

13. SAFE SPACES

Attached Tools: Sample Teacher Workshop: Large Class Size, Sports Fields Measurements

In order to engage in structured learning, children need a place to do so. This often brings images of a school, but a building is not enough on its own. It is essential that schools are safe places to learn, where all children feel welcome. In conflict situations, schools may be targeted outright as they serve as gathering points in the community and training grounds for future community leadership. In natural disasters, when earthquakes, floods or cyclones occur, schools are as likely to be destroyed as all the surrounding community. In both contexts, schools may be unsafe because of their surroundings, lack of facilities, or the behaviour of teachers.

What do we mean by safe spaces?

- ☐ Designated area for children's education and recreation activities
- ☐ Often includes an existing school building, in need of rehabilitation
- ☐ Secure from harm – cleared of landmines, far from busy roads, not remote
- ☐ Adequate facilities – recreation field, clean water, separate latrines
- ☐ Address needs of the whole child, including food and health
- ☐ Ensure that curricula supports peace and that discipline is child-friendly

Where will education take place?

It is possible to learn anywhere and in any environment. Structured education activities, however, require a safe space for groups of children to gather. Whether in the midst of or following a crisis, identifying and securing a place is one of the first steps toward establishing education opportunities for children. When conventional school buildings are not available, learning can take place:

- Under trees, with locally made benches and tarpaulins
- In a tent, generally used in refugee or IDP camps
- In community buildings, such as churches or assembly halls
- In locally constructed huts, when building materials are available
- By sharing existing schools, typically through a shift system

At the onset of an acute emergency, it is essential to know where schools were operating prior to the crisis. This information can be gathered through the ministry of education or a UN agency. If not available, an assessment – often done jointly with other agencies – can quickly identify school locations. In large-scale displacements, a common refuge is within the school. Families move in with no other options, but this leaves a community without a place for education. Efforts should be immediately made to identify alternative shelter so that the school returns to use as a school.

Child-friendly Space (CFS)

To promote the idea of a safe space, as well as an integrated approach to child services, UNICEF has developed what is known as 'child-friendly spaces'. It focuses on establishing spaces during an emergency where children can have access to education, clean water and health facilities together. Originally tried in Albania, 'child-friendly space' included a minimum of four tented spaces for pre-primary and lower primary classes, three similar spaces for upper primary classes, a play area, a well baby area, a water point, and a small women and children's 'adult' area. Schools and other education alternatives are a core part of this approach. CFS has now been tried in Albania, Kosovo, El Salvador, Turkey and East Timor.

THE SCHOOL BUILDING

When planning to support education following an acute emergency, one of the first options considered is reconstruction of schools. Their destruction can be a devastating blow to the morale of a community. When not completely destroyed, school parts are often looted – roofs, doors or windows. Alone, a new school building does little to improve education opportunities for children; however, coupled with a response that addresses the quality of learning and increases access to education, rebuilding a school can be a valuable input. Children should have access to a building with a sound structure. The locations listed above – under a tree, in a tent, in churches or halls, in local huts, in shared schools – are all less than ideal learning environments. Buildings used for a dual purpose are often ‘on loan’, and may be reclaimed unexpectedly. Efforts should be made as soon as possible to establish a building whose sole purpose is the education of children.

Community Responsibility

When rebuilding schools, communities should take on significant responsibility. If school committees are in place, they are the logical group to take on the project. Women and youth groups can also play a role. Responsibilities of the community can range from provision of labour, contribution of local materials, paying a one-off donation, feeding the workers, or management of the building site. The community should take on long-term responsibility for maintenance of the school and surrounding environment, as well as school security. Note, however, that a community’s involvement in a school is not exclusive to the building itself.

Classrooms

Classrooms should be built to the standards of the local community and use local materials as much as possible – mud walls or bricks, thatch, bamboo, etc. If a large-scale shelter programme is in place, plastic sheeting can be an interim measure with cement floors and metal roofs added. All construction should keep the local climate in mind and allow for lighting, ventilation, and, if necessary, heating. As much as possible, new classrooms should be accessible to children with mobility difficulties. Projects should always include funds for an engineer to manage school reconstruction. It is not realistic either for education staff or a community themselves to be fully aware of building standards or the issues involved in construction.

Specification for a Mobile Tent School¹

In refugee and IDP camps there are no previous structures and buildings available, meaning prefabricated tents and plastic sheeting are common responses. Advantages to tent schools are that they can be rapidly set up and can be stockpiled and re-used.

- Framework: aluminium hollow pipes (1.6m sections) joined by elbow connectors
- Canopy: single piece domed or rectangular construction
- Water-resistant polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in red, green, blue or yellow
- Walls: free-hanging membrane in white PVC welded to canopy, with four transparent windows and a door
- Floor: wood slats or PVC with eyelets and pegs

¹ Adapted from Aguilar, Pilar and G Retamal, *Rapid Educational Response in Complex Emergencies: A Discussion Document*, Hamburg, UNESCO International Institute for Education, 1998.

Cost estimate (1997): US\$6,500 per unit (including shipping and insurance to destination)

Furniture

Use of furniture, both in and out of the classroom, varies from culture to culture. What is common is that students do need some type of simple, clean seating. This initially may be locally made mats or a tarpaulin spread on the floor. Seats and desks according to age group can follow, again preferably locally made according to local practice. Teachers need a table and chair as soon as possible. There is also a need for lockable cupboards and shelves. Emphasising the local manufacture of furniture can support carpenters in the community or could be a contract set up with a vocational school. There should never be a large-scale need for imported chairs and tables as part of an education response to emergencies.

Drinking Water

Clean and safe drinking water must be available to all children at any school or education site. This is equally important in both hot and cool climates, as problems of dehydration and health risk occur in both. Depending on the local context, water may be supplied through a local water supply, a school well, or tanks or other containers brought in from outside. If water is stored on-site, it should be regularly chlorinated to ensure safety. When a water tap is not in use, a ladle should be available for children to draw water to pour into their cups. Children must be taught the basics of sanitation and the ways that disease may spread through improper handling of water.

Latrines

The availability of and use of latrines prevents the spread of disease. Latrines should be separate for girls and boys, and, if resources allow, separate for teachers as well. It is generally accepted that 1 latrine is needed for every 40 children. They should be located close enough to the school to ensure safety, yet with enough space to allow for privacy, especially for girls' latrines. Latrines should be regularly cleaned to encourage their continued use and so they do not become breeding grounds for flies. Water and soap should be available to wash hands immediately after using the latrine. Involvement of engineers or others in the water-sanitation sector is important during construction so that latrines meet local standards and are as safe as possible.

AROUND THE SCHOOL

Routes to and from school

It should be ensured that children's routes to and from a school are secure. Children must not be put in greater physical danger by attending school than by staying at home. Girls are especially at risk – both of the real danger of sexual assault and the exaggerated fears of a protective parent who keeps them confined in the home. Because a child's physical safety is of prime importance, parents can justify keeping children home if their risk increases on the journey. If it is found that this is a concern, the following strategies could be tried:

- Children arrange to use the buddy system, never walking alone
- Parent volunteers serve as escorts for groups of children
- Community organises transportation for children from particular areas
- Satellite classrooms are set up in distant communities

Landmines

Landmines are a big problem in most countries that have experienced war or political instability. In countries like Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Afghanistan and Mozambique, both mines and unexploded ordinance (UXOs) have been overtly used as a weapon of war, with civilians as the main target. There is always a risk that mines have been laid in or around a school. Before education activities can begin, professionally trained groups or peacekeepers must clear the building and surroundings.

Landmine Awareness

Landmine awareness is about survival – of both children and their families. Education of children is part of a response, but is effective only when connected with both de-mining efforts and integrated programmes to support landmine survivors. As all situations are different, an education programme should be designed based on an analysis of the magnitude of the problem, the location of mines, and the current response of the community. Mine awareness should emphasise repetition: messages have to be repeated again and again in class, in recreation activities, on posters and billboards, and on radio and television. In teaching, models should be shown but not touched. Teachers should never show actual mines or go deeply into the technicalities of how mines operate.

Messages for children should be age-appropriate. Sample messages for three to seven year olds include:²

- Stay in safe areas
- Ask an adult for the safe path
- Stay on the safe path
- Recognise warning signs
- Don't touch
- Choose safe targets (if throwing stones)
- In a minefield, wait for help

Sanitation

To provide children with a safe and sanitary environment, areas around the school should be kept clean and orderly. Stagnating water on the playground area or close to the school should be drained. These areas, untreated, serve as breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which spread diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. There should be clearly marked bins as a place to dispose of rubbish. If there is no operational waste management service, rubbish pits, where rubbish can be burned or covered, can be used. Regular clean-up days could be organised to involve children in keeping their environment tidy. An effort to raise children's awareness regarding cleanliness can eventually have an impact on the wider community, as children begin to educate their families regarding sanitation.

Recreation Space

A large open space should also be identified near to the school area. This area can be used for sports and recreation, as well as school assemblies. The community as a whole, in addition to student groups, often uses recreation areas near schools. The area should be designed for games commonly played in the culture. Football (or soccer) and volleyball are two of the most popular internationally. Girls should be able to participate in these games, or have their own. In some locations, school playgrounds are also important for children's recreation. Swings, slides, see-saws and other playground equipment can facilitate play, especially for younger children.

² Messages for other groups are also outlined in Save the Children, *Mines – Beware! Starting to teach children safe behaviour*, Sweden, Rädda Barnen, 1999.

Any contributions to recreation equipment should be in line with that of surrounding communities, and with the availability of similar equipment prior to the crisis.

IN THE SCHOOL

Food for Education

Malnutrition is a contributing factor to children not attending school. Others attend, but lack the energy to learn and are unable to concentrate. If properly administered, food for education has the potential to increase school attendance, and may improve children's nutritional status and academic performance.

*School Feeding*³

In emergency situations, food aid is sometimes provided to communities through school feeding. Two common models are in-school feeding and take-home rations:

- In-school feeding is characterised by distribution of a meal. This is typically in the form of wet rations, which are prepared at the school.
- Take-home rations are basic food items such as rice or vegetable oil. These are distributed to families in exchange for attendance (this strategy is particularly being tried with girls).

There are a number of potential problems with school feeding, especially in the long-term. Many programmes are unable to achieve either their nutritional or educational objectives. When nutrition is the aim, a concern is that food distributed in schools does not necessarily reach out-of-school children, a group more likely to be malnourished than those in school. When education is the aim, there is no evidence that school feeding affects quality or influences attendance beyond the project period, although it may increase attendance in the short term.

Food-Assisted Education

An alternative to school feeding are food-assisted education programmes. These are in use where straight school feeding is inappropriate.⁴

- Food for Work can be offered through school committees to improve school classrooms, kitchens and latrines, or drinking water sources.
- Food can support teacher training (eg during a two-week workshop).
- Food can be provided as an incentive to teachers to show up at school regularly, on time, or use new teaching methodologies in the classroom.
- Food can be provided as grants (commodity grants) for school committees to monetise and fund small school improvement projects.

Health Promotion and Care

Issues of health have an immediate impact in creating a safer environment for children to live in – both in the school itself and at home. In-school or accessible health services, such as immunisations, can save children's lives. Health education

³ For more details see SC UK (2002) *Technical Paper: School Feeding Programmes*, Save the Children.

⁴ Adapted from Nazaire, Jennifer (2000) *Selected Targeting and Design Guidelines for School Feeding and Other Food-Assisted Education Programs*, Catholic Relief Services.

TOOLS TO USE

can give children the information to save their own lives. Messages should be age-appropriate, and can be communicated both by teachers and by children themselves. A method called child-to-child, which focuses on peer education, is widely recognised as one of the most effective ways of promoting healthy habits among children. The following priority health themes have been identified to address with children.

Priority Health Themes⁵

Hygiene and Sanitation

- Personal hygiene including care of body, teeth and skin
- Community hygiene, including environmental protection
- Diarrhoea prevention and management
- Worms and parasites

Nutrition

- Good food and nutrition practices
- Breastfeeding
- Food hygiene and safety

Growth and Development

- Growth and development of babies and young children

- Growing and changing through puberty, including sexual awareness
- Safe motherhood, timing births

Serious Communicable Diseases

- Immunisation against 'killer diseases' of babies and young children
- Insect-borne diseases, especially malaria
- Coughs, colds, pneumonia, tuberculosis

Safety and Safe Lifestyles

- Prevention of AIDS and STDs
- Preventing accidents including home and road safety and first aid
- Prevention of substance abuse, including alcohol and tobacco addiction

Walls and Decor

Charts and other learning aids on the classroom walls enhance learning and arouse curiosity, while helping teachers to use interactive learning. There are three methods of making charts and other visual aids for the classroom walls – painting directly on the classroom walls, using stencils, or colouring on heavy paper which is then taped to the walls. These should all be placed on the lower part of the wall, at children's eye-level. Students' work can also be displayed on the walls, giving children a sense of pride in what they have done. Some ideas for wall designs include:

- Number chart (1–100)
- Alphabet chart
- Parts of the body
- Health & hygiene messages
- Common foods
- Basic shapes
- Colour wheel
- Clock face
- Country and world map
- Environmental messages
- Domestic animals

IN THE CLASSROOM

Creating a safe space for children to be in and to learn in in the classroom is equally important as creating that space on the outside. Violence in a society is often reflected in the classroom. This may be found both in the politicisation of what is taught, and in the way in which a teacher controls the students. The presence of military personnel and a culture of intimidation will also affect a classroom, whether they are directly present or not.

⁵ Hawes, Hugh (ed) *Health Promotion in our Schools*, London, Child-to-Child Trust, 1997.

Politicisation

Education, by its very nature, is based on cultural values. When those values include norms of inequity and discrimination, they are often passed from teacher to student. A one-sided view of history or a certain event may be put forth in curricula and books. While content of curriculum matters, so does process. Lessons focused on building peace, but which are delivered within fundamentally intolerant education structures, cancel out much potential positive impact.

Some of the ways that education can be politically negative include:⁶

- The uneven distribution of education as a means of creating or preserving positions of economic, social and political privilege
- Education as a weapon in cultural repression
- Denial of education as weapon of war
- Education as a means of manipulating history for political purposes
- Education serving to diminish self-worth and encourage hate
- Segregation as a means of ensuring inequality, inferiority and stereotypes
- The role of textbooks in inhibiting students from dealing with conflict constructively

While addressing these deep-rooted issues is difficult in the midst of a crisis, it may be that small changes become possible in such times. Actions on a local level could include bringing different ethnic groups of children together for sport or cultural events, teacher training on active learning as a means to encourage participation, or classes on conflict resolution skills for children. Larger-scale actions may involve review of textbooks for biased messages, institutionalising human rights education within the curricula, and advocacy on access or discrimination issues.

Discipline

Children in many contexts describe their poor school experience in terms of teachers failing to respect children – using harsh language and, ultimately, physical violence, against them. Physical punishment may be triggered by many factors – overcrowded classrooms taught by untrained, overworked or underpaid teachers venting their feelings of inadequacy and their frustrations on pupils. The reality of corporal punishment is that it is ineffective, impedes learning, and causes physical and psychological injury. A conflict or disaster just makes the effects of physical punishment all that worse. In identifying new ways of disciplining, several points should be emphasised:

- Giving up corporal punishment does not mean giving up discipline: children need clear limits and guidance on what is right and what is wrong.
- In identifying alternatives, the focus should be to adopt a different approach that affirms children's good behaviour rather than punishing their bad.
- Children should be involved in establishing rules and determining consequences for breaking those rules.

⁶ Bush, Kenneth D and D Saltarelli, 'The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children', Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2000.

Safe spaces for learning should...

Be established as soon as possible following a crisis
 Involve rebuilding of schools only when coupled with quality initiatives
 Immediately identify alternatives when displaced people are housed in schools
 After initial inputs, largely be the responsibility of the community
 Address food, health and environmental needs, and children's need to play
 Make the process of learning safe for children

FURTHER READING

- Bergeron, G and J Del Rosso (2001) 'Food for Education Indicator Guide', Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project, Washington DC, Academy for Educational Development.
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