

Training teachers in areas of armed conflict

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Introduction

Introduction

It is a Sunday morning and the group gathers in a hotel that has seen better days, on the outskirts of the small town of Prizren, south of Kosovo and close to the Albanian and Macedonian border. It is last day of a psychosocial training seminar for teachers who have been working in the poor and war-affected area of Skenderaj, a province north of Kosovo. Inside the rooms, it may look quiet, but this is only an illusion.

In each room, five groups of ten teachers are working on one of their last assignments: making a drawing that expresses an aspect of the lessons given during the training seminars. One group draws a dove flying above Kosovo. Another group draws a man watering a tree, a reference to a small project that supports schools in tree planting. A third group draws two faces: one looks severe, with a big mouth and small ears and eyes, representing the attitude towards the children before training; the other face looks happy, with a small mouth, big ears and eyes wide open to represent the change of attitude after training.

These teachers are participants of the psychosocial training seminar for teachers described in this manual. They attended lectures and participated in small workshops. The lectures not only provided information relevant to the current daily work in the schools, it also provided new information. More importantly, it assisted teachers in developing more of an awareness of the acquired knowledge and skills they already possessed through the use of an overview.

The lectures also had another purpose; to act as a warm-up for the group work to be carried out in the workshops on

participants experiences and best practices. For many teachers in an area of armed conflict, participating in group work may be an entirely new experience.

These workshops, on average ten participants guided by two trainers, were opportunities to share examples of good practice, receive emotional support and acknowledgement. In addition, they offered chances for participating in role-play exercises; each one a new opportunity for the development of practical skills and empathy.

During the workshops the teachers were also encouraged to look for new solutions to their daily problems, and plan the introduction of feasible innovations within their schools.

Psychosocial interventions in areas of armed conflict often include training of diverse groups such as: counsellors, community health promoters, nurses, doctors, midwives, community leaders, etc. This special supplement is about the training of teachers, one important target group for community-based intervention, because of their daily contact with children.

The teachers participating in this seminar were, in a sense, privileged. Most teachers in areas of armed conflict globally work in difficult circumstances and would benefit from a support project like the one described in this manual. The training methods described in this manual appear to be applicable in diverging cultures, and contexts.

If you are an experienced professional working in the field of child psychology, or child psychiatry, this manual gives you all the information needed for organising a support program for teachers that would benefit children and their families in areas of armed conflict. When reading this manual, we hope trainers of counsellors and psychosocial workers may feel challenged

to think about their own approach to training and the support of traumatised communities.

In many psychosocial projects a Training of Trainers (ToT) is part of the package. These ToT's are rarely described. In this manual, the ToT is described in detail, and the ideas behind it are explicitly defined.

The description of the training for trainers, and the seminars for teachers, clearly show that they mirror each other. Both are aimed at active participation of the trainees, at empowerment, at creating and safeguarding an atmosphere of respect, support and encouragement, which eventually will be mirrored in a more protective school climate.

This manual describes development work that is still in progress. Some sections could be improved with more elaboration and comments from our readers; for example the ways in which teachers participating in the seminars can share their newly developed views and knowledge with colleagues. This publication offers an approach that has been effective in diverging contexts, but it is not the perfect manual. It is meant to be adapted to new situations and unforeseen challenges, and to inspire others to develop their own manuals and methods. However, the editors of *Intervention* believe that publishing such 'work in progress' is an important contribution to the development of our knowledge of good practice in psychosocial work. We look forward to your comments.

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Ria Stiefelhagen, child psychologist, works at War Trauma Foundation and was guest-editor for this special supplement to Intervention 3.2