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Follow-up on June Colloquium at Goetheanum
"Learning in Difficult Times"

Key suggestion: Due to the increasing number of people affected by natural disasters and human conflict the number of crisis-affected children without education is increasing in the world. It is imperative to develop a Waldorf Minimum Standards of Education, based on the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards framework, to improve the Waldorf movement's response to acute and chronic crises around the world.

Introduction

After the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas followed by Israel's retaliation, the global Waldorf emergency education community responded by aiding and empowering both besieged Palestinian and Israeli communities. Stefanie Alon, who started the first Waldorf kindergarten in Israel where now there are over 250 kindergartens and numerous Waldorf schools and high schools, played a key role organizing the varied Waldorf emergency education responders visiting Palestine and Israel. The humanitarian responses arising from the global Waldorf community were generous, but also unorganized. There was no central Waldorf coordinating body to ensure an effective, efficient and integrated emergency response. The burden lay on Ms. Alon's shoulders to coordinate with few resources the community interventions and trainings to upskill teachers in this time of crisis. Witnessing a "wild west" of emergency responders from late 2023, each not in contact or collaborating with the other, Alon repeatedly made requests for the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum to organize a colloquium of the global Waldorf practitioner community to respond to this; her request was granted at the beginning of summer 2025.

The topic for the colloquium at the Goetheanum on June 12th and 13th 2025, was on emergency aid, trauma and emergency education. A variety of approaches was represented at this first such conference on the topic. Participation included interdisciplinary sections of the Goetheanum (Pedagogical, Medical, Social Inclusion and General Anthroposophical); this multidisciplinary approach is vital in education in emergencies because "normal" education is not reaching crisis-affected learners as they might have previously experienced pre-crisis at their regular school. All participants at the colloquium have been inspired by Waldorf education, and the goal of these approaches was to support the wellbeing and learning of children in crisis zones. Speakers focused on different priorities in the psychosocial and educational realms.

The authors of this report, as participants in the conference, recognized strong interest in Waldorf practitioners to support communities undergoing acute and chronic crises, but despite this interest, there was not a unified response from the Waldorf community on how to best launch interventions.

Context for the Global Need of Emergency Education

This year, UNICEF warned in an authoritative study, *Prospects for Children in 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures* that the world is entering a new era of crisis for children; climate change, inequality and conflict are disrupting their lives and limiting their futures. Over 473 million children — more than one in six globally — now live in areas affected by conflict, with the world experiencing the highest number of conflicts since World War II. Subsequently the percentage of the world's children

living in conflict zones has doubled from around 10 per cent in the 1990s to almost 19 per cent today. Intensifying armed conflict will continue to pose serious risks to children in 2025.[1]

In regards to children's education, currently 263 million children and young people remain out of school, and another 330 million are in school but are judged not to be "learning the basics."[2]

UNICEF's *Prospects for Children in 2025* states, "To uphold children's rights and well-being, action is needed to rethink and strengthen systems. Systems approaches (i.e., approaches that go beyond mere service delivery) are essential to build resilience into every area of children's lives, whether it is disaster preparedness frameworks that safeguard schools and communities, education systems that can adapt during emergencies, or inclusive health-care systems that respond to immediate needs while planning for future risks. These systems must not only address current global challenges but also anticipate and prepare for what lies ahead."[3]

The writers of this paper believe there is much potential for the Waldorf movement to make a far greater global impact educating and building resilience into the lives of children - if Waldorf leadership can rethink and strengthen its emergency education response.

History of Emergency Education

Inspired by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000, and informed by the understanding that children in times of crisis learn differently, the United Nations launched the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies known as INEE. The INEE takes a "whole-child" approach advocating holistic education responses by addressing the diverse and multi-sectoral needs of crisis-affected children and young people to improve their academic outcomes and their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. While many national authorities have yet to prioritize gender equity, quality education, and educational continuity in their education sector plans, contingency plans, emergency response plans, and budgets, INEE recognized the need to adopt a set of collective strategic priorities to ensure that all people who are affected by emergencies and protracted crises receive a holistic response to create an equitable, quality, safe, and relevant educational system.

According to the INEE, education in emergencies refers to the quality, inclusive learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational, higher and adult education. Education in emergencies provides physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection that saves and sustains lives. Common situations of crisis in which education in emergencies is essential include conflicts, protracted crises, situations of violence, forced displacement, disasters, and public health emergencies.

Addressing the fragmentation of emergency responders in its own system, INEE realized that a far more efficient system was needed to coordinate planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian services and educational programs during a response to a crisis. "Since 2004, the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (INEE MS) have provided a framework for inclusive and equitable quality education. The INEE Minimum Standards for Education are designed to be applicable for crisis responses in many different situations, including emergencies caused by conflict, natural hazards such as those induced by climate change, and slow- and rapid-onset

[1] UNICEF, *Prospects for Children in 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures.* https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/prospects-children-2025-global-outlook
[2] *Prospects for Children in 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures.*
[3] *Prospects for Children in 2025: Building Resilient Systems for Children's Futures.*

crises in both rural and urban environments."[4]These standards were further influenced by the creation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

INEE developed Minimum Standards of Education as a planning and preparedness framework to improve the quality of crisis response coordination between humanitarian organizations and to promote continuity of education for children which may no longer occur in regular school setting. The goals of the INEE Minimum Standards for Education are:

- To improve the quality of education preparedness, response, and **recovery;**
- To increase access to safe and relevant **learning** opportunities;
- To ensure that the actors who provide these services are held **accountable;** *(do no harm, economical aspects, prioritization)*

These Minimum Standards for Education are guided by the general standards of each country aiming towards recovery over time.[5]

Waldorf Minimum Standard of Education (Waldorf MiSE) as Part of a Crisis Response Plan
A crisis response plan is important to consider for both short-term emergency responses and long-term recovery plans that will be in effect long after the initial crisis is over. As of yet, leadership in the Emergency Waldorf movement has not defined Minimum Standards for Education leaving a large void in criteria for assessing, planning and implementing short term or long term psychosocial and educational programs based on the Waldorf view of human development. There is a need to recognize the reality that even in regular Waldorf schools, the ideal maximum standards – which identifies the DNA of Waldorf and encompasses the full breadth of principles and best practices – can't be attained in emergency settings. Furthermore, it is critical to acknowledge that there are differences between a regular Waldorf school which is affected by a crisis, schools aspiring to adopt full Waldorf standards, and non-Waldorf schools which are supported by emergency approaches inspired by Waldorf principles.

Crises have an undeniable effect on the provision of Waldorf pedagogy. Aspiring Waldorf schools in crisis zones trying to transition to Maximum Standards Waldorf schools are struggling and often failing; they mix methods because they are working with both state and Waldorf curricula. Additionally, Waldorf schools that have met Maximum Standards for Waldorf but experienced a severe crisis, such as the Waldorf schools that burned down in the Los Angeles fires, are also struggling because of the increased needs of students and the lessened availability of necessary resources. This juggling of Waldorf curriculum and state curriculum, as well as increased student needs, is weakening both established and aspiring Waldorf schools because of the lack of consistency for the children. Consciously attuning to the learning needs of the children means to be consistent in evaluating what is missing and what still can be improved. This self-evaluation helps teachers adapt their response to changes in the learning process of the children according to time, methodology and variations of lessons. This all needs to be professionally documented so it can be communicated to parents, any relevant Ministries or Departments of Education for the school's location, and the Waldorf association.

Waldorf Education as a Buffer to Toxic Stress
Developed as a new social form to aid recovery from World War I, Waldorf schools integrate into their curriculum methods to help buffer children from toxic stress. On a practical level one of the big differences seen between Waldorf pedagogy and regular pedagogy in most state-sponsored schools is that Waldorf pedagogy balances direct (often considered core or academic) and indirect (often considered extracurricular) learning subjects while also limiting – if not completely eliminating – standardized testing. In Waldorf, direct subjects are understood to be classes in mathematics, reading, grammar,

[4] Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, *INEE Minimum Standards for Education, 2024 Edition.*

[5] Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, *INEE Minimum Standards for Education, 2024 Edition.*

foreign language and science. Indirect subjects are understood to be classes in art, handcraft, sports, cooking and gardening. In Waldorf all subjects are equally important and, utilizing standard Waldorf practices, these schools are able to meet the therapeutic and psychosocial needs of children through the Waldorf curriculum. Additionally, children are spared from additional unnecessary stress knowing they don't need to pass tests to progress to the next level.

This is completely different from state sponsored schools where they treat direct learning subjects as more important than indirect learning subjects. In times of extreme crisis in state-sponsored schools any indirect (extracurricular) learning subjects that are part of the educational program are often cut during crises because of the diversion of resources. There is often also a need for school classrooms which are often used for the double shifts to provide only direct lessons. In crisis zones generally the methods used by educators to teach direct subjects generate more stress for children. While therapeutic and psychosocial support could be helpful, often the needs of crisis-affected children overwhelms and far exceeds the help available, with NGOs tasked to provide supplementary psychosocial support.

Waldorf schools generally have flourished in stable societies where they have the capacity to meet the framework of guiding principles set in The (Waldorf) Hague Conference's Maximum Standards for Education, and Waldorf principles have the potential to provide invaluable support to crisis-affected children around the world. However, it is vital to recognize that establishing Waldorf schools and providing well-trained Waldorf teachers in line with Maximum Education Standards for Waldorf is challenging and fraught with possible derailments, which is another reason why there is a great need for Minimum Standards for Education in the Waldorf movement.

Historic Challenges and Limitations in Supporting Waldorf Education in Unstable Countries
Below are several examples of various challenges to supporting the growth of Waldorf education in unstable countries or marginalized communities:

The American interfaith organization, reGeneration Education, was founded based on appreciating the potential of Waldorf education to help heal children through education while also fostering social cohesion. It was one of the organizations represented at the colloquium at the Goetheanum. reGeneration Education spent 20 years working to promote Waldorf education in Palestine and Israel to help heal children and families as a means to advance peacebuilding in the region.

In one of a number of projects, with the blessing of Palestinian school administrators in a private school, reGeneration Education worked several years with Stefanie Alon to attempt a Palestinian Waldorf kindergarten teacher training in Jenin, West Bank (Occupied Palestinian Territories). After many visits to the Jenin kindergarten, Alon concluded that the Waldorf training had met serious roadblocks: The female kindergarten teachers, relaxed without the presence of the administrators, froze whenever the administrators walked in. reGeneration Education's conclusion was that, although well-meaning, the patriarchal structure of the school undermined the training of the Palestinian kindergarten teachers. Later, reGeneration Education attempted another teacher training program in conjunction with the local Ministry of Education officials. reGeneration hosted a two week Waldorf enrichment course attended by 120 Palestinian kindergarten teachers and primary school educators. After providing both financial resources and substantial expertise into the Jenin project which anticipated seeding a Waldorf kindergarten in Jenin with the support of the Ministry of Education, the project was shut down when the supervisor of the Jenin district changed. It was a huge loss of momentum and resources.

In crisis zones starting Waldorf initiatives in line with Maximum Education Standards for Waldorf is challenging, fraught with possible derailments. But what about in marginalized communities in relatively stable countries that already have a flourishing Waldorf system?

Israel and Palestine: We Can't Breathe

Tamrat El Zeitoun, is the first Arab Waldorf school in Israel, a country previously described as having an impressive number of Hebrew speaking Waldorf kindergartens and schools that has served as an excellent pool of resources to ignite the spark of Waldorf education in the Palestinian community in Israel. To start Tamrat El Zeitoun, the faculty received Waldorf training and support in Hebrew from the Waldorf community, much of it from the faculty at Kibbutz Harduf, which is a ten-minute drive from Tamrat El Zeioun. Despite the support, before Tamrat El Zeitoun was fully accredited and received financial support from the Israeli Ministry of Education, Tamrat El Zeitoun was in desperate financial shape for years after starting its primary school, unable to pay faculty salaries while also trying to continue mandatory insurance payments and other expenses. A desperate email from Tamrat El Zeitoun to reGeneration Education captured the dire situation with the sentence, "We can't breathe." They asked for help to pay salaries and other operating expenses while they were waiting for final accreditation. Responding to requests for funds from parents and administrators at Tamrat El Zeitoun, reGeneration Education partnered with the Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolf Steiner to send money to cover salaries to keep the school from falling apart or being shut down by authorities before it was accredited and began receiving government funding to sustain itself.

After years of efforts to support the growth of Arab Waldorf education in Israel, reGeneration Education began to realize there were a number of obstacles blocking the growth of Arab Waldorf education. Some difficulties were the struggle for quality Arabic Waldorf teacher training and issues in the capacity for independent governance and parent initiative. Additionally these are marginalized communities with scarce resources relative to the more privileged majority in Israel. reGeneration Education conducted a 21-month study of systemic barriers that prevented Palestinian families who were citizens in Israel from accessing Waldorf early childhood and elementary education in their communities. reGeneration Education's findings are detailed in the report, "Closing the Gap: Increasing Access to Trauma-Informed Education for PCI/Arab Communities in Israel Through Waldorf Education."

Ultimately Tamrat El Zeitoun is both a success story and also a cautionary tale. It is a success for seeding Waldorf education in the Arab world and the school is proudly recognized as a precious gem in the Arab community of Shefaram, Israel. However the story of Tamrat El Zeitoun is also a cautionary tale for Waldorf in marginalized communities because it demonstrates the vast resources the school is dependent on for operations and most importantly, for well trained qualified teachers.

At the colloquium, Shepha Vainstein, the founder of reGeneration Education, reported what an Israeli educational policy maker said to her when she was speaking to him about what Waldorf schools could bring to marginalized children in Israel. "Waldorf education is a beautiful education. But how do you bring it to thousands of children?"

Kosovo: The Disappearance of a Waldorf Kindergarten

After the brutal war in Kosovo ended in 1999, a Waldorf kindergarten named "Oases" was established in the capital city of Pristina with the support of the Swiss Acacia Foundation. Swiss Acacia Foundation provided funds to purchase a building to have a sustainable space for a Waldorf inspired kindergarten. The hope was for this to be a seed planted for the growth of post-war healing Waldorf education in Kosovo. However, it is no longer operational – reports show that it stopped functioning in 2022. The building where the preschool was operating was torn down and currently an apartment building is under construction at the site of the former kindergarten which closed three years before. While there are plans for a preschool to be reopened in an apartment of the building, there is also a contingency plan for the funds from the sale to be returned to the Swiss Acacia Foundation if the reopening of the preschool does not take place. Unlike Tamrat El Zeitoun, which fortunately benefited from the close collaboration of the local Hebrew speaking Waldorf community to help it grow and flourish, this example of the Waldorf kindergarten in Kosovo shows the fragility of new Waldorf kindergarten initiatives, how much effort is

needed to keep track of and support the initiative, and how important it is to determine if it is possible to reclaim funds invested in the kindergarten so they can used for a new initiative.

Today crises with vast instabilities are permeating the globe. It is urgent we meet these challenges in a realistic way by defining Minimum Standards for Waldorf for educational communities in crisis zones around the world so that on a practical level the Waldorf Minimum Standards of Education (MiSE) can be absorbed into projects funded by Ministries of Education around the globe. In a twist of fate, although the Pristina Waldorf kindergarten disappeared, this intervention did foster long-term change: the original Waldorf pedagogical mentor for the kindergarten, Beatrice Rutishauser Ramm, developed with Caritas Switzerland Essence of Learning, a scalable early childhood teacher training based on the Waldorf view of human development; it has since been adopted by Kosovo's Ministry of Education as part of its newest standards of Early Childhood Education. reGeneration Education is documenting this as a case study to be examined for future early child and primary school educational work in Gaza once hostilities cease there. The success in Kosovo's integration of Essence of Learning could be used as a working model for developing Waldorf MiSE.

Impacting Ministry of Education Standards Throughout the World
Minimum standards are preliminary steps for elements of Waldorf education to be incorporated into state-sponsored schools while also fulfilling the country's Ministry of Education's goals for their curricula. In this case the pedagogical priorities can be formulated to reach the goals of the Ministry of Education of that country and the associated national/state curricula. Waldorf MiSE are also needed so that teachers can be trained in a shorter period than the regular Waldorf training focusing on child development and methodology.

To further identify the need for coordinating emergency responses and developing and applying Waldorf MiSE, the following section briefly outlines types of crises, crisis response, crisis intervention, psychosocial support, trauma, toxic stress and long-term impact of adverse childhood experience.

Types of Crises
Education in Emergencies has been the focus of research by various NGOs with follow up by university studies these past 25 years. From this body of research comes an understanding that there are different types of needs for children and families depending upon different types of chronic and acute crises. This has a direct impact on the length of the support programs and the age and development of the children.

Acute crisis: The Immediate Separation from the Old Normality
An acute crisis occurs when people respond with significant emotional distress to any natural or human-caused disaster. This distress can be a state of intensified arousal accompanied by strong cognitive, physical, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual reactions as a result of the exposure to the disaster. Psychological homeostasis (balance) is disrupted, one's usual coping mechanisms have failed, and there is evidence of significant distress, impairment, and inability to function.

Distinguishing features and considerations of an acute crisis are:
- The disaster occurs without any warning; with life splitting into "before" and "after".
- People affected by an acute crisis need different support than the people affected by an ongoing chronic crisis.

Crisis intervention is a short-term, acute intervention designed to mitigate the stress reactions associated with a disaster. It is aimed at assisting individuals in a crisis situation to restore equilibrium to their biopsychosocial functioning and to minimize the potential for psychological trauma. The goals of crisis intervention are: (1) to stabilize, (2) reduce symptoms, and (3) return to adaptive functioning or to facilitate access to continued care. When these three goals are reached, the work is considered complete.

Chronic Crises: Long term
Chronic crises are ongoing with many uncertainties and instabilities. Additionally, people living in chronic crises can suffer an additional acute crisis such as a war, thus creating a polycrisis, a complex situation where multiple, interconnected crises converge and amplify each other, resulting in a large-scale predicament that is difficult to manage or resolve, such as the world is currently witnessing in Gaza.

Chronic crises are distinguished by one of more of the following criteria:
- Events create unstable circumstances where children are not learning grade-level based on their age.
- Resources such as therapy, supplies or even nutritious food are scarce.
- Unexploded ordinances have a long-term impact and over successive generations lead to more children with learning difficulties and special needs.[6]

Chronic crises can have secondary effects beyond the principal event; these include poverty, structural violence, and disproportionate effects of climate change, amongst others. Interventions should pay particular attention to the following:
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- Malnutrition or (lead) poisoning negatively affects brain development - one factor for the large group of "slow learners"
- Wrong educational methodologies are a secondary factor for functional illiteracy, rates rising especially in times of crisis.
- Children who grow up in refugee camps need continuous school access and a curriculum which serves their special needs (i.e. temporary physical school access, schooling in their language).
- Living as a refugee in a "normal" setting is a chronic crisis: Refugee children's school biography has been interrupted. They experience their individual crisis in otherwise normal surroundings but nevertheless want to be integrated into these normal surroundings with the acceptance of their personal story.
- In chronic crises, the situation can continuously evolve, which is why ongoing monitoring and evaluation of methods and time frame is needed.

Psychosocial Wellbeing as a Precursor to Learning:
Crisis response planning includes crisis intervention to restore psychosocial functioning. The American Red Cross and the International Federation Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) state psycho-social support as "[a] process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families and communities. By respecting the independence, dignity and coping mechanisms of individuals and communities, psycho-social support promotes the restoration of social cohesion and infrastructure."[7]

Similar to the Red Cross's definition, the International Network for Emergency Education (INEE) defines psychosocial support as, "[p]rocesses and actions that promote the holistic wellbeing of people in their social world. It includes support provided by family and friends. PSS [Psychosocial Support] can also be described as a process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families and communities. PSS aims to help individuals recover after a crisis has disrupted their lives and to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events."[8]

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[6] ARTE Reportage, "Irak: Das Leid der Kinder Nach Dem Krieg,"
https://www.arte.tv/de/videos/112746-000-A/irak-das-leid-der-kinder-nach-dem-krieg/
[7] Jessica Ports Robbins, "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support,"
https://preparecenter.org/topic/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support/.
[8] Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, "EiE Glossary: Psychosocial Support,"
https://inee.org/eie-glossary/psychosocial-support.

Psychosocial activities are actions that address both the emotional and social needs of individuals, with the goal of promoting well-being and resilience.[9,10] These activities are diverse, ranging from arts and crafts, drama and puppet performance, pretend play, storytelling, games, sports, music, song and dance to relaxation and mindfulness activities, psychological first aid, skill-building and counseling.[11] Many of these activities are strengths in Waldorf education and they are often used to support individuals coping with stress, trauma, or challenging life circumstances.

INEE goes on further to recognize that psychosocial wellbeing is a significant precursor to learning and is essential for academic achievement; it thus has important bearing on the future prospects of both individuals and societies. Furthermore, the INEE recognizes the need for more intentional and consistent implementation of good- quality psychosocial interventions on the frontlines of education. However, psychosocial activities, often implemented as indirect-subjects in Waldorf schools, in quality education go hand-in-hand with teaching direct subjects. The goal of psychosocial support for crisis-affected children is to stabilize. The goal of quality education is to help children learn. Psychosocial support does not take the place of teaching direct subjects needed to provide quality education. Providing psychosocial support needs to be distinguished when using the term Emergency Pedagogy or Emergency Education when the focus is not quality education but rather offering psychosocial support as a precursor to learning.

Quality Education is Missing in Crisis Zones

Goal 4 of the United Nations Millennium Goals is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" providing a general criteria for quality education that includes numeracy and literacy and equal access to quality preprimary education - all strong domains for the Waldorf movement.[12]. The INEE states, "Too often in the wake of mass violence, inter-group conflicts, or natural disasters, education, and in particular quality, relevant education, is neglected and not integrated into a holistic humanitarian response. Recognizing that quality education can contribute positively to human security and development across all stages of risk management—from crisis response to recovery, from development to prevention and preparedness—is essential."[13]

In a severe crisis almost all children show regression resulting in learning difficulties; therefore, unless effective teaching methods are adapted for these children, most of them can't reach standard grade level goals normal for their age - even if they want or if there are attempts to force them to reach the goals of the curriculum. Children in crisis zones may behaviorally regress in ways that are more obvious such as bedwetting or exhibit impulse control issues. But children who don't outwardly exhibit symptoms of regression may yet have nervous systems which are still affected by the stress of the crisis. In both instances the process of learning in and by itself can be stressful unless teaching methods are used that attune to the state of the child's nervous system. As stated in his lectures, Rudolf Steiner understood the importance of taking a child's nervous system into account when educating children in a healthy way.

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[9] Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, "Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support", page 9. (PDF: https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_Guidance_Note_on_Psychosocial_Support_ENG_v2.pdf)

[10] Interagency Standing Committee (IASC), "IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings," https://www.icmc.net/resource/iasc-guidelines-on-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-emergency-settings/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=12527980043&gbraid=0AAAAACRvLKwfOLb2GLhtdMEStXfyIVIst&gclid=CjwKCAjw49vEBhAVEiwADnMbbEkcc04jTi-kNjdO_HiAiIRbk1cbALNea5MZt_GtqSuMlb5eHAUHbRoCeJQQAvD_BwE.

[11] UNRWA, "Psychosocial Support Recreational Resource Guide," (PDF: https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/recreational_activities_resource_guide.pdf)

[12] United Nations Global Goals. https://globalgoals.org/goals/4-quality-education/

[13] Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, "Guidance Notes on Teaching and Learning," (PDF: https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_Guidance_Notes_on_Teaching_and_Learning_EN.pdf)

Sderot in the Gaza Envelope in Israel: "The Children Could Have Been Learning"
The country of Israel has been called a laboratory for the study of trauma due to its in-depth psychological research on trauma treatment for civilians and soldiers. And yet, after the October 7 attack by Hamas when Sderot and other neighboring towns and kibbutzim along the Gaza envelope were repeatedly under attack from missiles launched by Hamas, a decision had been made by the Israeli Ministry of Education to lower the educational standards for the children of Sederot and instead focus only on offering psychosocial support. When the Israeli teachers in the Essence of Learning training were taught how to teach mathematics through Emergency Education, a teacher in the course had an epiphany. She shared that there had been an educational decision to lower the academic requirements in Sderot to reduce the stress on the children. But in the Essence of Learning course she realized that "the children could have been learning," by adopting the Essence of Learning emergency pedagogical approach with the use of positive coping strategies used in a "new normality" which the children could stop using when they decide they don't need it.

Repercussions from the staggering number of children not learning is numbing. And in developing coun-tries early childhood development and education is the lowest priority. Building a strong underpinning in early childhood that forms a basis for later reading, writing, and mathematics is crucial for a child's future academic success and overall development. Unfortunately, in crisis zones, the resources for this most vulnerable group are generally reduced if not slashed - if there are any early child programs in the first place. Additionally, if there are interruptions in educating children in crisis zones, not all impacted children can attend afterschool programs to return to normality.

Resilience and Trauma
At the colloquium Peter Selg's moving presentation, "The Image of the Human Being Next to the Abyss" provided a soulful and visceral picture of a person's trauma arising from the dissolution of the sense of autonomy while perched upon the crest of that dreadful abyss. Clinically speaking, individual trauma is described as resulting from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.[14]

General Comments:
- Children who grow up in difficult life situations generally gain a lot of resilience and self-regulation options because they need them to survive.
- Children who are living in over-protective families also have difficulties in adapting as the use of their skills is not needed. Their own Resilience Buffer filled with various self- competences and skills are less filled and less self-tested.

We can't treat the two groups the same as they have two different needs to prioritize after a crisis:
- The first group considers returning to learning as their biggest problem as it represents their hopes and future
- The second group's biggest problem is that they don't even feel the inspiration or desire to learn, as they feel "lost" in the new normality which they don't know at all.

It is critical to understand that not all children who face a severe crisis experience the event as traumatic. But many of these children still suffer from learning difficulties. Long term research shows that toxic stress resulting from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), not registering to the level of trauma, takes a lasting toll in children - and unfortunately is widespread. It too must be addressed in emergency education.

[14] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "Trauma and Violence," https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/trauma-violence.

4 **Key Points on Toxic Stress and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Long Term Impact and its Causes**

Toxic stress could be seen in both acute and chronic crises, as well as in adverse childhood experiences described in the chart below. Long term research on adverse childhood experiences has validated Rudolf Steiner's indications that major stressful events experienced in childhood have long-term impact on children's physical health as well as social and psychological functioning.[15]

Toxic stress is a neurological response to heightened stress levels over a prolonged period.[16] Unlike moments of everyday stress, where a child's stress levels reduce over periods of calm or the support of a nurturing, supportive caregiver, toxic stress occurs when the child experiences prolonged, chronic stress without the benefit of going back to a stress baseline. Stress releases hormones in the brain, which can impede the building of neural networks in childhood if the stress hormones persist for too long. Below are five key points on toxic stress and its causes.

1. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refer to some of the most intensive and frequently occurring sources of stress that children may suffer early in life. ACEs can include violence, abuse, and growing up in a family with mental health or substance use problems. The following are possible examples of ACEs.:

Violence	Abuse or Neglect	Growing up in a family with mental health or substance use problems.	Other
Bullying Involvement in a physical fight Community Violence Collective Violence	Physical abuse Sexual abuse Emotional abuse Abuse of mother by partner Abuse of father by partner Psychological neglect Physical neglect	Depression or another mental illness in the family Suicide in the family Alcoholism in the family Drug abuse in the family	Incarceration of a family member Parent separation or death

2. ACEs lead to toxic stress in a child. Research on the biology of toxic stress in early childhood shows how major adversity, such as violence, poverty, abuse, or neglect, can weaken children's developing brain architecture and permanently set their stress response system on high alert, limiting school readiness and potentially harming lifelong health, learning, and

[15] Kaiser Permanente: Thriving Schools, "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)," https://thrivingschools.kaiserpermanente.org/mental-health/aces/.
[16] reGeneration Education, "Toxic Stress and the Brain," https://regenerationeducation.org/toxic-stress-and-the-brain.

behavior. Toxic stress from ACEs influences the child's growing brain and body, which will impact the child's health, academic and social functioning long into adulthood.[17]

3. Unfortunately, ACEs have a long-term dose-response effect that is seen in adulthood. This means that the greater number of ACEs in the young child's life results in a greater likelihood that later in life, they may suffer from physical and psychological problems such as heart disease, depression and diabetes, poor academic achievement, substance abuse, and other significant issues.[18]

4. In the United States ACEs are pervasive. 64% of all U.S. adults report at least one ACE. 17.3% have experienced four or more ACEs. Experiencing four or more ACEs was most common among females (19.2%). To have multiple ACEs is a major risk factor for many physical and mental health conditions.[19] [20]

Children with four or more ACEs have:
• 10-12 x greater risk for intravenous drug use and suicide • 2-3X greater risk of developing heart disease and cancer • 32x more problems for learning and behavior problems • 8 out of 10 leading causes of death in the U.S. correlate to exposure to 4 or more ACEs

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Emergency Education and Further Supportive Measures

The biggest educational problems in a crisis according to children are: [21]

- That they can't learn like before after a trauma or an acute crisis
- They suffer from learning difficulties which affects them in their self- confidence and self-efficiency.

Therapeutic interventions for trauma are employed in Waldorf and regular schools by specialists who diagnose, formulate and implement a treatment plan in an external setting. Usually therapy requires one on one services. Special services such as therapeutic interventions must meet specific criteria for referral. Systems that might have made special services available for children in school during normal times are generally overwhelmed during times of crisis and are usually unavailable for children for months or, as

[17] Harvard University Center for the Developing Child, "ACEs and Toxic Stress: Frequently Asked Questions," https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/infographics/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/.

[18] American Journal of Preventive Medicine, "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults," https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(98)00017-8/fulltext

[19] U.S. Health and Human Services, "Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences," https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/trauma-adverse-childhood-experiences-aces

[20] U.S. Center for Disease Control, "About Adverse Childhood Experiences," https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/; NIH National Library of Medicine, "The effect of multiple adverse childhood experiences on health: a systematic review and meta-analysis," https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29253477/.

[21] Beatrice Rutishauser Ramm heard this from teachers and children in all countries and crisis she worked in the last 25 years. The reasons why they say so is that the children lose the ability to learn appropriately according to their age and grade level, and that this is the reason why more children want to get into a well-being or therapeutic programs but can't. If the focus is on learning also the regulation of well-being can regulate a sense of self- competency this could be proved as well in EoL programs.

seen in Israel, for years. Learning difficulties or behavior problems arising from toxic stress can be a cause for a child's referral for therapy when instead a change in educational methods can transform a classroom from chaos into a place for learning. Emergency pedagogic programs fulfilling the criteria of Waldorf MiSE can be adapted to meet the educational needs of children in the regular schools. In this way transformation can take place for children.

Currently programs under the banner of Waldorf emergency education taken beyond Waldorf schools are providing psychosocial activities. The pedagogy in the crisis-affected school is not changed and does not include different methodologies to learn subjects (i.e., math, reading, science, and the humanities). Learning positively affects children enabling them to develop more self-esteem and self-efficacy.[22] Waldorf MiSE will lay down the foundation for further collaboration of Waldorf responders to the crisis, but will also help to amplify the global impact of the Waldorf movement in educational communities around the world.

The following is a description of an Emergency Education approach inspired by Waldorf that focuses on children learning:

Essence of learning (EoL)
Essence of Learning Emergency Education prioritizes learning for crisis-affected children, who often regress and need to gain the confidence that they are able to learn again. Once this feeling is back the age-appropriate tasks can slowly be attained with or later without the help of learning helpers. Teachers learn in a 4-day practical training how to adapt their teaching methods so that children can learn and they can document the progress so the children's improvement can become visible. There are EoL trainings for early childhood education, primary school and after school programs. Primary school children who attend the EoL Three Month Learning Support Training have the clear goal of reaching the level of self-compe-tent learning with the support of learning strategies that they can use when they need them. This is the first step to quickly reach grade level age-appropriate learning again. This approach uses only (recycleable) materials which the children also have at home to enhance learning at home as well as in the classroom. Parents of crisis-affected children are overwhelmed with the challenges of daily life and need help. Parent education work is provided to educate and lend them support. Parents consider their practical EoL Parent Program as a wellbeing program tailored for them. Regular school programs are adapted to-wards the general curricula with a focus on supporting sustainable preschools and kindergartens because the youngest children have the greatest level of need and are mostly lacking for crisis-affected families who can't afford a private preschool.[23]

The EoL Trainings support meeting the goals of each country's curriculum so that crisis-affected children have learned enough content to pass tests to be able to enter another level. It must be remembered that often teachers confess that they are affected by the crisis and can't perform as before. This problem is handled with meta-lesson preparation, mentoring and self-evaluation to document the process.

A key evaluator of the EoL program, Professor Wiltrud Weidinger of the University of Zurich stated, "The concepts and models used to date for educational work with children in crisis situations are in many cases not approaches developed specifically for this particular context but mostly consist of existing programs that have been successfully used in development cooperation but were not developed for the

[22] Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, "Guidance Notes on Teaching and Learning," pg 58.
[23] Preschool attendance is not compulsory in many countries. The child feels in this age the toxic stress as in an unconscious way and their body system is shutting down to survive. The preschool is therefore a level of harmonizing again, and to be prepared for school.

specific needs of this target group…" Weidinger later added, "EoL closes a gap that did not yet exist in working with children in crisis situations in this way and in this condensed and pragmatic form."[24]

The Essence of Learning program started in the year 2000 with Caritas Switzerland Projects in Kosovo and in 2017 Essence of Learning was awarded the Humanitarian Health Accelerator prize by the U.N. Refugee Agency's UNHCR. This resulted in local teams (often local NGOs) supporting quality edu-cation in the different countries around the globe guided by Beatrice Rutishauser Ramm working with the aim to scale up Essence of Learning trainings to support quality education getting integrated into the country's Ministry of Education system.

Emergency Education as Part of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
Since the number of crises has increased and greater numbers are predicted to come due to climate change, as part of disaster planning, every teacher should have an Emergency Pedagogic training. Within every teacher training a Waldorf CPD Training should be designed that can be also provided for teachers of regular schools (without Anthroposophical terminology). Continuing Professional Development trainings in emergency **education** are needed because in these regular classrooms are children who are slow learners, refugees, and children with their individual crises.

Monitoring and Evaluation
Emergency education as a field of research still needs to be developed within the Waldorf movement, especially for emergency education interventions. There is a lot of knowledge available which can be adapted and included in Waldorf MiSE. In this way comparisons can be made and used as feedback to further serve crisis-affected children better.

Funding and Project Designs
To find funding for education is very difficult but less difficult than for well-being programs. Never-theless the experience and connections already developed can be used for joint projects and also to sup-port work in areas where the crisis is long apart but learning problems are still existing (i.e. Syria) In this way the research can be done on a wilder scale.

Different crises will determine what elements are needed first, second and in the long term. This sequential plan demonstrates that one approach after another assures a continuity of support meeting the needs of the community. But to achieve this, more communication and cooperation is needed between the emergency education organizations.

The Waldorf MiSE would be a big leap for determining interventions based on the crisis, the age level of the children or the CPD for Teachers:

- To professionalize the emergency education further within levels, different crises and CPD
- To strengthen teachers and artists in crisis zones with common tools defined in the Minimal standards to be adaptive to regular schools.
- To enhance the research and the cooperations with universities.
- To enhance further colloquiums

Next steps:
Develop a working group focusing on different elements comprising Waldorf Minimal Standards for Education to complete a document which can be used for project proposals.

[24] Prof. Wiltrud Weidinger, Universität Zürich April 2018

We end here by inviting responses and contribution from the participating heads of sections at the Goetheanum and all the participating organizations, Freunde der Erziehungskunst, Parzival-Schulen Karlsruhe, START, and Team U.S. Pedagogy without Borders,

Beatrice Rutishauser Ramm, M.A.

Beatrice Rutishauser Ramm is a trained Waldorf teacher and holds a master's degree in global education (specializing in emergency education). After working as a Waldorf class teacher, she spent almost twenty years as an emergency educator for Caritas Switzerland where she worked with local and international NGOs in chronic and acute crisis zones with the Ministries of Education in the affected countries. Since 2020, she has worked as an independent consultant on emergency education for various organizations. As part of her work for Caritas Switzerland, she developed “Essence of Learning” (EoL), an adaptable approach that meets children's learning needs – despite all crises. EoL considers learning as a sense which needs to be reawakened to self- regulate in a process-appropriate way. In 2017, Essence of Learning was selected by the UNHCR for the Humanitarian Educational Accelerator (HEA) as an educational program worthy of being scaled up to meet the educational needs of crisis-affected children. EoL was also adapted for the “Ready for Digital Learning program” to support remote learning. Essence of Learning has been externally evaluated. (u.a. by the University of Zürich).

Shepha Schneirsohn Vainstein, LMFT

Shepha Schneirsohn Vainstein is a California licensed psychotherapist who specialized in child development and trauma recovery. Shepha trained and taught at the Valley Trauma Center in the San Fernando Valley, California where she learned to help victims of violence move forward to create fulfilling and productive lives. She obtained her Masters in Counseling Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in 1994 where part of her internship included working at the Julia Ann Singer Therapeutic School, an outpatient center of Vista Del Mar. In 2005 a trip to the Middle East changed her life. After meeting with leaders in educational communities in Israel and Palestine she became convinced that the education of young children in crisis zones must play a critical role in advancing human potential to build the ground necessary for sustainable peace in that volatile region. With Palestinian-American Jihad Turk, president-designate of Bayan Claremont Islamic Graduate School in California, Shepha founded reGeneration Education, an interfaith organization supporting Waldorf initiatives in the Middle East. Today she is leading reGeneration Education forward to scale up Essence of Learning, recognized by the United Nations as an emergency pedagogy that is improving the lives of children and their families in countries throughout the world