

# **The Radical Modernization of School and Education System Leadership in the United Arab Emirates: Towards an Indigenized and Educative Leadership<sup>1</sup>**

Reynold Macpherson, Pieter Kachelhoffer and Medhat El Nemr<sup>2</sup>

*International Studies in Educational Administration*, 2007, 35(1), 60-77.

**Abstract:** This case study of school and systemic reform in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) begins with a highly critical evaluation of the national system of schooling. It will identify the indigenous theory of modernization that lies behind the reform program just allocated AED 48 billion (USD 13 billion) for the next 10 years. It will indicate the unique requirements of the reform program now being planned and mounted by the Ministry of Education and each of the Emirates' education councils (or equivalent). The paper will then explain how Abu Dhabi University (ADU) has developed two new masters programs (in teaching and learning, and in educational leadership) to help transform the capacities of the nation's current professionals. It will be argued that, despite the use of external standards, a fresh blend of theory and praxis unique to the UAE will need to be developed as lead teachers and school and system managers are encouraged to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential to whole system reform. The most immediate challenge is to engage a critical mass of current professionals in a process of becoming educative managers and leaders; enabling colleagues to learn and to create learning organizations. The case highlights the interplay of historical, cultural, political and economic factors that tend to drive national educational reform agendas, while also reflecting the presence of common factors; principally the impact of information and communication technology (ICT), many forms of globalization, the internationalization of knowledge about effective educational

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally delivered to an international symposium concerned with recreating linkages between theory and praxis in educational leadership at the CCEAM Conference, University of Cyprus, 12-14 October, Nicosia, Cyprus. It was developed in the light of many insightful questions asked at the symposium.

<sup>2</sup> Abu Dhabi University, available at Reynold.Macpherson@adu.ac.ae; Pieter Kachelhoffer@adu.ac.ae; medhat.elnemr@adu.ac.ae

leadership, and the wilfulness of reflective and determined leaders. It also reflects on some of the dilemmas potentially created by the globalization of leadership standards developed in an American context, and suggest how, with judicious leadership by educative consultants, they could develop an indigenous form of educative leadership. The paper ends with an invitation to educational researchers interested in capacity building.

## INTRODUCTION

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2005, the readers of the most popular Arab newspaper in the UAE, the *Al-Ittihad Daily*, were startled to read about eleven major problems in the nation's education system, including unsuitable curricula, collapsing school buildings and low salaries.<sup>3</sup> In the following days, the readers were told that AED 46 billion (USD 13 billion) would be spent in the next 10 years on rectifying the problems,<sup>4</sup> that current spending was 60% less than of international standards,<sup>5</sup> that new salary scales and a long-term contract system were to be introduced,<sup>6</sup> and most surprising, that the state intended to modernize Islamic curricula.<sup>7</sup>

It is rare for the public in the UAE to be told that one of their key public services is obsolete. It is unusual for any Education Minister to demonstrate the need for radical reform using research and then immediately obtain billions to carry through the reforms. It is extraordinary for the Nationals of a country only 35 years old, that two generations ago were living in desert tribal Bedouin communities and today comprising about 20% of the total population of their country, to knowingly set about transforming their knowledge, skill base and culture. The decision was made by the nation's Executive Council chaired by the President, HH Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. The decision was based on comprehensive research commissioned by the then Minister; HH Sheikh Nahyan Bin

---

<sup>3</sup> Problems Face Education: Unsuitability of Curricula, Collapsing School Buildings, and Low Salaries, *Al Ittihad*, (translated from Arabic), 19 November 2005, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> 46 billion dirhams will be spent developing the education system in the next ten years, *Al Ittihad*, (translated from Arabic), 20 November 2005, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Spending on education is 60% less than international standards, *Al Ittihad*, (translated from Arabic), 21 November 2005, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> New salary scales and long-term contract system, *Al Ittihad*, (translated from Arabic), 22 November 2005, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> The full development and modernization of Islamic curricula, *Al Ittihad*, (translated from Arabic), 23 November 2005, p. 9.

Mubarak Al Nahyan. The reform agenda was adopted in 2006 by his determined successor; HE Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali. It continues to enjoy strong support.

Is systemic reconstruction on this scale and depth actually warranted? As indicated above, the evidence heroically summarized by *Al-Ittihad* had eleven dimensions:

1. Unsuitable Curricula. The traditional, repetitious, fragmented and redundant content, disconnected from community and national needs, is encouraging closed attitudes.
2. Ineffective teaching methods. Rote learning is preventing the interaction needed to develop research, analysis and communication skills required for higher learning.
3. Inappropriate assessment methods. Memory is being tested rather than skills and understandings, ability is not being taken into account, and the tests are encouraging the proliferation of private lessons outside school.
4. Little use of ICT. Few schools use modern teaching and learning technologies. Computers tend to be old, unused, or used only for non-teaching purposes.
5. Poor libraries and learning support. Libraries are poorly stocked, textbooks are rigid and unrelated to learning processes, and laboratories are badly maintained.
6. Short school days and a short school year. Students in the UAE spend about half of the time in learning compared with students in other countries.
7. Ineffective school culture. Discipline is weak. Truancy is high, especially by male students. Healthy meals are not available. The learning environments are unattractive.
8. Poor facilities. Many school buildings are aged, poorly designed, badly equipped and maintained, with few facilities for sports and cultural activities.
9. Low levels of professionalism. Teachers have low skills, qualifications, pay and status.<sup>8</sup> They rely on traditional didactic teaching methods and do not use computers, libraries or other information resources. They are not interested in professional development and show little loyalty to their students and schools. The system provides no training, evaluation or incentives, and discourages creativity.

---

<sup>8</sup> As many as 4500 school teachers are reportedly not qualified, lacking even a diploma in education, according to Ali Majid Al Sweidi, Assistant Undersecretary in the Department of Planning and Human Resources Development at the Ministry of Education, *Weekly Research Updates for Impact Education*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2006.

10. Ineffective school system. The Ministry is highly centralized, has no clear vision and suffers from job inflation. School principals need intensive training and continuous follow-up support if they are to lead the reforms. The Education Departments in each geographic zone are, in general, dysfunctional.
11. Inadequate budgets. The budget is about one third of comparable international systems. The largest part of the current budget goes to salaries with little allocated for support, activities or developmental programs.

After consultations with international consultants and the current principals, teachers and communities in the UAE, the Ministry of Education proposed five strategies that have been approved - each with specified purposes:

1. Clarify an educational policy - to stress the development of understanding, character formation and community values to prepare students for an active role in a modern knowledge society, and to mobilize social and political support for investment in education in order to achieve national prosperity and development
2. Set internationally benchmarked performance expectations in all aspects and levels of education – to reflect the nature and needs of the UAE community in a global context
3. Launch a national 10-year reconstruction plan - to bring all school facilities, curriculum, pedagogy and outcomes up to international standards
4. Restructure educational management – to have the Ministry focus on improving performance levels, replace Education Departments with regional support centers, merge small schools to raise their viability and quality, and boost leadership capacities in school communities
5. Mobilize appropriate resources and support – to achieve all of the above.

This reform program exhibits an indigenous and neo-pluralist theory of modernization. It gives simultaneous priority to four meta-values; that the UAE needs

1. a strong and diversified economy,
2. a full and successful involvement in the ICT revolution, and
3. an open Arabic and Islamic knowledge society, all of which stress a fourth meta-value;

4. the need for an educational system of international character and quality.

The first dimension of this theory of modernization, economic diversification, makes good sense since most of the seven Emirates that comprise the UAE have exhausted their oil and gas. The exceptions are the Dubai Emirate, that has about 10 years supply left, and the Abu Dhabi Emirate that has over 130 years supply proven. Diversification is unfolding first in the construction sector. New construction projects to be tendered in 2006 and 2007 in Abu Dhabi are predicted to exceed AED 47 billion,<sup>9</sup> including commercial and residential buildings, roads, airport infrastructure, industrial parks and government institutions. It is an interesting coincidence that the total price of construction tenders for two years approximates the cost of the education reforms over the next ten.

Diversification has been enabled by a change to property law. In mid-December 2005, HH Sheikh Hamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chairman of Abu Dhabi's Department of Planning and Economy, announced legislation that will allow 100% private ownership in the Emirate's Higher Corporation for Specialized Economic Zones (HCSEZs) during the second phase of the 'Industrial City of Abu Dhabi' initiative (ICAD 2).<sup>10</sup> ICAD 2, as Sheikh Hamed explained, is intended to diversify the Abu Dhabi economy into "high value strategic and industrial clusters in sectors such as steel, aluminum, petrochemicals, automotive components, oil and gas services and pharmaceuticals."<sup>11</sup> About a dozen industry-specific clusters are to be established in the HCSEZs. The driver, he said, is that "Abu Dhabi's industrial base is composed of individual companies in fragmented industries. But now, our goal is to create high value industry clusters and transform the emirate into an industrial, services and logistics hub."

This diversification requires a large number of professionals, both through indigenous development or facilitated immigration, as well as urban housing and infrastructure developments on an unprecedented scale. The mega projects already underway include the Al Raha Beach Development (AED 53.94 billion), Al Reem Island Development (AED

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ameinfo.com/72661.html>

<sup>10</sup> Haseeb Haider, A. (2005) "New Abu Dhabi law allows 100pc foreign ownership", 15 December, see <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/detect.asp?section=business&col=>

<sup>11</sup> "Industrial evolution," *Gulf Business*, January 2006, p. 30.

34.86 billion), the Abu Dhabi Airport Expansion (AED 24.9 billion), the Mohammed Bin Zayed City and the Shams Abu Dhabi project.

To be sustainable, diversification on this scale requires international capital investment and engagement in the Abu Dhabi economy. International participation is being actively encouraged<sup>12</sup> by the Abu Dhabi Government and is already acting as an economic multiplier<sup>13</sup> with evidence accumulating in exponential national growth numbers. The UAE's economy is expected by the International Monetary Fund<sup>14</sup> to record a gain of USD 30 billion in nominal terms for 2005 and become the third largest economy in the Middle East and Central Asia. The country's gross domestic product reached USD 104.2 billion in 2004 after rising by more than 17 percent over the 2003 GDP of USD 88.5 billion. It is expected to record growth of 28.5 percent in 2005 to USD 133.8 billion and to continue its expansion in 2006 to achieve USD 150.9 billion.

When this four-part theory of modernization was translated by the Ministry of Education into reform initiatives, nine priorities were identified;

1. Develop learning criteria suitable for the UAE that meet international standards
2. Moving to student-focused learning environments
3. Devolve responsibility and accountability to schools and improve professionalism
4. Integrate ICT with learning, managing schools and evaluating the system
5. Develop a national system of rebuilding and refurbishing school buildings
6. Reform hiring, incentives, evaluation and development of all school staff
7. Boost investment and accountability to create successful public schools
8. Ensure private schools offer safe and legal environments, and quality for value, and
9. Offer adult literacy as a pathway to higher education, technical training or continuous learning for employment.

The next issue is how to implement this set of priorities. The authors used human capital analysis to identify the nature of people needed to deliver implementation, in addition to the

---

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.tradearabia.com/tanews/newsdetails\\_snCONS\\_article98578\\_cnt.html](http://www.tradearabia.com/tanews/newsdetails_snCONS_article98578_cnt.html)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.uaecontractors.com/default.asp> UAE Contractors Association, GM Humaid Alem Salem, 6461613, Wk 065567444, P.O. Box 44925 Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Tel: (9712) 6711844, Fax: (9712) 6711855

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=10&categ\\_id=3&article\\_ID=20984](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=3&article_ID=20984)

implementation programs being planned and developed in the Ministry of Education and being mounted by them in collaboration with the various regional authorities in the Emirates. Together the nine priorities anticipate the availability and effectiveness of educational professionals with two distinct sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes;

- *educative teachers* who can help professional colleagues learn how to reform teaching and learning in classrooms and in schooling communities, and
- *educative managers* who can help professional colleagues learn how to reform a human system comprising national support systems, regional centers and schooling communities.

The first point to be drawn is that both sets of professional knowledge, skills and attitudes share a common philosophy of *educative leadership*;<sup>15</sup> that is, their primary task will be helping co-professionals learn how to achieve reforms in their practices through creating continuous professional learning and, eventually, learning organizations.<sup>16</sup>

*The educational managers*, who are to be made responsible for developing new support systems at national, regional and schooling levels, must be able to facilitate evidence-based strategic and tactical planning processes if they are to both determine and achieve internationally comparable educational aims, goals, objectives, measures and targets. It is helpful that the capacities of the managers required at different levels of the system are functionally very similar, although they can be differentiated by scope and degree of devolved responsibility.

*Those appointed into the reformed Ministry* will need to be able to create national policy and programs that evaluate, accredit and improve public and private schools and support services. To be more specific, they will need the educational understandings, technical skills and educative attitudes to set criteria for student achievement, establish and manage support systems, develop a national and reliable students' learning assessment system, develop and manage a national education budget, create a national executive information system with

---

<sup>15</sup> Duignan, P.A. and Macpherson, R.J.S. (1992) (eds.) *Educative Leadership: A Practical Theory for New Educational Administrators and Managers*, Basingstoke: Falmer.

<sup>16</sup> Senge, P. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, New York: Doubleday.

databases of staff, student and financial resources, develop criteria for technical and adult education, accredit public and private schools, set the academic calendar, and account to the National Committee for Public Schools.

*Those appointed to manage regional service centers* will need to facilitate similarly collaborative planning in order to deliver the logistical support needed by schools to achieve national goals. They will be expected to help principals and service managers to learn how to provide leadership services, logistical services, evaluation and planning services, human resource and financial management services, and public relations services.

*Principals managing schooling communities* will need to facilitate school community planning so that the teaching and learning programs reflect international best practice and help each school achieve national goals. Principals will be expected to do this through collaborative work planning, participative budgeting, promoting interactive pedagogy, developing extra-curriculum activities, evaluation and community communication, and engaging parent and other community representatives in governance.

*Senior teachers* appointed to lead projects in school communities and regions will need to be skilled in project management, team leadership, curriculum and pedagogical development, teaching team planning, collaborative evaluation and student engagement. As with principals, the most fundamental theme of their service, as a leader, will be their capacity to help their co-professionals and their clients learn.

The nature and scale of national demand for educative leaders who can actually help deliver systemic reforms encouraged Abu Dhabi University to develop two new masters degrees; a Masters of Education in Leadership, and Masters of Education in Teaching in Learning. They were designed for current employees of the Ministry of Education to build a fresh nexus between the national theory of modernization and a practical and indigenous theory of educative leadership; initially most explicit in the intended learning outcomes, and potentially, through the implementation programs that are being planned in the Ministry.



The rationale and content of each of these degrees will be presented in the two coming sections. The final section will reflect on the nature of the national intervention and some of the dilemmas that are likely to be encountered.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The first challenge for ADU's curriculum design team was to identify a standards-based form of educative leadership that would cohere with the needs of the UAE system, as summarized above. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards<sup>17</sup> were adopted, not uncritically as I will show below, for seven major reasons;

1. it was known that the Ministry of Education regarded them as the 'Gold Standard' of school leadership competencies and that the Minister had commissioned highly regarded consultants to design the reform programs for the UAE who were experienced in the leadership of elementary schools and state systems in the United States of America (USA) and who had also played a strong and personal hand in the creation of the ISLLC standards
2. the standards embody "a vision of leadership based on the premise that the criteria and standards for the professional practice of school leaders must be grounded in the knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning,"<sup>18</sup> a profoundly appealing vision that repositioned the profession to accept the mantle of leadership for learning, nodded respectfully to Thom Greenfield's ghost by placing values central to educative leadership, and emerged simultaneously with the national standards-based reforms of the schools of a nation felt by some to be 'at-risk'
3. the standards were developed using a methodology that strongly valued practitioner input, embedded them as criteria in their professional licensure and career advancement processes, and legitimated itself by appeal to the well-being of youngsters and their families,<sup>19</sup> a process as valuable as the output
4. the standards value cultural and ethical leadership, professional and curriculum leadership, and community leadership, much as synthesized by research in Australia

---

<sup>17</sup> Council of Chief School State Officers (1996). Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (pp. 21) Washington, DC.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.umsl.edu/~mpea/Pages/AboutISLLC/AboutISLLC.html>

<sup>19</sup> Murphy, J. (2005). 'Unpacking the foundations of the ISLLC standards and addressing concerns in the academic community,' *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(10), 154-91.

that identified practical forms of educative leadership,<sup>20</sup> and not inconsistent with the culture, manners and protocols highly valued in Arab and Islamic societies as *adab al-Islam*<sup>21</sup>

5. they cohere with one of the most evidence-based models available of instructional and transformational leadership,<sup>22</sup>
6. they match the outcomes of one of the most comprehensive meta-analyses available of the leadership responsibilities that influence student learning,<sup>23</sup> and
7. they reflect the core competencies that have proved effective both in international settings and in turning around challenging schools.<sup>24</sup>

The ISLLC standards follow.

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards	
Standard 1	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
Standard 2	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
Standard 3	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
Standard 4	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
Standard 5	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
Standard 6	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the wider political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

<sup>20</sup> Duignan, P.A. and Macpherson, R.J.S. (1993). 'Educative Leadership: A Practical Theory', *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 29,(1), 8-33.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Kaysi, M. I. (1986). *Morals and manners in Islam: A guide to Islamic Adab*, Leicester, UK.: The Islamic Foundation, pp. 51-3, and Latif, S. A. (1961). *Principles of Islamic culture*, University of Madras: Goodwood Books.

<sup>22</sup> Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(3), 329-351.

<sup>23</sup> Waters, T., Marzano, R.J. and McNulty, B. (2002). Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on students achievement. A working paper. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

<sup>24</sup> Leithwood, K. (2006). The 2005 Willow Family Lecture: Leadership according to the evidence, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 5(3), 177-202.

These standards were modified slightly to indicate how the assessment of student learning in the MEd in Leadership will be achieved. The assessments will focus on six measurable student learning outcomes, expressed as the following six standards of leadership:

The Measurable Student Learning Outcomes of the MEd in Leadership	
Standard 1: Strategic Leadership	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
Standard 2: Instructional Leadership	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
Standard 3: Organizational Leadership	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
Standard 4: Community Leadership	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
Standard 5: Ethical Leadership	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
Standard 6: Cultural Leadership	Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the wider political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Together, these standards provide a profile of a person intended to lead the reforms to school management in the UAE. Using the unique requirements of the UAE reforms, the standards were elaborated and ‘indigenized’ by the authors in consultation with Arab and Islamic colleagues at the ADU. The following 15 intended learning outcomes for 12 semester-length courses are to be used to design appropriate learning activities, and will be progressively revised;

1. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the body of theory most relevant to the high-quality practice of educational administration, and to specifically relate research and theory to practice in educational administration.

2. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze politics as it impacts educational administration. Using indigenous cases, current educational issues and political systems analysis, the student will be able to explain educational policy development in terms of change agency, interest groups, the media and other political players and processes.
3. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the impact of positivism, subjectivism and functionalism, and critiques, in recent research on school organization and administration.
4. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze issues of policy and practice in educational administration in a seminar setting. The student will address value orientations, relevant research and policy considerations that shape decisions.
5. The student will be able to conduct a research project designed to generate or test theory.
6. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze a research project designed to generate or test theory.
7. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the principles and practices of personnel administration. The emphasis will be on recruitment, selection, deployment, evaluation, staff development, manpower planning and employee relations in the schools.
8. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the planning, design, construction, maintenance and evaluation of educational facilities. The student will develop awareness and skills related to needs assessment, educational specifications, site selection, maintenance and operation of educational facilities.
9. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the principles and practices of public relations applied to education. The student will gain proficiency and skill in the improvement of relations between the school and the public through interaction and utilization of political, community and human resources and other social institutions in the organization, and improvement of public education.
10. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the organization of the business management function in the public schools, including internal structure,

office and personnel management, budgeting maintenance and operation, transportation, food services, legal relationships, insurance and safety.

11. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze issues involved in financing schools.
12. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze issues, problems and trends in the K-12 curriculum, from an administrative and supervisory point of view. Organizational leadership and strategies for stimulating, implementing and evaluating alternatives in curriculum and instruction will be learned.
13. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze the basic functions of school principals including; planning, programming, communicating and evaluating and the current issues and problems that confront the practicing educational administrator.
14. The student will be able to describe, apply, and analyze philosophical techniques and concepts in the solution of contemporary educational problems.
15. The student will be able to conduct applied research, disseminate new knowledge, and develop applications for existing knowledge.

The MEd in Leadership Program will be studied as twelve 3-credit courses:

**Major Area Course Work: (3 credits each) - 21 credits**

1. EDA 501 Introduction to Educational Leadership
2. CAI 511 Instructional Supervision
3. CAI 515 Curriculum Development\*
4. EDC 516 Program Assessment
5. EDT 519 Information Systems in Education
6. EDC 514 Research Methodology in Education\*
7. EDA 570 Internship/Field Experience

**Professional Course Work: (3 credits each) - 9 credits**

8. EDA 540 Institutional Enhancement
9. EDA 542 Professional Development
10. EDA 580 Capstone Course / Research Project\*

**Two Courses of the Following Courses: (3 credits each) - 6 credits**

1. EDA 519 Women in Leadership
2. EDA 511 Philosophy of Education
3. EDA 512 History of Education in the UAE
4. EDA 521 Comparative Education
5. EDC 525 Qualitative Research Design\*
6. EDC 527 Quantitative Methodologies\* **36 Credits Total**

There are common features to the two MEd degrees. The asterisk in the table above indicates courses common to both degrees. Both degrees are based on an educative leadership philosophy and both will use constructivist pedagogies. ADU's emerging teaching philosophy favours constructivism as verified by cognitive science and learning outcomes, that is, people deepen their understandings most effectively when they engage actively in developing personal meaning in order to solve problems of substance. ADU is increasingly taking the view that the effectiveness of teaching is indicated by demonstrable learning outcomes, such as effective solutions, and the importance of using Moodle and other delivery systems to offer a mix of flexible learning opportunities to broaden learner choices. Both degrees therefore assume that lead teachers and school and system leaders will need to know how to clarify the intended learning outcomes of followers, motivate them to take charge of their own learning, provide them with access to relevant and trustworthy knowledge, enable them to interact with others so that the knowledge is examined thoroughly, and then to challenge them with opportunities to apply the knowledge. Adult learners on both degrees will be encouraged to use action research processes to complete self-directed sole and group learning assignments.

This approach also reflects ADU's wider strategic interests. A prescient text argued at the end of the last century that the exploitation of ICT for educational purposes would distribute competitiveness in the global higher education industry.<sup>25</sup> While ADU remains broadly

---

<sup>25</sup> Oblinger, D.G. and Katz, R.N. (Eds.) (1999) *Renewing administration: Preparing colleges and universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Bolton, Mass.: Anker.

optimistic concerning the impact of ICT on education, it recognizes that ICT and its educational applications are converging and still in their infancy. And providing constructivist pedagogical principles retain primacy over the technological drivers, flexible learning could yet give young universities, like ADU, and small nations, like the UAE, major strategic advantages as ‘the e-classroom of the Middle East’ in the global knowledge society. ICT is also enabling ADU to benchmark against other private higher education communities, partner with high quality international institutions, and achieve its vision as a premier university in the Gulf Region.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The MED in Teaching and Learning was also aligned with international performance-based standards; those developed by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the Department for Education and Skills (UK). Space limitations preclude their inclusion in detail here.

As above, the blend of standards was used to guide the development of a professional preparation program, including content, developmental standards and candidate evaluation. Identifiable in all sets of standards was a commitment to (a) developing attention to how learners learn best, (b) understanding curriculum in terms of content, scope and learning activities, (c) adherence to ethical and moral principles, and (d) a commitment to professional growth. These standards were the basis upon which the program was built, again in consultation with Arab and Islamic colleagues, unique to the cultural mores and expectations in the UAE.

The program was therefore conceived as a learning pathway of coursework and experiences that would link the growth of knowledge, skills and attitudes to the development of evidence-based professional practice. The design team took the view that making the links between theory (defined as an evidence-based set of understandings) and practice - to solve the real challenges of the UAE classroom in context – will be imperative for professional growth.

Similarly critical is incorporating ICT into the solutions developed. Hence, the design of ADU's MEd in Teaching and Learning used a performance-based, standards-driven and evidence-based approach, and incorporated the comprehensive use of ICT and enabled life-long professional development. Consistent with this approach, ADU faculty members will be required <sup>26</sup> to commit to, and demonstrate for advancement, high quality scholarship incorporating discovery, integration, application and teaching.<sup>27</sup> In essence, it is intended that colleagues will show their postgraduate and undergraduate students how to learn by scholarly example. Research-driven teaching and learning should become the norm.

As a result of having completed the MEd in Teaching and Learning, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge, skills and professional attitudes that are effective in helping co-educators learn curriculum content and pedagogy. The MEd in Teaching and Learning has also adopted Ministry objectives and will prepare practicing teachers for leadership roles in a wide range of practical areas; curriculum development, modern pedagogy, assessment methods, learning resource management, ICT applications, teaching foreign languages, programs for distinguished and special needs students, sport and cultural activities, managing longer study hours and academic year, nutrition education, introducing obligatory K-12 education, attracting and managing more highly qualified teachers with new hiring and reward systems, managing continuous professional development programs for teachers, principals and other staff, managing effective school maintenance, developing new school management and community / parent communication systems.

Assessments will indicate that graduates have met the criteria established both by the ADU and the Ministry of Education. Assessment will be related to five intended learning outcomes, currently expressed as provisional outcomes or competencies, and exhibit some category problems, will remain subject to revision as the Ministry reform programs mature.

The Measurable Student Learning Outcomes of the MEd in Teaching and Learning
--

---

<sup>26</sup> Abu Dhabi University (2006). Professional Development Policy and Procedures, Abu Dhabi: ADU, and Abu Dhabi University (2006). Faculty Promotion in Rank - Policy and Procedures, Abu Dhabi: ADU.

<sup>27</sup> Boyer, E.L. (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.



Standard 1: Cultural Competence	<p>Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the individual development of students</li> <li>• Teaching effectively through the integration of content and pedagogy</li> <li>• Using current and advanced technology</li> <li>• Adapting instruction to diverse learning styles</li> <li>• Promoting a learner-centred approach</li> <li>• Promoting conceptual understanding</li> <li>• Using a constructivist teaching and learning approach</li> <li>• Assessing learner’s comprehensive growth and outcomes</li> <li>• Conveying the nature of knowledge and knowing to the learners</li> <li>• Communicating knowledge</li> <li>• Engaging in professional development.</li> </ul>
Standard 2: Professional and Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills	<p>Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying pedagogical content knowledge within a classroom setting</li> <li>• Using multiple strategies to meet individual learner’s needs</li> <li>• Exploring the relationship between content, personal pedagogy and assessment</li> <li>• Developing portfolios which mirror self-reflection and foster critical thought relating to practice.</li> </ul>
Standard 3: Moral and Ethical Principles	<p>Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating sensitivity to community and cultural norms</li> <li>• Promoting a collaborative environment with teachers, parents and community</li> <li>• Demonstrating a collegial attitude and works with others to improve the educational experience of students</li> <li>• Establishing and maintaining a positive and safe classroom learning experiences for students</li> <li>• Treating all students fairly and equitably</li> <li>• Exhibiting a commitment to planning, assessment and reflection as an on going process.</li> <li>• Demonstrating flexibility based on needs and circumstances.</li> </ul>
Standard 4: Student Learning	<p>Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and the ability to promote the success of all students by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and maintaining portfolios of practice</li> <li>• Collecting relevant student work.</li> </ul>

Many of the teachers currently employed in the national education system are not UAE nationals and come from a variety of countries both within and without the region. They face all the difficulties of being expatriates. Those educated in UAE national schools have been found by the Ministry to be ill prepared to manage the comprehensive reforms being considered. The MEd in Teaching and Learning will therefore seek to develop a network of reformers from current employees; a network that understands the culture of the society and the dynamics of the contemporary UAE and which, through their acceptance of greater responsibility, will have the knowledge, skills, values and power to lead the reforms in

schools. The comprehensive nature of the reforms foreshadowed is reflected in the twelve 3-credit pathway offered:

<p><b>Major Area Course Work:</b> (3 credits each) - 21 credits</p> <p>CAI 500 Teaching and Learning in Context</p> <p>CAI 505 Classroom Behavior and Management</p> <p>CAI 506 Outcomes Based Teaching, Learning and Assessment</p> <p>CAI 515 Curriculum Development*</p> <p>CAI 510 Educational Futures</p> <p>EDT 518 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education</p> <p>EDC 514 Research Methodology in Education*</p> <p><b>Professional Course Work:</b> (3 credits each) - 9 credits</p> <p>EDT 550 Curriculum and Instructional Design and Technology</p> <p>CAI 504 Evaluation and Assessment in Education</p> <p>CAI 580 Capstone Course / Research Project*</p> <p><b>Two Courses of the Following Courses:</b> (3 credits each) - 6 credits</p> <p>DEC 515 Inquiry in Elementary Education</p> <p>DEC 530 Advanced Study in the Teaching of Science</p> <p>DEC 532 Advanced Study in the Teaching of Social Studies</p> <p>DEC 533 Advanced Study in the Teaching of Mathematics</p> <p>EDC 525 Qualitative Research Design*</p> <p>EDC 527 Quantitative Methodologies*</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Total – 36 credits</b></p>
--

In addition to the asterisked courses, the common ground between the two masters programs are the standards used internationally to guide the development of professional preparation programs, including the content, developmental standards and candidate evaluation schemes. Identifiable in all such schemes is a commitment to develop in professionals (a) a driving concern for the needs of learners (child, youth and adult) and to the host community, an understanding of curriculum in terms of trustworthy content, scope and technology, (b) an

adherence to ethical and professional principles, and (c), a personal commitment to continuing professional growth.

The blend of the international teaching standards could also provide a base upon which standards unique to the culture and policies of the UAE can be incorporated, although this part of the reforms are queued behind the development of a new school leadership cadre. As indicated above, the education policies of the UAE stress the need to introduce advanced educational techniques, improve the nation's capacity to innovate, and enable students to become self-directed learners. Leaders and master teachers are needed to enable the transformation of teaching, learning and curriculum development by ICT, national capacity building in entrepreneurialism, and the growth of life-long learning.

Further, the MEd in Teaching and Learning is also based on a constructivist pedagogy that will enable professional educators to link evidence-based knowledge to daily practice. These links between theory and practice are both considered essential by the authors to solving problems in the real world of the UAE classroom, and the education system, and to continuing the professional growth of reform leaders. Similarly, the program responds directly to the UAE Government's explicit call for the transformation of pedagogy using constructivist theory and methods. Further, ADU faculty members will expect students enrolled in its MEd in Teaching and Learning to exploit ICT, as it will for its MEd in Leadership students, reflecting another priority for the UAE Ministry of Education.

The differences between the two masters programs will be most marked in focus. The MEd in Leadership will attend to team, school and system leadership in a community context. The MEd in Teaching and Learning will focus on pedagogy and curriculum development in a context of emergent ICT.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTIONS**

There is an immediate challenge. This case started with the most popular Arabic newspaper in the UAE announcing, by association, that the current knowledge, skills and attitudes of its

current leading professionals in education were obsolete. Some took offence, understandably. Some demanded extra payments before taking part in any professional development. Beneath this noise is the dilemma of both maintaining the current educational services while fundamentally reforming them. In personal terms it means guaranteeing career and cultural safety, to a point, while carrying through a cultural transformation of the profession. Note that the early evidence is that a significant proportion of current school leaders lack the basic skills of using a computer - to the point where the evaluations were being compromised during short courses leading to an International Computer Drivers License (ICDL). In general terms it means enabling those who wish to help with the reforms, a cadre of early adopters if you will, move from their current knowledge, skills and attitudes, first to be able to demonstrate threshold leadership standards through achieving a preliminary proficiency certificate, and second, to acquire deeper understandings through higher education.

The approach proposed to the Ministry by the ADU was to create a network of educative leaders; a community of scholars committed to preparing themselves and their co-professionals to carry through the national reforms. It was suggested that the bridging process should begin as a series of socio-cultural events using indigenous and expatriate protocols so that the development of fresh professional knowledge, skills and attitudes can unfold in a highly supportive social and professional environment. The approach proposed was based on the successful model developed at the University of Calgary.<sup>28</sup> These proposals cohered well with early reform processes that will consult practitioners through focus groups, survey to establish baseline training needs, and form a foundational cadre of leaders - that will later be coached to offer mentoring, a help desk service and a professional association to colleagues. While planning continues, the leadership reform program has already offering the ICDL to 750 current primary and secondary school principals, prior to offering opportunities to 650

---

<sup>28</sup> Professor Charles Webber, his colleagues and their postgraduate students, mounted and hosted a series of early evening events in an executive dinner setting. These relatively regular events used guest lecturers and panels of local practitioners to analyze and respond to issues of immediate interest to the participants. They also invited participants to stay on and develop their own understandings and practical solutions over a meal. As demand for learning crystallized in particular areas, the University of Calgary then offered short courses customized to the needs of viable groups, and later bundled the learning experiences into short courses and added optional assignments in order to create credit transfer into a masters program. In this way, a network and critical mass of would-be educative leaders formed and expanded, and sustained their engagement in higher education. There are many equivalent models elsewhere that share two essential characteristics - being deeply respectful of the indigenous culture(s) of the client professionals, and serving their needs as they develop in a wider policy context.

assistant principals and then aspirants. Other challenges ahead are to lift all participants' English competence to TOEFL 500 and to design of a basic leadership proficiency certificate that will lead in to a licensure process and articulate into study at a masters level. The critical points here are that

- planning for the program is stressing three key strategies; decentralization, standards-centered learning, and standards-based instruction, and
- all of the mechanisms and strategies above will further the indigenization of the ISLLC standards used during startup.

More broadly, this case has drawn attention to the convergence of historical, cultural, political and economic factors that triggered an educational reform agenda in the UAE. The reforms were especially enabled by the ubiquity and utility of ICT, various forms of globalization, the internationalization of knowledge about educational leadership, the strategic leadership of a President, and the research-based practice of a Minister and the determination of his successor. It also shows that a national intervention was triggered by a rigorous evaluation of a national system. A holistic reform process is now being driven by an indigenous theory of modernization that simultaneously values a diversified economy, a successful exploitation of ICT, an open Arabic and Islamic knowledge society, and thus, an educational system of international character and quality. The process is fundamental; it will redefine for the UAE what it is to be Arabic and Islamic in a globalizing world.

Priorities have been identified for the reformed national system of education; internationally benchmarked national learning criteria, student-focused learning environments, greater devolution and professionalism, the integration of ICT, rebuilding and refurbishing school buildings, modern human resource management and development, successful public and private schools, and adult literacy as a pathway to higher education, technical training or continuous learning for employment. A key issue is how current leading professionals, whose understandings, skills and attitudes have just been defined as obsolete, are going to be prepared to lead reforms in the classroom, the school and across the system.

It was argued that these priorities will require the proactive presence of two types of *educative leaders*; *educative managers* who can help professional colleagues learn how to reform the management of a national system, and *educative teachers* who can help professional colleagues learn how to reform teaching and learning. Two mechanisms were proposed in response to these requirements; establishing a community of after-hours adult learners, and then bridging their learning into two customized MEd degrees in leadership and in teaching and learning. It was argued that all networking events, short courses and masters degree courses would need to remain true to a common philosophy of educative leadership. All would need to use constructivist pedagogies to sustain coherence and authenticity. All would need to facilitate the solving of practical problems of substance to remain plausible to professionals in schools. All learning experiences would need to help leaders embed organizational learning in their schools to remain strategically beneficial. All events would need to encourage action research, particularly those incorporating ICT, to achieve sustainability. The chances are that the ISLLC standards used during startup will be systematically indigenised through the needs analysis, the formation of a cadre of early adopters who will be coached to mentor, offer help desk services and found a professional association. The UAE is more likely to see the modified replication of the ISLLC process than they are likely to see an uncritical adoption of ISLLC standards.

There remains the need to be critically reflective<sup>29</sup> concerning the assumptions being used to conceptualize and manage this project of modernization through the reconstruction of schooling, starting with the understandings, skills and attitudes of school leaders and system managers. One such concern already highlighted concerns the adoption, or more likely, the progressive indigenization of the ISLLC standards. The development and utility of the ISLLC standards has been the subject of sustained critique in the USA and a literature has developed both to interrogate and to defend their utility in enhancing school effectiveness.

A recent, graceful and comprehensive critique<sup>30</sup> showed that the first edition of the standards actually reflected the designers' laudable attention to eight factors; student achievement, the actions and values of those that lead effective schools, trends in the environment, trends in

---

<sup>29</sup> The authors are indebted to the ISEA reviewers of this article for their stimulating contributions to this dimension of this paper.

<sup>30</sup> Murphy, loc cit.

schooling, the purposes of schooling, what the customers of leader preparation programs want and need, and the expectations of resource providers. Eight standard criticisms were also rehearsed and warrant brief comment. The first, that the standards lack an empirical base, seems to run up against the evidence summarized above. On the other hand, a review of methodology might have noted the bizarre absence of any randomized controlled trials, when a similar discipline, Nursing, is well advanced in using RCTs to refine evidence-based practice. The second, that the standards are too heavily based on non-empirical ideals, conflates and thus confuses two separate concerns – the wisdom of using values in standards, and what is the appropriate degree of their use. The criticism is unreasonable. Since numbers can't indicate what is right, and learning to arbitrate rightness is essential to the gaining of wisdom, it seems that learning how to make adequate justifications concerning the use of values will need to be refined by higher education that reaches well beyond what can be achieved by standards-based training. And in the interim, since values continue to drive education, the standards usefully throw their use into sharp relief. The third, that the standards are not comprehensive enough, or mistreat or miss a particular issue, such as technology, suggests the need for regular and inclusionary reviews. The States of the US have asked for the standards to be revised to reflect “a decade of policy experience and significant political and social changes”.<sup>31</sup> The fourth, that standards are over- or under-specified, bespeaks the need for additional refinements for specific applications. The fifth, that there is no legitimate place for dispositions in standards, defies what is now common sense of the field; that leadership is demonstrably a moral art.<sup>32</sup> The sixth, that the standards are exerting undue influence in the profession, vaguely implies discomfort with the shifts in meta-values and norms of practice enabled by the standards. Discomfort can be a symptom of learning. Indeed, I recall just such a moment. Having described the characteristics of the elite leaders I was researching, in some detail, Thom Greenfield gently advised that “I am not much interested in their characteristics but I would like to know about their characters.”

A seventh and missing criticism, ironically, is the degree of American ethnocentrism embedded in the standards. If the standards were adopted uncritically in the UAE, they could well be seen as promoting an offensively nationalist, pluralist, secular and culturally

---

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate\\_Consortium\\_on\\_School\\_Leadership/ISLLC\\_Standards/](http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_Consortium_on_School_Leadership/ISLLC_Standards/)

<sup>32</sup> Hodgkinson, C. (1991). *Educational Leadership: The Moral Art*, Albany: SUNY Press.

transformative view of schooling, run well ahead of the national reforms, and ill prepare people for the leadership of Islamic or private schools. In countries without the checks and balances of ‘good government’, a competency-based approach imposed nationally could create a professional class of leaders potentially able to capture the terms of their service; a danger not unknown in the Middle East.

Another concern may be the globalization of knowledge about the development of leadership programs for school leaders. It has been argued elegantly and compellingly <sup>33</sup> that educational leaders today need to frame their work in a globalizing context using at least six dimensions; economic, political, demographic, cultural, technological, American, linguistic and environmental. Since all of these dimensions were evident above, this framing process could reveal dilemmas to a leader in the UAE and suggest the need to accommodate countervailing forces by offering ‘ecological leadership’, analyzing the context of professional work, changing the context of accountability, and building trust and learning communities.

An equally sophisticated treatment has concluded that “each nation is responding to hegemonic global forces in ways that demonstrate the various cultural inflections of each state.” <sup>34</sup> This also applies to the UAE, especially as regards the health, education and career chances of Emiratis. The globalization of diets and lifestyles have meant that about 25% of the Emirati population are now at risk; they have the second highest early onset rate of Type 2 Diabetes in the world. It may soon be decided to make sports and health education compulsory subjects in schools. As implied by the evidence above, the preparation for and participation rates in higher education have long been poor. To boost access to higher education, international and private institutions have been encouraged to open institutions in a largely free market, with the point where uneven standards are becoming a concern.

Another effect of globalization is that about 16% of Emiratis are unemployed. Many government agencies have been replacing expatriates with Emiratis to assist. One result is

---

<sup>33</sup> Bottery, M. (2006). “Educational leaders in a globalising world: A new set of priorities?” *School Leadership and Management*, 26(1), 5-22.

<sup>34</sup> Brundrett, M., Slavikova, L., Karabec, S., Murden, B., Dering, A. and Nicolaido, M. (2006). “Educational leadership development in England and the Czech Republic,” *School Leadership and Development*, 26(1), 104.



that over 90% of employed nationals now work for a government agency. And when the Government initiated a major privatization of government functions, it had to offer mandatory training courses to help nationals prepare for the move into the private sector. The Emiratisation employment policy using affirmative action quotas to boost the number of employment opportunities in the private sector has not proved successful due to the overly attractive conditions in the public sector for Emiratis. Despite these perhaps inevitable contradictions, it may be a relief to read the conclusion of an excellent review of the impact of globalization; “Cultural imperialism as a Western ideology has not destroyed UAE traditions, it has instead, blended into the Islamic and Arabic culture of the region.”<sup>35</sup>

On balance, therefore, it appears wise to sustain and evaluate the reform program for the sake of UAE students and their families, given the recently measured conditions and outcomes of education. It is also crucial to remain critically aware of the potential limitations of the reforms underway, to identify the sources of unintended effects and to design remediation. University faculty members have a special responsibility in this regard; to create relatively trustworthy knowledge and applied research to test and refine it further in context. Hence, this article ends with an invitation to those interested in educational research and capacity building in UAE education. An extraordinary and unique set of challenging opportunities awaits scholars in ‘the Switzerland of the Middle East.’ And not incidentally, a closing reason for being involved is that ‘pushing the reforms’<sup>36</sup> in the UAE means knowingly serving an indigenous theory of modernization held by a Government and its people that continues to enjoy high levels of legitimacy, as it carefully steers a gradual pathway towards political democratization.

---

<sup>35</sup> Godwin, S.M. (2006). “Globalization, Education and Emiratisation: A Study of the United Arab Emirates,” *Electronic Journal on Information Systems in Developing Countries*, 27(1), 1-14.

<sup>36</sup> Foreman, C. (2006). “Pushing reform”, *Middle East Economic Digest*, 50(48), pp. 61-4.