

Thinking and Learning Together: Applying an Educational Intervention for Children Affected by Violence in Northern Uganda to a U.S. Classroom

Martha Bragin

*Silberman School of Social Work
Hunter College*

Joseph Mikulka

*William Alanson White Institute
of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis
& Psychology*

Opiro Wirefred George

*Ministry of Education and Sports
Republic of Uganda (Retired)*

Michael Lewis

*Silberman School of Social Work
Hunter College*

Sam Guzzardi

*Institute for the Psychoanalytic
Study of Subjectivity*

Adolescents affected by violence express a strong desire to learn at school. However, once there, whether affected by armed conflict, structural violence, the school-to-prison pipeline, or other traumatic experiences, they face multiple barriers to learning. Therefore, new ideas are needed. This promising intervention, originating in Northern Uganda and utilized in Oakland, California, applies new developments in attachment theory, along with

key elements of community resilience to create a trauma-informed, culturally integrated approach that has shown promising results in both contexts.

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Even if we go (to school) we have a hard time concentrating because we keep thinking about what happened to us and about our relatives being killed...But when we lose months or years of school because of war, we worry that our dreams will escape us. When we should be learning, we are growing up in ignorance. As a result of this ignorance comes lack of hope ...

**—Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General
of the United Nations for Children in Armed Conflict**

Will you Listen? Young Voices from the Conflict Zones, 2006

Educational success is among the central concerns of child welfare practitioners. Young people affected by violence often equate the ability to learn at school with a hopeful future and are eager to attend (Machel, 2009; Moyer et al., 2020). Community schools often are the only structures both available and obligated to assist these young people despite the limited resources and dangerous conditions in which they work (Brandt, 2006; EFA Monitoring Group, 2011; Ungar et al., 2019). However, when they arrive in class, these young people often become distracted and find it difficult to learn, which can lead to acting out, failing examinations, or dropping out altogether (Burde et al., 2017; Stevenson et al., 2020; EFA Monitoring Group, 2011; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019). Many practical factors may prevent young people affected by violence from learning at school. These include the need to earn a living, the need to care for small children or elders at home, or a lack of essential materials or a safe place to study (Burde et al., 2017; EFA Monitoring Group, 2011; Stevenson et al., 2020; Zaff et al., 2020). However, even when these factors are addressed, young people impacted by violence often experience traumatic reactions that affect learning (Crouch et al., 2019; Devkota, 2018; Fonagy et al., 2018; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; Saigh et al., 1997; Stermac et al., 2013). To date, there are few classroom-based interventions specifically designed to address this problem by engaging community strengths that take

culture and community values into account (Burde et al., 2017; Bragin, 2012; Bragin & Bragin, 2010; Holland, 2020; Zaff et al., 2017). However, one such intervention was piloted during and immediately after an armed conflict in Northern Uganda that was then replicated in Oakland, California. Both had promising initial results.

This paper discusses the use of a model from the Global South to address an intractable problem in the Global North. It details the fundamental principles that the programs applied to address the educational needs of children affected by violence, using a specific theoretical base and engaging the resources of classroom and community.

Background

The two programs were created in disparate contexts. The first was Northern Uganda, a region ravaged by a lengthy armed conflict, that led to the forcible displacement of the majority of the population and the abduction of children by an armed group (Annan et al., 2011; Republic of Uganda, 2007; Bragin & Opiro, 2012). The second was a school district in Oakland, California, experiencing decades of neglect, disinvestment, and the effects of systemic racism and structural and social violence (Chatmon & Watson, 2018; Robinson, 2020; Wilson & Riley, 2004). Children and families in both communities were affected by the violence they experienced, which bled into family interactions, leading to further exposure to violence in the home (Meinert & White, 2017; Vaughans, 2014). Despite the availability of free education, students from the conflict zones of Northern Uganda and the violence affected communities of Oakland, California, were disproportionately failing the standardized examinations that would lead to educational advancement (Bragin & Opiro, 2012). Therefore, the task was to pilot a method that might address these issues effectively, using the existing resources of school, classroom, and community, and focusing on community strengths. Through attention to the latest research in attachment and the social–ecological foundations of resilience, the

authors hypothesized that a classroom-based psychosocial intervention targeting cognitive capacities could positively influence educational outcomes for students affected by armed conflict.

The Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports agreed with such a model and began the long road to implementation in the midst of civil war. Because of the similarity of difficulties, a teacher and school principal in Oakland, California, agreed to replicate this model in a single classroom over a two- to three-year period. Both pilots shared the same theoretical foundation and implementation structure, but differed in some specifics based on culture and context.¹

There is appropriate criticism that the same intervention could not be applied to such vastly different environments. However, as early as 1996 and continuing to the present day, the developmental psychologist James Garbarino and his colleagues argued that children affected by armed conflict and those affected by community violence often experienced the same emotional difficulties (Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996; Garbarino et al., 2020). Additionally, our intervention's structure, as will be seen, explicitly addresses the need for cultural specificity and relevance.

Northern Uganda

The 23-year war in Northern Uganda, waged by the Lord's Resistance Army, was one of Africa's longest. The largely rural Acholi region where the program took place, is known for its rich cultural traditions and their integration with contemporary university learning and innovation. However at the time the program was implemented, approximately 1.6 million people, the entire rural population, were forced to leave their homes to live in crowded, poorly resourced, internally displaced persons camps, in constant fear of attack by an armed group

¹ For further reading on the intervention's theory and a more detailed description of each individual pilot and its implementation, please refer to Bragin, M. (2012) and Bragin & Bragin, G. (2010).

noted for its cruelty. Local cultural and religious leaders worked both to stop the violence and to provide ongoing treatment to those emotionally affected by the conflict (Annan et al., 2011; Republic of Uganda, 2010). Families affected by the conflict lamented to these representatives that their children were not passing examinations, but dropping out instead. They demanded that the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) improve the effectiveness of the local schools. The Ministry responded with a comprehensive study of the nature of the problem, and, on the basis of that study, developed the original pilot program (Bragin & Opiro, 2012). Called *Replica*, the MOES hoped that should it be effective, it would be a model to help other students affected by violence to succeed at school.

Oakland, California

Oakland is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, with a rich history of cultural institutions and leadership in labor and progressive social movements, including the well-regarded Oakland Community School of the 1960s and 1970s (Chatmon & Watson, 2018; Robinson, 2020). However, the city also harbors several neighborhoods in which systemic racism, disinvestment, lack of public services, mass incarceration, and associated community violence remain intractable (Chatmon & Watson, 2018; Wilson & Riley, 2004). At the time of the intervention, 20% of the adult male population was incarcerated and an additional 24% were on probation or parole (Alameda County Probation Department, 2013). Mass incarceration leads students to experience changing caregivers, the frequent need to move, pressure to enter the drug trade, and family violence born of the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Chatmon & Watson, 2018; Novick, 2019; Stevenson et al., 2019; Vaughans, 2014). Targeting by police leads to alienation from law enforcement protection (Armaline et al., 2014). All of these factors can result in chronic school failure and what has come to be known as the school-to-prison pipeline

(Bacher-Hicks et al., 2019; Chatmon & Watson, 2018; Wilson, 2020). However, strong school principles and neighborhood leaders have continued to invest in the community and its schools (Alkon, 2018). Therefore, when a young teacher asked the principal for help turning things around, and learned about the Northern Uganda pilot, the principal agreed to a single-classroom pilot that could run for three years if effective.

What linked these communities was the high value that adolescents and families placed on education, the view that school success is the way to a better future, the rich historic reservoir of cultural resources, and the trauma-related learning difficulties both groups of young people faced (Brandt, 2006; Machel, 2009; Paiva, 2019; Opiro, 2005; Meinert & Whyte, 2017; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; van der Kolk, 2015). In recognition of the vast differences between the locations, culturally based activities and ancillary programs were distinct, while the theoretical underpinnings and principles remained the same (Aiyal-Naveh et al., 2019).

Description of the Learning Problems to Be Addressed

The learning difficulties of children affected by violence are well known and well documented (Crouch et al., 2019; EFA, 2011; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; Machel, 2009; Saigh et al., 1997, van der Kolk, 2015). When young people affected by violence enter classrooms, the effects of violence on their cognition begin to manifest. They often find themselves unable to concentrate, experience themselves as being unable to think, and many are removed from school altogether due to outbursts that are often enactments of the violence they have experienced (Bragin & Bragin, 2010; Crouch et al., 2019; Machel, 2009; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019). While their minds work overtime to keep intolerable memories out of consciousness, that same mechanism can make it impossible for them to think clearly at all (Allen, 2013; Bragin & Bragin, 2010; Crouch, et al., 2019; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; Machel, 2009; Saigh

et al., 1997). Therefore, these programs sought to address two distinct aspects of the problem: First, the protective inability to think, that students affected by violence experience to avoid “flashbacks” or memories that reenact experiences of violence; and second, the more distinct aspects of learning, namely lack of concentration, attention and the symbolic processing of abstract ideas. Both can be addressed by attachment theory, which explains how cognitive and emotional development occur together in the context of human connection (Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; Siegel, 2020).

Child psychologists explain that we are all born with the aggression required to leave the womb, cry when in need of care, and eventually stand up and walk. This aggression is modified by the experience of responsive caregivers. Small children report violent dreams and may engage in playground games like “chase the monster.” Through time, development, and loving care, these violent fantasies fade away and children report dreams and games in which they do good things and rescue those who have been harmed. These processes are founded on the connection to caregivers and close members of their community (Winnicott, 2011; Reeves, 2018). However, children exposed to violence report difficulty distinguishing their own anger at the terrible things that they experience and the violence of perpetrators (Brandt, 2006; Crouch et al., 2019; Garbarino et al., 1996; 2019). They may alternate between feeling guilty, unworthy of any success, and overwhelmingly angry. Both of these feelings may prevent them from connecting to others, and benefitting from new and positive attachments (Allen, 2013; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; Vaughans, 2014; Winnicott, 2011). However, resilience-based studies, including a randomized controlled trial (Twemlow & Fonagy, 2006) have indicated that the opportunity to do good things for others and be recognized as capable of goodness, supports the capacity to connect to teacher and classmates in positive ways, enabling the positive effects of attachment based resilience (Ungar, 2012; Ungar et al., 2019; Reeves, 2011; Winnicott, 2011; Zaff et al., 2017). Therefore, positive consistent interaction with the teacher

and other students supported by daily opportunities to feel useful to others, (or to plants and animals at first), and praise for their kindness and concern were built into each program.

Once these close connections were established, it was necessary to use them to address the lack of concentration, attention, and processing of abstract ideas (Brunzell et al., 2016; Crouch et al., 2019; Paiva, 2019; Saigh et al., 1997; van der Kolk, 2015). An emerging field of study at the intersection of developmental science, neurobiology, and attachment theory may provide a scientific understanding of how these difficulties occur and point to a way of intervening effectively. Research suggests that the capacity to think and to think about thinking, a developmental achievement referred to as “reflective function,” is a neuropsychological capacity co-created with caregivers, parents, and teachers (Fonagy et al., 2019). People with “reflective function” “mentalize.” They think about what they are thinking and what others might be thinking (Bragin & Bragin, 2010; Fonagy et al., 2018). This capacity is created through attachment, and may be compromised or even lost following extremely violent events (Allen, 2013; Fonagy et al., 2018; Luyten & Fonagy, 2019; Twemlow & Fonagy, 2006).

By creating classroom experiences that replicate the essential conditions that foster the development of mentalization and reflective function at the same time as they promote resilience in cultural and community context, theory and research suggest improvement in the capacity to attend school consistently, pay attention to lessons, and improve grades among students affected by war and violence (Aiyal-Naveh, 2019; Brunzell et al., 2016; Machel, 2009; Paiva, 2019; Stermac et al., 2013; Twemlow & Fonagy, 2006).

The Intervention: Thinking and Learning Together

Since both the management of aggression and mentalization are normal developmental processes that emerge from the social ecology, the

programs sought to replicate their salient factors in the classroom. To this end, the program emphasized processes designed to foster consistent and caring bonds with the teacher, classmates, and community members. It also integrated cultural activities and opportunities for altruism into daily classroom life.

Preparing the Environment: Structural Elements of the Intervention

Following a social ecological approach, three essential structural elements are required from school administration in order for the mentalization-based intervention to go forward:

1. Administrative support for teachers: We assumed that teachers could not be expected to support attachment and mentalization in learners unless the program supported it in teachers.
2. Community connections. The learning and emotional difficulties children experiencing war and violence face are often too large a burden for a single teacher to bear. Community integration allows teachers to receive support from volunteers, and links students to positive connections in their environment, allowing them to see and feel hope for the future.
3. Decentralized classrooms. For students to receive the constant care and attention of other people, the classroom had to be decentralized so that students in small groups could be linked to one another and to teacher's assistants or classroom volunteers. This helped ensure that no student was left alone to struggle with an educational problem or distressing emotion. It also allowed those who felt emotionally overwhelmed to have individualized assignments, which kept them part of the classroom even if they were too distressed to join a work group (Brunzell et al., 2016).

Promoting Attachment and Mentalization: “Classroom” Intervention Elements

While the intervention is not manualized, allowing teachers considerable leeway in their approaches, it does have specific elements to promote mentalization that teachers must follow:

1. Group processes to support both teachers and learners. The use of group activities encourages peer and community connection and learning, combats feelings of isolation, and creates a sense of membership in something positive.
2. Creating caring classroom connections. Both teachers and learners feel welcomed, safe and have a sense of belonging in the classroom, where they are allowed to make academic and behavioral mistakes without fear of exclusion.
3. Permission to express unwanted thoughts. Permission to verbally express thoughts and emotions that prevent teaching and learning, either in peer support groups or in the classroom, as long as they respect classroom rules and don't harm themselves or others.
4. Accepting atmosphere for students to manage their emotions. Classroom support that allows each student to receive one-on-one support when needed and helps children to focus attention on the subject at hand by calling their name directly, speaking to them clearly, and looking directly at them.
5. Opportunities for positive creative actions to make meaning of violent experiences. Use of teaching tools, modes of expression, and activities like music, art, drama, and dance that allow students to express themselves, make meaning of their experiences, and teach others.
6. Multiple opportunities for altruism and abundant praise for these activities. Space for students to help others and their

community, in turn feeling effective and confident about themselves and their abilities, even when they are struggling with learning or with life.

7. Participation in ongoing cultural activities that promote community integration. Expanding classroom elements by linking students to the community through culturally specific community learning exercises (either within or outside the school) in order to promote a sense of efficacy in the community, hope and community connection.

Implementation

The following sections will explain how each of the elements were implemented in context, connecting theory to practice.

Structural Elements of the Intervention

Administrative Support for Teachers

In Uganda, the program was instituted in three Model Learning Centers in the most highly war-affected districts. Local District Education Officers (DEOs) visited each learning center on a monthly basis. By spending at least one night each month in the IDP camps with teachers, students, and families, local DEOs provided a connection to the wider educational system. They also provided emotional solidarity and accompaniment in difficult times. During the visit DEOs would meet with the head teachers and community leaders to answer policy questions, address practical concerns, and share a meal.

Though the teachers in Oakland did not face the same terror and violence as those in Uganda, they worked with students who faced constant threats from structural racial violence and its interpersonal manifestations. All experienced frightening encounters with law enforcement

as well as death and loss in their families. One of the students in the class was murdered during the course of the program. Therefore, it was essential to provide teachers the support necessary to hear students' stories without becoming overwhelmed by them. The principal had an "open door policy," allowing teachers to come to her with problems and ideas, which created a strong personal connection. Teachers in both groups received consultation with local teaching experts.

Community Connections

In Northern Uganda, the Community Integration and Participation (CIP) process formalized the connection to the community through an assessment process that was necessary for the realization of the program. To facilitate this process, training packages were developed. They included a tool kit, a facilitator's guide, posters, brochures, and guidelines for community workshops. Community dialogues on critical issues were conducted. Cultural leaders organized elders and healers to partner with teachers and schools and ensured that traditions, customs, and cultural values supporting psychological healing were transmitted to the young people.

In Oakland, the teacher in the designated classroom received support from the principal to use new teaching techniques and apply to donors to fund specialized classroom equipment. He then reached out to and informed parents that students were expected to attend—not because it was required, but because if they completed the program, they would pass the examinations required to receive a high school diploma. When students were not in school, he visited their homes to collaborate with family or community members.

Decentralized Classrooms

With the help of community volunteers, leaders, and healers, teachers in Uganda were able to form small classroom groups of 10 to 15 students.

In Oakland, classroom desks were set up in small groups of four students with clearly marked learning areas for specific assignments. The groupings allowed students to work collaboratively and the teacher(s) to circulate the room freely, offering one-on-one attention to any student struggling academically or emotionally. Individual attention could lead to counseling referrals for students in distress or, in Oakland, referrals for special education or neuropsychological evaluations.

Both pilot classrooms contained mini-centers for clearly marked alternative activities. In Uganda, materials were located and made available at each center so that students not engaging with the teacher had materials for practicing skills or working on a community project. In Oakland, reading material, musical instruments, crafts, and practical activities (such as caring for pets and plants) were available should students require separation from their classmates. Rather than resorting to punishment or exclusion, these alternative activities maintained the message that when students were stressed, anxious, and unable to learn they were still wanted in the classroom as part of the community.

Promoting Mentalization

Group Processes to Support Teachers so that they in turn Support Learners

In monthly peer-support supervision and monitoring meetings, the head teachers in Northern Uganda and Coordinating Center Tutors (CCTs) (local education experts) met to share implementation experiences, identify areas of improvement, and think about the needs of the students and teachers. CCTs then met with teachers in small groups and learned how the month went and inquired about their welfare. In Oakland, the teacher, a Teach for America Volunteer, attended consultant facilitated weekly meetings with other volunteers from schools in the district.

In both situations, these meetings created space in which teachers could begin to think together about their classrooms and receive

praise, encouragement, and support. It was a time when success was applauded, where expressing frustrations could lead to discussing new ideas, and where a lack of materials could find creative solutions. It allowed space for the teachers to reflect on their experiences as teachers and as people, feel connected to something that mattered, and provide emotional support for each other, practicing their ability to do this for students.

As mentioned earlier, the Ugandan pilot also included a monitoring and evaluation system, which brought Ministry of Education officials to teacher meetings, helping officials to understand teachers' concerns and providing official recognition and support of their success. It also ensured that teachers knew that their concerns were being heard and that they had someone taking care of their needs the way they were taking care their students' needs.

Creating Caring Classroom Connections

In Uganda, within each decentralized classroom, students learned in small groups and worked together as a team to develop creative arts programs that served the community through giving important messages about health, safety, and peace. Each member of the team could think together with others about these important issues, and in the process assist each other in increasing their capacity to learn. Students also formed activity groups such as drama, community education groups or school magazine groups, and HIV/AIDS awareness and Red Cross clubs. Students would sign attendance sheets with their group affiliations out of pride for their group's achievements together. This helped to create a sense of school as a secure base.

By attending school every day and behaving consistently, the teacher in Oakland became a reliable figure to whom the students could connect. He was able to show students that he *liked* to be at school, which helped students want to be there too. Students also had to know that he was willing, and able to step in when they needed help or support.

To facilitate this, the classroom was kept open to students at lunch and after school, so that when a student got stressed and needed a safe haven, the door was open. The students also had a cell phone number they could use to reach the teacher in case of emergency after school hours, such as the removal or incarceration of a parent.

Perhaps most important, the teacher made it clear that the classroom was an exclusive club in which only the teacher, his assistants, and the students were members. Community members and school personnel were invited as honored guests, but strangers could not come in without an invitation. This enabled students to feel safe and form reliable connections. As long as they tried to show up, each was a valued member of a caring community.

Accepting Classroom Atmosphere for Both Teachers and Learners

With large classes decentralized and divided into small, consistent learning groups, it was possible for teachers to receive support when needed throughout the day, and then to give support to needy students. If a student stood up to strike another (an activity that may represent a symptomatic response to memories of abduction), they were acknowledged by name, their action was named (“I see that you are standing, Otobi”) and they were invited to help the teacher (i.e.: chalk distribution or taking smaller children to the latrine). In this way, classrooms remained safe and student behavior was redirected at sensitive times (Bragin, 2012).

In Oakland, when students were able to engage in learning activities, they were encouraged to do so in learning pairs. The teacher made sure to circulate and make himself available to engage with any student who was left on their own, ensuring that each was supported. That prevented the process of intellectual work feeling too lonely or isolating, and supported students before they reached the point of feeling overly frustrated and acting out. When students were too distressed to

participate, they could leave the learning area for the alternative activities at the back of the room. The teacher checked in with these students frequently so that they did not feel isolated.

Permission to Express Unwanted Thoughts

In the Uganda program, children were provided special times for expressive activities where all thoughts are acceptable. They could speak their thoughts without being questioned or attacked, and were encouraged to refocus attention on the subject at hand. Sometimes a student was too pre-occupied or distressed to go further. That student was encouraged to say what was on their mind as best as possible. If they found themselves in serious traumatic distress, they could leave the classroom and sit with a qualified volunteer.

In Oakland, following the teachers' support group model, the class held discussions about the difficulties presented by thinking, what happens when it becomes difficult to think, and how to manage feelings. When students could not work at a particular task at a particular moment, the decentralized classroom features came into use. The distressed student could go to the back of the room to pace back and forth, sit with the pets, read, draw, or look at familiar items. The teacher would join as soon as he was free to engage the student if the student was ready.

Accepting Atmosphere for Students to Manage Emotions

Students in Northern Uganda, particularly those who had been suffered the most extreme forms of violence, were often overwhelmed during moments of the school day. Before the decentralized classroom was instituted, they often simply fled the classroom, soon to fall behind and become unable to return. In the new classroom, the teacher or an assistant could identify a distressed student and address them by name, asking if they were having a really bad feeling, or if there was

something they wanted to say out loud. They could say their piece if they wished, and then either go back to work or be accompanied to the volunteer specialist located outside of the classroom.

In the Oakland classroom one day during the school year, the class learned that a classmate was shot and killed. The teacher immediately let his students know that this was a “big deal” and that it was ok to feel mad, bad and have destructive feelings. The teacher also joined the class music group and wrote a song about his own feelings of sadness and anger to model helpful, positive expression. The class later created a group memorial for their lost classmate.

Opportunities for Positive Creative Actions to make Meaning of Violent Experiences

In both pilots, arts projects created a space for putting experience into symbolic form in both words and expressive media. In Northern Uganda, trained art therapists and traditional healers in the classroom worked with students as part of the regular curriculum. Students participated in writing, dance, and musical performances. Storytelling helped children create and control a narrative, helping them manage their fears and create new hopes for the future. Instruments and costumes were available in the classroom and during student-led community learning exercises.

The Oakland classroom was set up to have a reading and drawing center in the back of the class. The class also had a music group, facilitated by the teacher and a volunteer musician from the community to engage students in hip-hop and jazz writing. Finally, as a group, the students created a film about violence in their community. This film, a form of eulogy for their murdered classmate, similar to the story telling in Northern Uganda, allowed students to create and control their own narrative, making meaning of their feelings and experiences of the past and present, and providing their own ending for a more hopeful future.

Multiple Opportunities for Altruism and Abundant Praise for these Activities

Students were given opportunities to help with classroom chores or help another student whenever he or she was struggling. Given the history of civil war in Northern Uganda and the cultural importance of community, students were also involved in peace building and community education activities through theater groups. The groups provided an opportunity for students to engage the community at large in learning important skills and engage in critical dialogue. In addition, students could help with a school garden and caring for school livestock to help improve the students' diet.

The Oakland classroom was populated with pets and plants. These living things required daily care. Fish and reptiles had to be fed and their tanks kept clean. Plants needed food, water, and light. Vegetables required harvesting. Similar to Northern Uganda, the students had to learn to keep the needs of these living things in mind and tend to them reliably. The tasks were divided up among them, and because it was critical that each task actually get done, every member of the class was necessary. The reliable routine of taking care of living creatures that thrived under their attention helped the students begin to see themselves as providers of care, goodness, and nurturing, however angry and destructive they might sometimes feel or even act.

This helped students to feel that they were able to do good, be good and be in touch with the creation of good things, supporting the toleration and expression of their terrifying experiences and destructive impulses, while maintaining a sense of value and hope of the future.

Participation in Ongoing Cultural Activities that Promote Community Integration

Teachers and students in Northern Uganda participated in cultural activities essential to the curriculum—theater, music, and dance. Traditional elders were frequent guests in the classroom and advisors to

the intervention. Engagement in these activities gave both teachers and students the opportunity to manage their daily sufferings through symbolic expression. Traditional healers also served as a direct connection to the greater community and helped to reinforce continuity between past and present, despite the war's destruction. In turn, each student was reminded that they were part of a tradition that they themselves could transmit.

In Oakland, the teacher visited students' homes and invited elders to visit the classroom to teach community history. A volunteer local musician, who visited the classroom regularly, instructed students in the musical traditions particular to the Oakland African American community, as did other local cultural and progressive icons.

Results

Northern Uganda

In 2007, Schools to Schools International carried out an independent evaluation of the Northern Ugandan project (Lynd, 2007). More qualitative than quantitative, the report focused not on academic achievement but rather on teacher, parent, and student reports to measure the project's success. While more thorough evaluations of future implementations are needed, this initial evaluation showed promising results. Teachers felt more connected to the education community, citing stronger relationships between staff, students, and parents: "Now big kids tell younger ones what is wrong, rather than the teacher always being the one. And in class, older kids come up to assist. Sometimes they say 'let's wait for teacher.' They're happy." (Lynd, 2007, p. 13). They reported increased teamwork among teachers, as well as greater respect from students and more participation. Teachers directly cited the intervention as the reason for greater teacher retention. All the pilot classrooms showed an increase in student enrollment and retention, especially among girls. Finally, the total pass rate on national examinations and overall graduation rate increased significantly (Lynd, 2007).

In interviews and written statements, students consistently expressed pride in their education and activities. They stated that they valued the teachers' pride in their work. Older, stronger students listed their role in supporting younger, weaker ones as important to their positive view of themselves and the program. Both were related to students' increased sense of self-worth and hope for the future (Lynd, 2007). The program was replicated for a number of years until the final reintegration of the children affected by conflict.

Oakland, California

Unfortunately, no formal evaluation of the Oakland program was conducted. However, outcomes for each of the 20 students were recorded as follows:

- Three students graduated and went to four-year colleges.
- Four students graduated and went to two-year colleges.
- Four students graduated and went to accredited vocational programs.
- Five students continued in high school and earned their diploma the following year.
- 2 were assessed and diagnosed with cerebral palsy and sent for specialized care.
- One student moved away.
- One student was killed in a drug-related incident after school hours.

In a classroom where no students were expected to graduate, 16 students out of 20 earned high school diplomas, seven went on to college, and two were referred to ongoing services to treat their disabilities.

Unfortunately, these results were only monitored and evaluated within the context of the intervention; neither was compared to a

control group to learn whether the intervention was in fact more effective than “teaching as usual” and if so in what way.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article reports on how a project developed to help war affected adolescents in Northern Uganda was adapted successfully by a school community in Oakland, California. Predicated on attachment theory and its relationship to developing affect regulation, reflective function, and cognitive capacity, the intervention took a community resilience approach to building student capacity and developed specific tasks and activities designed to improve student experience and performance. The intervention galvanized school communities around the classrooms where it occurred. As a result, in both communities, hopefulness around the possibility of shared connections between students, teachers, and community members enhanced students’ and teachers’ ability to persevere and eventually to succeed. Improved educational outcomes were noted in both pilots.

The possibility that innovative ideas based on the knowledge and experience of advocates and educators in Sub-Saharan Africa could be successfully applied to help communities affected by systemic, structural violence in the United States to improve student learning may open up new possibilities. The authors hope that these pilots will be replicated and studied for effectiveness, creating a hopeful new option as we look for ways to address the learning needs of children affected by violence.

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