethical vision that generates an impact on the life and interaction of communities. Territories must understand peace as a collective and daily experience.

Pérez and Álvarez (2021), observing the challenges in the implementation of peace education in Latin America, positively show a series of norms and institutional initiatives to overcome problems associated with conflict and coexistence. However, they point out that these proposals remain isolated in the documents or are decontextualized, limiting the transformation of school dynamics. The need for a critical perspective that thinks of education for peace as a dialogue of knowledge and not as a series of isolated contents, fragmented in the curricular proposals, is reiterative.

Finally, the study conducted by Bickmore and Kaderi (2020) analyzes the incorporation of values oriented towards peace and citizenship in the curriculum of countries such as Canada, Mexico, and Bangladesh. In essence, they reiterate the importance of the role of teachers in curricular transformation and in the formation of citizens with values for a healthy coexistence. Now, as for the barriers to the consolidation of peace education models, they mention the traditional positions that prioritize the norm, the socio-political contexts that limit the development of a comprehensive peace, and the lack of teacher training. Countering what these findings raise requires greater coherence between the culture of peace and the formal curriculum; added to the recognition of the school as a propitious place for political and pedagogical transformation. A place where local and global needs are solved and where social justice is promoted.

## **5. RURALITY, ARMED CONFLICT AND PEACE AGREEMENTS IN COLOMBIA**

The rural environment in Colombia has been characterized by abandonment, marginalization and armed conflict. In the country's recent history, armed groups have silenced teachers and recruited minors for war. This has caused children and adolescents to distance themselves from their training processes and from the possibility of improving their living conditions. Thus, the possibility of forming ethical, critical and committed subjects with the environment was diminishing.

The studies analyzed in this paper present a series of methodological proposals or critical reflections pointing to the necessary transformation of curricular processes towards inclusion, coexistence and emancipation. These include strategies that promote dialogue, social justice, sustainability, reconciliation, self-care and social skills. In addition, it is evident that a curriculum for peace, from a transdisciplinary perspective, requires a paradigmatic change that invites the rural community and contributes to forming subjects capable of inhabiting the world in a more conscious and supportive way. This raises the need to generate a flexible, contextualized curriculum, and connected to planetary challenges.

In the case of rural schools, the curriculum has been a victim of the armed conflict. In Colombia, this has existed since the nineteenth century with the appearance of the civil wars that began, in turn, with the war of the supreme in the period between 1839 and 1842 (Jaramillo Uribe, 1982); and culminating in the Thousand Days War between 1899 and 1902.

This war left more than one hundred thousand dead and the loss of Panama in 1903 (Tovar Zambrano, 2001). Subsequently, the bipartisan violence of the years 1948-1958 emerged, between the militants of the Liberal and Conservative political parties. This war, developed mainly in rural areas, left more than two hundred thousand deaths and generated displacements, assassinations of political leaders, torture, massacres, economic and agrarian crisis, among other effects. This stage culminated in the creation of the National Front, which sought to alternate power among the aforementioned political parties (Sánchez and Meertens, 1983).

At the same time, the school was mired in abandonment and there was little state coverage. Curricular conceptions revolved around the Orthodox religion and populist politics, and the country was experiencing high levels of illiteracy. For example, during the Thousand Days War, 9 out of 10 Colombians did not know how to read or write. These data show that education was the privilege of a particular elite, characterized by inhabiting the urban with a traditional, moralistic and religious approach. In general, violence permeated education through the indoctrination of people. And obedience served as support for the actors interested in the war (Sánchez, 2001).

The creation of the National Front - far from ending the armed conflict - became an event that consolidated the guerrilla in Colombia. The alternation of power of the Front left out the sectors that demanded from the State minimum conditions for their well-being and, later, in 1964, the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) emerged with the argument of fighting for social justice and for a comprehensive agrarian reform (Pécaut, 2008). In the same year, the National Liberation Army (ELN) emerged that sought to attack the large landowners, confront the corruption of the State and imperialism (Palacios, 2003). Three years later, in 1967, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) appeared, a guerrilla group that mainly influenced the departments of Córdoba and Antioquia. Maoist, this guerrilla group consolidated itself in the rural sector, ideologically influencing the communities. The occupation of land, coupled with the persecution and murder of peasant leaders in the region by the State and the EPL itself, exacerbated the gap between the State and rural communities (National Center for Historical Memory, 2016).

The only presence of the State in many parts of the country was through education, however, as has been pointed out, it was going through a deep crisis. With their basic services limited, schools became spaces of threat for teachers and students. According to the report of the National Center for Historical Memory (2014), more than a thousand teachers were murdered in Colombia between 1985 and 2012. In the mid-1980s, illiteracy in the country was 30%, and the rural sector suffered from the forced recruitment of children and adolescents. Between 1960 and 2016, 16,789 were recruited and 2,453 died in the conflict (National Center for Historical Memory, 2017).

As for the curriculum, technical pedagogical practices were developed, some with an ideological bias of the guerrillas and others designed without context. Despite the circumstances, there was teacher resistance and the hope of recovering peace in rural areas.

Another fact to note is that of the presidential elections of 1970. During that day there was an alleged fraudulent act that led to the appearance of the guerrilla called M-19 (April 19 Movement), in 1974. The M-19 participated in criminal acts such as the seizure of the Dominican Embassy in 1980 and the seizure of the Palace of Justice in 1985 (Sánchez and Peñaranda, 1991). Consequently, the State defined a series of policies to allow civilians to arm themselves together with the public forces to counter the guerrillas and provide support to farms located in the departments of Córdoba, Antioquia and the middle Magdalena.

These groups protected businessmen and ranchers from possible kidnappings, murders or extortion by illegal armed groups. This organized support would later become known as paramilitary groups. Thus, during the 1980s, the paramilitaries were

strengthened through the economic power provided by drug trafficking, business and military sectors, not only in rural but also in urban sectors. Against this backdrop, in 1997 the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) were created, with a total of 30,000 people and occupying at least 30% of the country (Romero, 2007). The new armed actors murdered rural teachers who were considered *subversive agents* because of their emphasis on critical thinking and their social-critical approach to the curriculum. The school thus became a paramilitary barracks with the aforementioned recruitment of minors and the widening of the gap between rural and urban. In short, this era was characterized by obscurantism, fear, anxiety, and despair (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Ending this panorama, the Peace Accords emerged to respond to the systemic war. Although conflicts continue in rural Colombia, the State has made efforts to mitigate the impact of violence. Thus, in 2003, more than 30,000 combatants were demobilized in the AUC. This process has had serious limitations in terms of justice, truth and reparation. For this reason, only a few months later, new criminal gangs called BACRIM emerged, and made up mainly of the demobilized members of the AUC. Again, in 2016, the FARC and the Colombian State signed a Peace Agreement that sought demobilization and social reintegration. However, some signatories expressed their disagreement with the implementation of the treaty and FARC dissidents emerged operating in territories predominantly occupied by drug traffickers (Restrepo, 2020). During the current government (2022-2025), negotiations have been held with the ELN. However, these dialogues have not represented a significant step towards peace.

This panorama allows us to conclude that, for approximately 200 years, schools have continued to be victims of the same actors of violence (González, 2022).

## 6. TRANSDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM IN RURAL SCHOOLS

Considering the history and nature of the school, it must be the protagonist of the scenarios for the construction of peace and reconciliation. In 2014, Law 1732 established the Chair of Peace in all educational institutions in the country. Its objective is to "create and consolidate a space for learning, reflection and dialogue on the culture of peace and sustainable development that contributes to the general well-being and improvement of the quality of life of the population" (Congress of Colombia, 2014). According to Llinás (2022), the limited supply of teachers specialized in the subject has caused the Peace Chair

to be framed in content that is far from the context and knowledge of the communities. In addition, the lack of resources in rural areas has caused the development and formulation of peace curricula to become a fragmented subject of the curriculum and an institutional requirement.

Resignifying the curricula implies going beyond the contents established in the norm and evolving towards emancipatory, transdisciplinary and complex dialogue, to achieve true peace in the territories. This ideal implies the participation of all educational actors in the search for collective well-being, social justice and the integration of scientific research in school settings. Following Maturana and Dávila (2015), peace is a construct based on loving coexistence and respect for difference. Therefore, the collective construction of a curriculum for peace requires leaving aside pedagogical practices focused on academic content. In the rural context, and especially in scenarios marked by conflict, peace means the creation of affective, ethical relationships based on respect and dialogue. Freire (1970) and Fals-Borda (1985) agree that education is a mechanism of social transformation for the formation of people with a critical and reflective sense; with the ability to understand their realities and generate dialogues to solve the problems of their daily lives.

For his part, Galtung (1996), in his *theory of positive peace and negative peace*, presents a transdisciplinary and critical vision based on the articulation of three dimensions of analysis: direct violence, cultural violence, and structural violence. Her work makes peace visible as an active and collective social

construct, which promotes the transformation of historically marginalized territories based on curricula that recognize peace as a social and pedagogical challenge. Muñoz (2001), in turn, proposes the *theory of imperfect peace*, a curricular approach based on active listening and local action, designed to consolidate peace as a dynamic, imperfect and unfinished process in which communities participate. The debate on epistemological contradictions in education, or on conflicts in relationships and their impact on formation, must be addressed through dialogue, recognition of the other, and the integration of holistic and transdisciplinary visions in communities.

In accordance with the above, the transdisciplinary curriculum for peace must incorporate human rights through ethical training, respect for the dignity of the subject and the integration of democratic values. Cortina (2007), for example, exposes the concept of *shared humanity*. An expression to understand that human beings, despite their differences, deserve to be respected in order to lay the foundations for a solidary, democratic, transformative and fundamentally peaceful coexistence. Reardon (1995), a pioneer in peace education, also argues that conflict resolution must be achieved without violence, with social justice, comprehensiveness, and equity. As for human rights, it is not a matter of sharing content related to the subject but of integrating it harmoniously into pedagogical practices, with balance, equality and respect. *Active peace* is understood as challenging the power structures that perpetuate violence.

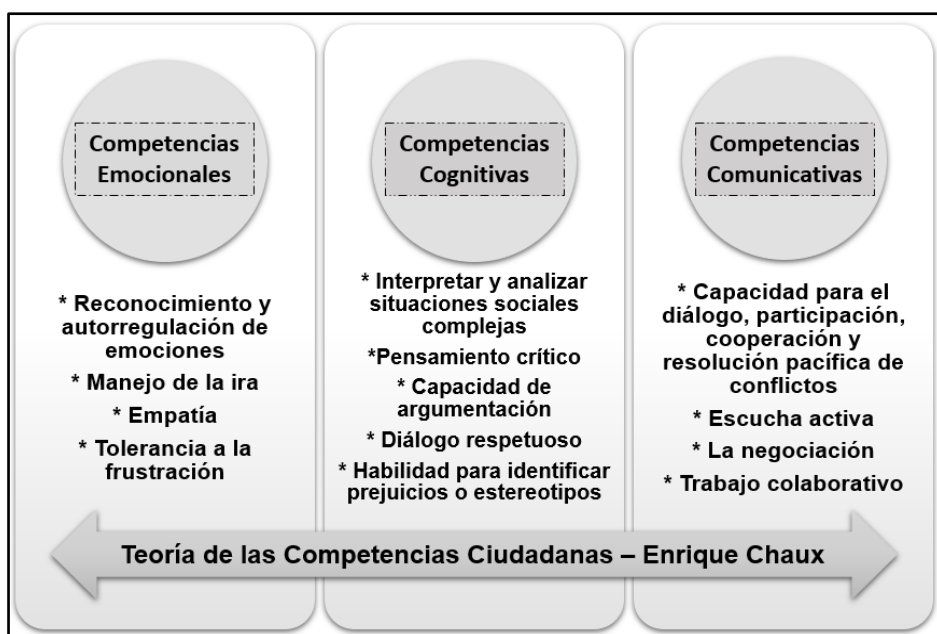


Figure 2: Outline of the Theory of Citizenship Competencies  
 Note. Authors, adapted from Chauz, 2004. In original Spanish language

Finally, Chaux (2004), through his *theory of citizenship competencies*, proposes to train people to live together peacefully and exercise their citizenship responsibly. For the author, the competencies to be developed in the curriculum are emotional, cognitive, communicative, and social (Figure 2). These competencies, articulated to a transdisciplinary approach, favor the construction of a curriculum for

peace in Colombian rural education.

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