



Tabio, Colombia

I.E.D. Instituto Técnico Comercial José de San Martín

Overcoming conflict with debate



**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL**
Community
Collaboration

FUNDAÇÃO

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**WORLD'S
BEST SCHOOL
PRIZES**

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Introduction

I.E.D. Instituto Técnico Comercial José de San Martín, a K-12 public school in Tabio, Colombia, serves vulnerable children with complex backgrounds or disabilities. Most of this school's students come from poor families and many have been displaced by violence. Believing that they have the power to build peace and a different reality for themselves, their communities and the country, the school created the Annual Social Science Congress to teach them that they can contribute to a better society through debate and mutual respect.



Profile:



Country:
Colombia



Region:
Tabio



School type:
Public school



Location area:
Town



Student population:
2000+



Prize Category:
Community Collaboration

“It is important that our model of the Congress of Social Sciences can be replicated in other educational contexts, with the benefit that it brings to students in the development of their artistic, communicative, critical thinking skills, and transcends to their life projects.”

- Nubia Isabel Rojas Carrillo, Principal, I.E.D. Instituto Técnico Comercial José de San Martín



In-depth look

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

I.E.D. Instituto Técnico Comercial José de San Martín, a K-12 public school in Tabio, Colombia, serves vulnerable children with complex backgrounds or disabilities. Most of this school's students come from poor, underserved families and many of whom have been displaced by violence. A number of students also hail from migrant, low-income, and/or low-education families.

To counter the negative influences that displacement and violence have had on some of its students, the school has endeavoured to focus on social transformation through the power of education. The Social Science Congress project initially arose in 2013 from the need to

generate spaces for dialogue for students that allowed democratic, academic, social, and political interaction.

The school fosters and promotes values of solidarity, honesty, responsibility, and respect towards other people's differences. It seeks to create a culture of belonging and emboldening students to contribute to the social fabric of the wider community. During the pandemic, it was a challenge to maintain the annual Congress. Due to the lockdown, the wider school community was isolated. There was also a need to access and use more digital technology and devices, not only to facilitate the school's curriculum but to create a platform that would allow the Congress to carry on like before.



“What is so important about this Congress is that it goes beyond the classroom, because it allows [students] to expand their critical thinking outside of what they’re learning in class and to be able to create their life projects that will help fulfil their lives.”

- Vilma Sofia Sabogal Amaya,
Teacher, I.E.D. Instituto Técnico
Comercial José de San Martín



EXPERTISE AND APPROACH

The school is supported by the Fundación Alquería Cavelier as part of its flagship "Programa de Mejoramiento de la calidad educativa" programme (Improvement of Quality of Education Programme, in English), in partnership with the Education Department of Cundinamarca, the state where this school belongs to. The institution seeks to guide and support all its students through its unique pedagogical practices, specifically aimed at showing them how to contribute constructively to society and developing and strengthening their skills as upstanding citizens. The school also tries to teach conflict management and engage in respectful debate without resorting to violence.

The Social Science Congress, an initiative that has entered its 10th year, is a forum to stimulate critical thinking, research, innovation, and social transformation. The Congress allows students to strengthen their communication skills on multiple subjects, including questions that address some of the country's biggest issues.

All students participate in the Congress with papers and debates, and write about their research on the annual theme. An important component of social inclusion consists of adapting these activities to promote the participation of students with special needs.

In another part of the programme, students are invited to participate in the "Sanmartinian Artists" contest, where they create a visual piece within the Congress' annual theme, thereby encouraging their artistic expression. The collection of pieces is presented at the event and the winning piece becomes the Congress' logo.



The annual themes are often designed with the student's interests in mind. Other schools and speakers from the wider community are invited to participate and engage in the Congress. The Congress acts as the main platform to build these ties and requires that the whole school participate, including teachers, directors, parents, and local community members.

The projects have four main stages:

1. Within the first stage, the faculty presents the most significant elements of the theme and each project to ensure the students understand the idea.
2. The second stage involves planning the Congress itself, with a “Social Sciences network” – a small committee that helps organise the wider operations of the congress. This stage has three cycles of participation:
 - a. Kindergarten to second grade, who focus on drawing and other small art projects that are showcased during the programme.
 - b. The third, fourth and fifth grades prepare by creating literary narrative works that correspond to the Congress’ main theme.
 - c. Grades six to eleven research and prepare presentations on the main theme by producing academic papers and essays.
3. The third stage is the actual implementation of the Congress, with a pre-congress in which older students’ papers are selected to be presented at the official forum.
4. The final stage is the evaluation, where students are given a survey to express their experience of the Congress and provide feedback on how best it can be improved for the following year.



The Congress continued online throughout the COVID lockdowns. Students and teachers connected through Facebook, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom. In order to ensure access to students and families with limited access to the internet, the event was also broadcasted on local radio. The theme during the pandemic prompted students to analyse the confinement experience.



“We hope we can have global impact, that this can be used elsewhere to form citizens of peace, who care for the environment and each other.”

- A teacher at I.E.D. Instituto Técnico Comercial José de San Martín



OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The socio-cultural impact achieved through Social Science Congresses won the recognition of the wider community and became known for its inclusiveness and ability to increase participants' knowledge and cultural understanding. As a result, the school was bestowed with the National Award from the Ministry of the Interior in the category of "Children, Youth and Adolescence".

The Congress has helped students better understand the myriad ways of addressing both local and international problems through debate, a high level of communication, and mutual collaboration. Some of the themes, over the years, have taken on issues that students face directly, such as climate change and the increasing rise of technology. It has also created space for students and their

communities to think and discuss solutions for a more peaceful world order. As a result of the Congress program, other schools have begun developing their own student-centred annual democratic forums.

To overcome the issues posed by the pandemic, the school decided to hold its first digital congress in 2020. It used social media, local radio, and other online networks to help facilitate the event. Students even recorded short audio clips of the Congress's main theme in English, which were later used at the official event.

This effort was very well received amongst families who were concerned their children or family members would be left behind in their studies. "It was a beautiful experience because my family and I listened to my grandson on the radio station," says Olga Castiblanco, a student's grandmother, speaking fondly of the school's commitment to continue despite the pandemic.



Key Steps



PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The first step required all members of the school faculty to devise ways in which they could help students resolve conflicts without resorting to violence and improve their mentality. They determined that democratic participation played a fundamental role in uniting the educational community through the construction and acquisition of knowledge. This would allow students to identify their main daily and environmental problems that they could then investigate, compare, and discuss clearly. With this, the school decided to create the Congress of Social Sciences to further develop these skills.



PREPARING THE SCHEDULE

The school needed to determine the schedule for each phase and socialise the idea with the entire educational community, with the aim of bringing in as many participants as possible.

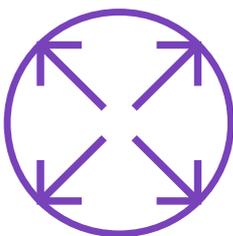


The school also invited schools from around the local area to engage with the programme. In recent years, the school has increased their goal to hold a congress at a national level.



DRAWING CONTEST

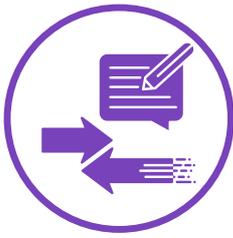
The school then takes art submissions from a school-wide contest, with the winning entries then showcased at the Congress. Students from art classes interpret the Congress' main theme through their own techniques and creativity. One entry is chosen from the primary school level and another from the secondary level.



PRE-CONGRESSES

The school holds a pre-Congress across seven different venues, during which they gather and select students' academic papers and essays to showcase during the official forum. This allows students from both rural and urban schools to participate. During the pandemic, students prepared their papers at home with the help of their families.





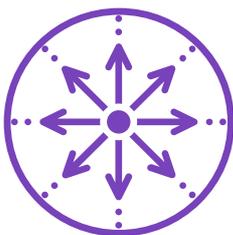
INVITATIONS

The school then sends out invitations to student families, members of the wider community, and other schools throughout the municipality. They put up banners on social networks to help promote the event, as well as emails to help generate interest.



BROADCASTING

The school worked with the local community radio station to gather and broadcast written, audio, and video presentations. These presentations then went out over the school's Facebook and YouTube channels.



PROMOTION

Finally, the school uploaded information about the Congress onto their website, as well as the videos and drawings, so that students and parents with no or less reliable access to the internet could view the content in their own time.



Advice and Guidance

Each stage of an initiative like this Congress should be well mapped-out and prepared ahead of time to ensure the best possible outcome for all participants. It's important that the theme of the initiative fits the overall context of the students' environment or touches upon issues that they are either familiar with or are likely to encounter in the future.

Ideally, the institution should endeavour to use social media and other digital platforms to hold the forum online. In the case of I.E.D. Instituto Técnico Comercial José de San Martín, the school had to remove the majority of the laptops and tablets and give them to the students so they would have access to the Congress from their homes during the lockdown. The school also recommends that students of all grades and ages be included in Congress and have a role in the forum.



More information

 **Josedesanmartin Tabio Cundinamarca**

 **IED JOSÉ DE SAN MARTIN**

 **<http://www.josedesanmartintabio.edu.co/>**

Learn more about their work by watching their event at 2022's T4 World Education Week: [watch here](#)

