

Title: Light for Honduras: Teaching How to Teach.

Country: Honduras

Nominating College, University, or Institution: International House at UC Berkeley

Designated project leader name and all student team member names: Carlos Amat Casas, Spain, University of California, Berkeley / Juan José Conforto Sarrias, Spain, University of California, Berkeley.

Summary

Creating synergy through the enhancement of digitalization in the four schools created by the NGO “ACOES”, located in the most marginalized areas of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in two ways: Digitalization of their teaching content provided by UNICEF and an in-person Microsoft Education software course to all educators of these schools.

Project description

After obtaining first-hand information from the NGO “ACOES Honduras”, we came to know that the state of education in Honduras was -and largely still is- a seriously worrying issue that has been impaired by the Covid-19 Pandemic. To get a correct insight on the issue, we decided to talk to several experts -among them Dr. Erin Murphy-Graham, UC Berkeley professor and renowned expert on Honduras-, and it was then when we realized that most of the efforts and external aid in Honduran education has focused on the demand-side of the education. On the contrary, it was the supply-side -that is, educational content, teamwork among educators, and teaching content- where the margin for improvement was greater. As such, the NGO had a remarkable impact on the level of assistance of the kids that were going to the school, and they were well provided with food, school materials, and transport. However, the schools showed us that teaching materials and coordination methods had remained unchanged for a long period of time, which holds true even after the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Bearing this in mind, we decided to design a project to improve with a long-term impact on the educational supply of the schools, by ameliorating the educational content and the educator's job through the impact of digitalization.

The location of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, was chosen due to several factors. First of all, the educational system is known to be one of the worst in Latin America (World Bank 2020). In Honduras, one in three youngsters is illiterate. It is also known to be one of the poorest countries in Central America, where around 73.6% of Honduran households are in a situation of poverty. In combination, these two issues immerse Honduras in a vicious cycle: Poverty hinders access to education and lack of education leads to growing poverty. This issue is impaired by the severe role played by the “Pandilleros”, gangs that recruit young people and immerse them in the bloody ambiance at very early stages in their lives. Apart from that, we had previous knowledge about the marvelous work that our ultimate partner institution, the NGO “ACOES Honduras” had been carrying out in the country for ages, which would reduce coordination issues and facilitate the implementation of the project as planned. Finally, we believed that as Spanish citizens, cultural and language barriers would be smaller than in any other region in the world, which we came to confirm when we finally arrived in the Central-American country in early August.

Due to thorough planning and close coordination with people that had previous experience in humanitarian projects and had for long been on the ground, very few changes were made to the original plan. As such, most of the previous work was carried out in the process of operationalization of the project. For instance, as we started analyzing Microsoft Software, we realized that the digitalization of the content was best suited through Microsoft OneNote.

Being a low-income country, funding provided by Davis Projects for Peace sufficed all that was necessary to correctly implement our project. Thus, we did not seek funding from any additional source. In spite of this, we did receive additional support from Microsoft as they granted the NGO the licenses needed to work

on our project. In this sense, we owe Microsoft a huge thanks as the actual applicability of our project depended enormously on this prerequisite.

Without a shadow of a doubt, there are more opportunities to continue the work on this issue. After all, reality shows that the project is not finished. Even though we are extremely satisfied with the results, we are aware that we are half the way through. So far, the content of Spanish and Math from 1st to 6th grade has been digitized. Moreover, the NGO “ACOES” now has available Microsoft Office 365, meaning that all the educators can use what they learned about Microsoft OneNote and Microsoft Teams in the course we taught in Honduras to improve their jobs, classes, and content for their students. However, digitalization is a process that needs time. As of now, we are staying in touch with the NGO to measure the impact of the use of these applications in their classes, and the respective adaptation of the educators to these new ways of teaching. Furthermore, the NGO has educational institutions outside Tegucigalpa, so we intend to potentially come back to Honduras in the near future to expand the scope of the project.

Reflection

In our view, the definition of peace as the absence of war is not only an obsolete conception, but it also fails to address the very basic features of the international society in the 21st Century. . As such a thorough definition of peace must integrate a positive instance in addressing, not only the maintenance of order but most importantly, a high level of justice and the absence of direct, structural and cultural violence. In our view, peace should not be any more just an intergovernmental phenomenon, as it is also inter-human and inter-group. In this sense, as citizens, we can and should play a leading role in contributing to generating the conditions that live to positive peace. Peace realization is multidimensional and requires additional conditions: health, education, and general well-being. In turn, the promotion of human rights is fundamental to the achievement of a sustained, comprehensive state of peace.

“Teaching How to Teach: Education to Bring Light for Honduras” was meant to tackle one of the main pillars—arguably the most important one—that sustain peace and provide societies a way out of poverty: Education. Our project focused on technology with a double goal: Provide means of cooperation and teamwork in a society where distrust is prevalent—both for historical and cultural reasons—; and set the basis for transnational cooperation with other educational institutions in Spain and elsewhere. Given the location of the schools where we worked in some of the most marginalized communities of Tegucigalpa, where police would rather stay away and “Los Pandilleros” (young gangsters) fully dominate, we were quickly confronted with the power of education. When kids are at school, they stay away from the material conditions that lead to violence. Hence, education has emerged in these areas as the best—and only—alternative to keep the youth far from “Las Pandillas”. The higher the quality of education, the more power it will have to confront the prevalence of gangs.

Bearing these factors in mind, as well as the difficulty of making a long-lasting difference during a short voluntary project, we decided to minimize the scope of our project to better implement and test the results. At the end of our project, educators expressed in the final form that their knowledge and disposition to use educational tools had significantly risen. Short term, this will definitely have an impact on the way educators cooperate with each other, but we believe that this program may have set the basis for the long-term inclusion of tech tools to all students. Additionally, at the end of our project, we decided to create a constant channel of communication between the educators and ourselves. One month after the end of our project, we have already had three meetings with the principals of the schools, which aims to enhance the effectiveness of the project.

It is difficult to express how much this project has changed the way we see and interact with the world. As soon as you get to Tegucigalpa, mental frameworks are restructured. Cooperating with an institution that provides schooling, food, and an opportunity in life to more than 10.000 students requires an immense workload, but both of us coincided in that there could be no more rewarding feeling than that of going to bed after having done so.

Personal statement

Juan José Conforto Sarrias → Our time in Honduras included tears and laughter, seeing how evil can only be beaten by kindness, and learning how much power education has as a society-changer. Those two young men who departed for Honduras early in August were definitely not the same who landed in Madrid three weeks later. Thanks to Projects for Peace Foundation for that.

Carlos Amat Casas → This project is of immeasurable value. It has been a life-changing experience that has made us rethink our priorities, goals, and purposes. Hopefully, this is only the beginning of a new life path for both of us, where our thoughts and actions will be guided by improving the conditions of those who are most in need.