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I. Introduction

For many children caught in conflict or exposed to extremist ideas around the world, hate and intolerance is often all they have ever seen and known. These experiences have contributed to a variety of fears and misconceptions they may have of others, which influence their behaviors. These experiences can also create trauma that reinforces the fears and perceptions they have of others (Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014). Unfortunately, unless children are taught another way they will be lost to the viscious cycle of hate and intolerance fueling recurrent conflict in their communities.

The simple lesson that just because someone is different does not make them your enemy can be life changing. And when conflict is all you have ever known, it can be life-saving as well (Ramirez, 2017).

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Jorinand Gorkemwere living in a camp with other families displaced by Da'esh – also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – in northern Iraq. After surviving the attack, these two Yezidi teachers began working with children who had also escaped in makeshift schools throughout the various displacement camps – searching for a way to give these children hope for a better future. Hardwired Global, a non-governmental organization that combats religious oppression by training and equipping indigenous leaders to defend the freedom of conscience and belief for every person, provided these teachers training in how to develop lessons that would teach children to overcome the fear and misconceptions they have of people who may have attacked them or other communities different from their own. And when these severely traumatized children experienced the lessons these teachers shared with them they learned, for the first time, that they were valued, regardless of what they believed, and deserved to be treated with respect and dignity. At the same time, the children were able to work through their trauma and experience positive emotions through the lessons that taught them how to value the freedom of others and live together in peace and dignity.

It was the first time these two former-teachers-turned-refugees or their students had ever heard these rights-based concepts – about human dignity, equality, and the rights of people of different religions and beliefs – and how to apply them in practical ways. As a result, these simple lessons brought the teachers and hundreds of children from many different faith communities who had been displaced by extremists, the hope of a future without violence over religious differences.

The simple lesson that changed the children's lives is aptly called, *The Peaceful Garden*, and it was just the beginning of a project that has expanded into two other countries in the Middle East and North Africa and helped plant the seeds of freedom and dignity in the hearts and minds of many children affected by religious conflict and intolerance across the region.[1]

[1] As background, Jorin and Gorkem (names changed for protection) are members of the Yezidi religious community, an ancient monotheistic faith originating in northern Iraq that was targetted by ISIS because of

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Sidebar: Peaceful Garden Lesson

When they first brought groups of children together, they would take them to a beautiful garden and invite them to make colorful bouquets of flowers. The children were permitted to pick any flower except those of one particular color. When the children came back to the group with their bouquets, they beamed with pride and excitement over their creations. But when they looked back at the garden, they noticed that it was ravaged and had lost its beauty.

Then, Jorin and Gorkem would share how the same thing had happened in their country when ISIS came in – they destroyed everyone except for the people that looked like them. At once, the children's faces would change as they recalled how they had fled from Da'esh and lost everything, even many loved ones.

But the teachers offered them a choice – they could remain with a ravaged garden or could plant seeds to make it beautiful again. The children's enthusiasm would at once return as they realized they could rebuild the garden. And as the teachers handed a packet of seeds to each pair of students – of mixed religious faiths – they asked them to plant them together.

The children worked diligently to rebuild the garden, not realizing that they were doing something much more significant in the process. As they tended their seeds, they learned something new about one another and began the process of overcoming the fears and misconceptions they had of one another. The experience was not only therapeutic, it was life changing.

When the children returned to the garden several weeks later, its beauty was restored. One child shared how he learned that not all Muslims were like Da'esh, that some were forced to flee as well. Another child shared how he realized the importance of protecting freedom for everyone, regardless of what they believe. And the teachers shared that planting the seeds of freedom would be hard, but it will ensure them a future of peace and not destruction (Ramirez, 2016.

II. The Role of Human Rights Education in Countering Extremist Thinking

Jalal and Ghanim stood on the front line of a conflict fueled by intolerance and radical ideology. But these challenges affect society outside the epicenter of war, and they are not unique to any particular region.

Recently, two stories that mirror the challenges of preventing and countering violent extremism faced by leaders around the world have emerged on playgrounds far from each other – one in a country struggling for freedom and one in a country where it abounds:

> *On a playground in San Diego, California, a group of refugee children began fighting. As they were broken up, a teacher overheard one boy say to another that he was part of ISIS and would get him back.*
>
> *Similarly, thousands of miles away on a playground in Erbil, Kurdistan, a group of children were playing a game where they pretended to be members of ISIS. As their teacher drew close to them, she was horrified to see that they were pretending to behead one of the boys.*
>
> *Shocked at what they witnessed, neither teacher knew what to do or how to respond. And they are not alone.*

These children are acting out what they have seen and heard without knowing the implications of what they are doing or how they are being influenced by the most nihilistic form of religious bigotry witnessed in recent human history. Many of these children are scared and traumatized, surviving in an environment hostile to people of diverse religions and beliefs because neither they nor their teachers have the tools needed to respond (Fink et all, 2013) .

The threat of intolerance, extremism and radical ideology is evident everywhere and children are particularly vulnerable to its influence (Ramirez, 2017). As a result, many governments and international organizations are working fervently to address growing concerns about radicalization and intolerance among youth, and its implications for future regional and global security (Adyan, 2012; UNESCO). The classroom is, in many ways, the front line of efforts to prevent and counter radicalization and confront extremist ideologies and the intolerant ideas that threaten the security and stability of a community, region, nation, and the world. It

their reverence for Melek Taus, the peacock angel, who has been confused for Satan by some groups. Because of this, ISIS taught that the group were devil worshippers and justified the killing of their community (Ramirez, 2016).

In mid-2014, ISIS attacked communities across northern Iraq and no one was left unharmed – they slaughtered Shi'a Muslims, placing their bodies along the streets into the city as a warning to all who entered. At the same time, the group forced Christian, Shabak, and Turkmen communities out of dozens of villages in less than 24 hours, confiscating all of their wealth as they fled. And perhaps the most horrifying destruction was left for the small Yezidi community.

When ISIS terrorists entered Sinjar, the area of northern Iraq where most of the Yezidis lived, they had no mercy on the ancient religious community, evidenced by the eighteen mass graves they filled with the bodies of young men who were immediately killed to prevent any resistance. They then took nearly 6,000 women and young girls captive as sex slaves to fuel their need for recruits and at least 900 young boys were captured and sent to jihadist training camps where they adopted the groups nihilistic ideology and hatred for their religious community.

For those who remained in areas under ISIS control, life was harsh. Girls were not permitted in schools and young boys were indoctrinated in the group's extremist ideologies of hate, intolerance and violent extremism. Millions were displaced from the conflict in Iraq and Syria, forcing many children into refugee and displacement camps across the region (Bandow, 2017; Ramirez, 2017).

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is in this context that educators, in particular, have a unique opportunity to counter the ideas which fuel aggression and promote values which foster peaceful, and pluralistic societies.

"Irem" has taught civil education for 12 years in Sinjar, Iraq. A first-hand witness of the takeover by Da'esh, he longs to reclaim the youth of his land from the cycle of hate and intolerance that has led to so much violence and destruction. "The district of Sinjar is multi-religious. We have to get them safe. We have to let the culture of pluralism expand to them." Idrees has witnessed religious persecution first-hand: he watched, holding his children, as ISIS barreled up the road to his city. He protected them as they fled. He experienced a death in the family just before the training described in this paper began, but his loved ones wouldn't hear of him staying home. They felt it was far more important that he work for their future than mourn the past.

Around the world, there seems to be a missing dimension in progress to this end. This led Hardwired to consider two critical questions that grounded the objectives for the project:

How can we build resilience to radicalization among youth if we are unable to identify and address the root causes — the fears, misconceptions, and biases — which fuel extremist ideology?

How can we ensure teachers from the largest cities to the smallest villages are equipped to respond to these challenges and prepare youth to engage in a diverse and pluralistic world?

III. Project Background

a) *Choice of Location*

Based on research and experience in the field of human rights and education in more than 30 countries, with a particular focus on protecting the rights and freedoms of people of different religions or beliefs, Hardwired Global developed a new approach to these challenges. They understood that *how* you teach is equally as significant as *what* you teach. With support from the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Hardwired designed a program to support governments' and educators' efforts to safeguard youth against radicalization and intolerant ideas which fuel conflict — not only in the Middle East in North Africa, but around the world (Ramirez, 2017[1]). This paper presents an evaluation of that project.

Following an initial small pilot with teachers in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, Hardwired recognized the urgent need to expand the program with support from local officials. Hardwired met with educators and officials across the region in the various Ministries of Education, observing similar challenges in several countries. The lack of programs to help children respond to violent extremism created an extremely urgent opportunity to test a rights-based educational program, particularly as children would be emerging from the conflict in Iraq and Syria once the areas were liberated from ISIS and needed immediate support to overcome the indoctrination they experienced.

Therefore, from 2016-2018 Hardwired conducted a Teacher-Training Program to equip teachers in three distinct countries in the region – Iraq, Lebanon, and Morocco – with a rights-based pedagogy and educational resources to integrate greater respect for human dignity, equality, and the rights of people of different religions and beliefs in the culture of the classroom. The countries reflect the diversity of the region and were selected because of the support provided by local officials who were eager to test an innovative new approach to countering violent extremism by building resiliency among youth. These countries also provided an opportunity to assess the broader implications of rights-based education on children affected by extremism or related trauma that could be applied across the region and around the world. Given the challenges to curriculum reform across the MENA region, Hardwired recognized the value of working with teachers in three distinct political and cultural environments to test a rights-based educational program. For this reason, the program differs from other approaches undertaken in the region because it trains educators in a holistic rights-based pedagogy that can be applied in various social, cultural, religious, and national or political contexts. The findings presented in this paper illustrate that countries with various degrees of diversity and stability can exhibit significant developments in their efforts to promote greater respect for the dignity and rights of others through rights-based education. For example, Lebanon is diverse and relatively stable. Iraq is relatively diverse and unstable. Morocco is relatively homogeneous and stable.

b) *Objective and Pedagogy*

The objective of Hardwired's educational program is to provide teachers with tools to lead youth toward a greater respect for the dignity and freedom of people of different religions or beliefs, while at the same time helping teachers promote a positive counter-narrative to the ideas that inspire intolerance and violent extremism. Therefore, teachers are trained to understand the value of the human right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as defined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights(UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as an important foundation for helping students build more inclusive and pluralistic societies that are resilient to the fears and intolerance which fuel violence toward others on the basis of their beliefs(United Nations, 2018).

Importantly, the program does not focus on teaching about religion or belief in any way; rather it focuses on the key concepts inherent to Article 18 and

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related human rights. Similar to general guidelines on national action plans for human rights education, the program was designed to fit within the national, historic, religious and cultural context of each country where it was applied. Moreover, the program established a group of Master Trainers in each country who could develop lessons, train other educators and replicate and sustain the program. These trainers all experienced the process of conceptual change that their students would undergo in their classes.

Hardwired's pedagogy is also unique in that it does not require reforms to curricula or any immediate revision of religious education content. The rights-based pedagogy does not singularly apply to religious education or directly teach about religion. Also, it does not just teach about civics education or focus on inter-faith engagement. Rather, the program uses a pedagogy of conceptual change to promote key concepts inherent to universal human rights that lead youth toward a greater respect for the dignity of others and a greater appreciation for diversity of opinions and ideas. The key concepts include: human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, the human conscience, the expression of beliefs, and the balance of rights and responsibilities that affect how rights may be limited or restricted in certain circumstances to protect the rights of others. At the same time, the program challenges long held and embedded ideologies, misconceptions, and fears in a way that many other programs do not. This is an important distinction since merely teaching about a concept is very different than teaching for conceptual change about a concept that in turn changes behaviors.

Sidebar

"Abel", from Kurdistan, holds a degree in the Sciences and teaches in Imam schools. "I have classes in living together for Islamic children that like to attend lessons in the Mosque after their formal education." Highly cognizant of religious freedom issues from day one of the training, he stated, "There has to be a clear line between freedom of religion and extremism," and, "When someone changes, we need to respect them. They do not present any danger to us when they change …. When you treat people with a bad attitude, you're not doing what your religion is telling you. We have to think all religions are equal and treat people in a good manner."

Hardwired's training model is based on conceptual change theory, which refers to the development of new ways of thinking and understanding of concepts, beliefs, and attitudes (Murphy & Alexander, 2008; Rea-Ramirez, 2008; Orey, 2010; Lundholm & Davies, 2013;. "This occurs through restructuring elements of existing concepts, but goes beyond just revising one's ideologies to actually restructure the underlying concepts used to develop those beliefs (Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2018)" and ultimately one's behavior. Hardwired's published research and application of conceptual change theory to work on freedom of religion or belief and rights education, has allowed a deeper look at the process of conceptually moving from actions based on inherent beliefs to new models of conceptual understanding of others, and directly addresses the issues of intolerance, social conflict, and violent extremism (Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2018). Details about applying conceptual change theory to this area of the social sciences can be found in a recent article published by the authors in the Winter 2017 issue of the Journal of Social Science Education.

Throughout the lessons, students engaged in simulations and activities in small groups where they were encouraged to exchange and challenge each other's ideas. This active engagement is thought to be essential if a basis of pluralism is be be achieved (Harvard, 2018). Importantly, conceptual change is not about changing someone's religion or culture; rather, it is meant to help individuals develop new ways of understanding their religion and culture compared to the rights of people of different religions and beliefs (Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2018). Ultimately, when individuals develop new ways of seeing people of different religions or beliefs and how they should be treated, they also develop empathy toward them and their behavior changes as well, which can create resiliency against extremist ideologies and violence against vulnerable populations.

This paper provides an assessment of the findings of this project and its impact with both teachers and children. This includes details about how the program fostered significant development in students' understanding of and respect for the rights of others, promoted positive behavior toward one another, resilience to extremist ideas, and developed students' ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with people of different religions or beliefs without fear of losing their own identity. One of the most profound findings that will be discussed is the development of empathy in students toward those with different beliefs than their own.

IV. Methodology

A mixed method research model was used to collect and analyze data on the project. This provided not only quantifiable pre-post results but observations and discussions with teachers that supported the findings and provide a rich picture of what is occurring in the region as a result of the program.

a) Three Cycles of Training

Hardwired conducted two training workshops for teachers from Iraq and Lebanon in the first half of 2017 that provided an opportunity for a smaller initial group of seven teachers from each country to attend a

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more intensive five-day training workshop together and then mentor a second set of participants before the larger group of teachers participated in the second two-day training workshop. The initial group of teachers from Lebanon and Iraq (14 total) were taught how to develop lessons which were later used by the broader group of participants. In addition, this initial group were able to serve as mentors to a second group of teachers in their community, as each of the initial participants identified two additional teachers that observed the lessons implemented in their classrooms.

Hardwired then conducted a second phase of training and hosted a three-day workshop for 21 teachers in Lebanon and 22 teachers in Iraq, which included the initial group of 14 teachers and the new teachers they had recruited. The training supported returning teachers' ongoing development and leadership as they helped to facilitate the learning of new teachers. In August 2017, Hardwired facilitated one intensive five-day training for 12 additional teachers from Morocco.

Following each training, teachers returned to their classrooms to implement lessons and share what they learned with other teachers and administrators in their schools, conduct pre- and post- surveys to measure conceptual change in students, and make detailed observations of student responses during the Spring of 2017, Fall 2017 and Winter 2018 school terms. Moroccan teachers implemented lessons in a human rights club and informal educational settings. Throughout this process, the teachers participated in group conference calls to share best practices, challenges, and to discuss new opportunities that created a strong support network for ongoing collaboration with one another in each country.

During the Spring of 2017, 14 teachers implemented lessons they developed with their students. In the Fall of 2017, all 55 teachers implemented the same lesson, a simulation called Sanctuary Island, that was also one the teachers had experienced as part of the training course. The Sanctuary Island lesson was taught over five days. This enabled a more accurate assessment of the impact of the lessons on students from different countries. In the Winter of 2017, some teachers had an opportunity to conduct a second lesson with the same group of students from the Fall 2017 class to provide additional longitudinal data of the impact of multiple lessons on children and whether the initial conceptual change was maintained over time.

b) Participants

Participants included students in classes taught by the teachers trained. The classes included a variety of makeups including all one religion and one gender, mixed religions and mixed gender, mixed religions and one gender, and one religion and mixed genders. Students ranged from 9 to 20 years of age, with an average age of 14.4 and were grouped in similar ages within each class. A number of the classes were conducted in displaced person communities while others were in government public schools, private, and private religious schools (see Figure 1).

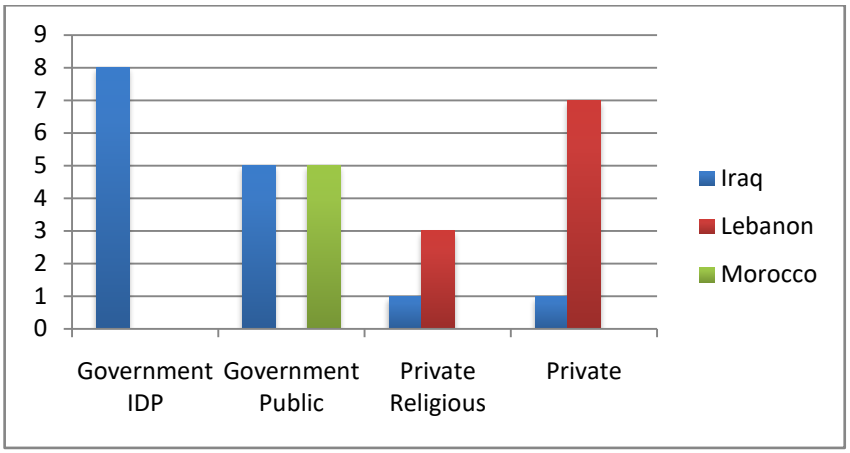


Figure 1: Breakdown of participants by type of school.

The classes in government schools in Iraq included those set up for displaced students especially from Sinjar and Mosul. Teachers from the affected areas often were also displaced and taught in these schools. Amman was from Mosul and taught in an IDP school in Erbil. He has since returned to Mosul working in a school for students who lived under ISIS. Four other schools for displaced students were started in Dohok and teachers from the program taught students who were displaced from Sinjar and Ninewah/Mosul. Three additional schools in Bashiqa were created for students displaced from Mosul.

In Lebanon, while schools were not created strictly for displaced children, three of the government public schools included refugees from Syria and one school for refugees from Palestine.

While the majority of students were from Muslim or Christian religions, a wide variety of faith groups were

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represented (Figure 2). All students in the schools in Morocco were Muslim. The Yezidi were all in Kurdistan, and the Druze in Lebanon. Other groups were mixed in classes throughout Lebanon and Iraq.

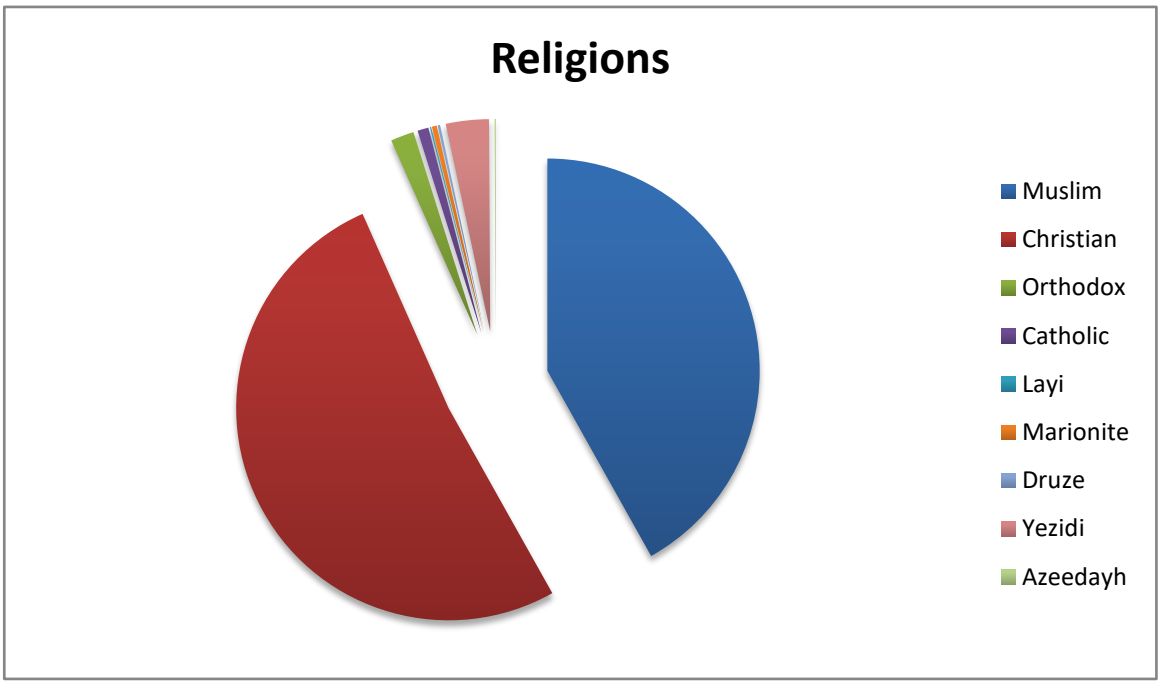


Figure 2: Designation of religious affiliation as self declared by participants.

Of the 1161 students in the program who completed the required pre and post survey there were more females than males, 673 to 488.

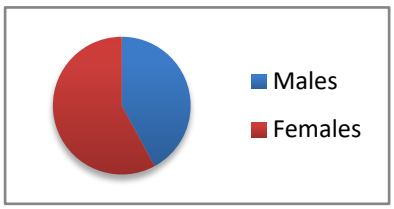


Figure 3: Mix of males and female participants

The lessons were carried out in a variety of subject area classes. These included Islamic Studies, Christianity, Medicine, Mathematics, Civics, Geography, History, Arabic, Art, Social Studies, Biology, and Math.

V. Data Collection and Analysis

The evaluation of student learning was carried out using a mixed method approach drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data consisted of instructor comments, observations, and web conference discussions collected over the year. Quantitative data consisted of a scenario-based survey that addressed key concepts relating to greater respect for human dignity and the rights and freedoms of others. These key concepts included: human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, the human conscience, the expression of beliefs, and the balance of rights and responsibilities that affect how rights may be limited or restricted in certain circumstances to protect the rights of others. The survey included nine scenarios and was given prior to the lessons and immediately following them by all teachers. Each scenario reflected one or more key concepts and assessed how students would respond to situations that affected the rights of women, minority communities, people of different religions or beliefs and ethnicities, violence, and a variety of challenges in society.

Answers to scenarios were based on a conceptual scale of naïve to sophisticated, measuring students' knowledge of and attitudes toward these concepts and situations. Teachers introduced the survey by explaining that it was not a test and that there are no right or wrong answers. This was found after the very first pilot in Iraq, to be important since students were used to giving answers that they believed were "right" or what the teacher wanted rather than their feelings, and authentic, candid answers were important to truly understand the concepts students held. The survey provided an understanding of where students were on a continuum or scale. The survey therefore provided a useful tool for teachers to assess what concepts they needed to focus on during the course of their lessons and how to assess whether students better understood those concepts by the end of the lesson, as well as providing an evaluation of the training and lessons.

Figure 4depicts the continuum of conceptual understanding one would expect a student with naïve, intuitive, developed, or sophisticated knowledge,

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attitudes, and beliefs to use in a scenario. Since the model is based on conceptual change, it is not expected that every element at one level is expressed at a single time. Some students may hold attitudes, ideas, and perceptions that cross two levels as they are developing new understanding and ways of thinking about the key concepts (Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez).

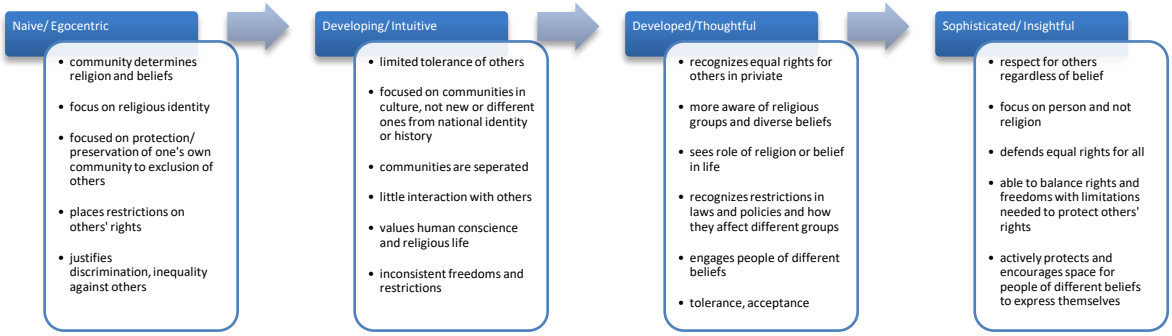


Figure 4: Levels of the Conceptual Change Continuum for Understanding of FORB (adapted from Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2017)

In addition to the survey, qualitative data was an essential tool for assessing conceptual change among students as it helped explain changes seen in the survey. Teachers were trained to make observations of student comments and behaviors throughout the program. This was also modeled in each of the workshops they attended. Teachers shared feedback in monthly webinars with the trainers and discussed their observation of how students were responding, in particular by explaining the logic that student's used to explain their ideas. As students began to change their way of thinking and seeing people of different religions or beliefs, teachers were able to report what led to those changes and examples of how their behavior reflected the application of their new ideas and understanding.

Quantitative data from the pre-post survey was analyzed using a t-Test on aggregated data from all participants in the student groups. It was then analyzed by individual teacher class, by gender, by country, and by religion. Comparative analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a difference in results by gender, religion, or homogenous classroom makeup. Finally, data was analyzed across the pilot sessions for Spring 2017, Fall 2017, and Winter 2018 to determine whether repeated lessons had an effect on student conceptual change. Qualitative data was coded and analyzed for patterns and trends.

VI. Findings and Discussion

Trained teachers implemented lessons with a total of 1161 students throughout the year. Some students, the Winter 2018 group, received instruction in more than one lesson, allowing for the analysis of students across multiple lessons and time. Every student in the Fall of 2017 went through the same lesson, Sanctuary Island, in each country, which provided an opportunity to compare data across countries more accurately. (A description of the Sanctuary Island lesson taught to all students in the Fall of 2017 is available in the JSSE article published in Winter 2018). Based on the initial survey and teacher observations, a benchmark arose for how students' perceived people of different religions and beliefs that was important for how teachers then engaged students throughout the lessons.

In general, most teachers recognized that one of the greatest challenges for their students was the lack of diversity or engagement with people different from them, and the reinforcement of negative perceptions by their families, culture and society. In some cases, schools were the only place children of diverse religions and beliefs interacted, but in many cases communities were so isolated from one another that schools were also segregated. Teachers made the following observations about their students in light of the lack of interaction with people of different religions or beliefs:

- Children have many incorrect ideas about the beliefs and practices of others who believe differently
- Children often exhibit less or no respect for others who think differently than them
- Children often do not trust people from different faiths or interact with them
- Minority students feel like they are unable to share their experience with others
- Majority students believe they are superior to minority students

a) Misconceptions and Fears

The general fears and misconceptions children have of others emerged from the discussions that occurred during the lessons. While student behavior and challenges differed by country and even by region within each country, the underlying fears, biases, and misconceptions influencing student opinion and behavior remained consistent with what Hardwired has observed and documented in more than 30 countries around the world.

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Table 1: The most common fears and misconceptions teachers reported among students.

They fear the judgment and mistreatment of people who are different from them, regardless of whether they are in the minority or majority.	
They are afraid of others justifying violence against them based on their religion and are uncertain about the future for their community.	
They fear they will lose their beliefs or be forced to change their religion or identity	
They feel they lack the skills and understanding to respond when their religion, beliefs, or identity are threatened by others.	
Misconceptions about others	
About others and other religions	Belief that some religions can justify intolerance or violence toward others
	Belief that the majority will never accept their rights
	Belief that segregating religious communities reflects freedom and equality
	Belief that people who wear the headscarf are too religious or conservative or people who do not are too liberal. The same was said about those who fast.
About human rights related to the protection of people of different religions or beliefs	Freedom of religion is misused to force people to change their religion
	Belief that extremism is justified under freedom of religion.
	Belief that freedom protects religion and religious ideas.
	Belief in many restrictions on public expression of religion.
	Belief that they are judged only on the basis of their religious identity.
	Religious freedom is equivalent to tolerance.

Importantly, the growing comfort in hearing and learning about the different ways people express their beliefs did not change students' own basic religious beliefs. One of the teachers expressed this well when describing what she observed in her classroom. She said, "Students realized they didn't have to change their religion."

b) *Conceptual Change in Content, Attitudes, and Beliefs*

Evaluation of pre- and post- survey data indicates students entered the program primarily in the *Naive* and*Intuitive* stages of understanding. Within a short period of time, students reached *Developed* and *Sophisticated* stages of understanding in some areas, indicating a statistically significant level of conceptual change about the many fears and misconceptions they have regarding others.

Paired t-test on aggregate student data indicated that the pre-post change was extremely statistically significant, with a p value of 0.0001 (Table 2). This suggests that conceptual change in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs occurred at a significant level, which has been supported by the qualitative data assessed as well.

Table 2: Paired *t* test results PRE-POST Test Aggregated Student Data

Spring 2017	The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0012
Fall 2017	The two-tailed P value is less than 0.0001
Winter 2018	The two-tailed P value equals 0.0001

Data from the lessons taught in the Spring of 2017 indicated significant statistical change particularly in questions 2 and 3. Question 2 was a measure of the concepts of non-discrimination, expression, and limitations, while question 3 was primarily concerned with non-discrimination and expression.

Data from the lesson teachers conducted in Fall 2017 with 654 students indicated that they demonstrated extremely statistically significant changes in questions relating to non-discrimination (questions 2 and 9), conscience (question 1), expression (questions 1), and balance of rights and limitations (questions 1 and 2). The average pre-score placed students in the naive to intuitive levels on the conceptual change continuum. The average post-score placed students in the developed level, and some students reaching the sophisticated level on individual questions, although aggregated data did not indicate any reached the sophisticated level overall.

As an example of this positive change, Question 2 asks students how they will respond to a hypothetical situation where they are being discriminated against by teachers and students at school. The situation posed is uncomfortable because it is an attack on their religious identity and beliefs. The responses range from acting in retribution and anger to dialogue and understanding. It is significant that students responded in the pre-survey with a negative reaction, and in the post-survey they responded in a more measured approach that sought to deflate the situation and build bridges and understanding in the school among people of different beliefs. Instead of responding to the situation by calling for greater restrictions on what others say, the students

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opted for responses that opened the door for meaningful dialogue and avoided the slippery slope of retribution which often leads to greater restrictions on or threats to everyone's freedom over time by creating a hostile and vindictive environment. While 38% of students were in the naïve level on the pre test, by the post test this had dropped to 28% and the percent in the developed level increased from 57% to 66%.

In Question 9, students were asked how they would respond to a hypothetical situation involving discrimination against girls in the classroom. The initial responses reflected common attitudes that force girls to be quiet observers in the classroom and not learn how to speak up for themselves because they are considered more emotional or incapable than boys. However, importantly, those attitudes were significantly changed over the course of the lesson so that post-survey responses reflected attitudes whereby girls would be given equal opportunities in the classroom and be considered for classroom responsibilities for their abilities and not gender. On the post-survey 84% of students scored at the developed or sophisticated level while only 17% scored at the naïve or intuitive levels. This was a positive movement from the pre survey where 25% scored in the naïve and intuitive area and 75% in the developed and sophisticated area. The greatest change in this area occurred in the male students, even in all male classrooms.

In Question 1, the concepts of conscience, expression, and balance of rights were all considered. The hypothetical scenario involved someone sharing an inspirational story from their faith on their social media. Students were asked how they felt about public expressions of faith such as this. Initial responses showed a lack of support for the public expression of different beliefs and even discomfort about such diversity in the public space. However, on post-surveys, student attitudes shifted, where they increasingly supported the sharing of personal faith in the public square and did not feel threatened by it. This shift, from an aggregated average of 2 to an average of 3, coupled with the other quantitative data, exemplified a movement toward greater pluralism and respect for diversity in their communities.

Students demonstrated a smaller, but still significant, positive change in two questions relating to non-discrimination (questions 5 and 7). Both questions involved acceptance and inclusion of girls or people of different religions and beliefs in the life of the community and school. The average pre-score was relatively high at the developed level (3), which is positive. However, this may suggest that students were either overrating their attitudes in the pre-survey or they were genuinely more developed in their understanding of the concepts addressed in these questions. Post-score averages placed students slightly higher within the developed level. This was particularly marked in students moving from the intuitive to developed level. On question 5 the percent of students in the naïve level remained the same throughout at 3% while the percent of students scoring at level 3, developed/thoughtful, moved from 58% in the Winter of 2018 from 75% on the post in Fall of 2017 and the percent of students in the sophisticated/insightful level increased from 17% to 28%. This suggests students were moving in a positive direction from the developed/thoughtful to sophisticated level of conceptual change. On question 7 the number of students in the naïve range also remained the same, at 7%. However, the percent of students in the developed/ thoughtful range increased from 19% to 30% after the second lesson.

Overall, students moved from the naïve and intuitive/developing levels into the developed/thoughtful levels at significant rates. While overall students did not show sophisticated/insightful levels on aggregated data, individual students did score in this range on specific questions such as questions 5 and 7 mentioned above. Table 3 shows the total number of students who scored in each conceptual change level. Table 4 presents the percentages at each level. This indicates that students scoring at the naïve level (1) moves downward as students complete one and then two lessons from 7% initiall to 1% after lesson two in the Winter of 2018. Percentages are used to show this change since the number of students in the Fall cohort was considerably more than in the Winter cohort, 654 to 172.

Table 3: Number of students at each conceptual change level on pre and post surveys in 2017 and 2018.

CC Level	LESSON ONE		LESSON TWO
	Pre N	Post 17 N	Post 18 N
1 (Naïve)	43	10	2
2 (Intuitive)	264	199	48
3 (Developed)	347	445	122
4 (Sophisticated	0	0	0

Table 4: Comparison of conceptual change on pre and post tests indicating positive movement away from the naïve and intuitive levels to the developed level over two lessons.

	LESSON ONE		LESSON TWO
CC Level	PRE	Post	Post
1	7%	2%	1%
2	40%	30%	28%
3	53%	68%	71%
4	0%	0%	0%

Data from the second lessons teachers conducted in Winter 2018, although fewer classes in all, indicated similar results. Students demonstrated

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significant conceptual change on all questions, especially by progressing from the Intuitive to Developed level of understanding and moving out of the naïve and intuitive conceptual change categories. Finer analysis within each category also showed movement. That is, while a student may have stayed within Category 2, they, for example, moved from a 2.0 to a 2.6 indicating movement in conceptual change understanding.

Importantly, these changes along the continuum from naïve to sophisticated occurred with only a few hours of instruction in the material. Students that received additional instruction, even in lessons that lasted only a couple of additional hours, exhibited continuous growth in understanding of the key concepts. This may also be in part due to a change in the culture of the classroom, which can be a result of additional teacher training as well.

c) Gender and Religion

In each country, male and female students made significant developments in their understanding of the key concepts about respect for the rights and freedoms of people of different religions or beliefs. Responses to survey questions on non-discrimination, particularly in the area of women's rights, yielded the most significant positive change. Male students from all classes showed the most significant change in this area. This reflects an important relationship between education in the area of pluralism and women's rights.

Classes were comprised of both mixed-gender and single-gender as well as mixed-religion and single-religion students. Analysis of student responses indicates mixed-gender classes exhibited more significant conceptual change than all-male or all-female classrooms (Table 3). This is likely because there is greater exchange of and challenges to ideas, which, in turn, allows for greater conceptual change and development among students. This was more obvious in the Spring 2017 group, while in the Fall and Winter groups both all-male and all-female classes also exhibited positive conceptual change. It suggests that the attitudes and modeling of the teachers who had participated in multiple trainings may have a positive effect on the attitudes in the classroom.

Table 5: Data Analysis by Gender

Gender	Females	Males
Spring 2017	P = 0.0019	P = 0.0022
Fall 2017	P = 0.0001	P = 0.0001
Winter 2018	P = 0.0001	P = 0.0003

While the Spring 2017 data had showed that mixed-religion classes exhibited greater conceptual change than single religion classes, there was no significant difference among the various religions represented in single-religion classroom data in the Fall and Winter (Table 6). The difference in all Muslim and all Christian classes was not significant and the degree could be due to other factors such as age or makeup of the class. In Winter 2018, we recognized a positive trend toward more significant conceptual change among single-religion classes. This is likely because students tested during Winter 2018 had completed a second lesson within a six month period and exhibited significant positive conceptual change as a result of the multiple learning opportunities. It may also indicate greater modeling by teachers throughout instruction rather than just during the specific lessons lessons. After the Spring lessons, teachers were again trained and trainers worked with them on ways to challenge student ideas even in classes that were all one religion. This will be followed in subsequent research as it is a positive effect of the training that should be emphasized if it does indeed exist.

Table 6: Data Analysis by Religion

Religion	Mixed	All Muslim	All Christian
Spring 2017	P = 0.005	P = 0.4679	P = 0.8686
Fall 2017	P = 0.0001	P = 0.0001	P = 0.0076
Winter 2018	P = 0.0033	P = 0.0025	P = 0.0001

It was found that when there was mixed-gender and mixed-religion in a class there was the most significant positive conceptual change. This supports the assumption that the program has the greatest effect in an environment where students with different experiences, perceptions and ideas can challenge each other and listen to one another. Figure 5 shows the number of classes in each category that showed positive conceptual change or showed negative/no change. This suggests that positive movement in conceptual change was made in primarily the mixed religion and mixed gender classes, while negative or no change was more often seen in the classes where there was only one religion and one gender. While positive movement was noted in three of the 10 same religion/same gender classes, this was the lowest percent of positive change. When percentages of positive movement in conceptual change are analyzed, both religion/both gender same classes are much lower than all mixed classes.

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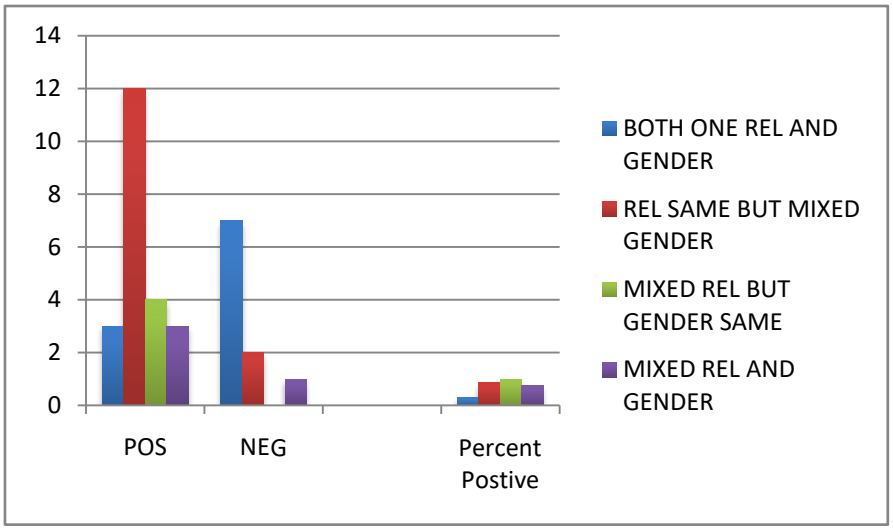


Figure 5: Comparison of effects on conceptual change by class makeup

This data was reinforced by the qualitative data collected. For instance, following her second lesson, Samar observed students exhibit greater respect for the practices of others who believe differently from them. "I observed students having more respect for girls who wear hijabs than before," she said. "They did not just respect them, but they accepted them."

Moreover, Samar reported greater respect for gender equality in her classroom. She observed, "Boys listen to girls more and their voice is equal."

d) Development of Empathy

While many of the students came from classroom makeups with one gender and/or one religion, they began to form empathy toward other participants as they shared experiences and were confronted with, not just others beliefs, but their own deep feelings of isolation and oppression. This was supported by teachers as they described students' reactions to the simulations and activities as well as their personal experiences that they discussed. The concept of empathy was new to many, especially those who were in the homogeneous schools. In schools where they began to recognize intolerance toward minorities, students began to stand up for the rights of others who believed differently than themselves, showing that they had developed a degree of empathy even with one lesson experience.

Teachers shared their experiences with evidence of this change. Several teachers commented that students had never responded to a lesson with such enthusiasm and excitement before. When the teachers called for a break in the lesson, the students objected and insisted they continue the activities. In one classroom when the students discussed how to share about Article 18 with others, they suggested creating a booklet or story book to share with other students who could not participate in their classroom. In another, a teacher related that students are more involved with one another after the lesson, and students who previously remained in more isolated groups walk home together and interact with one another more freely. These provided examples that students were beginning to understand and feel what others were feeling even though their beliefs may be different.

Other examples that support the development of empathy among students include:

- A teacher from Lebanon who had one of the more diverse classes, said that his students were hesitant to immediately accept others. They were suspicious of others and projected their personal feelings into the lesson (expressed their suspicion of others). He said these students gradually became less suspicious of others and more willing to work with students from different groups as the lesson progressed. He stated: "This lesson helped them understand and accept each other and were less isolated." This observation is consistent with one of the main objectives of the lesson, which discourages isolation as a means to avoid conflict, and encourages engagement and interaction with those who believe differently from you. H. --- Lebanon
- Another teacher, stated, "There is a group of Syrian refugees in the village who are Muslim, and the [Christian] students at the school did not often interact with them or include them. In fact, they would refuse to participate in activities together. After the lesson, we had a large celebration. My students wanted other children from the refugee community to participate in the celebration. They said, 'We learned we need to be together.'" The teacher along with parents and other teachers worked together to have a small celebration in conjunction with the second session to make it

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more of a celebration and include the community more broadly. S. -- Iraq

- One teacher's lesson included 5 teachers, including the school director, as observers. The teacher noted that students were very engaged in the subject matter of the lesson, and one student asked: "If Article 18 protects us, then why do Christians experience persecution in so many places?" (students were able to relate the lesson to their lives). In response, the teacher. encouraged students to discuss their own rights as well as the rights of other with their peers. She then encouraged students to share ideas about how they would describe or teach others about Article 18, and students came up with ideas about how to implement these lessons in other classrooms and share about Article 18 through videos and media. L. -- Lebanon

Empathy was also noted in the survey results. Initial pre survey responses to scenarios in many questions reflected students' desire for retribution, fear of others, desire to remain separate, and disinterest in standing up for others when they are attacked or discriminated against. The initial responses also exhibited a general inability to dialogue, which is an important factor heightening fears and tensions among different communities. Lack of understanding in situations has been an important factor in the cycle of intolerance and contributed to hostility and violence, and susceptibility to the ideas that lead to extremism. Students' marked growth in empathy to others reflected in the highly significant changes between the pre and post survey, coupled with the behavioral changes exhibited in their ability to dialogue and mitigate tensions, even when personally offended or hurt. These are important indicators of the likelihood they will not respond out of fear and violence but with understanding and peace when faced with difficult challenges or extremist ideas.

One teacher (K – Iraq) implemented lessons in a school for students from mixed religious and ethnic communities displaced by ISIS in northern Iraq. Prior to the lessons, students in the school had congregated with other students from their own religion, and there was a distinct separation between religious and ethnic groups. He was one of the teachers who had shared his concern in the training over whether students would be able to overcome their deep seated fears of one another, including the fear of retribution among Muslims, and fear of continued violence among the groups targeted by ISIS. However, during the lesson, the teacher was surprised and impressed by how open students were with one another.

After the lesson, he noticed students started to engage with others who were different from them, both in and out of the classroom, which had not happened before. The lesson broke down huge barriers between students from different religious groups who were fearful of one another, particularly in the wake of ISIS. Following the lesson, some students returned to their homes, including one Yezidi boy who returned to Sheikan with his family. The teacher related how Muslims returning to the Yezidi area were being shot and killed and he had expressed his own fear that he would not be able to bring his family back to the area once the conflict ended. Therefore, he was amazed when Muslim and Christian students wanted to visit their Yezidi friend in his home, and asked the teacher if they could arrange a class trip to Sheikan.

Throughout the program, this teacher observed his students become less violent toward one another. "Following the events of ISIS in 2014, students were shocked and had negative ideas about others," he said. "They hated one another and wanted to retaliate against others with violence. Through the lessons we implemented with them, they changed their ideas. Now my students have a positive view about diversity of religions and they want to share with others."

e) Effect of Program in Displaced Persons

Conceptual change was also measured in the schools for displaced persons to see whether students who had experienced violence and relocation were affected differently than those in other private or government schools (Figure 6). The data showed similar results in that statistically significant positive change was noted in classes in IDP schools where either the religion or gender or both were mixed. In those schools where there was only one religion and one gender less movement was noted. This may be due to the lack of opportunities for students to be challenged with new revelations and ideas by students with differing belief systems and ideologies.

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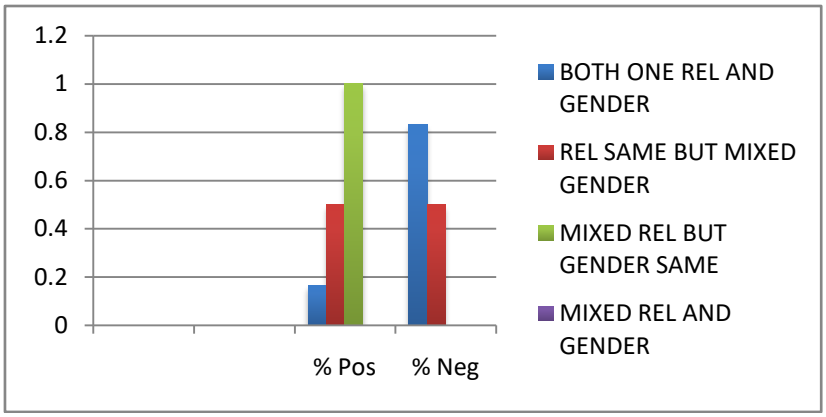


Figure 6: Percent of positive gains seen in IDP schools by makeup of classes.

It was particularly interesting whether conceptual change in the schools for displaced persons where students had experienced violence and relocation was different than conceptual change in other private or government schools. The analysis showed similar results in that statistically significant positive change was noted in classes in IDP schools where either the religion or gender or both were mixed. In those schools where there was only one religion and one gender less movement was noted. When all schools were analyzed together the groups that showed the least conceptual change were those with all one religion and all one gender (Figure 7). Again, this may be due to the lack of opportunities for students to be challenged with new revelations and ideas by students with differing belief systems and ideologies. Even though these homo geneous class showed negative or no change, teachers still noted that students made major changes in their thinking and in how they treated each other after the lessons, indicating more change than the quantitative data showed. It is possible that students overrated their conceptual level at the beginning or that conceptual change was occurring within a level that did not measure as statistically significant.

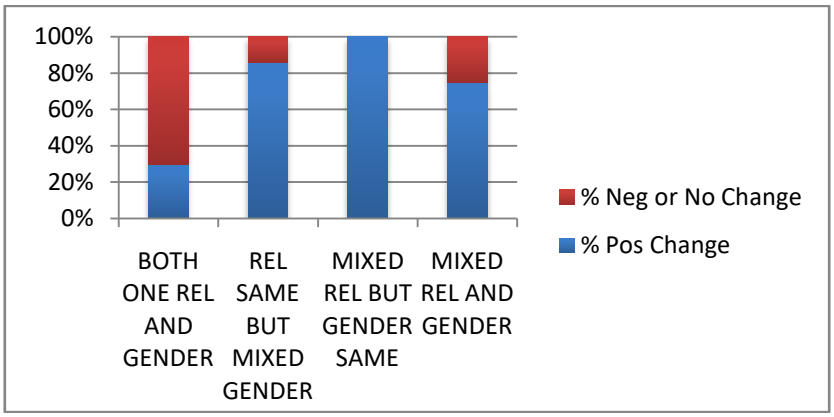


Figure 7: Results by class makeup for all schools together, IDP and other government and private, for the Fall 2017 cohort showing higher percentage of positive results in mixed classes

Analysis of pre post results for the 259 IDP students in the Fall 2017 cohort indicated statistically significant gains with a $p = 0.0001$. The questions that showed the most change were questions 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9. This is consistent to results from all students in private and government schools. These particularly dealt with non-discrimination, conscience, and expression. This was consistent with other government and private schools.

f) Inclusion of Religious Diversity

Analysis reflected an increase in conceptual change about the concepts of human dignity and equality related to greater acceptance and inclusion of people belonging to different religions and beliefs living in their community throughout the program. This data was also reinforced in the observations made by teachers. For example, one teacher (S.– Lebanon) implemented a lesson among Christian students in a community with a significant Syrian refugee population. "There is a group of Syrian refugees in the village who are Muslim, and the [Christian] students at the school did not often interact with them or include them," she said. "In fact, they would refuse to participate in activities together. After the lesson, we had a large celebration. My students wanted other children from the refugee community to participate in the celebration. They said, '*We learned we need to be together*.'"

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g) Human Dignity and Equality

Teachers also reported that lessons created an opportunity for students to apply the key concepts of human dignity and equality to discussions on other associated rights — including the rights of women and gender equality, individuals of different sexual orientations, and ethnic minority groups — in a safe a non-threatening environment. Many teachers reported this was the first time they heard their students speak openly and honestly about these often sensitive issues.

Teachers observed that, as their students developed greater respect for their peers on the basis of their human dignity, they exhibited greater empathy for others regardless of gender, religion or ethnicity.

h) Impact of Lessons Over Time

Students continued to exhibit positive conceptual change over time. While average pre-post scores indicate a positive conceptual change for all students through each lesson, evaluation of data from students who completed more than one lesson suggests ongoing learning opportunities foster cumulative development along the conceptual change continuum.

Data from Fall 2017 and Winter 2018 from classrooms with paired students was compared to measure conceptual change. Due to time constraints, only data from five classes was collected in time for accurate comparison. When comparing the post survey for the second lesson to the post survey of the first lesson, four out of five of the classes showed significant change.

This suggests that 78% of students who experienced a second lesson exhibited greater understanding and respect for the rights and freedoms of people from different religions or beliefs. It also leads to the suggestion that students need to engage with the key concepts during repeated sessions over time. It is expected that while the average score on the second post test placed students in the *Developed* to *Sophisticated* level of conceptual understanding, as students engage in more lessons over time, they will continue this positive conceptual change movement.

VII. Conclusion

In 2016-2018 a total of 1161 students in Iraq, Lebanon, and Morocco participated in a rights based program that included lessons on freedom of religion or belief. Classes varied from all one religion and one gender, to mixed classes, either mixed gender, mixed religion, or both. Students ranged in age from 9 to 20 with an average age of 14.6 years.

Lessons were based on Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and a pedagogy based on conceptual change theory. It used a pedagogy to promote key concepts inherent to universal human rights that lead youth toward a greater respect for the dignity of others and a greater appreciation for diversity of opinions and ideas. The key concepts included: human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, the human conscience, the expression of beliefs, and the balance of rights and responsibilities that affect how rights may be limited or restricted in certain circumstances to protect the rights of others. At the same time, the program challenged long held and embedded ideologies, misconceptions, and fears in a way that many other programs do not. Perhaps the most significant finding of this program is that all of these developments were achieved without addressing the content of religious education or undertaking broad curriculum reforms. Moreover, students in diverse education settings and in diverse cultural, historical and political contexts experienced similar statistically significant conceptual change and development in their respect for the rights of others. The program can easily be adapted to a variety of environments and local contexts. In addition, the program can be integrated into any subject area as we have seen, not restricted to religion classes.

Significant statistical conceptual change was measured in aggregated data for each cohort with a p's between 0.0012 in the Spring of 2017 to 0.0001 in both the Fall of 2017 and the Winter of 2018 indicating a positive conceptual change. This change was measured against the conceptual change continuum that measured student knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs from Naïve to Intuitive/Developing, to Developed, to Sophisticated. Collectively students did not reach the Sophisticated level, although individual students scored in this level on specific questions. Most students moved from the Naïve and Intuitive levels into the Developed levels. However, movement in a positive direction within one level was also noted.

Classes that were composed of a mixture of religions and/or gender showed greater growth than those where all students were the same religion and same gender. This suggests that the makeup of the class may allow for greater challenging of divergent ideas and ideologies, leading to greater chance for conceptual change. This same pattern was found in schools comprised primarily of displaced persons.

Students' perceptions of and behavior toward one another were transformed. Rather than forming their ideas or actions according to biases, misconceptions, or fears they had about others, they responded to one another with empathy and respect. Evidence of the development of empathy was noted in both the responses to the survey and the anecdotal evidence from the teachers. Students scored at higher conceptual change levels that expressed that they

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would support another student's right to express their beliefs even if the student believed differently. Examples were expressed of students reaching out to refugee students and embracing students who they previously feared or mistrusted. This also included a decrease in specific incidents of violent retribution.

Overall, the program showed significant positive results with students showing increased appreciation for the rights of others, inclusion of religious diversity, and the importance of human dignity. The program has demonstrated that rights-based education can influence significant social developments in a short period of time where curriculum reform and broad coalition efforts could not. It can be applied to any cultural, political, or social framework — in the Middle East and North Africa and more broadly around the world.

Implications

Through intensive teacher training and development of teaching resources for students, educators in various settings can prepare youth for a diverse and pluralistic world, strengthen their resilience to extremist ideas, and ensure greater protection of the rights of all people. The program has gained interest by educators and officials in additional countries, including Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. The Ministry of Education in the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq issued a letter of intent to partner with Hardwired to train its teachers to promote greater respect for the dignity and rights of all Iraqis through the new religious education curricula and distribute activity books promoting these values to 1.8 million students in the region.

Since results suggested that the most conceptual change occurred in mixed classrooms (gender and/or religion), it may be important to find ways for teachers in very homogeneous classes to collaborate with a class that has more diversity so that students can exchange ideas and challenge one another. Since some of these schools were remote, it may require investigating ways to use technology as a vehicle to engage different groups.

Further work in the area is expected to provide longitudinal data that will help us gain greater understanding of the effects of the rights based curriculum. It is also important to continue to investigate the effect on specific situations such as the integration of children who were indoctrinated into violence by ISIS and who are now returning to schools and communities in the region. It is also important to implement and test the curriculum in other countries outside those in the midst of violent situations but where the roots of intolerance and misconceptions exist.

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