A Co-designed Blended Approach for Teacher Professional Development in Contexts of Mass Displacement

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Location	Lebanon
Teacher Profiles	Refugee teachers and host community teachers
Topic	Teacher professional development

DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Teachers in contexts of mass displacement respond to unique needs of learners, and observe and experience situations that require responses beyond teaching and learning activities. In addition to the lack of resources and poor infrastructure, learners and teachers in crisis contexts deal with a variety of difficulties: psychosocial problems, language of instruction, dilemmas about accreditation, and hostilities in host communities. Teachers need professional development (TPD) opportunities tailored to deal with these challenges. Teachers are often required to manage complex needs with few opportunities to learn from other teachers in similar situations. They are often unfamiliar with the complexities of the situation and are rarely trained to respond appropriately (Burns & Lawrie 2015). This initiative aims to involve refugee educationalists in Lebanon in co-design cycles to develop collaborative educational practice, combining digital spaces in a massive open online course (MOOC) and face-to-face campus-based training to selected participants.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Building on previous experience of creating blended learning sessions, (Kennedy and Laurillard 2019), we collaboratively designed the course by conducting participatory workshops with stakeholders. Curricular materials were produced drawing upon empirical data and filming teachers in their own settings, demonstrating effective practices. Teachers from the community became teacher-educators via MOOC. The rich video resources and collaborative activities designed encouraged other teachers to test new ideas in their own educational spaces.

We worked with teachers at different phases: from February to May 2018, we conducted several co-designing workshops in Beirut and Biqa'a to identify
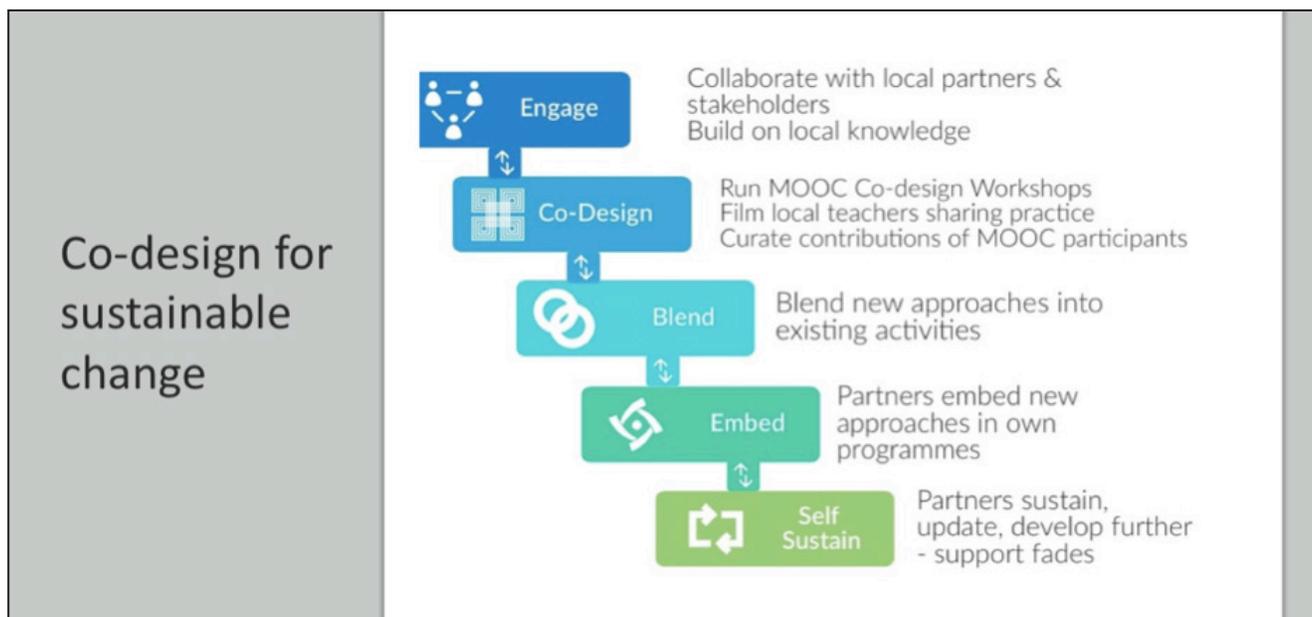

Figure 1: The co-design process including the engagement of partners in Lebanon on each level and how this process contributes to sustainability.
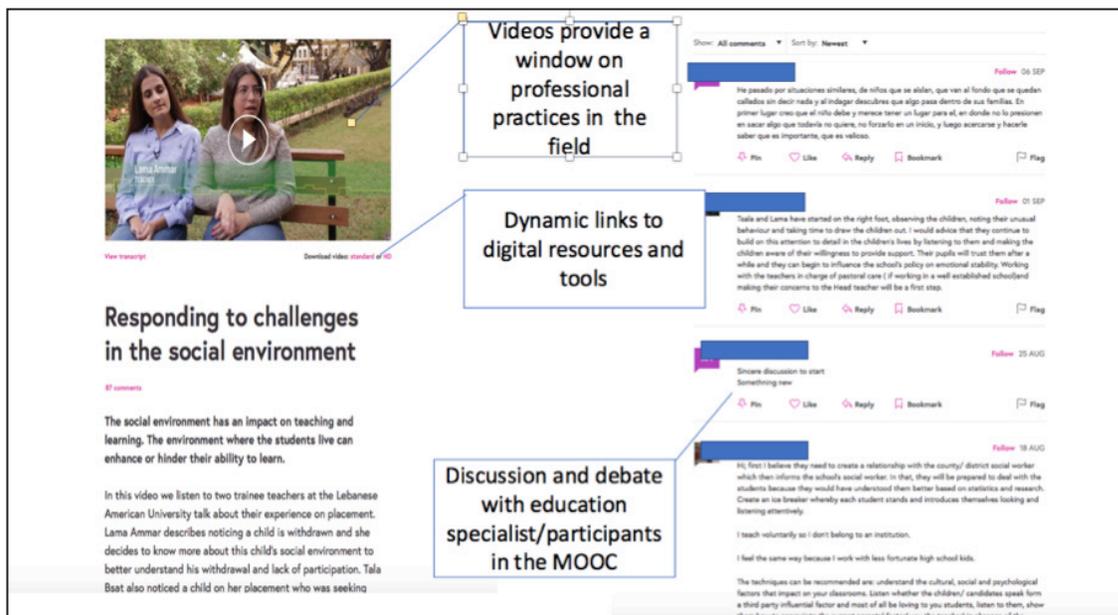
Figure 2

teachers' needs, scout locations for filming, and develop the initial design of the training course. In August 2018, we conducted a two-day workshop with 12 education specialists working at the Ministry of Education, UN agencies, (I)NGOs, academia and CBOs to operationalise the content, structure, and design of the training course. Once the content and structure of the course were finalised collaboratively, we produced and launched the MOOC in English and Arabic in June 2019.

The teachers who took the course, who are overstretched, have little time, and little access to campus-based opportunities, appreciated the additional value of the blended learning model, in which the MOOC was embedded in a campus course. We explored this model by creating a face-to-face (f2f) course in collaboration with the Lebanese American University and the Lebanese University. It was timed to take place concurrently with the MOOC: 29 teachers graduated from this blended learning TPD course. The f2f course consisted of three (3) two-day sessions: one session before, one during, and one after the MOOC. The f2f sessions were designed to provide further learning opportunities such as presentations, group discussions, and activities using the tools introduced in the MOOC. The f2f sessions focused on ensuring that education practitioners were comfortable with using the online platform and tools (e.g. Padlet, Mentimeter) and were able to engage in the online discussions. In terms of content, we focused on dealing with controversial issues in the classroom, such as discrimination and gender based violence. We also focused on learning design.

EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

Outcomes of the Programme

- Content

1. **Sixteen subtitled videos and transcripts of teachers' experiences and examples of good practice in both Arabic and English.** The MOOC took place over four weeks and covered diverse issues that emerged from our research workshops with refugee teachers, followed by consultations with education specialists in Lebanon. Issues covered included how educators create change with limited resources, dealing with trauma in the classroom, linking the experience of children with the content presented in the learning space, use of technology in the learning space and designing lessons, dealing with controversial issues, and how to respond to students' aspirations.

2. **Rich materials on the MOOC (Arabic and English) including theoretical texts on teachers and transformative learning, follow up exercises, lesson plans, and examples of good practice.** All these materials including academic articles and summaries of theories are also downloadable. The MOOC participants added to this material by sharing their lesson plans and models of good practice.

3. **Digital tools used in the classroom - exercises on Mentimeter, Padlet and Word Cloud.** Teachers were introduced to tools that could be used in
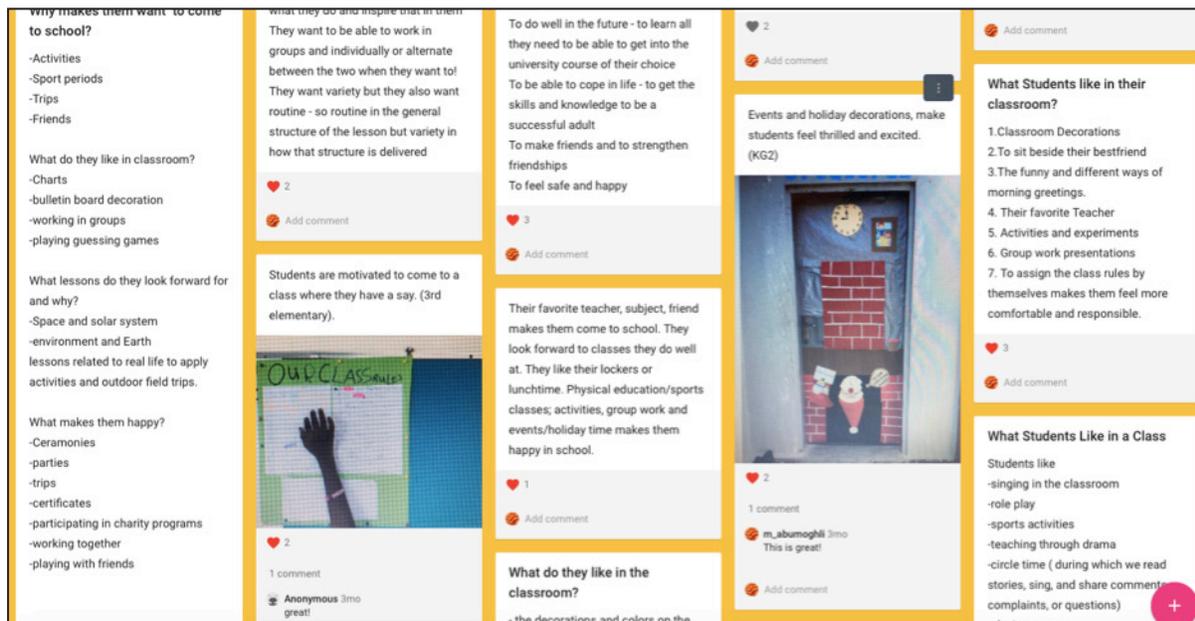
Figure 3: A Padlet exercise where teachers shared their practice. The exercise, entitled: 'getting learners' perspectives', asked the teachers to share the perspective of their students on: *what makes them want to come to school? What lessons do they look forward to and why? What do they like in the classroom? What makes them happy in school?*

the classroom to improve the quality of learning. The MOOC participants worked with these tools and exchanged ideas in the discussion on the online forum - exploring ideas about how to adapt them in their own practice.

4. **Production and dissemination of knowledge and good practices based on teachers' experiences through assigned tasks.** For example, participants were asked to share their experience as transformative teachers. This was a peer reviewed activity and the participants described their ideas providing scenarios of a challenging classroom situation and applying various approaches to learning: hegemonic, accommodative, critical, and transformative. Finally, they were asked to suggest which is more appropriate for the situation they described.

- Policy and Sustainability

1. Ministry of Education, Lebanese American University, the Lebanese University, and UNHCR are preparing to integrate the MOOC into their TPD training (pre-service and Continuous Education Programme).

Research and Evidence: Evaluation was an integral component of the pilot.

- Evaluation Methodology

1. Two questionnaires were filled by MOOC participants for each platform, English (N=82) and Arabic (N=1209).

2. Post course questionnaires were filled by teachers who attended the f2f course (N=29)

3. Focus groups conducted with all 29 teachers who attended the f2f course

4. Individual interviews were conducted with teachers who attended f2f course (N=9) and with teachers who only participated in the MOOC (N=7).

- Findings

1. **Teachers' needs for TPD particular to contexts of mass displacement:** The following specific needs were identified: differentiated classrooms (language, ability, and ages); psycho-social support; advanced use of technology to design lessons, content, and methodology .

2. **Sharing best practices:** Best practices identified included the importance of building empathy, understanding different social networks in the school that promote students' positive behaviour and how they engage with them, the value of sharing teaching ideas, documenting

teaching processes, and the importance of networking with other teachers.

3. **Best practice related to use of digital technology:** Those identified included embedding digital tools into lesson plans, adapting already tested templates and exercises, and being prepared and having backup plans in case the technology does not work.

4. **Experience of the blended approach:** The physical presence of the educators (the f2f component) accelerated the learning process and provided an opportunity to interact with them to clarify theoretical concepts and develop an understanding of digital tools.

LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Time and resources: The co-design process is demanding in terms of expertise, time, and finances. It requires field visits, numerous workshops, and creating relevant educational videos and exercises built around them. However, the MOOC takes away the need for repetitive presentation of ideas, enabling the classroom sessions to focus on discussion and critical reflections around the practical application of the ideas and tools. The already developed MOOCs will be re-run with a minimal financial cost.

Co-design: Open and positive participation requires in-depth knowledge of the context from the core team members. Developing and maintaining positive partnerships with various institutions, organisations, and individuals in a context that is highly competitive and sensitive to issues of status, partnerships, resources, funding and visibility, is also challenging.

Complex, dynamic and politically sensitive context: Full participation in the f2f component was affected by a number of selected participants having to withdraw due to safety and authorisation barriers. This highlights that the stand-alone MOOC approach is an important alternative TPD option, despite it not being as effective as the full blended course.

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LINKS

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