

# Sustaining Hubs for Peace

## Institutionalizing Peace Centers in Schools and Universities



**Peace education** in the Philippines spans a three-decade old history. The combination of a robust civil society advocating for a culture of peace, and the existence of national policies aimed at mainstreaming peace education in the country has greatly pushed the movement forward. Since it first took root in Mindanao decades after Marcos' Martial Law, many education institutions have implemented varied peace education programs and approaches that address a wide range of themes such as nonviolence, conflict resolution, intergroup dialogue, environmental protection, human rights and gender equality.

In an attempt to systematize and synchronize these different programs, a number of private and public schools and universities have established dedicated centers within their individual institutions specifically for this purpose. Notable examples are the peace centers created in Notre Dame University (NDU) Cotabato and the Mindanao State University (MSU). Although now defunct, NDU pioneered the holistic integration of peace education in both formal (graduate curriculum development) and informal education programs (dialogues and workshops outside the institution) through the establishment of its Center for Peace Education. MSU in 2007 also developed its system-wide Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao (IPDM) in seven of its units including MSU-IIT. For years, these and a few other institutions have made strides in curriculum development, material production, capacity building, and advocacy work.

### Background

**Forum Civil Peace Service (forumZFD) Philippines**, in its peace education projects, accompanies partner education institutions in increasing their capacities to create sustainable infrastructures for peace not only through curricula integration and teacher training, but also by providing support to institutionalize peace education within their systems and structures.

On this note, a learning exchange on the formation of peace centers among different academic institutions from all over Mindanao was organized by forumZFD last 24 October 2018 in the city of Davao. Over 15 representatives from a number of higher education institutions all over the island region gathered to share practical and theoretical insights and questions in running and developing peace centers in Mindanao.

In the one-day event, key strategies, approaches and practices on establishing and sustaining peace centers were identified. Participants also shared major challenges that provided lessons and opportunities to further develop their centers. The open and participatory method used in the Exchange was critical in allowing those present to become both participants and facilitators of the discussions.



### Why a Peace Center...

Provides space where identities are recognized and diversities are celebrated.

Aims to address direct, structural, and cultural violence by promoting a culture of peace.

Facilitates the integral formation of students, teachers, administrators and communities to collaborate towards a shared goal for positive peace.

Using appreciative inquiry, forumZFD guided the resource participants in a process of sharing experiences, and rediscovering good practices, while also reflecting on their vision and goals for creating their peace centers. In particular, questions on the impact and sustainability of peace programs were vital points for discussion in the whole Exchange.

The Exchange was also conducted as a response to the expressed need of some of the partner institutions of forumZFD, sans established peace centers, for capacity building and strategic direction in developing such within their school.

The knowledge generated during the Exchange is encapsulated in this document. This attempts to provide a summary of what are key considerations in forming centers for peace within academic institutions, specifically in the Mindanaoan context, as well as values and practices that make the work of peace centers integral in the continued promotion and advancement of a culture of peace within the education sector, and society as a whole.

## Mind, Heart and Hands

### A Five-Year Story of Peace in NDU



The Notre Dame University Center for Peace Education in Cotabato City pursued peace education through a framework centering on the utilization of “*the mind, heart and hands*” when promoting and living out a culture of peace. Dr. Ofelia “Bing” Durante, one of the pioneers of the field of peace education in the country, shared how their vision in putting up the peace center revolved around three aspects: **increasing awareness and knowledge** on the root causes of conflicts and violence (mind), **developing values** that encourage the cultivation of a culture of peace (heart), and **instilling skills** that equip individuals and communities with the capacity to create structural changes and become resilient to conflict (hands). By sharing the experience of NDU, Bing hoped that other learning institutions would be inspired to pursue their own peace education initiatives.

Bing, with the guidance of her mentor, Dr. Toh Swee-Hin, was the first director of the peace center in NDU. She traced back the Center’s humble beginnings to 1988 when it was set-up to coordinate NDU’s peacebuilding activities. For five years under her leadership, the Center conducted a myriad of activities focusing on three components: 1) *peace education*, 2) *peace advocacy*, and 3) *peace research*. This was despite the human, technical and financial constraints of institutionalizing a peace center in a time where peace education was still very new in the Philippines. In the Exchange, she shared some of the key lessons she identified throughout the process of establishing and sustaining the Center.

#### Pioneering Education for Peace: Key Lessons

**Alignment with the Institutional Vision.** The very first step in establishing the Center was the strategic decision to anchor its creation on the overall vision/mandate of the school, which is the basic Catholic social teaching that gives *preferential option for the poor* or most vulnerable. This basis provided solid grounding for the Center’s own programmatic direction. It also meant that the Center had strong institutional support being aligned with the structures, systems and principles of NDU.

**Creating an Enabling Environment.** Another key part in the initial process of organizing the Center was building a constituency of peace advocates and supporters not just among the staff, faculty and students of NDU, but also the leadership of the school. Essential to this was the internal trainings and workshops conducted by the Center to build capacities, understanding and also commitment of every individual from the bottom to the top.

**Holistic Integration.** As a general practice, the integration of peace education as a subject was not only curricular. There was an awareness among those in the school to embed it as a theme in almost every aspect of university life, even in their faculty meetings and induction. It was not just a subject, but a way of life within the university.

**Building Strong Linkages.** In coordinating and collaborating with international networks, civil society organizations and community members, creating or building on a shared goal gives more impetus to work in synergy with each other. In the case of the Center, it was able to overcome many challenges because of its partnerships with so-called peace champions from both the institutional and community level.

Aside from the Center, NDU also **pioneered the formation of a graduate studies program** on peace education. Some of the challenges during the first years of the program was limited access to relevant resources and the lack of university faculty who had in-depth understanding of peace and conflict issues. However, with a lot of patience and creativity, the Center was able to overcome this by building a library from the books and material donations they received from different universities around the world. A number of international universities globally responded to their request for resources around relevant topics. A core group of volunteers also assisted in gathering news clippings related to various peace and conflict issues in Mindanao as additions to the library. Those who graduated from the program also became the teachers of subsequent batches.

The contributions of the Center goes well beyond NDU. It spearheaded the gradual integration of peace education in about 100 other Notre Dame schools, and the training of elementary school teachers in Central Mindanao. They also trained government officials, employees and members of the security sector. More importantly, the Center was **a bridge between the school and community** where it was situated. It conducted multifaith/cultural dialogue between the different identity groups in their area, fostering more understanding among people in the community, and the root causes of the conflict that beset them.

## Centers for Peace: Appreciating and Rediscovering What Works Well

In the session where small clusters of four to five individuals were formed, the resource participants exchanged diverse high points in their peace work. Using the *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) approach, they told stories that centered on people's strengths and positive experiences in developing peace centers. Through such a process, they were able to determine several good practices and values. The principles, actions, and strategies identified in these 'discovery' sessions were 'owned' and practical because they were based on the participants' knowledge and experiences.

Building on the storytelling session, the participants consolidated these positive elements into three major themes: **People and Institutions, Strategic Processes and Activities, and Values**. They further defined the varied practices and values they see necessary in making peace centers work well.

### Appreciative Inquiry

AI is an approach and philosophy to organizational and community development. It is a way of working and seeing from a positive and strength-based standpoint. Although AI only gained momentum in the US in the late 1980s, as a concept it has been already practiced by many groups around the globe.

AI grounds its approach on storytelling, particularly on the knowledge and experiences of the participants, making its results more deliverable. Hence, in the Philippines, where storytelling is a cultural tradition, AI's principles and process are easily adaptable. AI follows a five "D" cycle of definition, discovery, dream, design, and delivery. In the discovery session, participants in small groups alternate the role of a storyteller, scribe and listener.

For more information on AI and its 5-D cycle:

<https://www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk/what-is-ai/>

### People and Institutions

One vital component in peacebuilding work, and Filipino society, in general, is the value placed on **relationships**. In forming and sustaining a peace center, a lot of the established peace institutes shared that they put premium to keeping a relational approach as a practice. This means being aware of the diversity of actors and strengthening people-to-people relations to form a stronger constituency of peacebuilders in the school and in the community.

**Formation and advocacy** begin among individuals who make up the institutions to ensure that there is internal buy-in. In this, when first pitching the idea of creating a peace program to the top-level administration of the institution, it is important to contextualize the presentation in a language that managers would better appreciate – more business-oriented. In the long term, the more crucial challenge would be to gradually help these key people understand the relevance and potential impact of investing in peace vis a vis sustaining institutional development and integrity.

Another element to consider is emphasizing the **interdisciplinarity** of the work of peace within the institution. The leadership and composition of those who are involved in the peace center should not be exclusive to the social sciences. It is important to include individuals from other disciplines and fields so that perspectives and expertise are diverse and broad.

One example of such **inclusivity** is the Institute for Peace and Development in Mindanao (IPDM) within MSU-IIT. IPDM has made it a practice to rotate the leadership of the center across different departments within their university, from History to Natural Science to the Humanities.

The predisposition towards a relational approach also extends to others from civil society and the government. Institutional efforts are multiplied and enhanced when institutions and organizations **work more in synergy** with each other. By forming partnerships and coordinating with government agencies and other nongovernmental organizations when conducting activities, education institutions have a better chance of infusing a peace paradigm at all levels and dimensions within their school and beyond.

### Strategic Processes and Activities

Persuading “**key**” and “**more**” people of the relevance and consistency of peace education to their institutional vision and mission is only the first step. The subsequent question is how to begin the process. In this, several concrete approaches and thematic strategies also emerged from the discussions of the participants in terms of how peace centers operate. These were sub-divided into the following topics: formal and informal strategies, thematic activities, convergence initiatives, principles of engagement, monitoring and evaluation, and resource generation.

Recognizing that often the focus of education institutions working for peace is peace education and education for peace, peace centers work mostly to **integrate concepts** of peace and conflict in the formal setting, particularly in the curricula of specific programs and even in general education.

In Davao Central College, their peace program, although still yet to be publicly launched, has endeavored to include peace education as a subject within their general education curriculum from basic to tertiary level. Several schools, in collaboration with relevant NGOs and government agencies such as CHED and DepEd, also labored to produce a number of modules and exemplars, and conducted trainings to introduce new pedagogies and enhance the skills of their teachers.

Informally, peace centers focus on **bridging curriculum development with community extension**. Some of the activities include facilitating peace tables to address conflicts in the communities, organizing of out-of-school youth to raise their awareness of social issues, educating actors from the security sector to gain deeper understanding of nonviolent alternative solutions to conflict, and supporting local peace and order councils.

Other strategic activities of peace institutes **address key issues** that are specific to the localities and contexts where the institutions are situated. For example, some institutions are more closely involved in facilitating interfaith and intercultural dialogue because of the situation in their areas where intergroup conflict related to religion and/or culture play a more prominent role such as the case with IPDM in the Iligan campus of MSU.

Initiatives where individuals and organizations **meet and exchange** is also a vital process for continuous coordination, solidarity-building, and learning. This exchange on the development of peace centers, for example, is one point of convergence for institutions with a peace paradigm to learn from each other and design joint projects. A horizontal learning community is created through this process.



As a strategic process, **monitoring and evaluation** is often one aspect that is not prioritized among many peace programs but is, nevertheless, one of the most crucial. One reason why peace programs and centers cease to be relevant is the lack of a clear mechanism for regular reviewing and assessing of their implementation. On top of this, the monitoring and evaluation that does happen often focuses on the immediate impact of the activities. How the short-term effects are actually leading to long-term outcomes such as the vision of the peace center are not intentionally taken into account.

In line with this is the recommendation for more **research** on peace and conflict topics. To keep abreast of emerging issues, centers should not only be a repository of information but a hub for building and expanding knowledge on peace and conflict.

**Mobilization of resources** is another organizational process that should be considered by peace institutes to address sustainability. This refers not only to securing funding and devising ways to become financially self-sustaining, but also drawing out from and maximizing local resources and experiences to develop contextualized materials and culturally-sensitive programs.

In all of these, the underlying element would be the existence of a **solid and clear conceptual framework** for how the peace center will engage internally in the institution, and externally with partners. This means having a common understanding of the principles and values that will ground all the work of the peace center among those involved. UCEAC in Ateneo de Davao University mentioned that they generally employ a multi-partisan approach when identifying and engaging potential and existing partners. Hence, as a principle of engagement, they work inclusively with actors from the military, academe, civil society, religious sector and local government.



## Values and Organizational Development

Values are abstract, in the sense that they are either a decorative part within an organization or individual that bears no real meaning, or a **core element that is integrated into all aspects** of the work of the organization and life of the individual. Therefore, it is first necessary to set how values are indeed embedded and actualized within systems, processes, and structures.

One of the participants shared that this process of internalizing values is closely connected to the **development of the organization**. Values are gradually integrated as each of the following is also developed:



On the other hand, these values are also the foundation of organizational growth as the vision, mission, goals, and strategies must all **reflect and align** with what is most essential to the institute or its core values.

In the Exchange, the discussion on values began with the primary question: *“What drives the vision of a peace center?”* It is important to begin with the “end” in mind. Hence, the institute must already **envision and define** what it must aim to achieve with the creation of a peace center prior to identifying its strategies and activities.

Values vary because they depend on what is important to the organization or individual. Nonetheless, there are values that are considered to be **universal** among those working for peace in Mindanao. The resource participants during the Exchange offered the following as some of the inherent values or non-negotiables when running a peace center:

- Inclusive systems and structures
- Reflectivity on the strategies and goals
- Responsive to realities on the ground
- Knowledge and evidence-based
- Self-sufficient and sustainable
- Cultural sensitivity
- Ethical Dialogue
- Formative of people and relationships

In reality, there are challenges in **operationalizing values**. There is even the question whether values change over time. Although most values are inherent and core to the identity of an institute or individual, there are some that are challenged when contexts change. This complex process begins with the awareness of how values continue to contribute or not to peace in a specific context or understanding. In some cases, some values are confronted because the understanding of people changed or that they are re-shaped. People and institutions begin to **critically reflect on their identities**, particularly their values. This culminates in a decision whether to sustain or to redefine one’s values.



## Making Lessons Learned Practical

After identifying the variety of good practices and approaches, as well as challenges to initiating and sustaining peace hubs in academic institutions, **concrete actions and recommendations** were discussed in the Exchange. Each institution identified two things they would endeavor to implement once they returned to their respective areas. Lessons are only truly learned when they are actualized.

### Some concrete practical steps after the Exchange:

- A number of the participants mentioned that they will revisit their institutional vision, mission and objectives to reaffirm and articulate their core values as the foundation of their peace centers. Further, some will look into their current peace programs and strategies and reflect whether there is a need for realignment to their core values and principles.
- As a follow-up, some also expressed that they will cascade the results of the Exchange to other concerned individuals within their institution to share new knowledge and insights. This will further build the capacities of those working in the peace centers and create better synergy.
- Building linkages and strengthening existing alliances with other academic peace centers for stronger collaborations and coordination was also seen as a practical step.
- For those only taking the initial steps towards formalizing the creation of their institutional peace centers, they are determined to draft a clear and concise proposal outlining the vision they have for their peace hub and the core elements shared by the experiences of others, which will be submitted to the head of their school.

As a general recommendation, the participants also expressed **the need for a stronger network** of the different peace hubs in Mindanao. In this, knowledge management and sharing, and coordination of their programs and activities were identified as priorities. forumZFD, as the main initiator of the Exchange, was considered as a potential connector among these academic institutions, especially in organizing learning exchanges and increasing capacities for peace education.



forumZFD thanks all those who attended and contributed to the Learning Exchange on the Formation of Academic Peace Centers last October 2018 in Davao City, Philippines. The open and dynamic sharing of insights and experiences on the development and sustainability of peace centers among the participants brought about a productive exchange. forumZFD, for its part, will continue to support the promotion of peace in Mindanao, together with these institutions, by providing spaces for cross-learning and collaboration among education institutions. Those who attended the Exchange were representatives from the following institutions: Ateneo de Davao University, Ateneo de Zamboanga University, Caraga State University, Cotabato Polytechnic State College, Davao Central College, Holy Cross of Davao College, Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology, Rizal Memorial Colleges, University of Mindanao Main and Digos Campus, and Xavier University.

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