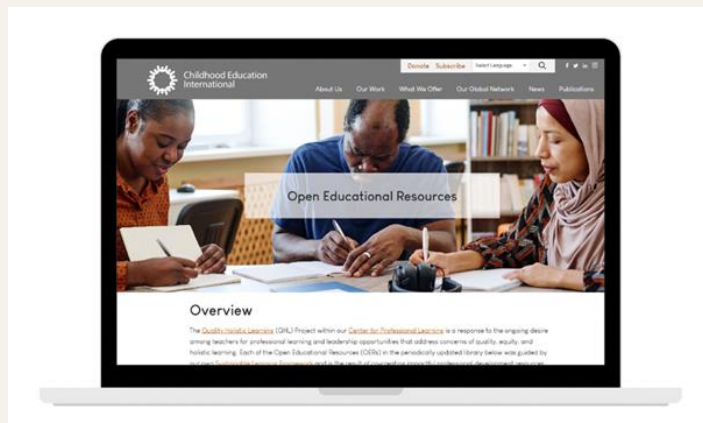# Embracing emergent change and sustainable learning in the EiD ecosystem

Educators working with refugees in Kenya, Lebanon, Niger, Chad and around the world have been given a considerable boost thanks to the creation of a set of open source professional learning resources covering social-emotional learning (SEL), psychosocial support (PSS) and asset-based pedagogies.

The resources have been co-created by educators serving refugee and displaced learners as part of the Quality Holistic Learning Project (QHL) through the Center for Professional Learning (CPL) at Childhood Education International (CE International), supported by Porticus' All Eyes on Learning (AEoL) programme.

The work responds to a critical need for teachers working in contexts of crisis and displacement to be more directly and meaningfully involved in developing materials and gaining access to professional learning, which supports teacher management, teacher wellbeing, workforce development and professional learning.

As noted in project reflections by the CPL project team: "Teachers, themselves, must be provided rich opportunities to learn and grow in collaborative webs and within supportive ecosystems they themselves are cultivating. This is especially true in displacement, refugee, migration, and other low-

resourced settings in which teachers, alongside their learners and those children's families, are often marginalised."

Teachers as centre: Learning from emergent change and context

Adaptability has been central to the initiative so teachers can respond to the unique contexts of Niger, Lebanon, Kenya and Chad. This emphasis on flexibility covers multiple aspects of the grant: from the nature and structure of partnerships to a diversity of approaches, to the concept of holistic learning.

Project Fellows expressed the most interest in two of the grant's proposed four teacher training modules, which ultimately led to the development of two modules: PSS/SEL and asset-based pedagogies. A variety of options for access and availability was also developed, including online courses, offline workshops and handbooks, alongside hybrid models and self-directed learning. CPL thus shifted its approach to creating bespoke resources that were responsive to broader pedagogical concerns and contexts, and teachers' technological needs and learning preferences.

Alongside this focus on context was an acute awareness of emergent change. This term refers to the ability to realign an organisation as unpredictable change occurs around it. Projects that can build in a system of monitoring and reflection will be well positioned to recognise and respond to such emergent change, so they benefit the overall health of the ecosystem.

From the start, this project has prioritised learning from teacher feedback in each national context. While there were overarching themes — for example, teacher certification and licensure, PSS/SEL and other continued professional learning — methods of support for teachers became clearly differentiated across Niger, Chad, Kenya and Lebanon.

The feedback provided insights into the political, economic and social forces in each country, and how these could impact the teachers' work. This led to a more nuanced understanding of whether it is tenable to push for teacher certification and licensing for refugee teachers within national systems, and also the feasibility of supporting teacher professional development and learning opportunities outside of formal pathways in each context.

At its core, the QHL project places the teacher at the centre of all efforts and prioritises their input, feedback and collaboration across all phases and activities of the project. Teacher Fellows who co-created QHL Project materials recently wrote about their experiences focusing on holistic learning and the needs of teachers working in displacement contexts.

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Having an organisational commitment to learning

The Sustainable Learning Framework (SLF) created by Dr. Diana Woolis, former Director of CPL, reflects a commitment to learning about the complex global, regional, national and local ecosystems in which refugees learn and educators work. The SLF operationalises an ecosystem-based approach into a cohesive, actionable set of practices to guide the implementation of education programming both in this grant and beyond.

Watch here a video on the Sustainable Learning Framework.

The framework consists of five pillars:

1. Cultivate learning ecosystems through systems thinking – to leverage actors, factors and relationships.
2. Deliver purposeful pedagogy – to mindfully design learning.
3. Loop learning — to hold ourselves accountable.
4. Facilitate democratic engagement — to facilitate access and agency.
5. Navigate digital geographies and ensure digital inclusion — to plan and sustain the learning journey.

CPL's engagement with its Fellows is a strong example of how they have managed to cultivate learning ecosystems and loop learning back into their work. It shows how emergent and adaptive management can be put into practice.

What does it take to cultivate a learning ecosystem?

Relationship building, meaningful collaboration and mutual learning has been integral to the project, as has been the recognition that the ways of working are paramount to the sustainability and vitality of such relationships.

The project reframes learning from an *individual* process towards a *relational* process. The team adapted their approach to emphasise ways in which groups were able to co-create and learn collaboratively. This was done, for example, through the formation, development and support of teacher Fellows in communities of practice focused on education in displacement contexts, resulting in the co-creation of QHL products and tools. The results varied in each context, so flexibility in the creation of material was essential to ensure relevance and uptake.

CPL focused on creating conditions and support that would allow teachers to influence the ecosystem around them. Through this leadership, teachers themselves became the most successful actors in leading the processes of dissemination and uptake.

In early progress reports to Porticus, the CE International team noted significant challenges in successfully reaching out to Ministries of Education and other national stakeholders. By 2022, however, the team said that "despite team failures to engage ministries directly, QHL Project Fellows have had tremendous success in making connections and forging pathways with ministries of education and other national education systems/entities. They have, through affiliations and relationships, succeeded in getting direct feedback from trainers and directors in ministry (or affiliate) offices on QHL materials which have assisted substantially in revisions of materials and alignment with national systems."

The project team was able to successfully reframe education leadership in a way that recognises complexity in education (and EiD – education in displacement) ecosystems, with the critical need to focus on leadership in context. Their work highlights how advocating for teachers as leaders creates greater success.

What can we learn?

This case study exemplifies embracing emergent change for the purposes of learning. Working with complexity challenges the status quo, including existing hierarchies of decision-making and power structures. It requires slowing down and re-evaluating the trajectory of one's work and providing space and time for meaningful collaboration and engagement.

This takes notable and significant investment and commitment on the part of all involved. CPL underlined this point: "Partnering is central to working within the EiD [education in displacement] sector…We have learned, however, that everyone working in this space is working with limited capacity (human, time, money) and while there is interest amongst stakeholders in collaboration… there is limited ability for the type of partnership needed." Funding to support collaborative work is critical, and it "needs to incentivise these partnership approaches."

Ultimately, this project is about centring teachers and teaching throughout the learning process, demonstrating openness and flexibility to emergent change incorporated as learning across the project duration. It offers significant reflection on and examples of an actionable ecosystem approach that incorporates and celebrates the contribution of teachers to all elements of its work. A similar approach could be taken not only in other EiD work, but in the education and international development sectors more broadly.

*For more information please contact jkasper@ceinternational1892.org and see
https://ceinternational1892.org/cpl/cplinaction/quality-holistic-learning/