

Becoming A Human Rights Master Trainer: the Journey

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ABSTRACT: *With the growing prevalence of religion, culture, ethnic, social, and political related conflict globally, individuals are increasingly confronted with ideas that fuel misconceptions, fears, and intolerance about those who believe differently than them. Children are particularly vulnerable to the ideas of intolerance and hate that lead to violent extremism and need a framework to understand freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as a fundamental human right in order to become resilient to such ideas and know how to respond to them out of a value for people regardless of what they believe. The Director of the Teachers Union for the Mosul/Nineveh Plains region of Iraq recognized an urgent need for ways to teach children to value the freedom of conscience, become resilient against the ideas of hate and intolerance, and overcome the effects of trauma. It is in this context that the Union invited Hardwired to train teachers in the Nineveh Plains and Mosul to help create communities that embrace a diversity of religions and beliefs to prevent recurrent cycles of religion-related conflict. This paper follows the journey of 27 teachers as they struggle with challenges to conceptually change knowledge, attitudes, and practices. By the end of training all of the teachers demonstrated that they were ready to take on the role as a beginner Master Trainer to allow for scalability and sustainability of the work in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains. Master Trainers demonstrated conceptual change in their understanding of freedom of conscience, religion, or belief.*

KEYWORDS– *Human rights, pluralism, freedom of religion or belief, freedom of conscience, teacher training*

I. Introduction

With the growing prevalence of religion-related conflict globally, individuals are increasingly confronted with ideas that fuel misconceptions, fears, and intolerance about those who believe differently than them. Such ideas are fed by a lack of knowledge, active engagement with, and empathy for people of different beliefs, and are often reinforced through families, communities, social networks, and political leadership. Children are particularly vulnerable to the ideas of hate and intolerance within deeply integrated cultures of discrimination and need a framework to understand the freedom of conscience as a fundamental human right in order to become resilient to such ideas, and ultimately value people regardless of what they believe.

This freedom, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has a significant positive impact on other rights and freedoms when embraced in society. To evaluate this impact, Hardwired has undertaken research to test and apply teaching for freedom of conscience on teacher and students' attitudes and behavior toward people of different religions, beliefs, ethnicities and gender. Consistent with previous research, this study shows the positive impact teaching for conceptual change about this particular human right can have in increasing respect for other rights among those who participate. Positive impacts include greater empathy for others, reduction in violence, greater participation of women and girls, effects of trauma mitigated, and more. This paper will evaluate the impact of teaching for freedom of conscience on conceptual change of Master Trainers.

In Iraq, communities across Mosul and the Nineveh Plains have struggled to overcome the influence and destruction brought by ISIS. In 2014, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were displaced from their homes,

and minority faith communities were attacked by the terrorist group in what was internationally recognized as genocide. Those who lived under the authority of ISIS were subjected to the group's radical ideology, and children in particular were targeted with a school curriculum that enforced intolerant beliefs and violent behavior. While ISIS was officially driven out of the region in July 2017, the influence of the group remained. Efforts to integrate those families who lived under ISIS with their former neighbors who fled and sought to return to their homes proved difficult, as fear, intolerance and distrust fomented throughout communities across Mosul and the Nineveh Plains (Hardwired, 2018).

The Director of the Teachers Union for the Nineveh Plains recognized an urgent need for ways to teach children to value the freedom of conscience, become resilient against the ideas of discrimination and intolerance, and overcome the effects of trauma. It is in this context that the Union invited Hardwired to train teachers in the Nineveh Plains and Mosul to help transform the mindset and behavior of children and create communities that embrace a diversity of beliefs to prevent recurrent cycles of religion-related conflict. Hardwired Global was presented with this historic opportunity to ultimately train 40,000 teachers across Mosul and the Nineveh Plains in proven teaching methods that will lead students to value the freedom of conscience and learn to live in peace with people of different religions and beliefs.

This request was based on more than seven years of work across the Middle East and North Africa where Hardwired has trained groups of teachers using an innovative program based on conceptual change theory and pedagogy (Hardwired 2019). However, simply attempting to duplicate the program using Hardwired's staff, with 20 teachers at a time, was determined not to be sustainable or scalable. Such a project would require Hardwired staff trainers to be available within the country almost continually and, while it would eventually train the teachers over an extended time, it would not insure the long-term sustainability of the program. Therefore, a new structure was designed to train Master trainers who can help scale the program among the 2,000 schools throughout the target area in subsequent years while Hardwired provides ongoing support of teachers to ensure that the program can be locally owned and sustained.

This modification in the program, while still based on a conceptual change model for teaching, began with a collaboration with a local organization, Hammurabi Human Rights Organization (HHRO), and the training of a group of Master trainers. Twenty-eight highly qualified teachers were selected through local recommendations and a lengthy interview process, to participate in a year-long training. This article describes the first phase of the program, supported through funding from the Templeton Religion Trust, to train the Master trainers. It is our intent to tell the story of the journey of these Master trainers as they experienced conceptual change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors about the key concepts of freedom of conscience and about conceptual change pedagogy.

Throughout the training, Hardwired wanted to determine how Master trainers experienced conceptual change based on the training model. This meant telling their stories in this journey of conceptual change as they developed as Master trainers. We looked for movement on multiple levels:

- Knowledge about freedom of conscience and related human rights
- Change in degree and depth of empathy with specific examples
- Knowledge about conceptual change pedagogy
- Knowledge and skill in training others in freedom of conscience and conceptual change

II. Selection of Master Trainers

In order to create a program that was both scalable and sustainable, Hardwired adapted their teacher training model to include the initial preparation of a cohort of Master trainers who could help scale the program among the 2,000 schools and 40,000 teachers throughout the target area in subsequent years, and provide ongoing support of teachers to ensure the program could be locally owned and sustained. Of great importance, however,

was the selection of these potential trainers to insure that those trained were not only knowledgeable in human rights and pedagogy, but dedicated and passionate about the vision. Participants were selected on the basis of the following: experience in diverse teaching settings, with special interest in those teachers who hold administrative or leadership responsibilities in schools, previous experience in teacher-training or teaching about sensitive topics in their communities, enthusiasm and interest in developing their skillsets to this end, and gender and religious diversity within the group to ensure broad representation in the cohort of Master-Trainers and model diversity within the training framework itself. Ultimately, 27 potential Master-Trainers were selected through a lengthy vetting process, allowing for possible attrition.

Selection was carried out in collaboration with our local partner, HHRO, an Iraqi non-governmental organization committed to the protection of human rights for all Iraqi citizens. HHRO has partnered with Hardwired over the last five years to implement civil society and education trainings for leaders across Iraq. They engaged with Hardwired in the interview of more than 50 candidates and assisted with the final selection of participants. In the first meeting in September 2019, Hardwired staff facilitated two one-day sessions for prospective participants in the program. During each session, participants completed a one-on-one interview with Hardwired and HHRO staff. During this interview, they shared their teaching experience, local context, experience in trainings or teaching and training others, and interests and concerns about training teachers to promote pluralism and respect for diversity in their communities. Candidates also participated in group discussions and were asked to respond to real-life scenarios describing challenges to freedom of religion or belief, respect for diversity and pluralism in their community to determine both what concepts, attitudes, and beliefs they held and whether they were aligned with the program. Following these group discussions, participants completed an in-depth, open-ended survey to allow Hardwired to assess participants' views on key concepts and better understand their baseline capacity to articulate human rights inherent to a pluralistic and diverse society.

The 27 participants selected for training included teachers representing different genders, ethnicities and religion or belief communities who have advanced teaching skills and were available to successfully complete the program *and* commit to scaling it in the target area in subsequent years. Two of the participants had been trained previously by Hardwired and acted as lead teachers throughout the program. Five religious groups were represented with fifteen participants stating Muslim as their religious designation (although three of these designated secular Muslim), six Christian, one Kakai, four Yezidi, and two with no stated religious affiliation. Participants represented a variety of subject areas, level of teaching, and professional designation. Subject areas represented included English and Arabic language, computer science, history, political science, geography, fine arts, human rights, psychology, Sociology, religion and math. Nineteen were employed in a k-12 program, six in college, two taught in both k-12 and college, and eight were principals.

There was a wide variety of experience among the participants that allowed for robust discussions. This included individuals who worked primarily with orphans, displaced children, and others who still suffered from the violence or held violent ideas themselves because of the influence of ISIS. One participant who worked in an internal displaced persons (IDP) camp stated,

What I have seen in the camps and with the students was a lot of children who were mentally disturbed and incompetent, full of fear, traumatized from what they had been through. After every lesson I would take time to help them extra. Seventy-five percent of the children are orphans and we help them feel safer and more normal through our teaching and support. Sometimes racism can happen because there are children from all over and some of their parents were in ISIS. I try to help them process their emotions, fears and trauma. Hopefully through my work with your organization we can help eliminate this violence and discrimination.

Other participants brought experience in administration and government positions as well as education. Participants from minority communities brought an additional perspective. One stated, "I am from a minority community and the differences and challenges I have faced have helped me to overcome so much, to gain courage and strength so I can train other students and teachers about dialogue, acceptance and peacebuilding." Others expressed personal reasons for wanting to participate in the program. One stated, "I want to live in a diverse community, and I think we need to build this in society, starting first with the children." Another, who was a principal of a school for boys in Eastern Mosul with more than 600 students where they continue to experience violence among students stated, "If the teachers do not step in to defend those who are being discriminated against, Da'esh [ISIS] will win." Still another principal of a school for girls in Hamdaniya stated,

It is the vision of my school to prepare a generation who believe in freedom, peace, tolerance, acceptance, and love because I believe that when we receive a child and teach them these values, these teachings will remain because children are a blank slate with potential. This will work to prepare the country to grow and prosper because the way ISIS planted evil, we can plant good. With your help, I can further promote this vision.

III. Overview of Training

The Master Training program builds upon current research that shows a statistically significant positive impact education for religious tolerance can have upon individuals by: "(a) building a pluralistic environment where people of diverse religions and beliefs are free to explore the spiritual dimension of life together; (b) encouraging dialogue and active engagement with people of different religions or belief to address underlying fears, misconceptions, and biases held by youth; and (c) building empathy toward others and resiliency to the ideas of hate and intolerance that contribute to violence and extremism" (Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2017; Rea-Ramirez, Ramirez, & Smith, 2018). The training model is based on conceptual change theory, that refers to the development of new ways of thinking and understanding of concepts, beliefs, and attitudes (Rea-Ramirez, 1998; Clement & Rea-Ramirez, 2008; Vosniadou, 2013). Conceptual change is not about changing someone's religion or culture; rather, it is meant to help individuals overcome fears and misconceptions about other and to develop new ways of understanding their own beliefs. The pedagogy of conceptual change used in this training consisted of multiple cycles with five major parts: accessing prior conceptions, creating dissonance, construction, criticism and revision, and application and evaluation. These cycles were revisited many times throughout the workshop through the use of simulations, hands on activities, group discussions, and reflections to help all participants to move slowly through small steps in changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Rea-Ramirez, 2017).

To lead the teachers to a conceptual change about the freedom of conscience, the training focused on three areas throughout the workshops:

- 1) The nature of inherent human dignity and equality for all people;
- 2) The value of religion, belief, and conscience in the human experience, known as the *forum internum*; and,
- 3) The value of freedom to express beliefs and explore diverse truth claims as individuals or groups and in public or private, known as the *forum externum*.

The training consisted of three face-to-face workshops and monthly or bi-monthly Zoom meetings. The first stage of training was intended to help participants better understand human rights, particularly freedom of conscience, while building a framework for articulating these concepts to the teachers they would train. During the second stage of training, participants explored the pedagogy of conceptual change and different methodologies that could be used to develop their own lessons and also to train teachers in the pedagogy. By the end of the training, it was expected that Master-Trainers would be able to articulate this human right in their

own cultural context, teach other teachers about it, and be able to evaluate their level of understanding of key concepts inherent to this right. The training was not intended to teach about any particular religion or belief, but rather to understand the nature of this universal human right and its value in building a peaceful and pluralistic society.

Participants met for the first two-day training session in September 2019. During this time, they engaged in face-to-face interviews, small group discussions, an introduction to Hardwired and the organization's education and civil society work in Iraq and elsewhere, and completion of an open-ended survey.

In November 2019, participants gathered for a second four-day training session focused on the following activities and concepts:

- *Fruitopia Simulation.* In order to learn more about how to build pluralistic societies where the freedom of conscience is respected, participant took a journey to an island, but to get there they had to take on the identity of a fruit who was forced to flee their homeland in search of freedom. Each community of fruit represented a different culture or belief community in the world although these were not identified but rather fruit communities developed their own imagined story built on their collective beliefs and experiences. The intent of the simulation was to allow participants to actively engage in challenges and to solve problems while decreasing the level of anxiety often encountered when learning about sensitive topics.
- *Understanding Conceptual Change.* The theory of conceptual change is not about changing someone's religion. It is a theory that helps us understand how individuals make sense of new information and change their ideas and behaviors with the new information. In this context, it addresses how someone adapts their established ways of thinking to recognize a particular human right about the rights and freedoms of others. Following the simulation, participants retraced their steps through the activity within the context of understanding conceptual change to observe how each step in the simulation fit into the process of conceptual change.
- *Understanding key concepts inherent to pluralism, respect for diversity, and freedom of conscience.* Participants identified key concepts and worked together to understand how individual key concepts supported pluralism and respect for diversity. Understanding these key concepts also increased their understanding of freedom of conscience as a human right.
- *Lesson Development.* Master-Trainers selected a specific key concept and developed short lessons or activities to teach the concept to students using the pedagogy of conceptual change.

Participants again gathered for a four-day training session in February 2020 to build on the initial intensive training session in November 2019. The session focused on the following concepts:

- *Identifying real-life challenges to pluralism and respect for diversity in the classroom and community.* This was a particular priority and need shared by teachers, as they had many examples of challenges to diversity in the community but felt incapable to responding or resolving these challenges in their community. This feeling of helplessness, according to participants, is widespread among teachers and leads to a sense of apathy in response to community tensions.
- *Understanding the root causes — the ideas, fears, motivations — that lead or contribute to these challenges in society.* This process forced participants to look more closely at the ideas, beliefs, and motivations that underpin speech and behavior in their community. A critical analysis of contributing factors helped teachers make sense of issues or topics that are generally excused as unflinching intolerance or discrimination only motivated by religious dogma.
- *Developing positive arguments in favor of pluralism and respect for diversity.* Participants were asked to consider and discuss what the most successful argument or roadmap to encourage genuine support for these concepts in your specific community was. What can you appeal to? How can you help

overcome the misconceptions and misunderstandings about these concepts? What will work in your space?

Bi-monthly virtual meetings were held from December 2019 through July 2020 to continue to work with participants on developing deeper understanding of freedom of conscience and of conceptual change pedagogy, with a particular focus on how to engage teachers in this same journey to understanding. These sessions were held with small groups of four to five participants at a time, with each group meeting twice a month. Between meetings, participants completed assigned activities to further their training.

IV. Journey Toward Conceptual Change

Just as we relied on analogies throughout the training, and especially during the Fruitopia simulation, it seems most fitting to use an analogy to discuss the journey the Master trainers experienced. In searching for the best analogy for this journey, the one that rose to the top was that the journey to conceptual change about freedom of conscience and conceptual change pedagogy was like a river with rapids, ox bows, wide still water, tributaries, and twist and turns. The journey, while moving eventually forward toward greater understanding and ability to train others, it was not always a smooth or direct route. Even the training process was not linear, but rather presented content in repeated but spiraling cycles as trainers moved slowly through the conceptual change process. The conceptual change cycle begins with accessing prior conceptions, then introducing dissonance and construction, review and modification, and finally application (Figure 1). It should be noted, however, that this cyclical process may move back to dissonance and construction after reviewing and modifying a conception. Therefore, the analogy of a river appears to simulate this process well.

For instance, participants began their journey to becoming Master-Trainers from the very first day, where they began to engage in small group discussions of scenarios related to freedom of conscience. This initial engagement aligns with the *accessing prior conceptions* phase of the conceptual change process.

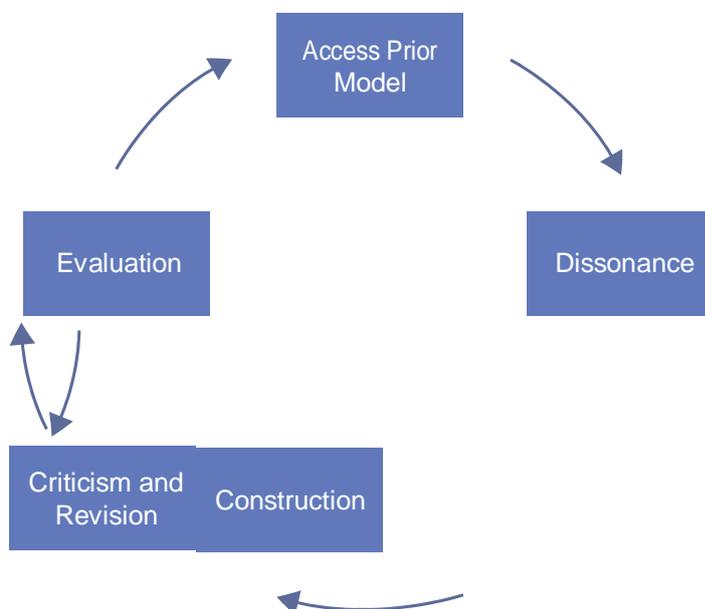


Figure 1. repeated cycles of conceptual change that each contain the elements of accessing prior conceptions, dissonance, construction, criticism and revision, and evaluation.

Having participants confront their own prior conceptions on issues and discussing these with others from diverse backgrounds provided opportunities for participants to confront challenges that either strengthened their own beliefs or caused them to modify conceptions in positive ways. Therefore, participants may have started with accessing their prior conceptions, but quickly moved through a cycle of dissonance as they engaged with others' ideas and then reviewed and modified their own concepts. These small, quick cycles generally provide what we call optimal dissonance, similar to the calm but flowing river with some twists and turns but not yet reaching rapids that could cause trainers to feel unsafe or too dissonant. Evidence from their group discussions suggested the trainers were beginning to be open to discussing their own beliefs and ideas with others who held different beliefs, even though there may not be evidence yet of change in their own beliefs.

As they moved on, however, trainers experienced greater dissonance similar to the river rapids when they gathered for the second workshop and were right away immersed in the simulation, Fruitopia. For almost all teachers, this was the first time they participated in such an activity. At first they were uncomfortable assuming the role of a fruit, but they also recognized the value of this simulation as it allowed discussion of sensitive concepts in a non-threatening simulation environment. While their underlying beliefs and attitudes were uncovered and challenged through difficult discussions, as if moving through the rapids into smoother water, being able to confront these difficult discussions through their fruit character removed them from any direct confrontation. However, these discussions drew on past experiences and prior attitudes and returned repeatedly throughout the year's training.

V. Twists, Turns, and Tributaries

Revisiting concepts similar to how a river might turn back on itself, were found to be essential for trainers to revisit their evolving concepts and attitudes, little by little making modifications. While the Fruitopia simulation was conducted during the second workshop, future workshops and virtual meetings continuously referred back to the simulation to stress important issues in conceptual change theory and pedagogy. A number of specific activities were included that were intended to cause dissonance and then construction (Table 1). Even during the simulation, other small activities were introduced into the training, as if journeying up a tributary off the river to explore, allowing trainers to revisit certain concepts that might be more affected by their personal experiences. This allowed them to internalize the process of conceptual change as their own concepts, attitudes, and beliefs about how to teach were challenged and modified.

The need for using such activities based a conceptual change pedagogy was exemplified by several Master-Trainers who work with children in internal displaced persons camps (IDP). Wael stressed the passion many of the master trainers held for learning and putting into practice the theory and strategies of conceptual change that would have a positive effect on students and communities. Laith, who also works in high intensity conflict settings in an IDP camp in Zakho, near the Turkish border, has observed tensions among youth from different religions and sects. He currently provides training and supervision to teachers in IDP camps implementing activities with youth but was interested in learning more formal approaches such as the conceptual change activities in this workshop to resolving conflict and overcoming tensions among youth that he can apply to IDP settings and share with other youth/social workers to implement in their activities.

Table 1. Activities to Introduce Dissonance and Construction

Dissonance	Construction
Tree of Intolerance lesson 1	Tree of Pluralism
Facing Oppression – fruit Lesson 2	Seeking Freedom
Confronting Fears and Misconceptions – fruit Lesson 2 b	How will you ensure that you will be safe?
Complications – fruit Lesson 3	Making bargains to work together and share
Challenges – fruit Lesson 4	New Rules

Returning Home – fruit Lesson 5	Building a Case for Religion or Belief
Where do rights come from? – fruit Lesson 5 b	Benefits of Freedom of Religion or Belief
Changing Perspectives Lesson 6	Conceptual Change pedagogy
Challenges for Conceptual Change Lesson 6 b	Conceptual Change teaching model for FORB
What is your method of teaching Lesson 7	Teaching for Conceptual change
How do you know they are learning Lesson 8	Observations and evaluating conceptual change
Galileo – Whose Freedom was the State Protecting Lesson 9	Who decides what is wrong?

As the trainers moved through repeated cycles of conceptual change over the course of the year, their initial conceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about others changed. Evidence showed that Master-Trainers were more open to talking and negotiating with others whose beliefs were different than their own. As they moved further into the training, this began to evolve away from mere tolerance to empathy and understanding of the needs of others. Overall, Master-Trainers voiced that conceptual change is not about changing a person’s beliefs or identity or religion. In fact, one teacher noted that the process made her feel more confident in her beliefs and her identity, because she recognized her right to hold her beliefs personally. This is an integral realization for teachers in Iraq, who are often accused of trying to change the beliefs of people when discussing concepts like pluralism and freedom of conscience. Master-Trainers were quick to recognize the Fruitopia simulation is really a broader analogy for their own experience in society. The simulation was also crucial in identifying key misconceptions participants had about pluralism, and freedom of conscience more specifically, which were then addressed in the following days of training.

VI. Still Water

While there were periods of rapids and twists and turns, there were also periods of still water where Master-Trainers sometimes felt as if they were in open, uncharted water. This is a time of *dissonance* and then *construction*. In the conceptual change cycle, there were times when they may have felt like they needed more information to construct meaning, particularly when the situation was completely new to them. This occurred when they were introduced to new pedagogy causing a period of dissonance. The simulation provided the first introduction to the pedagogy of conceptual change they had ever received. Master-Trainers noted they had no prior training in teaching for conceptual change, or how to teach about pluralism and diversity in their classrooms. There is no coursework or training that currently addresses these issues, or how to respond to conflict or tense situations in the classroom. To help Master-Trainers better understand the pedagogy of conceptual change, the trainers were assisted in developing short conceptual change lessons that they could try with students. For most teachers, this was also the first time they ever developed a lesson on their own; all learning materials in Iraq are provided in textbooks by the Ministry of Education. This presented significant challenges, but the exercise was effective in helping participants understand the framework of conceptual change by creating a lesson using this pedagogy. Therefore, while Master-Trainers may have initially felt like they were in an open expanse of still water not knowing where or how to go, they were guided to construct new understanding through the lesson plan activity.

Since initial attempts at writing lessons exemplified just how unprepared the trainers were, we revisited this lesson after they had attempted to teach it to students. Through challenges, discussions and revisions, trainers moved out of the still water but through more rapids and twist and turns as they began to demonstrate new-found understanding of how to design and teach a conceptual change lesson. In the beginning, about half of the trainers recognized the need to challenge students but did not demonstrate an understanding of the need to first access prior conceptions or how to determine key concepts that related to teaching about human rights. Through activities and discussions about the key concepts and how to translate them to learning outcomes, Master-Trainers began to revise lessons to insure they not only included an engaging activity but also helped

students challenge prior conceptions and construct new understanding about the key concepts of freedom of conscience. The evolution of the lessons demonstrated conceptual change that had occurred in the Master-Trainers. They grasped the use of analogies to introduce concepts of key concepts. By their final draft, 95% of Master-Trainers were able to effectively use analogies to implement a conceptual change lesson, including accessing students' prior conceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, creating dissonance, supporting construction of new ideas and/or modifications in attitudes and behaviors, and finally evaluating and revising these concepts.

Each lesson focused on the major concept of human dignity. An example was Farhad and Zeid's lesson in which they addressed equality, pluralism, and individual expression of beliefs. They described their lesson plan in a limited way, leaving out many of the elements of a conceptual change lesson that was more teacher directed than student active. It clearly indicates that the teacher will tell students rather than help them discover these ideas. This limited students' ability to engage in a way that could foster conceptual change in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. They described the lesson as:

Each group was given a flower that was different in color, scent and size. The groups shared one plot of soil, one land and one environment despite their difference in color, scent and size. During the play I'll be doing a detailed illustration about the importance of the activity and the differences in the acceptance of others and belongingness to the land concepts. The lesson will demonstrate how people have the right to express their individual beliefs and practice those beliefs within a religious community or dissent from that community. Then I'll be asking questions and interacting about the activity and it's general importance.

Multiple iterations, each with small changes, were needed before the lesson demonstrated a true understanding of conceptual change pedagogy as well as how to integrate the key concept of freedom of conscience with the analogy. By the final draft, considerable difference was noted in Farhad and Zeid's lesson that demonstrated a greater understanding of conceptual change pedagogy and use of student active learning to help students challenge their own ideas. These trainers were better able to articulate the learning outcome for the lesson, i.e., "Students will demonstrate how people have the right to express their individual beliefs and practice those beliefs within a religious community or dissent from that community. Students will begin to demonstrate empathy for others whose individual rights and expression are oppressed." They used a simple activity to access prior conceptions that would later be used to link the lesson to the key concept in the learning outcome. This lesson used an analogy of the needs of seeds to the needs of humans related to freedom of expression. During the dissonance portion of the lesson, students were restricted in where they could plant their seeds, with some groups being given preference to prime locations and size. This caused students to experience feelings about limitations on freedom of expression and discrimination among groups. Students were then encouraged to reflect on these feelings and what they might do differently. Some questions for discussion included: What would you do differently? What would you like the garden to look like? Why are color and types of flowers restricted to some areas? Were some flowers that will grow tall restricted to an area that will block the sun from other plants? This led to a discussion of how the garden reflected society and the effect of limitations on expression in human rights, especially on freedom of conscience.

Another example that demonstrated growth in conceptual understanding of the key concepts of freedom of conscience and of conceptual change pedagogy was a lesson written by Abdullah and Zahid. In the original lesson plan, Abdullah and Zahid described a situation in which various animals (analogy for different religious and cultural groups) were caught in a forest fire and had to flee to the other side of the island on which they lived. The lesson told of how the different animals had to take charge of steering a ship when they were attacked. Each animal had a different role, but when attacked had to change roles and work together as a team to survive. The analogy and story were engaging, but the lesson did not provide a vehicle for conceptual change. It was simply a story with no activities and none of the elements of a conceptual change lesson, thereby making it difficult for teachers to make the connection of the analogy to the key concept. However, over the

process of the year, Abdullah and Zahid were able to integrate student centered and active elements into the lesson that used the animal analogy to help demonstrate that while different, people, just like the animals, must work together for everyone's good. Dissonance was introduced through the story by telling the students, "There is a fire in the forest where all the animals live. The animals need to flee to the safe side of the island. The Tiger and Lion could run faster than the other animals but there is a big mountain in the way and the fire is all over this side of the mountain. What can they do?" Students could see that the teacher had put a cardboard boat by the 'beach'. Students were challenged to solve the problem. Other complications could be added to the animal's plight, such as being attacked as they sailed to the other side of the island. Each cycle of dissonance was followed by construction in which students tried to find creative ways to work together to solve the problem. As students suggested solutions, the teacher related the animal analogy to real life to help students demonstrate the learning outcome. Some questions in this lesson included, "How is this activity like your life? Is there anything in your community or country that is like this? How would you feel if you were one of the animals on the boat that was attacking others? How would you feel if you were on the boat that was attacked?" The final lesson exemplified greater understanding of the key concepts of non-discrimination and of conceptual change theory.

All other lessons created went through a similar process of twists and turns, rapids, and tributaries, but eventually all designed a conceptual change lesson that addressed a key concept. Additionally, documentation by the Master-Trainers who were able to teach their lesson, discussed how even simple, short lessons can be conducted in a variety of situations using actual materials such as the gardens or analogies and drawings to help people engage in conceptual change about freedom of conscience, and to confront their fears and misconceptions about others who may believe differently.

VII. The Ox Bow

As mentioned previously, the conceptual change process is not a linear one. Often the cycles of conceptual change are revisited or take detours in order to allow individuals to revisit their prior conceptions to challenge or refine them. That is, conceptual change is not always from point A to point B but rather stops to introduce other activities that enhance the change process. As part of this journey along the river to conceptual change, a type of detour occurred that was intended to introduce how to teach others, and then relate that experience back to the Master-Trainers' own further understanding of conceptual change about freedom of conscience. To do this, the Master-Trainers engaged in implementing a mini lesson called The Peaceful Garden. This powerful lesson was designed by two Yezidi teachers who escaped from ISIS and were later trained by Hardwired. These teachers took their students to a beautiful garden, full of many different colored flowers, to make bouquets. They told the children to go pick every flower except for the yellow ones. Once the students finished picking the flowers for their bouquets they realized the garden's beauty had been decimated. Then, the teachers explained how the garden represented northern Iraq, saying: "When ISIS came, they destroyed everyone who didn't look or think like them. They killed people and drove others away from their homes. The result was pain, death and destruction. But you have an opportunity to plant the seeds of religious freedom that will give us a reason to hope for a better future and restore what ISIS stole from us."

The teachers then directed students to work together planting seeds and helping to restore the garden's former beauty. As they worked together, the teachers shared additional lessons on freedom of religion or belief and pluralism that helped the students learn powerful lessons about their rights and how to treat one another in ways that allow them to live with the dignity they deserve. When students finally returned to the garden, it was restored to its beauty. Through this lesson, children across Iraq have been able to overcome the trauma and fear they experienced when their communities were attacked by ISIS, and now have the tools they need to rebuild and live alongside one another in peace. Inspired by the lesson, Hardwired has created a children's book also called The Peaceful Garden (Rea-Ramirez & Ramirez, 2020). Master-Trainers were provided with both the children's book and the lesson to use in implementing the activity.

The intent of this mini lesson was to allow trainers to practice their conceptual change pedagogy and understanding of freedom of conscience through a short activity with a small group of individuals. Most of the trainers used creative methods to adapt the lesson to the effect of quarantine from the pandemic. At the time this lesson was assigned, the pandemic was affecting congregation and movement within the area. For this reason, all but two of the trainers (92%) implemented the lesson with family and neighborhood children. The other two trainers still had contact with students and were able to either use WhatsApp or teach students online. Many used their own or community gardens to engage participants in the activity while others, particularly those without access to gardens, drew pictures of gardens to exemplify the gardens in the book. Farhad discussed with a group of neighborhood children after reading the story how “each flower in the garden has a private language, each giving us a message.” Then he introduced the idea of religions as flowers also have their own language and that a garden of flowers of only one color reflects isolation while diversity in the color and type of flower makes the garden more beautiful just as different religions do within society. Basim’s daughter (grade 9) made connections between the flowers in the story and lesson and real life, stating that it reminded her of having to move during ISIS, exemplifying how past experiences continue to resurface throughout the activities.

Rabab told of an unexpected response to the story and lesson with her twelfth-grade class. The students were all girls and of the Muslim faith but came from mixed provinces. Through their WhatsApp group, Rabab sent a picture with one kind of flower and a picture with different color flowers. When asked to choose which one they preferred, the majority chose the one in only one color. Then Rabab sent pictures of a full garden with one color and another with many colors. This time the majority chose the garden with many colors. When asked why student chose one color the first time and the garden with many colors the second time students, said the first time the one color represents peace and quiet - it felt more comfortable. However, the second time the full garden looked more beautiful with many colors just like a real garden. Rabab realized that it is important to delve deeper into students’ responses to understand better why they make decisions based on their prior experience and conceptions. While this is a simple example, Rabab went on to engage these students in a much deeper discussion of the issues based on the Peaceful Garden activity. She asked one student, "What if I prevent you from going to the garden you love and isolate you when I take others to the one-color garden?" All students said they would not go if Miriam does not go with them, indicating a level of empathy. Rabab then said, "Because I am from Mosul, I will just take girls from Mosul on a picnic. Again, the girls revolted, even those from Mosul. After allowing them to voice their concerns, she moved students into a discussion where she asked if any had friends who were not Muslim. Rabab then said, "What if I prevent you from talking to your friend who is not Muslim? What would you say?" Students asked why? Rabab, attempting to challenge the students, said, "She has a different religion and traditions and she may affect you." The students stated, "Each has her brain and controls it. We do not choose friends by religion." When asked, "Is diversity our strength or weakness" students replied, "Our strength." Rabab then told the students, "The responsibility is now on you because of your age; you are now ready to be trainers of others."

Master-Trainers reported insightful statements by students. One young boy stated, "This story really impacted me." Another, in response to hearing the story, asked, "What if tomorrow there is no garden?" All were upset at question, but another child said, "I would not let them destroy this garden." In another instance, after completing the lesson and reading the story, a college level student stated that he and his sister went back to college and told the story to all their very diverse group of friends. They all then went to isolated villages and retold the story. Another student stated, after hearing the story and then discussing the relation of the story to real life, "Now this looks like our society. You can't just depend on one type of people. It is more beautiful with diversity." When shown the destroyed garden, students were asked, "How can we make this garden beautiful again?" Students answered, "Turn back the flowers." But when they were told you couldn't replace picked flowers, the trainer reported that all students put their arms on the shoulder of others since the lesson had touched them inside and made a connection to real life. Finally, one student commented, "The story is like the prophets God sent."

VIII. The River Continues

Just as the river continues its twists and turns making its way to the ocean, Master-Trainers continued their journey. The conceptual change experience did not end with the training workshops and online meetings; rather, they will continue to evolve as they begin training teachers and working with these teachers to make the conceptual change themselves. Description and analysis of the Master-Trainers' initial training of teachers is presented in a second publication, as we have confined ourselves in this article with the journey that prepared the Master-Trainers to teach others. However, there is clear evidence from the pre-post survey, review of mini lessons, and focus groups that this journey resulted in conceptual change in the following areas: 1) knowledge about Freedom of Conscience; 2) change in degree and depth of empathy; 3) knowledge about conceptual change pedagogy; and 4) knowledge and skill in training others in freedom of conscience and conceptual change. 83% of Master Trainers showed significant improvement in knowledge about freedom of conscience and another 14% remained the same in expression of knowledge, but their original scores in this area indicated they already had a high level of understanding. On questions related to empathy there was a marked increase in movement from pre to post with 100% responding at the highest level for empathy related to gender issues and equality and 89% overall in all areas of freedom of conscience related to empathy. Positive movement in knowledge of conceptual change pedagogy was noted in the analysis of Master Trainer reports on their individual teaching of The Peaceful Garden lesson. 93% of the trainers successfully implemented the lesson including use of the conceptual change pedagogy. The final area of concern, knowledge and skill in training others in freedom of conscience and conceptual change is described in detail in the second article currently out for publication, *Promoting Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East Through Training of Teachers* (Rea-Ramirez, Ramirez, Abboud, 2020). However, evidence from the focus groups indicates that all 27 Master Trainers were able to successfully complete their first teacher training using the Fruitopia simulation.

Along with beginning to internalize the pedagogy of conceptual change, Master-Trainers developed a deeper and broader understanding of freedom of conscience as a human right, as well as more robust definitions of freedom of conscience and pluralism. Importantly, Master-Trainers recognized tolerance as a minimal expression of respect for diversity, and they challenged their own understanding of a pluralistic society. This was documented in the surveys that trainers completed at the beginning of the first workshop and again after the third workshop. Analysis of changes in response to the survey from September to the end of February indicated that conceptual change had occurred.

Master-Trainers demonstrated increased understanding and ability to articulate freedom of conscience and key concepts inherent to this right, and an increased ability to identify and respond to challenges to this right in real-life scenarios. When trainers completed the first survey, many responded with recognition that scenarios involved various human rights or the restriction of those rights. Most trainers responded to the initial survey scenarios with basic answers consistent with human rights, such as, "Every person is free to believe," or "It is your right." However, when they answered the same scenario later, their explanations became more personal, detailed, and integrated concepts of freedom of conscience. Their responses also included reference to key concepts and activities to promote human rights. Trainers did not just say it was your right but began to describe why and how to address the issue through conceptual change activities.

Certain scenarios showed more movement than others. These included scenarios about violence due to differences in religion or culture, restrictions on freedom of expression, government determination and restrictions of belief practices. One scenario stated, *A boy in your class stands up during a lesson and states that he thinks all people that are not of his religion are evil and the government should force them to change their religion or be punished.* Farhad responded initially with stating, "I would try to clarify to everyone that there is no such thing as a wrong religion, as long as that religion respects the others and their beliefs." Later, he moved from just telling to actively engaging the students to help them think about what they believed and to begin to consider others beliefs. He stated, "I would first talk to the student individually and try to understand

and listen to the ideas and the environment in which he lives to know the motivation for his speech. I would then include activities in the classroom to communicate the idea of respecting freedom of religion or belief and make the student apologize for his speech. I would explain the principles of coexistence.” In another instance on the same scenario, Fadi initially stated that she recognized that this sometimes happens and creates problems, so it is better to avoid the questions. However, later she stated that, “We must raise awareness by introducing students to other religions and examine the reasons for the behavior of the students that say these comments. Basim state initially, “I will try to learn the underlying reasons for this reaction by the student.” Later he expanded on this to include, “I would involve him in group activities with others who disagree with him in the school to help him change his ideas.”

Some scenarios, however, showed mixed responses depending on the way they were interpreted. For instance, when presented with statement, “Religious freedom will provide protection for dangerous religions and their ideas, which is bad for our community,” many trainers reflected on their own personal experiences and the situation in Iraq where government control over religious expression is dominant. Some appeared to be focusing on extremist groups like ISIS that then force these beliefs on others and cause violence. One trainer stated, “Do not confuse religious freedom with violence,” while another said, “You must first define religious freedom.” Several who had initially stated simply that the government should provide protection for everyone’s beliefs, changed to state that “it is not permissible to provide protection for any dangerous religion, because this will negatively affect everyone.” This move back to reflecting on experiences that for many were still fresh is actually seen as a positive move within the conceptual change journey. It has been noted previously that while participants will often give expected answers initially to such a survey, that will appear to reverse or even show more fears and misconceptions as they actively engage in the process (Rea-Ramirez, 1998). This may be due to the emotions and memories excited by the difficult discussions in which they engage during the process.

Several other scenarios related to gender discrimination, violence encouraged by faith leaders, government protection of human rights, that individuals should give up their citizenship if they left their religion, and whether children should be able to select what they believe showed little change from the initial to second survey. That is, almost all trainers agreed in both surveys that children should have the right to choose once they reach maturity. They all agreed that gender discrimination and violence was never acceptable. Most agreed in both surveys that there should be a separation between belief groups and the government, that it was the government’s role to protect, not dictate or punish. This was interesting since trainers did not revert to emotion or experience on this point even though this is not what they have experienced in Iraq, but all still voiced a strong opinion on this point. However, when presented with the statement, “Everyone should have a right to criticize any religion or belief even in public or online,” most agreed with the statement as written but attached conditions to it. Others qualified their agreement with, “criticize without violence” or “criticize with offense.” In general, it appeared again that Master-Trainers were harkening back to their experience with violence caused through criticism where violence was the result.

Evidence in the survey of conceptual change was aligned with other observations and focus group discussions. For example, one teacher’s definition of pluralism changed dramatically over the course of the training session. First, Ziad recognized pluralism as the presence of diverse perspectives in a community. The extent to which these diverse perspectives were shared or discussed remained undefined, and he inferred the role of the majority was to simply tolerate or allow other perspectives to exist. By the end of the training session, Ziad shared that his perspective of pluralism had grown. He recognized true pluralism is reflected in society when the diversity of opinions, customs, and ideas is embraced and valued by all people in society, not simply *allowed* to be present in the community. To this end, the community culture is enriched by differences that are expressed and shared. Moreover, sharing an opinion or belief publicly does not require others to agree or share the same beliefs. In a truly pluralistic society, each person is entitled to hold their own beliefs with confidence and without fear of another person’s beliefs stifling their own. Fadi stated, “Respecting religions and beliefs is

the most important characteristic of pluralism and non-discrimination between one religion and another. As for the issue of criticizing other religions, It creates divisions in society. We must treat the other side as human and with respect.”

This conceptual shift made by the Master-Trainers is especially significant in light of the fact that all of the trainers were selected because they were already passionate about human rights, and specifically freedom of conscience. Many also already worked with various organizations such as HHRO in social programs promoting respect for religious minorities in Iraq. At the same time, they recognized that they needed to know more. Rabab shared, "I have a love and passion for this change, and I want to be a part of this change that creates a country and community that can exist peacefully." She was particularly interested in helping communities recognize that not all Muslims hold the same views as ISIS and wants to reclaim a narrative within communities that promotes peace and collaboration. Zainab held similar beliefs and recognized the importance of diversity in society, particularly in Mosul, and wants to be a part of the change that helps the community and the next generation integrate successfully to avoid future conflicts.

Shahad, who has experience using art programs to promote inclusion among youth in Eastern Mosul, was eager to use these more formal techniques to overcome fears and biases students have in the community about others. Ruaa recognized the importance of training teachers to explain these "sensitive and difficult" concepts to youth and other teachers in the community. She also recognized that people are different and learn or understand concepts and ideas differently based on their experiences and beliefs, and that trainers must understand these differences and adapt to help their subjects learn. Farhad, who teaches human rights and social cohesion and is a researcher of sociology and works with Ministry of Social Affairs, has trained people on child protection practices stated that he would bring his experience as a Yezidi working in diverse settings and with the community to help teachers build skills to promote peace in the classroom.

On the final day of training, Master-Trainers developed a role play based on what they had learned about human rights and conceptual change. This included an explanation and illustration of a challenge in their community, identification of “root causes” and motivations fueling this challenge, articulation of counter arguments or ideas to address these specific root causes and motivations, and a realistic conclusion or resolution to the challenge. They identified root causes as:

- ◇ Ignorance (parents do not know any different)
- ◇ Influence of parents (on values and beliefs)
- ◇ Lack of exposure (students are not exposed or integrated with people who hold different beliefs, and so they are uncomfortable or unsure of how to interact with them because they don't understand their culture)
- ◇ Community pressure (such as fear of losing job or status in the community by ignoring or failing to uphold traditional behaviors or responses)
- ◇ Inherited ideas (social norms or ideas that are inherent to the culture re: not mixing religions, keeping separate or preferring your own group, etc.)
- ◇ Historical tensions (sectarian conflicts in the past remain unresolved and communities resent other groups for their behavior or their treatment of others in the community)
- ◇ Influence from the media
- ◇ Security issues (for example, some parents don't want to send their daughters to school because they don't want her to be at risk traveling from the village to the school or potentially face risks of violent attacks in the city)
- ◇ Intolerant religious teachings

Through this activity, Master-Trainers were able not only able to identify specific “root causes” or motivations for speech and behavior that challenges pluralism and respect for diversity but were now slower to

base their response on their own preconceptions about individuals, and instead carefully assessed the scenario to develop a response to promote pluralism and respect for diversity. Teachers were able to model (through the scenario) how “root causes” influence or dictate behavior, as well as how positive arguments in favor of pluralism and respect for diversity can promote the integration of these values into diverse communities (even in more traditional or conservative settings). This was a particularly important conceptual change, as it demonstrated how they moved from their initial concepts based on personal experiences, often based on misconceptions and fears, to a broader understanding of pluralism and freedom of conscience.

Basim, a teacher in Hamdaniya, said he wanted to share this activity with every teacher in his education council in Hamdaniya because he believed it would give them the skills and, most importantly the confidence, to respond to challenges in a productive way. Shahed first approached the role play scenario with hesitation. She said it was unrealistic to try to change the ideas of radicals or older people who were set in their conservative mindset. Through the training session, she realized incremental progress could be made in responding to challenges. And while these individuals may not demonstrate an immediate and monumental positive shift in their behavior, she recognized it is possible to identify those ideas that are motivating behavior and mindfully respond to those misconceptions in a way that can ultimately impact their understanding and response. The problems didn't seem as overwhelming. Master-Trainers began to recognize that conceptual change takes time and does not occur after one encounter. It often encounters twists, turns, tributaries as well as turbulence and even sometimes still water where they question whether movement forward is occurring at all. At the same time, Master Trainers were able to make significant progress in their journey to conceptual change which has now set them on the path to training other teachers.

One issue that arose and that will be important to revisit as this group of trainers moves forward is the issue posed in the survey statement, *Every religion is true and equally valid*. Interestingly, almost all trainers agreed with this statement on both the initial and subsequent survey. It is probably one of the most misunderstood concepts of the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. This freedom is not about convincing others to accept that every religion is correct or even equally valid. It is also not about convincing others to change their religion or culture. Rather, it means developing new ways of understanding your own belief system and culture and recognizing that others have a right to their beliefs even though they may differ from your own and may even state that your beliefs are wrong. Levinowitz (2015) stated:

You can think a religious belief is wrong without being intolerant. Tolerance is not synonymous with ‘believing someone else is right’. It is a virtue that allows you to coexist with people whose way of life is different from your own without throwing a temper tantrum, or a punch.

Understanding this key point could free those whose faith beliefs would prevent them from accepting as true other belief systems without resorting to intolerance and even violence. As we see in the world today, this concept applies to other human rights issues such as freedom of expression. It is often a difficult concept of human rights to grasp and, as with our Master-Trainers, will take time and patience to address as they continue on this journey to conceptual change.

IX. Conclusion

A thorough documentation and analysis of the journey in which potential Master Trainers engage was necessary to understand the process of their conceptual change in the context of freedom of conscience, religion or belief in order to prepare the Master Trainers to train other teachers. This paper has documented that process as the Master Trainers moved through multiple cycles of conceptual change, demonstrating how their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors changed throughout the process. It also evaluated the curriculum used by Hardwired to train the Master Trainers based on how well trainers demonstrated: 1) Knowledge about freedom of conscience and related human rights, 2) Change in degree and depth of empathy with specific examples, 3) Knowledge

about conceptual change pedagogy, and 4) Knowledge and skill in training others in freedom of conscience and conceptual change. In each area Master Trainers demonstrated that they had gained sufficient knowledge in all areas to begin to train other teachers. The greater understanding of the process the Master Trainers undergo when engaging with the Hardwired curriculum is expected to assist the organization in making additional modifications to the curriculum as needed and to extend the curriculum to enhance learning. This is expected to increase the sustainability and scalable throughout the region as it demonstrated that the training of local Master Trainers will allow for ownership by the local area rather than Hardwired training each group of teachers. This is key as it is expected to have a much larger effect on teaching children to value the freedom of conscience, religion or belief, to become resilient against the ideas of hate and intolerance, and to overcome the effects of trauma. An additional article to be published describes the effects of the initial training carried out by these Master Trainers, focusing on the experience of the Master Trainer as well as on the teachers who were trained.

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