EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (EiE) COMMUNITY

The Lesson Plan No One Gave Us: How to Talk to Children about Attacks on Education

Monthly Call | 9 September, 2025

About the Education in Emergencies (EiE) Community Calls

Staff, alumni and fellows from across the Teach For All network come together regularly to share ideas, solutions and resources to support students and communities impacted by emergency situations. If you'd like to become a Member of the EiE Community and receive invites for future calls, please complete this short form!

Community resources

- Insights from the last EiE Community call
- Register for the next EiE Community call
- Join the EiE Facebook Community

Key insights from this call



TEACHING STRATEGIES

- Don't Fear the Hard Conversations, Prepare for Them
- Focus on Student Agency and Leadership
- Simplify and Be Honest
- Build Empathy and Solidarity
- Prioritize Teacher Wellbeing



POWER OF STORYBOOKS

- Focus on Agency, Not Victimhood
- Weave in Universal Childhood Concerns
- Highlight Acts of Kindness and Hope
- Safe Spaces for Peril and Empathy
- Power of Telling Such Stories

Insights on Teaching Strategies

Don't Fear the Hard Conversations, Prepare for Them

Teachers don't need to avoid difficult topics, but rather prepare for them and be ready for students' unique reactions. The goal is to support students and welcome their emotions. Teachers don't need to provide the "perfect answer," but rather create safe spaces for students to share their fears and doubts. Silence can make students feel more confused or alone. Engaging in these conversations can lead to powerful lessons in compassion.

Focus on Student Agency and Leadership

When discussing 'attacks on education', teachers can empower students by shifting their focus from helplessness to agency. For example, you can ask your students, "If you were a leader, what would you do to protect education?". This approach encourages their critical thinking and leadership skills, and helps students see that they have an essential role to play in solving today's problems.

Simplify and Be Honest	Teachers should avoid lying to students about the realities of war because we all know children are smart! However, it's best if the information shared is simplified. Teachers can also use phrases like "I'm angry just like you" to show empathy and help them feel understood.
Build Empathy and Solidarity	Teachers can foster empathy by connecting their students with personal stories of those affected by attacks on education. By helping students understand the human impact of conflict, it can move the conversation beyond abstract concepts and build solidarity for the struggles of other children around the world.
Prioritize Teacher Wellbeing	Attacks on education is a challenging topic to navigate in classrooms all around the world, and teachers should remember to also prioritize their own well-being. Teachers can find support from within their family and community, and find other ways to recharge to continue supporting their students to process these difficult realities.

Insights on the Power of Storybooks

Focus on Agency, Not Victimhood	Instead of portraying children in conflict zones as 'helpless victims', books should give their young characters agency and a sense of purpose. Young readers can then see that children can play an active part of the solution, and are not just a passive recipient of circumstances. For example, Wafa' Tarnowska's book - Nour's Secret Library - tells the real story of teenagers in Damascus who rescued 15,000 books from bombed buildings and created a secret library. This shows readers that even in times of conflict, children can have important projects to focus on and a sense of responsibility. By focusing on what children can do, stories about attacks on education can provide hope and show readers that there is life even during war.
Weave in Universal Childhood Concerns	Even in conflict-affected areas, it's important to remember that teenagers are still teenagers, navigating typical adolescent problems like friendships, appearance, and exam pressures. For example, in Elizabeth Laird's book - Welcome to Nowhere - she incorporated these universal concerns into the story, making the characters more relatable, helping young readers around the world connect with their experiences.
Highlight Acts of Kindness and Hope	When authors show glimmers of hope and kindness, even in the darkest moments of war, they look after the soft hearts of children, giving them belief in humanity. In story books about conflict, acts of kindness can be dramatic, like searching through rubble or risking your life to help someone escape, or they can be quieter acts, like sharing a loaf of bread or offering a kind word or smile. In Hiba Noor Khan's book - The Little War Cat - these moments of compassion and light are vividly highlighted, which help nurture children's belief in the possibility of something better.
Safe Spaces for Peril and Empathy	Children's books about war and conflict can provide a safe way for young readers to experience and understand "danger" and "jeopardy". For children in peaceful contexts, who may not be allowed to play outside without parental supervision due to modern fears, fantasy books and stories about conflict offer a way for them to experience danger and peril. Reading stories such as Anne Laurel Carter's 'What The Kite Saw' allows children to test themselves by asking, "Could I be like that?". This is supported by research on mirror neurons, a set of specialized brain cells that activate when a person connects with a character or story. These neurons allow a reader to

safely live through the story's dangerous plot, providing them with a blueprint for navigating the world. Stories also teach empathy and help young readers develop a deeper understanding of experiences outside their own.

Power of Telling Such Stories

Stories are essential for children, particularly during times of darkness and difficulty, because they're a powerful tool for shifting perspectives and fostering hope. The human brain is uniquely responsive to narratives. Research has found that when people are given a list of facts, only two regions of their brains are activated, while when the same information is woven into a story, six different brain regions are activated. Humankind has a mysterious yet undeniable need for stories. By resisting the narratives of fear often presented by politicians and the media, even stories set in conflict zones can help children overcome despair and darkness by providing them with hope in humanity.

Video Recordings

1. Teach For Afghanistan fellow, Bushra
2. Teach For Bangladesh fellow, Ashraful
3. Teach For Lebanon fellow, Mohamad
4. Teach For Niger fellow, Abdallah
5. Teach For Palestine fellow, Muna
6. Teach For Ukraine fellow, Anastassia
7. Teach For Ukraine fellow, Dmytro
8. Teach For Ukraine fellow, Liza

Attendees dialed in from:

Empieza por Educar, Enseña Chile, Enseña Ecuador, Enseña por México, Teach First, Teach For Afghanistan, Teach For America, Teach For Bangladesh, Teach For Chad, Teach For India, Teach For Italy, Teach For Kenya, Teach For Lebanon, Teach For Malaysia, Teach For Niger, Teach For Palestine, Teach For Poland, Teach For Qazaqstan, Teach For Thailand, Teach For Uganda, Teach For Ukraine, and Teach For Zimbabwe. With friends from Canada, Dominica, France, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tunisia, and Zambia.