

HOW INCREASING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE LOW-COST PRIVATE
SCHOOLS OF DUBAI CAN IMPROVE STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE
SKILLS

by

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Introduction/Background Information

“Literacy arouses hopes, not only in society as a whole but also in the individual who is striving for fulfillment, happiness, and personal benefit by learning how to read and write. Literacy....means far more than learning how to read and write...The aim is to transmit...knowledge and promote social participation”. –UNESCO Institute for Education (cited in Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p. xiii). I acknowledge that this is an ideal goal, but I believe that it can be achieved by all schools by the use of the right curricula, educational leadership, and promoting a partnership of parents in their child’s schooling. Also, I understand that knowledge is used to mean different things in different parts of the world. In Afghanistan I have noticed it seems to focus more on vocational skills, in Dubai it is more about test-taking skills, and in Canada, based on conversations with my peers who teach at different schools, it differs based on the schools - some have a focus on critical thinking while for others it is being able to achieve high grades. My goal for schools in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, is to understand and accept knowledge as something that benefits the students long-term, which will allow them to be global citizens and schooled so that they can successfully participate in the work force and in their society. For this goal to be achieved, I think it is essential that family literacy be part of schooling. This involves teaching families how to enable effective learning within their child, while at the same time enabling learning of the families, be it in a vocational field or in a language.

In order for the reader to have a better understanding of my ideas and views, I thought it would be beneficial to provide some information about myself. While I was in Dubai, I worked with a range of communities; professionally I worked in a government university as an academic officer; but my experiences as a volunteer with the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN–www.akdn.org), has brought about my passion for education. For the past three years, I have been the Vice-Chairperson for the Education Portfolio for the Gulf region for the AKDN, and it is a NGO and closely related to my community; its works are vast—but one crucial one is to build schools in third world countries.

In my role of a Vice-Chairperson, I inspired a team of volunteers to facilitate the educational aspirations and success of over 600 students in our community between the ages of 0-18 years, residing in the countries of Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (these countries all together are known as the GCC- Gulf Cooperation Council). My role required me to engage key stakeholders (parents, students, peers and influencers) to maximize focus on education. During my term, my Chairperson and I pioneered new initiatives such as early reading programs, foundational English & Math skills, career fairs, one-on-one mentoring, and internships. We also organized and implemented workshops and seminars on parenting and improving literacy. Within the portfolio, we also liaised with and assisted partner institutions to set-up schools in third world countries by looking at and developing appropriate curricula and school sites.

I have been at UBC for the past year, enrolled in the Masters of Education program with a joint specialization in Curriculum Studies and Educational Administration and Leadership. My aim is to be qualified to work for the Aga Khan Education Services (AKES) professionally, and

make a difference in the lives of children from third world countries by enabling and empowering them to lead better lives.

During my term as Vice-Chairperson, I came across an issue that is the basis of this paper. A part of my responsibility was to ensure that the ethnic minority groups from our community were doing well in the education field. During this process, I learnt that a lot of the children from my community had low literacy skills, in that they could not read or write effectively in the English language in comparison to their peers. I found that a lot of the children went to schools that had the British curricula, but the skills that they gained depended on the fees that the parents paid: The children who had low literacy skills usually attended low-cost schools. There were a number of factors that contributed to low literacy skills, such as inadequate resources, lack of reading time in the classroom, and also no policy to encourage parental involvement in the classroom or within the school. After coming to UBC, I have been interested in how parental involvement significantly affects literacy.

My stance on parental involvement in school, classrooms and at home is much like the one stated by the U.S. Secretary of Education (cited in Gianzero, 1999, p. 1): “Parents are children’s first and most influential teachers (and), by reading to children or having them read to us, by making sure homework is done, by monitoring television use, by knowing how children spend their time, parents can have a powerfully positive effect on their children’s learning.” Unfortunately, I am not sure how many parents from my community understand or accept this notion, and part of my responsibility as a Vice-Chairperson of a NGO, was changing their views on this. I was working with a lot of students and parents who had migrated from places such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Syria. The parents whom I worked with saw parental involvement as something that happened once their children returned home after a day at school.

They saw their role as making sure that their child was fed, bathed, did their homework, went to prayers and were taught the moral responsibilities of life. Grumet (1998) touches upon this notion when she states that the “family is always preoccupied with material necessity (by) procuring and preparing food, providing and maintaining shelter, (and) sustaining each others’ bodies” (p. 106). This is an educational role—as the child is receiving knowledge outside of their schools in terms of learning their first language, learning what is right, safe, what it means to be kind, what are birds, animals, etc. But a lot of parents that I worked with did not see this as an educational role. For them, education usually meant knowledge learned in schools and from textbooks, a notion that a lot of parents outside of our community also have. This type of parenting is usually referred to as a more traditional form. For these parents, their child’s grades were the main determinant of their future, the better the grades, the better the child’s chances of attending a good university and then eventually getting a good job. Because of this phenomenon, I saw the parents leaning more towards the ‘expert’ model. In this model, parents see the professional as the experts who hold all the “valued” knowledge and use their position to take all decisions about school matters. If parents believe in this, then they see themselves as only having a limited role in their child’s schooling as the school is the expert (Crozier & Davies, 2005, p. 300).

In contrast, there were some parents I worked with that believed that they should be involved in their child’s schooling. They assisted their children with homework, read to and with them as often as possible, and attended parent-teacher meetings. Another notion that I observed was that parents who had more schooling did more than the parents who had not gone through the schooling system, in that they attended some of their children’s classes, assisted in field trips, volunteered around the schools and knew their children’s teacher.

In today's world, where parents' contribution is seen as vital for a child's successful schooling; areas in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. do not welcome parents into their children's schools and classrooms--a notion that I find very disturbing. I believe that the parents from the East need to be educated on how and why it is important for them to be involved in their child's schooling, how beneficial it would be both for them and their children. Crozier and Davis' article "Hard to reach parents or hard to reach school? A discussion of home-school relations with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents" mentions the "transplant" model in contrast to the "expert" one explained earlier, which I believe would be very beneficial. In the transplant model, the professionals transplant the skills and expertise to the parents to help them become more competent in the roles of co-teachers/co-educators, through parent classes, playing with their child, etc. (Crozier & Davies, 2005, p. 300). A partnership between teachers and parents is vital and Debora Tinnin rightfully says "The child pulls parents and teachers together, but without the help of one another, parents and teachers pull the child apart" ([http://socyberty.com/education/parental-involvement"-through-"in-class-support-program](http://socyberty.com/education/parental-involvement))

Parental involvement has many benefits including positively affecting literacy skills in children. Darling and Westberg (as cited in Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p. 135) indicate that "parent involvement has a positive influence on student achievement, especially in terms of literacy acquisition, and that even active parent involvement in their children's education at home has more significant impact than when teachers try to encourage their students in learning in school activities". This research also indicates that "early literacy behaviors in reading, such as knowledge of letter names and letter sounds, phoneme awareness, and early decoding abilities, as well as word recognition and reading comprehension, can be enhanced when parents get

involved with their children's literacy development" (Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p. 135).

Building on this notion is what defines my research question:

- "How can Dubai's low-cost schools develop parental involvement programs and policies to develop their students' literacy skills while working with traditional forms of parenting?"

In order to completely develop the question, this paper will look at:

- What the definition of literacy is in today's world, how it has developed over the past few decades, and the lack of value for it in the low-cost private schools in Dubai.
- The types of parental involvement present in today's world; how it is practiced in the West in comparison to Dubai, and the link between literacy and parental involvement
- The barriers to parental involvement in Dubai's low-cost private schools, such as teacher's attitudes, schools' policies and structures, and the different cultural perspectives of parents on what they believe education is.

Schools in Dubai

The education system in the U.A.E. is very different from the one in Canada. The Ministry of Education supervises all the schools, and the majority of schools in Dubai are private ones that range in their fees depending on their facilities of the school and the curriculum offered. The most popular schools in Dubai are the ones that offer the Indian, British or the American curricula. In the most recent years, International Baccalaureate (IB) schools have also become popular.

Dubai is mostly comprised of expatriates. They make up approximately 85% of the country's population. The main population is made up of Indians and Pakistanis, and recently

there have been a lot of people migrating from Australia, Canada, Europe, U.K., and the U.S.A. The schools have started to cater to the growing population and the different socio-economic status of the population, hence the schools fall into one of three categories: low-cost, average-cost and high-cost private schools. A recent trend has been that organizations have started setting up schools under their brand name, and building schools that cater to all classes. An example of one such organization is GEMS Education.

GEMS Education (<http://www.gemseducation.com>) is run by the Varkey group of companies, which include businesses in healthcare and transportation. GEMS Education has schools all over the GCC and in India, and has 18 schools in Dubai. The organization's aim is to target each socio-economic status (SES) and population, and hence they have schools that range from being low-cost to high-cost, and have schools with many curricula. Families from a low SES usually send their children to the Indian or Pakistani curricula schools as they are more affordable than the British, American and IB curricula schools.

Below is a table that depicts three schools from GEMS Education. It is interesting to see the difference between the fees that the schools charge. Each school knows its target audience well—for example, the Indian school would not be able to charge the fees of the IB school, as the Indian expatriates in Dubai are usually from the middle-class and do not earn a high income.

Name of School	Curriculum	Range	Grades	Fees per Term (Canadian Dollars)
Our Own Indian School (http://www.gemsoo-alquoz.com)	Indian	Low-Cost	1- 4	\$1,047.43
			11-12	\$1,865.99
Cambridge International School	British	Average-	1-4	\$4,210.45

(http://www.gemscis-dubai.com)		Cost		
			11-12	\$5,017.24
GEMS World Academy (http://www.gemsworldacademy-dubai.com)	IB	High-Cost	1-4	\$18,573.03
			11-12	\$25,772.52

The public schools in Dubai, contrary to their names, are only for the local (Emiratis) and other Arabic speaking nationalities, as the language of instruction in these schools is Arabic. These schools are not viewed as being ‘good’ because the graduates usually have a low grasp of the English language. My first experience with graduates from the public school came about during my career at the government university. The university was only for local students and the majority of them had to go through the ‘academic bridge program’, where they were taught English and basic academic skills needed for university-level courses. Because of these outcomes, a lot of the Emirati families prefer to send their children to private schools instead of the public ones.

In my volunteer role, I worked with a student who was from Syria and who attended a public school in Dubai. He had applied to an American university in the city, but he had conditional acceptance because of his low English grades. I worked with him for a few months so that he could pass his TOEFL test. He did pass eventually, but this example shows how his schooling failed to assist him in passing the English proficiency test the first time around. Because English is something that is seen as basic education in today’s world, being literate in it is a fundamental goal that all schools in Dubai should adhere to.

The example above clearly demonstrates a phenomenon that is present in today’s world. Fluency in the English language is a must because it has become the dominant form of

communication, and the most effective form of literacy. *In this paper, I refer to literacy as being the ability to read and write fluently in English*, a set of skills that not all schools in Dubai are effectively teaching their students.

This brings about various issues, but the most detrimental one is the production of power relationships within the society of Dubai. People who are fluent in English are seen as being a niche above the others who are not fluent. Ironically for Dubai, the fluent students are mostly expatriates who attend private schools rather than the local students who attend public schools, where the medium of instruction is Arabic with a very poor emphasis on the English language. Dubai has grown into a very cosmopolitan city, where major organizations and corporations have set-up offices and hence there are numerous job opportunities for people who have the credentials and who are literate in the English language. Most of these companies hire expatriates, and this had become such an issue that Dubai now has passed a nationalization law that requires at least a certain percentage of local Emiratis to be hired by each company. If only the Government of Dubai would take charge and ensure that English is taught effectively, it would benefit all students, regardless of which school they attended. The knowledge that is valued and lacking in the public schools of Dubai is literacy in the English language, something that is unfortunately ignored, and causing varying degrees of one's status in society. On paper, Emiratis are seen as the most powerful in Dubai's society, because they are favored when it comes any law or services, otherwise they are usually seen as being inferior due to their lack of literacy in the English language.

Literacy in the English Language

The traditional understanding, and one that is evident in the low-cost private schools and the public schools in Dubai, is that literacy is the ability to acquire the 3 Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) in the English language. But today, literacy is increasingly thought of as being “multiple, socio-cultural, and political” (Dighe, 2005 p. 3). UNESCO (2002) (cited in Glasgow & Farrell, 2007) talks about literacy as ‘literacies’, in the plural, and believes that it is embedded in a range of life and livelihood situations.

Literacy, in today’s schools are usually measured in the following 5 areas:

- *Phonemic Awareness*: the ability to hear and identify sounds in spoken words.
- *Phonics*: the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.
- *Fluency*: the capacity to read text accurately and quickly.
- *Vocabulary*: the words students must know to communicate effectively.
- *Comprehension*: the ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read (Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p.9-10).

But in the twenty-first century, the definition of literacy has grown well-beyond text reading, writing, and spelling. Meaning making at the beginning of the twenty-first century now involves the ability to “read” print in addition to multimedia presentations and complex visual representations (Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p. 7-8). In today’s world communications and the media are reshaping the way we use language, and because technology evolves at such a rapid rate, it is difficult to maintain one standard definition of literacy. Ibid (cited in Dighe, 2005, p.3)

says that “multiple literacies are therefore a way to focus on realities of increasing local diversity and global connectedness”.

Even though the components of what literacy entails has evolved, “functional literacy” is still prominent and the main form of literacy that is being taught in a lot of the schools in Dubai. Functional literacy describes a very basic level of literacy needed to function in all but the most menial jobs (Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p. 2-3). Functional literacy is defined as “1. A level of reading and writing sufficient for everyday life but not for completely autonomous activity; 2. The application of the skills and knowledge of reading and writing to adult or near-adult responsibilities in the workplace;” (Hodges, 1999, p. 1-2).

Even though the low-cost and public schools in Dubai are still putting functional literacy in the English language as their main aim, the concept had actually started evolving by the eighties. Literacy skills in general were seen as a much more complex task, and reading and writing above a functional level was beginning to be seen as necessary in most jobs (Glasgow & Farrell, 2007, p. 6). During this period, Street (cited in Dighe, 2005, p. 2) referred to two models of literacy: the **autonomous model** and the **ideological model**.

In the autonomous model, Street said that there is a distancing of language from the learners. Language is treated ‘as a thing,’ distanced from both the teacher and the learner. External rules and requirements are imposed and it is this model of literacy that has generally dominated curriculum and pedagogy. The autonomous model is evident in the low-cost private and public schools of Dubai as literacy in the English language is seen as something that is taught, but there is no ownership of it from either the teachers or the students—its only part of the curriculum. For most of the educators in Dubai, literacy is synonymous with the ability to read and write, and as long as the students grasp the basic notion, their job is done.

According to Street (Dighe, 2005, p. 2) the notion of multiple literacies is crucial in challenging the autonomous model, which has promoted the notion of a single literacy. He advocates the ideological model of literacy that views literacy practices as being “inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given context”. The concept of culture plays a huge role in Dubai, people from different parts of the world make up the population, and hence there are a vast amount of differing cultures and perspectives on what literacy is. Some believe it is reading and writing skills in the English language, but a majority believes it is the ability to learn test-taking skills, as that is what determines one’s grades. But at the end of the day, realistically students are judged on literacy by how fluent they are in the English language. The English language a one that is used worldwide, and it is a common cultural belief in the Middle East, that all doors will open up once someone is fluent in the language. At the same time, unfortunately, what low-cost and public schools still concentrate on is the functional use of the English language. This phenomena actually confuses me, as the need and value of the English language is recognized, but nothing is being done about it. The notion of multiple literacies is alien to a majority of parents and educators in Dubai, a notion that would greatly benefit all students to be global citizens. In today’s world, the English language is fundamental if a student wants to progress in school. In the early years of schooling, it is vital that children learn it appropriately and that teachers realize how crucial it is that students grasp it and be fluent at it. If literacy in Dubai were seen completely from the ideological model, it would enable students to work with the English language in more than a functional level, which would become an asset for the students.

A lot of the students that I work with in my volunteer role have an excellent command of their native language, but when it comes to English, a lot of them are below average. Some of the

reasons are that English is not spoken at home, is only associated with school, and the fact that teachers usually switch to their native language when teaching at these school. These factors, as well as others, put these students at a disadvantage when it comes to progressing in their school and community, and thus this affects their confidence as well.

Literacy and Parental Involvement

The Harvard Family Research Project done in 2007 showed that parental involvement throughout the K-12 years has been linked to outcomes as higher grades, success in school, higher standardized test scores, self-esteem, more social competence, reduced substance abuse, aspirations for college, and participation in out-of-school programs (cited in Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 22). The outcomes mentioned above are crucial for any child, and something that low-cost private schools in Dubai need to put into their goals.

The concept of social participation is key here—this is where I believe schools should open up and allow and assist parents in being able to assist their own children. The aspect of parental involvement has been recognized as a crucial element in a child’s learning and reading abilities. “Home is generally the setting in which a child first encounters language and literacy...and the effects of home literacy environment...(affect) children’s early literacy skills in several domains including oral language, letter knowledge, reading ability, and comprehension” (Bracken & Fischel, 2008, p. 45-46).

There is a lot of research available that shows the link between literacy and the home environment. For example, a language facilitation project in a nursery (Rathbone, 1977 as cited in Long, 1986, p. 6) involved parents helping their children in class and also supplementing the program at home. The ‘parent involved’ group showed significantly higher gains in literacy in

terms of language and comprehension tests than the other group. The best known example of this type of parental involvement is home reading, where parents are encouraged to hear their children read regularly at home. Projects done have shown that if parents spend about ten minutes daily hearing their child read, the child's reading performance is significantly improved (Long, 1986, p. 6) showing us an increase in one aspect of literacy.

The Harvard Research Project (2007) (cited in Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 22) showed that in the K-12 arena, parental (or more broadly family) involvement can be defined by three main processes: (1) *parenting*, which considers the values and attitudes that parents have, which in turn affect how they raise their children; (2) *home-school relationships*, which reflect the role of the institution in the parent-child relationship – the formal and information connections between the family and the school; and (3) *responsibility for learning*, that is, parents' emphasis on activities that promote the student's growth, both socially and academically.

The first point of parenting is crucial, as “the discourse about trends in parenting and institutional standards for parental involvement is most frequently based on middle-class behaviors. Parent-school interactions and the degree to which parents meet the standards for involvement are affected by parents' class status” (Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 24). Schools in Dubai, more so the low-cost private and public ones, need to realize their audience's status and culture. The parents of the children that attend these schools are usually very apprehensive about their lack of schooling and their inability to speak English. The schools should take into account that these parents have a very traditional way of parenting and a traditional view of what literacy entails and then put together a parental involvement initiative. Building on this would be the second process of home-school relationships. Once the parents are understood and approached in an appropriate manner, the schools can start ensuring that there is a link between a child's home

and school environment.

The schools would need to assess which types of communication are most effective—for example, it is well known that the handouts that are sent home are not read by parents, as language is usually the barrier. To address this, the schools may want to print them in different languages. Another point is that the schools should have sessions and personal meetings with the parents to help them understand that they play a crucial role in their child’s education – inside and outside the classroom. These parents will need to be taught activities and strategies that could enable their child’s learning of the English language.

In a study done by Whitehurst and his colleagues (cited in Watkins & Bunce, 1996, p. 195), they trained parents “to use interactive reading with pre-school age children” and they found that these groups “demonstrated significant gains in language proficiency...(and) specific gains in print and literacy concepts”. Bringing parents and schools together is an important aspect and Pahl and Kelly (2005) explored the concept of “family literacy” by drawing on the fieldwork done in family literacy classrooms in the United Kingdom (cited in Glasglow & Farrell, 2007, p. 137). They observed that parents and teachers often saw home and school as separate spheres, and children operated in both spaces. Their research defines a “third space” between home and school. The study centered on younger children and examined various parents/child/literacy interactions in family literacy classrooms. In this work, a family literacy classroom is described as a place where educators attempt to join home and school by focusing on shared literacy activities with parents and children, usually practiced on school sites, drawing on home-based activities. Family literacy classrooms are seen as a place, between home and school, where both home and school literacy realms are recognized and validated (Glasglow & Farrell, 2007, p. 137). This concept is crucial to the schools in Dubai, and something that should

be understood and implemented urgently. The family literacy classrooms will not only benefit the students but their parents as well, as they will gain exposure to the school environment, be more comfortable with it, see that they add value – and hence they will be more willing to be involved.

An example of how this could be implemented in Dubai is based on a project described by Stuczynski, A., et al (2005). The lesson is an example of a family literacy project aimed at engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families for students between Grades 3-5. An overview of this project is that teachers, ask parents to write down a folk story or fairy tale from their childhood in their primary language, in blank booklet that students bring home. Students rewrite the story in English in their own booklet and add illustrations. Parents and children are then invited to present their story to the rest of the class in both languages.

The main goals of this exercise are to:

1. Promote cross-cultural awareness and appreciation among students, families, and staff,
2. Strengthen connections between home and the afterschool program, and
3. Increase student/family engagement.

As a first step, teachers will need to send letters home to parents in their first language, asking them to share their favorite fairy tale or folktale and write it down in the book provided. Since it has been noticed that not all parents read the handouts sent home, the teachers will have to follow up with calls to families to encourage everyone's participation, and if needed, translators and other parents can be used to make some of these contacts.

Once all families have been communicated with, teachers will have to ensure that students are familiar with fairy tale/folktale genre by reading and comparing stories from around the world. Also, the students should know the key elements of fairy tales, including structure, plot, theme,

etc. Once the students have a good overview, they can write down the parent's story in English and illustrate it in their own book.

The next step would be to arrange for parents to come to the classroom and read their story aloud in their home language, while their child presents the story in English. It is not necessary to have these presentations during one sitting or one week, they can be scheduled over several weeks. As a culminating event, teachers could arrange a "reader's theater" student performance of one of the shared stories, and invite parents and siblings to attend.

The main outcomes that teachers should strive for are:

1. Diverse cultures are represented in student-parent presentations,
2. Improved communication and relationships between families and program staff,
3. Majority of parents and students participate in the project, and
4. Students demonstrate understanding of key elements of fairy tales through worksheets, presentations, and comments.

The project above is just one example of how family literacy and parental involvement can be implemented in the schools of Dubai, in the next section different types of parental involvement are explored.

Types of Parental Involvement

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), (cited in Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 23), three main factors cause parents to become involved in their children's education: the parents construction of his or her role in the child's life, the parent's sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school, and the institutional role or the general invitations and opportunities

for parental involvement presented by both the child and the school. Unfortunately in Dubai, even ideas such as home reading are not even practiced in the low-cost private schools, and this is due to factors such as parents and teachers lacking the knowledge of the importance of, and books being available in English which restricts the use of them by parents who do not speak the language.

Schools need to educate the parents on things they can do at home to assist their children, such as telling parents that even if they do not understand English, it is ok, as the child can read to them books in English, explain to them in their language, and then explain to them what it means—this will strengthen the children’s ability to be fluent in the English language. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), (cited in Wartman & Savage, 2008, p. 23), rightly state that the role of the institution in the parent-student relationship is key. The degree to which a parent is involved depends not only on the relationship with his or her particular student but also with the student’s school. In the next section, the way schools can encourage different types of parental involvement is discussed.

There are many ways that parental involvement programs can be implemented into schools, Epstein mentions six types of it, which include:

- 1) **Parenting** (helping families with child-rearing and parenting skills);
- 2) **Communicating** (developing effective home-school communication);
- 3) **Volunteering** (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school);
- 4) **Learning at home** (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula);
- 5) **Decision-making** (including families as decision-makers through school-site councils, committees, etc.) and
- 6) **Collaborating with the community** (matching community services with family needs and

serving the community) (Epstein, 1986, 1995). In the following section I am going to evaluate whether the model above is something that could be implemented into one of the low-cost private schools of Dubai.

The first approach of addressing parenting and communicating styles would be a great way to start. As mentioned earlier, the form of parenting that is the most apparent one in the lower end schools is the traditional form – and one that is not conducive to being involved in their children's schooling environment. This type of parenting usually involves the well being of the child, ensuring that schoolwork is done, being reprimanded, and installing cultural and religious values. The parents see the schools and the teachers as the experts, and something that is outside their arena because of their lack of schooling and English language proficiency. Instead of ignoring the parents or dismissing them, the school needs to change its attitude towards them and start respecting and taking their parenting styles into consideration. Once the acceptance is there, the schools can then design workshops, sessions, and one-on-one dialogue with the parents on how they can and should be involved in their child's schooling. There should be translators available, and sessions should be available in different languages so that all parents can be reached. Communications, in terms of handouts and newsletters, also have to be in different languages in order to address all the parents. In the sessions, the parents should be praised and admired for what they do – as once the parents' confidence goes up, it will be the first step for them to be willing to take up another role.

Enabling the parents to volunteer at the school would be a great way to boost the confidence of the parents, and help them shed their inhibitions about being in the school environment. Tasks such as aiding the teachers in the classrooms, organizing events, talking about their culture, and helping with other general school tasks would do wonders for these

parents. And since the majority of the mothers are homemakers, time should not be a problem. The only issue would be that fathers would not be able to give the time during school hours, as they are the breadwinners of the families. For the fathers, there could be sessions during the weekend, or events in the evenings which they can help out with.

Once parents' needs and confidence has been built – that would be an ideal time to provide the parents with the material and skill to improve their interaction and involvement with their children at home, so as to ensure that appropriate learning is taking place at home. Parents can be invited into the classrooms to see how the teacher-child relationships are, and how activities are taken place.

The fifth point of decision-making within the school is something that I do not think would work in Dubai. As I mentioned in the beginning of the paper, schools are usually run by organizations and hence the decision-making power rests with them. One way that I do see parents being able to assist in decisions, is when the staff is deciding on events and planning cultural shows and festivals.

Also, the concept of community services is very rare in Dubai. Usually there are not many places a family can go to gain assistance. Within my community of the Aga Khan Foundation, we have an organization where families can approach different portfolios for different needs, for example, there are programs for English classes, building vocational skills, resume writing, assistance with educational issues, health issues, etc. There are not many services like this offered for the residents in Dubai who are not a part of my community, and I believe that schools should start filling up that void. If schools start acting like a community centre where English classes are taught for parents, and vocational courses and different hobbies classes are offered, the school will be able to have parents as a part of their school.

Barriers

Despite the benefits of parental involvement, there are a lot of barriers that prevent this from happening. The ones that are the most apparent are: the lack of knowledge of the importance of parental involvement amongst parents and schools; the educator's negative attitude towards it; and the lack of policies and structure on the part of the school and its running organization.

Most of the parents of the students attending low and average-cost private school in Dubai adhere to the expert model of teaching – where they see the teacher as the expert and their role as being minimal in their child's schooling. They fail to realize that what they teach their children at home, be it in terms of language, values or religion, is all part of their children's education. Because of this misconception, they tend to distance themselves from schools. Other factors that play into role here are things such as the parents' low-proficiency of English, low socio-economic status (SES), and the fact that teachers and schools actually discourage parents into the schools.

In their article, 'Hard to reach parents or hard to reach school? A discussion of home-school relations with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents', Crozier and Davies (2005) describe many things that I come across in my volunteer work. I am going to discuss this article in depth as it mirrors a lot of the experiences I have had in Dubai. I have worked with both ethnic group parents mentioned in the article and their attitudes and preconceived notions are very similar to a majority of all ethnic minority parents – such as the ones from Afghanistan, India, Syria, and Tajikistan. The perception of the UK schools and teachers mentioned in the article are also similar to the ones in Dubai, and the descriptions mentioned are an accurate description of any low or average cost private school in Dubai. The

article explains why some of the schools and parents act the way they do when it comes to parental involvement in children's education, and since the schools and parents described in the article are similar to Dubai – the insights and learning from this article would greatly benefit the schools in this region.

The article starts off by saying that many schools thought that South Asian parents, especially the Bangladeshi parents, were “hard to reach”, and it was evident that parents were either minimally involved or not at all in the school system. Most of the teachers and heads that were interviewed cited that the lack of interaction and involvement from the parents was because of cultural differences. The authors did not accept this notion, and noted that schools usually see parents as a homogenous group and that they imposed normative values of white middle-class parents to all the parents at the school. The school's implicit expectations about parental involvement is based on an assumption that parents are ‘like us’ – meaning that they are white and middle class. So, instead of starting with the question ‘what influences and, or constraints the parents from engaging with the school?’ the authors decided to concentrate on ‘why are the schools hard to reach?’

The article draws on research with Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage families in the north-east of England. The authors examine the ways schools attempted to or not to “involve” parents, and how can there be discrepancies between the needs, values and traditions of homes and schools. Crozier and Davis argue that rather than the parents not matching up to the values and requirements of the school, it is the schools that fail to acknowledge the potential that the parents could offer; and thus this frequently inhibits accessibility for certain parents, rather than the parents being ‘hard to reach’. This occurred because schools had the ‘One-size fits all

approach'; they believed that everyone would and should fit in the dominant society of white middle-class

The research is based on a qualitative study, which considered parents' views of home-school relations, their own roles in relation to education and the students' perspectives on this, along with the teachers' views. The two communities that were studied were Shipton – where a majority of the Bangladeshi heritage families live, and Ironoretown, where the Pakistani heritage families live. The researchers found that the level of education was slightly higher among the Pakistani community than the Bangladeshi one, and that the majority of the Bangladeshi mothers in the sample did not speak English.

The authors describe the notion that within education policy and parental involvement communication, there is an implicit assumption that the responsibility for initiating parental involvement, lies with the parents. There is usually no requirement for schools to encourage parental involvement, and none of the schools in the study had policies on parental involvement or home-school relations.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, Crozier and Davis (2005) described the schools in their study as either adopting the traditional 'expert' model or the 'transplant' model. In the expert model, the professional is the expert, whereby they hold all the 'valued' educational knowledge and uses his/her position to take all decisions about educational matters, and thus the parents only have a limited role and the child is passive. In the 'transplant' model, the professionals transplant the skills and expertise to the parents to help them become more competent in the roles of co-teachers/co-educators, such as through parent classes, playing with their child, etc.

The article further identifies the school's perspective about Pakistani parents, in that the school saw their parents as being interested in education and wanted their children to do well,

but noticed that the parents were reluctant to initiate contact. If they were contacted by one of the teachers, the parents would come.

In contrast, the article mentions there was also a view that there was hardly any contact with the Bangladeshi parents except when there were problems, usually regarding behavioral matters. From the parents' perspective, the Bangladeshi parents that were interviewed did not see the need to visit the school or attend parent-teacher meetings; they thought that if there was a problem, they would hear about it either from the school or the community. Parents from both the communities saw their role as inculcating Islamic, family and community values in their children, enabling them to construct a (British) Muslim identity. For the Pakistani community, the actual contact between parents and schools varied between families and between schools. The authors identified the parents as falling into one the three 'types' of parental behavior: parents as consumers, independent parents and non-participant parents.

The students were seen as the main way that information from school to home was transmitted; but in many cases of the study the information never reached home, especially in the secondary-school environment. A lot of the students, particularly from Shipton, wanted to keep home and school separate. Their reasons included: parents lack of education; the mothers' limited fluency in English; they felt embarrassed by their parents and wanted to protect them; and because the mothers' wore traditional dresses which would lead to racial harassment for the students.

All schools in the study had some systems in place with which they hoped to involve parents, but there was little or no recognition of the nature of the parent body or their particular needs and perspective. Schools had the 'One-size fits all approach' as they believed that everyone would and should fit in the dominant society of white middle-class, but this approach

obviously did not work for the minority ethnic parents. For example, one of the ways in this approach failed was the type of information sent out (and the way it was delivered), Sending home newsletters or notes did little to understand the workings of the children's schools or inspire the parents to attend events. And the events that were organized were seen as "tokenistic" and "one-offs", and some were even inappropriate for the Muslim community such as fashion shows and wine and cheese night.

Some Pakistani parents felt that there were differential attitudes towards them because of their heritage and felt that these attitudes were often based on stereotypical and racist opinions. In the study the authors saw that this was true, and that in some cases, the Bangladeshi and Pakistani children were seen as a burden; and them and their parents were often labeled as "others".

In the conclusion of the article, the authors noted that schools spend a lot of energy, time and resources in sending out information to parents – but the fact remained that it was not an effective way of involving or empowering parents to take a proactive role. The research conducted showed that schools were not welcoming to minority ethnic parents – ideally they should help parents to overcome their own apprehensions about their lack of educational knowledge, levels of English, or even how they will be received as Asian or Muslim people. Also, unfortunately the schools have failed to address racist abuse towards children and have presented places, which are insecure and potentially hostile.

The article showed how differences in culture, and them not being addressed, can effect a child and their parents' experience of and within a school. Here the concept of school-community is not successful as the school fails to note the cultural differences, tends to judge parents according to their ethnicity; and parents sense this prejudice and the stereotypical

attitudes towards them. This study shows how important it is for a school to be well versed with different communities and their cultures, and ensure that students and parents are aware of school practices, and the expectations of them.

My own community is very multicultural, and we adapt to the needs of each segment of the community. I was guilty of having preconceived notions about each batch of parents – for example, when I was working with the parents on a literacy program, I assumed that the parents that had migrated from the West would either already have the skills or be better at implementing them when I taught it. And in most of the cases I was right. Instead of using this attitude negatively, I always ensured that I paired up a ‘strong’ parent with a ‘weak’ one, and it would make a lot of difference for the parents who had no or little education as they had someone to talk to and knew they had a partner to help them. In these sessions, we always provided child-care, made sure that the speaker was bilingual and that there was food served; all these elements helped to attract parents to come in and benefit from the workshops. I think the schools in the article and in Dubai, need to take the same approach when handling their parents – they need to understand what the parents’ needs and issues are.

What needs to be done in Dubai to promote Parental Involvement?

Even the most difficult-to- reach parents can be reached through the appropriate school and teacher practices (Epstein, 1986).

Schools in Dubai usually do not make families feel welcomed, respected, needed, and valued which are all risk factors for alienating parents. G. Gianzero (1999) observes that “bureaucratic school environments ...tend to discourage parental involvement. Additionally, educators' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, parents may facilitate or impede their

involvement”(p. 8).

A majority of Dubai’s schools are run bureaucratically unfortunately, and because of this, sometimes the aims of schooling and education are not always sound – which leads to the reluctance of the governing organizations to get parents involved.

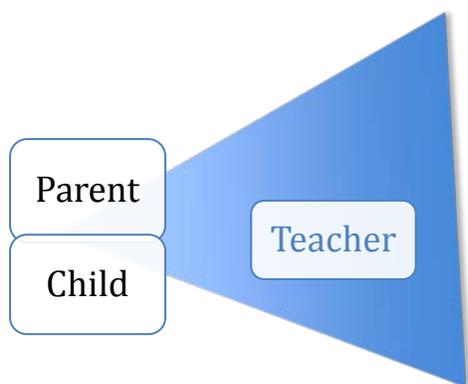
Apart from the owners of the school, educators are skeptical of parental involvement, as they fear that it is an invasion into their domain, and they prefer parent participation to be limited to certain functions and specific occasions. Teachers who taught the students whose parents had not gone through schools, or who did not speak English fluently, perceived the parents as deficient and not interested in their children’s education. They did not understand the culture or the thought process of the parents, and hence did not communicate with them, which left the students at a disadvantage (Crozier and Davis, 2005)

Another issue that is common in a lot of schools in Dubai is the fact that teachers do not want parents in their classroom, they prefer to work in isolation for numerous reasons including a desire to avoid disruptions in their classroom. But I believe, at the end of the day it is fear. Teachers tend to be wary of an outsider being in their classroom as they see it as their domain, not part of their pedagogy, and because essentially they do not trust the parents and do not want to be judged by them. Grumet (1998) mentions “Ethics traditionally falls into this service of limiting relations, defining the boundaries of persons and protecting them from the unwarranted intrusion of others” and that “the home, where one eats and sleeps and makes love that makes children, is disqualified as a context for ethical behavior” (p. 168). In this scenario, I take ethical behavior to mean life lessons that can be taught outside the classroom, such as moral behavior, and also the ethical responsibility of parents to add to their children’s education. This area is often ignored, and one that needs a lot more importance. I firmly believe that “The school will

teach children how to read, but the environment of the home must teach them what to read. The school can teach them how to think, but the home must teach them what to believe” (Charles A. Wells, <http://parentingteens.about.com/od/familylife/a/quotesparentsfamily.htm>).

Teachers who view parents as deficient or reluctant participants in their children's education rather than potential supporters of the educational process, (similar to what the teachers felt in the Crozier and Davis’ article) damage parent involvement. Interestingly, it has been noted that teachers who are uncomfortable with parent involvement have usually not received sufficient training and support in working with parents (Gianzero, 1999, p. 8).

Roy Long rightfully points out that for a variety of reasons – historical, institutional and cultural – the involvement of the teacher in early education has tended to drive a ‘wedge’ between the parent and the child which diminishes the importance and effectiveness of the ‘learning bond’. To a greater or lesser extent, the teacher has assumed the central educative role (Long, 1986, p. 3-4). He describes this through the ‘wedge’ model, an adaptation of which is below (The double line represents the parent-child learning bond).

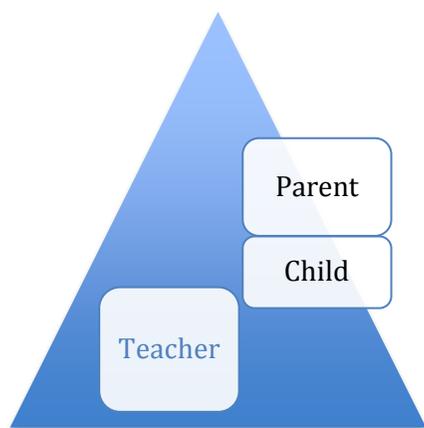


The ‘wedge model’

In this model, the concept of the teacher as an expert is depicted, as he/she comes in-between the parent and the child to teach. But with recent developments in communication and information systems in the home, and the problems of coping with the current ‘knowledge

explosion’, the role of the teacher as the expert transmitter of knowledge is becoming outdated. Parents are becoming to be seen as part of the solution in education rather than part of the problem (Prosser, 1981 in Long, 1986). The ‘wedge’ model is a good description of what happens in Dubai, but the main issue is that parents actually do feel that this is the way a school is supposed to be, and hence they stand back and let the teacher take over their child’s education.

I believe that Deer got it right in saying that “the role of the teacher is moving from an instrumental one (‘schools are for teaching kids’), where parental ‘deficiencies’ need to be remedied, towards a ‘community facilitator’ dimension, where the school is a resource centre, and the contexts of learning are widened into the home and the community” (Deer, 1980). I believe this notion is exactly what is needed in the schools of Dubai. R. Long suggests the ‘clamp model’ for the implementation of this notion. In this he teacher recognizes the role of the parent as the primary educator of the young child, fosters and develops the parent-child learning bond, and complements the parents’ educative role (Long, 1986, p. 5). An adaptation of this model is shown below, and like the ‘wedge’ model, the double line represents the parent-child learning bond.



The ‘clamp’ model

To a great extent, the responsibility for generating effective parent involvement lies with the schools. Parents have to be educated on how and why they should make time for involvement in their children's education, and at the same time schools must provide the opportunities for parents to become involved in children's schooling. They need to design and implement strategies that engage parents on a continuing basis in their children's schooling. While doing this, they should come up with strategies on how to engage low-income families and others who are reluctant to approach schools on their own. Although programs in school will and do vary, it has been known that successful parental involvement strategies share a number of common characteristics; Davies (1991) (cited in Gianzero, 1999, p. 12) points out three central themes that promote successful parent involvement: providing success for all children, serving the whole child, and sharing responsibility for children's development among schools, parents, and communities. If the schools in Dubai were to follow these themes and base workshops and seminars around them, I am confident that they will be successful in implementing a parental involvement program/policy, which in turn will help the students enhance their literacy levels.

Pedagogy and Parental Involvement

Most schools and teachers want the control and they accept the expert model. Grumet (1998) rightly states "...curriculum is our attempt to claim and realize self-determination by constructing worlds for our children that repudiate the constraints that we understand to have limited us" (p. 169). By educators controlling both the school and home environment (as parents do not intervene with homework and additional educational activities), they are only presenting them with skills and information that they deem important. Phillips supports the notion of

parental involvement by his observation of education being driven by desire, he says “From an unknowable (unconscious) set of criteria a person, unbeknown even to himself, picks out and transforms the bits he wants; the bits that can be used in the hidden projects of unconscious desire” (Phillips, 1998, p. 70-71). Building on this, parents can notice these choices and hence nurture them. If parents were presented with skills and knowledge about what should be focused on, how they enable their child to be an all-rounder’ – and not just excel in textbook studies – the education of the child will not only be based on the standard curriculum. This can only happen when schools understand and accept that the “presence of parents in classrooms is essential if teachers and parents are going to trust one another” (Grumet, 1998, p. 179).

During my M.Ed. program, I have been interested to learn how to educate teachers on the importance of parents’ role in a students’ lives no matter what background they came from. I believe that the school as a whole first needs to be *parent-friendly* policy, something that the teachers need to adhere to. But I believe that it should not be that just because a policy is in place that is why the environment should be inclusive. Teachers should be given sessions on different cultures, different ways of parental involvement and the benefits of it, and how to establish it as part of their pedagogy.

I also think that an English language literacy program needs to be established for parents as well within the school—making it more of a community organization. The schools need resources to reach out to these parents such as translators who can also act as parent representatives. They can hold sessions for parents from minority ethnic backgrounds to educate them on parent’s responsibilities and ways they can help students at home. Additionally, English classes and vocational courses would be beneficial. They could also make books available in different languages, so that parents and children can read together at home. The parent

representatives could also be the link between teachers and parents, and educate the teachers on different the different cultural perceptions of schools and teachers as being the experts, and how to break that barrier.

Interestingly, up until very recently, I have been preoccupied and concerned about why and how parents can be brought into their child's educational world, and how it would benefit them both; but after doing research I have realized that I have been naïve in not thinking about what the parents may lose during this process. Ellsworth (2005) recalls an important observation made by Anna D. Smith that reflects my own thinking: "I believe identity is a process and that we are every moment making an adjustment, and sometimes those moments happen while we are talking...." (p. 63). When I first read this sentence I realized that I had never taken into account the parents' identity and how they might be compromising their own culture when trying to adapt to the role of an ideal parent and be included in their child's classroom. Trying to learn and communicate in English must be a tough task especially for parents who have to learn and speak in the presence of somebody they see as an expert. The internal conflict must be vast for these parents, and the ones that I worked with always stammered and hesitated when I spoke to them in their own language or in English, and I always thought it was because they lacked self-confidence, but I wonder now, if it was also because I was making them change their identity, trying to make them someone that they really are not.

Smith (cited in Ellsworth, 2005, p. 63) interestingly mentions "I think we can learn a lot about a person in the very moment that language fails them. In the very moment that they have to be more creative than they would have imagined in order to communicate". Ellsworth builds on this saying that "this is where we find the pedagogical pivot place in Smith's work. It occurs at the moment where the smooth-sounding words fail us, that is, at the moment where and when the

individual act of speaking comes into relation with the turbulence of social and cultural negotiations and modulations of racial and ethnic identities. At this moment of socially produced identities in the making, something (new, different) is trying to find its way into relation” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 64). Ellsworth’s observation was an eye-opener for me, it clearly explained to me the transformation that was taking place within these parents. They too were a part of pedagogy-my pedagogy. I have never seen myself as a teacher, and whenever someone asks me about my program, I always have to explain that I am not a professional teacher. Though that fact is still true, I feel that trying to make parents partners in their child’s education makes me somewhat of a teacher and facilitator. D. W. Winnicott (cited in Ellsworth, 2005, p. 69) rightly says “the time of transitional phenomena, as the interval of change between the self’s past and future, is pedagogy’s time” Learning involves stepping beyond what we know and embracing the risk of what we do not, in this sense I am a teacher, and in a way, I guess everyone is to some degree.

Using Winnicott’s statement that the “time of transitional phenomena, as the interval of change between the self’s past and future, is pedagogy’s time”, I believe that the teachers also go through this pedagogical hinge when their perception and belief of what their responsibilities are begins to change. Teachers who are taught the benefits of parental involvement and how they should be involved in their classroom and in their students’ home lives – are also going through this transition. When the teachers take in account their past expectations and actions and accept what their future actions should be-this is when transformation happens, as Ellsworth says, “we find ourselves at a temporal hinge where past and future fold into proximity and create the time between past and future: the interval of change” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 68). This change brings

about transformations not just amongst the teachers, but gradually amongst the parents and students as well.

Conclusion: My Inner Conflict with Parental Involvement In Schools

As much as I believe that the partnership of parents and children is vital and something that should be part of every teacher's pedagogy— there is a conflict in my thinking when I consider the schooling system in the third world countries such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The aim of my work in Dubai is that the students, teachers and parents are partners in education, so that a child gains the maximum from it, be meritocratic, and be able to pursue any degree that they want in a reputable organization. This aim is for the children who we set up schools for in Afghanistan and Tajikistan is different and I think this can be best explained if I give a bit of an overview.

In the eastern third world countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, any form of education is valued as it is one's ticket out of poverty; and also since most of these countries are going through political turmoil, people without an education are usually driven into subordinate positions where they feel vulnerable to those in power (H.H The Aga Khan, 2008). In those parts of the world, therefore, having an education not only guarantees better jobs, it leads to respect and subsequently gives one a voice in their societies and communities; a virtue that can bring about a positive change if used correctly. Educational access enables people to be good citizens, as it teaches tolerance and cultural understanding (H.H. The Aga Khan, 2008). Adam Philips says that democracy, “works through the encouragement and validation of new forms of association and the conflicts they inevitably reveal” (Phillips, 2002, p. 21); these associations and conflicts are the only ways that students will learn how to gain their voices.

Recent clashes in Pakistan's Swat valley are between the extremists and the remaining public. Women not wearing a hijab are killed, schools for girls are brought down, and places where music is sold and played are being set on fire; as the extremists see these acts as being against Islam. This clash is nothing more than a clash of unawareness. People are so ignorant of one another, that even after living in the same city – they cannot find a common language to communicate in and understand one another (H.H. The Aga Khan, 2008). Schools and education, unfortunately, are seen by many as being 'modern', and something that would harm the society as they would take away from their own culture and way of life. When reading about the crisis of learning, James Baldwin (cited in Ellsworth, 2005, p. 89) described it as follows:

being the “moment of letting go of a former sense of self in order to re-identify with an emerging and different self that is still in transition. In the crisis that is learning, I am suspended in the space between losing myself and finding myself caught with different knowledges and other people. In the moment of learning, I am simultaneously me and not me”.

Ironically, this can only be tackled by education. It is not about how each child is scoring on a test; it is about empowering each child with the belief that modernity does not harm a community as long as the tradition is steadfast (H.H. The Aga Khan, 2008); an approach that I firmly believe.

My aim for the students there is to have a school and appropriate teachers to provide educational schooling. Currently, a lot of the classrooms that are used if schools are not available are huge fields in which teachers put students from different grades together and teach what they deem important; a curriculum is for those fortunate. Also, these field classrooms are seasonal as the winters are very harsh in those regions. We have been building schools with roofs, desks and

books (that are all seen as luxuries) and that are useable in the summers and the winters. For the parents there, it is a sacrifice to give up their child for school as it leaves a gap in the labor that they need in their farming and household chores, but they realize the importance of it. Because of war, illnesses, the earthquake in 2005 and the recent floods, a lot of the children are orphans or only have one parent, and this is one of the reasons I have never asked my colleagues about parental literacy, involvement or including it in the curricula. The 'expert' model is more established there for the parents, and they are usually so burdened with everyday life and providing for their family that it would seem very unreasonable, in my view, to ask them to be in the classroom with their children, or to help them at home with studies. I believe the way Winnicott (cited in Ellsworth, 2005, p. 89) recognized "that the transitional space of learning not only is a source of creativity but can also be the source of terrifying anxiety" is very true, and the anxiety would be very high for the Afghani and Tajiki parents who are scared of adhering to another identity, as their current traditional one is causing them grief because of the political and fundamentalist wars.

Saying all of the above, I come across another conflict within myself. Even though it seems that I believe pedagogy should strategically separate parents in their child's classrooms, as it is not the right time for their involvement, I do think that women in Central Asia should be literate and be taught outside of their child's school. I was recently approached to do some consultancy work with the 'Focus on Literacy Development Foundation' who are trying to set up early childhood development and adult literacy centers in Central Asia and Africa to help eliminate illiteracy amongst the ultra poor in those areas. They are aiming to build mother literacy centers that will educate mothers to read, write and speak their native language and also teach English Language Arts. Mothers will also be taught vocational skills and business

economics. The vision is that these mothers will be able to learn business skills and have the confidence to contribute to the family's economics through home-based businesses. I am hoping that these women will come across the pedagogical pivot point between their past and future, understand why they need to be educated, which will enable and empower them to take a stance, be literate, educate their children, be confident and hence be more independent.

I am actually quite thankful that during the process of writing this paper, I have realized that I am an educational teacher, something that did not occur to me before. Interestingly, my pedagogical pivot point happened while I was writing about it. I may not fit into the traditional form of a teacher, I do not have a classroom or a bunch of young students, but I do have a group of older ones – the parents. My passion and aim is to enable them to be better parents, educators, be partners in their child's education, and for them to have a pedagogical pivot point where they see their past and then understand why they need to be different in the future. My aim and wish is that I am able to enable the students in the U.A.E. and Central Asia to cross this bridge as well, to a future that is better for them, and eventually for their families as well.

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