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Cristine A. Smith, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Wendy Wheaton, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*



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Literacy for Adults in Fragile States: Design Adaptations for Successful Implementation

Cristine Smith, Ed.D.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Wendy Wheaton

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Jacqueline Mosselson, Ph.D.

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

This paper reviews the benefits and challenges of providing adult literacy education services in fragile states. The goal of the paper is to provide guidance to adult literacy practitioners and program planners about design adaptations based on the challenges in such settings. Using project experiences from Sudan and Afghanistan and existing literature on education in emergency settings, this paper proposes practical suggestions for implementing adult literacy programs in fragile states. A comparison of recent reviews of adult literacy program implementation is followed by options for adaptations to program design in fragile states, including suggestions for what should count as successful outcomes of such programs. Finally, the paper calls for research and collective interagency dialogue to capture lessons from adult literacy programs currently running in fragile states.

Keywords: *Adult Literacy, conflict, Fragile States, Non-formal education, Youth Education*

Introduction

If fragile states are to achieve progress in Millennium Development Goals for enrolment and equity targets in education, they will need not only to regenerate the formal schooling system but also to create opportunities for adults to participate in education. Despite much evidence (Archer, 2005) to demonstrate the positive impact of adult education, the vast majority of the growing body of literature surrounding education in emergency and fragile settings focuses on reconstructing/reforming primary education services and, to a lesser extent, developing educational programs for youth (Rose & Greeley, 2006). Only a few reports address the importance of and strategies for non-formal adult literacy education services in fragile states (see McCaffery, 2005; Newell-Jones, 2004; Hanemann, 2005), and the outcomes they describe support the assertion that adult education contributes to the development of individuals and communities in such settings.

In this paper, in order to address the “disconnect” between academics and practitioners, where “recommendations made by academics are rarely fleshed out into ideas that could be used to construct practical programming able to be implemented in the constrained situations where practitioners actually work” (Paulson and Rappleye, 2007, p. 342), we consider the real challenges and opportunities of such contexts. We found almost no research, beyond program evaluations, about implementing adult literacy programs in fragile states in crisis. Drawing on evaluations and experience of two adult literacy programs in the post-conflict states of Sudan and Afghanistan implemented by our institution, the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, we propose suggested adaptations to the design of adult literacy programs

for fragile states. In doing so, we hope to add to what Sinclair (2002a) calls “the culture of real-time documentation and research” about non-formal education for adults in fragile states.

While there is “no common definition” (Dubovyk 2008) of states and countries experiencing emergencies or fragility, practitioners and donors since 2004 have increasingly used the term fragile states as defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) group on Fragile States (Miller-Grandvaux, 2008). The definition characterizes fragile states as countries with “poor governance” (Rose and Greeley 2006) and “difficult partnerships”, where there is a “lack of political commitment and/or weak capacity to develop and implement pro-poor policies” (DAC website). Such states tend to experience violent conflict or, at the very least, create “conditions that make development difficult” (DAC Fragile States Group). OECD (2005) describes four distinct categories of fragility—(1) deterioration, (2) post-conflict transition, (3) arrested development and (4) early recovery. Diverse views about which particular states are fragile means that there is no agreed-upon list of states; thus, international and local NGOs and agencies envisage rather different interventions for each type of context. These varied categories and views, coupled with rapid movement by states in and out of fragility, pose an added challenge to large-scale assistance programs that have inflexible systems of monitoring, evaluation, funding restrictions, and data retrieval expectations. Successfully delivering education services in fragile states is challenging not only because of security risks, limited personnel, logistical constraints and infrastructural challenges but also because defining success is subject to agency-specific assumptions and experience working in fragile states. Here, we attempt to momentarily step aside such broad proposals and focus in on a creative and flexible approach to offering quality literacy education services for conflict-affected adult populations living in fragile states.

Benefits and Challenges of Education in Fragile States

During crises and the reconstruction period, researchers and practitioners stress the need to provide educational services different from those that existed before the conflict, for two reasons: (1) education itself can contribute to conflict (Bush & Salterelli, 2000), and (2) the conflict and post-conflict period present opportunities to generate new educational structures that attempt to redress the inequities in access and quality that existed in the old system. Reconstruction can be a time to introduce transformational change to educational systems, but adult literacy services are often left out of such system creation (Hanemann, 2005, p. 9) because primary schooling is prioritized.

The reasons for reconstructing formal school services apply equally well to the reasons for increasing access to non-formal education for out-of-school populations. Education programs can play a critical role in the lives of war-affected populations in re-establishing a daily routine and providing a sense of normalcy, increasing psychosocial well-being, offering life skills and protection amidst conflict (Agulair & Retemal, 1998; Sinclair, 2002a; Sommers, 2002; Boyden & Ryder, 1996; Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003). While education programming has traditionally been rooted in the field of international development and not in humanitarian relief, the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) has recently endorsed education as a focused area within the multi-sectoral emergency humanitarian response to new and chronic emergencies (INEE website, 2008). Today, education is considered a ‘fourth pillar’ (Machel, 1996) of humanitarian response, together with food, shelter and health (Midttun, 2000; Government of Canada 2000; Sinclair 2002a; Colenso 2005). Education is a vital tool for populations affected by war to rebuild themselves, helping them to adapt to a new culture and to cope with their traumatic experiences in the aftermath of war and flight. In ongoing conflict and post-conflict situations, education enables children, youth, women or other vulnerable groups to (re)gain a sense of optimism and accomplishment through educational attainment, which

can foster resilience (Luthar, 1999) among populations affected by stress or traumatic events. Survivors have already overcome high odds against survival and successful resettlement (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994) and they are a determined population (Suarez-Orozco, 1989). International aid agencies support education programs to protect children in times of crisis and transition (Burde, 2005; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003; Sinclair, 2002a; Machel, 1996). Furthermore, persons who have witnessed loss and sacrifice become keenly aware of the value of an education for a successful future. Throughout history, populations who have lived through war have attempted to ensure that their children gain an education (Suarez-Orozco, 1989) that will ensure their own well-being and that of their communities.

There are multiple reasons why offering literacy instruction to adults in post-conflict settings is beneficial. Once food, shelter and security are reasonably stable, adults, no less than children, also benefit from the routine that classes can offer. Classes help them build a sense of accomplishment in learning, as well as learn new skills and knowledge about health care, rebuilding livelihoods, and managing scarce natural resources. Literacy class content can also provide strategies for conflict resolution and good governance, and previously displaced persons benefit from forming groups that learn together and consider how to develop their communities. Beyond that, adults can make immediate use of the knowledge and skills they acquire in non-formal education in their daily lives. Archer (2005), in a review of 67 literacy programs to determine “what works in adult literacy”, concludes that such programs reduce gender inequalities by increasing women’s participation and empowerment, and mothers’ literacy levels are associated with better health and emphasis on schooling for their children. Since “the reinstatement of schooling also has a beneficial effect on the psychological conditions of adults” (Sinclair, 2002a, p. 40), and literacy class participants are more likely to send their children to school (Abadzi, 2003), a “twin track” of education for both parents and children would provide mutual reinforcement to both (Rhodes, Walker and Martor, 1998).

Literacy classes are an excellent venue for conveying vital information that adults can put to immediate use in preventing and caring for health problems, including HIV/AIDS prevention, conflict resolution, livelihood development, human rights, and awareness of landmines, to name but a few key post-conflict content areas. The reading, writing and numeracy skills acquired, however limited, serve as foundation skills on which other, future reconstruction and development programs can build upon, such as HIV/AIDS education and conflict prevention programs. Adult literacy classes can also nurture the development of local change agents and resource people (such as female community health volunteers, midwives and even school teachers) who can become leaders in the community and help to rebuild the local human resource infrastructure at a time when government services are fragile or non-existent (Comings & Soricone, 2005). Research indicates that bringing adults together in literacy classes, particularly women, builds group identity, which can support community development efforts such as oversight and accountability of the formal school, resource management, and sanitation initiatives (Comings, Smith & Shrestha, 1994). The methodology of adult literacy classes, which often include songs, games, stories, discussion and dialogue, can (with sensitivity) provide a valuable way to support the psycho-social needs of adults upon whom reconstruction depends (Kirk, 2003). Non-formal literacy programs are free from some of the challenges formal schooling faces: they are cost efficient (Oxenham, 2000; Lauglo, 2001) compared to formal school services, and they can be delivered virtually anywhere---in homes, open-sided shelters, or even outdoors---without needing construction of special facilities. Finally, offering adult literacy services can serve as “a barometer of the relationship between the state and its citizens” (Rose & Greeley, 2006) and can signal that the government is responsive to people’s needs, one reason why many national literacy campaigns (e.g., Russia, Cuba, Nicaragua) have taken place shortly after governments change hands, as soon as conflicts subside (Miller, 1985).

For these reasons, adult literacy programs are increasingly being implemented by local and international NGOs, international aid agencies, and some governments around the world, even when resources are scarce, the setting is fragile, and program designers and practitioners have little practical guidance upon which to base their efforts. However, even though skepticism among international development funders about the efficacy and efficiency of adult literacy services is starting to be replaced, based on better data collection and analysis, by optimism about the successful implementation of literacy programs (Lauglo, 2001; Archer, 2005), fragile states present special challenges to all educational services. These challenges and constraints—on both the supply and demand sides—can affect adult education as much as they affect the reconstruction of children's education.

Supply challenges include the reluctance of relief agencies and host countries traditionally to provide education for fear of long-term commitments; limited mobility and security concerns, making training, monitoring and program support difficult; the cost and time of curriculum development and delivery, particularly where further violence, elections, and frequent staff changes make continuity difficult; the difficulties of choosing language of instruction so as not to exclude or exacerbate ethnic strife; and the lack of capacity and knowledge about implementing programs, designing materials, and training teachers. On the demand side, participants in fragile states typically experience difficulties that challenge their ability or willingness to attend adult literacy classes: they face immediate needs for food, shelter and medicine, issues that are especially problematic for women heads of households, a key demographic for these programs (Kirk, 2003). In addition, although implementing organizations can offer small-group classes locally, walking to classes in an insecure environment can also lower attendance, especially amongst adult populations suffering from poor health or trauma.

Although the challenges facing both supply and demand of educational opportunities in fragile states in the stage of ongoing or recurrent crisis are numerous and real for daily implementation of literacy programs, there are alternative design strategies for running literacy programs in the face of such challenges. First, however, we review what is known about designing and implementing adult literacy programs in non-fragile settings.

Design and Implementation of Adult Literacy Programs

In the past decade, researchers and practitioners in the field of adult literacy have made great strides not only in demonstrating positive outcomes of adult literacy programs, but also in demonstrating the factors or “elements” of literacy programs related to successful implementation, such as teacher training and instructional methodology, curriculum and materials, and monitoring and supervision. We summarize implementation guidance from two recent reviews: Comings & Soricone (2006), who review the theory and practice of adult literacy programs in Asia and Africa sponsored by World Education; and Archer (2005), sponsored by ActionAid and the Global Campaign for Education, who led an extensive survey among adult literacy experts about successful programs. Comings and Soricone identify 10 design elements, and Archer identifies twelve “benchmarks” as a start for policy makers’ and practitioners’ dialogue about adult literacy. By looking at commonalities between the two reviews, we present a condensed list of key implementation elements in the table below:

Table 1: Elements for Literacy Program Implementation

Recommended Program Elements	Comings & Soricone	Archer
Timing and duration	Provide 250 hours of instruction; optimal timing not well researched, but adults usually can attend 2 hours per day, 6 days a week, 5-6 months; instruction for out-of-school youth could be more concentrated.	View literacy as a continuous process, not “one-off” provision. Good quality programs usually meet 3 times a week, 2 hours a week, two years or more; ideally, 600 hours over nearly three years.
Instructional materials	Use field-tested and revised set of materials with active learning methodology, which supports teachers with little experience teaching. Use common format for lessons (intro, group work, games, practice/eval) that make active and participatory learning standard.	Use participatory instructional methodologies for both teaching learners and training facilitators.
Language of instruction	Pros and cons to using a national language for instruction.	Give learners in multi-lingual environments a choice of language, and encourage bilingual learning.
Teacher recruitment and training	Pay facilitators. Training should focus on concepts of adult learning and on orientation to specific materials and instructional approach.	Pay facilitators at least the equivalent minimum wage of primary school teachers. Train local people as facilitators, with ongoing training and development.
Supervision and monitoring	Ensure that teacher shows up for class and teaches. Support teachers to be as interactive with and respectful of adult learners as possible.	No more than 30 learners per facilitator; no less than one supervisor per 10-15 classes, visiting at least once a month.
Connection to other development activities	Content of interest to participants. Promote “integrated programs” where content is focused on livelihoods, health, or resource management; invite non-education agency staff to participate.	Literacy is reading, writing, numeracy for the development of citizenship, health, livelihoods, and gender equality. Focus evaluations and research on practical applications for implementation and promoting health, citizenship, livelihoods and gender equality.
Government/NGO collaboration	Governments provide “economies of scale” elements (developing, printing, transporting materials; training NGOs). NGOs implement at community level.	Governments should take a leadership, policy and enabling role, working with local organizations. Governments (assisted by international donors) should dedicate at least 3% of their education budgets to adult literacy.

Continuing education activities	Begin during literacy classes, using existing reading materials.	Governments stimulate market for publications for new readers, including publication by new readers.
	Build mechanisms (community blackboards, learner-generated materials) for on-going self-study.	
Funding	Cover development costs (materials, curriculum, teacher training).	Literacy programs should be funded at between US \$50-100 per learner per year for three years.
	Thereafter, cover recurrent costs on per class basis: facilitator salary, lighting, texts, materials, monitoring and evaluation.	

In program design, whether in fragile or non-fragile states, planners must balance these elements to maximize quality for the resources they have, depending on the approach to literacy they choose. Currently, the two most common non-formal literacy approaches include REFLECT (Re-generated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques); and a curriculum-based approach. Both use aspects of Freire's literacy approach (generative keywords, decoding words by dividing and reforming words into syllables, functional content related to lives of the rural poor), and both advocate participatory/interactive instructional methods. The difference between the two is mainly in the use of primers. REFLECT, which is promoted by ActionAID, trains teachers to use an emerging-curriculum approach, where learners participate in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) activities such as community mapping or making calendars and matrices on issues of high priority to the community (health, agriculture, gender issues, etc.). Learners first draw and then discuss a map or matrix, and then teachers use the content to teach words and sentences. Over time, these maps, matrices, words and sentences "emerge" as the text for that class and community (Archer & Cottingham, 1995). In the curriculum-based approach, which is promoted by World Education, designers create learner textbooks on a wide range of content (health, livelihoods, HIV/AIDS) for use in literacy classes, and the teaching methodology is standardized to include discussions of pictures, introducing and decoding keywords, group work and games to practice reading and writing, and "checking" learners' understanding (Comings & Soricone, 2006).

Balancing elements of teacher training, curriculum, and monitoring can maximize efficiency while minimizing costs. For example, the curriculum-based approach will require upfront development of the textbooks, materials, and facilitator's guide to teaching, which, when done well, can take several years, requiring small-scale piloting for the first year. However, once completed, programs can use the textbooks in many different classes for a broader scale program, and teacher training can be shorter and less intensive, because "a good set of materials provides a framework in which teachers and participants can work out a way to learn, even when teacher training has been insufficient" (Comings & Soricone, 2006 p. 14). Monitoring and supervision under a curriculum-based approach is aimed then at ensuring that teachers show up to teach and to encouraging teachers to use the interactive teaching methodology (discussions, games, songs) when they fall back on rote instruction. By comparison, the REFLECT approach can require much less time and fewer resources for developing curriculum and materials, since this will be emerging within each class, but much more intensive teacher training to help facilitators prepare to implement PRA activities and design reading and writing activities based on them. Monitoring and supervision under the REFLECT approach is

aimed at supporting teachers to use the participatory methodology when they are not sure how to proceed without a curriculum. It is not our intent in this paper to advocate for one or another instructional approach; we feel there is evidence enough from program evaluations about the success of both approaches to support their use. Instead, we present them here as a backdrop to understanding some of the design adaptations that may be needed in adult literacy programs in fragile states, where supply and demand challenges and constraints make implementing such program elements more difficult.

Experiences Implementing Adult Literacy Programs in Fragile States

The Center for International Education (CIE) at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where the authors teach, research and work, implements international education projects, coordinated by faculty and graduate students with staff in-country. Over the years, the Center has conducted education projects in numerous countries, and many have involved working in fragile states to design and implement creative non-formal and popular education approaches to learning. We recently conducted adult literacy projects in two fragile states in crisis: in Southern Sudan, the Sudan Basic Education Project (SBEP) and in Afghanistan, the Learning for Life (LfL) project. The challenges confronted in the literacy programs in Afghanistan and Sudan were many, and project staff learned valuable lessons—sometimes after the conclusion of the program, unfortunately—about ways to deal with the challenges faced in implementing adult literacy in such settings.

The Sudan Basic Education Project (SBEP, 2005-2006) offered adult literacy classes in three regions of Southern Sudan through a local NGO, the Sudan Evangelical Mission, which had already been operating in this capacity prior to the project. The project also designed and implemented accelerated formal school learning for adolescents. After years of war, the literacy rate was only 25%, with an estimated female literacy rate of only 12%, and the country suffered from a lack of everything: services, roads, safe transit, health care and employment opportunities (Young, Buscher & Robinson, 2007). A baseline survey for SBEP (Kamuhira H.A., 2005) found that the biggest challenges to the success of the literacy program included:

- Travel challenges: Lack of roads made it difficult to monitor classes and sometimes impossible to deliver classroom materials (blackboard, chalk) and learning materials (texts).
- Teaching challenges: Teachers were volunteers, receiving no pay, with limited literacy themselves, and lack of mobility made it difficult to offer more than initial training.
- Poverty challenges: Learners identified lack of education, sickness/diseases, lack of water, inadequate health facilities, and tribal conflicts as their most serious problems in daily life, problems which caused them to frequently miss classes.
- Gender role challenges: Men and women were grouped together in classes, to the satisfaction of neither, and women reported a serious lack of support from their spouses as a major barrier to attending.

Of these, travel was the most serious constraint to project success. Monitors reported that hiring a car for a day could cost well over US\$150, a prohibitive amount, and travel by airplane to sites was also expensive and irregular, so delivering materials and providing regular support visits to teachers were extremely difficult. The lack of learning materials prompted one adult learner to report to his facilitator: “If you can’t provide us with books and pens, how can we continue writing on the ground

like nursery children?” (Kamuhira, 2005, p. 21) In addition, the program had several serious design flaws that lead to the collapse of some classes, including not providing incentives to teachers (pay, in kind support, or even mechanisms for the community to recognize teachers) and providing instructors’ guidebooks written at a literacy level higher than the majority of the teachers could read. During the course of this project, CIE worked with the local implementing NGO to address these problems with plans for better distribution, new learning materials, and in-site training and support to facilitators, but because project monitors prioritized the part of the project aimed at accelerated learning for adolescents, and funding was cut short, we were unable to address many of these challenges.

In Afghanistan, the goal of the Learning for Life program (2004-2006) was to build local infrastructure for health by educating rural women to a literacy level where they could participate in Community Health Worker (CHW) and midwife training. Due to severe constraints to girls’ and women’s education under the Taliban, the female literacy rate was only 14% countrywide, and as low as 8% in rural areas in 2004 (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2000-2004). The end-of-project evaluation (Anastacio, 2006) identified the following challenges as major obstacles during the project:

- Gender role challenges: the residue of Taliban beliefs prohibiting women participating in education, traveling outside of their household compounds, or studying materials that could be considered inappropriate for women;
- Teaching challenges: lack of facilitators and trainers (especially female facilitators) with literacy levels high enough to be trained to teach classes;
- Travel challenges: continuing fighting and security concerns made monitoring and supervision difficult everywhere and impossible in some regions;
- Program design challenges: an overly-ambitious scope of work for the time span of the project (2 years), with too rapid scale-up in the second year and heavy demands by the funder for evaluation data.

The Learning for Life project team was eventually able to overcome most, but not all, of these challenges; they developed two curricula (one for women with no literacy skills and one for women with some skills) and offered services to 8,000 women, of whom only 6% dropped out. 90% of completers passed a third-grade equivalency test, a testament to the incredible motivation of the women and the management skill of the local NGOs who implemented the classes. However, the pace of delivering materials did not keep up with development, so that materials arrived late to classes, leaving facilitators to devise their own means for instruction; also, the program made a mistake in scaling up the number of classes without also scaling up the number of trainers and supervisors, so that local class facilitators received less support over time. In addition, the plan to refer successful literacy program graduates to community health worker and midwife training never materialized, and since the program did not provide post-literacy materials, adult learners were left without reading materials to continue learning and reading on their own. We turn now to sharing these and other lessons learned for improved implementation of such programs.

Design Adaptations for Implementing Literacy Programs in Fragile States

Based on the literature about literacy programs and our (and others') experience implementing adult literacy in fragile states experiencing crisis, what are some of those "adaptations" (Rose & Greeley, 2006) to project design? Using the core program elements (curriculum and materials, teacher training and instructional methodology, and monitoring and supervisor) as a framework, we present some suggestions below.

Adaptations to curriculum and materials

While there is urgency to getting programs for adults up and running quickly in fragile settings, we need to convince funders of the critical importance of balancing quality versus quantity and speed. Making good and context-appropriate curriculum and materials takes time. Curriculum-based programs in particular need time to develop and pilot curriculum in key content areas of health, livelihood development, and conflict resolution. It is far better to spend more time in the development phase, and attract participants to the classes based on high-quality, interesting materials, than it is to roll out classes too soon and risk failure. REFLECT programs may not need as much preparation time for developing curriculum, but they will need time to train and mentor facilitators before (and after) classes begin. Regardless of approach, local facilitators need simple-to-read written guidebooks to which they can refer on-the-job when training and supervision is reduced. In addition, programs should integrate a plan and process for developing reading materials that will be ready for new literates to use when classes are completed. One way to do this is through funding for a component to develop learner-generated materials: newly-literate adults create their own stories, poems, and songs with the help of a facilitator and artists, and these are then "published" for distribution to other literacy classes and new readers. The process and content can be particularly helpful in fragile states, where there is a need to create publications in literate-poor environments and a need to promote personal healing and empowerment, by helping people "tell" their stories (Hanemann, 2005).

Even though we know that addressing gender issues and women's empowerment is critical, women's immediate participation in the program is more valuable than focusing on women's strategic interests in ways that might increase the resistance of male family members. Curriculum designers should suspend teaching of sensitive subjects (e.g., gender issues and family planning in Afghanistan) in the first round of classes in order to increase women's access; and it is important to ask local religious leaders and male community members to review the materials beforehand so that they can reassure others in the community of the appropriateness of the content. The Afghanistan Learning for Life curriculum included a whole component on religious education, with quotes from the Koran that made the materials acceptable to community members and thus made it possible for more women to participate than may otherwise have been the case.

The selection of venue for literacy classes must be flexible. In settings such as Afghanistan, literacy projects need to create "female spaces" (Hanemann, 2005) in home schools for girls and women, where male family members can ensure safety and respectability. Also, the literacy class schedule should be set by facilitators and participants, not by the funding agency, so that women who are heads-of-households can still meet their immediate survival needs.

While needs assessments are always important before planning any literacy program, it is already sufficiently clear that for fragile states in crisis situations, key content must include information about health, livelihood development, conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, importance of children's schooling, psycho-social healing, citizenship, and sanitation and resource management, since these are almost-

universal, “core” concerns for conflict-affected populations (Sinclair, 2002a, p. 126). A curriculum that includes these topics could be used widely, while still creating additional lessons for needs that are unique to particular situations, such as landmine awareness. Resources that would otherwise be spent on extensive needs assessment can then be devoted to teacher training or monitoring and supervision.

Adaptations to teacher training and instructional methodology

Although fragile states are, by definition, resource poor, we strongly advocate the program paying literacy class facilitators a stipend, especially women who are capable, so that “teachers are not financially disadvantaged compared to their neighbors who undertake petty trade or laboring work” (Sinclair, 2002a, p. 54-55). Compensation increases teachers’ attendance and reduces turnover, so that investments in teacher training are not wasted. It is important that the program cover this cost, so that the local communities are not charged with the burden of covering the facilitators’ costs. What communities can provide at little cost is recognition, since many literacy class facilitators want to be “treated with respect and being considered as important member of the community” (Kamuhira, 2005, p. 13); programs need to build the ownership of local leaders to organize such acknowledge in tangible ways.

Facilitators in such settings will usually have limited literacy and teaching skills themselves, and “communities who have experienced the terrors of conflict firsthand are likely to need a greater degree of support in adopting participatory methodologies” such as community mapping and other participatory rural appraisal activities (Newell-Jones, 2004 p. 69). Therefore, one suggestion for those programs that opt to use an emerging and participatory curriculum (REFLECT) is to develop a small packet of prepared materials for facilitators to use when needed. It is imperative that the instructions for using these materials are themselves easy for facilitators to read. These materials could be, for example, simply-written stories with pictures on key topics such as health and conflict resolution that relatively untrained teachers and traditional adult learners can use until both become familiar with participatory methodologies. Having content-rich texts for adult learners and facilitators to read aloud, share and discuss with each other may help fill in the gaps until all are more confident with new instructional methodologies.

All programs need to provide more time for teaching training, at the beginning and throughout (McCaffery, 2005). Ideally, trainers should provide in-service training not through infrequent “blocks” but in regular, on-the-job, short and frequent interventions. Since this is difficult to do where travel and security are hard, programs should experiment with setting up regionally-based facilitators’ self-study groups, perhaps augmented by interactive discussions and activities supplemented with radio or distance education through CDs or cassette tapes. Class facilitators can then help each other to improve their teaching, rather than depend on outside trainers. However, using a mechanism for instructors to “train” and learn from each other should be no excuse for scaling up new programs beyond the capacity of program staff to monitor the continued quality of the program.

The specific instructional methodology chosen is not as important as making the classes interesting, content-rich, and relevant. If the materials are adequate, and the teacher shows up for class on a regular basis and attempts to teach, and the class activities are interesting enough to continue to draw adult learners, then the class should have at least a 50% completion rate (Comings, et al, 1992). If participatory activities are also used, then evidence indicates that the achievement of learners’ “see(ing) oneself as having the ability and right to participate in community decision-making has had

a greater impact on lives and livelihoods than the relatively modest increased in literacy skills per se” (Newell-Jones, 2004, p. 69). For example, a regular feature of every literacy class could be routinely asking several female members to come to the front of the class and say a word or sentence describing a picture on a poster or from a book can begin to help break down women’s reluctance to talk in front of groups. Since teachers in any situation are apt to fall back on teaching the way they learned in formal schools, in what Lortie (1975) terms “the apprenticeship of observation”, program designers should use every enticement they can think of to help teachers adopt participatory, interactive teaching activities, even if such activities are formulaically delivered.

Adaptations to monitoring, supervision and evaluation

Regardless of their lack of management experience in fragile states, adult literacy programs are much better off being implemented and monitored through local NGOs, since they are community-based and, with training and support, they can sustain the project over time (Carlson, et al, 2005), especially if and when donor agencies and INGOs turn their attention to other projects. NGOs can provide “a strong foundation in which to ground larger-scale interventions when the context turns more favorable” (Newell-Jones, 2004, p. 71). Adult literacy programs should make use of what Rose and Greeley (2006) call the “short route”, using NGOs to develop programs and systems that can “ultimately be inherited by the state” (p. 13), as long as attempts are made to include the government, however fragile, as an interested stakeholder throughout the program cycle.

In most fragile states, adult literacy programs will need to spend resources setting up mechanisms for community monitoring and supervision of facilitators and classes, so as to reduce the travel expense burden for off-site monitors and supervisors. When mobilizing the program in each community, program staff should help establish a small community education committee that is trained and empowered to hold teachers and NGOs accountable (Sinclair, 2002b). Establishing the committee should not be a task left to class facilitators, who have plenty else to do, but should be part of the implementing agency’s early activities in the local area. Such education committees can be responsible for screening potential facilitators, reviewing materials, monitoring classes to be sure the facilitator shows up, and planning recognition activities for both facilitators and adult learners who complete the program. Depending on the stability of the community, such committees may even be authorized to allocate facilitator payments provided by the program, as has happened in some programs in Afghanistan (Cornelia Janke, personal communication, August 2007).

Evaluation of literacy program success in non-fragile settings includes outcomes such as individual and collective acquisition of basic reading, writing and numeracy skills (usually equivalent to primary school completion), plus life skills knowledge related to health and livelihoods. Today, there is no consensus on what program “success” looks like in different fragile settings. However, for the purposes of this article, we define successful literacy programs as those that are easily accessed by people and communities in crisis, provide good quality reading, writing and math instruction, build participants’ knowledge of survival strategies, and help participants deal with trauma by providing a safe and nurturing group environment. In other words, gauging the success of a literacy program in fragile settings should focus less on how well participants improve their literacy skills, and more on improvements in participants’ psycho-social wellbeing, confidence and skills for dealing with practical concerns in a new and dangerous environment. As Newell-Jones states,

Education and training can be beneficial even in distraught and disrupted communities where the progress made in terms of the acquisition of literacy skills might be very limited but the impact of increased self-confidence, self-esteem, self-

respect and oracy skills can play a major role in community mobilization (2004, p. 68).

Therefore, we must convince funders to take a larger, contextual view and count other outcomes besides acquisition of reading, writing and numeracy skills. It is more important for adults in fragile states to gain confidence and learn valuable knowledge and content information than it is to expect great gains in literacy. For example, literacy program providers long ago stopped reporting adult learners' steady participation in the program as an outcome, since it is not a reliable gauge of what is actually learned. However, in fragile settings, the simple fact of regularly attending the literacy class may indeed be a positive outcome of the program, indicating that participants are able to deal with their immediate survival needs enough to be present in class, or that the class is providing valuable psycho-social support to participants, even if their reading and writing skills improve more slowly. The focus, then, should be on participation in classes, so that adults—individually or as demonstrated by the group as a whole—learn important survival content such as health care, resource management, tools for livelihood development, or conflict resolution on which future development programs can capitalize. Other outcomes that should “count” include:

- improvements in psychosocial status (recovery from trauma) (Sinclair, 2002a, p. 64);
- emergence of change agents (women who can be trained as community health volunteers or primary school teachers);
- group development, if literacy class group takes on a support and accountability role for local schools or other community development, such as sanitation projects, landmine awareness, HIV/AIDS education.

The emergence of community groups from literacy classes, however temporary, can also empower those community members to have a greater voice in demanding and receiving services (Carlson, et al, 2005). We must convince funders to “count” outcomes that are realistic in quantity and quality, based on the specific context of fragility, giving pilot projects room to grow and develop without the burden of constant data collection about the impacts of the program.

One way to make evaluation demands realistic for the staff implementing the program as well as to satisfy funders' demands for information about outcomes would be to first determine “what counts” as success in the particular setting, and then to provide funding for limited quantitative and qualitative data collection from a sample of participants and communities on a continuous basis. For example, programs should not waste resources or energy on initial testing of UallU participants' literacy skills; given the gaps in education services in many crisis settings, most learners will be at a very basic literacy level by default, and this information will not in any case help facilitators with minimal training to make instructional decisions about how to adapt classes to multiple literacy levels. If literacy outcomes are to be tested, let implementing NGOs collect reading, writing and math data, before and after attending the class, from a small sample of participants and non-participants, rather than testing all participants. Allow those who want certification to sit for the test rather than requiring it of all participants. Then, utilize qualitative and participatory action research efforts to gauge the impact of the literacy classes in a small number of representative communities, so that non-quantitative outcomes can be “counted” and valued.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, our hope was to provide guidance to practitioners about possible adaptations to adult literacy program design, considering the challenges experienced in fragile states. The suggestions for designing core elements essential to program design—(1) teacher training and instructional methodology, (2) curriculum and materials, and (3) monitoring & supervision—present hypotheses for future research, a beginning for dialogue and consideration by both program designers and funders in fragile states. We cannot delay provision of adult literacy education services until research funding produces experimental studies to guide us, because in fragile states such as Sudan and Afghanistan,

..formal and non-formal education, including skills training, cannot wait until the fighting is over. Rather, these must be seen as essential components of humanitarian assistance at the onset of conflict and displacement, for only then will those displaced be able and prepared to full participate in peace (Young, Buscher & Robinson, 2007, p. 12).

An important contribution to the field of education in emergency settings would be to bring together representatives from INGOs and NGOs who have implemented adult literacy programs in fragile and post-conflict settings and have them elaborate and analyze, based on their own experiences, the concepts presented here about design for successful implementation and evaluation of literacy programs.

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