

4. The training program

Basic assumptions

The goal of the training program is to improve the psychosocial climate of the school. A well functioning school offers a safe, supportive and motivating environment for all students. It also provides some basic psychological and psychosocial assistance to children with special needs, and to those who are traumatised.

The training of the teachers has one primary message: *Teachers are very important people in children's lives. They can make a real difference by using their both their inborn capabilities and those developed through the learning process and experiences within their professional work helping children.* The training is meant to be a process that empowers the teachers by stimulating their pedagogical involvement and their psychosocial support to the children.

Teachers already have a lot of practical experience in dealing with children in distress and those with special needs, and are experienced in managing critical situations in the classroom.

During the training they are given ample opportunity to present and demonstrate their own philosophies and strategies in working with children, as well as share examples of good practice.

The training emphasises the positive aspects of handling problems: coping, resiliency, protective factors and empowerment processes. It tries to avoid the development of victimisation and learned helplessness in children, as well as in teachers.

The training is comprehensive. It is based on a systemic approach to the psychosocial

functioning of the school. It integrates psychosocial contents (in the narrow sense of the term) with other educational approaches: civic education, child's rights protection, mutual tolerance, respect and co-operation. Therefore, it is also aimed at trust and confidence building.

The training program is conceived as a partner-relation between trainers and trainees-teachers. Both can contribute to the quality and richness of the program. It should enhance teachers' incentives for the modification of the program, and support their initiatives for introducing psychosocial and related activities in schools.

An overview of the program

The program includes the following activities:

1. Selection of schools and teachers through a local partner organisation;
2. Recruitment of local trainers;
3. Training of local trainers by international trainers;
4. Training of teachers by local trainers;
5. Implementation in the schools by the trained teachers.

Activity 1: selection of schools and teachers

Fifty to 100 teachers, from 5-10 schools, or more, are included. Local implementers of the program and local trainers are responsible for selecting the participating schools. Priority is given to schools from the most affected villages, and from schools with a very large number of Internally Displaced children, returned refugee children, or children otherwise affected by armed conflict.

During the selection process, special attention is paid to the most remote schools and those that have not been included into psychosocial programs so far. Often, it is these schools where the needs for educating and empowering teachers are most pressing.

A minimum of two teachers should participate in the program from each school selected. If the school is large, the number of teachers included should be proportionally higher. This principle is extremely important, because it is very difficult for one, single teacher to introduce innovation. It is helpful if school principals participate in the seminars as well, as this gives them intimate knowledge of the program. The support of the school principal cannot be over-stated in the implementation of new approaches.

Teacher selection within any one school should be based on considerations of the following: age to create a mix of older and younger, experience and less experienced, sex (genders should be represented proportionally related to the gender structure of the teaching staff), and varying levels of classes. In multi-ethnic schools, the ethnic ratio should be respected in the choice of participants.

It is essential that the participation of teachers be voluntary.

Activity 2: recruitment of local trainers

The program is designed to use local trainers, as often as possible, to carry out the training program with the teacher's chosen. This is important because they speak the local language and are familiar with the context, the culture, general attitudes and concepts related to education.

The trainers may come from a range of professions and diverging educational backgrounds. The composition of the group of trainers depends on who is available in the region. Trainers can be teachers who have

special interest in the psychosocial field, or have already attended some kind of course in this field. They can also be: other school workers, university teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, physicians, nurses, other health workers, social workers, religious leaders, or community leaders. It is very important that the group is multidisciplinary and that the representatives of the various professions and sectors cooperate.

It can be difficult to find good trainers and there is a high incidence of dropouts and false starts. It takes time to develop and encourage creation of an involved and reliable core group.

However, it is always possible, and sooner or later, development of an efficient program is assured.

The local partner organisation is the main agent for recruiting and appointing trainers who will implement the program. A local organisation can be a non-governmental organisation, school, university, or any other institution.

Candidates for trainers are invited to an introductory informative meeting. The interviews can then be conducted individually, or within the group.

For the training of trainer's sessions, we always invite more trainers than we need to carry out the training of teachers. It is our experience is that some candidates will dropout of the program for various reasons. The number of trainers required depends on the number of groups; for each group consisting of 10 teachers, 2 trainers are needed.

During the first meeting the philosophy and action model of the program are presented to the trainers. They are briefed about what they can expect in terms of financial reward, and rewards beyond money, such as new knowledge, interesting professional social contacts and moral satisfaction. Their

obligations and responsibilities are clearly presented: they have to be present at all sessions of their training, they have to prepare and performing lectures during the seminars for teachers, and they have to facilitate group discussions, role-playing and other activities, They are also expected to visit trained teachers at their schools. It is also made clear that they are expected to actively participate in the creation of the program. The final version of the program will be the result of a cooperative, working exchange between local trainers and international professionals.

Activity 3: training of local trainers by international trainers

The main message of the training of trainers is: *Training is an interactive process in which trainers and participants cooperate in order to further develop their insights, knowledge and skills.* The participants are trained to carry out seminars for teachers using educational methods such as giving mini-lectures, facilitating group discussion and group reporting, and carrying out role-play exercises¹.

Activity 4: training of teachers by local trainers

The most important contents of the seminars for teachers are:

- The protective role of the school and teachers for children at risk and for children with psychosocial problems
- The psychosocial climate of the school and class
- The teacher and students
- Trauma's and losses
- Children with psychosocial difficulties and children with special needs
- Learning difficulties and learning disorders
- Relationships between peers and education for pro-social behaviour

- School violence and bullying
- The impact of poverty on children and how the school can help reduce this
- Co-operation between teachers and parents
- Co-operation of the school with the community and mobilising resources for the benefit of children and school
- Volunteers helping children with psychosocial and learning difficulties
- Children as volunteers
- The teacher – his work and his family, his professionals burdens and stresses, prevention of burn out
- Civic education and children's rights

Activity 5: implementation of new ideas and practices into the schools by trained teachers

The training of teachers is divided in four seminars, or modules, over the course of 3 days. After each seminar, the teachers immediately puts into practice what was learned during the training. The trainers support the teachers in this implementation process through school visits in between seminars. Therefore, training and implementation alternate.

During their visits, the trainers discuss any matters the teachers want to share, for example: individual children, difficult situations in the classroom, job related problems, and their own painful experiences and losses. The trainers try to help teachers realise their incentives and goals, develop new activities, and use their newly acquired skills and knowledge in the daily reality of the school. This is aided and supported by short workshops, lasting two to four hours each and attended by all teachers of the visited school. In some cases, parents of children having difficulties are invited for consultations. In other workshops, local trainers can present a short lecture and run a group discussion with parents within a framework of parents' meetings.

¹ *Expressive techniques and physical exercise.*

Personally I do not often use expression techniques in my programs, because I prefer to give priority to reflections, insights and psychodynamic dimensions. But, it can be useful to integrate some techniques into the program. Expressive techniques, such as drawing, may stimulate self-reflection. Physical exercises may work as energisers, ways to restore concentration, or help the participants to acquire relaxation skills (Van der Veer, 2003).

It is important to ensure that these techniques do not overload the program. Local professionals, who have learnt these techniques in various international programs, often wish to extensively introduce these methods.

Teachers can sometimes feel unhappy, because local trainers can force them to

experience situations perceived as inappropriate for their age and position, such as sitting on the floor, or climbing during games. On the other hand, many exercises are well accepted by teachers, and sometimes with great enthusiasm, because teachers have the feeling that they have concrete to work to do with children.

Other methods of work. It is possible to introduce other methods of work, such as using dolls to explore a difficult situation a teacher experienced during his work (Van der Veer, 2003). With regard to each of the educational methods described in this chapter, the trainer should always consider how people from a different cultural, or religious, background might experience these methods.