

**STE06549**

**SYMPOSIUM HAR06457: Developing Leaders: A Middle Eastern  
perspective**

**Paper 2: Developing curriculum leadership for UAE principals, teachers  
and Ministry personnel**

**Dr. Lauren Stephenson, College of Education, Zayed University, United Arab  
Emirates**

**ABSTRACT**

*Zayed University's Center for Professional Development (CPD) assists UAE K-12 teachers, and educational administrators to develop their practice so that they may, by example, participate in the reform of the UAE educational system, the Center operates outreach programs and research agendas focused on educational improvement to accomplish this goal.*

*The Center is currently working with a number of partnerships and this paper will discuss the development of four very different communities of practice and their approaches to curriculum leadership, partnership relationships, and the maximization of social and human capital. This paper compares outcomes, successes and challenges that impacted each partnership. Some of the issues that arose include the role of the project manager, the value of distributed leadership, levels of decision making, work relations and processes, and training versus education. The initial findings indicate that the individual and collective learning as a result of these developing learning communities contributes to a new, evolving and organic model of professional learning which encourages a focus on long-term solutions for educational leadership in the UAE.*

**Introduction**

Zayed University's Center for Professional Development (CPD) assists UAE K-12 teachers, and educational administrators to develop their practice so that they may, by example, participate in the reform of the UAE educational system, the Center operates outreach programs and research agendas focused on educational improvement to accomplish this goal.

The Center is currently working with a number of partnerships and this paper discusses the development of four very different communities of practice and their approaches to curriculum leadership, partnership relationships, and the maximization of social and human capital.

The paper contributes to the knowledge base on professional learning in several ways:

- Developing a better understanding and analysis of teacher professional learning
- Development and implementation of a new model of teacher professional learning

- Developing a framework that has a potential application in other contexts
- Evaluation of an interdisciplinary application of teacher professional learning.

### **Professional Development/Learning**

The literature is replete with information and recommendations about factors that lead to success in professional development. This material tends to take a summative perspective on the products of professional development (e.g. level of teacher use of new ideas or strategies, impact on student learning). However few studies have sought to determine the nature of teacher learning during the process of professional development.

The model suggested by Sergiovanni (2000) offers a framework that allows for further exploration of professional learning. His systems view of change focuses on interacting units including the individual, the institution, the workflow and the political system. For professional learning to be best facilitated an approach that encompasses both individual and collective learning in practice seems to be most promising. This view is apparent in Kennedy's (2005) perspective where she suggests that a combination of practices and conditions support a 'transformative' agenda. Here, an effective integration of a range of professional learning models including an action research model and a communities of practice model, together with an awareness of issues of power, are critical to enhance positive change and professional learning.

### **Communities of Practice**

Social theories of learning recognise that learning in the workplace is both a cognitive and social activity (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Gherardi, Nicolini & Odella, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lemke, 1997; Wenger, 1998). Learning is not an individual process separated from our daily activities and experience but rather occurs by acting, reflecting and talking with others. Lave and Wenger's (1991) practice based theory of learning takes the position that learning occurs in communities of practice. Similarly, Brown & Duguid (1991:41) argue that "the composite concept of 'learning in working' best represents the fluid evolution of learning through practice." Their position is that through the practices of communities, work, learning and innovation are influenced and enhanced and that learning in the workplace is best understood in terms of the communities being formed or joined and identities being changed (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

Wenger (1998) likewise takes the view that learning occurs in both the context of lived experience and through social participation. For him social practice is the fundamental process by which learning occurs. When people interact together in a particular social setting, community or culture they learn and evolve.

Cognitive activity is part of our everyday social configurations, social practices, situated experiences and social formation as well as how such learning occurs through our social and cultural networks (Gherardi et al, 1998; Wenger, 1998). This social learning perspective provides a conceptual framework for thinking about teacher professional learning because it integrates the components necessary to characterise social participation.

It also recognises the intersubjectivity of organisational knowledge and the interpretative nature of the learning process (Mahler, 1997; Lemke, 1997; Wenger, 1998).

Key elements in the learning process include ongoing practice, communication, relationships, power, interpretation and subjectivity. When individual members struggle together to apply their experience to routines, address conflicts and solve problems learning occurs through sharing interpretations, reflecting on those interpretations and taking action in response. This action and reflection can result in changed practices.

*Learning is thought to be an especially informed and effective type of change because it represents conscious effort to interpret and analyse results in order to correct problems rather than blind reaction to crisis (Mahler, 1997: 519).*

Nonaka (1994) argues that knowledge and learning is the result of continuous dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge. Individuals, groups and organisations can change tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. That is, where there are people in interaction, learning exists.

Not surprisingly studying teacher professional learning and the emotionality of learning is challenging for researchers. Implicit learning can be problematic to detect without extensive observation. It is possible to show changes in behaviours and actions but not changes in thoughts or awareness. Therefore, we adopted an autoethnographic case study methodology to allow our own learning to be measured as action, changed practice and/or raised awareness.

The University's Center for Professional Development had been closely involved in supporting individual and collective learning of teachers and administrators in local schools, and was moving to a *Development/Improvement Model* of teacher professional development (Stephenson, 2004), which engaged teachers in problem solving and thinking about learning, inquiry and self assessment, curriculum design and helping activities such as mentoring. Such an approach supported the provision of continuous and cumulative professional development experiences over time, was responsive to teachers as developing adult learners and aimed to transform teachers' conceptual understandings of teaching and student learning.

While much was known about the characteristics of school-based professional development in other international settings, little research had been done in the UAE using ethnographic approaches. The four projects discussed in this paper thus aimed to uncover important local data to inform the change process in public and private schools in the UAE, as well as contributing to the international literature on the topic and further, to inform policy and practice within the Center for Professional Development. Secondly they aimed to build a comprehensive picture of teacher experiences as various educational institutions undertook the process of professional development curricular and assessment reform, and to provide ethnographic case study accounts of school-based curriculum and pedagogical strategy reform through professional development.

## **The Projects**

Each of the projects had a set of initial research questions to guide the study but others emerged as the projects developed.

### ***Al Athaba Private School***

Al Athaba Private School, (APS) a local private school with two campuses (A& B) requested one such professional development program. The school was staffed by a diverse range of faculty on short term contracts. The researchers had been invited to participate in the planning of this school-based approach to making changes in curriculum and assessment.

The following initial questions guided the study:

- To what extent and in what ways will the school-based development change existing relationships, roles, and practices within the schools?
- What is the impact of the changes on teachers, administrators?
- How well do theories about the process of change within schools explain the situation in a particular school in the UAE context?
- What model (if any) of change is adopted?

While these questions provided an *initial* focus for investigation, it was expected that the nature of the research would lead to further questions emerging from the data and it was envisaged that new questions would continue to arise as the work progressed.

When evaluating progress in the project, it was apparent that several issues had impacted on the lack of development of communities of practice in the early stages of the project. These include the logistics of staff turnover, the identified need for distributed leadership, levels of decision making, work relations and processes, communication and access to information, and training versus education. The initial findings indicated that the reality of implementing this approach to school curriculum reform and renewal can sometimes run counter to the rhetoric. It became evident that there was a mismatch between the espoused values of the school's leaders and administrative team and the manner in which the project aims were supported or hindered.

### ***MOE Action Research***

The Center for Professional Development was contracted by the Ministry of Education in late Fall 2005 to run its fourth series of workshops with Arabic-speaking supervisors. It was agreed to implement these using a new model which had the following characteristics:

- Preparation of main resources and materials were done by ZU faculty
- A team of bilingual 'lead supervisors' (chosen from the English supervisors who had already completed successful AR projects) joined the ZU faculty and assisted with translation of key documents and presentation slides.

- The 'lead supervisors' delivered content directly to the Arabic-speaking supervisors without the need for initial presentations in English.
- The lead supervisors each took responsibility for 2 teams of subject supervisors and supported and facilitated the planning and implementation of AR projects with these teams. This was done both during and between workshops.
- ZU faculty took responsibility for the overall preparation of the 'lead' supervisors, implementation of the workshops, and for responding to specific academic and research questions or concerns that needed further clarification. They also provided some assistance to the new English supervisor participants and other project groups as requested.
- AR projects were 'grounded' in the everyday practice and professional concerns of each team of supervisors and findings were directly relevant to their work.

A series of 7 workshops was implemented between November 2005 and February 2006, culminating in the public presentation of nine successfully completed projects in the areas of English, Math, Science, Islamic Studies and Social Studies.

The following initial questions guided the study:

- What is the impact of the AR initiative on supervisors and administrators?
- How effective is the professional development model in implementing change?

Responses from the majority of participants indicated that their experiences in the program had been worthwhile and had left them with confidence to continue with the approach independently. In addition to the development of practical knowledge and skills, the collegial nature of the experience had been appreciated by the participants.

The most valuable aspects identified by the MOE, Supervisors and ZU include:

- Collegial development
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Better communication in bilingual situations
- Improved knowledge and skills of AR, teaching, learning and assessment
- Appreciation of the practical experience
- Perceived benefits for professional work, teachers and the curriculum

Some concerns and suggestions for change were raised but most of these related to logistics of travel, timetable, and translation. The content and program delivery had satisfied most participants.

All participants completed and presented an action research project in their subject teams. The projects were grounded in day to day concerns, were motivating for the participants and resulted in concrete findings that can impact on the supervisors' further work in the schools. The lead supervisors were also satisfied with the overall program and delivery and their involvement had increased their own professional leadership skills, and understanding of the research process.

Our experience with the organization and delivery of the action research program has shown that this model of professional development does work and has value for future Zayed University/Ministry of Education projects, especially where Arabic-speaking personnel are involved. The advantages of the model included the following:

- Grounded in the practical realities of participants' work
- Drew on participants' needs and interests
- Used a team based approach to planning and implementation of projects
- Focused on small, manageable and achievable projects

### ***Indian Private School***

Another professional development program was requested by a local private Indian private school (IPS) with two campuses (one for male students (3000) and the other for female students (5000)). The school was staffed by a largely Indian faculty (400+) on short term contracts. The researchers had been invited to participate as trainers in the planning of this school-based approach to make changes in teaching and learning strategies.

The following initial questions guided the study:

- As a result of this model of professional development, in what ways and to what extent do teachers report they change their relationships, roles, and practices within the school?
- What is the impact of the changes on teachers, administrators?
- How appropriate is this model for schools in the UAE?
- What improvements can be made to this model?

Similar issues to those in the Athaba Private School impacted on the development of communities of practice in the early stages of this project. The initial findings indicated that the success of implementing this approach requires supportive principalship, distributed leadership and a culture supportive of individual and collective ongoing professional learning.

### ***Institute of Technology***

This study was designed as an ongoing longitudinal case study using autoethnographic techniques. Once again, it described and analysed the learnings of the authors who were involved in a professional development program organized by the CPD. We were commissioned to initiate a 'learning community' in the Business College of a local Institute of Technology (IOT) and worked with the institution over a 5 month period, conducting workshops at regular intervals with a total of 26 members of the department and faculty from other sections.

We aimed to highlight the interrelationship between perception and reality as vital to qualitative approaches and to encourage researchers to investigate their reality more fully

by practicing the art of autoethnography in the context of professional development model design. The project thus uncovered important local data to inform professional development design and, concurrently, the change process in educational institutions in the UAE, as well as contributing to the international literature on the topic. Further, it informed policy and practice within the Center for Professional Development.

The autoethnography aimed to build a comprehensive picture of facilitator experiences as an institution undertook the process of professional development and teaching practice reform. The following questions provided an initial focus for our investigation:

- How do we [the trainers] improve our practice of professional development design and delivery?
- How effective are we in broadening participants' knowledge of best practice teaching and learning?
- How effective are we in exploring the process of changing practice?
- How effective is the 'co-constructed inquiry' model as a method for changing practice?

In this project we used a professional development model based on Lave & Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and Wenger et al's (2002) theories of learning as social participation in the workplace. The project aimed to develop a professional learning model that was co-constructed by participants, based on specific individual and collective needs, and grounded in classroom inquiry. The model started at the institutional level where the people for whom the professional development was intended, the teachers themselves, selected topics related to their needs. This gave them ownership of the process from the outset and helped maintain the reform momentum. Professional development sessions were co-constructed by university faculty and teachers in such a way that the outcomes of the total program could be clearly stated and measured to give direction to the improvement efforts. Activities were designed around a central tenet that all professional development should be designed to improve students' learning outcomes. The focus of inquiry was the nature of individual and collective professional learning and the impact of the particular model in a tertiary learning environment.

In the next section I compare outcomes, successes and challenges that impacted the partnerships. Some of the issues that arose include staff turnover, the value of distributed leadership and decision making, work relations and processes, communication and training versus education.

## **Successes and Challenges that Impacted the Partnerships**

### ***Logistics of staff turnover***

A key issue that impacted on the projects was staff turnover. The majority of staff across all institutions were expatriates on short term contracts and, for some, there was a

reluctance to invest in the kind of long term commitment required for the types of professional development programs we were offering and to build communities of practice. There was also reluctance on the part of some of the school administrators to invest in professional development programs that extended beyond the one- off workshop approach.

### ***Distributed leadership and decision making***

For Glickman et al. (2001:49) ‘distributed leadership’ is the number one characteristic required for an ‘improving school’, a ‘school that continues to improve student learning outcomes for all students over time’. Leaders are responsible for learning and effective leaders encourage design, teach, steward, build a shared vision and encourage individuals to challenge existing mental models (Belasen, 1998; Senge, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Sergiovanni, 1996). Leaders recognise the complexity of teachers’ work, provide time to learn, and encourage work processes that allow people to collaborate and cooperate by doing things together (Blasé, Blasé, Anderson & Dungan, 1995; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Senge et al., 2000; Sergiovanni, 1996). Shared leadership occurred in three of the four projects.

Within the IPS, the MOE program, and the IOT there was distributed leadership amongst participants and senior management. Our interactions with administrators and participants reflected this pattern. They fostered communication and shared project ideas so that we could all work collaboratively towards a shared goal.

Values were shared and an understanding of the nature of the professional development program was apparent. On the whole, the leadership supported the facilitators’ philosophy and principles of professional learning for school improvement despite some minor contextual constraints. Key teachers and supervisors were able to share the decision making about various aspects of the professional learning program. As previously mentioned, when hierarchical models of leadership are predominant, decision making across the levels are significantly impacted. In order to facilitate individual learning, a leader’s actions and decisions should consider building and sustaining relationships (Addleson, 1998). This is exactly how the program leaders tried to operate. Teacher input appeared to be valued and teachers had a voice in the process through their immediate supervisors.

However, at *Al Athaba School*, there was no distributed leadership amongst HODs, teachers and senior management, and our interactions with the HRD reflected a similar pattern. While she had an administrative leadership role, she acted as a ‘gatekeeper’ between us and other school leaders, blocking our aim of sharing the project ideas and working collaboratively towards a shared goal.

Overall, there appeared to be neither shared values nor a shared understanding of the two campuses’ school curriculum, the use of course books, materials and assessment procedures. Without consensus, individuals taught in isolation often at cross purposes with other teachers’ learning objectives. Teachers claimed that the students’ learning experiences needed streamlining and teachers remained frustrated that ultimately

ineffective leadership negatively impacted students. The researchers also felt varying degrees of frustration as our research philosophy and principles of professional development for school improvement were being compromised through these contextual constraints.

For effective professional development to occur there needs to be upward and horizontal communication that is open and honest. If relationships are not built among people and interaction does not occur then individual learning is thwarted at various organisational levels (Addleson, 1998; Frank, 1985; Fullan, 1993, Sergiovanni, 1994; Trowler & Knight, 1999; Trowler & Turner, 2002). Writers (e.g. Kim, 2002; Witt et al., 2000) note that participative leadership, collaborative decision-making and consultation are more effective means of creating communities of practice, shared understandings and effective school improvement.

### ***Work relations and processes***

#### *Building relationships*

In each of the four projects the importance of building relationships with the project managers, participants and amongst the participants was critical. As Fullan (2004:77) claims “the relationships make the difference.” Throughout the professional learning programs as we developed and implemented each model we were involved to varying degrees in a process of negotiation. In the earlier projects our communication was initially less effective which resulted in a mismatch between facilitator and client expectations. Once we were able to communicate more frequently and in a variety of ways we were better able to make tacit assumptions explicit, address concerns, explore learnings and challenge “the way things are done around here” (Schein, 1985).

Throughout the projects we became aware that our view of our role as facilitators was initially being contested by many of the participants who wanted us to deliver ‘expert’ content and give them clear direction. Gradually, except for the APS, they moved from a position where they expected a lot of direction to one where they could ‘let go’ and take control of the professional learning process themselves.

In the IOT project through ongoing reflection, discussion and action we were able to explore individual and collective constructs in relation to the way we should continue to deliver the professional learning program and the Business Department’s vision and goals. Exploring the relationship between individual and collective beliefs, values and assumptions enabled us to come up with a shared approach to enhance knowledge, skills and attitudes in the context of professional practice.

#### *Collaboration*

In the IOT, our preferred action research professional learning model focused on developing the participants’ understandings of their teaching situation as well as practice within their institution (Kennedy, 2005). Although collaboration is not a prerequisite of an action research model, we believe that action research has a greater impact on practice when it is undertaken in communities of practice (Weiner, 2002 and Burbank & Kauchack,

2003). Taking a more systemic view, our model contests the traditional transmission training model by encouraging interaction among the components of the system (Sergiovanni, 2000). As the IOT program progressed, facilitators, program managers and participants became more committed to integrating a communities of practice model with an action research one.

In all but the APS project, through practice, reflection, feedback, theory and time the development of communities of practice had begun to create positive change and facilitate the creation of an environment in which individuals and teams were empowered to act. This building collaborative relationships with others enabled “coalitions for change” (Ancona, 2005). Working toward common goals enabled individuals to make connections with others, learning individually and collectively through sharing a variety of opinions and perspectives on teaching and learning. In the fourth project classroom based inquiry involved suspending judgment and trying to understand how an individual moved from data to interpretation, evaluation and finally action.

#### *Power sharing*

Throughout the projects the significance of power and agendas (personal and institutional) was apparent. In each of the projects questions were raised about whose agendas were being addressed during the initial program planning and discussion. And yet, as the programs progressed, and as suggested by Kennedy (2005), it was when the realization and consideration of conflicting agendas and philosophies occurred that the researchers could engage in real reflection and debate, leading to the kind of debate amongst facilitators, project managers and participants that could lead to “transformative practice.” As a result our professional learning model provided an alternative role to the passive role often imposed on teachers in more traditional models of professional development and what was initially proposed by the client.

As the IOT program unfolded we moved more toward power sharing and that power took the form of influence sharing. This was evident in the change that occurred from an initial mismatch of goals to a position where the learning goals were shared and the leadership became more distributed between the facilitators, administrators and some of the participants. By the latter stages of the fourth project, participants had taken ownership and were accountable and responsible for the outcomes (Barry 1991).

When motivated, competent individuals work together as a team toward shared goals, albeit with different perspectives, they are a powerful force in problem solving; usually much more so than an individual (Kruger & Mieszkowski, 1998; Michaelson, Watson & Black, 1989). Work processes in APS were largely individual rather than collaborative. Some teachers stated that they had unspoken ways of doing things such as “dummying down” work and tests so students had some success and parents were kept happy. The researchers requested copies of school policies on several occasion, however these were either not documented or else comprised brief descriptions of processes rather than detailed guidelines. Nor were they transparent across the two campuses. As a result departments were isolated, and the campuses had developed different organizational cultures. The

professional development program was significantly hindered by the lack of researchers' interaction with teachers and the sharing of work processes prior to the program's delivery.

### *Communication*

From the outset at APS the HRD and the senior academic adviser were strongly supportive of the goals of the project and the rhetoric reinforced their commitment. However over time the HRD became frustrated at what appeared to be a lack of progress and lack of interest by the teachers in the professional development planned, even though the topics were developed from the data base provided by the initial teachers' survey. What we noted was that teachers needed to air frustrations about difficulties in moving towards school improvement. Although some tried to communicate their concerns to school leaders these did not appear to be heard or understood. Hence their commitment to the program was questioned. The process of airing complaints and concerns is an integral part in the change process (Fullan, 1993). If this is not permitted, it has a negative impact on morale. Frank, (1985) for example, notes that individuals cease to share their ideas with management and turn to alternate means to express themselves such as the 'grapevine' (Kreps, 1990). The importance of allowing staff to voice concerns was not clearly understood by the HRD despite discussions about this with the researchers. She seemed fearful that allowing such dissent would undermine her authority.

The researchers' communications with the HRD were characterized by inconsistency and fragmentation. Meetings or workshops were frequently postponed or delayed, and emails and phone calls were not answered, while the researchers waited for information and documents that we thought had been agreed to. The mismatch between what action items were agreed in meetings, and the follow up, was disturbing for the researchers as it left us feeling disempowered and with the impression that the HRD was following a different agenda. According to Rountree and Marsh (1997), communication strategies must support decision-making processes. They state that rapid communication and decisive action are necessary in quickly changing environments.

One explanation for this may have been that the HRD found it difficult to gather the information and materials because policy documentation was fragmented, and the system was compartmentalized with little horizontal communication between departments.

Another explanation might be found in a cultural perspective. In Arab culture, if someone does not want to follow a course of action, they will not state this upfront, but rather will use delay and postponement of a decision in the hope that the other person will decide not to pursue the action. This is a face saving strategy that is understood by others in the culture but can be frustrating for outsiders who may be unsure whether or not to continue with the original course of action.

Communication was predominantly top down and formal. The HRD called meetings with HODs who represented the teachers and told them what would be covered in the professional development program. Regrettably what the teachers were told was sometimes different from what the researchers and the HRD had agreed to.

When researchers met with the HRD, typically the researchers listened and the HRD talked about her plans. Over and over again it was apparent that she was not hearing what was being suggested by the researchers which led to a certain amount of communication breakdown.

In contrast, the IPS, MOE and IOT program leaders made a conscious effort to facilitate the development of the learning communities and the CoPs within them. Specifically at IPS, the principal constantly shared his vision of learning and as advocated by Blasé and Blasé (1998), he was available to students, parents and staff, which enhanced motivation, self-esteem, sense of security, and morale within the school. The facilitators typically left each meeting with the principal having agreed that we were ‘managers of a process’, engaged in joint leadership with school personnel. We saw ourselves as consultants facilitating a project that the principal had identified and was moving forward. During our meetings the principal reported on the “*walk through visits*” to classrooms and the observations he had made. He was well informed about the progress of the project and discussed his strategies for encouraging the teachers and supervisors to remain focussed on incorporating cooperative learning strategies into their teaching.

For effective professional development to occur there needs to be upward and horizontal communication that is open and honest. If relationships are not built among people and interaction does not occur then individual learning is thwarted at various organisational levels (Addleson, 1998; Frank, 1985; Fullan, 1993, Sergiovanni, 1994; Trowler & Knight, 1999; Trowler & Turner, 2002).

### ***Training versus education***

The researchers involved in each program shared the philosophy that professional learning is personal, individual, collective and ongoing. For example, the APS program was developed with the HRD and Academic adviser in response to the latter’s initial request for a coordinated and coherent professional development program. Their rhetoric was of shared values and principles of collaboration and sharing, and yet the reality, as we attempted to implement these through the program, was very different. It appeared that some teachers wanted templates or ‘recipes’ for how to do things rather than work through tasks together. Others indicated that they only valued professional development as workshops where the experts provided the input and their role was one of information receiver. In the IPS, MOE and IOT programs, participants and administrators were willing to “walk the talk” and encouraged individual and collective discovery learning through our facilitation of professional learning sessions. The findings indicate that the individual and collective learning as a result of these developing learning communities contributed to a new, evolving and organic model of professional learning which encourages a focus on long-term solutions for educational leadership in the UAE.

## **The Development of Our New Model**

The model that we developed draws on our experiences over the three year period of involvement in professional learning in the UAE (see Harold & Stephenson, 2006). During that time as our own learning journey has weathered mistakes, challenges, successes and celebrations, our approaches to teacher learning have evolved considerably. Following this most recent experience - a five month process of lived experience, continual reflection and practice - we had refined a model that combines collaborative action research and the development of communities of practice. Our model draws on Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning recognizing that learning happens as a result of interaction within communities and as such action research can better create change when it is shared in communities of practice (Burbank & Kauchack, 2003). Our model facilitates changes in practice and enables what Kennedy (2005) refers to as "transformative" professional learning where both professional autonomy and collective learning are valued. The negotiation and contestation between facilitators and participants resulted in the latter taking an increasing level of autonomy and responsibility for their learning. They moved from a position of interdependence to one of independence. In developing this model, our initial learnings suggest some inherent guiding principles:

- Participants work in collaboration to foster individual and collective learning
- Participants define the intended learning outcomes and learning activities
- Participants engage in learning activities in their own work place
- Participants are given resources to plan and implement inquiry, reflection and evaluation
- Participants recognize that professional learning is context specific, time consuming, messy, and fluid.

## **Conclusion**

Our work as facilitators of professional learning in the Middle Eastern context has been an ongoing journey that has expanded our own professional learning in significant ways. We have been working in a cross-cultural context, with varying mixes of native speakers, second language speakers and differing cultural and institutional expectations. The process of professional development is not straightforward. During this process we have made assumptions, mistakes and errors of judgement, but throughout, our own learning has evolved and developed .

Whilst acknowledging that there are many effective ways that teacher professional learning can be organized, we believe that our model has much potential, particularly in this environment. In the UAE there has been an over emphasis on the one-off workshop model of professional development. The traditional transmission of knowledge model has taken precedence over transformative models and outsiders who have been deemed to have the expertise have been "brought in to teach." However, times are changing and as various educational institutions and government bodies look for alternate ways to cope with the

rapid change brought about by critical societal imperatives, they seek to draw on the human capital within their communities to promote effective teaching and learning for all and, as such there are many more opportunities to implement such a collaborative practice-based model.

This research holds important implications for theory as well as practice and advances knowledge in the areas of professional learning, informal learning and the implementation of a research methodology such as autoethnography.

First, our professional learning model expands the idea that learning is embedded only in the cognitive worlds of individuals (Richter, 1998). Instead, it recognises that life in the workplace is socially and culturally structured and co-constructed; it is constantly changing through the learning that occurs in everyday activities and lived experiences amongst and through its members (Stephenson, 2004; Harold & Stephenson, 2006). Thus, as learning occurs in communities, through social practice and situated lived experience, it leads to social formation (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) and culture change (Harold & Stephenson, 2006).

Second, few studies have focused on professional learning in a variety of educational institutions in the Gulf and apart from our own previous work (Harold & Stephenson, 2005; Stephenson & McNally, 2006; Harold & Stephenson, 2006) no other studies that we are aware of have used ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches to focus on participants' and facilitators' professional learning to examine the effectiveness of a professional learning model.

Third, having reviewed methods used by researchers in sociology, cultural anthropology, education, organisational development we have adapted ethnographic perspectives to develop a reflexive case study perspective as a way of capturing formal and informal professional learning.

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