

Equipping and activating teachers in Honduras to address school-based violence and other crises

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Location	Honduras
Teacher Profile	Host community teachers
Topic	Teacher professional development

DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

The teacher professional development program in this case study helps teachers recognize and talk about their context. It gives them skills to be conflict-sensitive and gain a better understanding of the challenges related to violence—including gender-based violence (GBV) and other crises and how they intersect with education. It promotes social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices that increases their sense of agency and helps them deliver education more effectively.

Education in Honduras faces many challenges. The country is facing very high dropout rates (27% of Honduran youth neither study nor work); low achievement scores, and some of the highest rates in Latin America of illiteracy and inequity. (Inter-American Dialogue 2017) According to data from the Honduran Education Observatory, school enrollment in the two most populous departments (states) of the country has been declining in recent years—from 172,126 students in 2014 to 157,662 in 2019, a decrease of over 8% in enrollment (Moncada 2019). Poor education outcomes are the result of various complex challenges, but have been largely affected by community violence. The Inter-American Dialogue and other studies have found correlation between homicide rates and migration as well as school enrollment. Children and young people (both males and increasingly more females) are targets of gangs that seek to engage them in illicit activities such as extortion and drug trafficking, which allows for community violence to permeate into the schools. A recent internal study by the *Asegurando la Educación* project found that students and teachers experience high levels of insecurity in school premises and on their way to or from school. Over 60% of female students, for example, report perceptions of insecurity in the school

restrooms. Teachers have reported “being afraid of some students” which impedes appropriate delivery of education. Further, the migration crisis affecting Central America is leaving many schools with record number of abandonment rates. An internal census conducted by the *Asegurando la Educación* project last July with principals from 90 schools in the country found that just this year, some of the schools have lost 15% of their student population due to irregular out-migration.

Additionally, 2019 has proved to be particularly challenging for the education sector in Honduras. In April 2019, teachers went on strike in most of the cities where this project operates. Strikes lasted between two and four months in different cities. Thousands of schools remained closed during the strikes as teachers were on the streets often clashing with governmental security forces.



This program gives teachers the tools to promote social-emotional learning and helps them develop restorative practices, increasing their sense of agency.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Docentes por la Paz (“Educators for Peace”, in Spanish) is an empowering and innovative five-module professional development program for public school teachers in Honduras that increases their capacity to provide quality education in contexts of crisis and conflict, and fosters safe learning environments within the education system. This participatory program responds to the need to support teachers as they navigate contexts marked by generalized conflict, violence, and irregular migration and displacement. While the program was originally developed for use in Grades 4 to 9, many schools have expanded it to include teachers from Grades 1 to 3 and Grades 10-12 as well.

The program is part of the USAID- and UNICEF-funded *Asegurando la Educación* project and is based on INEE’s TiCC Framework. Modules are workshop-based, delivered through a cascading method that begins with pedagogical experts from the Ministry of Education’s Directorate General of Professional Development (DGDP) and the district principals, and eventually reaches teachers. While the program has been co-developed and is co-implemented with the DGDP, the project is still working with the Ministry of Education to offer curricular value for teachers in the form of a certification. The project expects this to happen in 2020, which would be an important milestone to mainstream the program. Further, the Pedagogical University has expressed interest in the program as part of their pre-service curriculum.

EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

Outcomes of this program are promising, but evidence is still limited due to ongoing rollout and challenges described to implement the program. Overall, teachers have found *Docentes por la Paz* to be a relevant professional development program that helps them better navigate the challenges in their context (school-based violence, community violence, and other crisis) and consider the program to be of high quality.

USAID’s Monitoring and Evaluation Support for Collaborative Learning and Adaptive (MESCLA) Activity conducted a rapid assessment (which included surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews) of *Docentes por la Paz* reporting the following summary of findings:

Module I. The educator’s role: the educator as a leader in contexts of conflict or crisis (e.g. violence and irregular migration); conflict-sensitive education; psycho-social wellbeing to foster access, retention, and quality in education.

Module II. Rights, violence, and gender: competencies to identify and categorize the types of violence that can affect education, based in a framework of human rights, child protection, and gender-based violence prevention.

Module III. Social emotional learning: educational approach based on fostering social-emotional competencies: a) self-awareness, b) self-management, c) social awareness, d) ability to relate, and e) responsible decision making.

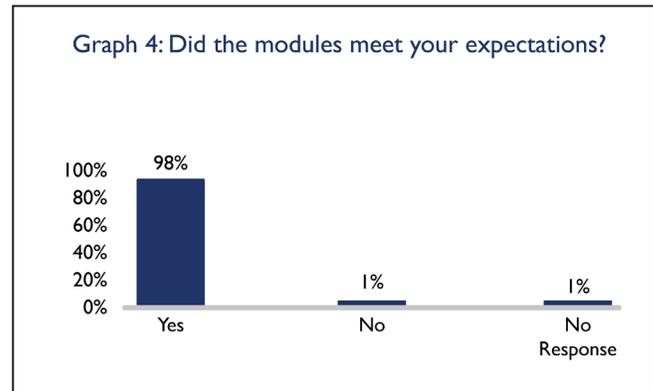
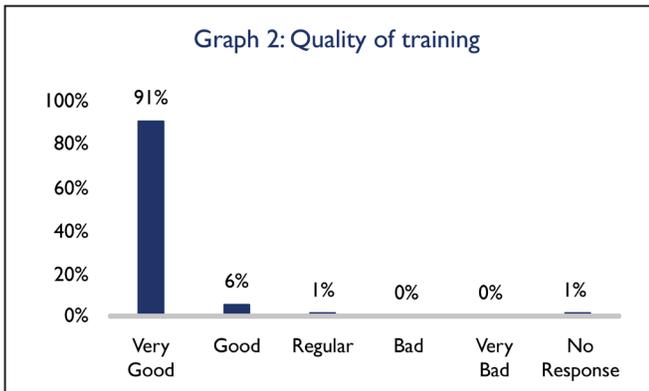
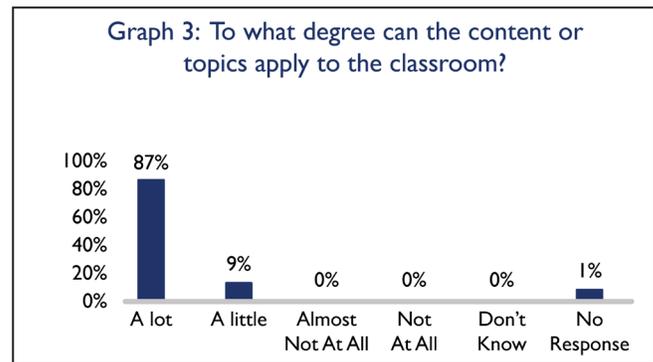
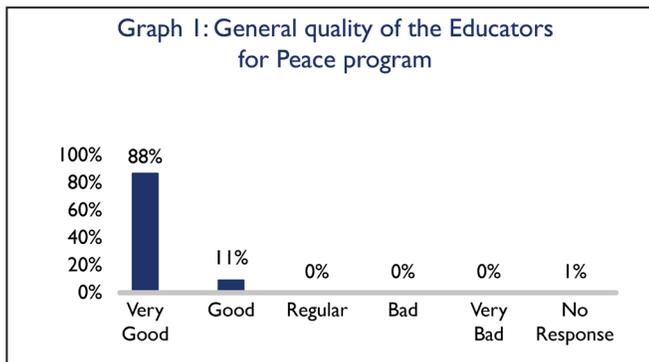
Module IV. Inclusive Education and Migration: knowledge and tools for teachers to actively support students and families to mitigate school dropout due to irregular migration and successfully re-engage student returnees and families.

Module V. Restorative pedagogy: applications of restorative approaches to prevent, manage, mediate and resolve conflicts in the school taking students’ developmental stages into account and reinforcing emotional connection.

The Docentes por la Paz program consists of 80 hours (16 hours / module) and is designed to be delivered in one school year. The interactive training method engages participants actively and is complemented with techniques such as learning circles, action research and, “application in the classroom” commitments.

The results from the assessment show that the training was well received, with 88% of respondents indicating that overall the program was “Very Good” (see Graph 1), and 91% rating the quality of training as “Very Good” (see Graph 2). The responses to the interviews and focus groups highlighted a number of patterns regarding the quality of the Module 1 and Module 2 training. For instance, adapting the training activities and content examples to the specific contexts of their schools allowed the Master Trainers to engage their colleagues/peers more directly—for example, having a safe space for teachers to discuss experiences related to gang threats and strategies to prevent or mitigate them.

With regards to the program’s content and perceived impact, the survey and responses from interviews and focus groups suggest there have been provisional



benefits from the first two modules. In general, 87% of teachers responded that the content or topic applied to the classroom (see Graph 3) and that almost all of the teachers' expectations were met regarding the content (see Graph 4).

Most reported that teachers learned strategies from which to better discern the types of conflict and violence, while others said they benefited from the opportunity to openly discuss such topics among colleagues. Another pattern found in responses was that there were personal changes in attitudes among teachers, yet obstacles did impede the full potential of the program's implementation

LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Below is a brief summary of key challenges to date related to design and evaluation:

1. **Design.** For the first two cohorts of teachers trained in the first two modules, materials developed only included a facilitator's guide, a dense document with key concepts and theories embedded within. For the third cohort of teachers trained, the project identified the need to develop a "Theoretical Framework" to complement the facilitator's guides, which, then, became much more user-friendly. Trainers were

also given additional resources to learn further from specific topics about which they may not be experts (e.g. conflict-sensitive education and gender-based violence). An additional challenge was finding expertise in-country to develop some of the modules. Some of these approaches are new to the country's education system (e.g. SEL or restorative practices), so there is no local expertise. Additional funding could help build sufficient local capacity to support a wide-scale implementation of a program like *Docentes por la Paz* and provide the right levels of technical support to hundreds of school districts and thousands of schools.

2. **Evidence and evaluation.** The data collected to date point mostly to perceived quality and value added of the training, but do not yet extend to impact on key education outcomes such as enrollment, retention, and learning. Evaluating the program has forced us to ask challenging questions, such as "How do we measure changes in the classroom?" and "Is it valid to measure comprehension of new concepts as a proxy for improved teaching?" The project does not have the resources to conduct a thorough evaluation of changes in the classroom so we are conducting only a post-test which is more focused on changes in teachers' knowledge. We remain interested in better understanding the program's impact in the classroom.

One key recommendation is to evaluate the impact of *Docentes por la Paz* at the classroom, school, and community level, especially as it relates to specific contextual challenges. In this case, data from the project's school safety study conducted in 135 schools can serve as baseline. Evidence of impact could help rally key education stakeholders (Ministry, donors, NGOs) behind *Docentes por la Paz* in order to scale up its implementation both for in-service and pre-service training.

While *Asegurando la Educación* is conducting another rapid assessment of *Docentes por la Paz* in October-November 2019, US government funding restrictions for Central America in 2019 limited the ability of the project to conduct a more rigorous impact evaluation. This case study presentation represents an opportunity to call other funders to support the necessary research for *Docentes por la Paz*, which would have implications not only for Honduras but for the region as well.

REFERENCES

Inter-American Dialogue (2017). "Educational Challenges in Honduras and Consequences for Human Capital and Development." <https://www.thedialogue.org/analysis/educational-challenges-in-honduras-and-consequences-for-human-capital-and-development/>

Moncada, Gerardo. "Situación Educativa del Tercer Ciclo." Presentation to Asegurando la Educación staff. May, 2019. Presentation can be found here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZY9G4T3GkS3hijZu00vyM_9WgFoQWYDM/view?usp=sharing

LINKS

- *Docentes por la Paz* Program Brief (2-pager): <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1O-xCmmnFCC0q-YOqb3UOhsF4TGs6GVH/view?usp=sharing>
- About the *Asegurando la Educación* project: <https://www.dai.com/our-work/projects/honduras-securing-education>



Teachers who participate in the program typically report learning strategies from which to better discern the types of conflict and violence present in the classroom

TEACHER PROFILES

Teacher Profile 1

Name: Wendy Azucena Hernández. The preliminary video of her interview can be found here.

General Information: Teacher of 8th grade and Academic Coordinator of “Desarrollo Juvenil” School (located in the community Villafranca, which is dominated by the 18th Street Gang) in Tegucigalpa, Honduras (capital city). She’s been a teacher for 15 years.

How the program has helped: *“Docentes por la Paz has come to strengthen the education triangle that we have: teachers, parents and students.”*

Ms. Hernández was trained as a “Teacher Trainer” in Docentes por la Paz. In addition to strengthening the relationship between key school stakeholders, she believes the program has helped teachers in her school because:

1. It provides a safe space for teachers to talk about topics that are not discussed otherwise
2. Issues discussed help them to be more able to deal with some of the students with challenging behavior
3. It is a way to refresh and gain new knowledge
4. Teachers are now more aware of their own biases and behaviors—she cited an example of another teacher who didn’t get involved with students and has now developed a more nuanced understanding of the context in which students live in and develop empathy.

What she likes the most about being a teacher is: the daily contact with students and being in a position to create positive change. To this, Wendy says “One of the things I love the most about being a teacher is that I know that what I do today with that student is leaving a footprint for what he or she will be able to do with his or her life.”

What she likes the least is: how the teaching profession is undervalued/underappreciated by many in and outside the school, including parents.

Main challenges: “I work in a very unsafe community with large presence of youth who belong to [gang] groups. One of the greatest challenges is how our

youth are “captured” [recruited by gangs]”

What she would change: Wendy thinks the National Basic Curriculum should be re-structured, take the context into account, and be more practical. The curriculum should prepare students for life and offer more hands-on skills.

Teacher Profile 2:

Name: Javier Enrique Ramos

General Info: Teacher of 7th grade in “Justo Rufino Spilbury” School, located in La Ceiba, Honduras (northern coast)

How the program has helped: *“I’ve learned techniques and strategies to better cater to the needs of the children in my classroom, paying special attention to students who display aggressive and violent behavior.”*

In addition to techniques that help Mr. Ramos engage students with aggressive behavior, he reflects on the following benefits of *Docentes por la Paz*:

1. It is motivating to discuss about the “role of teachers in our context” and learn more about other topics such as “children’s rights” and “violence and gender.”
2. He has learned techniques to be a more effective teacher e.g. being more patient and empathic, more effectively engage the family of the student.
3. He is much more aware of children’s rights, particularly to education, which has helped him to be more intentional in his efforts to be inclusive and promote equity in the classroom.

What he likes the most about being a teacher is: teaching students and shaping human lives; sharing my experience with others

What he likes the least is: excessive administrative burden (e.g. reports and documentation) imposed by the education authorities

Main challenges: some students’ behaviors (aggressive and violent) which stems from lack of parental supervision and discipline; family disintegration; poverty and unemployment

What he would change: getting textbooks from the Ministry of Education and getting the Docentes por la Paz materials from the project