HUMMAN INTEREST STORIES

"TEACHER, TODAY YOU DIDN'T ASK US HOW WE FEEL"

SYSTEM STRENGTHENING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR QUALITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF SAHRAWI REFUGEE CHILDREN

Jadhiya is a primary school Spanish teacher. Today she arrives at her class a bit late, so as soon as she arrives, she starts teaching the lesson. She notices that her students are looking at her a bit strangely, and that is when one of her students says, "Teacher, today you didn't ask us how we feel."

Jadhiya smiles. She is right.

Since she received training in pedagogy as part of the teacher strengthening project implemented by UAM in partnership with UNICEF Algeria, all of her classes start the same way: with the emotions chart. Through this educational resource, she manages to connect with her students. It allows her to understand if any of her students are going through a personal situation that might affect their learning.

Jadhiya is not just a Spanish language teacher; she is one of the main participants in the teacher strengthening project launched in 2018. Later, she would be one of the six teachers initially selected to become mentors for this project. But when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, making it impossible for the UAM professors to travel, a new possibility arose for them to take on the role of trainers themselves.



Jadhiya, Suadu, Gadfa, Nacho, Matu, Tfarrah (selected teachers)

At first, the idea seemed impossible to them: "How are we going to teach other teachers?"

Fear and insecurity overcame them. Tfarrah remembers with a laugh that they couldn't sleep the night before delivering their first training. They spent the night calling each other on the phone, asking what they were going to do. The next morning, full of insecurity, they went to Auserd and taught a class of 36 teachers. They came out of those classes happy and proud.

That small triumph, along with the trust placed in them and the guidance they received, gradually gave them the necessary skills and, above all, the autonomy and empowerment to lead this project.



The Sahrawi trainee teachers during the workshops

Today, years later, Jadhiya and her colleagues not only teach in classrooms, but they have also trained numerous teachers from other refugee camps, who, also, have trained others after that.



Trainers from the refugee camp of Bojador

Thanks to this training, they have reconciled with teaching by acquiring pedagogical knowledge. Teaching has become an easier task, they have gained recognition within their communities, and they have strengthened family participation in their children's education.

Pedagogical training has gone far beyond traditional teaching. Among other things, they have learned about learning difficulties, project design, and emotional intelligence, understanding how emotions influence their students' learning, and they have even a greater self-awareness of their own emotions.

They have discovered new ways to create educational materials using the resources around them, valuing the wealth and capabilities of their own environment.
But it is not just them; now it is common for their students to arrive at class with plastic bottles, fabrics given to them by their mothers, or yogurt containers because they have become accomplices in everything their teachers are capable of creating with them.

The teachers showed us, with great enthusiasm, the pedagogical materials they have created. They all talk at once, interrupting each other and completing their colleagues' explanations. They want to show us every game, every resource, and every activity, explaining how the idea came about and how they use it in class. The emotion with which they speak makes it clear that these materials are much more than educational tools, they represent hours of hard work, creativity, and pride.



Trainers from the refugee camp of Auserd alongside the director, showing the materials they created.

What started as a small initiative gradually expanded. The demand grew because more and more teachers wanted to access to this training. They saw that the colleagues who had participated were doing many new things in class, and they wanted to do them too. Considering this, it was decided to incorporate it into the teacher training institutes, allowing it to reach many more people.

Today, this project has become one of the most important educational programs in the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf. A project born from sensitivity, from listening to and understanding people's real needs. Because when a project is designed around people, it doesn't just transform schools, it also transforms the culture.

In addition, the project has helped resolve another fundamental challenge: bringing training closer to each refugee camp.

Nana is 33 years old. She has always known she wanted to be a teacher, but due to the distance of the training centers, she hadn't been able to do it until now.

Both she and her classmates highly value the efforts made by their trainers. For three weeks a year, they make a great sacrifice. Leaving their students, means having to make up those lessons at another time or having to find someone to substitute for them, in a context marked by a shortage of teachers.

Despite the challenges, the transformation continues.



The transformation continues through the young women receiving this training today.

They are fully aware of the role they play and how they influence the children's future. They have understood how understanding children and playing with them is one of the most powerful tools for teaching. Such is their commitment that they want to continue training to address the different educational needs of the children.

Initial Teacher Education is a project implemented by UAM in partnership with UNICEF Algeria in the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf

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