

New Thinking in Guatemala

With the Integral Heart Foundation entrepreneur and integral thinker Mick Quinn and educator Deborah Prieto support the flourishing of young children and teens in the slums of Guatemala.

Interview by Mike Kauschke.

Jasmine and Otilia who are in the IHF Sponsorship Program posing outside their one-roomed house.



EnlightenNext Impulse: *For many years you both studied integral theory and different spiritual paths. How did you come to start such a “hands on” project as The Integral Heart Foundation? What was the transition from being more philosophically engaged to applying those ideas in a developing county like Guatemala?*

DEPORA PIETO: I studied philosophy at university and read a lot about different theories and concepts. But at a certain point I felt like being in a restaurant and knowing all the menus, but never tasted a dish. Something was really missing. I came to a point in my life, were felt I had to break with everything. Around that time I met Mick and we talked a lot about how to live from the different mode of knowing, that we might call “integral”, that we both learned about and also had experienced. And I remember, he had a sticker on his computer, a quote from Andrew Cohen that said: “There is nothing more powerful than a living example.”

MICK QUINN: That was the time when I wrote The Uncommon Path and after it was published, we decided to take a vacation and went to Guatemala.

We stayed in Antigua, a beautiful UNESCO protected town in central Guatemala. In the second week we ventured out of the city and we got lost in a little village. It was right around lunch time when the schools were letting all the young kids out. There were all these 7 to 12 years old kids in their beautiful uniforms running through pretty nasty looking streets. But all that we could see was potential. The theme of The Uncommon Path is in essence the discovery of previously unseen potentials and releasing these potentials from where they have been trapped, for the greater good. So when we saw those kids, we saw this potential of consciousness, and at the same time we saw the environment of great lack in which they lived.

DP: The poverty was plainly obvious and completely overwhelming. There was dirt and squalor, horrible living conditions, evident alcoholism, prostitution, exploitation of working children and even more unimaginable events unfolding in front of our eyes; a normal day in the life of Guatemala. But on that day, we made the decision that we had to come back here and do something about what we had seen.

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Deborah Prieto

ENI: *It is powerful to hear how you were recognizing this potential in the midst of all that suffering. Now, I know you are actually applying a lot of what you have learned from approaches like Integral Theory in your work. How does that look like?*

DP: First of all, this work offers us a huge sense of humility, because we realized how arrogant we were. We knew all these theories, but then you talk to a mother who doesn't know the future tense and talk to families that can not understand the meaning of “next week”, all they want is something to eat that day. So we really focus our work on the kids, that's were we see tremendous potential, they are the future, literally. They are still also embedded in this conditioning but they can and want to learn.

MQ: That's why we are focusing on education with our Critical Thinking Program. We are teaching kids, not what to think but how to think for themselves. The concept of critical-thinking may seem simple to someone in a developed country, in Guatemala children are taught by their parents that their futures will be a carbon copy of all previous generations; a life of hardship full of tough manual labour and physical, emotional, and psychological suffering. We teach them that this is simply not true, and that they are capable of rising above this insidious cycle.

We teach the kids for instance the concepts of classic philosophy, like Plato & Descartes; Meditation, appreciation of world religions, sexuality and appreciation of sexual preferences, morals and ethics, human evolution and evolution of consciousness, values and decision making and the basics of the Integral model.

All our other programs support this educational work, like our Kindergarten Program or our Solar Lighting project and our Sponsorship Program, which offers people the opportunity to enable a child to participate in these different programs. This sponsorship program is itself integral, we take care of their basic needs, they get a food basket,



Our college sponsored and philosophy program teens receiving information on the Meditation Marathon schedule at one of our Kindergartens.



Cynthia, Hugo and Oscar listen to Jeff Carreira lecture on the Big Bang via video-Skype as part of Critical-Thinking Program.

a solar lamp, we connect with their families and we also get in touch with the legal organizations on their behalf. We also take responsibility for the external situation of the kids as well as the interior development of the older children in our sponsored families.

ENI: *Often we do not consider, that it is possible to reach kids like in Guatemala with the consciousness and the ideas you are bringing. That is also part of what you are setting as an example. Can you say a bit more about how you teach the kids and how they are responding to the ideas and practices like meditation you introducing them to and how it is changing their lives?*

DP: Well, first to say, we have a lot of fun with the kids. We laugh a lot and use a lot of theatre and other engaging methods. When we introduce Plato's metaphor of the cave, we do not talk about it, we play it out. Or when we study the history of philosophy and for instance the discussion between the Empiricists and the Rationalists, we divide the class and let them have arguments between themselves. We also facilitate groups, were it is really about going beyond what they already know. And the kids ask these surprising questions were Mick and I look at each other and have no idea how to answer.

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Mick Quinn

We saw in those kids this potential of consciousness, and at the same time we saw the environment of great lack in which they lived.

Mick Quinn

MQ: In terms of the responses from the kids, we noticed that we have what we call our “superstars” in the class. These are the kids, that are sitting on the edge of their seat, waiting for the next thing that is going to be said. And they always have a comment or question or a different angle. Then you have a group of kids who are listening, paying attention, but they nor interacting too much. When you call on them, they will submit something to the class. Once in a while these kids will offer these gems, these insights, that seem to come directly from an enlightened mind. Or someone relates what Jeff Carreira taught about the big bang and cosmic evolution to what we spoke about in terms of cultural development – a connection that we not made yet in the class. So there we see that they are actually thinking about the topics of the class, that they actually inquire for themselves. Then there are the rest of the kids in the class that are not that interested. So, we know, that we are dealing with different levels of intelligence here.

In the longer term we are trying to fund our own school, so that we can take the really gifted kids and anybody else who is interested, and put them into a 3-year program. This program would start after the normal school education here in

Guatemala, which is usually 9th grade. It will be a simple program, English, Math maybe one of the sciences and geography and philosophy. If they are interested in continuing to teach we hope to put them in a job as a teacher in non-profit or governmental schools, because they will be better qualified then if they studied in university here. So then they would have an influence on many kids, in this way we can spread this work of developing potential far more, then just with the two of us teaching.

ENI: *It is a powerful vision you are describing here, because it is really about changing culture from the inside out. One can sense the potentiality in what your developing there and bring out the potential in the kids to have an influence on the culture at large.*

MQ: Right, we want to evolve the culture here in Guatemala without losing its amazing beauty and diversity – but we also want to have an influence on the progressive cultures in the West. One of our goals is a deeper integration of leading edge theories about consciousness and culture and the fact, that we all need to include all of our humanity into our considerations. When we loose that part of the picture, we have a fragmented view. When we started our project we went through a pretty long phase of darkness, we felt despair and meaninglessness. It was a dark night of the soul. We went to Guatemala to do something for humanity, but for some months we were confronted with our own shadows of suffering and the question, how to help these people? And how do we use here all these powerful tools we learned from integral theory and spiritual development?

DP: Yes, it was just overwhelming. In the West we see suffering, like homeless people on the streets. But here it was in such a magnitude that was just too much. I literally went through phases were I couldn't leave the house, because I didn't know, how to deal with the constant scene of misery. In a way it felt like all the pain I saw was my own pain. It wasn't empathy – I was the person that was suffering. And pain is so all pervasive here, it is more normal seeing pain than seeing happiness. Before we came here we were not in touch with that level of suffering; here you can just not avoid it.

MQ: Because we were not conscious of it. In my life I handled a lot of difficult and painful situation, but when I came here I saw how unconscious I was of such a level of unnecessary suffering. And it's about real people, a part of humanity, a part of us, of me. I realized, we are one humanity and I can not turn away from that suffering, I needed to respond.

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Deborah Prieto

When we want to develop as humanity we need to move in two directions at the same time: We need to continuously evolve, but we also need to reach back down, so to speak. Often we seem to have forgotten, that the bottom rungs of the ladder, which are supporting the whole structure need our immediate attention. Healing our own shadow that manifests as human suffering is part of being Integral.

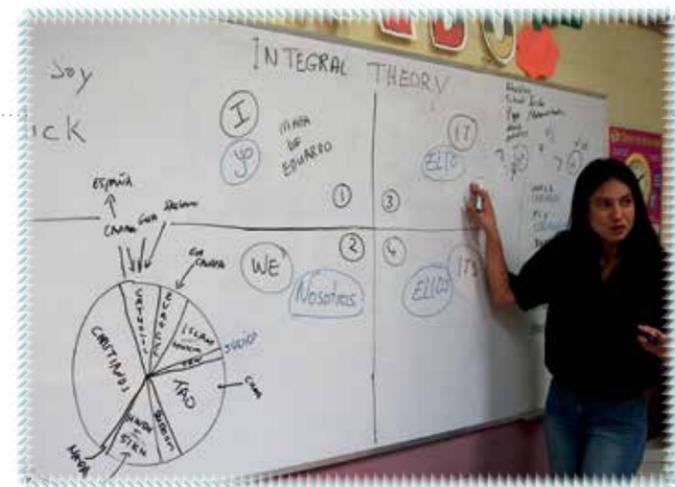
ENI: *With your Sponsorship Program you are providing a way for that kind of integration. You bring together people, that are engaged in the development of consciousness in progressive circles with the children in Guatemala. So, you are actually building a bridge between these two directions of development you described. You are bridging the potential of knowledge, love, and financial support of people in the west with the potential of your kids in Guatemala.*

DP: Yes, and I think potential is really the key word. You sit in a room full of kids, that maybe live with 8 people in one room in a hut in the slum, that can fall down in the next storm, but when you bring a thought into the class you see their minds working, their interest emerging. There is something alive and well in these kids that goes beyond their outer circumstances and that's the human potential. And all that needs is a little love and attention. ■

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The Integral Heart Foundation is doing incredibly important work, and, just as significant, is doing so by using (and teaching) Integral Theory. This insures a truly inclusive and comprehensive approach, something so important (and rare) in today's fractured world.

Ken Wilber



Deborah Prieto introducing the basics of the Integral map with our critical thinking teen in San Mateo, Guatemala.



L to R; Liz Flinn (Canadian) Sponsorship Program Director, Mick Quinn (Irish), Deborah Prieto (Spanish) and Reinhard Prosch (German/Guatemalan) Business Manager.

Deborah Prieto graduated from the University of Madrid as an educator of mentally handicapped children. She spent the following 10 years working with her skills in the Spanish healthcare system. Deborah is also a trained facilitator of the *Big Mind Process*, a counselling tool that combines Western psychology and Zen teachings, which she uses in this work. www.integralheartfoundation.org

Mick Quinn is an Irish immigrant whose life's path brought him from his native home in Athlone, Ireland, to New York City where he founded several successful businesses, to the publication of a book on the future of human potential - *The Uncommon Path* - to his current work in the slums surrounding the Spanish Colonial city of Antigua Guatemala. www.mickquinn.com



Leonel and Mick making a flower carpet during Catholic Holy Week in Antigua Guatemala.



Guadalupe and Sarita: Guadalupe is heading into grade 1 in January and is sponsored by a German couple in Munich.

VIDEO: TV-Film about Integral Heart Foundation: www.bit.ly/UHQZ6

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