Investing in Young Children Globally
Workshop
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Bridging Dialogue and leveraging Social Services in Early Childhood to Generate Solutions for Sustainable Peace

- Session objective
- Background and previous experiences
- Intergroup VS intragroup
- Research and programs
- Lessons learned
Objective

- Explore potentially effective programming models that facilitate intergroup dialogue and conflict resolution to leverage the period of early childhood for efforts to promote harmonious relationships in regions experiencing conflict, taking into account the phases of conflict. What are the goals for each program? How does each evaluate their programs and progress towards meeting goals?
Reflections on Objective

• Questions to entertain thinking about the objective?
• 1. what intergroup relations are we talking about when the conflict in the Middle East for example is beyond control? Syria is an example of a playground for super powerful countries and entities.
• 2. Is it possible to promote “harmonious relationships in regions experiencing conflict” when people face existential threats and are occupied with staying alive. Again drawing from examples in the region.
• 3. If the scene is so dire, what can be done to lay the foundations for intergroup dialogue?
Background and Previous Experiences

- Increased engagement in research, training and advocacy in early childhood development and education out of conviction of its critical role in a better future.
- Training and professional development of educators and early childhood professionals in conflict areas such as in the MENA region.
- Pre-service teacher training in early childhood education.
- Working with Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Education and American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) offices in Palestine.
Intergroup Vs. Intragroup

- Intergroup dialogue is important. For example interreligious dialogue (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish).
  
  But is it what we really need right now (especially here in this region)?
- Do we need to work with intragroup before intergroup or simultaneously?
- Intragroup is also important but who are the parties involved? In the case of the Middle East?
- Intragroup conflicts maybe: Muslim- Christian, Sunni- Shia, religious- secular, women- men, adult-children, etc.
- What and who is involved in intergroup and intragroup looking at MENA as an example? Like many, the entanglement in lingos is discouraging.
I suggest the following:

- Investing early and intensely to bridge differences starting with accepting those who look or act slightly different than me as a child.
- Investing holistically. If we don’t provide secure, caring, and healthy environments we can’t entertain dialogue amongst adults or children in some conflict areas such as in Palestine.
- Investing in educators and teachers working with young children. They are key in reaching children and families especially in small and marginalized communities.
Research and Programs

- Forgiveness research among teachers in Arab schools in six communities.
- Forgiveness curriculum developed for children 12-16 and now for children 5-8 that is based on play, music, and drama.
- ANERA’s model of investing in ECD: focus on teachers in marginalized communities such as those in poverty or close to Separation Wall in West Bank and Gaza.
- Training of trainers in Iraq.
Lessons learned

- ECD teachers are at the bottom of professional scales (low salaries and they lack resources in many contexts).
- Starting early means to expose children and model dispositions related to good citizenship and conflict resolution skills in early years.
- It also means to allocate needed resources to train teachers who work with children to develop skills and dispositions that support dialogue and conflict resolution.
- Teachers need to be convinced and capable of collaborating with such initiatives.
- A system of coordination and regulation on the governmental levels should be in place.
Lessons Learned

• We should be careful to qualify imported concepts that people developed resistance to”.

• Involve religious institutions and figures in the process. Most KGs we work with in Palestine (in marginalized villages) are Charitable with some connection to a mosque or local clergy.

• Advocacy on behalf of children, their teachers, and families is critical.

• Community outreach is critical to support teachers.