Expressions of “Conviviality” in Everyday Life From a Communal Praxis

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The paper presents a preview of the results of the project “Community Violence Prevention” conducted in an awareness phase in three urban neighborhoods of the city of Durango, Durango, and Mexico from August to December 2011, involving children, adolescents, and women. The aim was to promote cordial neighborly relations through the coexistence of these population groups, taking as a meeting point the different workshops within the project implemented to counter expressions of violence in everyday life practices of these people. This exercise is part of an institutional project intervention named Social Praxis and Sociocultural Identity Processes, carried out by the Faculty of Psychology and Therapy of Human Communication of the UJED (Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango) in different contexts of the state capital city since 2007, working along with federal, state, and municipal government agencies. The proposed project intervention works generating environments that promotes a healthy and wellbeing in the quality of life of the population (Rozas, 1998), promoting the growth of participants for its reconstruction as people and social subjects through processes of self-reflection, formation, and/or redefinition of psychosocial support networks among the settlers themselves who participate in the workshops.

Keywords: cordial neighborly relations, violence, urban neighborhoods, workshops, quality of life, PAR (participatory action research), self-reflection, support networks

Introduction

The Faculty of Psychology and Therapy of Human Communication of the UJED (Universidad Juárez del Estado de Durango), in collaboration with federal, state, and municipal authorities, has been making various community projects, including the one we present in this paper. We have linked, as an institution of higher education, with such instances through federally subsidized program—HABITAT supplemented with state and municipal resources for the execution of several actions aimed specifically at strengthening community organization, social participation, and development of individual and collective capacities of the participating

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population. The actions are intended to help improve the quality of life of people in urban areas where they are located in the three neighborhoods where we make the community meeting that gives meaning to the reflections presented here.

Conceptual Framework

To delve into the understanding of the encounter with the communities, we take into account a number of conceptual and theoretical considerations set out here with the aim of understanding how, today, the city is set on a larger scenery for people we work with. The creation and definition of urban dwellers come to be determinants that influence the behavior of people, and in general, in the wealth or poverty of their social interaction, and therefore, in their quality of life.

We know that, the influence of context and its conformation affect the lives of people due to diverse problems and/or strengths they present. Hence, residence, education, work, recreation, culture, sports, politics, and environments, connected to the city, make it, or not, possible additional wealth to its inhabitants. This means that the provision of a home, the access to a range of services, and activities in an immediately way, will make it possible for people to have access to a better quality of life achieved while meeting their growing demands. These satisfiers define urban architecture and social improvement, which improves (or not), their quality of life, and this has its counterpart in the satisfaction that citizens perceive and feel (Montero, 1994, as cited in Saforcada & Castellá, 2008).

To Rozas (1998), the quality of life of the population will be affected if a negative community identity is developed, being affected by intrabarrial violence, as a product of social mismatch amid an urbanity that compresses without social oxygenation spaces, causing many problems, including those having to do with the type of relationships established between people of population in urban areas or neighborhoods with different levels of marginalization.

In that sense, positive coexistence may be considered as a condition for improving the quality of life of people. To Olea (2003), coexistence is configured as a psychogenetic, biographical, and historical dimension which begins in childhood when people internalize attitudes of parental figures as a normative emotional core we modulated throughout life. Thus, we incorporate patterns of behavior that we consider beneficial to us. Thus, the processes regarding coexistence deal with the intra- and inter- subjective, with micro- and macro- social aspects. Therefore, we refer to the role of family, school, and community as educational approximation spaces in and for coexistence, with the understanding that the latter “is a stage of human development in the prevailing creative solutions to the conflicts inherent the collective future”, herein lies the importance of group work as an opportunity for meeting and sharing of meanings which suggest the slogans: “Coexistence is made” (Olea, 2003).

Understanding the meaning of everyday life allows recognizing the importance gained by perceptions that people have about life styles around the neighborhood relations, in which it is implicit in the sense of coexistence. The latter is conceived as an extensive expression implying social interaction as a process through which it is built mutual interaction with other people. That identity, according to Hunter (1987, as cited in Jiménez, 2000), is equivalent to one with a community character, since it builds on interaction with outsiders as a network of social relations spatially close or distant in the definition and design of yourself (self) specular (Mead, 1934; as cited in Jiménez, 2000).

So, there is the creation of the conditions for social networking as contextual elements that nurture the

development of personal and social identity. Giddens (2005) argued that if social identities indicate how individuals can be equal to others, personal (or subject) identity individualizes us on a personal development and in a true sense of who we are, always in relation to the world around us. That is when social identity is to be a basis for the formation of personal identity and an offer to local residents to gain a basic sense of belonging, sharing, in many cases, a similar conception of the world, certain attitudes and certain values through participation in neighborhood social networks (Gans, 1962; as cited in Jiménez, 2000).

Social interaction from their relationship with the practices of everyday life then appears,

... like intimacy of a conspiracy for the establishment of a joint and total entity that can be called group, meeting, community, culture, society, collective, a collusion, without a mastermind or director, to create and preserve a situation where all the accomplices remove their personal claims and put them at the service of the common task. (Fernández, 2006, p. 98)

For him, life is one of every day and for everybody it is going to the supermarket, yawning on Mondays, interfering in any gossip, or saying hello to the neighbor, as it is not made of hard content or stable bodies but configured, as an inconsumable relationships process always making itself, because they are never finished or done, as they are dissolved in other relationships, and because mostly of what is called culture, identity, history, and customs is finally the order of that interaction that constitutes endless relationships, without interest.

Methodology

Objectives

The proposed project intervention has been defined, in its practical path, from the Community, Youth and Family Complete Education Program named CYFCEP (PFICAF in Spanish) of Faculty of Psychology. This program has undergone several changes since its implementation in 2007, preserving the primary objective of generating environments that promotes healthy and wellbeing in the quality of life of the population (Rozas, 1998) and the growth of participants for its reconstruction as people and social subjects through processes of self-reflection, conformation, and/or redefinition of psychosocial support networks.

PFICAF has defined his work from an intervention process whose lines of action are articulated to the following specific objectives:

- (1) Strengthen psychosocial support networks to counter various conditions of risk in the population;
- (2) Strengthen family and community context for the development of the capacity and potential of the participants (children, adolescents, and women);
- (3) To generate in people interest in their own culture and their ability to express themselves through the theatrics, the story, and orality;
- (4) Encourage creative writing and storytelling as tools for expressing communication and the collective imagination of the participants to recreate their own life stories as self-reflective capacity.

The Technics and the Process

We run the first phase (awareness), of a total of four, in the intervention project named “Community Violence Prevention”, and that is what is presented in this paper. We have the participation of a team made up of teachers, students, and graduates from our academic unit, the latter two actors as facilitators of cultural and psycho-educational workshops we use in the program for the meeting with the participating groups.

From the perspective of Community Psychology and consistent with their values, the PFICAF, has sought,

as mentioned above, to encourage individual and collective welfare, in relation to the social and political context of the communities served, strengthening and/or recognizing the sense of community (Ornelas, 2008) that links its members, through a collaborative process among professionals and the community.

The project works in the neighborhoods named San Isidro, Arturo Gámiz, and Cypress in the municipality of Durango. In August 2011, it was consolidated as a project with four phases of intervention: The first one is to raise awareness of violence prevailing in the colonies, then comes a self-reflection on the origin and consequences of violence in the community; one more is forming a sense of belonging to community violence; and finally, the phase of consolidation of a sense of community in favor of non-violence.

Each phase is planned to take place over a period of six months. The first was carried out from August to December 2011, and it required a double effort in relation to what is expected at later phases, as it was the first encounter with the new participating neighborhoods, and therefore, it was conducted different activities prior to the start of the intervention: promoting and disseminating the project through home visits, leafleting, and distribution of posters in key locations within the neighborhoods with the support of people of the same localities who worked as volunteers and who also served as project sponsors among its neighbors/as, especially with children.

The development of the intervention consisted of the formation of groups through integration strategies that enabled group empathy to carry out the intervention with people who attended the cultural and psycho-educational workshops, backbones of the intervention process within the institutional project. The agency goal, as already mentioned, was to sensitize participants about the violence in their neighborhoods. As the final activity, we closure the workshops, and therefore, the first phase of the project.

The proposed intervention by the workshops had a qualitative approach, considering aspects from an ethnomethodological perspective (Garfinkel, 1968, as cited in Wolf, n. d.) and some principles that define the method of PAR (participatory action research) (Balcázar, 2003) to promote a continuous and permanent self-reflection at the group level. In this regard, through workshops, in a naturalistic context, we have sought to enhance the participants' resources for the benefit of the community.

We designed several assessment instruments that are not described in this paper for space reasons. So, we used different techniques to collect quantitative and qualitative information with the idea of deepening the diagnosis, as well as to cover the needs for monographic reconstruction of the places we work in and for the characterization of the population we work with.

The intervention method is summarized, operationally speaking, in the implementation of 12 psycho-educational workshops: six groups of children (two per neighborhood), three with mothers (one per neighborhood) and three with teenagers (one per neighborhood), plus three cultural workshops (one per neighborhood) involving an average of 12 people per workshop. The purpose of them focused on enhancing the own resources of the population participating in benefit of their own community.

It was held a two-hour weekly session with the different groups in each neighborhood. Highlights include the topics: the group integration, the self-concept, the recognition of the family system, neighbors, friends, the recognition of the community in relation to the physical environment, places and groups, as well as features which foster a sense of belonging: family, neighbors, friends, places for recreation, sense of the religious, commercial life, education, occupation, characteristics and activities of the people, traditions, myths, among others.

The Intervention Process and Evaluation

We employed the cultural and psycho-educational workshops, and group management techniques, structured in a way so that each session had a prevalence process in each assistant. The workshops have been designed and constructed as input fronts (Carranza, Segura, & Hidalgo, 1991) that allow us to remain in the workplace communities (Guzmán, Ortiz, & Alquisiras, 2012; Guzmán, Ortiz, Alquisiras, & Barragán, 2010).

Besides that, applying some assessment tools allowed us to recognize certain socio-cultural character traits in the population we work with, among them are: a questionnaire on daily life and cultural identity processes, a focused interview guiding to gather participants' perceptions about the meaning of neighborly relations, and in the case of women's groups, focus groups designed to promote the expression of concerns or opinions regarding the intervention work.

Results

The indicators of the problems we address marked the strategy work in this first phase of awareness, however, it is important to note that each group defined its own dynamics and expressed specific problems.

The formation of the different groups in each neighborhood allowed us to take a first step towards the integration, from the different activities that led a rapprochement between the settlers themselves. The group integration was the first strategy to combat communal violence in everyday life in these urban spaces. Thanks to this phase of awareness, some attendees began to be aware and perceptive about the importance of sociability as a principle of encounter beyond generational, educational, gender, and religion barriers, between other issues that have prevented the neighborhood meeting.

The exercise we have done together with the participants has meant that children, women, and teenagers allowed themselves to know other people who they had not dared to greet, because they considered them aggressive, unreliable, and/or unsociable. That is, we stand in front of an experience which seeks relearn to live (Olea, 2003) with those who we are not used to, recognizing the positive aspects of people, while it strengthens proactive incident on the recognition of social skills for living in a personal and group level.

We could detect problems related to neighborhood conflicts due to rumors that generate discredit, anger and strife, lack of solidarity, a sense of belonging only to the immediate neighborhood as well as responsibility for own conservation, in the absence of a shared vision of “being part of the community”. We also detected little awareness about the ethical and ecological caring for both their private and public spaces, among other problems detected.

Participants and Quantitative Achievements

We present information in Table 1 where we concentrate quantitative data with which we show the level of participation of the population in the neighborhood where the project was carried out and its scope in other near neighborhoods of the city which also received the benefit because of its closeness.

Participants and Qualitative Achievements

In Tables 2, 3, and 4, we show the qualitative information considered by each kind of participants: women, adolescents, and children. We present the information in this way trying to make it easier to read and save some space.

Table 1

Number and Sex of Participants in Each Neighborhood

Neighborhood	Boys	Women/girls	Total
*Polígono San Isidro	17	19	36
San Isidro	9	17	
Acereros	4	1	
San Martin	2		
Gobernadores	1	1	
Arturo Gámiz	23	38	61
Polígono El Ciprés	28	33	61
Ciprés	21	32	
Carlos Luna	5		
Armando del Catillo	1		
Francisco Zarco	1	1	
Total	68	90	158

Note. *Names given as geographic areas defined by the conditions of poverty and marginalization that can reach into the city.

Table 2

Problems Presented and Results Achieved With Women

Problems	Results
Difficulties in integrating groups of mothers Slight opening to their peers members No empathy Slight verbal skills Differences between participants because of family and neighborhood problems Rotation of attendees Absenteeism	<p>Greater integration and group cohesion, result of the pressure exerted on those members who were late or missing, or with who took the deal to go through their partners, while others reminded them to attend weekday workshops.</p> <p>Through group techniques with simple games for them, it was achieved a more open approach in terms of personal situations that are causes or arising out of communal violence.</p> <p>There was a gradually transformation of the way in which the participants were expressed, as orally or in writing, due to activities designed to promote the narrative through their own life stories.</p> <p>Changes were evident in neighborly relations, both at the time of reflection on the importance of coexistence with neighbors and to appreciate what we have done at some time for them or their families and in activities, such as writing a letter and delivering it to a neighbor to say thank you.</p> <p>The relationships between the participants advanced to the point of being, rather than neighbors or colleagues, as friends.</p> <p>The topics reviewed required a high level of commitment, trust, confidence, and respect and most of the participants were able to develop and provide evidence of it at the last moment on the phase of awareness.</p>

Table 3

Problems Presented and Results Achieved With Adolescents

Problems	Results
Aggression Apathy Absenteeism Little capacity for dialogue low self-esteem	<p>They managed to express their emotions and feelings through telling their life stories.</p> <p>Moreover, they themselves motivated and invited other young people to participate in the meetings of his workshop.</p> <p>Commitments were not to miss sessions, and cooperating in the various activities that were proposed.</p> <p>Concern was expressed about meeting the neighborhood youth bands, whom the community “was always complaining” of.</p> <p>They pledged to respect among all proposed rules. The facilitator was asked for stricter sanctions to those who transgressed the rules.</p>

(Table 3 continued)

Problems	Results
Aggression Apathy Absenteeism Little capacity for dialogue low self-esteem	<p>Managed and whitewashed a fence (wall) in their neighborhood as a place to make graffiti. They were who managed the place, organizing and providing materials to make presentable the fence (wall).</p> <p>They left their own context to share with others their own musical talent.</p> <p>The “Panthers”, one of the groups who attended one of the workshop for teens, went to a recording studio where they could produce the video: “My neighborhood” collective composition and pretext to show the commitment of young people to rehearse and even leave out some of the band commitments to prioritize collective recording.</p> <p>This activity was a very successful video production, even the older ones of the first generation of the “Panthers” who were estranged from the new generation (The “Panterillas”) joined and participated in the composition of the lyrics of the video’s song and were committed in the collective work.</p>

Table 4

Problems Presented and Results Achieved With Children

Problems	Results
Aggressive behavior Little cooperation among peers Little awareness in the use of working Materials High demand for care Rotation of the participants	<p>The kids found a place where learning was fun, and where they could socialize negative aspects that they have been practicing for some time along with conflicts they daily experienced in different social spaces (school, street corner, etc.).</p> <p>They showed significant learning about the consequences that aggressive behavior toward peers can bring.</p> <p>They gave themselves the opportunity to build their own space to express positive emotions and to improve self-esteem to give credit to their work and their talent.</p> <p>Change was evident in the interaction between peers, amid an atmosphere of camaraderie, cooperation, participation, sharing and helping each other, situations that were noticeable, contrasting with the common way they used to behave at the beginning of the workshops. Girls established a friendly and relaxed, despite the occasional bouts for the use of working materials.</p> <p>Facilitators managed to venture into everyday life of boys and girls participating in activities in which they met stories or events related to drug trafficking and kidnapping in which the figure of the drug dealer, the policeman and the soldier were emulated sometimes as heroes and others as reference to consider on what they would like to be in the future.</p> <p>Gradually, they positively appreciated the effort and the work of others with comments like “Look, it came out nice” or “Yes, you can do it”, referring to the work or tasks performed by them in the workshops.</p> <p>Significant changes were noted to show solidarity with each other to learn to share the work material and assistance they provided themselves in each activity assigned.</p> <p>The quality of the meetings allowed closer relationships between themselves and the facilitators.</p> <p>Valuable information was obtained at the personal and family level, and their living conditions in general.</p>

Final Comments

The work done so far allows us to see the complexity of it in terms of our claims for conducting an exercise in community practice, not only from the intervention but also in its implications as a research process and its approach considering the main principles proposed by the PAR method (Balcázar, 2003; Montenegro, 2004), a methodological approach that allowed us to precisely reflect the limits and scope of the exercise at this early phase of awareness about violence in the community.

In terms of the intervention process, we sought to strengthen and promote the construction of psychosocial support networks to counter risk conditions in the population, and to find the approach to the family as one of the main pillars of the task we set. To do this, we rely on cultural activities that allow us to foster a warmer encounter and continuous interaction with the population. Although the claim was ambitious, considering that this phase is the first of four, we had a first look at the community that gave us the opportunity to identify some characteristic features of the social dynamics of the neighborhoods from the life experience of participants.

The workshops process required promoting their own time and space as a fundamental activity to contact with the community and the formation of groups that we seek to maintain, according to the three sectors of the population that had already been considered (children, teenagers, and women).

Each kind of the population responded to a particular integration dynamics in both the conformation of the group as in the workshop activities. The integration of the group of mothers was slower and characterized by high turnover of participants. However, as we advanced in the development of the proposed intervention, the conditions were given to work with greater cohesion and participation in each of the proposed activities to women, sometimes seeking each other to attend workshop meetings together, reminding to not miss the next Saturday, or others offering their house to perform some of the group work sessions.

To be able to get into fragments of daily life in the neighborhoods directed our attention to the particular ways in which social interactions marked the community encounters and discounters in each of the multiple contents of relationships, then we reworked with them on what we have been insisting to call "avecinaamiento" (neighborhoodness). The term was acquiring sense to focus on the promotion of proactive thinking in neighborly relations to identify own strengths of the inhabitants of these neighborhoods, despite of the crime and violence manifestations perceived and felt by people that further extend the level of vulnerability in the quality of life for residents due to problems, such as access to quality education, sources of work, recreation, culture, and sports among other goods and services necessary for the fulfillment of social demands, a necessary condition for improving indicators of the quality of life and developing a positive identity as opposed to a negative one (Rozas, 1998).

We found out that the meaning of these "avecinaamiento" sense proved is polysemous as urban identity is also polysemous in the network of social relations, both proximal and distal (Jiménez, 2000). Therefore, it would be premature to say that our intervention succeeded in influencing the participants who shared some of their experiences of life; so, we consider it necessary to continue the analysis and discussion during the second phase in the community working around self-reflection on the origin and consequences of violence that prevails in these communities.

Which leaves us so far the community approach and intervention is a series of questions relating to the process of awareness about violence that is difficult to outsource because of its degree of complexity, so we ask ourselves about: What evidence do we have of today participants' achievements in different decision-making about relationships with their families and neighbors? What kind of communication strategies and group meeting could we propose to build new meeting spaces where we could apply the conviviality principle? Do we understand the meaning that this principle acquires in coexistence with the perceptions and daily events that they and we observe in the reworking of the chain of events occurring daily in their lives? Will it be possible that the cultural and psycho-educational intervention we implemented encourages and strengthens the requirements for building human capital development towards a creative solution to the conflicts in different groups? What is the level of complexity that it takes in the process of awareness of the realities facing the

people whom we have invited in this attempt to build a community praxis? Are we directing, facilitating, or mediating between the reproduction of a social system, economically, politically, and culturally dominant, and one with emancipatory sense, conducive to acquiring an awareness of the tools and materials, especially symbolical, that enable people to interact with surroundings in an alternative way? Are we encouraging, (through various workshops and activities planned and performed in accordance with context demands and the participants' interest), the shift from a passive spectator to a collective group creative “spect-actor” protagonist of the dramatic action of shared life? (Boal, 2007).

These are just some of the questions that are pending for the second phase in which we aim to build a methodological-critical path to try to understand the subjectivities that enclose the neighborhood building, or the purposeful “avicinamiento”. This way is the one we are committed to fostering closer relationships to the groups of participants with the idea that our academic capital can facilitate the establishment of a stronger university social commitment to the human side of participants.

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