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Education for Peace in the Mexican context

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This paper presents a case study of a peace-based education program piloted in Mexico. An analysis of the interactions among the micro, meso, and macro levels sheds light on how the benefits, challenges, and impact of synergic action contribute towards building a culture of peace. The paper concludes that the best strategy for crime prevention is education for peace. This requires multi-stakeholder collaboration to create transcendental solutions that go to the roots of the problem of violence in Mexico rather than simply fighting its symptoms.

Keywords: Education for Peace; Mexico; citizenship; multi-stakeholder collaboration; violence prevention

Introduction

The country of Mexico is afflicted by a high degree of violence. In the past 10 years, more than 83,541 people have been killed due to violence stemming from the trafficking and trade of narcotics. Widespread poverty and state corruption have enabled the proliferation of drug-related gangs, drawing whole communities and particularly young people into the volatile and exceedingly violent world of organized crime. Schoolyards have become recruiting grounds for gangs and community streets front lines for violence. Neither families nor schools nor state institutions have yet succeeded in quelling this tide of intrastate violence.

Due in part to the genocidal wars of the 1990s, the international community has engaged in a deeper exploration of how “cultures of violence” can be transformed into “cultures of peace”. In this regard, it has been widely assumed that peace education is one of the most important tools to build a culture of peace. In theory, through empowering children and young people with the knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills of peace, a culture of peace can take root and gradually extend through ripple effects beyond the classroom to families and the wider community. To the extent that peace education engages a range of actors, such as grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs),

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international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, governmental institutions, the private sector, religious institutions, international organizations (IOs), and the state at large, positive effects in these social and political domains are also anticipated (Spaulding 1998; Orjuela 2003; Cabezudo and Haavelsrud 2007; Galtung 2007; Danesh 2007; Ross 2010).

Despite these assumptions, there is little empirical research on the actual impacts of peace education at the school and societal levels. This is particularly true in Mexico, where no studies of this type have been conducted. Within the peace education literature, many studies bring important insight to the study of peace education. However, most of them focus primarily on outcomes in the educational community by tracking attitudinal and behavioral changes among participating children and young people (Krosnick and Petty 1995; Salomon 2004; Johnson and Johnson 2010; Bar-On 2010; McCully 2010). They have not examined the structural correspondence among schools and other actors outside the school, leaving an important empirical knowledge gap about how peace education is conceived and transferred from major political institutions towards schools. Only a few studies have reported the impacts of peace education on societal structures and interinstitutional relationships (Paolini et al. 2004; Danesh 2010; Clarke-Habibi 2005; Staub, Pearlmall, and Bilali 2010). Therefore, what remains unclear is how the role of institutions, actors’ interests, politics, and policies at the macro level influence peace education from the top-down approach and vice-versa. Ross (2010, 197) argues that, beyond changes in the attitudes of program recipients, “the many changes at the collective, institutional level may matter far more in the long run”, as “peace education programs do not operate in a vacuum” (Salomon and Cairns 2010a).

This study aims to contribute to this gap in peace research literature and to transform the policy and practice of peace education by examining its social construction and by making an in-depth case study of a peace education initiative in Mexico. The study explores two broad questions. First, how do school-based peace education programs in diverse conflict-affected contexts (micro level) involve the wider society (meso and macro levels)? Second, how do institutions at the state, federal, and international levels influence peace education at the micro level? From an examination of this dialogue between the micro, the meso, and the macro, the study aims to understand the benefits, challenges, and impacts of multi-stakeholder peace education collaboration within Mexican communities.

The paper presents the case study and examines the preliminary findings from the qualitative evaluation of a new peace education program – Education for Peace (EFP) – which has been implemented in 10 schools in the Mexican state of Nuevo León since March 2012. The program so far involves 4,154 students, 417 teachers, and more than 8,000 parents. The data were gathered during the period of May 2013 to April 2014 and consists of 150 questionnaires and 17 in-depth interviews with teachers, parents, members of CSOs, NGOs, government leaders participating in this pre-pilot program, and others planning to launch the program in other Mexican states. Drawing on their reported views, the analysis of the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats (SWOT) to the program are presented. This methodology inquires on those four specific areas and contributes to strategic planning. This is then examined within the wider cultural, institutional, and political dynamics beyond the school which have an influence on the program’s implementation and in the following phases.

This ongoing study is timely and relevant given the prevalence of intrastate violence globally, along with the acute challenges to human security in Mexico with which the federal and state governments and the international community are currently struggling. The study aims to inform national and international decision makers about how best to
invest in EFP in Mexico, and about the strategic value of promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration at the state and federal levels, as a key mechanism for building a culture of peace in this violence-afflicted society.

Part I of this article lays out the conceptual basis of the study, highlights the gap in the literature on peace education, and presents the EFP program. Part II focuses on the challenging Mexican scenario which has prompted a declared need for peace education. Part III presents the preliminary results of the EFP pre-pilot program in Nuevo León, Mexico. Part IV discusses the implications of this experiment to trigger multi-stakeholder collaboration to build a culture of peace.

Part 1: peace education in theory and research

Peace education as a field began gathering momentum after the World War I. Diverse intellectuals and activists such as Montessori, Freinet, Roselló, and Raynaud de la Ferrière attributed to education the responsibility of cultivating peace (Jarés 1999). After World War II this notion was enshrined in the constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1945). The 1945 declaration statement “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (UNESCO 1945, 1) became the mandate for twentieth-century engagement with peacebuilding and with peace education. In the 1960s, the concept of peace as the absence of war (negative peace) was distinguished by Johan Galtung (1967) from the dynamic processes of creating a culture of peace (positive peace), lending a clearer and more ambitious focus to peacebuilding efforts. Through successive United Nations World Congresses and UNESCO “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World” (2001–2010), education has been formally recognized as a key tool to the cultivation of peace, gaining increased political and financial support from governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Both “peace” and a “culture of peace” are contested terms. They have been used to mean different things in different contexts. For this paper, peace is defined as “a psychological, social, political, ethical and spiritual state with its expression in the areas of the intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, international and global human relationships” (Danesh 2006, 55) and as the main expression of a unity-based worldview. “Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations” (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243).

Contrary to a “culture of peace” is a “culture of violence”, in which Galtung (1967) distinguishes direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence occurs when a visible actor commits the act of violence. Structural violence, in which there is not a visible actor committing crime, is observed through the growing poverty, inequality, and unemployment for which the government’s lack of effective policies are principally responsible. Cultural violence is observed in the use of political discourse and policy; for example gender inequality, the stigmatization of the poor as criminals, and the lack of equal access to education (Horowitz 2004–2006).

In order to understand how a culture of peace is being forged in the context of Mexico, it is necessary to examine advancements at the level of awareness, proactive involvement, and commitment of its civil society today and relate this with the advances occurring in the country’s democratic consolidation. As such, three other concepts are of importance to this study: civil society, citizenship, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.
Civil society is defined as “the social fabric formed by a multiplicity of self-constituted territorially and functionally based units, excluding families and business firms, which peacefully coexist and collectively resist subordination to the state, at the same time that they demand inclusion into national political structures” (Oxhorn 2011, 9). Civil society is thus the collective expression of active citizenship.

In Sustaining Civil Society: Economic Change, Democracy, and the Social Construction of Citizenship in Latin America, Oxhorn (2011) distinguishes between three types of citizenship: citizenship as co-optation, citizenship as consumption, and citizenship as agency. Citizenship as co-optation refers to a citizenship created in a top-down fashion in which the common dynamic is to grant citizenship rights selectively “to co-opt particular actors and contain popular sectors’ pressure for greater structural change and inclusion” (Oxhorn 2011, 30). Citizenship as co-optation has been present for a long time in Mexico (Oxhorn 2011), causing civil society to remain weak and with a low profile, which challenges the prevalence and professionalization of programs such as EFP. They are at risk of being manipulated to serve state goals, limiting a dialogue with other actors that would promote the social construction and evolution of the program according to the societal needs. Controlled inclusion, as assessed by Oxhorn, is a dynamic in which the state decides to give privileges to some while leaving others out of the game. Initiatives of a co-opted citizenship tend to disappear after the government is changed, so they are short-lived attempts to empower citizenship and to have their goals represented on the political agenda.

Oxhorn (2011) also suggests another concept that explains the kind of citizenship that emerged during the Mexican market liberalization, neo-pluralism, and economic development period. “Citizenship as consumption” explains a relationship between the state and civil society in the form of patron and clients, respectively. “Clientelism affects the potential for civil society to emerge in numerous ways” (Oxhorn 2011, 194). As such, citizenship as consumption is antithetical to education for peace principles. Clientelism, for example, promotes competition rather than collaboration among the leaders of different organizations in their struggle to gain access to the decision-making process and to resources (Eckstein, in Oxhorn 2011, 194). It also promotes unilateralism and individualism over multilateralism and community building. This type of citizenship only nurtures the growth of structural inequalities, and thus structural violence.

Finally, “citizenship as agency” (Oxhorn 2011) represents the ideal to build a truly democratic synergy between the state and the civil society. The effective implementation of EFP is triggered and facilitated as strong citizenship promotes the building of a culture of peace (Danesh and Clarke-Habibi 2007; Cabezudo and Haavelsrud 2007; Galtung 2007; Jarés 1999; Morin 1999). Nowadays, a common saying in Mexico is that “peace is everybody’s task”. Therefore, if the state acts in a unilateral top-down fashion, efforts are dispersed, not socialized, and effectiveness of the initiative might be put in doubt. If civil society is alone in this journey, it would take more time, massive resources, and a lot of strategic planning to accomplish its goals without having those represented in the national agenda. “State and society synergy requires new institutions that provide the space for an active partnership between civil society actors and the state in pursuit of common goals” (Oxhorn 2011, 238). In this scenario, actors have a good degree of autonomy and also are included and supported by the state. It is in relation to this point that multi-stakeholder collaboration becomes important.

Through this paper, multi-stakeholder collaboration denotes the practice of synergetic action between different actors (within or external to the state) allied in certain ways to accomplish shared goals. Those actors could range from states, IOs, INGOs, CSOs, media agencies, government offices, educational institutions, enterprises, and religious institutions, among others.
Peace education is a discipline that focuses on teaching students such concepts as human rights, freedom, democracy, and environmental protection, as well as informing them about the negative consequences of conflict and violence. This is currently the most common approach to the inclusion of peace in school curricula. There is a multitude of approaches and focal terms according to the socio-political contexts in which programs are implemented (Salomon and Cairns 2010b). For example, in Rwanda, defined as a context of ethno-political conflict, peace education is introduced in the form of forgiveness and reconciliation or restorative justice. Education for mutual understanding is used in the cases of Israel–Palestine and Northern Ireland, which are categorized as contexts of longstanding intractable conflicts (Whyte 1991; Salomon 2002).

Most approaches to peace education focus on the classroom dynamics without elaborating much on the dynamics outside of the school. Indeed, Marc Howard Ross (2010, 184) has argued that they fail to give an adequate account of the role that institutions and practices can play in the achievement and maintenance of peace. Schimmel (2009) suggests an affective peace education model rather than a cognitive one, and identifies the need to develop a comprehensive social and political approach that attains a “ripple effect” or “transference” of peace education beyond the schools and towards society as a whole.

Lyndsay McLean (2011) studied the case of Rwanda and addressed the structural violence behind the emergence of conflict and genocide in 1994, arguing that this type of violence continues. She calls on the government and international development partners of Rwanda to assess the impact of actual educational policy and to provide substantive alternatives so that post-genocide education in Rwanda can contribute more effectively to peacebuilding and reconciliation. Macro problems are addressed in this literature, but with little assessment of the interactions between the macro and the micro actors.

In the case of Mexico, peace education to date has taken the form of human rights education, conflict resolution education, and civic and moral values education. However, have so far proven unable to address the deeper roots of Mexico’s entrenched culture of violence or identify a suitable and sustainable long-term solution. I argue that the case of Mexico is unique because its violence is predominantly related to the illegal market of drugs and gang activities rather than an ethno-political, territorial, or religious conflict. As such, it has not been easy to find an education for peace model that is tailored to this type of conflict and capable of addressing its particular dynamics and deeper causes.

**Education for Peace**

EFP is an innovative and integrative “whole school” program that creates violence-free and peaceful school environments conducive to meeting the emotional, social, and intellectual needs of diverse educational communities. The program focuses on engaging and helping students, teachers, staff, and parents/guardians to become peacemakers by developing inner, interpersonal, and intergroup peace. This goal is accomplished by emphasizing the acquisition of unity-based worldviews founded on universal principles of peace, which form the framework for teaching all subjects of study and are the basis for transforming the micro- and macro-level relations (Danesh 2006). A peace-oriented worldview includes the “recognition that humanity is one”, “that the oneness of humanity is expressed in diversity”, “that the fundamental challenge before humanity is to maintain its oneness while celebrating and fostering its diversity and the recognition that this task cannot be accomplished through violence, but rather through open, creative, peaceful, just, and unifying processes of decision-making and problem-solving” (Danesh and Clarke-Habibi 2007, 306).
A survival-based worldview is developed under conditions of poverty, injustice, anarchy, physical threat, violence, and war. In these circumstances, authoritarian and dictatorial practices are common, and in this context it is not possible to create peace (Firer 2002; Duffy 2000; Danesh 2002). Identity-based worldviews are common when a society embarks on economic progress, and multi-party democratic practices in the framework of adversarial power structures, extreme competition, and material consumption in the context of competitive individual and group identity formation. The survival of the fittest is the prevailing frame of reference in an identity-based worldview, which is not conducive to peace building.

It is in the context of a unity-based worldview that diversity is celebrated through unity-consciousness with the ultimate objective to create a civilization of peace. Cooperative power structure in the context of unity in diversity creates the necessary conditions for legitimate power exercise and facilitates empowerment; both necessary for survival and identity formation (Danesh 2006; Galtung 1978). Nowadays in Mexico, the three worldviews overlap and coexist; they do not necessarily reflect the level of socioeconomic development of people or institutions, but they reflect the level of advancement in attaining another level of consciousness through critical thinking and more transcendental interests that mold their policies and practices.

The EFP program was chosen among many others for its principles, methodologies, universality, and adaptability, as well as for the quality of its extensive, research-based curriculum, the availability of the EFP faculty members, and its results in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and other countries.

Part 2: conflict and violence in the Mexican context

This section analyzes the Mexican context at the macro, meso, and micro levels. By micro we refer to individual level; it could also denote the classroom and educational community (school). The meso level refers to families and inter-institutional-level relationships, for example among schools. The macro level is all sorts of organizations different from the school, for example grassroots civil society organizations (GCSOs), NGOs, IOs, government, media, universities, and intrastate relationships, among others.

The macro and meso levels

Political scientists have labeled Mexico as a democratic country since the year 2000 (Schedler 2000), as it runs free and fair elections and there are alternating parties in power. Nevertheless, it is necessary that democracy can be practiced not only in the political realm but also in the social and economic arenas in which democracy has not been experienced for the majorities. “Democracy restricted to the political realm has historically coexisted with exploitation and oppression at the workplace, within schools, within bureaucracies, and within families” (Przeworski 1986, 63). “Freedom from physical violence is as essential a value as freedom from hunger, but unfortunately authoritarian regimes often produce a counter-reaction or the romanticization of a limited model of democracy” (Przeworski 1986, 63). Przeworski (1995, 35) has also stated that “the exercise of citizenship is feasible only for those individuals who enjoy some modicum of material security, education and access to information”.

Mexico is also one of the most unequal countries in the world, measured by the Gini Coefficient (UNDP 2013). Income inequality among working-aged people in Mexico is the second highest in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), after Chile. “The average income of the top 10% of Mexicans in 2008 was 228,900 MXN, 26 times higher than that of the bottom 10%, who had an average income of 8,700 MXN. The ratio is 9 to
1 in a typical OECD country” (OECD 2011). In this scenario, the emergence of an active civil society is restrained.

In Mexico, the role of the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE, National Union of Education Workers), the largest in Latin America with 1 million members, has been considered instrumental in reproducing an authoritarian system of social exclusion and inequity. The Secretary of Education in Mexico and the SNTE had been accused of maintaining the social hierarchy, inequality, and a system loaded with corruption, nepotism, and absence of will to change and improve the educational quality of Mexican children and youth. The low-quality education is due to the structure that sustains the power for SNTE to obtain corporative benefits without caring for the quality of the offered services. Thus, a social order in which economic inequality and poverty is reproduced takes a heavy toll on social development in the Mexican context (United Nations Development Program 2010).

Nevertheless, citizenship as agency is certainly increasing as accountability and responsiveness are part of everyday lexicon. Diverse institutions emerged and are led by citizens inquiring about the politicians’ practices and outcomes. Institutions such as Observatorio Ciudadano (Citizen Observatory), Congreso Nacional Ciudadano (National Citizen Congress), and programs such as “evaluate your politician” are changing the mentality of Mexican citizens from labeling themselves as servants or clients of the politicians to becoming their patrons, capable of making politicians accountable. Citizenship as agency is characterized by synergy between the civil society and the state to attain shared goals. This type of citizenship is needed to face the actual challenges of replacing a culture of violence with a culture of peace that the government alone is not able to do.

To forge a culture of peace it is necessary to understand that “Violence begets violence: children who witness abuses have a higher tendency to perpetrate violence later in life” (Danesh and Clarke-Habibi 2007; United Nations Human Development Report 2011). Besides the crimes usually linked to a context of poverty and inequality, domestic violence has also increased: in the state of Nuevo León alone, a new record of domestic violence was set in June 2014, with an average of two accusations presented every hour for this crime, totaling 1,478 cases during that month. It is expected that if this tendency continues, it will surpass the number of accusations for domestic violence of 2013 that totaled 11,761 (García 2014).

Deeply related to domestic violence, in a bigger context, Mexico experiences an increasing spiral of violence in the form of kidnappings, grenade attacks, extortions, and road blockades, as well as children and youth recruitment by different Drug Trade Organizations (DTOs). This has resulted in a great number of killings in recent years, in a context of the “War against the Narco”, launched by former President of Mexico Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, who militarized many states of Mexico, including Nuevo León. While scholars may rightfully argue that this approach often works, in this case violence grew (Huerta 2012; Mercille 2011). Before the new administration, the mainstream political discourse in Mexico tended to privilege the use of violent means over peaceful ones to control and reduce the incidence of violence, without acknowledging the unintended consequences of this approach. In general, Mexican authorities have failed to plan ways to build peace by peaceful means.

Today, few politicians are able to foresee alternatives to stop and transform the present situation of violence. The President of Mexico launched the National Program for the Social Prevention of Violence and Delinquency, calling for co-responsibility of the government and the civil society. “The peace that our society deserves, I am convinced it is possible to attain it […] I call all Mexicans to participate in their communities
working hand in hand with the government to build a peaceful Mexico together” (Medios Mexico 2013). Nevertheless, the militarization of many Mexican states continues, along with a lack of an effective response to reduce structural violence.

Civil society organizations are instrumental to ensure the respect of the rule of law and contribute to the construction of a truly democratic public life. They also promote synergy among them, as well as with the government, and form networks capable of strengthening the social tissue and increase mutual respect (Olvera 2004). It is precisely in two grassroots CSOs that the initiative to introduce EFP was first conceived. They later found echo in many other institutions, such as the TEC de Monterrey, the private sector, the Nuevo León Secretary of Education, Mexico state government and the Mexican Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO, Jalisco Secretary of Education, and the National Commission for a Culture of Peace, gathering 50 peace-oriented organizations.

The micro level

Generally, schools have been considered by many authors as an instrument for reproducing and reinforcing violent economic and social structures by promoting individualism, competitiveness, mediocrity, passivity, and dependency (Galtung 1975; Jarés 1999; Haavelsrud 1976b; Russell 1988). These and other authors have pointed to the latent aggressiveness structured into the formal school system. While promoting discipline and coercion, achievement is usually based on meritocracy and competition. There is a scholar hierarchy constituted by inspectors, directors, deans, sub-directors, presidents, vice-presidents, and professors divided in levels according to their knowledge and power. Students are also divided according to their economic and intellectual capacity (Galtung 1974). Communication is also hierarchical. The formal education socialization process is typically anti-dialogical in character as it does not promote dialogue but usually suggests that students follow the rules without questioning them. The process promotes cultural and anthropological ethnocentrism, the practice of bullying, as well as a fragmentation of knowledge (Danesh 2006; Galtung 1975; Haavelsrud 1976a). Schools are in part the reproduction and in part the reinforcement of the economic and social structures in general (Galtung 1975). The budget is often wrongly used, as often funds are labeled for infrastructure when certain schools need it to hire personnel; teacher preparation and training is deficient; and many teachers generate a conflictual environment in the classroom by promoting discrimination, memorization, obedience, and authoritarianism, causing student desertion.  

Approximately 87% of Mexican students attend public schools. Primary education is where the majority of students are concentrated, with 15 million compared to 4 million in kindergarten and 5.8 million in secondary school. Upper secondary and high school together account for 6 million students (Santibañez, Vernez, and Razquin 2005). Even though decentralization is attempted, it is mostly effective at the administrative level. Teachers often lack the autonomy to use their creativity and knowledge to propose solutions according to the most urgent needs. There is a high level of rigidity in the curriculum, including the choice of books, which is determined centrally.

In May 2014, the OECD reported research showing that, among their members, Mexico occupied first place for violence among basic education students of both public and private schools. Bullying, threats, beating, insults, cyberbullying, and verbal, psychological, and physical violence have been experienced by 60% of the students in primary and secondary levels, as stated by the National Commission on Human Rights. School violence is mainly concentrated in nine Mexican states: Nuevo León (which is the chosen site for this case
study), Jalisco, Estado de Mexico, Guanajuato, Distrito Federal, Veracruz, Tabasco, Puebla, and Chihuahua. In the same vein, the Secretary of Education reported that 27,000 basic education schools are affected by criminal groups while one out of 10 schools experience various forms of violence and the so-called Secure School program provides only superficial short-term solutions.\(^7\)

**The Nuevo León context**

Nuevo León is a state located in the north-eastern region of Mexico and is known as a “state of progress” and the industrial capital of the country. It is one of the most economically prosperous and advantaged states in the area of education, not only at the primary and secondary levels but also at higher education level. The state experiences a good amount of autonomy, agency, and freedom towards the state-administered education. The stable economic growth has made this state very attractive for national and international investment. Nuevo León had distinguished itself as a relative pacific state in the social and political realms, but this scenario of relative tranquility has completely changed recently.

The multiplication and spread of drug cartel activities have been aggravated since 2007. Around 3,000 troops were sent by the federal government to Nuevo León, but the government kept them outside urban areas. However, violence increased and, by 2009, both the federal and state governments invested a lot of economic resources and efforts to build and operate the so-called centers of integral coordination, control, command, communication, and computer for the enhancement of security and intelligence (C5), an investment of around a USD 100 million subsidized at 60% by the federal government and at 40% by the state government. More soldiers were sent to initiate what was called Operation Nuevo León, aimed to control and contend the multiple violent acts reported daily.

The year 2010 was one of the most violent years in the history of Nuevo León. Many innocent people died during clashes between soldiers and drug traffickers.\(^8\) During this time, many people decided to leave the country to the United States for insecurity reasons. It was not until mid-2012 that a reduction of the 80% of military presence was replaced by *Fuerza Civil* (Civil Force), which is a new civilian police force that has reportedly helped to reduce the incidence of violence.

**Part 3: the Education for Peace experiment in Mexico**

The peace education approach ultimately adopted in Mexico is based on a unique model – Education for Peace – initially piloted and developed in the context of Bosnia-Herzegovina since 2000 and continues to this date with excellent results. Although violence in the Bosnian context was ethno-political in character, this model of EFP was assessed as appropriate to the Mexican context because the EFP curriculum is at once universal and specific: universal in its conceptual foundations and specific in the manner in which these concepts are applied in each distinctive context. Also:

EFP engages all members of the school community – students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents/guardians (to the extent possible) – in the study and practice of EFP principles in classrooms, school environments, and within the families of the students. As such, EFP helps to create a situation in which every member of the school community is immersed in an environment of peace. Whenever EFP is introduced to a new school
community, the basic EFP curriculum is adapted to the specific needs and realities of that community. This task is approached with the full participation and involvement of educators from the host community.

The decision to introduce EFP into a few schools in Mexico, as a pre-pilot project, to determine its suitability to the Mexican context, was made on the basis of these facts. As will be seen later in the paper, the pre-pilot project proved to be successful.

**The quest for peace by peaceful means**

Diverse non-state actors began to strongly use a discourse in which lasting peace must be created by peaceful means. In October 2011 two CSOs – La Paz Comienza con los Niños A.C. (Peace begins with Children) and Enlazando Esfuerzos Conjuntos A.C. (Linking Efforts) – searched for synergy among different actors and, together with the Alfonso Reyes Chapter at TEC de Monterrey and TRANSCEND Mexico, gathered 24 organizations and invited Johan Galtung to convene a meeting. Galtung, widely regarded as the father of peace studies, founder of TRANSCEND Peace by peaceful means, and mediator in 80 international conflicts, accepted this invitation and a workshop for 2,200 representatives of Mexican civil society, government, educational institutions, media, and the private sector was organized on 24 October 2011. It tackled three essential tasks that needed to be promoted in the Mexican context: peace-based education, peace-based leadership and governance, and peace-based conflict resolution. H.B. Danesh, President of the International Education for Peace Institute (Canada), was invited for consultation to fulfill these tasks.

**Training and support of teachers and staff**

Following Danesh’s visit in February 2012, the first EFP training workshop was held in the state of Nuevo León. One hundred and fifty representatives of 10 schools, along with other actors from the public and the private spheres including the state’s Secretary of Education, Secretary of Tourism, and Secretary of Social Development, as well as higher education institution representatives and NGOs leaders, participated in a two-day intensive training (Figure 1). The Education for Peace Curricular Manual, translated and published in Spanish, was also presented to the TEC de Monterrey high school professors of diverse states, aiming for gradual implementation. To this day, 17 Nuevo León UNESCO Associated Schools have expressed their intention to be trained in the EFP curriculum in order to implement the program in the following academic year.

Later, the Federal Secretary of Government sent representatives to evaluate the first outcomes of the program in Nuevo León, who were satisfied and expressed their commitment to study alternatives to support it.

One of the higher education professors who went to the EFP training reflected:

Danesh invited us to reflect about our own worldview. It is necessary to favour cooperation and equality: to work for justice; to live in unity. Following the Education for Peace approach will be possible to build a sustainable and lasting peace. (Yuri Luis Carlos Sánchez Ríos [interview, February 23, 2012]; University of Monterrey professor)

Another professor of a primary school expressed his support for the program, saying:
In the near future, I wish to belong to the training team representing the Secretary of Education and to promote the program both within the educational community and beyond. (Eduardo Valdés Puente [interview, February 22, 2012]; Professor and Human Development and Social Participation leader of the Secretary of Education)

After the training, the leader of the National Commission for a Culture of Peace stated:

The approach of Education for Peace will help us to rebuild from inside out. We reflected on the importance of the unity principle, which has to be present at all levels: individual, family, schools, society, and governments. The peace we want to build requires social justice, respect for the human rights and democracy. (Hiram Valdez Chávez [interview, February 22, 2012], Founder of the National Commission for a Culture of Peace)

In May 2013, in an unprecedented effort, Peace begins with Children and Linking Efforts convened a certification process with the government of Estado de México. In an alliance, the Secretary of Education, the Mexican Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO, the UNESCO Education and Community Development World Center, and the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network brought 400 representatives from 28 states of Mexico to begin the first phase of an EFP certification process. It was conducted by the EFP international staff to implement the program in many schools across the country (Figure 2).

Bernardo Olvera, Subsecretary of Medium High and High Education of the state of Mexico, exhorted the participants to take the certification “as an opportunity to generate actions and promote dialogue as a principle to live together in harmony in the institutions you lead, favoring a culture of peace and sustainable development in the framework of the principles established by UNESCO: learning to be, to know, to do, and to live together” (Gobierno de México 2013). In the framework of the Jalisco Congress of Values in October 2014, its government and Secretary of Education invited EFP staff to introduce the principles of the program to 1,500 professors. After an important visit of Jalisco representatives in November 2014 to a few schools of Nuevo León in which the program has been applied, they are considering its implementation in many schools of Jalisco.
For the next academic cycle, 2015–2016, the program will enter another phase by training a group of trainers that will give subsequent follow up to each of the schools, and continue the introduction of the EFP program to other states and schools.

**The Education for Peace program**

The 10 schools participating in the EFP pre-pilot program agreed that its philosophy, principles, methodology, and practices are “perfectly applicable for the case of Mexico” and expressed their appreciation for the program’s flexibility to adapt to their most urgent needs. After the training, all participants made a commitment to share their newly acquired knowledge with all school professors who could not attend the first EFP training workshop, as only one professor for every 100 students directly participated. It was confirmed that the total of professors from the participating schools would be trained by those directly trained. One of the 10 schools applied the program in only three classrooms, but they plan to extend its introduction throughout the entire school.

We have trained the whole educational community at the beginning of each academic year. There are monthly training sessions on the principles of EFP to parents, and to all the educational community from the director to the janitors. (Iliana Ayala de Treviño [interview, May 13, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Nezalidi School)

EFP has worked very well as a stepping stone, as orientation that unifies and nurtures oneself and the others […] Teachers have assimilated the program very well and with a positive attitude. This
has been very important to believe in it, to make it our own, and practice it in their daily lives. (Ursula Werren de Bolaños [interview, May 9, 2014]; Director of FORMUS private school)

The main objective of the EFP program is to create – with the help of teachers, parents/guardians, and students – unique school communities characterized by a *culture of peace*, a *culture of healing*, and a *culture of excellence*, and to instill in its participants the will to become peacemakers by developing inner, interpersonal, and intergroup peace and enable critical thinking and reflection (Danesh and Clarke-Habibi 2007).

In this respect, the following statements provide initial indications of the impact of the EFP program, once it is fully implemented in many more schools.

Since its introduction, we have experienced more participation of parents in school activities. Professors are now open to dialogue among them and towards the children. (Mirthala Ceniceros Gutierrez [interview, May 6, 2014]; Director of the Emiliano Zapata federal primary school)

After implementing the program, bullying decreased and also the bad behavior of the children. Teachers now are more proactive at thinking on generating alternatives that trigger a better environment. (María Lourdes Valdés Conte [interview, May 12, 2014]; EFP Coordinator Mirasierra private primary school)

Greater commitment for teamwork (professors, administrators, and janitors), a better working environment, and more actions oriented to respect the principles to build a culture of peace. (Ilíana Ayala de Treviño [interview, May 13, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Nezaldi private school)

Parents are now more empathetic with professors. (Norma Lilia Garza Montemayor [interview, May 7, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Enedina Garcia public school)

EFP is conceived as a transversal program that transforms the whole academic curriculum so that every discipline is connected and taught, privileging a complex understanding of certain laws and principles that are applied in all life processes (Figure 3). Laws such as that of unity, growth, and creativity, among others, are foundational for the program. While it integrates all members of the school community, usually what children learn at school does not always coincide with what they see at their home, in the media, in the parks, and the work places, and for that reason it is imperative to integrate the society at large in these efforts.

The most important challenge at applying the program are the parents […] With the aim of making synergy with the school a peace attitude has to be privileged as well as prevent lack of congruence […] Family education should synergize with what we do at school. (María Lourdes Valdés Conte [interview, May 12, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Mirasierra Private School)

At the public school Clodio Gonzalez Beltran, diverse conferences and seminars on Human Development for parents, based on the EFP Curriculum, were organized. “The parents patrol is a program that emerged as an initiative to help with the school traffic and to prevent their children being approached by unknown people at, and outside the school”. Besides that, “empathy between parents and professors grew since the program was introduced” (Victoria Solís Coronado [interview, May 7, 2014]; Director of Clodio Gonzalez Beltran public school)

We organized a Peace Week in which the children draw a painting that stated: For me, peace is [... ] and presented the result to the parents. (Norma Lilia Garza Montemayor [interview, May 7, 2014]; Director of the Enedina Garcia public kindergarten)

Some schools created a monthly publication to practice and live by the EFP principles on a daily basis. FORMUS, for example, developed training for parents, in which diverse alternatives were discussed to put EFP principles in practice both inside and outside the school.
Training in mediation, and workshops on emotional intelligence and peace, were organized for the teachers, children, and parents of the Mirasierra private school with astonishing results.

At Nezaldi, the commitment was to make the program involve the society at large and, therefore, they developed conferences for parents, peace festivals, and, among others, a landmark event called Peace Roundtables. The students invited 30 prominent society leaders from different specialties (arts, sports, political field, academics, entrepreneurs, and philanthropies) and established a dialogue to search for unity and synergetic efforts towards the creation of a culture of peace. Through these initiatives, Nezaldi educational community shared their motto: *I sow peace, harvest peace, share peace*. They use it in all institutional communication, printed or electronic, internal and external. For the next academic year the motto will be:

*Integrating mind, body and spirit to become the best I can be.* The weekly institutional bulletin sent to all the community includes fragments and reflections from the Manual of Education for Peace. (Iliana Ayala de Treviño [interview, May 13, 2014]; Nezaldi School, EFP Coordinator)

It was pointed out by all professors that EFP materials have a comparative advantage versus other programs that do not have its knowledge organized, socialized, and reproduced for its immediate use and quality assurance.
The didactic materials and manuals of EFP are novel and we are very much in need to apply them. The quality of its materials is superior to any other program available. (Statements by Victoria Solis Coronado, Iliana Ayala de Treviño, Ursula Werren de Bolaños, Gladys Martínez Ibarra, María Lourdes Valdés Conte, Cyomara Inurrigarro, Norma Lilia Garza Montemayor, Mirthala Ceniceros Gutierrez, and Cecilia Mendez de la Fuente [interview, May 2014], professors of the schools in which the pre pilot is implemented)

Once every semester, a peace event is organized at each participating EFP school. In this, students have the opportunity to present, in a scenario, EFP principles, by taking advantage of arts – drama, music, dance, painting – and any creative form through which the participants demonstrate that the concepts have been interiorized. Usually peace events are the schools’ best opportunity to gather parents, politicians, entrepreneurs, researchers, professors, media leaders, and society at large, as well as invite other schools to interchange advances, knowledge, and strategies (Figure 4).

We have been invited to various schools’ peace events. In this great opportunity the school connects with the wider society in an effort to spread education for peace principles to all. Synergy and collaboration is viable after a peace event occurs due to the openness of the educational community to the larger society. (Hannia Quijano [interview, July 7, 2014], Linking Lives representative)

Fortunately, in this effort of introducing EFP, many actors have been active participants not only at the school level but also outside the school in the wider society. Many families have been positively involved in the program and have expressed their perception of the program.

Education for Peace has given to our family the opportunity to redefine our worldview and recognize ourselves as capable to build peace. It has allowed us to recognize, accept and value our differences, promoting unity and togetherness. (Family Treviño Ayala [interview, July 4, 2014] about EFP)

EFP program has reinforced the task of transmitting to our family communication, respect, collaboration, prudence, and unity. Convinced that these are the basis and the only mean to live in peace and harmony together. (Family Larenas Morán [interview, July 4, 2014] about EFP)

Figure 4. Nezaldi school children working on peace transversally throughout the curriculum. April 2014. San Pedro, Garza García. Photo: Narcedalia Lozano.
Part 4: findings and discussion

In this section, the qualitative research strategy and findings relating to early outcomes of EFP in Mexico are described. By revising the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, a strategy might emerge for the advancement of EFP to the next level of implementation in Mexico.

Understandably, a short-term implementation of EFP within a limited number of schools is unlikely to produce drastic changes in the wider functioning of a violence-afflicted society like Mexico. Through longer-term engagement, however, it is hoped that the combined efforts of many different actors create peace. This study hypothesizes that by applying a systematic peace-based education program on many fronts, noticeable changes will begin to appear not only at the micro level but also at the meso and macro levels.

SWOT analysis from interviews

To inquire about the EFP pre-pilot program at the 10 schools in Nuevo León, Professor Alejandro Huesca from the Unit for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Tec de Monterrey carried out a series of interviews with people responsible for EFP at the schools. Through the semi-structured interviews, the following information was obtained to elaborate an analysis to develop strategic planning and advance the program in Mexico. Its summary is presented here.

Strengths

School representatives have assessed EFP philosophy, methodology, and suggested practices as applicable to Mexico. All schools reported the transference of knowledge to the members of the educational communities that could not participate in the initial EFP training workshop. The involvement of the whole school (directors, professors, parents, students, janitors, sponsors, and supervisors) was a continuously mentioned asset of the program as an integrative inclusive approach. The program is applicable from kindergarten to graduate level. It has been able to spark a change in children’s attitudes, with a decrease in bullying and the creation of a healthy environment among kids. The program clearly exposes principles and strategies to put peace into practice and not only as an ideal discourse. Reflective processes and critical thinking are an essential part of the program, and needed in Mexico. The awakening of civil society and citizenship as “agency”, as defined by Oxhorn, is occurring, but it still needs advancing in its autonomy and responsibility for triggering lasting changes.

Opportunities

In all pre-pilot schools, EFP representatives have assessed a prevalent culture of violence as an opportunity for the program to attract attention and resources. This is because the greatest challenges (insecurity, violence, family disintegration, among others) are seen as the current status quo, and a different reality needs to be created. For the schools, there is a clear urgency to apply the program to transform the prevalent culture of violence and insecurity. They would like the program to be fully approved and integrated within the Secretary of Education curriculum. As everybody in the society is affected by violence, they are also willing to both collaborate in synergy with others and invest their resources in creating a culture of peace.
The opportunity to recognize ourselves and acquire the consciousness as coauthors of peace will be possible by training professors and parents to become responsible of their reality. (María Lourdes Valdés Conte [interview, May 12, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Mirasierra school)

Another opportunity detected is the creation of a strong, highly committed team of trained personnel with enough resources to work on the development of EFP, providing a close follow-up to the schools implementing the program transversally in every class. School professors hope that the Secretary of Education sponsors the EFP curriculum series to be fully translated, published, and distributed.

**Weaknesses**

The dominating weakness of the program has been insufficient follow-up. Schools need more activities and daily planning orientation. They also need every student to have his/her own textbook. There is still insufficient transmission of information and knowledge of the good practices among schools. Schools should create more opportunities to share their efforts and to avoid feeling isolated.

We intend to give more dissemination of EFP inside and outside the educational community. To become a reference for other schools and community efforts is our goal. We have succeeded without a big budget. We would like to make more connections with other institutions (synergy), to be part of the working process of implementation and multiply EFP throughout the country. (Iliana Ayala de Treviño [interview, May 13, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Nezaldi school)

**Threats**

In many cases, parents are deeply embedded in their own jobs and this could make them remain outsiders to the program, so a threat for the program results is that the school experience does not necessarily connect with the home environment. Professors might be also busy in other jobs, and yet have to integrate the curriculum in every class, facing crowded classrooms.

In Nuevo León, even though the Secretary of Education participated in the EFP training, he has neither strongly and effectively promoted the program nor invested economic resources to implement it in a sustainable way. Therefore, the EFP curriculum textbook took one year to be completely translated and published in Spanish. Some public schools expressed a need for day-to-day strategies to be better equipped in order to introduce the concepts and principles throughout the totality of the academic curriculum.

I expect more resources, more information to generate peaceful solutions, creative forms that support all personal and social efforts that build peace. (María Lourdes Valdés Conte [interview, May 12, 2014]; EFP Coordinator, Mirasierra school)

**Next steps**

For the EFP program to continue its growth process, it is essential to secure the necessary financial resources, to establish a strong team that can offer close and ongoing follow-up for each and every participating school, and to train an adequate number of Mexican educators as EFP trainers, who could actively engage in the systematic introduction of EFP into Mexican schools.

The first step in this process is to initiate the EFP pilot program, involving at least four schools (two primary and two secondary) each from several, preferably all, states in
Mexico. In the pilot phase, the full EFP curriculum will be introduced in every classroom, every subject, and every day through the academic year. The specific details of the pilot project will be developed in collaboration between EFP-International and Mexican Secretaries of Education, Teacher Unions, education scholars and researchers, representatives of the civil society engaged in education, and parents. The agreed-upon strategic planning will address all major issues with regard to training, research, implementation, administration, and financing of the project.

**Conclusion**

Preliminary findings from the EFP program in Mexico, which began in 2012, confirm that a process of multilateral involvement has begun. Today, the program has become the stepping stone that triggered multilateral efforts at different levels aiming to build a culture of peace. The way the program has been socialized, the response from diverse actors, the forms in which the program has evolved, both influencing and being influenced by the role that different institutions play, along with their interests and practices, are paving a new path in the history of Mexico. It is an unprecedented concert of many efforts from various actors to instigate positive social and policy change.

As a main element of their involvement in the implementation stage, schools and professors have been encouraged and assisted to innovate, create, engage, and develop those activities they consider pertinent for an effective peace-based education. All different actors (within and outside the school) continue contributing, in their own ways, to the social construction of peace-based education in both directions. EFP is becoming the best strategy for crime prevention, as multi-stakeholders at all levels commit to tackle the root causes of violence and not only invest resources fighting its symptoms.

In this project, both bottom-up (grassroots) and top-down processes are essential. This paper presented the bottom-up dimension of this project at its earliest stage of development. However, for the program to succeed there is a need for effective, ongoing, and sustained partnership between the Mexican Secretaries of Education, Teacher Unions, regional and national stakeholders in education, CSOs, schools, and universities, along with the International Education for Peace Institute (Canada). Ultimately, it is necessary that the EFP program in Mexico be fully established and be provided with the necessary financial resources and administrative capacities to offer a systematic, well-conceived program for the introduction of EFP to all Mexican school communities and teacher-training faculties. For such a process to be successful, unity of thought, objectives, and an approach on the part of government, the civil society, the school system, and the parents are essential.

As documented in this paper, the EFP-Mexico bottom-up approach – in which the schools emerge as laboratories of innovation and creativity, capable of influencing the decisions of CSOs and local and national NGOs and engage diverse actors within, across, and outside the school and at all levels – has been successful. A dialogue among diverse actors emerged in both directions, top-down and bottom-up, contributing to the awakening of a citizenship as “agency” – strong, autonomous, and ready to promote multi-stakeholder collaboration among diverse actors – to bring a culture of peace to Mexico.
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Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes
3. In Nuevo León there are 1,500 gangs, of which 20 are allegedly linked to the Zetas (NAF Report 2010, 21–22). To refer to Drug Trade Organization (DTO), the word "narco" will be used thought the paper.

Notes on contributor
Narcedalia Lozano Garza is a Vanier Canada Scholar and a doctoral Political Science student at McGill University. She is the founder and president of La Paz comienza con los Niños A.C./Peace Begins with Children Foundation in 2000. Since 2012 she has led the implementation of Education for Peace in Mexico. She is a member of CALACS and the Canadian Peace Research Association, and collaborator for the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, the Institute for the Study of International Development (ISID), and the International Education for Peace Institute. She is a proud and happy mother of three children.

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