Introduction
A Developmental Perspective on Restorative Justice and Peace Education

I.1 My Personal Journey

When I first encountered peace education and restorative justice in the middle of the 2010s, I was teaching at a private K-12 school on a sweeping, lush campus on the outskirts of Colombia's bustling capital, Bogotá. During these years, the national government of Colombia was making a concerted effort to address the country's complex and deeply rooted relationship with violence. Over the previous half-century in Colombia, politics, society, sports, and daily life for many had been marked by diverse forms of violence, from a constant armed conflict between the government and revolutionary guerilla groups, to gangs engaged in the international drug trade, and petty street crime.

As the son of a Colombian immigrant, I had been only lightly exposed to this history growing up in New York City in the 1990s. My Colombian father and grandmother would captivate me with stories of my great-grandfather avoiding political violence as a coffee trader, but these stories felt more like family lore from times long past. We never visited the land of my ancestors when I was young because of the terror engendered by the drug kingpin Pablo Escobar (among others) and widespread kidnappings that included my extended family members. Still, my memory is experiencing all this through an unclear fog; only as an adult was I truly able to grasp the depth of violence that has marked Colombia, its history, and its people.

Living and teaching in Colombia in the 2010s, I was faced with constant news and many symbols of a country and people trying to come to terms with violence, both past and present. This was driven at a societal level by the government of President Juan Manuel Santos, a former defense minister who staked his legacy on a peace process with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército Popular* (FARC-EP). The multiyear process was held in Cuba and symbolized a significant and noteworthy

effort to end over 50 years of armed conflict between the two sides. What stood out about this peace process – and drew international attention and acclaim – was its broad, inclusive framework. Ending the violence between the state and the FARC-EP was one prong of an effort that included taking on structural issues in Colombian society and politics, recognizing and working to address factors leading to violence (e.g., the international narcotics trade), and coordinating with civil society to change Colombia's narrative from a country marked by violence to one engaging in building peace across sectors. Restorative justice was integral to these efforts: first, to provide accountability and healing as ex-combatants tried to reintegrate into communities across the country; and second, as an element in mandated peace education initiatives in schools. Under Santos's government, the Ministry of Education moved from devoting considerable attention and resources to civic education to a mandate and central focus on peace education.

Like the broader peace process, however, both efforts were controversial. From the political arena, to the media, to the streets, to my school classrooms, there was intense debate on this topic. Some vehemently felt that restorative approaches were giving the country away to the FARC-EP and letting people off for heinous atrocities. Others pointed toward the need to end over five decades of conflict and collectively heal. Perspectives in this debate intersected with personal experience – a loved one killed or kidnapped, a family business extorted, being a *desplazado* who fled one's home due to violence – rocked families, communities, and schools. Sitting here years later, I can still call to mind numerous, and at times heated, conversations with young Colombians about these questions in the classroom, the cafeteria, tutoring sessions, on the football field, and more.

I was experiencing all this as a half-Colombian gringo who spoke Spanish with an accent on my own identity journey, as well as in my role as a teacher making sense of my experiences working with young people in Harlem, New York, Tacna, Peru, and Colombia. My foray into peace education and restorative justice was embedded within my broader interest to study how young people made sense of societal events, as well as how they experienced and interpreted reverberations of these macro-processes in their education. I was curious about how all this would impact their future trajectories: how they integrated these experiences into their emerging sense of who they were and how they understood their roles in communities and societies. In other words, I kept coming back to asking myself how these young Colombians' identities – which I clearly saw forming and playing out day-to-day in school – intersected with educational programming and experiences driven

by broader societal narratives and systems. In my graduate studies, I came to understand that this question is inherently psychological – addressing processing and interpretation, identity, and meaning making – and also essential to building peace, promoting human rights, and fostering justice in our societies.

I.2 Restorative Justice, Peace Education, and Psychology

As my engagement with restorative justice and peace education has grown, I have become aware that the connections between development, psychology, and these prosocial ends (i.e., peace, human rights, social justice) exist, but are also underdeveloped. Restorative justice, broadly construed, refers to "a process where all stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm" (Braithwaite, 2004, p. 28). This concise – and admittedly simplified – definition points toward links between restorative justice, peace, and psychology: internal reckoning, interpersonal dynamics, implications for conflict resolution, and a focus on how people treat each other. Importantly, restorative justice serves both reactive and proactive ends: addressing both healing after harm has been committed and creating conditions to prevent it.

A key underlying psychological thread in restorative justice and peace education is cognitive: the sense-making we all engage in. A rich literature in moral and developmental psychology, for example, details how children and adults think about harm and justice, including across cultural contexts (e.g., Haidt, 2013; Jensen, 2015). Developmental systems theories outline how meaning-making processes underlie the way young people experience and respond to our social worlds and various ecological contexts in building identities (e.g., Spencer, 2006; Spencer et al., 1997). This approach is both attentive to individual psychological worldviews, as well as social contexts and influences informing how we think about the world. There has been little direct integration of development and ecological systems into restorative justice (see Gavrielides, 2016; Velez & Gavrielides, 2022; Velez, Hahn, et al., 2020). Still, some scholars have argued for the peacebuilding potential of restorative justice by highlighting how it can facilitate deconstructing systems of oppression and raising consciousness (as in education; Armour, 2016; Knight & Wadhwa, 2014; Skelton, 2018).

Peace education with children and youth, in contrast, has a rich theoretical and empirical basis, including much work rooted in psychology (e.g., Bajaj, 2008; Bar-Tal, 2002; Christie & Wagner, 2010; Harris & Morrison,

2013; Velez & Gerstein, 2021). Broadly, peace education can be defined as "draw[ing] out from people their instincts to live peacefully with others and emphasizes peaceful values upon which society should be based" (Harris, 2004, p. 78), though a more classic definition is that of "learning intended to prepare the learners to contribute toward the achievement of peace" (Reardon, 1982, p. 38). Drawing on Galtung (1969, 2008), scholars in the field tend to address how education can be leveraged both for negative peace (i.e., preventing or addressing violence) and positive peace (i.e., fostering attitudes, behaviors, and systems that promote harmony and justice; Harris & Morrison, 2013).

While developmental perspectives have been used in peace education, there has been less theoretical complexity articulating specific cognitive processes related to the emergence of peaceful self-identities. Some studies – many before the year 2000 – explored developmental trends in how children and youth thought about peace (Cairns et al., 2006; Hakvoort, 1996; Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1993; Kagaari et al., 2017), leading to a paper integrating theory in development psychology and cognition about peace by Hakvoort and Oppenheimer (1998). The paper integrates classic developmental work by Piaget with empirical study focused specifically on peace. More recently, there have been attempts to advance theory on how children and youth develop as peacebuilders through interaction with education systems and initiatives. This new branch of scholarship includes a model centering on belief systems (Willis, 2017), a Developmental Peacebuilding Model (DPM) focused on prosocial behaviors in intergroup conflict settings (Taylor, 2020), and one outside of the field of psychology centered on the organic, grassroots ways youth build peace (Berents, 2018). Within this emerging work, there is space for greater attention and integration of a phenomenological focus: How do children and young people make sense of peace, themselves, their societies, and their roles within these as they experience peace education and restorative justice? Such a question matters in a world where peace education and restorative justice are growing and used to address issues of equity and violence. The implications are not only within school contexts, but perhaps more importantly related to who these young people are and who they will become as adult participants in their communities and societies.

I.3 The Current Volume

There is thus room to more deeply understand and evaluate the potentials of peace education and restorative justice to support social justice, equity, and a

more peaceful and harmonious world. One aspect of these investigations is quantitative: using validated measures, building statistical models, getting a sense of effective sizes, etc. But, as many argue, such an approach only captures part of what is going on as people experience, make sense of, and respond to their psychosocial worlds (see Power et al., 2018). We must additionally consider the psychological meaning-making processes connected to young people's experiences of peace education and restorative justice: how they think about these experiences, how and why they engage with the practices, and in what ways these influence their sense of self and place in the world. It is important that investigations of these questions are based in sound theory, the rich empirical foundations that exist in adjacent fields, and critical perspectives. Careful contextualization is particularly important because both peace education and restorative justice are often shrouded in positive valence; framed as panaceas leading to greater peace and equity (Bar-Tal, 2002; Cremin, 2016; Gavrielides, 2007). Education for peace and creating opportunities for young people to restore harm are valuable goals, but the gap between theory and practice requires a critical understanding of the underlying meaning-making and developmental processes.

This volume of *The Progressive Psychology Book Series* addresses core issues related to building more democratic, harmonious, and equitable societies. The book is guided by a question for the future of restorative justice, peace education, and their connections to psychology, peace, human rights, and social justice: How can we better understand the psychological mechanisms of participating in peace education and restorative justice with a developmental lens? This broad motivation encompasses multiple subparts: How do young people's previous experiences and understanding of harm, justice, and peace inform the ways they are willing to engage with restorative approaches and peace education; does the resultant experience of participating shape their social identities and engagement in the world; and how do the ways young people conceptualize peace and justice shape their potential engagement in building peaceful, more harmonious societies?

This book looks to address these questions, laying out interconnections between psychological meaning making, developmental theory, and the fields of restorative justice and peace education. It is grounded in advancing theory and integrating across these areas, but also provides empirical case studies, methodological considerations, and future directions as potential roadmaps for scholars and students in these fields. These arguments are rooted in both developmental and social psychological traditions. Spencer's

Phenomenological Variant of the Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST; Spencer et al., 1997) is used to map the role of meaning making in forming identities, while Moscovici's Social Representations Theory (SRT; Moscovici, 1984) offers a more systemic focus on the creation of meaning that young people engage with as they build their own understandings of themselves and their social positioning.

I.4 Book Contents

This opening section presents the motivation and guiding aims. It is meant to give the reader a sense of my positionality and history with these topics to situate what will come, as well as the rationale for why a developmental meaning-making framework that is rooted is needed. The volume encompasses many themes – education, theoretical considerations, my own academic and personal journeys – and this introduction weaves them together to set the stage. In Chapters 1 and 2, I provide richer detail about restorative justice and peace education to contextualize the main theoretical argument. Chapter 1 discusses historical roots of restorative justice by describing its connections to ancient and indigenous traditions, its emergence in the Western world in the twentieth century, its recent growth, and its application in various domains (e.g., education, criminal justice, transitional justice). Key debates within the field are also discussed. Chapter 2 provides a similar foundation for peace education: a short summary of its historical development, its use and growth both within the West and beyond, and the current state of the field. Psychologists' roles in designing and evaluating peace education are highlighted, as well as areas for growth in relation to expanding understandings of what is peace education, empirical research on it, and considering cross-cultural contexts.

The first main section of the book – Part I: Restorative Justice, Psychology, and Peace – details a theoretical argument for a developmental lens to the interrelations between restorative justice, peace education, and building more just and harmonious societies. Chapter 3 focuses on making connections between restorative justice, peace education, and the goals of a "progressive psychology." This chapter situates the book within the broader *Progressive Psychology Book Series*, with a particular focus on why this framework should be of interest to psychological researchers and practitioners who are interested in supporting the development of more just, equitable, and peaceful societies. In this chapter, I make a theoretical case for why restorative justice and peace education with youth matter for these ends.

In Chapter 4, I outline a developmental approach to restorative justice and peace education. This chapter begins with proposing developmental frameworks beyond the current predominant approaches in both fields. I also argue for a focus on meaning making – that is, attending to antecedents, contextual influences, and age-related factors that shape engagement with restorative justice and peace education, as well as the mechanisms for how such experiences can shape future trajectories. I outline the roles that psychosocial processes may play in the "success" of these projects based on current understandings, including the psychological limits or obstacles to individuals and groups in engaging with restorative justice and peace education. In this chapter, I draw on moral and social development literatures and phenomenological and social psychological theories to summarize these processes across childhood and into adulthood.

In Chapter 5, the final in Part I, I present a developmental model using social psychology and developmental systems theory to create an integrated framework for how young people conceptualize peace and justice. *Conceptualized peace*, which applies Moscovici's SRT and Spencer's PVEST, frames how individual meaning making relates to identity-based outcomes as members of communities and societies. The chapter explains developmental processes in individuals' understandings of peace, the possibility of a peaceful future, and their own role in peacebuilding. This framework is extended to incorporate understandings of justice and linked into individuals' experiences with restorative justice and peace education.

Part II demonstrates the utility and applicability of *conceptualized peace* through two case studies. The first, Chapter 6, uses my dissertation project in Colombia, in which I examined how adolescents made meaning of peace amid the peace process and as part of their developmental processes. The project involved analysis of over 40 sources of government discourse on youth and peace, 328 interviews with Colombian adolescents, and secondary analysis of close to 1,500 questionnaires with other adolescents across the country. The empirical work motivates a discussion of applying *conceptualized peace*, and what insights it offers in this case of peace education in Colombia.

Chapter 7 provides an in-depth case study of how the experience of school restorative justice can carry beyond young people's time as student. I use *conceptualized peace* to study the developmental trajectories of young people who were leaders of restorative justice in their high school and have integrated it into their lives as young adults. The analysis focuses on identity, with attention to the ways that young people have made meaning of their experiences and incorporated this into their sense of self. The goal

is to highlight the contextual complexity of *conceptualized peace* in relation to topics not explicitly about "peace."

Finally, Part III focuses on methodology and future directions for research in this area. Chapter 8 begins this section by arguing that integrative, synthetic, and multimethod research is needed to expand how we understand the intersection of development, restorative justice, and peace education. Specifically, I describe the *SAGE* model that I have detailed elsewhere with colleagues (Power et al., 2018), with an expanded focus on attending to meaning, observation, viewpoints, and experience from the *MOVE* (Power & Velez, 2020) framework. These models are applied to restorative justice and peace psychology to demonstrate how to effectively investigate the potential described in this book. Finally, the book ends (Chapter 9) with future research directions, both in terms of greater understandings highlighted by *conceptualized peace*, as well as where the fields of restorative justice and peace education are moving. Areas of focus include the COVID-19 pandemic and its reverberations, racial injustice, and intractable conflict. It also provides implications for the teaching of psychology, as well as for dissemination and research funding within institutions like the American Psychological Association (APA).