



IRC's *Healing Classrooms*

Helping Children Learn and Thrive in Times of Crisis

The IRC is on the ground providing education to children in 20 countries affected by conflict and crisis. In 2016, we reached nearly 1.5 million children who have been exposed to multiple adversities.

The Impact of Crisis on Children

Crisis and conflict have direct and profound effects on children's physical safety, well-being and ability to learn. Neuroscience has shown that children who experience the types of adversity common in crisis settings can have a physiological "toxic stress" response that inhibits their brain development, impacting their physical and mental health, cognition, behavior and relationships.¹

But this can be reversed. Children are remarkably resilient. When provided with the right support, such as safe, quality educational opportunities, the negative effects of hardship and stress are mitigated and children can heal, grow, learn and thrive.²

The *Healing Classrooms* Approach

The IRC's *Healing Classrooms*—built on 30 years of education in emergencies experience and a decade of research and field testing—offer children a safe, predictable place to learn and cope with the consequences of conflict. Unlike many education programs that focus solely on teaching academics, *Healing*

Classrooms builds children's social-emotional skills as well as their capacities in reading, math and other traditional subjects. This approach is based on research that shows social-emotional learning programs improve students' life skills, behavior and academic performance.³

To help teachers, school personnel and communities create *Healing Classrooms*, the IRC:

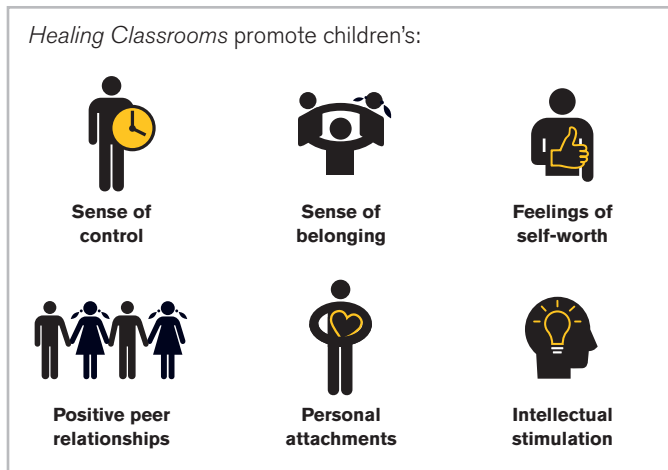
- ▶ Supports and trains teachers to establish safe, predictable and nurturing environments;
- ▶ Creates and provides teaching and learning materials to build students' academic and social-emotional skills; and
- ▶ Connects parents and caregivers with schools.

Supporting and Training Teachers

The IRC supports tens of thousands of teachers working in the most challenging, under-resourced and volatile settings. We provide them with the practical tools and training they need

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to create positive, nurturing environments where children are protected from violence, feel cared for and experience stability and predictability amidst the chaos of crisis.



The IRC works with teachers to understand and respond to the distinct needs of different learners, such as boys and girls. *Healing Classrooms* also strengthens teachers' own well-being and provides opportunities to learn from their peers and professional coaches.

Developing Teaching and Learning Materials

The IRC provides curricula, lesson plans and activities that teach traditional academic subjects, such as reading and math, as well as social-emotional skills, such as communication and perseverance. Our materials are contextualized with education leaders or ministries of education in each country. They provide active-learning strategies that help children develop and improve their abilities to show empathy, control their impulses and emotions and resolve conflicts, as well as those required for learning, such as memory and focus.

Connecting Parents and Caregivers with Schools

The IRC works with caregivers in the home environment to promote a continuum of care, support and protection across the places where children live, play and learn. Parenting programs provide strategies to create safe and nurturing home environments to build and reinforce the skills children learn at school. Parent-Teacher Associations monitor the physical safety of schools and work with other parents to ensure children attend and remain in school.



Healing Classrooms Products

The IRC has developed a number of materials to equip teachers, trainers and program staff with the skills they need to implement *Healing Classrooms*:

- ▶ *Healing Classrooms E-Learning Program*: a distance education course to familiarize field staff along with government and other local partners on the core concepts of *Healing Classrooms*.
- ▶ *Creating Healing Classrooms: A Multimedia Teacher Training Resource*: a print facilitator's guide and DVD of video segments for delivering a teacher training on instructional and classroom management techniques to promote student well-being.
- ▶ *Learning to Read in a Healing Classroom and Learning Math in a Healing Classroom*: trainings on using teaching strategies and developing lesson plans to increase children's competency in literacy and numeracy along with their well-being.
- ▶ *Safe Healing and Learning Spaces Toolkit*: a resource that provides guidance on implementing and monitoring programs at the onset of crisis that include literacy, numeracy, social-emotional learning and recreational activities.

Generating and Applying Evidence on IRC's Healing Classrooms

The IRC's strategy, IRC 2020, shows an institutional commitment to producing and using evidence to ensure that our programs have the greatest impact for the largest number of people affected by crisis. Two randomized trials have now provided evidence that the IRC's *Healing Classrooms* works across delivery modes and contexts to improve children's academic skills in crisis contexts.

Our largest study to date, carried out in partnership with New York University's Global TIES for Children (NYU/TIES), assessed a program combining *Healing Classrooms* and literacy instruction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After one year, students in schools using this program showed, in comparison to control groups, improved reading and math scores, and increased perceptions of the safety and supportiveness of their teachers and schools.⁴

Through our Education in Emergencies: Evidence for Action (3EA) initiative with NYU/TIES, we are marrying innovative program delivery with rigorous research to build a global knowledge base about what works to improve children's learning outcomes in crisis-affected contexts, as well as how, where and for whom and at what cost. Findings from year 1 show that in Lebanon and Niger, access to *Healing Classrooms* tutoring support programs improved children's literacy and numeracy skills.

For more information, please contact Jamie Weiss-Yagoda, Education Policy Advisor: jamie.weissyagoda@rescue.org.

1 See, for example, Compas, B. (2006). Psychobiological processes of stress and coping: Implications for resilience in childhood and adolescence. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094, 226–234.

2 Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.

3 Jones, S. M., Brown, J. L., & Lawrence Aber, J. J. (2011). Two-Year Impacts of a Universal School-Based Social-Emotional and Literacy Intervention: An Experiment in Translational Developmental Research. *Child Development*, 82(2), 533–554.

4 Torrente et al., 2015; Aber et al., 2016; Aber, Tubbs Dolan et al., 2016; Starkey, 2016.