

Coaching – Observing – Reflecting – Engaging (CORE) for Teachers: A well-being and support intervention for teachers

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Location	Colombia and Occupied Palestinian Territories
Teacher Profiles	Refugee teachers, IDP teachers, and host community teachers
Topic	Teacher well-being

DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Few evidence-based interventions are available to help teachers build the complex skill sets needed to effectively address the barriers and the multi-faceted demands they encounter in their professional lives (Hardman et al 2011). Those that are available traditionally treat teachers like production functions: inputs being in-service trainings focused on specific curricula, and outputs being gains in student learning, with little attention to helping teachers navigate the roles, expectations, and stressors they must balance at the nexus of students' lives and systems' accountability (Schwartz, Cappella, & Aber 2019). Research has shown that stress and burnout, particularly prevalent among the least experienced teachers, radiates to affect teacher attendance and attrition, pedagogical and classroom quality, and student outcomes, with cascading impacts on education systems (Hoglund et al 2015; McLean & Connor 2015; Wolf et al 2015).

War Child Holland is researching the effectiveness of a holistic teacher support program that provides individualised and scaffolded psychological care and real time support to teachers through a continuous quality improvement-based coaching model. Drawing inspiration from Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) prosocial classroom theoretical model, the aim of the *Coaching - Observing - Reflecting - Engaging (CORE)* intervention is to have a positive impact on classroom climate by providing teachers with the skills and knowledge to create an enabling, impactful, and safe learning environment.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Colombia has seen more than five decades of armed conflict which has had a devastating impact on the education system in some departments of the country. The conflict has led to a breakdown of social norms

leading to increased psychosocial needs of children, violence in the classroom, and lack of engagement between teachers and children. In the Gaza Strip, the recurrent conflict has disrupted education services and impacted the psychosocial well-being of children and teachers leading to a deterioration in learning outcomes. Schools in Gaza are chronically overcrowded, resulting in student difficulties in focusing on their studies and heightened levels of violence in schools. In both of these settings, the project worked or will be working in formal schools with teachers who have had some pre-service training. As the project has a whole school approach, the demographics of the teachers in regards to years of experience, subject focus, age, gender, and pre- and post-service training will vary. The model is developed to work with individual teachers as much as possible, allowing for some adaptations developing on individual needs.

Through a whole school, real time, and continuous quality improvement-based coaching model, CORE will support the teachers to build skills in three main areas:

1. **Teacher social-emotional competencies:** Building teachers own SEL competencies: Based on CASEL's 5 core competencies, the coaches individually mentor teachers to build personal social-emotional competencies that directly relate to competencies that they wish to build in children.
2. **Teacher well-being:** Based on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), using a mindfulness and acceptance approach. Coaches support the building of knowledge and skills to equip teachers with the necessary tools to improve their self-care, manage their stress, gain emotional regulation, and create a positive classroom environment.
3. **Positive classroom management:** Focused on behaviour management and core classroom management and planning skills.

The development of this intervention has included:

- I. A scoping study of research and current teacher professional development (TPD) programming which contributed to the development of a theory of change;
- II. A formative qualitative study in Colombia with key education actors including teachers, school governing bodies, and ministry to inform the development of the intervention;
- III. A four-month proof of concept (PoC) which examined feasibility, user-experience, and acceptability of CORE; and
- IV. Adaptation of methodology based on findings from PoC.

The next steps planned in the development of CORE include establishing the research agenda, culminating in an effectiveness study. In particular, this will focus on the current context-relevant process pilot study in Gaza in partnership with Global TIES for viability and feasibility. This will provide an opportunity to fine-tune the research and program implementation protocols in preparation for impact evaluation.

EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

The assumption being tested is that CORE will lead to improvement in quality of education in three levels:

1. Our primary outcome is focused at the teacher level, including improving teachers' emotion regulation, mindfulness, and teachers' psychological well-being; reducing teachers' feelings of burnout/distress; increasing teachers' self-efficacy and engagement; and increasing teachers' knowledge and competency in classroom management and planning.
2. A secondary outcome, at the student level, is that we expect teachers' improved ability to directly model social-emotional skills and improve classroom interaction quality to lead to changes in student teacher engagement.
3. At the school level, as CORE coaches will work with all teachers in a school, we expect improvements in whole school climate and peer support.

While the PoC showed that some key elements of CORE were on the whole feasible, acceptable, and relevant

to the teachers, it also identified key ways of improving and adapting the methodology. These included;

1. To improve trust and acceptance of CORE in the school:
 - a. Coaches spend one week in the school assisting the teachers outside of their roles as a coach.
 - b. Ensure that the teachers understand the whole process of the intervention at the beginning.
 - c. A whole school approach ensures that there is not mistrust or fear as to why a teacher has been selected for the intervention.
2. To improve the content of the methodology:
 - a. Initial training of coaches is to be no more than three weeks with a focus on coaching skills and well-being training.
 - b. The remainder of coaching training is to be broken up at the start of each module.
 - c. Begin each module with a whole school information session to allow for clarity of the module's aim and provide a forum for teachers to share.
 - d. Reduce the amount of in-class support to one identified exercise per cycle and increase observations to two sessions per cycle.
 - e. Strengthen reflection and mindfulness support for teachers during individual support.
 - f. Provide examples of other activities for teachers to use in their practice.

The study will also outline key findings that informed the adaptation of the methodology and discuss the following data that informed the development of the intervention.

- Scoping review findings,
- Development of CORE theory of change.
- Qualitative and quantitative data from the proof of concept,
- Adaptation workshop and changes to methodology.

With few validated outcome measures in education, especially for teacher well-being and teacher social emotional competencies, further research on CORE will also discuss the identification of outcome measures and the process undertaken to ensure these tools are valid and effective to measure the assumed outcomes.

LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

The current research process for CORE has embedded periods of reflection and adaptation before the final effectiveness study. The process has yielded the following learnings and points of critical reflection which will inform forthcoming research:

- Challenges and considerations of ethical research in crisis affected contexts - We will outline the learnings from CORE, not only in the effectiveness studies but in all the WCH research agenda, to ensure that the research process is ethical and contextualized.
- Contextualisation process for a generalised intervention – CORE has not been developed for one specific country context; further study will outline the learnings from the contextualisation processes to ensure the acceptability and relevance, especially around themes of well-being and social emotional competencies.
- Critical reflections focused on scale-up and cost efficiency – the forthcoming research will outline some of the critical thinking WCH has been engaging in around the issue of CORE’s ability to scale and cost efficiency.

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