TAMAM
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Building Leadership Capacity for School-based Reform:

TAMAM Professional Development Journey Phase One

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INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Arab Thought Foundation signed a memorandum of understanding with the American University of Beirut and launched the TAMAM project. The project was conceived in response to a dire need in the Arab region for a paradigm shift in how educational reform is planned and implemented in that Region (Akkary and Rizk, 2011). A focus on teacher-education, and professional development supporting the educational reform movement in the Arab world, has been widely recognized as critical to the success of any attempt at reform in the region (World Bank, 2008; Arab Knowledge Report, 2009).

The word "TAMAM" in Arabic means "complete" but relative to the project it is actually an acronym that consists of the initials of "school-based reform" in Arabic (al-Tatweer Al-Mustanid ila Al-Madrasa). In the context of Arab countries, TAMAM attempts to break the current trend of the prescriptive top down approach for school reform and develop a reform model that is school-based where professional development and continuous inquiry play a central role. The project introduces a new approach for building capacity at the school level to initiate, lead and sustain school-based improvement initiatives.

A group of university professors - the TAMAM project steering team (PST) - serve as both the trigger and the catalyst for the project implementation. Educated in Western Universities, the PST team shared the belief that despite the very different cultural and political contexts, the changes educators in the Arab world aspire to make - as well as the challenges they face - are fairly similar to those experienced by their Western counterparts. Their main challenge thereafter became to develop a culturally grounded model of school-based reform in order to trigger teachers learning, and build their capacity to lead and sustain school-based improvement.

While the PST believed that a lot can be learned from examining best practices around the world, they were aware that, in developing countries, educational researchers and policy makers should exercise caution while adapting Western born models and practices (Ryan, Carlton and Ali, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2003; Hallinger, 1995; Akkary, 1998). As such, the TAMAM project is designed with a thorough consideration of local context coupled with a deep understanding of the existing professional habits and beliefs. This understanding helped to determine the applicability and usefulness of internationally accepted models of school reform.

The PST relies on organizational development considering that "change comes from the emergence and wide spread embrace by the whole system of stakeholders of new ideas, models, metaphors, and theories... and that it is fueled by questioning and challenging the basic assumptions of the organizational culture that leads to fostering critical consideration of that which is taken for granted and culminates in new alternatives towards actions" (Bushe and Marshak, 2009, p. 355). Moreover, it assumes that changes in behavior are mostly "self-generated," shifting the emphasis towards changing the framework that shapes what people think and say and guides how they behave. Consequently, as coaches and initiators of change, the PST use inquiry to help school teams surface their underlying beliefs and frame of minds thus raising awareness of current realities and experiences at the school level. Their roles involve confronting school teams in order to explore and seek alternative perspective and outcomes.

The TAMAM Professional Development Program is built on the belief that schools and educational systems are complex, dynamic, and "living" entities that continuously develop in response to their internal and external environments. Therefore, school teams working towards school improvement face challenges that cannot always be predicted. These challenges might

vary from team to team and from school to school. Hence, adhering to a preset professional development program that is not responsive to these emerging challenges will not be effective. TAMAM PST set clear goals for the project but adopted an evolving design to set and implement the activities needed to achieve these goals; engaging in critical, creative, and on-going reflection while monitoring the implementation process seeking to gain insights upon which next steps are framed. All participants, including the PST engaged in critical reflection and inquiry as Oliver (2005) described; with a spirit of openness, humility and learning, and with the hope that such spirit is communicated and adopted as habits of mind that will shape future actions and behaviors.

The TAMAM approach to professional development is intended to provide both "structure" and "flexibility". It is designed in such a way that the big lines reflect coherence, and converge towards clear goals, while details of how activities are carried out are left to the school teams who make them situationally specific and well-attuned to contextual conditions. Consequently, decisions related to planning and designing professional development activities emerged during the progress of the project and were grounded in the data collected then analyzed concurrently as the project unfolded.

PURPOSE AND FOCUS OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to describe the journey of the TAMAM project steering committee (PST) during the first phase of the project. It documents and illustrates the experience of the PST while developing the TAMAM professional development activities aimed at building the capacity of teachers in order to initiate and lead school-based improvement. The report illustrates the steps PST devised, highlighting the challenges that emerged during that journey, as

well as the lessons learnt and the subsequent evolution of actions that followed based on this learning. The report concludes by recommending an "emerging model" grounded in lived experiences and mindful of the unique cultural characteristics of its context.

This report presents the different capacity building activities and approaches the PST followed in carrying out these activities with the participating school teams. It especially emphasizes, and focuses on, the evolving nature of the process of planning and implementing these professional learning activities. The PST – through continuous monitoring and examining of their own actions – assessed emerging results to gain new insights into school culture and its transformation. Such insights informed their actions towards building leadership capacities of school teams for school-based reform.

The report will include the following: a presentation of the methodology followed for the collection and analysis of the data, a summary of the international and local literature that the PST explored throughout the journey, a descriptive account of the TAMAM Project, an overview of its professional development design, and lastly, the description of the "live research" process that PST engaged in throughout the implementation of the first phase of the project followed by the lessons learnt and the overall reflections observed regarding the remaining challenges.

RESEARCH IN TAMAM

TAMAM is a "live research project" (Craig, 2010) and its PST played a dual role in this project: that of researchers and that of coaches, for individual, team, and organizational development. This dual role rested on the belief that research tasks are an interplay between "the development of insight (interpretation of the local practices), critique (investigation of the local through the combination of micro practices and macro discourses), and transformation

(association of insight with social action)" (Oliver, 2005, Ch.5, Paragraph 3). The PST took prime responsibility in designing professional development activities - as well as conducting, and modifying them based on their learning and on-going reflective inquiries - by means assuming the role of inquirers and learners.

The flow of needed information in the TAMAM project was ensured as a result of monitoring procedures embedded into the project activities. These came in the form of asking the school teams to record their progress, write reflection papers, participate in reflection session moderated by the PST, as well as by making sure the PST kept audio and video taped records of all follow up meetings and workshops. Consequently, a steady stream of information was able to flow into the project regarding the work progress and how it was being executed. Monitoring in TAMAM looks at both, *what* is being done (product) and *how* it is being done (process). It involves continuous tracking of activities, analysis of these activities and the flow of events, translating of the conclusions reached into feedback for the schools, as well as the mapping out of decisions and actions in order to designate how to the team ought to proceed next with the PD activities. Monitoring in TAMAM is characterized by a multilevel practice where the PST monitors: (1) the schools; and (2) and its own work (with the schools monitoring their own work as well).

Research activities in TAMAM are strongly influenced by qualitative traditions. As a result, they focus on exploring the meaning of social phenomena from the perspective of those closely involved in these phenomena, and on examining the context surrounding these phenomena along with their impact on people' s actions and beliefs. Moreover, they are mostly interested in stimulating the production of ideas and in deepening the understanding of social

phenomena and interactions. Within that frame, narratives are central to conducting and reporting research activities in TAMAM. In fact, data collected during the project heavily relied on oral or written narratives of the live experiences of all the project participants. The main argument for the use of narratives in educational research claims that human beings are considered to be storytellers who, individually and socially, lead storied-lives and tell the stories of these lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways human beings experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own - and other's - stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). PST researchers are involved in the project as participant-observant researchers, reporting their own story regarding how they build capacity for school-based reform, and collect the other project participants' stories, in order to construct narratives that describe this collective experience. The educational importance of this line of work lies in how it brings together various theoretical ideas, about the nature of human life, based on the educational experiences underwent.

The focus of this report, as mentioned before, is professional development in the TAMAM project. It follows a case-study design in order to frame the narrative (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005) and adopt grounded theory procedures for the collection and analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2005; 2010). The field work consisted of concurrent observations and reflections, where the researchers/participants-observants were "personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting and revising descriptions and meaning of what [was] going on" (Stake, 2005, p. 450). Data, spanning the course of three years, were collected in the form of: (1) Researchers' field notes as participant-

observants; (2) workshop materials shared with participants; (3) video-taped workshop sessions; (4) individual interviews with participants; (5) focus group interviews with school teams; (6) interviews with school principals; (7) follow-up meetings with school teams; (8) participants' reflection papers; and (9) progress reports and reflections prepared by the participating school teams.

Memoing was heavily relied upon throughout the field work. The "research and analytical progress" was re-coded by the PST team as memos, and later on reflected upon in order to determine what had been achieved, and consequently, what further steps were needed to bring the emerging theoretical categories "to higher levels of abstraction" (Charmaz, 2010, p. 94).

Charmaz's (2005, 2010) procedures following the constant comparative method guided the analysis of field data and the construction of the conceptual understanding of the professional development design and approach in the project. Three levels of analysis were completed: First, data was examined and organized to produce evidence-based narratives of the professional development activities in TAMAM. Then, an evaluative analysis was conducted in order to identify points of progress regarding the goals and challenges faced by the school teams. Finally, a critical examination of the project goals - and the premises/reasons behind these goals - was carried out, in light of the conclusions reached in the previous two sessions and the relevant theoretical literature. This analysis resulted in decisions and actions that shaped the design - as well as the approach - of the professional development activities. It also culminated in proposing the TAMAM professional development model.

Relevant literature was consulted at various junctures during the study. First, prior to the field work, the literature on educational reform and professional development in the Arab world was reviewed to draw the historical context and identify current reform trends in selected Arab countries. This situated TAMAM within past and current trends of school reform in those countries. Second, the international literature on effective professional development and school improvement was examined throughout the field work, and informed the theoretical understanding of the TAMAM project PD experiences.

Over-dependence on the international theoretical literature was inevitable due to an acute lack of indigenous empirical and theoretical literature relevant to the case. However, following the grounded theory procedures where conceptual categories were inductively constructed from initial field data, compared and checked against new field data and existing conceptual literature, and integrated to derive a theoretical portrayal that emphasized understanding rather than prediction, allowed the researcher to maintain a cultural sensitivity during data analysis.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTEXT

Prevalent Practices in the Arab Countries

The dominant belief in the Arab World is that school reform is the sole responsibility of leaders and can only be initiated starting from the top i.e. those highest in authority. This "paternalistic" view of change is deeply reflected in all aspects of the educational system. Teachers view change as the responsibility of policy makers, something that "happens to them" rather than something that "they initiate". This has resulted in a learned passivity, where teachers are no longer motivated – or find a reason to - become proactive agents of change in their institutions. This position is aggravated by a belief that taking initiative and bringing up new

ideas is too risky for teachers as it might upset people in critical positions and trigger power struggles and retaliations. Moreover, there is a severe disconnect within the educational system between schools, universities and national policy makers.

This is mostly due to a lack of collaboration between schools and universities in terms of research policies and the overall improvement of practice. In fact, most of the current research activities are planned and implemented by researchers with a bit of regard to practitioners' needs and realities. Consequently, the impact of those studies on school-level practitioners is very limited. Change initiatives are mostly conceived as introducing dispersed innovative practices while little attention is paid to their connection to actual problems of practice or to the integrating of innovations at the school and classroom level. The normative dimension of school change, as encompassing beliefs and values, is never targeted as a goal, and little or no attention is given to building human and institutional capacity to support and sustain these initiatives.

Moreover, the scope of the adopted innovative practices is often limited due to a prevailing belief - at the school level - that structures and policies are beyond “critical evaluation” and are seen as “non-modifiable” and too hard to change (Akkary and Rizk, 2011). As Bashur’s (1982) observation, politicization and bureaucratization of education, added to the paternalistic culture in Arab countries, and led school practitioners to treat reform as the sole “property” and responsibility of their politicians and government. Because of the way teachers are socialized into their profession - as well as the limited conception of their role they develop as a result - they act as mere executors of those top-down directives and rarely have a sense of urgency when it comes to contributing to the school reform process. As such, they rarely voice their suggestions and never ensure that their complaints, concerning the shortcoming and/or

inadequacies of those reforms, are heard by policy makers (Akkary and Greenfield, 1998). Consequently, Arab school practitioners are disengaged from the whole reform process, without being interested in making any attempt at adapting their practices to the demands of its mandates (Bashshur, 1982; El-Amine, 2005).

Professional development activities in the Arab countries are often planned as disconnected, independent goals, as opposed to being fundamental steps in the direction of comprehensive school improvement. They are designed as one stop, one-size-fits-all workshops, and are characterized by the top-down approach. Professional development activities are dominated by prescriptive and directive approaches to training and coaching, neglecting the special needs of teachers as adult learners, and falling short when it comes to providing the continuous follow-up and mentoring they need.

PD activities are conceived, planned, and implemented by collaborating with practitioners at the school level, completely marginalized from the whole process. While university experts are sometimes called upon for consultation, there is no evidence that the role of school practitioners goes beyond that of being the "passive workers" expected to just execute the top-down directives. As a result, most professional development activities are far from being responsive to - or aligned with - the teachers' needs and priorities. A study conducted in Lebanon examined the teachers' needs for professional development as well as the areas where more training was required. It was concluded that teachers found the workshops and lectures attended, 'odd' and ineffective, since there was no follow-up system. 67.1% of the teachers wanted professional development to be collegial and practiced in their own school environment. They also wished they could receive constructive feedback by their coordinators. Additionally,

they expected class observations in order to check the application and efficiency of whatever was studied in the workshops. But most teachers resented the inspective evaluation carried out by the coordinators or supervisors which aimed at spotting their weaknesses (Nabhani and Bahhous, 2010). In another study, Mattar (2012) found that the majority of professional development workshops offered skills that were deemed irrelevant to practice by the teachers. Teachers reported that they failed to find practical applications for those skills in their school context.

Moreover, building teachers' capacities is challenged by harsh conditions present at the school and classroom level: (1) insufficiency of curriculum and instructional resources; (2) large class sizes; (3) traditional conceptions of teaching and leading; (4) lack of continuous professional support; (5) limited decision-making authorities when it comes to implementing reform directives and adapting them in response to local conditions; and finally (6) unrealistic expectations, imposed upon teachers by reformers, demanding them to prepare their students to be autonomous, critical thinkers, life-long learners, inquirers and leaders in their community, while the teachers, themselves, are not yet equipped or supported in such a way so as to be able to practice and model those exact same skills within their current organizational and cultural context.

Added to the previously mentioned conditions surrounding school reform and professional development, is an acute lack of collaboration between schools, universities, and policy makers, in terms of research policies and improvement of practice. In fact, current research activities in the region fell short of building a knowledge base grounded in the local cultural context and connected to the actual problems of practice, (Hanafi, 2011; Al Amine, 2009) planned and implemented by researchers with no consideration to the problems of practice

regarding the practitioners' needs and realities. Consequently, the impact of those studies on school-level practitioners - as well as on the policy-making process - remains very limited.

Given these conditions, it is not surprising that the belief, that dramatic changes are needed in the Arab region when it comes to educational reform, gained momentum in the last decade. The latest World Bank report on the MENA Region (2008) titled "The road not traveled" concluded that in order for the region to bridge the gap with the rest of the world, educational reform should be based on new assumptions, and should focus on dimensions that have been neglected. The report pointed at "new roads yet to be travelled" and called for a comprehensive approach to reform. It recommended that Arab countries adopt a new paradigm that focuses on promoting the performance, commitment, and active involvement of teachers (World Bank, 2008). The report also recommended establishing enabling structures that encourage teachers to take responsibility and initiative, and build capacity to become creative problem solvers, capable of crafting solutions based on the specific needs of their students and their school.

Professional Development for School Improvement in the International Literature

Education Reform and Building Capacity

Decades of educational reform in the West have left a rich array of literature regarding the best practices observed, resulting in a substantial knowledge base of what works and what does not work in the area of school improvement (Seashore Louis, Toole, and Hargreaves, 1999). The focus on the individual school, as the key to successful reform, gained a great deal of appeal and research support in the last two decades (Shields and Knapp, 1997; Fullan, 2005). Successful school improvement is dependent upon the ability of individual schools to initiate and lead change and development. In fact, school improvement is most likely to succeed when it is based

on building the skills, aspirations, and energies of those closest to the school (Barth, 1990). This requires an active role for school practitioners and an informed skillful participation in leading and implementing improvement initiatives (Lambert, 2003). In particular, it requires maximizing teachers' professional learning as a means to increase their agency - and involvement - in the overall school improvement. Many advocate that it is time for reform to "pull teachers back from the sharp edge of reform and move [them] towards its leading edge" (Bascia and Hargreaves, 2000, p. 20). They suggest that new approaches to educational change need to engage teachers in the process and connect them to the system in a way that helps them see themselves "not just as effects of the contexts" but rather as "contributors to it, and agents who can and must influence how others perceive, shape and support their work." (p.20)

This position calls for building the capacity for change and development within the school, and rests on the belief that when individuals feel confident in their own capacity, in the capacity of their colleagues, and in the capacity of the school to promote their professional development, (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000, p. 961 as cited in Muijs and Harris, 2006) school improvement is more likely to be achieved." The authority for school improvement should not be exclusive to those "up the chain" of the school administrative hierarchy, rather, it should be distributed horizontally to involve teachers in the decision-making process (Copland, 2003; Pavlov, 2004). Thus, a major responsibility, of those with traditional decision-making authority inside and outside the school, is to help facilitate the process for the teachers.

Effective Reform: Reculturing and Shifting Paradigms

Effective school reform adopts a transformative view of change that encourages shifting paradigms through making re-culturing schools, at all levels, its central goal (Sarason, 1996;

Cuban 1988; Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Cuban, 1992; Argyris, 1991; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Mckinsey and Company, 2010). This systemic transformation is located in the transformed educational values of individual practitioners (Capelo and Dias, 2009). This transformation requires learning that causes a person to engage in a "fundamental reordering of the paradigmatic assumptions, patterns of unexamined beliefs and taken-for-granted values that are built into educational processes he/she holds" (Werhane, Hartman, Moberg, Englehardt, Pritchard and Parmar, 2011, p. 23). Moreover, transformative learning is found to require that professionals critically explore, articulate, negotiate, and revise their beliefs about themselves, their students, their colleagues, and their schools. This means, going beyond "repairing" towards "discerning a new vision of what it means to educate and be educated" (Wilson and Daviss, 1994, p.8). Transformative learning also requires reflection to raise awareness of where things are at, surfacing familiar patterns and habits, examining them critically, as well as deconstructing them in order to build new models, visions, and approaches (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Sarason, 1996). This process of re-culturing examines not only the kind of students we want to graduate but also the processes that can lead us there: how to teach, lead, organize our educational system, and how to reform it.

Effective Organizational Development

Effective organizational development [OD] is one that focuses on building capacity for change, both at the individual and institutional level, to guarantee commitment, quality/effectiveness and sustainability. Scholars agree that successful efforts endeavoring to enhance classroom practices begins first and foremost with teachers, and that professional networks that engage teachers are promising vehicles for effective change (Seashore Louis et al.,

1999; Smylie and Hart, 1999; Mclaughlin, 1990, 1998; Fullan, 2008). This view shifts the focus towards building teachers' individual and collective capacity as a basis for organizational development, emphasizing the teachers' critical roles as informants and guides to the reform process (McLaughlin, 1990).

Building human and social capacity among teachers includes training teachers on inquiry (Greenwood and Levin, 2007), problem solving and reflective practices (Schon and Argyris, 1996), innovativeness and creativity (Wilson and Daviss, 1994), decision-making and leadership (Lambert, 2003), interpersonal skills and professional collaboration (Lambert, 2003; Mckinsey and Company report, 2010; Seashore Louis et al., 1999; Smylie and Hart, 1999), raising awareness about and in a system to change it, and providing support and encouragement rather than prescribing actions (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). It enables and empowers members of the organization to take action, and aims at changing mindsets not just behaviors (Bushe and Marshak, 2009). With these skills, teachers are expected to reconstruct their professional identity, acquiring new roles, both as agents of change, and as "generators of professional knowledge" (Seashore Louis et al., 1999 p.264). With this new identity, teachers will be willing to continuously reflect on their practice, examine - as a collective - their deeply held assumptions and mental models on education, and question to what extent these models help them deal with failures, treating them as opportunities for growth and learning.

Moreover, in effective OD, the process of capacity building does not aim at mandating predetermined cultures or values, rather it creates enabling conditions, and "containers within which whole systems talk to themselves" reflect, self-assess and organize (Bushe and Marshak, 2009, p. 358). Thus, at the institutional level, building capacity includes: (1) making

collaboration, "the main mechanism both for improving teaching practice and making teachers accountable to each other" (Mckinsey and Company report, 2010); (2) flattening the pyramid, "placing the power to change and making decisions during implementation in the hands of those in the front lines" (Wilson and Daviss, 1994, p.46); (3) Strengthening a "technical culture" within the teaching profession, one that builds on expertise and specialization and is rooted in research and experimentation, and has well-established processes enabling it to convert learning into practice (Wislon and Daviss, 1999; Seashore Louis et al., 1999); and lastly (4), placing the emphasis on personal transformation and meaning, and on preserving idealism within the teaching profession as a way to enhance individual motivation and "unleash positive emotions and inner resources" among those closely involved in reform (Seashore Louis et al.,1999, p. 265). In fact, Leithwood and Jantzi (2002) note that one of the key conditions for supporting the successful implementation of reform is the expectation that teachers' responsibilities extend beyond the quality of instruction of their own classroom, to include making school-wide decisions likely to influence their practice and its surrounding conditions.

Paying Attention to the Process: Educational Change as a Journey

Achieving this vision of educational change and organizational development requires a process that accounts for the inherent complexity of schools and educational systems, and views change as a "journey" rather than a "blueprint" (Fullan, 2005). Seashore Louis et al. (1999) pointed out that the process of change is much more complex, and entails so much more than the simple adoption of innovative practices, including implementation, impact on students' learning, institutionalization, maintenance, and replication (p. 254). Moving away from a rationalistic, linear conception of the change process, the current Western paradigm of educational change

emphasizes implementation and advocates a view of change as evolutionary and not revolutionary (Mclaughlin, 1990; Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002).

Thus, reform initiatives have to attend to both the planned and unplanned aspects, channeling them towards achieving its improvement goals. As Mclaughlin (1990) concluded, effective change is thus characterized by "a process of mutual adaptation rather than uniform implementation where local factors (rather than federal program guidelines or project methods) dominated project outcomes" (p. 1). Moreover, effective reform implementation takes into consideration teachers' motivation, making sure that the reform goals are aligned with teachers' professional views and aspirations, and that its strategies include providing them with the skills and resources they need to successfully implement the reform (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2002).

Sustaining Development: Communities of Practice

Lastly, there is growing evidence in the literature (e.g. Fullan, 2001; Sarason, 1996; Smylie and Hart, 1999; Harris, 2001) suggesting that attempts at school improvement are bound to fail if the school does not create conditions that foster its capacity for sustainability of this improvement. Hence, in order to succeed, educational reform should focus on transforming the school culture into "communities of practice" (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 2002) through structural and institutional arrangements that promote on-going teacher learning (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995). Scholars agree that sustaining school improvement need professional teachers who are highly skilled in their craft (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos, 2009; Lambert, 2003), capable of working together (Smylie and Hart, 1999), and willing and able to lead change (Lambert, 2003).

In fact, within these communities of practice, collaboration becomes "the main mechanism both for improving teaching, and making teachers accountable to each other" (Mckinsey and Company report, 2010). Sergiovanni and Starrat (2002) contend that developing these communities of practice includes building teams to engage teachers in collaborative inquiry, reflective dialogue and open sharing of their challenges and successes. It also means that schools must provide teachers with: (1) enabling environments for improvement that give priority to enhancing quality teaching; (2) supervisory practices that ensure continuous feedback and support development; and (3) sufficient time for the planning and implementation of programs (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 2002; Reeves, 2010). Reeves (2010), warns that failure to provide these conditions "is almost certainly fatal to reform efforts" (p.45). All the above stresses the need to make on-going professional development an integral part of schools (Hargreaves, 2007; Darling–Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Little, 1982) in order to ensure that professional learning is successful and continuous, and that improvement is sustained.

Effective Approaches to Professional Development

Background: The Old and New Views of Effective PD

The old view of professional development. The old view of PD is characterized by a top-down approach to teachers' training whereby packages of knowledge are distributed by experts to teachers in bite-sized pieces with transferable teachers approached as passive recipients of the findings of research (Darling-Hammond& McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1993). Staff developments took place as a series of workshops and conferences, sometimes with the help of long-term consultants. "What everyone appears to want for students - a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems,

using their own experiences, and working with others - is for some reason denied to teachers when they are the learners" (Lieberman, 1995, p. 591). In fact, traditional in-service teacher training programs were primarily prescriptive (Lieberman, 1995) making it hard for adult teachers to view themselves as autonomous, self-directed learners (Mezirow, 1997). In clear contrast to the adult learning theory that views learning to be inherently embedded in the immediate milieu of practice of the learner (Knowles, 1973), teacher training programs "delivered" new ways of teaching that are often disconnected from the actual classroom realities (Lieberman, 1995). These formal workshops rarely took into account the context of teaching and the experiences of teachers (Little, 1993). Thus, they usually fell short of creating learning opportunities for teachers which seek to reflect critically on their practice in order to build their own understanding about content, pedagogy and student learning (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995). Moreover, there is a general consensus that this approach to teacher training has failed to induce considerable change in students' learning and teachers' ways of teaching because it has been implemented in ways that neglect the view of the teacher as an adult learner (Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, 1995; Knowles, 1973).

The new view of PD. Bascia and Hargreaves (2000) noted that addressing what teachers want and need to grow professionally and improve their practice is an essential component of successful reform. The shortcomings of the traditional PD models coupled with a growing acknowledgement of the active role of teachers in inducing change in the classroom and the school as a whole (e.g. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Harris and Young, 2000; Little, 1993; Louis, Kruse and Raywid, 1996) resulted in new approaches to professional development. Researchers (e.g. Little, 1993) agree that the old training paradigm of professional

development based on knowledge consumption needs to be replaced by a paradigm built around inquiry and knowledge production. They call for a new approaches to PD that seek to create occasions for teachers to actively engage in finding ways to improve their own practice, and hence student learning (Newmann, King and Youngs, 2000).

After an extensive review of current literature on professional development, Ann Webster Wright (2009) concluded the following:

> "To gain further insights to enhance support for professionals as they learn, there is a need to understand more about how professionals continue learning through their working lives. I argue for the need to move beyond the current focus on how best to provide PD activities toward understanding more about the fundamental question of how professionals learn". (p.704)

Planning PD activities should take into consideration the unique nature of adults as learners. Adult learners are autonomous, socially responsible thinkers (Mezirow, 1997) and capable of self-directed learning (Knowles, 1973). Moreover, Mezirow (1997) explains that adult learners are capable of what he calls "transformative learning," where learning induces changes in one's viewpoints and habits of mind hence motivating adult learners to seek self-knowledge as a prerequisite for autonomy and self-directed learning (Mezirow, 1985). Moreover, a growing movement toward professionalization in schools views teachers as professionals who are actively engaged in building their craft knowledge rather than technicians with limited skills who follow scripted tasks that leave little room for creativity and innovation (Kruse and Louis, 1993, Seashore Louis et al., 1999). As professionals, teachers need to continuously accumulate expert knowledge in their specialized content areas, as well as acquire procedural knowledge that helps

them bridge the gap between ‘what they know’ and ‘what they do’ (Blase, Blase and Phillips, 2010; Glickman et al. 2010; Reeves, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2009).

In fact, Kolb’s (1984) theory of experiential learning postulates that there are two dimensions to the learning process of adults. The first dimension represents the concrete experiencing of events at one end, and the abstract conceptualization at the other end. The other dimension has active experimentation at one extreme and a reflective observation at the other. Thus, in the process of what he calls experiential learning, “one moves in varying degrees from actor to observer and from specific involvement to general analytic detachment” (Kolb, 1984, p.31). Kolb (1984) explains that learning can start at any point in time during those four steps, and that it should be perceived as following a spiral model. Learning typically starts with a person performing a specific action, and evaluating the results in the situation where this action took place. Afterwards, the person examines the circumstances of the action so that if and when it happens again, under the same conditions, s/he would be able to predict the outcome. The third step involves coming up with a generalization under which this specific action takes place. The fourth and final step would consist of the person using those generalizations to test this knowledge in different circumstances. Completing all four steps means that the person has constructed new learning.

Moreover, adults learn best when they receive support from mentors who present them with situations that challenge their beliefs and practices, which over time, have become taken for granted (Brookfield, 1995; Glickmanetal., 2007; Drago-Severson, 2004). Effective mentoring necessitates a deep understanding of teachers’ learning styles, readiness, stages of cognitive,

moral, emotional and psychological development, as well as a deep respect to adults' prior experiences and their need for autonomy (Glickman et al., 2010).

In sum, empirical research over the past twenty years has revealed interesting findings with regards to what helps professional learning (PL) flourish, mainly in terms of: (1) Providing learning experiences situated within a community that supports learning, such as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon, 2001; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas, 2006; Wenger, 1998); (2) Offering opportunities for practitioners enabling their active collaboration with others on authentic challenges within their practice (Boud and Middleton, 2003; Burbank and Kauchak, 2003; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Lieberman and Miller, 2001, Oakes and Rogers, 2007); (3) Setting PD goals and activities focused on the skills needed to improve and respond to the students' learning regarding specific learning challenges the students might face; (4) Creating opportunities for teachers to develop a sense of ownership by encouraging them to take the lead in designing and advancing their professional learning (Garet et al., 2001;Webster-Wright, 2009). In sum, there is general agreement in the educational research community that effective PL needs to be experiential, continuing, and embedded in everyday practice.

In order to promote professional learning, teacher-educators need to explore new ways for designing and delivering professional development activities. They must also be able to supply the necessary conditions needed for supporting the continuous learning of these teachers. In what follows, reflective practice and action research will be presented as key competencies associated with effective professional learning. In addition, the conditions that facilitate and enhance professional learning will be discussed, namely: (1) the adherence to principles of adult

learning; (2) the adoption of the evolving-design approach to planning; (3) the promotion of professional collaboration; and (4) the providing of administrative and structural support.

Enhancing Professional Learning: Key Competencies and Activities

There is increasing consensus in the literature (e.g. Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman, 1995; King, 2002) that suggests how reflection and inquiry skills are both essentials as competencies and tools for meaningful professional learning. For professional development activities to be effective, they must include training on inquiry and reflective practice skills, as well as follow processes that are grounded in reflection and inquiry. Many initiatives on school-based reforms such as PATHS (Philadelphia Alliance for Teaching Humanities in the Schools) (Little, 1993) and the BASRC (Bay Area School Reform Collaborative) Accelerated Schools (Copland, 2003) have successfully engaged teachers in inquiry as a vehicle for building their capacity for school based improvement. In these initiatives, practitioners were coached through the construction of their own theories of learning based on cycles of reflective inquiry. These cycles of inquiry involved: (1) the selecting of a question, for investigation, related to school problems; (2) the identifying of measurable goals; (3) the designing and implementing of an action plan; and (4) the collecting and analyzing of the findings. Finally, this cycle connected back to the first step as the question for investigation became refined in light of the new evidence (Copland, 2003).

Reflective practice. Professional development activities are no longer limited to acquiring new instructional skills and content knowledge. In fact, they extend to include opportunities that reflect on one's own learning process and help find solutions to problems faced in everyday practices (Brown and Macatangay, 2002).Critical reflection is considered central to

understanding the historical, cultural, and biographical reasons for one's needs, wants, and interests. Accordingly, critical reflection becomes an essential professional qualification as well as a main catalyst for enhancing the process of transformative learning, as "it is through challenging implicit assumptions and questioning taken-for-granted practices that PL can lead to changes in practice" (Webster-Wright, 2009, p.703). Without the ability to evaluate assumptions, teachers risk remaining prisoners of their old patterns and self-imposed normative and structural arrangements. By analyzing the values and personal theories that underlie their practice, teachers will acquire greater self-knowledge and self-challenge on their professional learning journey (Leitch and Day, 2000).

In addition to helping teachers engage in transformative learning, reflection can help teachers develop their procedural knowledge. Leithwood and Jantzi (2002) note that the development of procedural knowledge, as the basis of skilled practice, requires repeated cycles that include: "(a) developing a knowledge structure to guide one's mental or physical activity, (b) engaging in that activity guided by the knowledge structure, (c) obtaining feedback about the adequacy of one's actions, and (d) refining the guiding knowledge structure" (p.23). They asserted that reform initiatives, aimed at breaking existing organizational routines, need to be designed in such a way so as to grant those involved the opportunity of being able to engage in a repeated iteration of that cycle for the purpose of breaking their own patterns and transforming their practice.

In fact, inherent to the process of learning is the teachers'/researchers' ability to "reflect in action" and to "reflect on practice" (Schon, 1983). Reflection in action occurs while the teachers, immersed in the actions of everyday life, encounter a specific problem and identify it as

an object of reflective thinking. Later, they act on this object by refining their knowledge of the problem, revisiting past assumptions and judgments and constructing "a local theory for each unique case" (p.68). This is defined as reflection on-practice. According to Schon (1983), reflection is further enhanced through engaging in professional dialogue; one person alone cannot reflect and understand everything. By sharing their thinking and reasoning with each other, practitioners will be more likely to reveal tacit theories about their teaching, understand more explicitly the goals driving their actions, and discover patterns across cases and contexts (Schon, 1983).

According to Leitch and Day (2000), "Reflective practice is considered to be central to the growth of teachers as inquirers who engage in collaborative research with others from inside and outside the school in generating knowledge of practice rather than finding themselves as objects whose role is to implement existing theory in practice" (p. 183). Hence, reflective thinking that is - insightful, relevant and adequate (McLaughlin, 1998) - further supports the need for teacher-driven professional development by emphasizing teachers' role as critical thinkers and decision-makers throughout the learning process. According to McLaughlin (1998), reflection may be valued either as an end in itself, focusing on the content of reflection, or as a means towards an end. In the literature on school improvement (Harris and Young, 2000; Hopkins and Harris, 1997), reflection is often emphasized, especially with regards to the action it leads to. In fact, reflection as a means to school-based improvement and professional development has been widely valued across various countries worldwide (e.g. Harris and Young, 2000; McGee; 2008; Xu, 2010).

Action research as vehicle for PL and school improvement. Literature from the West, concerning successful educational reform, offers significant evidence on the centrality of inquiry as a capacity that can promote sustainable professional learning and improvement in schools. Recently, action research has gained widespread support amongst the educational community as a powerful tool, at all levels, for educational stakeholders who engage in meaningful and collective inquiry in order to study and reflect on their own practice hoping to build their capacity as well as promote sustainable improvement. (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2005; Cano, 2004; Gillies, 2009; Mitchell, Reilly and Logue, 2009; Savoie-Zajc and Descamps-Bednarz, 2007).The essence of action research lies in the fact that practitioners-researchers choose specific issues to investigate which: (1)pertain to their everyday teaching and learning; (2) are within their sphere of influence; and (3) about which they care deeply (Sagor, 1997). Action research has gained its reputation based on the promises it offers in terms of promoting evidence-based decision-making and in terms of being a channel for collaboration among various educational stakeholders (Gall et al., 2005; Sagor, 1997).

The action research paradigm is viewed as a vehicle for teacher-driven professional development (Harris and Drake, 1997). Action research is often conceived to be "deliberately and systematically reflexive [and]… both outwardly directed and inwardly [self] directed." (p.574). Thus, it aims to change community development practices (outwardly), and through collaborative communications and learning, change the practitioners themselves as well as their practices (inwardly). As reviewed by Rearick (1998), educational action research has been conceptualized by using different approaches. One example of such an approach is the teacher-as-a-researcher movement, in which teachers are required to engage in the act of problem-

solving specific cases (Schon, 1983). Another approach includes the critical emancipatory movement (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) rooted in the traditions of a participatory democratic approach of action research in which the educator's role becomes creating conditions that incite all members of a critical community to take action in support of democratic values such as deliberation (Dewey, 1910). This movement extends beyond simply redefining the role of the teacher (by making her a researcher in the classroom), to promoting "ownership of social inquiry and its role in social amelioration" (McTaggart, 1997, p.21). McGee (2008) further emphasized participants' ownership and control of the action research process as the main ideological underpinning of action research. Indeed, action research depends greatly on teachers' participation in diagnosing and identifying problems, knowing teachers have the freedom of choice regarding any action, or decision they choose to make (Rearick, 1998). Hence, defined broadly, action research focuses on the empowerment of educators and on generating theory and practice for democratic education (Rearick, 1998).

There is ample evidence in the literature that supports the positive impact action research has on individual and organizational development. During a school-university partnership project entitled SCOPE, Catelli (1995) examined the impact of collaborative action research on teachers' professional growth. The author found that as the cooperating teacher-university professor and student-teacher worked together, they supported each other during the inquiry project. Both cooperating and student-teachers' attitudes on educational research became positive as they were able to appreciate the role of action research in instituting change. Moreover, the project led participating teachers to question, reflect, act and evaluate in an effective manner. Catelli (1995) concludes that action research should be considered an effective tool helping transform teachers

into change agents and should also become an integral part of professional development geared towards overall school improvement.

Approaches to action research that promote investigations involving several stakeholders (teachers, administrators…) in the service of school reform are well known as being effective tools towards school improvement as well as individual professional growth. These approaches are most commonly referred to in the literature as participatory action research (PAR), collaborative action research (CAR), cooperative inquiry, or action learning. The rationale behind such approaches is that people who hold the same goals, beliefs and visions constructed from the "ground up" work more efficiently and harmoniously towards achieving improved performance. Hence action research is viewed as a phenomenon which is strongly mediated by the culture of the school (Clausen, Aquino and Wideman, 2009; Sagor, 1997). The purpose behind these approaches is the building of a learning community and the fortification of solidarity for school improvement efforts. Additionally, these approaches would also help contribute to the theory as well as produce a knowledge base that would be useful for other practitioners and educators (Gall et al., 2005). In fact, in all approaches to action research, practitioners-researchers are involved in every step of the research (Sagor, 1997). Indeed, action research is believed to promote democracy and equity in education, and collaboration in the educational community (Gall, et al., 2005; Sagor, 1997; Tuck, 2009).

Enhancing Professional Learning: Supportive Processes and Conditions

Enhancing professional learning in the context of schools, as part of school based attempts at improvement, requires purposeful manipulation of the structural and cultural conditions surrounding this learning process. According to Glickman et al. (2010) there is a

broad agreement among educators and educational researchers regarding a wide area of structural arrangements, norms, as well as processes that are successful in triggering, enhancing, and sustaining professional learning.

Supportive organizational structures/professional learning communities. On-going teacher learning is found to be best achieved in an environment that supports reflective inquiry (Harris and Young, 2000) by teachers working collaboratively with each other - and with experienced mentors - on planning, implementing and evaluating innovative practices (Levin and Rock, 2003) in their classrooms. As such, educators were called on to develop professional learning communities, (often called PLCs) where professional learning is continuous, reflective, and focused on improving student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Borko, 2004; Fullan, 2001). In these communities, agency for leading change would not be restricted to a few positions only; rather it would be shared by all members who have the skills and expertise to lead improvement efforts (Lambert, 2003)

The creation of strong professional communities in schools is important on several levels: (1) The collaboration exemplified by teachers' collective responsibility for school improvement (Kruse, 2000); (2) the establishment of shared values and belief systems; (3) the engaging in reflective dialogue; and (4) the assumption of a leadership role. Studies have identified the key characteristics for the development of professional communities to be as follows: (see Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Louis and Kruse, 1995; Louis, Marks and Kruse, 1996; Newman et al., 2000; Kruse and Louis, 1993)

- Shared values: Collectively agreeing on the norms, values and beliefs helps in sustaining and supporting teachers' professional practice. This implies aligning the individual professional goals of teachers with the school vision.
- Collaboration: Collaboration increases organizational learning in order to provide forums for teachers and staff to share expertise, as well as sustain reflective dialogue and de-privatization of practice.
- Reflective dialogue: Teachers reflect in-action and on-action (Schon, 1983) using collaborative dialogue with their colleagues to identify, evaluate and improve their professional experiences.
- De-privatization of practice: Continuous improvement and reflective practice requires teachers to trade-off roles of mentors, advisors and specialists to aid and assist their peers. Hence, it is within these flexible boundaries, that teachers master control over their practice in a public and de-privatized way.
- Focus on student learning: A sustained and un-deviated focus on student intellectual growth is a prime goal of professional communities. As a result there is harmony within the school between all initiatives, functions and development goals.

Moreover, Garet et al. (2001) assert that professional development is more effective and of a higher quality when it receives administrative support that allows sustaining it over a long period of time. Thus, "to improve professional development, it is more important to focus on the duration, collective participation, and the core features (i.e., content, active learning, and coherence) than on type (i.e., traditional versus reform types of activities) (p.936). In fact, it is

more effective to provide sufficient, sustained, and intensive (rather than short and intermittent) professional development. This will allow: (1) widening the focus of the content knowledge of the participating teachers; (2) providing them with opportunities for active learning for sake of developing their procedural knowledge; and (3) insuring coherence with other learning activities these teachers are involved in.

There is ample evidence that the PLC models were effective in making professional learning and continuous professional development activities integral parts of the school culture (Glickman et al., 2010). Similarly, they were also useful in providing personal and organizational support for teachers thus helping them to adopt and adapt to change in ways that are sustainable, and meaningful (Borko, 2004).

Supportive processes. Sergiovanni and Starrat (2002) note that a successful approach to professional development honors the unique nature of teachers as professionals and abides by the principles of adult learning. Mezirow (1981) recommends that "adult educators assist teachers to learn in a way that enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners" (p. 137). Accordingly, professional development should involve teachers as active participants in building knowledge about their own teaching as well as learning in the context of their school. It also should include direct ongoing assistance to teachers presenting them with situations that challenge their thinking while at the same time offering them the support and resources they need to learn and grow. Namely, teachers/educators should act as mentors (Brookfield, 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004), follow a developmental approach while providing assistance to teachers (Glickman et al., 2010), and maintain the connection between PD activities, school improvement initiatives and student-learning in such a way so as to keep teachers motivated and ensure their

long-term commitment to engaging in professional development and school improvement activities.

According to Glickman et al., (2010) there is broad agreement that successful professional learning requires the following: (1) involvement of practitioners in planning; (2) implementing and self-evaluating the learning process and outcome; (3) paying attention to the research on change; (4) following up with teachers for the sake of helping them transfer their learning into their classroom practices; and lastly (5), maintaining a careful on-going assessment of the progress and learning that serve as both a source of challenge and support for the practitioners.

Research had shown that mentoring is closely linked to teachers' learning for both the mentors and the "mentees" (Drago-Severson, 2004; Glickman et al., 2010; Brookfield, 1995) Mentoring is defined as the relationship between an experienced teacher and a less experienced one, with the former offering support, advice, curriculum help, and guidance (Drago-Severson, 2004; Glickman et al., 2010). Mentors are generally viewed as friends, guides, and teachers who can provide support to their mentees as they construct their understanding by building trust with them. There are numerous activities associated with effective mentoring, the most notable being a mentor advocating for his mentee by means of expressing the high expectations he has for him, hence creating a safe space for growth. Both mentors and mentees are invited to share their experiences and reflections and engage in a dialogue on classroom practices, expressing their vulnerabilities while simultaneously working on improving their skills. Within this context of support, mentors are expected to challenge their mentees' views, beliefs, and practices, thus inducing them to experience the cognitive dissonance that is associated with transformational

learning (Meziro, 1994; Elliot and Devine, 1994; Merriam, 2004; Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007). The right balance of challenge and support in a climate of trust are found to be necessary for growth (Drago-Severson, 2004). Mentors should present practitioners with challenging situations while at the same time offer them the support they need to resolve them (Glickmanet al., 2010). In sum, mentoring builds a sense of connectedness that can keep teachers motivated, as well as help them develop a sense of commitment to their profession and the school they are serving.

Additionally, attention to the developmental aspects of the mentees' ways of knowing is critical for professional growth. Effective professional development is closely linked with teachers, educators, and mentors adopting a developmental approach (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 2002; Glickman et al.,2010).The basis of this approach states that - aside the fact that teachers as adult learners have different learning styles - teachers are also at different stages in their developmental continuum. Thus, teachers acquire a particular learning experience with varied levels of readiness at the cognitive, emotional, psychological, and social growth continuums. Consequently, educators/mentors bear the responsibility of becoming more familiar with the assets - as well as the challenges - that teachers bring to a certain learning situation. Adopting a developmental approach means deciding on the level of directness regarding the assistance they need to offer to their teachers in order to help them advance on their learning journey (Glickman et al., 2010). According to researchers, when teachers receive the right level of assistance, based on their level of readiness, their development would progress towards making them self-directed, autonomous, and long life learners.

Using an evolving design approach. Unlike traditional PD approaches that rely mostly on rigid and prescriptive plans, enhancing professional learning requires a planning process that is flexible and responsive to the evolving conditions witnessed throughout the learning journey. In fact, according to western scholars, there is a big difference between learning about innovative practices, and implementing them in a way that ensures their integration into the daily practice and institutionalization of the culture of the school. Researchers warn against treating "plans" as finalized blueprints that prescribe actions to be followed during the implementation stage (Berman and Mclaughlin, 1974; Mclaughlin, 1990). Studies on organizational development and change reveal that the complexity of the improvement/development process raises the need for adopting an "initial plan" that develops and changes in accordance with the organizational realities and in response to the emerging conditions during its implementation (Berman and Mclaughlin, 1974; Mclaughlin 1990; Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Seashore Louis et al., 1999). They suggest a "redesign" process grounded in research data, both old and new. Similarly, Seashore Louis et al. (1999) propose a process that involves both "backward" and "forward mapping," while setting goals for reform and designing its strategies. Backward mapping begins at the school level with determining what practitioners want to do and are capable of doing. This is followed by forward mapping where a tentative plan is built. Yet, "all plans must be subject to continuous scrutiny…and are adjusted not only to the preferred destination but also to the immediate strength and developing capacities of the school" (Seashore, et al., 1999, p.271). Moreover, researchers assert that taking into consideration the specific cultural elements of the school (where change is to be embedded), requires giving a central role to all stakeholders to co-construct the evolving design (Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Mclaughlin, 1998; Chenoweth and

Everhart, 2002; Murphy and Datnow, 2003). In addition, a greater level of commitment is achieved when the decision to engage in change grows out of the stakeholders' desire to solve local problems and incorporate their views on how they should be solved (Rutherford, 2009). According to this model, research becomes closely connected to the process of planning and implementation. Change agents are invited to work with all stakeholders by means of: (1) closely monitoring their emerging needs; (2) allowing them to shape the design of the plan; and (3) determining the unfolding of its implementation process.

In fact, Reeves (2010) and his colleagues at The Leadership and Learning Center reached similar conclusions pertaining to the processes of planning, implementation, and monitoring within the context of school improvement. The results of his research, in which he examined over 2,500 improvement plans in relation to student achievement gains or losses, strongly suggest that high impact professional learning requires planning that covers the following: '(1) setting clear goals that keep the emphasis on student learning; (2) focusing on people and practices, not programs; (3) providing people (teachers, leaders, students) with 'opportunities for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement'; and (4) rigorously observing and collecting data on the progress of learning and improvement of practices' (p.21). Rather than making the execution of the plan the sole focus of the implementation stage, effective planning and implementation provide the monitoring progress with a central role and encourage change agents to remain "explorers," engaged in an inquiry process that generates "specific, measurable, and relevant" data.

Working with monitoring data provides school change agents with a rich evidence base which could prove useful in their judgment-making regarding the achievability of certain goals as well

as the setting of priorities for the upcoming few steps, thus clarifying the future measures needed to be taken as the implementation process unfolds (Reeves, 2010; McLaughlin, 1974). As, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) note, successful attempts at school reform are ones that adopt clear indicators used to measure progress in terms of "process" as well as "outcome" hence helping diagnose which aspects of the adopted strategies need to be refined in order to achieve its goals.

TAMAM PROJECT FOR SCHOOL-BASED REFORM: AN OVERVIEW

The TAMAM Project is a pioneering attempt at school-based educational reform in the Arab World combining research and development hoping to bring about - and support - school based initiatives for sustainable school improvement. Three concerns were the main motivation behind launching the TAMAM Project: (1) the quality of professional development programs that are available for Arab educational practitioners. (The available professional development opportunities consist mainly of traditionally delivered theoretical knowledge, with passive roles for the practitioners and little opportunities for connecting this theoretical knowledge to the realities and challenges of their practice); (2) the absence of information-based decision-making in school reform at all levels. (This is reflected in the choice of professional development activities that are not grounded based upon the needs of practitioners); (3) the absence of a knowledge base comprising the best educational practices available, that are also grounded in the Arab culture and representative of the experiences of its practitioners.

Goals

Three central goals for the TAMAM Project are: (1) building leadership capacities for school improvement at the school level; more specifically, building capacity for inquiry, reflection, evidence-based decisions and planning, documentation, professional collaboration,

and leadership among the members of the participating school teams; (2) designing and implementing strategies for school-based improvement, including, as a central component, the building of human and institutional capacities at the school level (these strategies need to be developed experientially and be supported by empirical research in order to be grounded in the cultural context of schools in the Arab World); (3) building partnerships, within the educational system, between universities, schools, and national policy-makers in order to increase professional dialogue and collaboration and to bridge the existing disconnect in the region between these three groups.

TAMAM received long term funding from the Arab Thought Foundation, and is currently in its second phase and fifth year of implementation. Phase one lasted three years and included nine private schools from three countries: Lebanon, Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in addition to three public schools from Lebanon. In Phase 2, the project expanded both with respect to the countries already included, as well as with regards to the new countries added, currently including 9 new schools: one private school in Jordan, three in the Sultanate of Oman, two in Qatar and three in Egypt.

Assumptions

TAMAM is based on the following beliefs: (1) Effective and sustainable educational reform can best be reached through a process that gives consideration to local contexts and individual teacher agency, hence recognizing the importance of partnership and support from school administrators, national level policy-makers and university academics; (3) the inclusion of stakeholders at different authority levels of the educational establishment - who hold different roles and are from different professional backgrounds - have the potential to enrich the

professional dialogue and thus enhance the chances of bridging the divide between theoretical knowledge production, policy-making, and the challenges and needs of practice; (4) academics have the important role of initiating, supporting and building capacity for school improvement; (5) practitioners at the school level need continuous support and ongoing professional development in order to achieve the goals of school improvement; and lastly, (6) change is a journey, allowing room for improvisation, reflective evaluation, and creative problem-solving.

Process

Contrary to conventional reform efforts that prescribe or import reform programs, TAMAM follows an approach to school improvement that is both responsive to the dynamic nature of school reform, and able to recognize the cultural context. Unlike other attempts at school improvement in the region, TAMAM did not adopt a pre-set plan for its professional development activities. Rather, it used constructivist, inquiry-based methods and followed an "unscripted-disciplined improvisational" process as project-steering team designed, implemented, and monitored the activities of the project (Sawyer, 2004). Throughout this process, they assumed the role of inquirers and learners. As such, there was room for creativity, innovativeness, (in breaking away from the status quo-adopted norms and patterns) as well as high levels of responsiveness regarding the emerging needs of the members of the participating school teams.

Two of the initiators of the TAMAM Project, together with a team of university-based educators, formed the Project Steering Team [PST] that played the role of external change agents taking the prime responsibility of designing, planning, monitoring, and evaluating the project. The PST initiated the project by setting the project goals and drafting an initial plan for the first

phase of the project. Their first step was to secure voluntary participation and commitment from the selected schools. The selection was made based on the following criteria: (1) the school being perceived as being successful and innovative and actively engaging in school-based improvement initiatives; (2) the school being able to form teams of teachers who agree to commit to the project on voluntary bases; and (3) the school administration being willing to grant the university team easy open access for visiting the school and working with the school team in order to avoid the rigidity of the bureaucratic red tape prevalent in the area.

A country team was formed in each of the three countries [Lebanon, Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia]. Every country team was comprised of three school teams each consisting of 4-5 members, in addition to a representative from a local public university, as well as another representative from the Ministry of Education. In the first phase of the project, the university and ministry representatives' role was mostly that of participant-observants who provided technical and logistical assistance to the school teams whenever the need presented itself. The PST coordinated the networking within countries - and across countries - through holding meetings that brought the participants in the project together. While being in charge of making the strategic decisions regarding the direction the project activities should take, the PST team adopted a collaborative participative approach making sure it seeks input from all participants at all times and incorporates their views and needs in the decision-making processes. All members worked as partners, deciding on what each school should focus its improvement on, as well as the interventions needed (left completely up to the discretion of the school team). As such, the school level practitioners were the main source of motivation, providing direction for the activities in the TAMAM project.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP CAPACITY: THE PD JOURNEY IN TAMAM

The heart of the TAMAM project consists of preparing teams of practitioners, at the school level, to plan, implement, and sustain teacher-driven improvement initiatives useful and effective for teachers and schools in their local contexts. TAMAM's PST builds leadership capacity through engaging practitioners in collaborative inquiry and reflective skills. It aims at empowering those practitioners with new habits of mind that liberate them from the mentality of learned passivity, encouraging them to become active learners, change agents and knowledge producers (Akkary-Rizk, 2011).

The following is a presentation of the professional development journey that the school teams participating in TAMAM experienced. It reflects the perspective of the PST regarding how the journey was conceived and implemented. However, it is also grounded in the data collected - throughout the course of this project - from the school teams, and their members, taking into consideration their voices, perspectives, and experiences. The section consists of two parts: One gives an overview of the PD component in TAMAM in terms of the approach it follows and the competencies it targets, and the other provides a detailed description of the implementation of the PD activities. It highlights the emerging concerns of the PST (as the PD trainers) identified through monitoring the progress of the implementation and the measures taken, to ensure the achievement of goals, namely the building of the school teams' leadership capacity for improvement.

Overview of Professional Development in TAMAM

Selecting the Schools and Forming the School Teams

The first group of schools selected, for participating in the project, included teams from three private schools, from Lebanon, Jordan, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Private schools were targeted for the ease of access, their flexible organizational structure, as well as their higher propensity for decision-making that authority allows their administrators, compared to their public schools counterparts. Despite their high advocacy for the public school system in their countries, the project's initiators opted to avoid the expected complications of working with the public schools in that region in the early stages of the project. The selected private schools were chosen because they were: (1) "active" in pursuing school improvement; (2) regarded as effective by members of the community; and (3) maintained some sort of contact with the PST. However, other criteria included: (4) the schools having money and access to resources that support the school improvement; and (5) the schools having an administration that wants to support new ideas and innovations, along with a structure relatively responsive to emerging needs. In the particular case of Lebanon, some minor considerations were also given to the sectarian denomination of the schools. As for the schools selected, they were not representative of the majority of schools in the Arab countries (they were not privately owned or had abundant resources); however, through their privileged conditions it was hoped that they would have many of the resources found crucial for the successful implementation of the project. Once the schools were identified, they were invited to voluntarily join the project.

Because the goal of the TAMAM Professional Development Program is the building of leadership capacities for school improvement teams, the first step was asking principals of the

selected schools to put together a team – consisting of three-to-four members – in order to participate in the project. The PST provided the principals with some criteria in order to guide them in their selection of the team members. Based on those criteria, the team was then supposed to include the principal or his/her representative as well as two teachers. The team members had to be Arabs who could read and undergo training in both Arabic and English. They had to have the potential, interest, and willingness to be trained for conducting research. In fact, was preferred that they have research experience. The university team required that school principals allocate time slots in the team members' schedules, thus reserving some of their hours for working on the TAMAM Project. Accordingly, and with the exception of these criteria, the selection of the team members was left entirely up to the principals' judgments, hence resulting in a variety of teams among the schools. The teams included school principals, heads of divisions or departments, and teachers. In three of the school teams, the principal was on the team while other teams were composed only of teachers with some of them holding supervisory functions. Eight of the nine teams had at least one teacher. The PST did not interfere with the selection of the members, regardless of whether it met the criteria for constituting the team or not. Moreover, because of the teacher turn-over rate, seven of the nine teams had changes in their members throughout the project. Below is a description of the initial constitution of each school team:

School	**Its team**
School 1 Ahliyyah School for Girls (ASG)	Three supervisors

School 2 Amman Baccalaureate School (ABS)	Two teachers and one supervisor
School 3 (AlAsriyya)	One teacher, one supervisor, and the school principal
School 4 St. Mary's Orthodox College (SMOC)	Three supervisors
School 5 Hariri High School II (HHS II)	One teacher, one supervisor, and the school principal
School 6 (AlKawthar)	Three supervisors
School 7 Dhahran Ahliyya School(DAS) Girls	Two teachers and one supervisor
School 8 Dhahran Ahliyya School(DAS) Boys	One teacher and two supervisors
School 9 Dar Al Fikr School(DAF)	One teacher, one supervisor, and the school principal

Figure 1: Constitution of the school teams

Setting the Initial PD Goals and Objectives

With the TAMAM Project's view of school improvement as a bottom-up approach initiated and sustained at the school level, leadership has been redefined as a collective activity by all teachers rather than as a field tied up to an administrative post. Teams of teachers, school administrators, and leaders need to be equipped with certain skills and habits of mind in order to be prepared to initiate and drive school improvement. Therefore, the central goals for professional development activities become building leadership capacities at the school level. Teams of practitioners [teachers and school level administrators] are formed and trained in such a way so as to lead

school improvement - in each of the participating schools - as a foundation for school-based improvement, and ultimately, as an effective educational reform as well. To achieve the above goal, the professional development activities aimed initially at helping school teams reach the following outcomes: (1) Encouraging team members to engage in professional collaboration; (2) encouraging team members to ground their decisions and plans for action in evidence. (This requires that school teams seek information and evidence to understand school problems, to set improvement goals aligned with the school vision and mission, to decide on interventions, and to monitor and evaluate the implementation of those interventions); (3) encouraging team members to document their experiences in order to facilitate rich and accurate communication; and lastly; (4) encouraging team members to initiate and lead change. In fact, school teachers should not depend on those with position-power to initiate change. They should, themselves, be able to look at the school as a system, and play a proactive role in school improvement.

Competencies and Skills in TAMAM

Based on the initial goals, the PST planned to train the school teams in order to acquire the following competencies: (1) inquiry/evidence based decision; (2) collaboration; and (3) documentation. During the implementation - and based on the analysis of the data collected while monitoring the progress of the implementation - the PST decided to introduce new competencies and skills. These skills, namely: (1) professional dialogue; (2) reflective thinking; (3) leadership; and (4) planning, were essential in ensuring the achievement of the PST's central goal.

Initial Skills and Competencies

Inquiry/evidence based decisions. The core of the building capacity activities initially planned by the PST involved training the participants on two important interrelated skills: inquiry and evidence-based decisions. In order to be able to make evidence-based decisions part of their practice, school teams need to master inquiry which allows them to acquire skills to gather data, analyze it, and then draw conclusions which will later serve as a basis for their subsequent decisions and actions. Based on their review of available literature and best practices, the PST chose collaborative action research as the inquiry model to learn in TAMAM. It adopted a view of action research as intentionally aiming at organizational development and deep structural change (Brydon-Miller and Maguire, 2009; Tuck, 2009). Based on this view, the practice of action research helps create communication channels among the various educational stakeholders, hence promoting democracy and collaboration in the educational community (Gall, et al., 2005; Sagor, 1997). Emphasis on inquiry, evidence-based decisions, and reflection is viewed as an important aspect of redefining teacher professionalism in many first-world countries (Conway, 2001).

Within the context of school improvement, action research is defined as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1990, p. 2) aiming at improving their own practices as well as their students' learning by means of the teachers collaboratively engaging in cycles of: (1) questioning; (2) analyzing data; (3) planning; (4) taking actions; and (5) reflecting on the outcomes of those actions. The work of Sagor (1997; 2005), Calhoun (2002), and McNiff (2002) were closely examined, and the action research cycle followed in TAMAM was adapted from their conceptual model and guided by their recommendations. Accordingly, training on action research in TAMAM includes determining a focus through

raising questions, collecting data, making sense of this information through analysis and reflection, reaching conclusions, and then finally, acting based on these findings discovered. During the action research cycle, the school teams, who are involved in every step of the research (Sagor, 1997), choose issues to investigate relevant to their everyday teaching and learning and about which they care deeply. The process is presented as a cycle that does not have an end. In fact, it is an on-going process with each step leading to the next or reverting back to the previous step in order to reflect and inquire more for the sake of reaching a final decision.

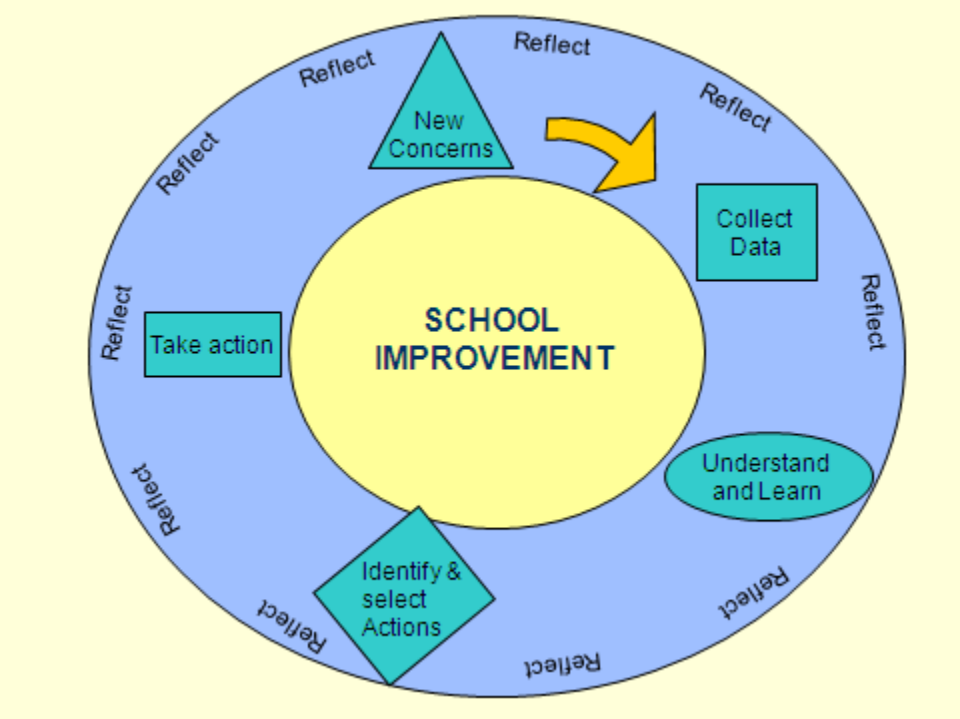

Figure 2: Action research cycle

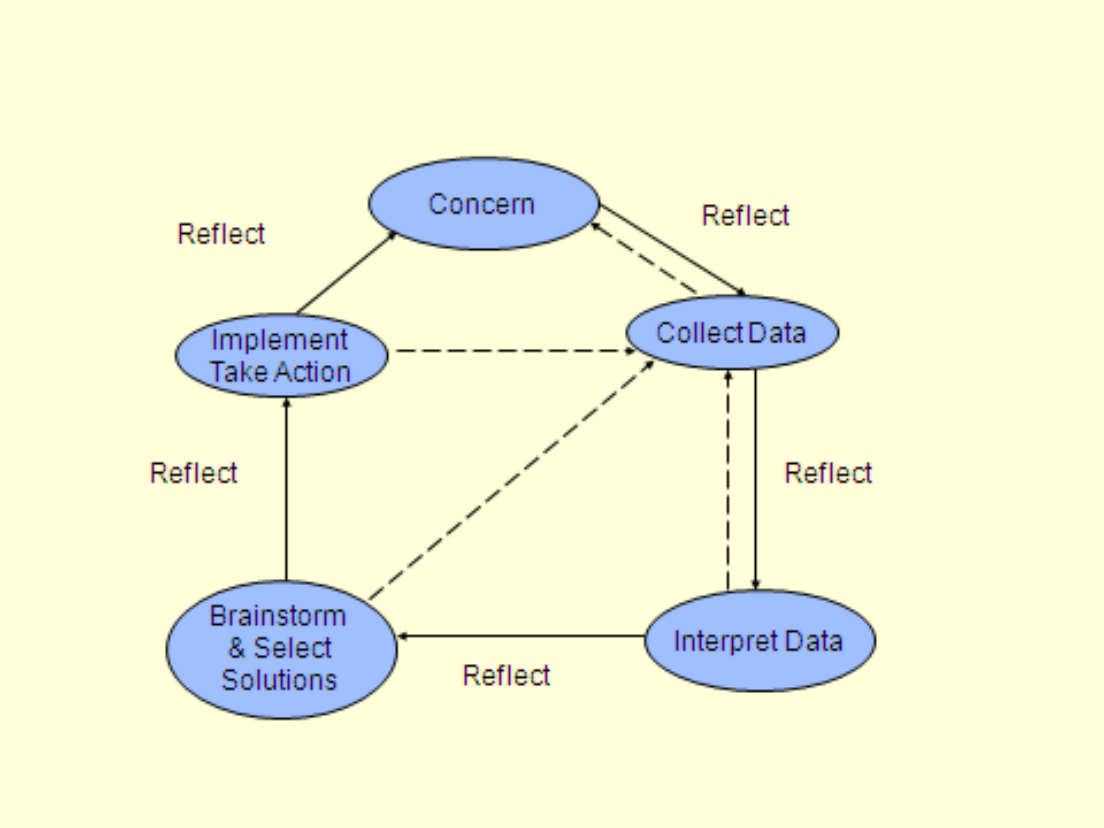

Figure 3: Action research cycle

Professional collaboration. Professional collaboration in TAMAM is introduced in the context of conducting collaborative action research for school improvement. Educational researchers (Catelli, 1995; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; Herndon and Fauske, 1994) repeatedly emphasize the role of collaboration in action research as a means for facilitating teachers' professional growth. In fact, teacher-driven professional development occurs during shared dialogue and critical reflection on the research experience and research findings (Herndon and Fauske, 1994). The literature on professional development and school improvement advocate collaborative action research for school improvement whether: (1) triggered in specialized settings (e.g. Levin and Rock, 2003); or (2) vis-à-vis following teachers' training on curriculum

reforms (e.g. Herndon and Fauske, 1994); or (3) by considering it as part of a school-university partnership (e.g. Catelli, 1995).

In TAMAM collaboration is believed to occur when a group of autonomous stakeholders engage in an interactive process using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain (Wood, 1991). Effective collaboration means building on team members' strengths, supporting their weaknesses, engaging in reflective dialogue and setting time to meet regularly. Moreover, to be collaborative, teams need to go beyond congeniality (feeling good around each other) and move towards building trust by getting to know each other's strengths and weaknesses and becoming comfortable enough to share their experiences with the group.

Collaboration and collegial support are closely connected to capacity building in schools - and aiming at - continuous professional development (Little, 1982). However, it is often not evident in schools where structural arrangements result in teachers working in isolation (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995) and where teachers' inherent beliefs about the profession and its practices remain primarily individualistic (Hargreaves, 1994). Hence, it becomes very important to enhance the organization's ability for collaboration in order to achieve school-wide sustainable improvement.

Indeed, TAMAM adopted the collaborative action research model in order to train its participants. This created more opportunities for these participants to work together and to communicate more effectively through shared dialogue.

Documentation. Despite its glorious past, the Arab culture is still characterized in Ong' s terms as one with a considerable "residual oral tradition" (Ong, 2002). This is especially

apparent with regards to the challenges present within the academic circles which build a knowledge base in the tradition of the Western cultures strongly based on systematic documentation and dissemination of the intellectual products of their society (Arab Knowledge Report, 2009). Within an oral culture, one of the main challenges of knowledge production is the inability to retain and retrieve large amount of information (Ong, 2002). This results in the loss of ideas and insights. It also limits the extents to which a person can analyze himself/herself as he/she continuously accumulates theoretical knowledge. Ong (2002) even claims that in oral cultures, the energy invested in storing ideas often presents itself as an excuse for its members to avoid spending time and effort exploring new ideas. Though this does not prevent oral societies from completely seeking change, it does put pressure on ensuring that these changes follow traditional formulas, and "are presented as fitting the traditions of the ancestors" (Ong, 2002, p.42).

Consequently, one of the initial PD objectives for TAMAM was emphasizing systematic documentation as a practice, and helping school teams and their members acquire the skills and habits needed to keep a record of their experiences, as well as the outcomes of these inquiries. Documentation is introduced in TAMAM as the methodical recording, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of educational practices. Participants in TAMAM were asked to keep continuous record of their work; namely: (1) data collected (interview notes, questionnaires, focus group notes, field notes, check lists, quizzes, etc.); (2) reflective notes (field journal, memos, etc.); (3) process notes (minutes of meetings, notes on the implementation progress, etc.); and (4) final reports (action research report, action plan, etc.). Documentation is presented as a means for: (1) keeping a public record and sharing the experience with a larger audience; (2)

ensuring the accuracy of information; and (3) for providing grounds for validating conclusions by capturing the insights that will in turn become the bases of their decision-making process.

The Added Competencies

After collecting data, monitoring, and reflecting on the progress, the PST saw that it was not possible to reach the Project's PD goal (building capacity for school teams in order to lead school improvement) without developing leadership skills, planning skills, and professional dialogue skills, and integrating the reflective thinking processes with the aforementioned skills. Thus, new competencies and skills were introduced, namely: (1) professional dialogue; (2) reflective skills; (2) leadership skills; and (3) planning skills.

Professional dialogue. In TAMAM, professional dialogue is conceived as a structured conversation about teaching and learning with the goal of solving a problem, providing feedback, or reflecting in/on actions. It is a dialogue among colleagues who learn from each other the various ways they could perform better in their jobs. In addition, it is "an opportunity of the teacher through the mentorship and facilitation of a coach to think of their practice and ways to improve it" (Duncan, 2006, p.16). Professional dialogue operates on the belief that everyone brings to a situation strengths upon which they can build on as a collective. It is a process of professional development. Practitioners need to share their thinking and reasoning with each other in order to: (1) reveal tacit theories about their teaching; (2) understand more explicitly the goals behind their actions; and (3) discover patterns across cases and contexts (Rearick, 1998). In TAMAM, professional dialogue was first presented as a concept. However, it was also modeled in workshop sessions and follow-up meetings as well as in the numerous interactions its members engaged in. Its selection as a goal is based on the need for a process that can foster

collaboration and break the intellectual isolation of school practitioners in general and teachers in particular (Akkary and Rizk, 2011). Within TAMAM, professional dialogue was initiated and practiced not only among members of school teams, but also among university academics, as well as among representatives from ministries of education. The international literature offers plenty of evidence supporting the need for establishing ongoing dialogue between these three groups as a way for coordinating their efforts towards improving the school, aligning the goals, and problem-solving together for the sake of removing the systemic and cultural barriers that stand as obstacles in the face of successful transformational change (Seller and Hannay, 2000).

Reflection and reflective practice. In TAMAM, training on reflection is a major component of the PD activities. It is presented both as a competency to be acquired by the school teams, as well as an approach to be followed by the PST members who carry out the PD activities. The conception of reflection that was adopted in TAMAM is one that views reflection as a disciplined process by which teachers examine their information, actions, behaviors, thinking processes, and underlying beliefs behind them. It consists of slowing down their thinking, making it more conscious, focused, and purposeful. Its purpose is to raise awareness about implicit knowledge, underlying thinking processes, and beliefs, in order to understand, criticize, and work on refining these skills for the sake of improving the teaching practice (Dewey 1933, Schon, 1987, Nofkee and Berman, 1988; Williamson, 1997). Reflection is also presented as a cycle that reviews problematic areas in one's daily practice by means of: (Wellington, 1991) (1) examining critically or bringing to awareness the beliefs behind them (Schon, 1983); (2) generating new beliefs, knowledge, and alternative actions (Dewey, 1933); and (3) trying them out and again reflecting on the results (Shulman, 1987). Reflection in

TAMAM is also conceived as being practiced at two levels: technical and critical. At the technical level, the focus is on applying knowledge to achieve predetermined goals. The end goals are not questioned and the actions are assessed based on their usefulness and effectiveness in achieving the set goals. At the critical level, the focus shifts to one's ability of bringing into awareness - and questioning - one's own assumptions and beliefs while considering the many multiple perspectives, morals, and ethics in our daily practices. At this level, one transcends the simple concern regarding goals, activities, and the assumptions behind them, in order to reflect on the larger context where all the different kinds of learning are taking place.

Reflective practice, on the other hand, is conceived in TAMAM, as the practice of reflection; when reflection becomes a "habit of mind" leading people to purposefully examine their actions and thinking processes. Reflective practice is presented as a major element in professional development contributing to school improvement and effectiveness by helping school practitioners build the capacities of teachers and principals, within themselves, as well as within their schools, in order to constantly learn themselves, and simultaneously enhance student learning at the same time (Tan, 2008). In fact, the PST in TAMAM adopted Leitch and Day's (2000) view of reflective practice as being "central to the growth of teachers as inquirers who engage in collaborative research with others from inside and outside the school in generating knowledge of practice rather than finding themselves as objects whose role is to implement existing theory in practice" (p. 183)

Leadership for change. In line with what is recommended in the international literature, TAMAM adopts a view of leadership that is distributive and transformative (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004; Spillane and Bijou, 2010; Gronn, 2002;

Mayrowetz, 2008). In that, TAMAM is challenging the existing paradigm of the one hero at the top of the organizational hierarchy who is solely responsible for the change initiatives and for the mandating of their implementation. In addition, a traditional view of leadership - as being tied up to a power structure - is believed to often pose as a barrier to the reforms efforts geared towards empowering teachers as change agents (Harris and Drake, 1997). TAMAM advocates that authority for decision-making that directly impacts the teaching and learning process and is placed in the hands of those in the front lines. This more distributive approach is believed to help break the current cycle of dependency among teachers, and ensure that responsibility for improvement is shared, with all members of the school community contributing to the improvement process based on the teachers' expertise and strategic location in the formal structure.

Moreover, in TAMAM, a transformative view of leading means that a sense of "activism" is nurtured by channeling the feelings of discontent with the status quo, towards identifying the prevailing conditions constraining improvement attempts. "Leading by outrage" as Sergiovanni (2001) proposes, and nurturing "pro-activism" at all levels of the educational system, are considered crucial for reversing the stagnation that has plagued the field of education in the Arab region.

Consequently, leadership has been redefined in TAMAM and presented in the PD process as an "act" that all teachers can potentially engage in as opposed to one tied up to the leadership position. TAMAM PD develops a new understanding of leadership whereby the authority for improving teaching and learning is no longer exclusive to those "up the chain" of the administrative hierarchy but rather distributed horizontally to involve all "expert" teachers in the

decision-making process (Copland, 2003). Pavlou (2004) reasserts the belief that schools "improve by harnessing the leadership qualities of all teachers and staff in the school" (p. 6). The PD activities include raising awareness about the multiple sources of power with a special emphasis on the power of "expertise" that teachers - as professionals - all possess. Inquiry, reflection, and action research can be tools used to increase teachers' expertise about a certain area of concern, thus encouraging them to take "leadership acts" towards addressing this concern and contributing actively to the improvement of their practice.

Strategic planning skills. Participants in TAMAM were coached to develop their strategic planning skills in order to prepare them to plan for - and lead improvement initiatives at - their school. The choice of strategic planning as a competency needed to be acquired in TAMAM was based on the assumption that it would help teachers think more systemically about their practice within the larger context of their school and communities. System thinking and strategic planning had long been viewed as an essential component of leadership (Senge, 1991, Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner, 2000; Mintzberg, 1994; Robbins and Coulter, 2005)

In the international literature, effective planning in dynamic environments is believed to be achieved by planning strategically (Sergiovanni, 2001) and by flattening the organizational hierarchy as the responsibility for establishing goals, and developing plans, is pushed to lower organizational levels since there would be no time for the goals and plans to flow from top to bottom (Robbins and Coulter, 2005, p.172). According to Robbins, and Coulter, M. (2005) planning is "the management function that involves the defining of goals and the determination of tasks and resources that are necessary to obtain those goals" (p.9). Therefore, planning

involves decisions about ends (objectives or goals), means (tasks or plans), conducts (policies), and results. Different reasons are displayed in literature showing why planning in general and – goal-setting in particular - help improve performance. First, goals provide "the basis for guiding the efforts of quite different individuals and [the] spell[ing] [of] higher performance all around" (Pearce and Robinson, 1989, P.167). Second, setting goals reduces the impact of change and uncertainty by guiding the organizational behavior, thus increasing the "predictability and the cause and effect relationships" (Pearce and Robinson, 1989, P.168). Third, it facilitates learning since it allows evaluating and impacting what happened. Finally, goal setting allows for coordination by "providing a focal point" that links parts to a coherent whole, thus increasing effectiveness (Pearce and Robinson, 1989, P.168).

Strategic planning was part of organizational development originated in the 1950s and was very popular and widespread between mid-1960s to mid-1970s. The 1990s brought the revival of strategic planning as a "process with particular benefits in particular contexts" (Mintzberg, 1994). Different models of strategic planning were subsequently rising, newer models concentrated on the importance of strategic thinking, organizational learning, and "strategic agility". Being strategically agile enables organizations to transform their strategy depending on the changes in their environment" (Gouillart, 1995).

Rather than being narrowly focused on what goes on in the confines of an individual classroom, school teams in TAMAM were trained to gather information about available resources and possible barriers, and also trained to explore alternatives for actions needed as a basis for developing a plan for action that would take everything into consideration. SWOT analysis (Shapiro, 1989) was introduced as a method for gathering information on the schools

and teams in order to plan improvement initiatives. SWOT analysis helps teams group key pieces of information into two main categories: The internal factors may be viewed as strengths or weaknesses depending on the impact they have on the organization's objectives. What may be considered strength with respect to one objective may also be a weakness with respect to another objective. The external factors may be viewed as threats or opportunities providing information regarding how: (1) to identify areas in need for improvement (informing the goal setting); (2) to inform the design of strategies; and (3) to evaluate and revise plans (Downey, 2007). School teams were asked to propose a plan of action that requires: (1) Identifying the objectives to be achieved; (2) collecting information on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; (3) analyzing the information; and (4) determining whether the objectives are attainable, given the SWOT analysis.

The TAMAM Project PD Approach

TAMAM PD approach is grounded in the belief that adults learn best through a combination of experiential activities and mentoring. Thus, all the building capacity activities in TAMAM are designed around the tenets of experiential learning, adopt mentoring as a coaching model, and often rely on reflection as a habit of mind rooted in the practice of all the project participants [PST as well as school teams]. Moreover, the planning and implementing of the PD activities in TAMAM follow an evolving design plan where decisions on actions - and their sequence - are based on evidence generated through the monitoring of the progress of the training, and the steering of it as it unfolds.

The PST members play the role of external change agents who lead the planning of the PD activities, monitoring the progress as well as building capacity of the school teams by

providing ongoing coaching and assistance to the participating school teams. All throughout the process, the PST was aware that the approach they were following was challenging deeply rooted beliefs and breaking strongly established patterns associated with how professional development and school improvement are usually conceived and implemented. As such, they remained vigilant in keeping record of their actions and engaged in cycles of technical and critical reflection to not just examine how they even surpassed the goals they set but also to question these goals and critically examine the processes followed to reach them.

Using Experiential and Mentoring Approaches

The PST approach to professional development activities was based on the principles of experiential learning. Teams selected their own innovative projects, made decisions on how to collect and interpret their data, and then designed action plans to implement the insights that emerged from their research. The PST members built all the professional development activities around the actual practices of the school teams, paced the progress of these activities, and then decided on their sequence based on how the teachers' understanding of these concepts, as well as based on their own application of competencies that the PD activities presented to them. As per Kolb (1984) experiential cycle, the PST invited the school teams to choose an issue from their practice [i.e. evaluate a newly introduced innovative program], asked them to tackle it using their traditional approach (concrete experience), challenged this approach on the bases of what is now known as best practices (reflection) and then presented them with the alternative approach (conceptualization) while training them on the skills needed to master this approach and then asking them to retackle the problem using the newly learned approach (experimentation).

Throughout all professional development activities, the PST members acted as mentors using their expertise to challenge the old patterns and beliefs as well as to offer on-going support and guidance. Support activities consisted of determining the needs of the school teams, conducting a series of skill building workshops, and providing ongoing support through regular follow up. The workshops provided training on professional collaboration, inquiry/action research, reflection and reflective practice, evidence-based planning and decision-making, professional dialogue, leadership for change, and strategic planning. Additionally, school teams also received support through the periodic visits the PST made to their schools. Between workshops, the PST made individual visits to the schools answering their questions, and assisting them in solving emerging problems. Moreover, throughout the project, the PST collected and documented data from each school. This data included the progress of the school teams, their emerging needs, and their suggestions regarding the upcoming steps needed to be taken. The PST used the collected data to examine critically the school teams' progress, to challenge the decisions made along the way, and then to offer the support needed to sharpen the understanding of the competencies the practitioners were developing. Below is a graphic representation of the activities carried out by the PST in preparation for the workshops:

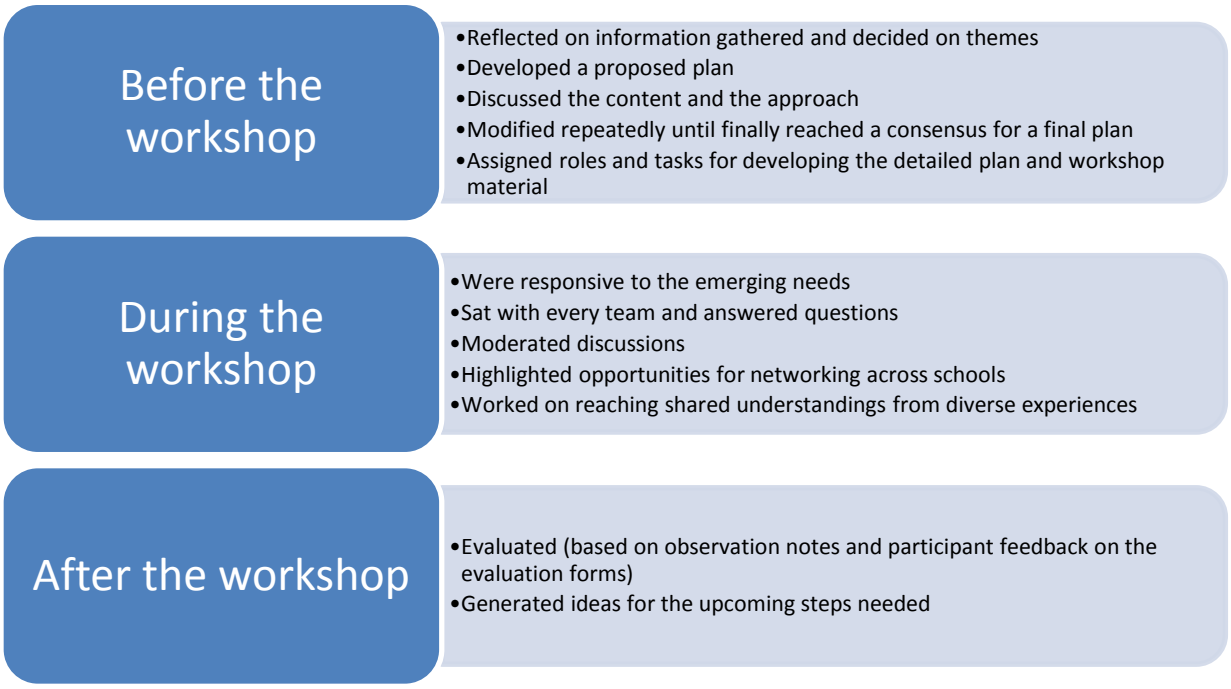

Figure 4: Activities carried out by PST in preparation for workshops

Whenever there was a need for it, the school teams also received additional support - through individual and team discussion meetings - regarding obstacles these schools were encountering. PST school team members were also given access to a website that included workshop materials and an electronic forum for discussing issues related to the project. In addition, this website was for the sake of updating the participants on all the TAMAM activities and for providing them with relevant resources. Finally, the grant also fully funded the PST, covering any and all expenses needed for their communication with the school team members. The extensive electronic communications between the PST and the school teams helped maintain a sense of support that was always readily available and continuous. A summary of the overall flow of activities is represented below:

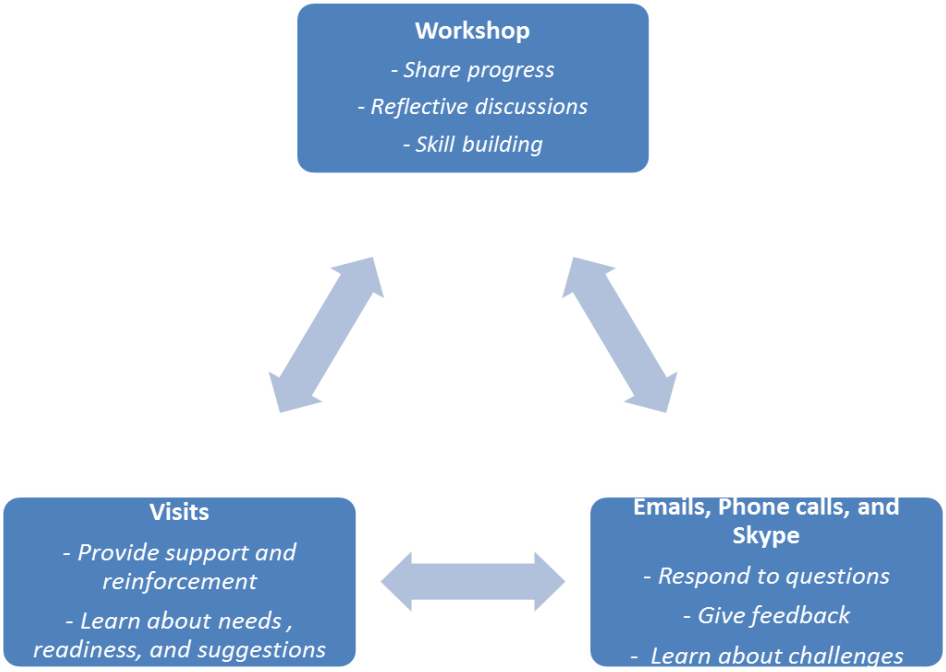

Figure 5: Flow of PST activities

Reflective Practice

In TAMAM, reflection is not only a competency that the participants are trained on; it is also an integral part of the PD approach that the PST modeled and followed. All through the workshop sessions, follow-up visits, and school team meetings, the PST probed and prepared the settings in order to allow all the TAMAM participants to engage individually - as well as collaboratively in a team - especially with regards to their technical and critical reflections. On the one hand, PD activities provided the participants with multiple opportunities for experiencing reflection on practice through: (1) their engaging in "reflective dialogue" with the other participating teams; (2) their reflecting on their individual learning and progress; (3) their reflecting on the effectiveness of the training program itself; and (4) their observing of the PST team model reflection by their reflecting on their approach and design of the PD activities

throughout the course of the project. On the other hand, the on-going data collection on the progress of the project provided the PST members with a rich medium upon which to reflect both "in action" and "on action." Given the non-prescriptive evolving nature of the PD approach, the PST team had the flexibility of being able to question its actions both in terms of measuring its effectiveness in achieving its stated goals, as well as by means of critically examining how compatible these goals were with the cultural context; while keeping in mind the deeply held values and conceptions of the team.

The Evolving Plan and the Continuous Monitoring of Progress

TAMAM professional development adopted a flexible design that enabled it to be responsive to the dynamic nature of school improvement, taking into consideration the readiness of the school teams. Accordingly, it included their voice and recognized their unique cultural context. Unlike other attempts at school improvement, TAMAM did not adopt a scripted program for professional development. Rather, it used a constructivist, inquiry-based approach that was constructed based on a close collaboration between the schools and the university team at TAMAM.

PST's approach views the professional development experience in TAMAM as a journey stressing the fact that there is still room for improvisation, reflective evaluation, and creative problem solving. PST placed great emphasis on displaying a high level of responsiveness to the needs and demands of the members of the participating school teams, as their learning progressed. Rather than assuming the role of experts who called the shots regarding the activities that needed to be done, the order the needed to be done in, as well as where, how, and at what pace they needed to be carried out, the PST acted as inquirers and learners as they closely

monitored the implementation of the PD activities, continuously seeking the input of the school team members and reflecting on their learning experiences. Sarason (1996) asserts that efforts directed at motivating change will be affected by exiting patterns of thinking and behaving. Hence, an encounter with these old habits would risk deviate the attempts at change from their intended path. Continuous monitoring, coupled with an evolving flexible plan, ensures that the PST understands and reacts to how the local practitioners make sense and implement the newly introduced skills needed for transforming their practices.

Monitoring consisted of an ongoing process of collecting data, reflecting and analyzing, and lastly, drawing conclusions necessary for devising the upcoming action steps needed to be taken, or the upcoming activities needed to be designed, or even the upcoming goals needed to be to be determined in order to help the school teams' build and develop their leadership capacity. Data gathered included the views of the participating school teams regarding their learning experiences, and their feedback on the usefulness of the training and coaching they were receiving from the PST. Throughout the project, school teams were encouraged to keep: (1) journals that documented their work and progress; (2) reflections; (3) comments; (4) suggestions for the upcoming steps needed to be taken; and lastly (5) questions and concerns that they could later share with the PST. The meeting minutes of school visits and the PST meetings that followed provided additional sources of information for the on-going process of designing, assessing, and re-designing the upcoming few steps to be taken for developing the school teams' capacity. Decisions regarding the sequence and choice of the activities performed during the PD implementation were based on evidence derived from this collected data. Hence, the design and content of the professional development activities were devised based on the needs of the school

team members, as well based on the PST's understanding of the challenges the school teams faced during the practical application of the newly acquired concepts and insights acquired throughout the course of this project.

The Implementation Journey of our TAMAM Professional Development Program

School teams in the TAMAM Project engaged in professional development through collaborative action research which: (1) built on felt need; (2) had a voluntary participation system; and (3) provided its participants with ample support and learning pressuring their participants to change. The TAMAM Project PD Program conducted seven workshops, from 2007-2011, for its first group of participants. Each of the TAMAM workshops lasted three to four days. The first workshop took place in Amman, Jordan and the rest took place in Beirut, Lebanon. At the end of each workshop, participants were left with a task to work on, challenges to discuss, and ideas to think of.

Stage 1: Training and Coaching on Collaborative Action Research

The TAMAM PD Program started by training team members on collaborative action research as a tool for evaluating or monitoring the implementation of the innovative projects at the school. It was assumed that after engaging in such an experience the school teams would be able to - with the expertise they would have acquired- spread the TAMAM objectives and lead improvement in their schools. School teams were trained on collaborative action research in order to adopt a range of attitudes and competencies, namely being able to: (1) develop evidence-based plans for action; (2) continuously reflect on their practice; (3) engage in professional collaboration and dialogue; (4) become comfortable with the de-privatizing of their practice; and lastly (5) develop skills for the systematic documentation of their experiences. Consequently,

school teams were first coached on collaborative action research skills such as: (1) asking research questions; (2) developing tools for data collection; (3) devising data collection procedures; (4) analyzing and interpreting the data; and lastly (5) reporting the research experiences to the school community. The university team adopted Sagor's (1997, 2004) model of action research, as represented in his book *The Action Research guidebook.* It also referred to another book by Koshy (2005) entitled *Action Research for improving practice*. These two books were then distributed to the team members. The PST also referred to the work of Calhoun (2002) and McNiff (2002) and relied on them as important resources while preparing for the workshops. The first three workshops were dedicated to the PST's presentation on action research. The goal of these workshops was allowing participants to experience conducting action research in order for them to be able to later use it as a tool for school improvement, and more specifically, as a vehicle for building participants' capacity as agents of improvement in their schools. The PST believed that being able to perform action research would help them solve everyday problems which would ultimately lead to school improvement.

The First Workshop

It took place in July 2007 and mainly aimed at introducing action research and presenting the selected innovative school projects that were to be studied. The workshop began with the school teams introducing themselves and their schools. They then described the various improvement projects their school was involved in and which they had considered as being innovative. Next, the school teams were invited to present these innovative projects of their choice. The reason for this was in order to encourage them to find an area of focus for their improvement journey as the PST believed this would minimize the schools' reluctance to share

when asked about problems and concerns. This activity helped school teams learn about other schools' projects enabling them to immediately spot out common interests. Networking among some of the schools began after this workshop, based on those interests. In the following session of this workshop, the TAMAM Project was introduced i.e.: its philosophy, purpose, research questions, methodological approaches, assumptions, and the roles it had in mind for its project participants. The PST then presented a brief overview of the action research process by describing its different stages. The school teams were then asked to select a focus project from the projects they had presented earlier during the workshop and which they felt they would all be willing to conduct the action research study on. The school project they chose could have either been in the process of implementation or have been completed already. The topics of the projects were quite diverse: from were using cooperative learning, to building student leadership, to using a computerized system for ranking and rating students' performance, and many others. The university team challenged the school teams by asking them to provide evidence as to why they believed those projects were successful. None of the nine schools had considered examining the impact of those innovations even though in some cases they had been adopting them for several years. This challenge triggered the school teams' motivation to examine the effectiveness of their interventions and to engage in the action research process. At the end of the workshop schools teams were left with the task of having to develop the research proposals that included their focus project, project targets, and research questions. They were then required to send all those back to the PST for feedback.

As school teams worked on developing their proposals, most of them received technical assistance from a university representative of their country, and also received continuous and

responsive support from the PST as well. When the proposals were completed, they were sent to the PST members who studied the proposals, agreed on feedback, and sent this feedback back to the school teams who in turn modified the proposals accordingly and shared the modified versions with the PST yet again.

The Second Workshop

It took place in January 2008. During this workshop school teams were introduced to the different tools needed for data collection namely: (1) classroom observations; (2) rubrics; (3) questionnaires; (4) interviews; and (4) focus groups that would then show them how to develop them and use them. During the period between workshops two and three, school teams prepared their own data collection tools. Most of the teams received assistance from a university representative. When the tools were ready, they were sent to the PST for feedback. After the PST shared its feedback, school teams modified the tools accordingly. School teams then proceeded with the data collection process. During this period, the PST visited the school teams between April and May 2008 in order to follow up on the progress of their work, listen to their suggestions regarding the progress of the project and the role of the PST, and lastly, to collect data on their learning experiences.

The Third Workshop

It took place in July 2008 and focused on data analysis and data reporting in action research. The workshop started with the school teams presenting their progress (focus project, research questions, and data analysis tools and procedures). The school teams then received feedback from the PST and from other school teams as well. Participants were then trained on

analyzing qualitative and quantitative results using several data analysis tools. Lastly, they were asked to report on their results.

After workshop 3, the school teams worked on analyzing the data they had been collecting. Most school teams received technical help from the university representatives of their countries. The PST met with the school teams in November 2008 in order to provide assistance for any difficulties the teams might face and to engage in a reflective conversation with the school teams regarding the results they had obtained. These meetings - in most of the cases - were very productive especially in their attempt to raise awareness regarding the transformational learning intentions of the project. The PST then found that the school teams were overwhelmed with the technical aspects of the experience. And lastly, the reflective conversations provoked many teams to question the school innovative project itself by questioning: its goals, its implementation, its meaningfulness to the school, etc.

Reflective Observations: Training and Coaching on Collaborative Action Research

In this section, we describe the observations of the members of the PST regarding the challenges they faced in stage 1 of their professional development journey where they attempted to achieve TAMAM's goal of building capacity for school based improvement. These challenges are categorized under two headings: Un-acquired skills and competencies, and resistance to the TAMAM professional development approach.

Un-acquired Skills and Competencies

Concern 1: School teams failed to perceive their training on collaborative action research as being directed towards using this skill for school improvement. The TAMAM project's PD activities began by training and coaching school teams on collaborative action

research as a tool needed for evaluating the schools' initiatives. In research terms, school teams were trained and coached on conducting "Research on/in action". The goal of PD at that stage was to equip school teams with the habit of looking for information and evidence needed to inform decisions and actions. The first three workshops trained on action research. During that period, the PST mentioned school improvement but the relation between action research and school improvement was not emphasized. The university team believed that if action research was carried out through a chosen school project, then evidence-driven decisions and actions would become a habit of mind for this group, and hence, they would automatically rely on it for school improvement. However, almost all of the school teams did not see how this experience of learning and conducting action research related to school improvement. They saw the entirety of the goal of PD in TAMAM as being focused on training them to become action researchers. Accordingly, they could not see how this related to the larger goal of the TAMAM Project: school-base reform. In the interviews conducted with project participants, as well as in the workshop evaluation forms which they completed, many of the team members: (1) asked about the nature of this connection; (2) complained about the lack of clarity regarding how the training on action research would help them become agents of change; and lastly (3) found it to be a very ambitious goal, simply hindered with an unclear pathway to achieving it.

The challenge seemed to be rooted in the perceptions the school teams developed over time. This happened in response to the PST inviting the schools to: (1) present their school based innovative projects at the start of the project; and (2) select one of those projects for the evaluative examination of its impact. School teams ended up choosing projects that they perceived as being successful. They also saw their involvement in TAMAM, at first, as being an

opportunity for proving this perception and promoting their school and themselves as opposed to seeing it as an exciting opportunity for learning and growing. Many chose projects based on how easy they were to work on, how conveniently focused the scope was (neither too broad nor too narrow), and lastly, based on how much interest the PST had shown in it. They did not choose projects they felt a genuine need to inquire about. This impacted the entire action research process in terms of: (1) asking the research questions; (2) designing the data collection tools; (3) analyzing the data; and lastly (4) interpreting it.

When invited to explain and reflect on their choice of focus in the reflective evaluation session which took place in the early stage of the project, one of the participants said, “Even the questionnaires we designed were a confirmation of our stance on this issue. We don’t want to fool ourselves, or fool you; but frankly speaking, we did the questionnaires only to confirm that what we were doing was right.” One school even admitted it chose an innovative project it had already evaluated. Moreover, halfway into the project, one of the team members even admitted: “We shouldn’t have chosen, an activity or a project that had already been done and made it into the focus of our activities in TAMAM just because we were proud of what we had achieved in that particular project. You said we had the best project. Of course we would. We were successful because we were confident about our project. We had already tried and studied its effects. So our study came out to be very refined.”

Moreover, the school teams seemed to be willing to change the focus of their research on action for the sake of being able to “complete successfully” the tasks the PST required from them. Some of them even found that it was better to drop the goal and change the focus of the action research study in order to obtain results that better promoted the school. In her reflection

paper, one team member said, “I'm not sure if we will achieve what TAMAM is aiming for [in terms of building capacity for school-based improvement] with our choice of focus… maybe we should have chosen a project that interested our students, as opposed to the one we have. Then maybe we could have come up with something really better… but that’s just my opinion that I don’t think my team member would agree with me.”

As the project progressed it became apparent to the PST that in the majority of the cases, action research became perceived as the sole goal of the PD activities in TAMAM. Therefore team members became meticulously over-attentive to the technicalities of the research process and lost sight of its bigger purpose. They approached action research as a set of discrete steps that they needed to “succeed” in, and were engaged in each step for the sake of completing the action research steps one after the other, and not for the sake of learning. They adopted the guidelines the PST provided them with during the workshop and became obsessed over fulfilling them exactly as the template suggested. They were too nervous to act with an agency and “use” those guidelines while working on their project. During meetings and workshops, participants often asked questions like “If I do this or that [referring to creative solutions they came up with to resolve a certain difficulty], would it still be called action research?” Some of the action research steps were treated as disconnected items on a checklist and were even carried out in a non-sequential order simply for the sake of fulfilling all the steps that were required of them; as though it were a homework that they needed to complete and submit. One of the school teams had administered a questionnaire for its teachers and only later remembered that it should have examined the questionnaire’s reliability. They asked the PST if they should go back and test its reliability. When the PST asked them if they would modify the questionnaire and administer it

again in the event that it turned out to be not very reliable, they were reluctant to do so and explained how they had to move on with their project. Another incident was when, in one of the workshops, two of the school teams requested to spend more time on data collection because they wanted to carry out triangulation. When asked why they would need to triangulate data and how they could benefit from it, the PST received answers like: “Isn’t it better if we do it?” Team members saw only one rigid way of doing things and constantly checked with the PST for feedback in order to verify whether or not they were on the right track and what else - if anything - was required from them. In another instance, and after being trained on tools for data collection, some participants started developing tools without engaging in reflective thinking that analyzed: (1) whether this tool was needed at all; (2) whether they already had answers to the questions they were seeking; or (3) whether this tool served their purpose better than other tools that could have been used for the data collection. Developing a tool for data collection was seen as a goal and not as a vehicle for achieving a larger goal. Moreover, it seemed as though participants were developing and administering the tool as an exercise, and not as a means to serve a need. At this point, the team members were simply trying out all of the different data collection methods regardless of whether or not they were actually needed for their research.

Moreover, data to be collected was approached in terms of quantity. For some of the team members, findings were not obtained when the team had enough data to answer its questions, but rather when the number of tools, sources, and sample participants sounded “impressive” enough. According to them, evidence could only be valued and appreciated after excessive data was collected; hence, they ended up collecting data in a very mechanical and non-reflective way.

They did not realize that when the data provided them with enough insight they were supposed to stop collecting more unnecessary data which they would neither need nor use.

On the other hand, the traditional views of research - held by participants who had previous training with research - constituted barriers to understanding action research and added to the challenge of relating their experience with action research in TAMAM to school improvement. In fact, most participating schools selected members who had previous research training (mostly academic) thinking that their skills would be an asset to the team in TAMAM. However, the previous conceptions of research that these team members held presented a challenge in their ability to "learn" action research. The difficulty was evident in the participants' practices especially when rationalizing the research focus and formulating research questions. When asked to rationalize the importance of choosing a certain project focus to research, the team members with previous research training, based their rationalization solely on the literature and not on the school context. They even asked the PST how many references would be considered sufficient. When they reached the stage of developing research questions, many teams asked questions often seen in quantitative academic research: those testing hypotheses, and examining relationships and correlations. As a result, most of their questions were neither directed towards understanding nor aimed at consisting of systematic qualitative descriptions of situated action. They did not ask questions that genuinely inquired about a concern of practice or targeted school improvement. Their response to the university team's invitation to explore a more practice related question was the following: "Would this question be considered as a research question or not?" Hence, all the school teams were greatly obsessed with academic research.

The disconnect among action research, practice, and school improvement became evident when the school teams began interpreting the data they collected. Some of the school teams struggled when trying to interpret their data and draw lessons that were to be learned from the insights provided. The school teams also had difficulty making sense of the data they collected for the sake of discovering the implications needed to action. As a result, what the school teams reported as lessons learned remained too general; mainly in the form of conclusions regarding whether the innovation was successful or not and whether the school should continue with it or not. Despite the rich insight acquired as a result of engaging in the inquiry the school teams conducted about their practice, the "reported" conclusions of their action research came as overly simplistic and reductionist. In many cases, the conclusions did not even align with the data. When faced with a huge amount of data, those teams went back to their "routine," resorting to "hunches" and jumping to conclusions rather than applying the skills they learned to systematically infer from that data.

Another difficulty related to connecting the activity of research results to actions was observed when some of the school teams struggled with: (1) "recording" the conclusions reached; and (2) reporting them back to their schools. Although the intent of the research they conducted was evaluative, upon encountering "negative" results and insights that pointed at a "faux pas" made by the school administration, school teams either chose to ignore those results, or worked very hard on "toning them down" when it was time to report on the shortcomings to their school administration and to the other participating school teams.

In reality, the traditional academic research model dominated over the action research model for both the trainers and the school teams. Trainers did not make clear the distinction

between traditional academic research and action research. In its presentation of action research, the university team did not present action research as a dynamic, cyclical, and organic process allowing practitioners to change course and adapt to the complex and dynamic nature of their practice. Rather the team presented it as a set of linear steps to be followed. This resulted in team members not handling their research on action projects flexibly. This was manifested in their application of action research. None of the teams moved flexibly in the process, or changed their course, based on new learning.

Concern 2: Most teams did not engage in reflection beyond the technical level. When the Program was at a stage where the school teams had gathered data on their focus, it was important that the school teams interpret their data reflectively and critically in order to come up with insights into their practice that would ultimately inform their decisions and actions towards school improvement. However, it was not easy to move the teams beyond the technical level of reflection. They were over-occupied with the technicalities of the action research and with evaluating the achievement of the goals of their focus projects that it was difficult to get them to stop and question the goals themselves. They engaged in discussions on questions like “Did we achieve the goals of our project?”, “What is our evidence?”, “How can we better achieve those goals”, “Why did grade 7 students perform better than grade 8 students?”, “What have we done towards achieving our goals”, etc. School teams saw their role as being limited to asking technical questions. In other words, they were occupied with just thinking about the “how’s” and not the “why’s”. They did not critically reflect on the goal itself or on the project they adopted towards achieving this goal. This prevailed especially when the improvement project was introduced to the school by the school principal; as though questioning the goals of the project or

the innovation itself was hindered by the fear of disappointing or questioning the principal as a higher authority.

In addition, many school teams did not use reflection as an opportunity to pause between "actions" and "decisions" especially regarding the various ways they could connect their visions, goals, beliefs, and actions at every juncture of the project. They also did not view it as a tool that could help them deepen their understanding and awareness of their actions. They were mostly hasty in their move from one step to the next, and often found that the invitations to think about what they were doing were a "waste of precious" time and aimed more at indulging in the luxury of theorizing. School teams considered that their work on the projects they had chosen ended after their completion of the data analysis stage of the action research cycle. After this stage, they wished to move onto another project without engaging in critical reflection on their goals and visions; a critical step that needed to be completed before their deciding of the actions needed to be taken based on the data.

Despite the awareness of the importance of reflection in TAMAM, the PST team did not purposefully target training the school teams on multiple levels of reflection in the first stage of the professional development. They assumed that raising challenging questions was sufficient for triggering the schools to engage in that process. As such they failed - to a large extent - in encouraging the school teams to critically reflect on their goals and the assumptions/theory of the practice underlying their actions.

Concern3: Practicing professional collaboration was a challenge for school teams. Participating schools in TAMAM were given the liberty to choose the members of their own teams. As a result, the school teams' compositions were heterogeneous and based on the level of

experience [novice, experienced], authority position in the school [teachers vs. supervisors], strength of character, education and expertise, years spent in the school, and social and political connections. These differences resulted in a complex power dynamic within the teams that made achieving professional collaboration quite challenging in most of the cases. Variations along the position-power were the most common. The members on most of the teams differed in their position power in the school. Out of the nine schools, three schools had the principal on the team, the nine schools had supervisors on the team, and six schools had a teacher on the team. While the PST encouraged having diverse members on the teams, this diversification resulted in the limiting of the freedom of expression among the different members due to the hierarchy it imposed. Hence, it presented a challenge in getting the teams to engage in professional dialogue for the sake of making decisions and taking actions.

Though the PST hoped that by forming teams, and emphasizing the fact that all participants in the project were "learners" working toward common goals, power differentials still constituted a strong barrier that hindered team formation and healthy group dynamics. This was especially noticeable in the three schools in which the principal or a school member with a strategic planning position was on the team: Their voice was dominant and their contribution was more significant. In those teams, the hierarchical distribution of power in the school was transferred to the team, where those in position power disproportionally took the lead: (1) in the planning and decision making; (2) in the distribution of roles, where they assigned very minor tasks to the teachers who joined the team; and (3) even in the writing of the team progress reports. Meanwhile, the rest of the team members deferred, accepted their assigned tasks, and rarely contributed to the team's decision-making process. Teachers on those teams were hesitant

to address ideas openly and reflectively especially in the presence of the more senior school team members. They ended up agreeing with whatever the team members with position power said or did. In the absence of the latter, and during the reflective sessions held in the follow up visits, some teachers complained about this group dynamics and evaluated the team's performance critically, but they failed to act on it despite the urging of the PST for them to do so. For one of those schools, the members evaluated the team's progress openly and critically only in those rare meetings where the principal was unable to attend.

As for the school principals, they were mostly resistant to engaging in open and critical self-evaluations of their teams and schools. Rather, they mainly focused on presenting the school's performance and the team's progress with the best image they could possibly think of. Even in the few instances where the school principal self-reflected, they were very reserved and cautious. They shared some of their critical reflections orally in meetings yet were reluctant to document it in writing in the progress reports or in the final school report. In one telling incident, one of the members shared an experience, that pointed critically at a problematic practice at the school, and that exposed shortcomings in the leadership approach of the administration. As a result, the principal was outraged and intervened to stop the conversation. Even other participants were surprised by this person's courage and were concerned about him losing his job. For the most part, school principals were fully absorbed with protecting their school image which they viewed as being the top priority at any cost while other members with them on the team were afraid of losing their jobs and therefore had to comply with the rules set by those principals. This put a major strain on the team dynamics and the quality of the professional dialogue within and across the different teams. As one of the team members puts it in one of the

individual interviews, “I always felt that some voices were stronger than others, even if at the end it looks like we all agreed. The opinions were neither evaluated with the same weight nor possessed the same authority. After all, the administration’s voice was more powerful […] I am not always encouraged to talk with the principal present on the team. His presence on the team sometimes restricted my participation.”

On the other hand, teams who were predominantly formed without the principal being a member of the team faced a different type of challenge when working as teams. Teachers in Arab schools are typically used to having supervisors to whom they report. In the absence of direct supervision, participating school teams did not work efficiently. There was no continuous coordination between the team members, no sense of direction, and no clarity regarding what each member was supposed to do. The team members only started to put an effort into getting to know each other, working in collaboration, and specifying their roles and contributions once the school principal interfered and began showing dissatisfaction with the team’s performance; hence highlighting the priority that the school was giving to the TAMAM project. Close supervision from the principal was needed for an extended period of time until the team was “formed” and the team members were finally beginning to start taking initiatives independently.

Moreover, with some of the teams, the principal intentionally selected members that would “fit” the traditional hierarchal dynamic in order to increase the efficiency of his team. When asked about the rationale for the selection of one of the teachers, one school principal said that she wanted “low profile non-rebellious teachers”. She noted: “to get the team to work and fulfill its tasks I had to think of teachers that would agree with me easily. I did not want trouble makers”. During the follow up meetings with the individual school teams it became evident that

not all teams had captured the essence of professional collaboration, and as a result, were not practicing it efficiently either. They did not spend time and effort trying to engage in dialogue and evaluate ideas. On the contrary, collaboration mainly comprised of task division among the team members. In one specific case, the team met once to divide the tasks, then each member worked in isolation on his/her part after which all the members "submitted" this part to one assigned person who was in charge of "putting it all together and reporting it to the PST". Thinking and collective reflection processes were undermined and teamwork was viewed as grouping separate technical tasks rather than including brainstorming ideas or creating a shared vision, goal, and understanding. The focus was on getting the task done, so when challenged by the PST, team members often justified their method by blaming it on the lack of sufficient time. The member with the position-power on the team was the one dividing the tasks and assigning the responsibilities. He/she ended up being in charge of the decision-making and assigned the other team members minor tasks which did not require any major thinking or decision-making skills.

In the first stage of the project, the only intervention that the PST did was with regards to preparing the teams for working collaboratively, by requesting that these teams be formed, as well as by repeatedly reinforcing the idea that the "work" was supposed to be completed by the whole team. There was neither a theoretical discussion regarding collaboration, nor an explicit description of the collaboration model that was required from the TAMAM schools. As a result, many teams saw professional collaboration as simply being the dividing of a task among a group of people. Collaborative work according to their understanding was the result of all of the parts being put together. Those team members, as observed by the PST, never succeeded in

developing a common understanding of their task, and also never engaged in critical reflective dialogue; they actually kept avoiding being part of this kind of dialogue. These teams had difficulty developing a functional relationship between their members. In fact, on several occasions, the PST was actually approached with complaints related to underlying tensions within the team. These teams saw collaboration as challenging and time consuming, and struggled in coordinating their work, dividing their tasks, staying focused on the task at hand, and in engaging in professional dialogue.

However, some school teams came to appreciate the value of collaboration and embraced the opportunity of working with school colleagues of different backgrounds and positions. They remarked how they saw the added value of working closely with colleagues across specialty areas. Some even pointed out that they were starting to get to know each other and that they no longer fought as they were beginning to invest time and effort trying to understand each other.

Concern 4: Reluctance to exercise their agency for change. After school teams had analyzed and interpreted their data, the PST expected that they would design and take action in order to complete the action research cycle that they presented to the team. However, most of the school teams believed that their tasks were completed once they reached the interpretation of data stage; and very few ventured into drawing conclusions on the implications of this understanding regarding practice. Many of the team members appeared to be trapped in their traditional "executor" role and did not assume the role of a change agent. They believed that they had satisfied all of their requirements, and completed all of their tasks, once they had handed in their conclusions and recommendations to their principals, who they had assumed were the ones responsible for planning and taking action. Even after the PST asked them to develop plans for

action and explained that their role went beyond simply providing recommendations, there were still some school teams who saw that as being more than what was required from them and were reluctant to carry out the tasks arguing that it was a waste of time for the school principal to take the lead and be in charge. Those team members acted based on a traditional conception of leadership, and accordingly, based on a traditional conception of the role of the teacher as well. They kept depending on those with position-power to initiate and lead change.

In fact, the criteria required for the selection of team members, which the PST presented to the school principals, was too general and did not mention that leadership skills was a fundamental requirement. The PST assumed that the principals would select members with some inherent potential for leading. However, this was not the case for all of the teams. School principals, during the interviews conducted at the beginning of the project, were asked how they came about selecting their team members. The principals had varying answers. One of the principals, for example, had selected one of the supervisors to be on the team because she felt that this person needed professional development and wanted to give her that opportunity to improve. Another school principal chose loyal non-rebellious teachers to be on the team. Some school principals purposefully avoided selecting resisters or teachers with bossy characters. When asked about the selection criteria in one of the interviews, one school principal answered, “We decided we wanted an MA holder with a background in research. The teacher we selected is flexible and open. We have other teachers who hold an MA degree, but they have a bossy character”. Other principals chose teachers and supervisors who were highly knowledgeable with regards to the subject matter of the focus project, irrespective of whether or not they had any

leadership skills at all. Very few principals mentioned "potential for leadership" as being a prime choice behind their selection of their team members.

In the first stage of the project there were no discussions about leadership during the PD activities. The PST assumed that by just being selected to be on the school's TAMAM team, team members would feel empowered and assume leadership roles. However, teachers who did not have formal leadership responsibilities in their schools [supervisors, lead teachers…] were less likely to take initiative and lead the actions the team was expected to make towards motivating change in the school. Moreover, most of the school teams agreed that the only way their team could begin taking action and leading change was by having someone in an influential leadership position be a member of the team or an advocate for them. In fact, many teams could not proceed with the activities of their project without the help of the school principal. One of the teams reported that they could not even get the teachers to complete questionnaires as part of their data collection until the school principal interfered. This challenge was strongest when the team needed to expand the scope of their project and introduce new school members to the TAMAM experience. They believed that they were not being taken seriously, and unless they resorted to the help of those with position-power at the school, they felt that their actions did not result in any significant impact or influence.

Concern 5: School teams were uncomfortable with de-privatizing their practice and participating openly in professional dialogue. To achieve professional collaboration, the PST wanted school teams to engage in professional dialogue in order to practice critical reflection openly without being afraid of: (1) sharing the challenges faced by their team (or sharing their "failures"); (2) describing how they worked through them; and lastly (3) explaining what lessons

they learned as a result of this process. For those discussions to be fruitful they had to be approached from a learner's stance and school improvement was to be considered as being the primary goal. However, though most teams were eager to exchange success stories about their schools, they remained resistant to sharing the difficulties they faced with other teams and the PST. Each school presented itself as "the" expert in the focus project it selected, and wanted to prove that its performance in that endeavor was exemplary and perfect. They were reluctant to sharing their struggles, and were uncomfortable with having the PST highlight shortcomings in their work in front of the rest of the teams.

Moreover, when some teams achieved a major breakthrough and gained a sudden insight into their practice, they did not feel comfortable discussing openly what they had learned as a result of it, and even avoided writing about it in the school report. This happened especially when the new insight revealed something related to decisions by their school leaders. Referring to a couple of examples, investigation into one of the adopted innovations at the school made it clear to the team member that this innovation was introduced in the school because of its popularity in society rather than because it was a response to a felt need or a problem hindering student learning. Team members were very reluctant about sharing their insights and reflecting on the underlying causes of the issues they raised. In addition, some school teams did not know what to do when their evaluation data revealed bad news. While few felt comfortable sharing that, some panicked and chose to conceal this part of the findings during their presentations.

Concern 6: Team members resisted documenting and reporting their experience. One of the main goals of the TAMAM project was to introduce a culture of documentation where school teams and university coaches documented and disseminated their experiences. Thus, the PST

emphasized the importance of the school teams keeping journals in which they documented their experiences in the project, took minutes, wrote reflection papers, and organized the data they collected in order to refer back to them when planning, making decisions, or just sharing their experiences with others. The PST assumed that the school teams would document if they were told to do so and that they would not require any special training or guidelines; they believed that a simple presentation on writing action research reports would be enough for the school teams. However, almost all of the teams did not document their experiences in the first phase of the project. When some of them did, after the PST's insistence, they thought it was all about taking minutes. Only one school meticulously documented the experience since its culture was built on documentation and since the administration requested that they document.

Moreover, some of the teams did not see the report they were required to submit to the PST as being one way of documenting their practices; instead, they found it to be a way for them to show off their school and their project's achievement. They even thought that if the scope of their project was large enough, and the data they reported more plentiful, then their report would also be better off as a result. Moreover, rather than considering the report an important tool needed for sharing the journey, most schools felt the need to "white wash" and package their experience as something "good" and "successful" in order to show their school in the best light possible. In many cases, the original drafts that captured the "raw" events were much better than the final product that the schools agreed to share publically. In one case, and despite the PST insistently convincing the team members of a particular group that they were ready for sharing their report, this team felt that it did not want to do so until it was able to collect more data.

Resistance to the TAMAM PD Approach

Concern 1: Failure to deal with the PST as a mentor rather than a traditional teacher. The PST saw its role as a facilitator for the process of building capacity for school improvement. Its role was to coach and provide support and challenge to school teams who in turn were required to show ownership of their work, determine their work pace, and benefit from the PST team as a learning resource. The PST team was cautious and avoided playing the "traditional teacher's" prescriptive and directive role. The team members also did the best they could by trying to: (1) break the image of the "all-knowing" university professor; (2) adopt the inductive teaching style that emphasized teachers experiences; and lastly, (3) invite the teachers to practice certain skills before working on fostering their conceptual understanding. Even since the first few workshops, the university team members acknowledged being learners themselves and emphasized the individuality of each school. It also highlighted the fact that the school team members were up-to-date with whatever happened in their school, and with whatever they or their school needed. Moreover, it also implied that the university coaches would follow the school team members in the direction they wanted to go and with the same pace they wished to proceed with, matching their needs, readiness and available resources.

However, almost all of the teams interacted with the PST through a "traditional" perception about the student-teacher relationship in a university setting. Their role was that of passive receivers of information who depended on their university professor and viewed him as being the sole source of knowledge, the director of their learning journey, and the only judge of quality and adequacy of their work. As such, most of the school teams behaved the way students usually behave in a typical university setting in the region: They followed the guidelines in the

training material mechanically, rather than adapting them to fit their own particular situation. They also kept requesting detailed step by step guidance, and wanted constant reassurance to confirm if what they were doing was "correct" all the time. They rarely took responsibility for applying the information the PST provided them with, were very reserved in taking decisions or moving forward with their project, and very rarely did so without first checking with the PST for approval. This prevailed especially when the school teams were implementing some stages of the action research. During this time, the PST refrained from providing directive guidance giving the school teams the discretion to do what they saw fit; hence, allowing them to ask for directions from the PST only when they felt like they really needed it. During these times, the school teams never initiated contact with their university coaches. Yet, when interviewed, many school teams complained to the PST about the quality of "guidance" they were receiving and shared that they felt left out and preferred it if the university team could check in more often. Some of the teams also wanted "to have some guidance and be familiar with the deadlines and expectations just as a traditional teacher would be," as one team member shared in a focus group. They explained that they felt lost rather than appreciative of the freedom given to them in being able to determine their own pace and direction.

In reflective evaluation sessions, the relationship between the PST and the school teams was brought up and almost all of the teams agreed that they dealt with the members of the PST just as they would have otherwise dealt with any other traditional teacher. School teams admitted that they were being passive learners. One team member even remarked, "In the beginning, we waited your instructions to start the action. We waited for your instructions then executed them." Another team member reflected and shared, "We were, in the beginning, traditionally receiving

the information from the PST as traditional teachers." School teams continuously saw the need for more explicit follow up and direction. As one team member put it:

> "We need your support, we need you to help us organize, and we need you to tell us explicitly: ok, you know what, on the day so and so you need to meet, you need to because on this day we're coming to check on you. On the other hand, if you tell us to organize our own professional day, we'll try to do that but I don't think it will be as successful as when you guide us step by step. I'm not saying that you have to be in the same country we are in, but you know, we feel better when you are backing us up by telling us: do this, do that…"

In a reflective evaluation session conducted by the PST one of the teams revealed, "We were just applying what we were told to do and followed the instructions to the last letter. We saw our work in the project as a series of assignments (or homework) and when we asked to do something, we did it." Reflecting back on their experience with TAMAM, one of the team members shared, "The biggest challenge for you (PST) was to communicate your approach to schools in the Arab world. We were used to just being ordered to do things as 1, 2, 3 so this new strategy you implemented was a bit strange for us and resulted in a lot of criticisms for you".

The "traditional" view regarding the relationship between the university coaches and the school teams also had an influence on the kind of feedback the teams sought. Most of the school teams were driven only upon receiving feedback from the PST which evaluated their "performance" especially insofar as it compared to the performance of other school teams. They constantly approached the PST team privately with questions like "Are you happy with our performance? How are we doing compared to other schools in our country, in TAMAM?" and

etc. In addition, school teams depended totally on the PST in order to resolve the problems that emerged - in the implementation phase - between and across the various team members. In one of the individual interviews, one participant - who reported that her team was having problems collaborating - suggested that, “The PST should follow up closely and resolve all issues encountered in order to ensure professional collaboration is taking place in the teams.” School teams also suggested that the PST should create networking opportunities among schools outside the context of the project despite the fact that they were encouraged to initiate such networking opportunities themselves.

Moreover, School teams did not seek information as independent learners. They relied on the PST for everything and considered it their only source of knowledge. Even when advised to do so, they resisted: (1) exploring the literature on their area of focus; (2) seeking to understand a challenge they faced; or even (3) looking for ideas for alternative steps they could take. It became obvious that most of the school teams were not used to doing this alone and did not have the skills it required.

Concern 2: School teams were uneasy with the evolving plan approach adopted by the PST. School team members had been used to participating in projects where all the objectives and strategies were pre-identified and pre-planned. However, the approach adopted by the PST was a continuously evolving plan approach with its goals and strategies evolving based on the monitoring of the needs and readiness levels of the various teams. School teams’ dissatisfaction with this approach was expressed in different occasions. Many of the team members expressed this discomfort in their reflection papers, in the focus groups, and in interviews that took place in stage one of the project. The following expressions were shared often, “We want a clear plan

with a detailed timeline. We want clear expectations […] with the scarce instructions you gave us we are not see the light at the end of the tunnel."

Moreover, the team members felt uncomfortable when the PST answered their inquiries about what is next by asking them back "what do you think you should be doing next." For many, this made them feel as though the PST team was "lost" and unsure of the project's goals and strategies. They did not see it as an opportunity to allow their views and conditions to shape the course of the project's implementation. School teams reported that they could no longer find the connection between the PD activities and the project's goal of achieving school improvement. Since the PST did not lay out the pathway needed to be followed from the beginning, school teams constantly shared their frustration regarding how they simply could not understand how the project goal was to be achieved.

The PST's Response to the Concerns: The Evolving Measures

When faced with the emerging concerns, and in order to achieve the goal of building leadership capacity, the PST decided to focus on developing the following competencies: (1) collaboration skills/professional dialogue; (2) agency for change/leadership skills; and (3) reflective thinking practice.

Introducing New Objectives

Therefore, the PST engaged in several meetings in order to brainstorm and reflect on where to go next, based on the concerns. It then decided to introduce the following new professional development objectives:

- School teams must conceive action research as a tool needed for school improvement.

- School team members need to understand the importance of reflection and incorporate ongoing reflection at both technical and critical levels in their practice.
- School team members should engage in critical dialogue and demonstrate ease in the de-privatizing of their practice.
- School teams must play a leadership role in initiating, planning, and implementing school improvement.

Strategies Needed for Addressing these Concerns

In order to connect action research to school improvement, action research was re-conceptualized and presented as a vehicle needed for building capacity for both individual professional development and school improvement. It was also presented as a practice that could lead to building a culture of inquiry where decisions, plans, and evaluative judgment are all informed with "evidence" and where practitioners adopt inquiry as an integral part of their practice, rather than simply conduct research occasionally to inquire about that practice. Action research was also presented as being tightly connected to reflective practice both as an aspect of it, and as a medium needed for improving the quality and richness of their inquiry. The more practitioners reflect during the action research process, the more likely their choice of focus, data analysis, solutions, and emerging decisions would effectively contribute towards school improvement. Leadership was also introduced as a capacity beyond a certain position of power, where expertise becomes a source of empowerment that enables practitioners to "act" as leaders and initiate change. The PST believed that at this stage school principals' support and commitment would become of increased importance; therefore, they were asked to attend these three workshops even when they were not part of the school team.

Stage II: Shifting the Focus to School Improvement

Following a new approach, the PST conducted four more workshops in TAMAM.

The Fourth Workshop

It took place in January 2009 and was entitled "From Research to Action". Participants were introduced (conceptually) to reflective practice at the individual, team, and school levels to help them start thinking about action research as a vehicle for change and to involve them more intimately in the cyclical process of inquiry. As recommended by Sagor (1997) and Calhoun (2002), collaborative action research was presented as: (1) building on felt need; (2) allowing voluntary participation; (3) focusing mainly on educationally critical issues; (4) providing participants with ample support; and (5) encouraging learning by pressuring participants to change.

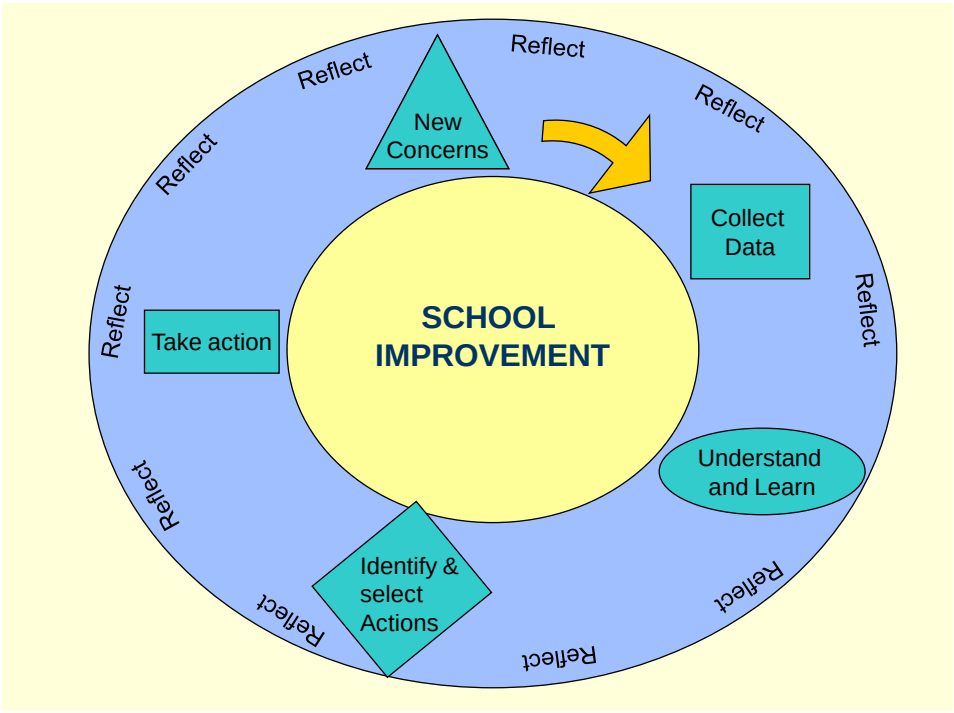

Figure 6: Action research cycle

The emphasis on reflective dialogue was placed mainly at this stage of the PD process, since the very first session of this workshop. The workshop sessions included many activities that engaged all participants in reflective dialogue. Each of the school teams was asked to present and reflect on the actions they took or planned to take in light of the research they conducted. The teams were asked to prepare those presentations in writing and to send them to the PST prior to the workshop. The PST, then, assigned a "critical friend" from another school team to read and discuss the work of another team during the workshop. Discussants were instructed to critically examine the work, and to prepare constructive comments, suggestions, and questions for the presenters. During the workshop, and after each presentation, the discussants presented their reflection and then an open discussion took place. The workshop also included a one-day-long training on reflective practice. As such, participants had the chance to practice reflection as a tool that could be used for individual development, school improvement, and organizational development. The workshop also included a full session where the participants were asked about their current conceptions of leadership, as well as the sources of authority it could be based on within the context of school improvement. The session aimed at raising the participants' awareness about the dominant conceptions of leadership, and the various ways one could go about challenging it. Finally, it also aimed at presenting them with an alternative model that views leadership as participative, and grounded in expert knowledge; one of leadership's main sources of authority. After the workshop the PST met regularly with individual school teams and focused in their follow up on reinforcing the conceptions introduced during the workshop, and on encouraging school teams to translate their newly constructed understanding in their actions, both within the project and in their practice in general.

The Fifth Workshop

Took place in July 2009, and was entitled: "Moving towards school wide improvement". Its main purpose was to allow school team members to continue working on reflective practice while also further exploring their roles and actions as agents of change in their schools. Planning for future action was brought into focus as an opportunity encouraging teachers to apply their inquiry and reflective practice skills, as a tool needed for promoting their agency in leading school improvement in their schools.

The three day workshop started with the school presentations where each team was asked to engage in an open self-reflection in front of others, while evaluating its own work and soliciting feedback from others both regarding the team members' actions and reflections. This activity made what is typically private in schools open to public scrutiny by others. Prior to the workshop, the PST met, analyzed the data collected on the school's progress during the follow up visits, scheduled on-going meetings and developed a description of each school team's progress in terms of: the team dynamics, the conceptions regarding the role of the PST, the understanding of action research, the involvement in critical inquiry towards school improvement, the readiness to take leadership acts, the levels of reflection, and lastly, in terms of what could be learned from insights. For example, when discussing school 1, the PST remarked that its team members had good team dynamics where they worked in collaboration and where every team member had a voice and successfully contributed to the project at every stage. This school believed that the role of the PST was that of a mentor and a support group. Moreover, this school team has a clear conception regarding the goals of action research but not its processes. The differentiation between academic research and action research was still not clear for the

team. This school chose the focus, asked questions, only so as to rationalize what they already believed in. the school team members remained fixated at the technical level. Although this experience could have been insightful in many aspects, they were not able to benefit from these rich insights that emerged. These school team members had yet to view the expertise they developed – through the TAMAM experience- as a source of empowerment needed for taking the necessary initiatives that would encourage change improvements at the school level.

Dimension / **School**	**Team dynamics**	**Conception of the role of AUB**	**Conception of action research**		**Critical Inquiry toward School Improvement**	**Levels of reflection**	**Readiness to take leadership acts**
			Goal	Process			
School 1	+	+	+	_	_	1	_
School 2	_	_	_	_	_	0	_
School 3	+	+	+	_	+	2	+
School 4	+	+	_	_	_	0	_
School 5	+	_	+	_	+	2	+
School 6	+	_	+	_	_	1	_

School 7	_	_	_	_	_	0	_
School 8	+	_	+	_	_	1	_
School 9	+	_	+	_	+	1	_

Figure 7: The table shows the description the PST did for each school

During the workshop, this evaluation - which was formulated in the form of propositions - was shared with each of the school teams at the conclusion of their presentations, after which the PST initiated and directed a reflective dialogue that followed each school team's presentation. School teams were given time to respond to these propositions and argue against the conclusions that the PST had reached. For most of the schools, the teams' reflection was aligned with the evaluation that the PST had deliberated.

During this workshop, school improvement was emphasized as being the ultimate goal, with action research being the tool needed for achieving this goal. In one of the sessions, the PST asked the school teams to select a focus area for improvement, either based on the data they already collected or on the additional data they would need to collect, at a later point, in order to inform this selection. The school teams were asked to remain mindful of the following regarding their area of focus:

- It should be based on a felt need by a majority of the school faculty
- It should be based on a shared understanding regarding the nature of the problem and the level of urgency needed to address it

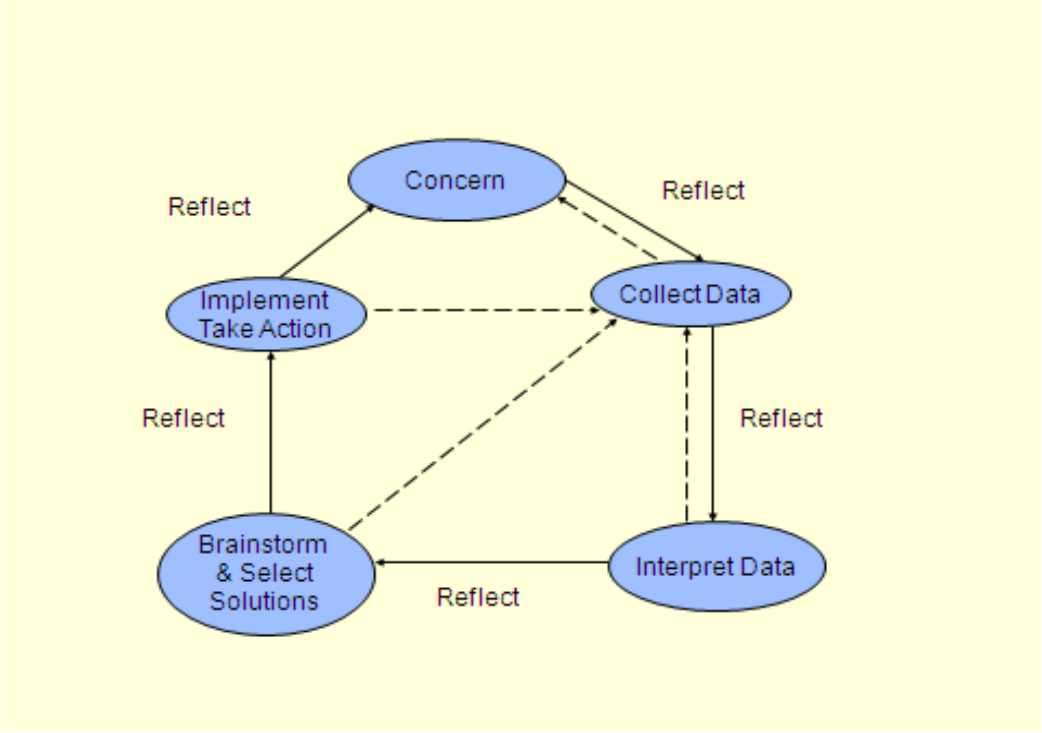

Figure 8: The Action research cycle

After deciding on a focus area, school teams were coached to: (1) set school improvement goals; (2) locate resources; and (3) expand their teams as needed. These issues were discussed during the workshop and guidelines were offered by the PST. However, goals and decisions were never imposed by the PST. The decision regarding what to improve was left to be determined by the school itself in relation to its vision, priorities, and insights reached as a result of the action research, circumstances, and opportunities. The purpose of this activity was to engage school teams in collaborative goal-seeking and continuous reflection at the group level and not just at the individual level.

In addition, professional collaboration was introduced during this workshop as an important factor needed for school improvement. The workshop discussions and activities drew the team's attention to the fact that successful professional collaboration needed to be

purposefully attended to, and that part of their planning for school improvement was supposed to involve thoughtful reflection on the forming of teams, distributing of tasks among their members, and the managing of group dynamics necessary for promoting team work. The PST then gave suggestions regarding how the school teams could expand the scope of their project activities in order to involve more members of their schools as well as increase the likelihood that the impact of their improvement initiatives would become school-wide.

At the conclusion of this workshop, school teams were asked to go back to their schools with the mind-set that they were now "agents of change" equipped with inquiry tools that would provide them with expert powers which make them ready to lead school improvement initiatives at their school. As such, the PST expected that the school teams would decide on how to proceed next without referring to their direct guidance. More specifically, the PST hoped that the school teams would rely on the skills they learned so far for the sake of triggering and spreading the culture and habits of inquiry around their school in order to sustain improvement. The team's next assignment was to build a plan for action based and rationalized by the findings obtained from the research data, and grounded in the insights and experiences that the teams documented throughout the project. School teams were invited to revisit these notes and to incorporate the lesson learned into the process of planning for future actions. The PST encouraged the school teams to engage in reflective dialogue and brainstorming sessions, and to develop their views about the school culture they were all aiming for. This propelled the PD work in TAMAM one step closer towards the developing of self-renewing schools.

The Sixth Workshop

It was held on February 2010, and entitled "Leading School Improvement I." At this stage of the project's PD process, the PST realized that the school teams were ready to engage in a reflection not only about what they had achieved so far, but also about the improvement process they had been engaged in since the beginning of the TAMAM project. In fact, since the conclusion of the last workshop, a new term - TAMAM Culture - began emerging among the project participants with reference to their experience, and the growing sense of community among them. Additionally, it was also meant to refer to a "way we do things" as well as what "we believe" as participants in the TAMAM experience. Therefore the workshop covered the following:

(1) School improvement was presented as being a journey which included certain stations necessary for the effective planning and implementation of this improvement (selecting a focus, setting goals for improvement, designing an intervention, planning its implementation, leading the process, building the team, etc.).

(2) School teams were invited to examine and critically reflect on what they had accomplished so far in light of these components.

(3) The PST presented strategic planning as being a tool vital for the school teams' goal of leading school improvement.

(4) The PST presented the scope and sequence of the PD activities which the school teams had completed so far. The scope and sequence were then developed based on the documentation and analysis of the actual steps the teams had taken up to this point of the project (see figure 1). The PST then asked the school teams to reflect on the

scope and sequence of those activities, and shared its own critical observations and lessons learned based on the challenges faced.

(5) The university team then shared a modified flow of activities based on those observations (See figure 2).

(6) The PST then presented a set of emerging principles - which they named pillars - that underlined every decision regarding the content, delivery and sequencing of the training. These pillars included: (1) Experiential learning; (2) Collaborative approach; (3) Inquiry-based decisions; (4) Team-driven school projects; (5) Continuous follow-up and support; (6) Reflective dialogue; (7) Monitoring and continuous evolving plan; and lastly (8) Systematic documentation. Afterwards, they invited the school teams to comment and make suggestions.

Figure 9: Flow of activities since the beginning of the TAMAM project

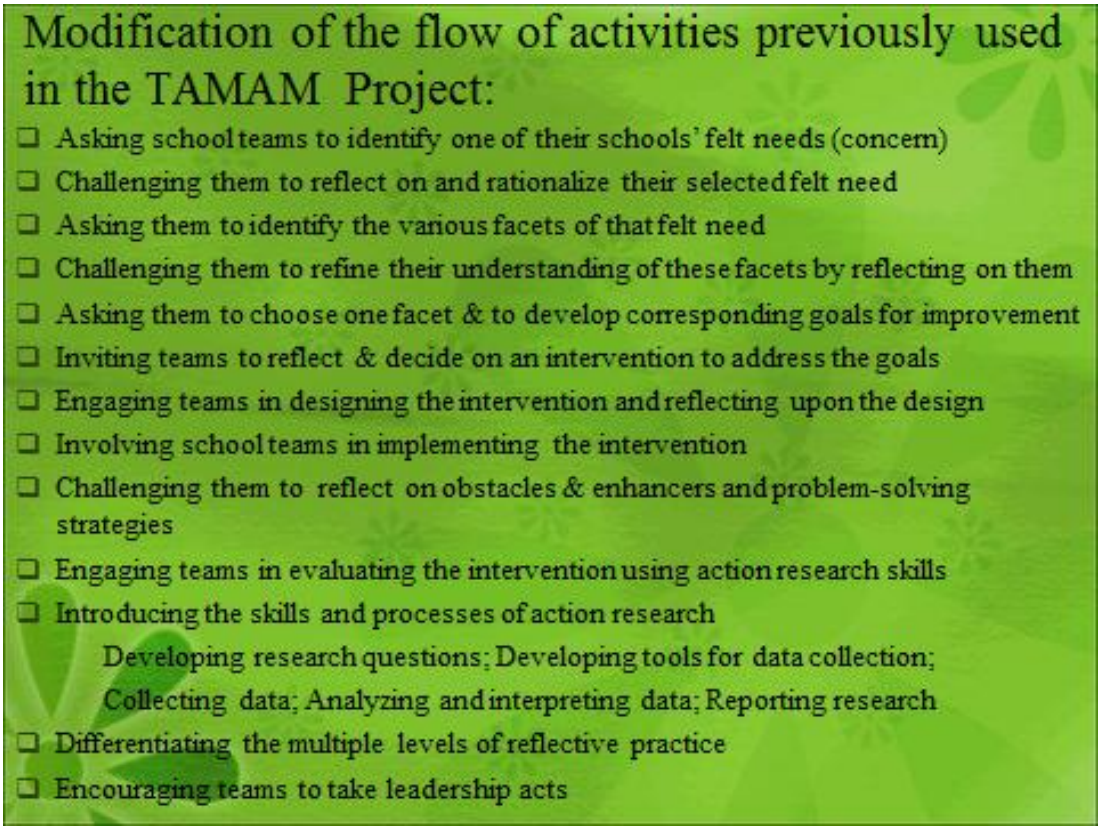

Figure 10: Modification of the flow of activities

The Seventh Workshop

It was held on January 2011, was entitled "Leading School Improvement II" and continued the focus on leading school improvement. This workshop began with the PST presenting their account of what each school team had accomplished on their school improvement journey while highlighting their focus area, intervention, and strategies. Afterwards, each school team reflected on its practices and the extent to which those practices aligned with the TAMAM pillars. Then, the PST challenged each school in terms of where it stood with respect to the implementation of certain TAMAM pillars. The next activity asked the school teams to reflect on their school improvement plans (which components of the plan they

had addressed, whether the components were aligned, and whether the plan allowed for ongoing examinations and revisions). Then, the PST introduced the SWOT analysis as a tool which could be used by schools in their planning of the school improvement initiatives. After the school teams engaged in SWOT analysis, the university team initiated a discussion regarding the challenges faced during the school improvement initiatives which the PST had identified while observing/examining the school teams' progress. These challenges mainly included: (1) building trust; (2) avoiding authoritative approaches to leadership; and (3) incorporating TAMAM pillars in the school. The workshop concluded with a "world café" discussion (Brown & Issacs, 2005) regarding the various ways the TAMAM project could be expanded beyond simply including the participating schools in each of the three initial countries. All along, the pillars were used - and referred to - as guidelines needed for capturing the vision, values, and approaches of the project.

Preliminary Signs of Success

The on-going data collection process during the course of the implementation of the TAMAM's PD activities provided the PST with evidence that indicated how the added measures they introduced were beginning to have a positive impact on the learning experiences of the participating school team members. Though no formal evaluation was yet conducted to measure the extent to which the PD intervention in TAMAM achieved its set goals, there were enough signs of success based on the data collected up to workshop 7 which revealed that the concerns faced during the process were being addressed. The following are observations grounded in data that give an overview of these signs of success.

Observation One

Team members gained a better understanding of action research and began to apply its processes - while attending to a school's felt need - for the purpose of motivating improvement. By critically reflecting on their work in TAMAM, school teams became aware of the rigid way they had approached action research earlier in the project and seemed to realize how this action research was not as a goal in itself, but rather a tool which could help initiate school improvement. A quote from one of the participants during the reflective session of workshop 5 captures this change very well. This participant notes: "We had a common project which we were working on in our school and the TAMAM Project came in to challenge us, to prove whether what we were doing was right. Our project was nice and exciting, but we were approaching it as scientists often approached their experiments: we had a hypothesis and we did things only to prove that all what we were saying was correct. Before, we did not compare between the action research and the academic research. But now our work is focused on the improvement plan, and not just on proving that what we are doing is right."

School team members realized that they could use the skills of action research flexibly and should not let the technicalities of the process overwhelm them. As they developed a deeper understanding of action research, school team members also realized that the technical terms used in action research could be adapted to make more sense within the context they are used in. A question one of the teams asked in a focus group interview after workshop 6 perfectly exemplifies this technique; the members asked: "Can't we change developing research questions into developing questions for evaluation?"

At the conclusion phase of the data collection and analysis, school teams were given the choice to either continue with the focus they had been originally working on or to shift to a new focus based on insights gathered. Almost all the schools who decided to move to a new focus started by identifying concerns or areas in need for improvement at their school and engaged in that process wholeheartedly. As they expressed in workshop 7, they now saw the importance of investing time and effort in using their inquiry skills in order to identify a shared need and develop an understanding of it. Almost all of the school teams no longer saw the activities they engaged in as serving any goal besides initiating school improvement. They were no longer completing 'an exercise' or 'a homework assigned' by the PST. As one team member put it in one of the presentations conducted during the sixth workshop, "We are now selecting a need for school improvement and not for TAMAM". School teams started to describe the TAMAM Project in a unique way. As one of the members said in one of the focus group interviews conducted after workshop 6, "It is a project that equipped us with the necessary skills which would help us tackle a problem or a need in the school."

In fact, most of the members of the school teams acquired inquiry skills which they started to use confidently and creatively as internalized habits of minds. In workshop 7, some teams described how they felt that they had adopted a researcher's way of thinking when attempting to attend to any problem faced; whether at the level of the classroom, the department, or the school. They even reasserted the importance of developing those skills at both the student and teacher level.

Observation Two

Team members engaged in critical reflection which resulted in meaningful learning. Team members were no longer overwhelmed with the technicalities of the action research study; contrarily, they shifted their focus to school improvement and became engaged in the critical reflection of the innovations they had adopted. They had also examined to what extent those innovations aligned with their goal as well as with the school's mission statement. One school for example, had adopted a program to develop students' research skills. This program required the students to carry out different steps in order to complete the research cycle. In a focus group interview with this school team, the team shared that - through reflection - they realized that "becoming a researcher was not just about completing a number of steps; on the contrary, it required a change in habits of mind and attitudes toward one's practice." This led them to modify the goal of their innovation: It shifted from helping the students learn the steps to working with those students through a process similar to what they experienced in TAMAM. In the presentations carried out during workshop 6, another school team shared, "Since we learned how to set clear goals in TAMAM, we decided to begin our improvement project by starting with our school's vision. We reflected: "What are the things that we seek for our students? So we identified those from our school vision. Then we moved from the school vision to the rest of the departments." Almost all the school teams realized the importance of developing reflective thinking and expressed how they enhanced their reflection skills through the TAMAM experience. In their presentation in workshop 6, one of the school teams shared, "We changed a lot after our experience in TAMAM. We acquired critical thinking skill and analytical skills, and so, the way we usually go about providing feedback was enhanced. The capacity was built in us

and our job was to deliver it to everybody else in order to maintain integrity." Another school team expressed, "After our work in TAMAM, we found out that reflecting and thinking was much more important than doing the action itself." School teams were no longer just "doers"; they now understood the value of aligning their actions with their vision and mission as well the importance of critically reflecting on their innovation or action prior to adopting it.

This learning impacted their daily practices in the classrooms, divisions, or departments. One of the team members shared her insights in the focus group interview conducted after workshop 6; she remarked, "Now any problem in the department alerts my attention and triggers ideas for solution even if I am not necessarily applying action research to every problem I face. My outlook on things is different now. I think I started questioning a lot of things.". Moreover, school teams approached their problems or challenges as learners and researched openly in order to understand the nature of those problems; as many teams asserted in workshop 7. Some school team members integrated reflective thinking into their professional development programs at school. Some of the teams trained and coached on reflective practice and reflective thinking. Others modeled this practice, and aimed at helping other teachers and students at their school become reflective practitioners.

Observation Three

Team members became more comfortable engaging in reflective dialogue and even more open in sharing their challenges. The discussions that took place in the reflective evaluation sessions of workshop 5 constituted a turning point - and gave ample of evidence - which revealed that the team members had become both willing and able to engage in critical reflective dialogue. Team members reflected critically and openly on the challenges they faced while acquiring the

different competencies they had been offered in TAMAM (collaboration, understanding of action research, de-privatization, etc.). Unlike their earlier focus of portraying their team and school as being successful, participating teams were more willing to identify areas of challenges and to share publically their mistakes and shortcomings. In fact, almost all team members' self-evaluations came out to be aligned with the PSTs' evaluations. The same was observed in workshop 7 when school teams were asked to reflect on their work in light of certain TAMAM pillars. Reflective dialogue was also present among members of the same team who reported that they were constantly engaging in such dialogue "not to criticize each other but to think and learn with each other", as one team said.

Trust was being established within the TAMAM school teams. It became a habit to reflect openly and discuss challenges. Reflective dialogue became viewed as an asset. One of the teams which was struggling to collaborate in the early stages of the project, shared in workshop 6, "We, as a team, are very motivated now. When we started reflecting together we realized that we have the potential to do the work and it made us aware that we can have the push from each other as well as from the administrators. As a whole, it helped us develop the spirit of working together, and helped us believe in our abilities."

Observation Four

School teams realized the role of the PST as being one of a facilitator. With the PST's continual modeling of a non-directive approach in coaching, and its being explicit about how its team members emphasize their status as "learners" in the project, school teams came to realize the value of the PST's approach as being one which primarily focused on facilitating their learning. The school teams also realized that they should play an active role in their own

learning. In workshop 5, one of the teams described this transformation clearly: "Upon the implementation of the TAMAM Project, every person within the team started talking the initiative to: (1) share ideas; (2) talk about achievements; (3) share concerns; and (4) seek support during their discussions of the obstacles encountered […] I would compare this to students who took charge of their own learning, yet it is important to note that it would have been as efficient, were it not for the presence of a facilitator. AUB played that role."

Gradually, school teams saw that what they were doing was for the sake of their own school improvement and professional development. Therefore, they finally realized how they should lead this process, by setting their own goals and determining their own pace. In the meetings held after workshop 6, it was evident that school teams had become aware of how the PST did not want to give a one-size-fits-all recipe for schools to follow rigidly because it had stressed repeatedly just how each school had its own unique cases and circumstances. They realized that the PST wanted each school team to determine its own path, think of its own context and needs, and design its own actions. As a result, the school teams stopped asking for ongoing detailed instructions on what to do, when to do it, and just exactly how to do it. Some of the school teams even took the initiative at one point, consulted the literature, and shared with the university team - and other participants - books which they had found as to be relevant and useful.

The school teams demonstrated their newly acquired "procedural" knowledge about the non-directive "mentoring approach" they experienced - and were coached on - by being motivated to apply this same approach in their coaching of the new team members at their school. As they described their progress in workshop 7, they remarked how they saw their role as

one which provides "support and challenge," and "answers questions with more questions," as one team member put it.

Observation Five

School teams adopted the TAMAM professional development approach in their school practices. School teams showed an understanding of "experiential learning" - and related instances - where they began to integrate "mentoring" - as well as the "evolving design" planning approach - in their professional development practices. Many participating schools in TAMAM shared how they planned to change the way they conducted professional development and currently shifted to adopt an experiential learning approach; especially in their attempt to train their faculty on action research or reflective practices. Moreover, school teams expressed their awareness regarding how change and school improvement could not succeed without professional development based on ongoing support and follow up. They even noted how this awareness had trickled to influence how they viewed their classroom practices. As one member described in workshop 6, "As a teacher, I used to enter the class, explain the lesson, and leave. I didn't believe in my ability to evoke change until I started working with the team in TAMAM. My views changed and my awareness of my classroom approaches developed."

In the reflective evaluation session that took place after workshop 5, two of the school teams shared that they found themselves - on multiple occasions - emulating the approach that the PST had implemented with them. Many members remarked that when they became in charge of training new members, they followed the same approach the PST did, by constantly asking the new members to apply the learning they acquired to real life situations. They also said that their

relationship with those teams did not involve traditional teaching but rather moved towards adopting the mentoring approach they had experienced themselves with the PST.

When invited to reflect on their experiences in Workshop 7, many school teams agreed that it took them a while to accept, understand, and begin to implement an "evolving plan" approach. As they talked about their plans for improvement, school teams highlighted the importance of the evolving nature of those plans based on the emerging needs and challenges. One of school teams shared, "If you [PST] were to tell us, we wouldn't follow, because if things were presented the way you presented them, we wouldn't understand it. We would have fears and we would escape. You chose to just do it, model it. Personally, I see that it was very effective; it was very good. So you did not tell us anything; we discovered everything along the way.

School teams showed understanding and appreciation regarding the evolving design approach. This was made apparent especially when they shared how they used this same approach to expand the scope of the TAMAM activities in their own schools. The following quote by a school team is very representative of their experiences:

> "When we went into it with the new teams in our school, we dealt with them the same way you [PST] dealt with us. Our approach wasn't an annoying one: We neither imposed our beliefs on them nor told them to 'do this' or 'do that'. We informed them where the project was going to start, how it was going to end, and what it was going teach us and help us achieve. We then told them that the rest would become clearer as we went along…"

CONCLUSION

The TAMAM project's approach to school based reform was built around the belief that successful reform: (1) needs to be grounded in a culturally and contextually relevant knowledge base; (2) requires building capacity at the individual level. This is done by means of locating and recruiting talented professionals and helping them develop professionally at the institutional level through their adopting of enabling structures and organizational processes, and finally through their enforcing of reflective processes that aim both at monitoring progress and accounting for impact for the sake of motivating continuous improvement. Accordingly, professional development was a major part of the project activities. Capacity building in TAMAM ultimately aimed at achieving a vision for schools where student learning was prioritized, and where the school system - as well as its practitioners - were ready to provide the best services needed for fostering the learning experiences of these students. Consequently, creating capacity for learning at the individual, collective, and system level is considered to be the central goal of all the TAMAM project school-based reform activities. School practitioners were ready to become leaders of this change through their acquiring of new competencies that would allow them to break loose from patterns and challenge existing systemic archetypes that hinder schools and individuals from continuously learning. Inquiry, reflective practice, collaboration, professional dialogue, evidence-based decision-making and planning, on-going monitoring and evaluation, are competencies that the PST selected to foster among teams of practitioners at participating schools. All along, the PST followed a non-directive, experiential, and mentoring approach where the voices and contributions of the school teams - during all stages of the project - were welcomed and nurtured.

The PST initiated the PD with a purposeful preliminary "program" that was informed by the best practices [choice of collaborative action research] - and subjected to continuous monitoring and examination - making necessary changes based on the context of the schools and the emerging conditions that emerged throughout the PD process.

Insights from the TAMAM Capacity Building Experience: Lessons Learned and Persisting Challenges.

Lessons learned

The difficulties that the PST faced during their professional development activities, throughout the first phase of the project, gave them insights regarding certain aspects of the capacity building activities which they had overlooked in their planning and which others had not emphasized enough. It also helped them experience and understand - through actual practice - some of the assertions made about school improvement. Despite the lessons learned, a number of challenges still persisted that required more attention from the PST during their transition into the next phase of the project. In what follows, the lessons learned from the implementation of the professional development activities will be presented. Then, an elaboration of the remaining challenges is presented, along with a few suggestions regarding the possible ways one could go about addressing them.

Lessons Learned on Professional Development

Firstly, school teams learned that they needed to start with a thorough exploration of the context, then focus on getting to know the school, and their teams, in terms of the background and skills related to initiatives regarding school improvement. It was learnt that the teams' acquisition of certain skills should not be taken for granted. The university team was expected to

know the members' readiness, level of experience, and knowledge in terms of the competencies necessary for their experience in TAMAM. For example, the PST assumed that the school teams were familiar with working collaboratively and that they were skillful when it came to exploring the literature and documenting their practices. Therefore, the assumption was that the teams did not need deliberate coaching on those skills. However, the following were the conclusions the PST drew from their experiences in this regard:

- For school teams to work collaboratively they should be coached on doing so and scaffolds should be designed to encourage team-individualized support.
- As soon as the project commences, team members should immediately be trained on documenting practices and the PST should be persistent in following up on the team progress on that front as well as with regards to the quality of the documents produced. The university team assumed that the teams knew how to do so, and did not need any guidance. In a culture not used to documentation, training and guidance on the different forms and uses of documentation were needed; in addition to a few tips regarding how to organize what was documented.
- The university team should help school members train on techniques in order to explore the literature, identify sources of information and benefit from them. They should also guide them towards opportunities that would help them practice rather than allow them to remain dependent on the PST in order to locate available resources.

Secondly, and for the school team members to see the connection between professional development and school improvement, it would be better if the experience highlights school

improvement – from the start – instead of focuses on learning and conducting action research for the sake of evaluating existing projects. This approach isolated "action research" from the broader context of school improvement and made it an end by itself rather than one of the means needed to achieve the vital end: school improvement. Thus, instead of selecting any innovative project and finding evidence that supported its success, school teams either worked on identifying a need for school improvement or were challenged to establish the connection between their innovative school project and their school vision and strategic improvement plans.

Thirdly, school teams learned that they had to introduce reflection as a skill - before or during the training on action research - in order for them to be able to engage in the improvement process reflectively. Moreover, action research, reflective practices, and the interrelationship between them needed to be introduced as crucial competencies critical for successful school reform. Teams needed to be coached in order to practice both and be able to distinguish between situations that warranted the use of one versus the other.

Fourthly, school teams realized that they needed to add leadership potential as a selection criterion. The PST observed that they were not supposed to leave the choice of the selection of the team members totally up to the discretion of the schools administration. Instead, they found that they were supposed to add a few more guidelines to the already adopted selection criteria in order to identify school members who possessed leadership qualities; namely: (1) having high levels of commitment to improvement; (2) possessing the ability to take initiative; and (3) being highly respected by their peers for their expertise and good people skills.

Emerging Insights on School Improvement

- School improvement needs to begin by establishing a high sense of urgency for its need

- School improvement requires a highly skilled team in order to be able to lead change in their school
- School improvement requires a clear and shared vision with time dedicated to establishing a clear sense of direction in order to avoid people working individually, arguing endlessly, or depending on formal leaders for each move they make.
- Transformational change cannot be achieved without challenging and changing not only existing practices but also the professional beliefs and models that underlie them. The TAMAM pillars capture the practices and beliefs that guide the project as well as shape the vision for the kind of schools, practitioners, leaders and change process which it is trying to promote. Thus, one of the main goals in phase 2 of TAMAM is to support the school teams in order to anchor those practices and values in the school culture. Addressing the emerging organizational obstacles that hamper the improvement attempts is crucial for sustaining the change. Obstacles such as hindering structures, lack of training, and lack of support for the change need to be considered as opportunities for learning how to anchor the change rather than seen as excuses which justify the giving up on it. School teams must avoid declaring victory too soon. Similarly, they must hold off claiming success until these new practices become anchored in the school culture. Lastly, they should also keep in mind that transformative improvement takes time.

The TAMAM Pillars

Upon reaching the conclusion of the first phase of TAMAM, a set of principles were derived from the on-going reflective dialogue and the analysis of the data that the PST had collected on the work of the school teams. These principles emerged in response to the team

members' need to characterize what they started referring to as 'the TAMAM culture;' what later became known among the project participants as "the TAMAM pillars" (Figure 3).

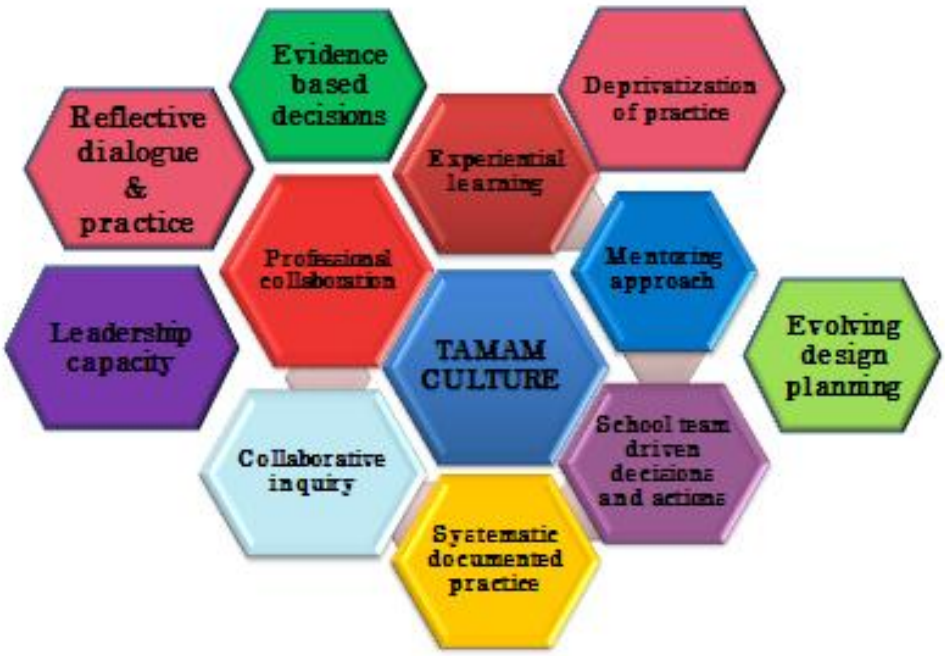

Figure 10: TAMAM pillars

These pillars served as the founding blocks of the teams' emerging vision regarding the school culture that TAMAM was trying to promote. Thus, the vision for the "improved schools" was linked to that of building a school culture rooted in inquiry where decisions were informed with 'evidence,' and where practitioners adopted inquiry as an integral part of their practice making them reflective practitioners willing to de-privatize their practice, engage in dialogue to find creative solutions to their problems, and lead their schools in an on-going process of learning and improvement.

The pillars also provide the PST or any university coaching team with a platform regarding what kind of change agents need to be prepared if the team is to trigger and prepare sustainable improvement at the school level.

The change agent practitioners need to be professionals with leadership skills, who know how to work in teams, reflect on their practice openly as individuals and as groups, conduct inquiry whenever the need for it arises, and lead change by being participative and inclusive especially of those who will be affected the most by the change they are initiating. Above all, these change agents should be willing to reflect critically and question prevailing practices as well as the norms and structures that support them. They should also use their inquiry skills to plan strategically, and monitor and evaluate the progress and outcome of their initiatives. They must then modify their course of action based on the evidence that they derive through their inquiry, professional dialogue, and collaborative reflections.

These change agents would actively participate in building a knowledge base in their country - about school-based change - by systematically documenting their practices and experiences and by adding their views to the analysis of these experiences for the sake of deriving theories of practice grounded in the cultural context of their schools, and their regions.

The approach used to train, and model, these change agents is rooted in theories that explore how adults learn; (namely vis-à-vis experiential learning, and reflection) approaches used to raise awareness on deeply held beliefs. The approach is based on non-directive mentoring, where learners are guided through their transformational learning journey by being presented with both challenges and support.

Reflections and Prospects

This section presents an overview of the challenges that the PST anticipates to face in its second phase. It concludes with a synthesis of the refined flow of PD activities based on the lessons learned and the challenges that still need to be addressed in TAMAM regarding the capacity building component of the project.

Remaining Challenges

Challenge 1

Most team members believed that their roles required that they act only as contributors to the school improvement which was driven by their school administration; they had no intention of becoming the initiators and driving the force behind this improvement themselves. As mentioned earlier, the PST encountered the challenge of having to break the old patterns of passivity among the teachers in order to trigger them into taking action towards improving their schools. For that, the PST emphasized the importance of the team's vision which focused on leading improvement in their school and offering training to sharpen their leadership skills [strategic planning, reflection, building collaborative teams, inquiry…]. However, while some positive gains on that front could be noted, most of the team members saw that the skills they had acquired - though necessary - were not enough to enable them to lead improvement initiatives at their schools irrespective of the formal position they occupied. In a focus group interview after workshop 6, one of the team members described his team's growing leadership skills. He explained, "We changed quite a bit after TAMAM. Now, whenever we encounter a problematic situation, we don't just look at it then walk away. That's what we learned; we can't just look at a problem and think 'there is nothing we can do,' then walk away to search for

someone in a formal position and expect him to take care of it. Now we feel like we have to search for evidence. Now we feel like we have to search for evidence. Now we raise the following questions: Why did it become like this? What can I do to solve the problem? How can I discover if it really is a problem or not?" Another team member added, "There's no particular position that you have to have in order to contribute to change at our school. All of us can sit and think together and make a change." The majority of the teams, on the other hand, still believed that either they were not ready yet to play a leadership role in their schools or that their schools/principals were not empowering them to play such a role. In workshop 5, one of the team members said, "All of us still don't feel that the input and expertise that we've acquired - until now - allow us to lead change and be change agents. We still don't feel that we've reached a point where we can spread the TAMAM culture." Another team member added, "We as teachers might participate in strategic planning. We can have a role in the planning but we are unsure as to how influential we could be; sometimes we are but most of the times we are not." Another participant touched on the challenge the current structural arrangements and expectations pose on the teachers' time. This participant remarked, "We deal with a lot of pressure in our work so even if we want to work on taking initiative we don't have time. So usually, the administration takes the initiatives but we would like them to support us so that we can do so as well."

Challenge 2

Most team members' understanding of the use of inquiry did not incorporate taking the initiative to: (1) examine the literature on the best practices available; and (2) critically explore the applicability of these practices in their own school context. Additionally, it also did not account for its transferability across cultural boundaries**.** Most school team members interacted

with the literature superficially and accepted as is, instead of approaching it as critical practitioners. “Knowledge” ‘produced in academia’ is perceived by most as being the only kind of trusted truth, and as transcending the realm of what many would allow themselves to question. Moreover, like most Arab educators, the participating practitioners had been infatuated with the advancements in the West and tended to apply whatever was marketed as being “effective” by introducing it to their schools. The teams’ choice of ‘innovative projects’ in their schools pointed to that fact; they got carried away with introducing cooperative learning methods, project-based learning, and inquiry-based teaching without giving any thorough consideration to how relevant all this was to their schools’ priorities in terms of faced problems, needs of students, as well as the readiness of their staff with regards to the introducing of these projects. Despite the school teams’ enthusiasm about inquiry and reflective practice, they completely avoided applying these skills in order to examine what the Western experts were recommending. Though the PST tried, on multiple occasions, to allude to this issue they failed to get the teams’ attention and hence failed to address it.

Challenge 3

For most teams, it was challenging to involve principals in building their own capacity as well as that of their school systems. Sarason (1996) pointed out that “teachers rightly resist and become discouraged if attempts at improvement demand changes from them yet do not require correspondingly deep changes in the school’s organizational structure, its leadership approaches, and in the deeply ingrained cultural patterns that hinder those changes in the schools”. Though TAMAM departed considerably from the existing norms in professional development by inviting the school principals to attend to all of the professional development activities [workshops and

follow-up meetings] the PST did not plan any specific activities targeted at building the capacity of the school leaders. The challenge that emerged as a result was twofold.

Firstly, with regards to the school teams who did not have their principals as active members, the training that the teams received created a gap between the new paradigm and practices they started to adopt, and the old ones that their principals still abided by. This became an additional obstacle for the teams especially when it was time for them to broaden the scope of their projects and share their learning school-wide. In fact, it was observed that the teams whose principals were members tended to do better in terms of: (1) engagement in the process; (2) open-mindedness to new learning; and (3) effectiveness in getting the support of other members within the school.

Secondly, the success of the next phase in TAMAM - whereby the original team was supposed to begin taking initiatives to lead school improvement and expand the scope of the project activities in their school - was strongly dependent on the school structure's - and the school culture's - ability to support these initiatives. As Sarason (1996) asserts "change takes root and flourishes only when teachers desire it and the culture of the school accepts it (p. 115). School leaders and principals play a key role in modifying their school structures and building these supportive conditions in order to motivate their teachers to change. Thus, the challenge for the PST is finding ways to make the school principals and supervisors engage in TAMAM as learners themselves. New PD activities are needed that target building the capacity of the school principals and those in key supervisory roles. The capacity building of the school leaders should prepare them to: (1) deal with the complexity of the change process; (2) identify potential

barriers; and (3) use their position power to create supportive conditions in order to allow the TAMAM trained leadership team to implement its improvement initiatives.

Challenge 4

Establishing channels and processes for on-going collaboration between practitioners at the schools, the university itself, and the policy-makers in the ministries of education proved to be a major challenge. The absence of coordination channels between policy makers, universities, and schools created a steep divide and constituted a major impediment to school reform attempts in the Arab world. Policy-makers in the Arab educational system neglected the importance of creating mechanisms of participation and coordination. They did not consider it as being an integral part of the design of their reform plans; a fundamental characteristic needed for promoting generative communication across the various educational stakeholders. The international literature on effective educational reform highlights several benefits from the establishment of coordination networks between policy-makers and practitioners both within the schools and across the whole educational system (Seller and Hannay, 2000; Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Fullan, 2007; Mclaughlin 1987, 1990). In the context of building capacity, the establishment of networking opportunities helps build a support system that would focus on what the school practitioners' perceived needs are.

Although the ministry representatives were considered - according to how the project was designed - an integral part of the project team, they ended up playing an observer role in the PD activities, and neither made active contributions to the professional development process nor provided support for the school improvement initiatives. The fact that the participating schools were private schools might have contributed to this situation, yet it was still necessary that the

PST find ways to involve those in contact with national policy-making in the supporting of the building of capacity and the implementation of the school teams' improvement initiatives.

Challenge 5

The PST had to face the challenging tasks of monitoring the PD process as it unfolds. In the first phase of TAMAM, the PST was responsible for several tasks: (1) exploring the literature for best practices; (2) researching the schools to understand their context and needs; (3) planning the scope and sequence of the PD activities; (4) implementing these activities through conducting workshops and providing continuous challenge and support to the school teams during their learning journey; and lastly (5) monitoring the progress of the implementation and making the needed adjustments to refine both the content and the process of the PD activities. Though performing these roles gave the PST a comprehensive understanding of the whole process, it compromised their ability to systematically document the progress and research it extensively. Staying responsive to the emerging school teams' needs and dealing with emerging challenges took precedence over keeping record of all the activities. The literature suggests (Wilson and Daviss, 1994; Chenoweth and Everhart, 2002; Fullan, 2007) that this challenge could have been met if an evaluation specialist had been invited to work alongside the PST throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of the PD. In such a case, the specialist's sole responsibility would have been the weighing and questioning of the decisions the PST would make with regards to the process and content of the PD activities. The close collaboration between the PST and the "specialist" could thus have helped the PST identify potential pitfalls and avoid the wasting of precious resources.

Challenge 6

The PST needed to find strategies to ensure the sustainability of the initial gains and to expand TAMAM to the whole school. Though TAMAM secured a long term kind of funding for the project, there were no guarantees that stated that it would receive the renewed commitment from the school teams or that all the schools would remain with the project in its second phase. Additionally, requiring the trained school teams to enter a long term commitment which would assert their promise to continue with the project activities, and to integrate their learning to their daily practice, necessitates both time and resources. School teams needed to be enabled go through more cycles of inquiry, reflection, and planning using the competencies they acquired in TAMAM both to expand the scope of their school improvement activities as well as to refine their internalization of these competencies into habits of minds.

Challenge 7

The TAMAM project steering team [PST] failed to adequately engage in self-examination and capacity building. Even though the PST members had clear values and philosophies which they preached, they remained 'trapped' assuming the traditional role of being the 'university experts' who were beyond accountability measures and who had reached 'terminal' degrees; thus no longer being in need of additional professional development. Though the team started the project with the intention of modeling the very competencies they had been coaching the schools on, they fell short in this regard especially when it came to continuously reflecting on their work, building their capacity to lead the training of others, and working collaboratively. In fact, while the PST had subjected the school teams to many challenges, it itself, followed the approach of traditional trainers in the region by neither seeking advice from

colleagues who underwent similar experiences, nor subjecting itself to similar kinds of challenges presented by its peers, regarding its decisions and actions. As such, their work went unchecked, and their capacity building was sporadic and guided by their personal initiatives instead of being systematically integrated in the PD activities of the project. Moreover, and despite some earlier attempts targeted at engaging in reflective dialogue, the pressures of work, and those of competing agendas, presented themselves as real barriers to achieving this goal.

Also, though the members of the PST agreed on the project assumptions, and extensively debated while planning for the workshops, the team members came from different specialty areas and did not have a common theoretical/conceptual base when it came to the foundations, processes, and tools associated with effective school improvement. The team rarely engaged in discussions related to constructing this common conceptual understanding and many of its members rarely made any attempts at expanding their knowledge base in that field of knowledge. In other words, they did not refer to the available literature on: (1) school improvement; (2) school change and its implementation; and (3) the leading of transformational change in schools; all of which constituted an essential foundation for the building of capacity in TAMAM.

Upcoming Steps: An Emerging TAMAM Journey for School Improvement.

In 2010, TAMAM officially launched its second phase. The main purpose of this phase was to expand TAMAM: (1) in the participating schools by enlarging the scope of its improvement activities and by means of including more members within the school communities; (2) to other schools within the participating countries, especially by reaching out to schools in the public sector; and (3) to new schools in new countries. The foundation of this

expansion was based on the project assumptions, original goals, as well as on the new insights and lessons learned during the first phase.

Stemming from the lived experience and the lessons learned through the TAMAM PD experience, as well as from the identified remaining challenges with the initial nine participating schools, the blueprints for the "TAMAM journey for school improvement" were developed (see figure 4).

As mentioned earlier, the PST was trying its best to monitor the process of planning and implementation of the PD activities. They gathered data through observations as well as through interviews, in order to capture the views of the participants. They then analyzed the data and developed the pillars and the scope and sequence of the PD journey. They also continuously engaged in reflective dialogue about its representativeness; both with the participating school teams as well as within the PST itself. The following representation of the journey represents the best refined version to date of the TAMAM PD experience. This representation will be put to the test again as it would be guiding the steps of the university coaches working with new school teams in phase two, and hence, would be subject to modifications, refinements, and improvements based on the data that the coaches would be gathering as they monitor the implementation of this journey in the contexts of the school teams they would be coaching.

As is, the TAMAM PD journey invites schools to: (1) begin with whatever knowledge, skills, and experience they already possess; (2) develop an awareness of their assets and challenges; (3) view improvement as a process not a goal; (4) aim for individual transformational learning and institutional re-culturing; (4) be flexible and responsive to the contextual demands; and (5) adjust the course of the journey accordingly. The TAMAM pillars capture the

foundational principles that guide both the processes and the content of the journey. At the start of this journey, the schools are asked to form teams comprising of administrators, teachers, and supervisors with the purpose of initiating and leading the school improvement process. The parallel goal of engaging in the journey is for the sake of developing the capacity of the school teams in order to lead school improvement. In the first phase, the school teams would focus on going through the journey and acquiring various skills along the way; namely inquiry, professional collaboration, dialogue, reflective practice, planning, evidence-based decision making, inquiry, monitoring and evaluation. In the second phase, the teams would continue the journey, either following up on the same focus or choosing a new one. However, in this second phase they would be asked to act as coaches in order to build the capacity of the additional teams around their schools. Moreover, the teams would be expected to identify the structural, human, and cultural barriers they would encounter in their attempts to expand the scope of TAMAM within their schools. With that in mind, they would be presented with the chance to sustain the changes they introduced, refine and internalize their acquired skills, and increase their leadership potential and the ability to exercise 'skillful participation' in the decision-making process at their school for the sake of contributing to the transformation/re-culturing of their schools. All through both phases, the school teams, and the university coaches that support them, would maintain a record of their experiences. This systematic documentation would allow school teams as well as university coaches to disseminate their experiences to a wider audience. More importantly it would become the basis for deriving empirically grounded assertions about school-based improvements in the Arab cultural context. It would then become possible to derive a theoretical model which would conceptualize these experiences giving credence for the building of a

culturally-grounded knowledge base regarding school improvement in the region. This very report is one installment which documents the university coaches' experience during the first phase of the journey.

The TAMAM Journey will proceed as follows: The selected school teams will be required to work on a school improvement project of their choice. The focus of the improvement project will have to be related to an identified felt need; established after having secured a broad base agreement for its urgency and its alignment with the school vision and strategic goals. In preparation, the PST will invite the school teams to explore the surrounding context to raise their awareness regarding their progress in the journey, and regarding the existing conditions in the country (national initiatives taken by the ministry of education, as well as the most recent improvement attempts at their school). The PST will then collect data about the schools in an attempt to get acquainted with the school team members, their background, and level of readiness in terms of the competencies, skills, and beliefs associated with the TAMAM pillars. The journey will comprise: (1) the identification of a problem; (2) the designing of an intervention needed for addressing this problem; (3) the implementation of this intervention; (4) the evaluation of its impact; and finally (5) the taking of actions based on this evaluation. The actions taken could either: (1) investigate new facets of the problem; (2) make decisions in order to set policies to institute the intervention; or (3) modify existing structures and processes in order to remove barriers for the effective implementation of the innovative intervention. Throughout this journey, school teams are expected to pass through cycles of inquiry that would allow them to gather data and reach insights that they need for taking action and moving forward along the journey; ultimately reaching their goals for improvement. The inquiry cycle will entail

the selection of a focus, the collection and analysis of data, the reaching of a conclusion, and finally, the taking of an action.

The school teams could choose to "enter" the journey at any point: either to identify a certain problem of practice, design a solution, implement an adopted intervention and monitor its implementation, or to evaluate an existing innovative improvement initiative that has already been implemented.

School teams will first examine and take note of their current school practices in light of their school vision. When they become mindful of those, they will identify a need, understand the different facets and parameters of this need, decide on which facets they want to focus on, understand the nature of this need in relation to a target group and in relation to the school's vision and mission, and then finally, rationalize the reason this need was chosen while analyzing the significance it holds with regards their school. If the focus is on identifying and solving a certain problem, then the team would need to collect data, ask colleagues, or review the existing literature for the purpose of identifying the problem and checking for possible interventions that might present a solution. On the contrary, if the focus is on evaluating an intervention, then the team would be required to carry out extensive data collection and analysis for the purpose of evaluating all the aspects of the designed intervention needed for reviewing and assessing its practices/plans/goals as well as its obtained results.

As a next step, school teams would form a vision for improving their school, where they would develop an ideal scenario by envisioning the project in an exemplary setting then setting improvement goals for it. Teachers would then look for the alternative strategies needed for reaching these goals. Afterwards, school teams would design their intervention by setting their

objectives, indicators of success, and the activities they would need to pursue as well as the resources they would be in need of for the implementation of the intervention. School teams must then plan the implementation of their intervention while also devising a monitoring and evaluation plan. For the planning of their implementation, school teams should describe the how they would implement their intervention. They must also disclose how they would carry out the procedure - which they should set a specific deadline for - during this implementation. For the planning of the monitoring and evaluation, school teams must set the criteria which they would use to monitor the progress and effectiveness of their intervention - during their implementation of it - by determining the monitoring stops and by following the specific criteria they set for themselves. During the evaluation, school teams should assess the impact their intervention has on the school teams and on the school culture as a whole. For this purpose, school teams should select the sources of data they plan to use and determine the data collection and analysis methods which they will later decide to adopt. School teams should then apply their intervention and evaluate it following the plan they had set for themselves. As a result, they will then report the results they achieved and disseminate them. Based on their evaluation, school teams will make decisions regarding how to proceed next. They might either decide to introduce a new policy or change an already existing one. All these decisions must be supported with evidence obtained from the intervention and the impact it had on the participants. On the other hand, and based on the evaluation, teachers could, instead, decide to improve the intervention and refine their old focus; hence directing them towards a new design for an alternative intervention. And thus, the cycle would continue.

Figure 11: TAMAM School Improvement Journey

Throughout this journey, school teams would be constantly invited to actively participate in events and activities in order to include their voice in the ongoing process of monitoring and planning of the project and its PD activities. This continuous involvement of the school teams in shaping the direction and strategies of the TAMAM project would demystify the school improvement process to them; offering them tools that would help them become proactive in initiating and leading change in their schools. The fact that the school teams would have direct access to the support of their schools' policy-makers and to the guidance of their university coaches, will empower them as they would later help their peers at the school level become

proactive, recognize needs, discover solutions, and be open to continuously adapting all such solutions in their monitoring of their effectiveness.

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