EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS IN THE [XXXX] PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

By

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To my family – thank you for giving me strong roots and wings, and for supporting me throughout this journey
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 DEFINITION OF TERMS

ADEC
The Abu Dhabi Education Council is the governing body for education in Abu Dhabi. Although ADEC collaborates with the UAE Ministry of Education, it exercises a high degree of control over the operation of schools in Abu Dhabi. ADEC functions as the governing body for all schools in the emirate but also as the operator (similar to a school district in the U.S.) for government-run schools.

Alhamdulillah
Meaning literally “praise be to God,” this phrase often is invoked by participants.

Cluster Manager
Termed the “principal’s principal,” these ADEC employees support and supervise principals, usually at approximately 5-10 geographically clustered school sites. These are usually Westerners who have experience working as principals in a foreign context.

Cycles
Schools in the UAE are organized into cycles:
- KG1/KG2 serves students from ages three to six, in two years of kindergarten classes. These generally are housed in a separate mixed-gender school site, although they are sometimes situated within a Cycle 1 girl’s school.
- Cycle 1 serves students in grades one to five, usually in gender-segregated sites. Some newer schools serve cycle 1 students in a mixed-gender environment
- Cycle 2 serves students in grades six to nine, in gender-segregated sites.
- Cycle 3 serves students in grades 10 to 12, in gender-segregated sites.
Note: Geographically remote school sites may serve multiple cycles in a single gender-segregated school building. KG1/KG2 is usually mixed-gender and is usually housed in a girl’s school.

HoF-A
The Head of Faculty is the lead teacher for Arabic Medium Teachers in a school using the New School model. This is a quasi-administrative position; the job responsibilities include assistance with professional development and evaluation for teachers.

HoF-E
The Head of Faculty is the lead teacher for English Medium teachers in a school using the New School model. These are mostly Western ex-patriots. This is a quasi-administrative position; the job responsibilities include assistance with professional development and evaluation for teachers.
Insha’Allah  Literally translated to “If it is God’s will.” Although it is often used to denote hope that a future event will occur, it literally references the Muslim belief in pre-destination (i.e., the future event will happen unless it is not God’s will for it to happen).

KPI  Key performance indicators—these are used to measure and monitor progress by both external and internal entities who work with/for ADEC.

NSM  The New School model is the term for the radical reform concept that is currently being implemented by ADEC, in KG and Cycle 1 schools. The official introduction to Cycle 2 is scheduled to begin in 2013. Cycle 3 will follow. Essential components include bi-literacy, an inquiry approach to learning, cooperative learning, and a student-centered approach to pedagogy.

MoE  The Ministry of Education—the federal governing body for education in the United Arab Emirates

PD  Professional development—In addition to its use in reference to ongoing learning opportunities generally, PD is also a division within ADEC, located in the School Operations sector. The division provides ongoing learning opportunities for school leaders and teachers, to support ADEC’s vision and initiatives.

PLC  A professional learning community is a concept that allows teachers and/or school leaders to form a supportive network in which they can learn and grow together as educators.

PPP  A public private partnership program is a program in which private companies were hired by ADEC to supervise and manage government schools, while providing intensive PD for school leaders and teachers.

Provider  Companies or external entities that offer services, such as professional development, to ADEC

Tamkeen  The Empowering Educators program is the current professional development program in ADEC government schools. This program provides leadership training for principals, vice-principals, and HoFs and supports teacher PD at the school site.
Education reform is a major priority for the government of Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates. Educational leadership is a key component of successful education reform efforts. The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) has invested heavily in providing professional development to school leaders, to ensure that their skills and abilities match the competencies needed to reach ADEC goals. A number of professional development provider companies, and both local and foreign universities, have been charged by ADEC with providing professional development for school leaders. The programs are grounded in (mostly Western) best practices in leadership development programs and are endeavors to align training to local needs. However, at this point, there is little research about the effectiveness of such programs in targeting and meeting Emirati school leader needs related to school reform initiatives in the UAE. This qualitative narrative study provides insight into the lived experiences of several members of the first cohort group of aspiring vice-principals, in a professional development program conducted by ADEC, in partnership with a local university. Results reveal that participants have a shared history of education which includes rote
memorization and authoritarian leadership. Participants viewed the program as helpful but sometimes lacking in practical application. After the program, the participants faced difficult circumstances with little ongoing training or support. It is hoped that the results of the study will be used by decision-makers to enhance the quality and contextualization of future leadership development programs in Abu Dhabi.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is an oil-rich state, which has seen a vast influx of capital in the past several decades from oil production. The GDP of the nation has risen from approximately $15 billion (U.S. dollars) in 1975 to approximately $300 billion in 2010 (World Bank DataBank, 2012). The relatively small number of local workers (9.3% of the labor force in 2005) versus expatriate workers (90.7%) has created a national imperative for increasing the capacity of local leaders for the next generation (Pech, 2009). Sheikh Zayed (peace be upon him), the founding father of the UAE and Emir of Abu Dhabi, summed up his aspirations for education in the country, stating, “The real asset of any advanced nation is its people, especially the educated ones, and the prosperity and success of the people are measured by the standard of their education” (UAE Embassy, 2012). The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), the governing body of education in Abu Dhabi, was established in 2005 to:

Develop education and educational institutions in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, implement innovative educational policies, plans and programs that aim to improve education, and support educational institutions and staff to achieve the objectives of national development in accordance with the highest international standards. (ADEC, 2012)

Current reform efforts in Abu Dhabi are focused on the rapid improvement of the schooling system, with a focus on professional development. ADEC identifies “elevating the capabilities of school leaders and teachers” as a key component of reform, which will be accomplished by utilizing the “expertise of best-in-class international operators to drive the reform” (ADEC, 2012c). Published literature from ADEC reveals a deep commitment to the introduction of international best practices in teaching and school leadership, supported by international experts and professional development providers.
Research concerning school reform shows that school leaders, especially principals, are important change agents in school improvement (Davis et al. 2005; Halawah, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Styron & LeMire, 2009). ADEC has invested heavily in providing professional development to school leaders, to ensure that their skills and abilities match the competencies needed to reach ADEC goals. A number of professional development provider companies, and both local and foreign universities, have been charged by ADEC with providing professional development for school leaders. The programs are grounded in (mostly Western) best practices in leadership development programs and endeavor to align training to local needs. However, at this point, there is little research about the effectiveness of such programs in targeting and meeting Emirati school leader needs related to school reform initiatives in the UAE. This study will provide insight into the lived experiences of several members of the first cohort group of aspiring vice-principals, in a professional development program conducted by ADEC, in partnership with a local university. It is hoped that the results of the study will be used by decision-makers to enhance the quality and contextualization of future leadership development programs in Abu Dhabi.

There is tremendous pressure on ADEC to produce immediate results. Harold and Stephenson (2010) stated:

Rapid and ongoing development across all sectors of its society characterizes … the United Arab Emirates. Currently, a great deal of attention is focused on the reform of its education sector … [to] bring the UAE education system in closer alignment with international best practices. (2010, p. 231)

Historically, the educational system in the UAE has evidenced a number of significant problems and barriers to success; the objective of ADEC is to overcome
these barriers. Thorne cited Mograby, who identified the following problems with education in the UAE:

- unclear and conflicting missions and goals related to problems and discrepancies in study programs and curricula;
- inappropriate methods of teaching and learning; and
- inflexible curricula and programs, which lead to high drop-out rates and long duration of studies. (2011, p. 173)

ADEC states, “Educational change requires a deep commitment by principals, vice-principals, and teachers to engage in continuous self-reflection and growth through ongoing and meaningful professional development” (ADEC School Leadership Handbook, 2012b, p. 3). MacPherson et al. (2007) stated that for current reform goals in the UAE to be met, principals would need to plan, including ensuring that programs meet benchmarks for global best practices. To do this, principals must engage in distributed leadership, involve parents and the community in the life of the school, promote student-centered learning, and support extra-curricular activities. Hess & Kelly state that “School leadership is the key to school improvement” (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 1). Providing instructional leadership to schools is a complex process, which involves many competencies. As identified in the research literature, essential characteristics, skills, and competencies for successful school leaders, are: self-awareness (Oplatka, 2009); systems thinking (Oplatka, 2009); creative problem solving skills (Oplatka, 2009); knowledge of testing and assessment (Oplatka, 2009); financial acumen (Oplatka, 2009); ability to provide excellent professional development (Oplatka, 2009); distributive leadership style (Clift et al., 1993; Walker & Quian, 2006); child-centered outlook (Clift et al., 1993); ability to collaborate and/or lead a team (Clift et al., 1993; Styron & LeMire, 2009); data-driven decision-making skills (Clift, et al. p. 259; Styron & LeMire, 2009);
skillful communicators (Clift et al., 1993); ability to challenge conventions (Styron & LeMire, 2009); personnel motivation and management (Hess & Kelly, 2007; Styron & LeMire, 2009); technical knowledge (Hess & Kelly, 2007); external leadership skills (Hess & Kelly, 2007); an understanding of and promotion of positive norms and values (Hess & Kelly, 2007); managing classroom instruction (Hess & Kelly, 2007); and managing and promoting a positive school culture (Hess & Kelly, 2007). ADEC has invested heavily in providing professional development to school leaders, to ensure that their skills and abilities match the competencies needed to reach ADEC goals.

A lack of coherent professional development programming has been identified in the research literature as a barrier to the success of educational reform initiatives in the UAE (Gallagher, 2011, p. 69). Thorne states “there seems to be a deliberate policy tactic of ‘sampling’ a variety of educational ‘products’ before deciding which to choose” (2011, p. 174). In terms of professional development, this approach may overlook or neglect homegrown or organic solutions to problems in the UAE, which may, in fact, be context specific (Thorne, 2011, p. 174). Although there is a substantial field of literature that addresses best practices in educational leadership development, there is almost no literature in which leadership development in the Gulf context is addressed (Stephenson, 2010). The current study adds to the research literature by providing information about professional development from the perspective of female Emirati participants taking part in the [XXXX] Professional Development program, a pilot program designed to increase leadership capacity for potential school leaders.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore participants’ perceptions of the effects of the various components of the [XXXX] Professional Development program, including
learned theory, on-the-job assignments, and the opportunity to form a professional learning community (PLC) with their colleagues, on their perceptions about their own effectiveness as a school leader.

**Research Question**

What are the perceptions of members of the cohort group of candidates for the vice-principalship who are involved in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, regarding the effectiveness of the program?

Sub-Questions are:

1. What are participants’ perceptions about the cultural appropriateness of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program?
2. What are participants’ perceptions about the relevance of the information presented in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, as it relates to their experience in the UAE context?

The researcher will utilize a qualitative research design, with a narrative approach, using a semi-structured interview protocol.

**Significance of the Study**

There is a body of research from a Western perspective about effective school leadership preparation programs. There is significantly less research concerning these programs in the UAE context. In the UAE, most professional development is delivered (with translation) by Western education professionals. Given this set of circumstances, it is purposeful to gather information from consumers of these programs regarding these programs’ effectiveness and cultural appropriateness. Findings from this study could be useful for multiple stakeholder groups, including ADEC leadership, PD providers (i.e., for-profit and not-for-profit companies), and university leaders, who can use this
information to help in planning more effective and culturally competent PD programs for school leaders in the UAE.

**Limitations**

There are immediate limitations presented by the use of cross-cultural, qualitative research. Although participants were chosen to participate in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program based partly on their English language proficiency, language issues could have hindered the research, especially during transcription. To ensure accurate transcription, I utilized the services of a reputable transcription company that specializes in academic transcription. After receiving the transcripts, I carefully audited the transcripts and used member checking, although I ultimately received very little feedback from participants.

Given my relatively short tenure in the UAE and outsider status, I lack background knowledge of the culture, which may limit my ability to convey the participants’ stories accurately. Cultural factors may also negatively affect participant candor. In her 2008 study of UAE banking employees, Jones finds that trainees exhibited “attitudes and behaviors related to self-preservation, including an avoidance of blame, and the perception that at all times, they had to execute tasks without any errors so as to avoid blame and punishment” (cited by Pech, p. 58). Stephenson writes that in Arab cultures, face-saving strategies “can be frustrating for outsiders” (2010, p. 154). Given my role as a PD coordinator for ADEC, it is conceivable that participants may have been resistant to providing honest feedback about programs, especially if that feedback was negative. When I began the study, I was quite concerned that participants would feel uncomfortable sharing honestly with me, as an outsider. However, as the study progressed, some factors led me to believe that participants’ exhibited a fairly
high degree of candor in their interviews. First, the program participants evidenced a high degree of status affiliation, as participants in the program, which was established as a high priority for the organization. Also, participants spoke frankly with me about the program both during interviews and in other informal conversations. Finally, although I was not involved in the implementation of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, I was very involved in subsequent programming for this group. I was able to form a bond with the participants, not only during our interviews but also through meetings and special events. Ultimately, I feel confident that the feedback provided by participants was honest and, to a fairly high degree, candid.

The final limitation of the study was the small number of participants who elected to participate. Although all program participants were invited to participate, only four volunteers signed consent forms indicating their willingness to do so. Three of the four participants who elected to participate were from the same geographic region and they knew one another well; therefore, the study may not include a high degree of diversity in terms of their experiences. There were many difficulties in conducting the interviews, including travel and the necessity of conducting interviews during the workday. Ultimately, it was quite a challenge to complete two hour-long interviews with each of the four participants. It was possible to complete all of the interviews only because of a high degree of patience and flexibility demonstrated by everyone involved, including a high degree of support from ADEC leadership, especially in the Professional Development Division, under the School Operations sector.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore participant perceptions of effectiveness of the [XXXX] program. Secondary considerations are participant perceptions of the cultural and contextual appropriateness of the [XXXX] leadership development program. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the related literature regarding professional development in the UAE context. The chapter begins with an overview of best practices in leadership development programs, from a Western perspective. The remaining sections provide context about the UAE, specifically concerning: women and the workforce, emiratization, the education system, the New School model, and reform efforts. Next, an overview of the literature concerning teacher preparation programs and professional development in the UAE is provided. Finally, the researcher explores the (very limited) literature regarding school leadership development in the UAE context.

Leadership Development Programs—Best Practices from a Western Perspective

Effective professional development for school leaders begins with effective professional development practices for educators, overall. Guskey points out that the methods used to identify characteristics of effective professional development “vary widely and that the research that supports them is inconsistent and often contradictory”; however, it is possible to find some consensus among the research which can guide decision-makers (Guskey, 2003, p. 738). Research suggests that effective professional development must be of an adequate duration (both within the session and across sessions) to allow educators to utilize the information effectively (Garet, et al, 2001; Cocoran, 1995; Hunzicker, 2011). High-quality professional development must also be
aligned to the improvement goals of the individual and the organization (Garet, et al, 2001; Guskey, 2009; Cororan, 1995; Hunzicker, 2011). Active learning and opportunities for collaboration are also noted as keys to successful professional development for educators (Garet, et al, 2001; Guskey, 2009; Cororan, 1995; Hunzicker, 2011).

Buskey and Topolka-Jorissen exhort those designing leadership development programs to focus on “leading your leadership journey courageously” (Buskey & Topolka-Jorissen, 2010, p. 116). The authors utilize a case study format to document the experience of faculty at Western Carolina University in 2007–2008, as they work to reimagine the Master’s degree program in School Administration (MSA). The team was aware of many challenges faced by educational administration preparation programs; not the least of which was poor leadership role models, which their students “found themselves emulating” (Buskey & Topolka-Jorissen, 2010, p. 115). These poor behaviors include:

Three types of leadership problems: ethical failings in which leaders took harmful or illegal shortcuts to address needs or respond to accountability pressures; the tendency of leaders to try and “sell” personal projects rather than to work collaboratively to address school problems; [and] leaders’ failure to see and address issues of social injustice. Buskey and Topolka-Jorissen, 2010, (p. 115)

The faculty’s “familiarity with best practices literature … led [them] to agree on a cohort model and continuous internships linking coursework and field experience as preferred components of the delivery system” (Buskey & Topolka-Jorissen, 2010, p. 116). In addition to the four core courses, the six major foci are Change, Process and Communication Skills, Relationships, Management, and Culture (Buskey & Topolka-Jorissen, 2010, p. 118). Additionally, faculty worked to ensure that entrance
requirements were sufficiently rigorous. Faculty worked to create a program that was responsive to student needs, rigorous, grounded in best practices and research, and has a foundation in practice.

Hess and Kelly (2007) undertake a large-scale review of syllabi of various principal preparation programs to ascertain their content. They frame the research in the context of the changing role of the principal in the twenty-first century. They state, “School leadership is the key to school improvement. In a new era of accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matter more than ever” (Hess & Kelly, 2007, p. 1). Hess and Kelly state, “the field of educational leadership has suffered from a general dearth of systematic scholarly inquiry” (p. 6). They endeavor to answer an important question—one that has been long ignored by educational scholars: What is taught in principal preparation programs? The authors identify:

seven areas of principal responsibility, each of which has been deemed vital to effective school leadership by at least some leading thinkers in the field. The seven are: managing for results, managing personnel, technical knowledge, external leadership, norms and values, managing classroom instruction, and leadership and school culture. (p. 4)

Results show that educational leadership programs in the U.S. remain, as in the 1980s, heavily weighted toward day-to-day management tasks of the school (i.e., technical knowledge), rather than instructional leadership. Hess and Kelly’s work highlights disparities between the current educational landscape and administrator preparation programs.

The process for identifying and nurturing future leaders for succession planning purposes in a successful U.S. school district is outlined by Zavadsky (2012). Steps include recruitment, data management, talent identification, leadership development,
and performance management. In her description of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Zavadsky recounts the talent identification process, which involved “ranking” teachers and leaders according to their leadership potential, a process which one leader called “eye-opening” (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 67). Once leaders and teachers went through the ranking process, which included both external and self-evaluation, those who showed leadership potential were placed into tiered leadership development programs, targeted at their strengths and weaknesses. As evidenced by their approach to succession planning, data analysis is a strong part of the CMS culture, and “interviews with CMS personnel at all system levels reveal a culture that values accountability and transparency and is focused on improvement” (Zavadsky, 2012, p. 74).

In *Turnaround Leadership*, Fullan states that for turnaround to be successful, “a culture of distributed leadership that grooms new leaders for the next phase must be established” (Fullan, 2006, p. 31). Fullan states “it is not turnover of leadership that is the problem but rather discontinuity of good direction” (Fullan, 2006, p. 30). Fullan asks, “How do you go about establishing a series of successive leaders that represent continuity of the new good direction?” (Fullan, 2006, p. 30). He identifies a model of “capacity building with a focus on results” (Fullan, 2006, p. 31). A culture that promotes capacity building, Fullan states, is in accordance with Kanter’s turnaround solutions model and includes three essential elements: accountability, collaboration, and initiative. In these environments, people “share information and take responsibility”; work together”; and “feel what they do matters, that they can make a difference in outcomes.” Fullan’s work highlights the importance of successful succession planning to foster long-lasting positive turnaround outcomes.
The authors of the *School Leadership Study* from Stanford highlight the succession planning problems facing many school districts. They state that “while there is increasing research on how principals influence school effectiveness, less is known about how to help principals develop the capacities that make a difference in how schools function and what students learn” (Davis et al. 2005, p. 5). They identify four main findings in their research. Their first important finding is a highlight of what successful principals know and are able to do. Research supports the tenets of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), which focuses on essential leadership practices, including recognizing accomplishments for schools and individuals, adapting leadership to be context-specific, supporting and promoting effective assessment and evaluation practices, and designing and implementing high-quality curricula (Davis et al. 2005, p. 7). The second important finding is the features of effective principal preparation and development programs, which include content (i.e., research-based, coherent curriculum), methods (i.e., field-based internships, problem-based learning, cohort groups, mentors), and structure (i.e., collaborative partnerships between university programs and school districts). The third important finding is focused on building multiple pathways to leadership development. Potential pathways include university-based programs, school district programs, third-party organizations, nonprofits, statewide leadership academies, and partnership programs. They state that no matter what type of program, “context is found to be important for key functions of schools, such as instruction, community-building, and change management” (Davis et al. 2005, p. 7). The fourth important finding is focused on policy reform and finances, which must be directed at ensuring that “principal preparation and professional
development programs [are] both more productive for schools and more sustainable for those who aspire to lead” (Davis et al. 2005, p. 20).

In an article promoting mentorships, Brown University cites statistics showing that few qualified candidates choose to enter the principalship; reasons cited include “the increased complexity and responsibility of the job, stressful work conditions, and a lack of resources and support” (Brown, 2003, p. 7). The authors cite a survey of new principals, asking about their training for the job. Some “respondents identified “good on-the-job training under a fine mentoring principal” as a “strong plus” but identified training that was “too theoretical” as a “minus” (Brown, 2003, p. 10). However, one principal summed up the experience of many others who received little help, stating, “The support I received was minimal. My feet hit the floor and I learned by doing” (Brown, 2003, p. 10). The authors cite research that shows benefits of mentoring, which include increased confidence, job satisfaction, recognition among peers, and productivity among those who have been mentored (Brown, 2003, p. 11).

Characteristics of successful mentoring programs include organizational support; clearly defined outcomes; screening, selection, and pairing; training mentors and protégés; a learner-centered focus; adequate time allotment; and a focus on building a mutually enhancing relationship (Brown, 2003, p. 16). Ultimately, the conclusion of the authors is, “When it comes to training principals, there really is nothing better, as long as the mentor is guiding you in the right direction and has the skills to help you get where you need to go” (Brown, 2003, p. 35).

The Wallace Foundation highlights the increased prevalence of principal mentorship programs in the U.S., which it attributes to:
a growing and welcome, if belated, national recognition that the ongoing training and preparation of school leaders matters a great deal—enough to invest more thought, energy and money in it—if states and districts are to meet the nation’s high-minded goal of universal student success. (Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 3)

While they regard this as a welcome trend, their research is an illustration that “many if not most existing mentoring programs are falling well short of their potential” (Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 3). Common failings in mentorship programs are identified as vague or unclear goals, insufficient focus on instructional leadership, insufficient time or duration, lack of meaningful data, and underfunding. Hallmarks of successful programs include high-quality training, adequate funding, adequate duration, and a clear goal—“to provide new principals with the knowledge, skills and courage to become leaders of change who put teaching and learning first in their schools” (Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 4). They cite benefits of mentoring not only for the mentee, but also for the mentor and the learning organization (Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 6). The authors conclude “mentoring should be seen as only one stage—albeit an important one—in a continuum of professional development of principals that begins with pre-service training and, ideally, continues throughout leaders’ careers” (Wallace Foundation, 2007, p. 6).

**UAE—Background and Context**

The United Arab Emirates is an oil-rich state located to the north and east of Saudi Arabia and west of Oman. The country is comprised of seven emirates, which include Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al Qaiwan, Ras al Khaimah, and Fujarah. Prior to 1971, the emirates were known as the seven Trucial Sheikdom States, which had strong connections with the UK, although they were never a colonized people in the sense of an outside country exerting control over their internal processes or
government (al Ali, 2008, p. 366). Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1950s, the economy of UAE mainly consisted of fishing, some limited agriculture, and, beginning in the late nineteenth century, the pearl industry. Formal schooling in the UAE began in 1953/1954 with one school in Sharjah and remained fragmented until the unification of the emirates in 1971 (Ihmeideh et al. 2008, p. 239). In the early days of public education in the UAE, literacy rates were low (below 50% for men and below 30% for women; Davidson, 2008, p. 642). However, today the literacy rates for the population overall are approximately 90% for both men and women (World Bank DataBank, 2012).

In 1971–1972, the seven emirates joined to become the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is ruled by a Supreme Council, consisting of individual rulers from each of the ruling families of the seven emirates (al Ali, 2008, p. 366). The President and Vice-President are elected by the Supreme Council every five years, as are the forty-five members of the Federal National Council, which reviews proposed laws (al Ali, 2008, p. 366). The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan became the ruler of Abu Dhabi in 1966, and was instrumental in the federation of the emirates. Sheikh Zayed is deeply revered as the father of the country and is known for his “constant drive towards modernization with deep respect of the country’s heritage” (Abu Dhabi government). Abu Dhabi controls much of the country’s wealth. In 2006, for example, the GDP of Abu Dhabi was five times greater than that of the poorest Emirate, Fujairah, and almost double that of Dubai, the second wealthiest emirate (IMF, 2007). Abu Dhabi functions under the direct leadership of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who is the emir of Abu Dhabi emirate. He is assisted by the executive council, which
supervises and provides oversight for various government departments, including the Abu Dhabi Education Council (Abu Dhabi Government).

**Women and Careers in the UAE**

In their study of students at Zayed University, Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, and Schvaneveldt (2005) found marked generational and cultural differences in Abu Dhabi women concerning attitudes toward education/careers and the family. The authors used a survey instrument with matched sets of mothers and daughters. They found that 93% of the daughters “reported a desire for a professional career, compared to only 7% of the mothers who were involved in a professional career” (2005, p. 9).

Crabtree (2007) used multiple qualitative methods to study students at the females-only Zayed University. She highlights girls’ higher scholastic achievement than boys in the UAE. However, she states that rather than studying for the “love of learning,” Emirati families appear to encourage academics because they are viewed as “providing the final polish to a young girl’s life, that marks her out as being successfully poised on the brink of adult life, commensurate with Islamic and cultural expectations of womanhood” (2007, p. 577). She states, “it is evident that only a minority of Zayed University students … intend to use their acquired knowledge to pursue an active career upon graduation” (2007, p. 577).

Abdulla (University of Arizona) utilizes a mixed methods approach to study the ambiguous relationships between women, higher education, and careers in the UAE. Using a quantitative survey, analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, she finds that there are differences in young women’s motivations and desired outcomes, based on socio-economic status and level of religious conservatism. Next, she conducted qualitative interviews with college students to probe into their motivations
for attending higher education, desired career path (if any), and the role of social
connections in their attitudes toward academic and career attainment. Her findings
demonstrate a wide range of motivations, desired outcomes, and social affiliations
among the Emirati students she studies. Her findings indicate that although the students
in her study received support from their families for their education, “not all types of
employment received equal support from families. There was a strong preference for
public sector employment and all female work environments” (Abdulla, 2005, p. 141).
She goes on to state that “participants in feminized fields, particularly education,
perceived greater support from both family and society than those in traditionally non-
feminized fields” (Abdulla, 2005, p. 140). In addition to family support, participants
themselves favored “gender segregated environments in general and environments with
a few or no Emirati men were considered ideal because of the importance of
maintaining family honor” (Abdulla, 2005, p. 140.). Abdulla’s work sheds light on the low
level of participation in the workforce by Emirati women, despite their overall high levels
of educational attainment.

Emiratization

Emiratization is defined as “drawing UAE nationals into their surging economy”
(Al-Ali, 2008, p. 365). Al-Ali examines this phenomenon in his study of emiratization,
from the perspective of national policy in the UAE, private sector working conditions,
and job specifications. He uses a qualitative and quantitative survey approach to
examine the perspectives of 20 executives and their peers in both private and public
enterprise. He finds that barriers to the successful inclusion of Emiratis in the private
sector include low standards of education for Emirati workers, poor English language
skills, and the perception by private employers of a lack of work-readiness on the part of
Emirati workers. A lack of interest in private sector employment by Emirati nationals was related to their belief that the private sector offers fewer career opportunities and limited benefits compared to public sector employment. He finds that while Emiratis make up approximately 9% of the workforce in UAE, they comprise only about 1% of the private sector workforce (2008, p. 367). He finds that this imbalance is even greater among women, who “overwhelmingly prefer public sector employment” (2008, p. 367). He concludes that government policies that have perpetuated a “cradle-to-grave” sense of security for Emirati workers in the public sector and that have favored short-term expatriates in the private sector, have led to conditions that are confusing and frustrating for Emirati workers, who are now expected to participate fully in private sector employment.

John Raven explored the emiratization of the education sector in the UAE based on secondary research concerning employment statistics and policy in the UAE and his own observations in the B.Ed. program at the Higher College of Technology in Abu Dhabi. He concluded that one major barrier to the emiratization of the education sector is “the perception amongst most Emiratis that … teaching, particularly in the government sector schools, is a low status job. Even with higher remuneration many Emiratis would prefer not to work in the education sector” (2011, p. 140). He finds that another major barrier to emiratization is a shrinking budget for teacher training, while a third factor is the implementation of Western style training methods, which may not be properly aligned to the Emirati context.

**Education in the UAE**

The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) is the government entity responsible for education in Abu Dhabi. ADEC functions in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of
Education (MoE) although the “exact nature of [the relationship] remains unclear,” according to Thorne (Thorne, 2011, p. 174). However, ADEC claims to be the “controlling body of educational activity in the emirate” (Thorne, 2011, p. 174). All Emirati students are entitled to free public education, including KG1/KG2 (ages three to five years) up to undergraduate tuition at the state colleges. Until 2012, schooling has been mandatory for students from 6–12 years of age (Abu Dhabi government). However, current legislation has been proposed that would raise the age of compulsory schooling to 18 (UAE National, June 27, 2012). Education in the UAE, in Abu Dhabi especially, is in a period of tremendous change and growth. The focal point of reform in Abu Dhabi is the New School model.

**New School Model**

In 2006, ADEC launched:

an ambitious school reform plan” called the New School Model (NSM). In addition to a “range of ongoing pedagogic, curricular and leadership reforms, a major departure is the introduction of English as an additional medium of instruction alongside the existing medium of Arabic. (Gallaher, 2011, p. 62)

The NSM is “a comprehensive foundation for learning that will enable desired student outcomes by developing major components of the educational experience: teaching quality, learning environment, school leadership, and parental involvement” (ADEC, 2012). His Excellency, Dr. Mugheer Khamis Al Khaili, Director General of Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), states:

The New School Model [will] enhance student performance by developing the student as a communicator, a thinker and a problem solver, appreciative of the UAE heritage and culture, able to develop positive relationships—a confident, healthy, creative and innovative person. (EdArabia, 2012)
The pervasiveness of change associated with the NSM cannot be overstated in terms of its relevance to any study of education in the Abu Dhabi context. Dr. Mugheer Al Khaili, Director General of ADEC, states “we don’t just want to improve our education system, our schools and the performance of our schools… we want to be ranked as one of the best education systems in the world” (quoted by Blaik-Hourani, 2011, p. 228). The sweeping reforms inherent in this ambitious project make much of the literature—even recent literature—somewhat obsolete, although actual classroom implementation may not always keep pace with ADEC’s vision for implementation.

**Education Reform in the UAE**

Davidson provides background information about the historical context of education in the lower Arabian Gulf (1820–1971). He indicates that although:

> most Western writers assume that meaningful educational development [in the region] did not take place … [until] Britain’s departure in 1971 … there had in effect already been an important series of indigenous or at least semi-indigenous developments gaining momentum[before that event]. (Davidson, 2008, p. 633)

He describes the influence of early schooling movements on the relative secularization of the education system, which developed a parallel system, separate from religious institutions. The movement paved the way for public education beginning with a focus on vocational education. This system allowed for access to education for many segments of the population, including women and the underprivileged. Women, in particular, benefitted from this system, as “many of the women educated by these [early] schools were the mothers and grandmothers of the present generation” (Davidson, 2008, p. 643). While literacy rates for over-16s were still below 50% for males and 30% for females in 1971, advances in education led the way for the modern
society to have access to education, including women and the underprivileged (Davidson, 2008, p. 643).

Gaad, Arif, and Scott (2006) examined the organization of the UAE Education System, including components, goals, and effectiveness. They found “poor alignment among what the system was developed for, how it was delivered, and what was evaluated” (Gaad, et al. 2006, p. 291). Their recommendations were to align teachers’ guides, provide training sessions for teachers and supervisors, and to develop an effective assessment system. The overreliance on textbooks and use of lectures is a recurring theme throughout the literature on education in UAE. However, given the publication date, the relevance of this case study is limited, especially in terms of its focus on the systems in the MoE. For example, in 2003, ADEC had less than fifty employees; whereas today, the number of ADEC employees is over 14,000 (ADEC, 2013).

MacPherson, Kachelhoffer, and El Nemr (2007) identified eleven major problems with education in UAE including unsuitable curricula, ineffective teaching methods, inappropriate assessment methods, limited use of ICT, poor libraries and learning support, inadequate time spent in school (i.e., scheduling), ineffective school culture, poor facilities, a low level of professionalism among teachers, ineffective school systems, and inadequate budgets. The authors described the strategies and measures undertaken by the MoE, including clarifying educational policy, setting internationally benchmarked performance expectations, launching a ten-year restructuring plan, restructuring educational management, and mobilizing appropriate resources and support. The authors then provided ideas for the development of educative teachers.
and *educative managers* that they believe are necessary for the implementation of reforms, in the context of their master’s degree programs at Abu Dhabi University. They concluded with a call for further work by educational researchers in the field of capacity building in the UAE.

Gallagher focused on the bilingual education component of the NSM, analyzing the “micro-factors and contextual variables surrounding the introduction of compulsory bilingual schooling in Abu Dhabi” (2011, p. 62). From her review of the literature, she concluded that bilingual education in Abu Dhabi is likely to have positive benefits for students; however, the literature regarding the proper age for the introduction of this type of schooling is inconclusive. The tensions between the benefits of embracing English not “as a colonizing [language] but as an international one” and preserving Arabic language and culture are discussed (2011, p. 73). She calls for ongoing research into this phenomenon, especially because it may contribute significantly to the research base on the appropriate age for the introduction of bilingual education.

**Professional Learning for Pre-Service Teachers**

The field of study about education in the UAE is narrow, generally, but work regarding teacher preparation is more prevalent than scholarly work addressing K-12 education. The disconnection between teacher preparation at local universities and reality in the schools is politically charged. Sowa and De La Vega (2008) chronicle their work with pre-service teachers at Zayed University, which has campuses in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai. They write frankly, asking, “How does one go about collaborating to change a system that has deep roots in a traditional format of memorization, repetition, and classroom management based on physical punishment and fear?” (Sowa & De La Vega, 2008, p. 103). Although “ZU teacher candidates have been taught to create
learning centers that are developmentally appropriate for young children,” the authors find that veteran “mentor teachers have sometimes been reluctant or unwilling to shift away from the official curriculum by allowing the student teacher to do something different” (Sowa & De La Vega, 2008, pp. 104–105) and “a very real disconnect exists between what our candidates learn about good teaching practices and the reality of teaching in schools and classrooms where traditional teaching and rote memorization are still practiced” (Sowa & De La Vega, 2008, p. 106). Trust, open communication, and positive culturally respectful interactions are central to the creation of strong partnerships (Sowa & De La Vega, 2008, p. 103).

Pedagogy and technology are rapidly evolving in education in the UAE. In her study of pre-service teacher attitudes toward technology use, Serhan (2009) found that students in her course, who completed a post-course survey instrument, exhibited a high level of confidence and skill in technology integration, albeit with differences between genders (2009, p. 439). More female than male students used “technology on a daily basis, although overall results revealed that a majority of students of both genders felt ready to use different kinds of software in their curriculum” (Serhan, 2009, p. 439).

In her controversial article Possible influences of Arab-Islamic Culture on the Reflective Practices Proposed for an Education Degree at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the United Arab Emirates, Richardson “critically examines the compatibility of UAE culture and values with the assumptions of reflective practice currently being written into a new teacher education degree program” at HCT.
(Richardson, 2004, p. 429). She explores research concerning the “cultural values frameworks underpinning society and education in the UAE” (Richardson, 2004, p. 415). Although “there has been no research done of how the Emirati students view the conflict between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ values and beliefs,” she states “it is clear that cultural values represent powerful constraints on individual behavior, which could limit the success of reflective practices for trainee teachers in local schools” (Richardson, 2004, p. 435). While reflective practice is characterized by students’ ownership of their own learning, Richardson posits that cultural factors may inhibit the effective use of this approach. She cites the limited social interactions of many Muslim women in UAE, the traditional gender roles, in which many women appear in public covered in the traditional abaya and chaperoned by men, a culture with high power-distance, a preference for authoritarian teaching styles, and K-12 education steeped in rote learning as factors that limit her female students’ ability to flourish in a system of reflective practice (Richardson, 2004, pp. 432–433). She quotes Minnis, who states “constructivist discourse is incompatible with Islamic teaching and social values” (Richardson, 2004, p. 434).

Clarke and Otaky (2006) rebut Richardson’s work stating “to engage in this reflective work within an essentialized, dichotomous framework is both reductive and limiting. The consequences of such reductivism is the sort of formulaic stereotyping and overgeneralizing that Richardson falls into” (Clarke & Otaky, 2006, p. 113). They cite numerous examples from their own work with pre-service teachers at HCT in which

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1It is worth noting that Dr. Richardson’s article states that she no longer works at HCT (2004, p. 429) and that the website for the HCT Education Department cites its commitment to “the development of excellent, practical teaching skills through extensive experiences in classrooms, supported by effective mentors, and a commitment to continuous improvement through reflective practice” (HCT).
students engage in meaningful reflective dialogue about their practice. They afford students opportunities to utilize a wide range of approaches, styles, and communication methods, including critical and reflective thinking. Ultimately, they encourage students to “make their own choices about what would or would not be appropriate in their own cultural context” (Clarke & Otaky, 2006, p. 117). They conclude with a quote from one of their students, who says, “I want to implement everything I’ve learned and utilize everything I’ve revealed throughout my academic years. … Simply, I want to make a change!” (Clarke & Otaky, 2006, p. 121). While Richardson’s article offers some “food for thought,” other PD researchers in the UAE context refute her claims.

In his two-year study of student teachers at HCT, Clarke explores the “discursive construction of the students’ systems of knowledge and belief” (Clarke, 2006, p. 225). He begins with a discussion of Mograby’s work on problems in UAE schools, and the “‘pedagogical gulf’ between existing and aspirational levels of schooling” wherein there is a desire to move from rote learning to more “active experiential learning” (Clarke, 2006, p. 226). He states that these aspirations can be thwarted by “tensions [that] are exacerbated by the political distance in a relatively stratified society, between the majority, non-Emirati, expatriate teachers and the Emirati student teachers” (Clarke, 2006, p. 226).2 He outlines the foundation of the program at HCT, which focuses on collaborative group inquiry and reflective practice. He cites tensions, which include “latent and sometimes explicit antagonism” and a sustained “pattern of negative, antagonistic expression towards Government schools and teachers,” which is “not a

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2 Although this work is recent (2006), the study was carried out over a two-year period. Conditions in UAE education have changed dramatically since it took place. Many of the Arab-speaking expatriate teachers have been removed as the NSM has created an imperative for more English-speaking Western expatriate teachers.
However, he states that despite “multiple sources of potential tension, a surprising result that transpired during the study was the remarkable coherence and consistency of student teachers’ emergent ‘teaching selves’” (Clarke, 2006, p. 229). He concludes that over time, as young teachers move into classrooms of their own and as educational authorities begin to adopt more progressive practices, the trend may naturally shift toward more “congenial educational discourses and practices” (Clarke, 2006, p. 236).

Harold and Stephenson (2010) indicate the potential of action research to affect educational change in the UAE positively. They chronicle the “capstone seminar” of their undergraduate research seminar course at Zayed University. Using an autoethnographic technique, the authors gathered qualitative data over a five-year period. Of particular difficulty for students was the challenge of engaging in higher-level undergraduate research in English, although students are native Arabic speakers. They also found “typically our Emirati students do prefer collaboration—it’s a cultural norm here” (Harold & Stephenson, 2010, p. 240). Through collaboration and research, the authors found that students developed research and leadership skills, preparing them to become educational leaders for the future in UAE.

**Professional Development in Government Schools**

Stephenson (2010) writes about applying the principles of “a range of professional learning models including an action research (AR) model and a communities of practice (CoP) model” in four professional development projects (two at private schools and two for the MoE) in UAE. She writes about her study of four PD projects, using an ethnographic case study design. Instruments included surveys, interviews, observations, documents, and reflective case studies. One factor that
negatively affected the project was turnover of essential staff members, because of the prevalence of short-term expatriate staff across all institutions. A factor that positively affected the PD projects was a distributive leadership style exhibited by school leaders in three of the four projects. She states “teacher input appeared to be valued and teachers had a voice in the process through their immediate supervisors” (Stephenson, 2010, p. 151). In the school where distributed leadership was not present, this had a major negative effect on the success of the project. Across the projects, building relationships and fostering collaboration were identified as important factors in the success of the project. Some limiting factors were participants’ desires for “templates or ‘recipes’ for how to do things rather than work through tasks together. Other participants indicated that they only valued professional development as workshops, where experts provided their input and their role was one of information receiver” (Stephenson, 2010, pp. 154–155). The author states that during the course of the projects, participants “moved from a position of interdependence to one of independence” in a system of transformative professional learning (Stephenson, 2010, p. 155). She identifies five guiding principles inherent in the work:

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

She concludes by stating:
In the UAE there has been an over emphasis on the one-off workshop model of professional development. The traditional transmission of learning model has taken precedence over transformative models and outsiders who have been deemed to have the expertise have been ‘brought in to teach.’ However, times are changing … [and] there are many more opportunities to implement … a collaborative practice-based model. (Stephenson, 2010, p.155)

In a research base that is very narrow, Stephenson provides valuable insight into the climate and culture of PD in Abu Dhabi.

Stephenson, Dada, and Harold (2012) used a longitudinal case study approach to identify themes and focal content areas during the implementation of a teacher-leadership development program in two government schools, as a part of the Madares al Ghad (MAG) “Schools of the Future” project. The objective of the PD project was to “develop teacher leadership capacity at the school level through a collaborative action research model, which draws on theories of social learning” (Stephenson et al., 2012, pp. 54–55). The authors used focus groups, dialogue, observations, field notes, and retrospective analysis of data to compile their research. Shared leadership was found to be important to success, while some cultural factors limited its effects. A lack of trust (e.g., a fear that work would be “re-appropriated to others’ credit”), fear that participants were being evaluated by supportive observers, and participants’ need to “maintain’ face by claiming that they already knew everything and that the workshops included ‘nothing new for them’” were observed to detract from the effects of the projects (Stephenson et al, 2012, pp. 58–59). They observed that during the course of the project, [participants] overcame cultural issues and began collaboratively to create shared assumptions, values, and beliefs. They found that the MAG modeled to a shift in school culture from collaboration for remediation only to collaboration where time was dedicated for meaningful dialogue.
Leadership in the UAE Context

The Relationship between Effective Communication of the High School Principal and School Climate is explored using a mixed methods study conducted in the UAE by Halawah (2005). He reviews the literature, which highlights the effects of school leadership, stating “the effect of the principal on student learning cannot be overemphasized” (Halawah, 2005, p. 334). The study utilizes the Evaluation of School Climate measure and a 16-question Likert-style survey to gauge student and teacher perceptions of school climate and communication within the school. Twenty-three high schools in Abu Dhabi, both for males and females, were included in the study. Results of the study “indicated that school climate is positively associated with principal's communication effectiveness” (Halawah, 2005, p. 334). In general, students assessed climate in the schools as “of moderate situation or level” (Halawah, 2005, p. 338). The author concludes “although there is no criterion or standard at the country level to compare with, these results can be seen as indicators that climate in these schools should be improved” (Halawah, 2005, p. 338). Across schools, climate was observed to be more positive in female schools than in male schools in several important areas including security, relationships, student behavior, and instructional management (Halawah, 2005, p. 340). Principal communication was observed to be more positive at male schools than at female schools (Halawah, 2005, p. 341). The author states:

Principals need a variety of supports to help them on their way to success. While there is a great deal of professional development that can be offered to groups and much of this is critical to a principal being able to lead a school there is also some support that can be offered on a one-to-one basis. (Halawah, 2005, p. 341)
Implications

Education in the United Arab Emirates is undergoing a period of profound change and revitalization. Research is clear regarding the paramount importance of leadership in order for successful school reform efforts to be implemented and sustained. Existing literature about best practices on leadership development provides guidance but is based mainly on application in a Western context. While the research base on education in the UAE is still relatively narrow, research regarding leadership development in this culture and context is virtually non-existent. Existing literature makes it clear that there is a need for meaningful professional development for teachers and school leaders throughout the emirate. Resource allocation for education in the UAE is substantial; however, research is scant. It is imperative for practitioners and scholars in this burgeoning environment to ensure that innovations are not only grounded in Western notions of best practice but also tailored to the unique culture and context of this fast developing country.
CHAPTER 3
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore participant perceptions of the effectiveness of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program. Secondary considerations are participant perceptions of the cultural and contextual appropriateness of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program. This professional development program is the first school leadership certification program offered to aspiring leaders in Abu Dhabi government schools. The study will utilize a qualitative research design, with a narrative approach, using a semi-structured interview protocol. A narrative approach will provide a significant window into the lived experience of the women who are taking part in this program.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how this study was conducted. The chapter begins with a discussion of the participants and setting. This is followed by the methods section, which includes a description of narrative qualitative research, a discussion of cross-cultural narrative research, and the specific methodology for the study. Next, the theoretical framework employed will be described, followed by a description of the data analysis methods used. Finally, issues of research validity will be discussed.

Setting

The [XXXX] Professional Development Program is a joint venture between a local university and ADEC. To conduct the interviews, in all but one case, I travelled to the participants’ schools and met with them in their offices. One interview was conducted at the ADEC offices; at the school site, the interview was interrupted several times. Therefore, the participant requested that we meet at ADEC, to minimize
disruption. Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Florida and approval from the Research Office of the Abu Dhabi Education Council were obtained before any research commenced. This included having the consent documents legally translated into Arabic.

Participants

All nineteen participants in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program were hand selected to take part in the program sponsored by ADEC leadership, through a rigorous interview and vetting process, including assessments of their English language levels. All of the participants in the program speak English well, which precluded the necessity for translation in the study; no translation was used in the course of the study, other than the translation of the IRB document. Program participants are newly designated acting vice-principals. All of the participants are Emirati women who currently work in ADEC government schools. The researcher obtained permission to discuss the project with the program participants after obtaining IRB approval and the appropriate approvals from the ADEC Research Office. The researcher met with the ADEC personnel who are in charge of the program to discuss the study. All nineteen program participants were invited to participate in the study during a group session held after a cohort meeting. Ultimately, I hoped to involve six participants in the study, with the goal of having at least four participants complete the study. Abu Dhabi, Al Gharbiya, and Al Ain are geographically somewhat remote from one another. Both Al Gharbiya and Al Ain are located approximately 1.5 hours from Abu Dhabi. I hoped to include voices of women from all of these areas in the research. Consent was obtained using an informed consent document, available in both English and Arabic. As outlined by Brenner (2008, p. 362), the document included: a) the nature of the research; b) the
procedures in which participants can expect to participate; c) a description of the means by which confidentiality will be protected; d) a list of contact people to whom questions and complaints about the research can be directed; and e) a description of the risks and benefits of the research.

Despite the fact that all nineteen program participants were invited to participate in the study, only four participants elected to do so. It is not known why so few participants elected to participate. It is possible that since the meeting when I presented the study to them was the first time I had met many of them, they may have been wary of agreeing to speak candidly with a stranger – particularly someone in a position of authority at ADEC. All participants who indicated their willingness to participate were included in the study. Three of the four participants who elected to participate in the study were from the same geographic region. This presents a limitation of the study. However, all four participants completed the entire study, so my initial goal of having four participants complete the study was met.

**Methods**

**Narrative Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is generally employed when: variables needed to conduct the study are unclear; the researcher wants to explore trends or explanations; and/or problems “need to be explored to obtain deeper understanding” (Creswell, 2008, pp. 17–19). Narrative qualitative research “begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 54). The researcher collects and tells stories with a narrative approach (i.e., beginning, middle, end) to tell the stories of individuals (Creswell, 2012, p. 22). Bogdan and Biklen stress that different qualitative researchers have different approaches to generalizability. They state, “those
[researchers] who are concerned [with NOT implying generalizability] are very careful to state that explicitly” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 36). In this study, I am focused only on learning more about the lived experiences of individuals in the program and do not consider this work to have wide generalizability. Although many researchers describe narrative research in different ways, Ollrenshaw and Creswell (2002, pp. 331–332) identify common themes and steps in the narrative process:

- Research is grounded in learning from participants in a given setting.
- The learning occurs via individual stories, which are told by individuals (e.g., teachers and/or students).
- Both personal experiences (i.e., individual) as well as social experiences (i.e., interactions with others) are captured.
- Data are collected as stories, which are usually gathered through interviews or informal conversations. Stories are called *field texts*.
- Researchers analyze raw data to *re-story* the events in a narrative format, concentrating on narrative elements (e.g., problem, characters, setting, actions, and resolution). The researchers then retell the story to conform to storytelling (e.g., time, place, plot, scene, chronology).

Rich details about the context of the story, including the setting, are included.

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) state “narratives of experience are both personal—they reflect a person’s life history—and social—they reflect the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 150). Given the current state of education in Abu Dhabi, in which major contextual changes are taking place, a narrative approach is desirable. This approach will provide unique insight into the lives of women who are taking part in a pioneering professional development and certification venture. A narrative approach is also well suited to a cross-cultural study, as it naturally takes into account the context in which the lived experience of the participants takes place.
Clandinin and Connelly use a *landscape metaphor* to explain their approach to narrative research, stating, “It has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, pp. 4–5). A narrative approach is multi-dimensional, taking into consideration the moral, emotional, and aesthetic approaches, as well as factual recall of events (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 151). In times of major school reform, Clandinin and Connelly state that the use of narrative research may allow decision makers to “imagine reform as … less impositional on the lives of children, parents, teachers, and others; as needing to be undertaken … with more willingness to listen, to negotiate, and to change as we move forward” (1998, p. 162). In the context of the breakneck educational change which characterizes the landscape in Abu Dhabi, a narrative approach will provide an opportunity for teachers and new school leaders to speak their truth about their lived experience.

Narrative research, grounded in the context of school reform, is necessarily “messy.” Craig (2010) states that in her work about capturing narrative research in the midst of school reform, she encountered three kinds of messiness: a) individual school landscapes against which teachers’ knowledge takes place; b) conducting funded research … in the midst of a live reform project; and c) capturing school reform and judging its success (Craig, 2010, p. 133). Although her work was situated in the context of the U.S., all of these elements have the potential to inform the current research in the Abu Dhabi context, as well. Craig’s conception of “messiness” is not pejorative; it is this innate richness of context that imbues narrative research with its strength.
Cross-cultural Narrative Research

Cross-cultural narrative research has the potential to be even messier than other types of narrative research. Cross-cultural research is defined as research that compares behaviors or phenomena across two or more cultures; includes researchers and study participants who have different cultural backgrounds; and/or uses measurements developed for one cultural context that are implemented in a different context (Clark, 2012, p. 28). When conducting this type of research, it is imperative that the researcher remains aware of the need for cultural awareness and sensitivity at all times throughout the research and that ethical considerations are given great weight in the research process. Ford et al. (2008) state:

Researchers should be mindful of the need to consider their own humanness—their beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, paradigms—and the limitations of their humanness when working with participants from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially those backgrounds that differ from their own. (Ford et al, 2008, p. 82)

Ford et al. highlight the important role of the cultural factors that influence the way the researcher goes about his/her work (e.g., life experiences, values, personal experiences) and state that the context in which research takes place cannot be ignored, marginalized, or trivialized, if research is to be conducted appropriately (Ford et al., 2008). They highlight potential problems in cross-cultural research:

- human predisposition toward accepting or stressing views that are consistent with our own viewpoint;
- the tendency to generalize or universalize findings across groups that may not be comparable;
- continued usage of instruments that are proven to be biased;
- tendency to pathologize the other groups with a negative paradigm and/or pejorative language (Ford, et al, 2008, p. 87)
The authors state that “racially, culturally, and linguistically responsive researchers have self-awareness, cultural awareness and understanding, strong feelings about social justice, and a range of skills and strategies” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 87). Culturally competent researchers focus on developing effective communication and data gathering skills to work with diverse participants, aim for the highest levels of cultural competence, and have an increased sensitivity to diversity (Ford et al., 2008, pp. 88–89). Ford et al. (2008, pp. 89–90) make general suggestions for researchers to practice cultural competence:

- select racially, culturally, and linguistically relevant research topics;
- choose racially, culturally, and linguistically informed theories and paradigms;
- examine multiple explanations and worldviews before making judgments;
- build relationships with participants;
- respect participants’ primary language;
- implement racially, culturally, and linguistically congruent research practices and assessments;
- create a diverse research team.

**Qualitative Interviews**

The purpose of the interview in qualitative research is to give “an informant the space to express meaning in his or her own words and to give direction to the interview process” (Brenner, 2006, p. 357). A semi-structured interview protocol will be utilized, which has the benefit of allowing the researcher to work from a prescribed list of questions but also frees him/her to ask follow-up questions based on participant responses (Brenner, 2008, p. 360).
Theoretical framework

Social constructivists seek meaning based on people's lived experiences, an outlook that is most compatible with a qualitative approach; researchers with this worldview “look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meaning into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2008, p. 8). Schwandt states “constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. … Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg state “Within the theoretical framework of social constructionism, individual identity or Self is the by-product of social forces experienced in context … Individuals are relational beings that create constantly changing meanings in interaction with others” (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005, p. 693). In my approach to this work, I was very careful to avoid any constructs under which I presupposed my own lack of bias or that I was capable of conducting these interviews without affecting their outcomes. I carefully attempted to avoid an ethnographic epistemology, defined by Gay, Mills, and Airasian as focusing “in depth on a group’s cultural patterns and perspectives to understand participants’ behavior and context” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012, p. 13). It is not my intention to describe any types of patterns or to draw conclusions from the unique lived experiences of the women I interviewed. Often, those planning and implementing professional development in the UAE rely almost wholly on research conducted in a Western context; however, UAE presents a very unique social and political context. Schwandt states that social constructionists, as defined by Gegen, believe:

all statements of the true, the rational, and the good are products of particular communities of interpreters … social constructivism [can be] a a means of broadening and democratizing the conversation about human
practices and of submitting those practices to a continuous process of reflection. (Schwandt, 2000, p. 200)

It is not my intention to provide generalizable data regarding the effectiveness of professional development practices in this context; rather, it is my intention to highlight the experiences of these specific and unique participants. I hope that decision-makers who plan to implement professional development programs based on what is considered to be best practice in a Western context will not only take into account the unique lived experiences of these participants but also will be motivated by this work to continue to seek further feedback, dialogue, and discussion with program participants, in order to tailor research-based practices to better meet the unique needs of participants in this specific context.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using a problem-solution approach. This approach is outlined by Ollershaw and Creswell (2002) as:

1. Interviews, conversations, and/or other data elements are gathered and transcribed.
2. The interviewer reads and rereads the data, making sense of it.
3. Transcripts are color-coded for the elements of plot structure (characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution). This information is placed into a table. Color-coded elements are grouped together.
4. A graphic organizer is used to organize color-coded transcripts into events (e.g., setting, problem, physical actions, reactions, thinking, and intentions, characters’ goals, and resolution).
5. The researcher sequences events, reworking and reordering events until they are in a logical order.

The problem-solution approach was applied to the current research because it offers a “linear approach [which leads] to a logical sequence of events for the story …
sequence that flows from characters, setting, and problems first, followed by actions or events, and finally a resolution” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 343). This approach provides a clear and linear format to tell the stories of the participants, which can be easily accessed (or even translated). The use of this approach will help to ensure that the work is accessible and usable for stakeholders who may wish to utilize this research to inform their practice in the future.

In my application of this approach, I conducted and recorded narrative interviews. I then sent the transcripts to a reputable transcription company, with a track record of academic transcription. Oliver, et al (2005) state that “transcription is a pivotal aspect of qualitative inquiry.” There are two types of transcription: “naturalism, in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, and denaturalism, in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbals, involuntary vocalizations) are removed” (Oliver, et al, 2005). Oliver, et al, state that transcription in qualitative research generally falls somewhere on a continuum between these two approaches. The transcription company I utilized removed some non-verbal utterances and duplicate words but, overall, utilized a mostly naturalistic approach. When the transcriptions were returned, I audited the transcripts by reading over them while listening to the audio recording (at least twice and, in one case, three times) and correcting any transcription errors. I made a conscious choice not to change participants’ grammar from the original transcription. Oliver, et al state that “Talk is peppered with verbal and non-verbal signals that can change the tenor of conversations and meaning. [...] such signals can set the tone of a conversation and/or offer insight into the participant’s affect” (Oliver, et al, 2005). I was very conscious of my position as
a researcher conducting cross-cultural narrative research and, in no way, wanted to unintentionally alter the meaning or obscure the “voice” of my participants. Only when it was necessary to ensure the meaning did I alter quotes, using parenthetical words or phrases. I also shortened some quotations for the sake of brevity. Outside of these alterations, I consciously chose not to change the grammar of the participants.

Once the transcripts were completed and I audited them, I began to analyze the data, identifying broad themes and color coding them. As I continued to analyze the data, specific themes (coding categories) emerged and I continued to refine and revise the coding categories. Once all of the transcript data had been analyzed, I re-storied the data into a chronological approach, yielding a linear narrative.

**Research Validity**

Validating is the process of ensuring that data are accurate, through the process of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2008, p. 259). Qualitative researchers must ensure that their work achieves standards of accuracy and trustworthiness to be considered valid (Creswell, 2008, p. 259). As Ford et al. state, “research is not an objective, neutral science […] All aspects of research are influenced by the researcher’s experiences and beliefs” (Ford et al, 2008, p. 83). In narrative qualitative research, the interpretive nature of the work is amplified; the researcher is entrusted with the responsibility for *restorying* (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332) participants’ lived experiences. It is essential for the researcher to take all practical measures to ensure that data meet standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Behar-Horenstein, 2012).

When working with cross-cultural qualitative data, Ford et al. (2008, p. 86) state two methods to overcome bias:
• Conducting reliability checks with another rater when analyzing interview transcripts, for inter-rater reliability, and

• Using member checking—asking participants to review transcripts for accuracy.

In the current study, some limitations were apparent, with regard to the use of reliability checking and member checking. Conducting research in a location far from the university meant that I conducted my research largely in isolation. I considered asking colleagues to conduct the reliability checks but felt that this might compromise the identity of participants; ultimately, I chose not to employ this tactic. I did attempt to employ member checking; however, I received very limited feedback from participants. This presents a limitation of the study.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences of four aspiring vice-principals in the first cohort of trainees to complete a leadership certification program offered by ADEC. Four participants (Hessa, Khawla, Mariam, and Fatima) were interviewed and data were analyzed using narrative analysis, with a problem/solution approach, as defined by Ollrenshaw and Creswell. This process resulted in the identification of themes. Some of the themes which emerged were: Character and background; experiences as a student; pathway to teaching; experience as a teacher; prior experiences with school leaders; master’s degree programs and prior professional development; beliefs about leadership; appointment as a VP; experience in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program (participants, content and tasks, timing, positive and negative aspects of the program, suggestions); current role (daily life, problems faced, Electronic Student Information System, community, collaboration with peers, future aspirations); and suggestions for future programs.

After broad themes were identified, the material was re-storied to generate a chronological storytelling approach to the material. Finally, the re-storied materials were reviewed to ensure that the voices of all of the participants were given equal weight and particularly to ensure that any counter-narratives were included. The findings showed that the participants shared many background characteristics, including a history of attending government schools, with a schooling background that was very traditional in approach. Additionally, participants mostly reported experiencing leadership role models

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1All names have been changed and references to specific details (e.g., schools or geographic areas) that could identify participants have been removed.
that were very authoritarian and traditional. The participants all expressed a similar philosophy and approach to education, which was congruent with ADEC’s vision and mission, in addition to evincing a high degree of commitment to their work as vice-principals. While most participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with the initial phase of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, an interruption of services because of a staff change mid-year resulted in a suspension of the program, which produced anxiety and some dissatisfaction. Participants’ lived experiences as first year vice-principals after their participation in the program revealed that they needed a much higher degree of follow-up and support than they received and that they were unprepared to handle many of the practical realities of the vice-principalship. Their experience as first-year vice-principals provides insight into recommendations for future programming. They also provide information regarding their plans and training needs as they develop into the next generation of leaders in ADEC. This information, although it provides insight into a small cohort group, can assist ADEC leaders, as they plan for future programming that is more highly contextualized and sensitive to the needs and experiences of program participants.

The findings of the study presented in this chapter are a form of narrative report, in which themes are highlighted. Counter-narratives are included in the relevant sections. At the conclusion of the chapter, a summary of findings, with specific regard to the research question and sub-questions, is included.

**Background and Context**

All of the women in the group were hand-selected by ADEC leadership and underwent a rigorous interview process. Shared qualifications included more than five years of successful teaching experience, a high degree of English proficiency, and a
master’s degree. All of the women obtained their degrees in the UAE, through either private or government universities. All four of the participants are fairly young Emirati women, who were recently appointed as acting vice-principals. All of my initial meetings were conducted at their school sites and they were all very welcoming and hospitable, as is consistent with Emirati culture, and we always took refreshments together before beginning any interviews. Hessa, Khawla, Mariam, and Fatima were all eager to share with me their pathway to the vice-principalship.

Mariam, applied twice to become a vice-principal. She stated:

I went to an interview to be vice-principal and then they refused me. They said that your mark was not very high … Then I felt really disappointed, really I felt upset that if all my knowledge, all my experience was not enough.

However, after completing her master’s degree studies, she earned a very high interview score and was accepted into the program. The perception of rigor in the interview process contributed to a high degree of status affiliation within the program. Hessa summarized this feeling, stating, “We are the new Vice-principals that Dr. Mugheer had chosen, according to high criteria.” The women in the study generally identified themselves as being capable and highly qualified. Khawla said, “I always wanted to … be there somewhere to make decisions, to let people know okay you can do it this way. I am very good at that, designing.” Hessa focused on the strength she found from a difficult upbringing, stating:

Maybe I was a leader before that [program]. I have been by myself, I consider myself raising myself by myself, and nobody raised me. … So I am an independent person … When [I] face a problem I have to solve it.

Fatima also identified family circumstances as making her strong, stating:
I got married when I was young, then I complete my education, I didn’t stay at home as a housewife for more than three months, never. So I [am] used to managing this very well with my children, my work.

Despite their high degree of confidence and status from being in the program, several of the participants referenced the difficulty of becoming an educational leader after experiencing rote, traditional schooling and authoritarian leadership role models.

All of the participants attended government schools in Abu Dhabi and all echoed the sentiment of Mariam, who said, “My education … was a kind of traditional teaching so it was based on memorizing the text books, only the text book. …just memorizing, memorizing, memorizing. …There was no enjoyment…It was boring; it was boring.”

Fatima recounted her experience, highlighting gaps based on the traditional educational style—“There are many skills I don’t know how to do it now,” she said, “Many things… because I used to just sit and listen to the teacher, I didn’t have chance to do things by myself. I didn’t have a chance to express about my ideas.” Khawla referenced the effects experiencing a rote education has on teaching, stating:

All these things that happen now you know, the new education, the practices that we have… we didn’t have these things. So I believe like 100% it’s going to affect your teaching. Unless you just develop yourself. … It affects a lot, some people they do it unintentionally, they just get back to the way that their teachers taught us and we were taught in a very traditional way, yes.

Hessa referenced a high power-distance culture as a trademark of the education she experienced, stating, and “Nobody explained anything. … They thought because I am a child I do not need to know. No… I need to know!” In addition to traditional teaching practices and authoritarian discipline, one participant, Fatima, also referenced low-quality English teaching as a negative aspect of her experience with government schooling, stating, “I don’t feel confidence about my language, until now, until this
moment. Because I graduated from a Government school, if you compare me and one student from private school, yes they are much better than me." Overall, none of the participants referenced any positive personal schooling experiences until they reached the university level.

Three out of four participants shared that they had a complete lack of interest in entering the education field, initially. Only one participant attributed her career choice to personal agency. Although three participants referenced family pressure as their primary reason for entering the education field, the degree to which they resented or resisted this pressure varied greatly. Fatima said:

I became a teacher to be honest, something… it’s related to our culture because our family has always direct us to become teachers because they think we will work in a safe place with all females, yes, so this is only, was the reason in that time.

However, she said:

To become a teacher yes, to study and join the education culture. …I am happy to become a teacher."

Khawla said:

Actually, honestly honestly, I never wanted to be in the education sector at all from the beginning. From my experience, I was… I never had my educational degree, I was literature student and when they asked for English teachers I just… my father went and applied.

Hessa showed the greatest level of resentment toward her father’s insistence that she enter teaching. She shared her story:

I am a teacher but I hated teaching all my life because you know the traditions, my father … refused that I apply for any other job unless if it is teaching. So I applied for teaching and I found another opportunity to be in a university … and they offered me a good position to be a manager there … if you are working there you will meet both [men and women] … but my father refused. That is why I hated teaching more, because I hated it really.
Despite their initial reluctance to join the profession, all three women described themselves as dedicated teachers, such as Khawla, who said, “Because I felt that it is my responsibility, I started to develop myself. From the first year, I just proved that I can do it. I started to love it but I always wanted to do something … more.” Despite her resentment, Hessa said “I am a dedicated person. I do everything to the maximum, I do it because I should do it—this is my job. I have to do it and I am good at teaching and I know that. I am good in teaching but I hate it.” The one participant who joined teaching out of a personal desire to do so, Mariam, described her journey:

When I was little I gathered my brothers and my sisters and our neighbors and I teach them on the wall, I use the chalk to teach them, to give them some papers, I like to correct, I like to teach how to write and read. I loved the core of teaching, I loved that.

She went on stating that she studied:

education … in the university and I discovered it is really wonderful job, a lot of things, especially when we started our practical courses to go to the schools … You are a student, now you are the teacher. So that was the thing that I loved from when I was a child.

The experiences of three of the four participants as teachers and, for one participant, as a parent, reinforced their early experiences as students in high power-distance, authoritarian schooling environments with very traditional school leaders. Hessa and Khawla echoed statements made by Fatima, who said that as a teacher, she had “no interaction with administration unless we have meeting, unless we have something that we have to hand it to them…. But working with them as a member of their team, no I didn’t have the chance to do that.” Khawla described the leadership at her previous school as “more authoritative, like err, there was a like dictatorship, not the kind of leadership that we are looking for, an instructional leader, you know.” Fatima referenced the experience of her own children, stating, “I remember in one school my
children say we never saw the principal. Yes. They never… she never comes out of her
office. So imagine that.” Mariam said, “Some of them, our leaders in school they are
working to reach 1 o’clock and that is it, everyone is fine, everyone is safe, everyone is
happy, go.” Fatima contrasted the traditional style of leadership with the desired style,
asking, “How can [the principal] improve their school if they are hiding behind their
desks? … The principal should serve her staff by providing them with what they need,
by guiding them, yes.” Only Mariam described teaching in a school with a more
distributed leadership style, stating, “My previous principal, her idea was to provide
training to the teachers from the teachers themselves … I was the head of that training
team.” Mariam expressed pride in her work leading the training center. Three of four
participants expressed a lack of understanding about ADEC reforms and the New
School model, before entering the leadership development program. Mariam said, “We
[Cycle 2 teachers] did not have this chance as the Cycle 1 teachers to have the New
School model, we were teaching the traditional way of teaching everything. It was
boring.” Khawla, who was also a Cycle 2 teacher, said, “I had no clue about … the New
School model … it was the traditional way of teaching, of teaching and the
administration.” Mariam said, “I don’t have a lot of information about ADEC and the new
school model, and all the reform things that ADEC did.”

Despite the authoritarian leadership faced by the participants and a lack of
specific knowledge about NSM by most, they all identified themselves as leaders within
their classroom and expressed pride in their use of updated educational techniques.
Hessa summed up her teaching philosophy, stating, “When I became a teacher, I didn’t
think like a teacher. I tried to visualize myself as a student. … [My lesson] was full of
movement actions, worksheets, activities, in order to make the student understand the
ccepts.” Khawla applied “the latest thing in my classroom. [But] some people they...
of course like the leadership … they just don’t like… they avoided me because they
know that I knew much and they didn’t want to include me in a lot of things.”
Fatima described herself as teacher as “a leader in my classroom.” She said, “I have a
leadership role in my school, when I express my opinion, when I give suggestions to my
principal or my vice-principal so it was the same but there’s no authority.” Although most
of the participants described their teaching as being more modern than their
contemporaries, most expressed frustration and a lack of satisfaction in the prior
professional development opportunities they experienced as teachers under the Public
Private Partnership (PPP) system.

All four participants participated in the PPP program, as teachers. Mariam, who
had 12 years of teaching experience, expressed mixed feelings about her prior PD
programs. She “attended those sessions and most of their information are… I know all
the information …except Kagan strategies…. That was really something new for us and
for me.” However, she expressed satisfaction with some additional sessions, stating,
“Other sessions from ADEC, they were about the New School model … I love that
because we did not know anything about the New School model.” Fatima said:

   Already I had this information [from PD during the PPP program] … I know
all these theories but I need them to help me in applying these theories in
my classrooms so I had a lot of concerns during that time.

Both Khawla and Hessa had strong negative feelings about the PPP program. Khawla
observed “resistance … [to] what they want to do, so I think [the operators] were so
depressed and they… and the way their attitude was not good in, you know, enforcing
people you know to do the things.” Expressing great frustration, Hessa said:
They used to force us to teach certain materials while these materials were not proper for the age that I used to teach. They demoted my evaluation and they tried to press on me a lot and I was about to quit teaching. I am against [those companies] totally.

Three of the four participants undertook master’s degree programs to prepare them as educational leaders and they all expressed satisfaction with the rigor of their master’s programs and pride in their accomplishments. “Most of the courses [in the master’s degree program] prepared me to look at things in different, from a different perspective than the normal teacher,” reported Fatima, because “you have to work and reach the high expectations, not just do your work as they told-you know. I have to try new things. Not like a normal teacher.” Mariam’s program not only prepared her for her second interview to be a vice-principal but also reinvigorated her as an educator; she said:

It refreshed my mind. I read about a lot of American strategies, American theories, a lot of things I discovered. The special needs, it is not only the low achievers [but also] gifted and talented. A lot of things. … It was really exciting.

Khawla expressed pride in undertaking “a very tough program … [an] accountable program and the people there, are … like the best and they understand what they are doing.” However, she said, “We talk about something, we study something and the reality is disastrous, it was disastrous, like the leadership, the school, the system, the discipline, everything. So what I started, it was just in my classroom.” This idea, of trying to be a pioneer as an educational leader in a landscape rife with authoritarian and traditional methods, was a common theme for participants.

Although the journey undertaken through their own schooling, their teaching careers, and their master’s degree programs were in some ways very different, all four women identified themselves as modern educators and expressed a philosophy of
education and leadership that was not only similar but also very congruent with ADEC’s philosophy and direction. Mariam summarized this feeling, stating:

All of us [in the VP program], in general, we had the same philosophy, this is the first thing, we all believe about [the] New School Model … We are thinking as a new generation, we hated our experience as students, which err, which mean that it was only teacher centered. We wanted to change that. … I find it’s not just we want to become Vice-principals just to have you know this position, no, we have something in our mind, we have something we want to accomplish, we have a philosophy. Yes, we have a vision.

Fatima related this vision and philosophy to her role as a parent, stating that she:

wants [her] children … to have the skills to be a lifelong learner … I want them to express about their opinions and accept others’ opinions. So this is my vision for my children so it’s the same for the students you know.

In addition to their qualifications, this common vision was a significant facet to their entrance into the program. Dr. Mugheer Al Khaili, Director General of ADEC said, “The competition for promotion to leadership roles in ADEC schools is very intense. … These aspiring Emirati school leaders were chosen on merit through a rigorous interview process” (ADEC, 2013).

Although three of the women referenced gender as a limiting factor in their career path, Khawla specifically cited the [XXXX] Professional Development program as an empowering experience, as a woman. She said, “I think we are very privileged to be Emiratis because the UAE, they care a lot about what a woman can accomplish and they believe that if woman aspires something she can accomplish it.” Hessa identified a cultural factor that she felt limited her prior experience with building a necessary skill for becoming a VP. She stated that communication, particularly with men, was an area of need for her, in terms of personal growth. She said:

I need [to learn] … another thing, how to face the men. In our culture I am not exposed to the men or strange men that much, especially locals. This
is kind of challenging. …[You] need to forget that you are a woman or whatever in order to talk freely. We are conservative so … I cover my face in front of men [if] I don’t know them … It’s a little bit different, you have to be stronger, you have to be firm, when you say no which means no. If they are willing to negotiate you have to convince them but…. with etiquette that suits the culture.

Hessa hoped that the program would help her to overcome this limitation, through future training. Khawla felt that the program was uniquely targeted as a mechanism for female empowerment. She said, “I told [H.E. Dr. Mugheer Al Khaili] thank you […] because you gave us an opportunity, it is like empowering women. I talked about empowering women because I said I cannot see any man here. So we were all women, 20 women.”

After being chosen for the program, the aspiring vice-principals embarked on their journeys to become the next generation of ADEC leaders, through the [XXXX] Professional Development Program.

The [XXXX] Professional Development Program—Initial Six-Week Program

All twenty program participants were young female Emiratis. Fatima described the group, stating, “We are young. Yes, we have the same thinking and we all were ambitious to do something better for our students, you know.” The initial intensive program took place over a six-week period, with full-day meetings twice per week. Additional planned activities included six months of practical follow-up activities, on-site mentoring, and a trip to the U.S. to visit a major university and conduct school site observations. All meetings for the initial program were held in Abu Dhabi, although participants of the program were from Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Gharbiya, which necessitated lengthy travel for many participants. Many of the participants knew one another already, particularly within individual regions; Hessa said, “We were very happy
because we leave the school and I will meet my friends because most of them were my friends. ...So I know them all. So it is kind of... something for a change. It’s better.” All of the participants except Fatima expressed some degree of trepidation before the course. Khawla summarized this feeling, stating, “We said when we came into the program, what are they going to teach us? What are they going to tell us? We know nothing about being a principal.” However, Fatima said this was “like a refreshment, about what I had studied in previous years, or in my master’s studies.” Participants received an agenda before each session and were informed in advance about program activities. Hessa and Mariam both lauded the organization of the program; Mariam stated, “We learned from that course organizing the agenda ... maybe [this is] your way in America or somewhere but that is not us. When we arrive, we receive the agenda....It is really organized.” Mariam described the program thusly:

The program took place [at the college] in Abu Dhabi. The presenters or our lecturers were experienced people from ADEC, two of them I think they were cluster managers ... and Dr. Paul, I think he’s the head of the [the college].2 It was Wednesday and Thursday, weekly Wednesday and Thursday and really we were enthusiastic to reach Wednesday and Thursday to go to Abu Dhabi. They consider the [five] elements [of the ADEC Principal’s Leadership Standards [Leading People, Leading the Community, Leading Organizations, Leading Strategically [and] Leading Teaching and Learning] ... So we discussed each one, each element it has five tasks and most of them are written tasks. We went home and read it and it was about answering a lot of questions. Those questions are really deep questions, we need to go and investigate and ask so you can’t find the answers in books or find the answers on the internet.

Several program participants remarked about the utility of the tasks that were assigned, such as Hessa, who said, “They give us tasks to investigate in our school which is, I told you this was the most marvelous thing happened that time.” Fatima gave

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2 Actually, three Cluster Managers [identified as Elizabeth, Jennifer, and William] supported the program, in addition to Dr. Paul, who was a Dean of the college.
an example of one of the tasks, which asked, “Is your school a happy school?” She described her reaction, “How can I answer this question. No, I am not happy. This was my first reaction when I read this task.” However, while completing the activity, she described a deepening of her understanding that “having a happy school, it means that you have a good procedure, behavior, rules …You are delegating work; you have teams; you have good communication with your staff, with parents, with students. It is about many things… It has made me think about many things.” Because the tasks required follow-up by participants at their schools, the level of support provided by their principals affected their ability to complete the tasks successfully. Although some participants, such as Mariam, reported that her principal was pleased by her curiosity, others had a more negative response. Fatima said, “You know maybe they [future VP program participants] can ask their principal and vice-principal questions, but sometimes I tried before. When you ask, they will not answer. They won’t give you the right answer, you know.” Khawla reported resistance and hostility on the part of her principal and school staff, in response to her questions. She said, “People started to avoid me when I started this program. Don’t show her anything [e.g., files, documents]; don’t give her anything, yes yes. They didn’t want, because it was like a taboo. … So it was difficult.”

Participants’ reactions to the tasks varied with regard to their feelings about the depth of the tasks. Mariam believed, “They were really deep deep questions. I reflect and ask experienced people. … So, really we discovered a lot of things, a lot of hidden things in our field.” However, Khawla said, “I wish the program was much deeper … the tasks that we were given, they were very good I think. … But maybe they need to work
on it to make it better.” Participants also had mixed reactions to the practical utility of the tasks. Hessa stated that the program “opened my eyes to see things that I did not know about in the administration.” She provided an example:

I asked my principal …, “How come you managed to follow up all these things?” She said, “I stay late in the school…. I open my email from three o’clock until four-o’clock, in order to keep up with everything.” I said, “Oh, really you spend a lot of time.” And it was overwhelming. But it makes you think about what it is coming. It gives you a good idea so you wouldn’t be surprised. You will find it useful.

However, Fatima felt some frustration, stating, “If you have theories without implement… there is no use for reading or studying about this theory if you are not going to apply it.” She believed that the program “was like lecturing, working, and discussing things in theory. It is not like hands-on activities, something like I will do it actually in the school. … It’s a big difference between theories and reality, yes.” However, she conceded, “We found some information about different things that we didn’t know about it before as teachers.” However, Mariam contradicted the idea that the course was not practical, illustrating her point with an example. She said, “At the end of the course, one of the vice-principals [said] you did not teach us how to do the timetable. You did not teach us how to put the timetable for the duty teachers’ duty. … Elizabeth [CM] said … you have to be smart, have to delegate … So, and that is what I did.” She described her experience:

The full time table, I didn’t know how to make it to be honest. … So … I asked [the teachers] who can help …? I take [the volunteer teacher] to a room there, I let her stay, I let her drink coffee, water, I bring her chocolate, sandwich, eat, stay, take four hours, stay and work, and closed the door. At one, it was ready. The same day she did it, okay. So, Elizabeth did not teach us how to do the timetable but she gave us the golden keys how to move in the school.
In addition to the tasks, other components of the program included guest speakers, a trip to visit a local government school, lectures, and discussions. Mariam stated:

the most useful thing [was] our visit … to one of the new schools in Abu Dhabi … the vice-principal there [presented] her experience as a VP in one of their new schools. She told us a lot of secrets, a lot of things. So—and don’t be shocked of this; don’t be surprised of this. That was really helpful.

Mariam also described a visit from a female Emirati Cluster Manager, stating that she was a “model from the field to our class.” Mariam also appreciated advice from Elizabeth, who reminded the participants to “always, always protect your back. How … how can we protect our back? By evidence, document everything, document everything, go back to policies, depend on policies, ADEC’s guidelines, everything. Document everything.” Two participants, Mariam and Khawla, explicitly referenced the opportunity to express themselves as an empowering element of the program. Khawla said:

I found myself in this program, really … I never had the opportunity to be allowed to talk, only in like, in [my] master’s [degree program] … to be addressed, you know, recognized I think I just found myself there. I found that I have abilities there because these people they encourage a lot.

All four participants referenced discussions and collaboration as essential to the success of the program, as exemplified by a statement from Hessa, who said, “We were discussing all the time, calling each other, trying to solve things, … Alhamdulillah we managed and it was not that difficult, it was proper and achievable, we can do it.”

Although the program lasted for only a few weeks, participants referenced its structure and content as providing them with a great deal of benefit. Several participants referenced the structure of the program as modeling gradual release, which is an important component of the NSM. Khawla said, “We were just like students and with encouragement, with a task … we felt more responsible, even developed our
personality. … You are not thinking of your classroom, you are thinking about everything." Mariam summarized her journey during the course, stating:

It is like this, step by step, baby step, moving from being a teacher to be [a] …vice-principal and later they really give us the chance to think, to be, to think as a principal, as a school principal.

Fatima learned, “I have to stop thinking as a teacher. I have to think as a leader.”

Hessa, Fatima, and Mariam all believed the program was highly contextualized and appropriate to the culture; however, Khawla suggested that further attention to contextualization would strengthen the program. Participant responses concerning contextualization were varied, with Mariam and Khawla focusing on the Emirati culture, and others, Fatima and Hessa, focusing on the organizational culture in ADEC. Hessa said that the program “contained everything which ADEC represents. It’s nothing from outside or not linked to our culture, it represents ADEC … really it was suitable.” Fatima concurred, stating, “We were very lucky to work with… [these] teachers, or doctors these people, yes. … They know exactly what we will go through when we become vice-principal.” Mariam said:

They [the program leaders] considered our identity, they considered our culture, everything, everything. Even when we welcome some males, some lecturers, they respect everything. Even, I am wearing Niqab [a face-covering veil] outside and they respect everything…. They know, I think they know about our culture and understand everything.”

However, Khawla offered some advice for ensuring that program materials are appropriately adjusted to the culture:

Okay, I understand that the person who put this program maybe he is Westerner but maybe there are not like people, professional people in that field like Emirati. I feel that some people want to Westernize things so in order to put our cultural aspect in it it’s like a challenge or difficult. … I think the program should be put by or reviewed by people who understand the culture and think how it can be more applicable, can be more effective when it is applied in our system.
Additionally, Hessa, Fatima, and Khawla expressed real difficulty with the program timing, which took place at the end of the year, while they were still assigned as teachers. Hessa said:

I was teaching and they were piling up the periods and the other days that I [was] supposed to be in the school. So my schedule was full at that time for three days and … and I stayed the whole night and into the second day without sleeping, trying to complete my report.

She suggested, “If they put it in the middle of the year it would be marvelous; it would be good for them.” Khawla expressed concern about her students, stating:

I just killed myself, I took extra classes and did stay in school and did a lot of things with the students because I felt it is not fair, I don’t want them... it to affect their performance or whatever because the teacher is not there.

Overall, most participants believed that it would be better to change the timing and release the teachers from teaching duties before the commencement of the program.

Despite some suggestions for improvement, most participants expressed generally positive feelings toward the program, especially concerning the knowledge and dedication of the program faculty. Khawla said:

I think I am really lucky to be chosen to be in this cohort, to participate and we were very lucky to be with Dr. Paul before he left. He was like a guru for us, yes. And we have really learnt a lot of things from him and from the other Clusters Managers that were in the program.

Mariam summarized her feelings, stating:

Miss Elizabeth, with Miss Jennifer, Dr. Paul, and Mr. William, they taught us a lot and even our chat, our discussion, it was most of the time it is more than thoughtful. We learnt a lot, we learnt a lot. And most of the time it was an actual situations, just imagine Miss Elizabeth [said], most, just imagine so, so, and so, what you will do, so think. So I learnt that training, how to make a decision.

Hessa concurred, stating:
When I finished … I said okay it is like another Master’s [degree], it needed a lot of work, contained a lot of information and they were useful. … And I felt that I am doing a good training it is not [just] any training… It’s a good one.

Fatima said, “The task, the questions, they were fine and they make us think about what will really happen when we become vice-principal.”

Upon completion of the six-week program, the participants presented a showcase event to Dr. Mugheer and to other dignitaries from ADEC. They presented in teams with each group focusing on one area of the Principal’s Leadership Standards. Mariam’s group “prepared a presentation, PowerPoint …. And I remember Dr. Mugheer was very happy with our group and not only my group, the other groups.” During the ceremony, Khawla reflected on the fact that “Dr. Mugheer… this program is his vision and … I told him thank you for that, because you gave us an opportunity. It is like empowering women.” After her first year as a vice-principal, Khawla reflected on her statements to Dr. Mugheer after the initial intensive program; she said:

We realize that we learned … the theoretical part of it but in practice it would be different, we realized that. But it was so different, so harsh, but I think this is life. It is not as like what is in the book, you read the book okay but when you go into the reality it is something different, different.

**Experience as a First-year Vice-principal—Hessa**

Hessa and Khawla both experienced a unique difficulty in their initial experience as vice-principals because they were assigned to schools that were not yet built, with principals who had not yet arrived from overseas. Hessa described her situation, stating, “The difficulty, the difficult thing was when we graduated we thought that we will be in schools which are already prepared. [We faced a] difficult situation to build a school from nothing. It shouldn’t be like that.” When she was initially hired for her position, she found “the building is not finished, no staff, nothing and I am, I have to
collect the children from two schools and I have to build the school and I am the only employee in the school.” She expressed her amazement about this situation to an ADEC leader, asking him “My god, am I the only one here?” His response was, “Yes, do your job.” Next, “they gave me big box with many files with the students from KG 2 and they told us we are not … we are not registering for KG 1 yet, we will delay KG 1.” Despite the fact that she does not drive and relies on a driver, she had to begin what she described as, “the journey, the agony journey, between two schools.” She described her responsibilities:

I have to check the building with the engineers so I run like a crazy person between four places. Collecting. Solving problems. Fighting with the principals who they distributed my staff between schools and I have to collect them back. [...] They hired the new AMTs who came from private schools and they are Egyptians and other, Arabic ex-pats. And they do not know anything about ADEC’s new model schools. Nothing, modern schools sorry, nothing, and I have to do all of that to establish the school from zero.

However, despite her unsteady beginning, Hessa said that she was “laughing all the time. It did not break me. Really, I was amazed. I thought that I am dreaming.... I said, ‘am I the one who is in this situation, really?’ When I face something, I start to laugh, I started to laugh and Alhamdulillah, it did not affect me. I was okay.” Once her principal arrived, Hessa found a partner and advocate as they work together to open the school. She described their relationship, stating, “When Gina [the new principal came] we started to fight everything together. We went everywhere together; we solved the issues together. We tried our best to be in the building before it officially opened.”

After the school was opened, the next major challenge facing Hessa and Gina was registration and data entry (using the ESIS system) and effective communication with the community. These two issues were consistent themes in my interviews with all...
four vice-principals and will be addressed in a separate section to follow. Once the school was established and students registered, Hessa stated that her job responsibilities included:

tracking the registration. … Discussions with teachers for evaluation …, papers or whatever, mothers, parents, problems with transportation, …budget …, [and] the teams that we have here because I am part of one of the teams trying to do our best heritage and culture….The regular things for the Vice-principal. Regular things. So many things coming at the same time. Sometimes they are minor or not. Sometimes [the principal] takes care of some, I take care of some.

Hessa described her major frustrations with her current role, stating, “I want to do my role as a vice-principal and it can be done but because of [registration and other online record-keeping] it is very hard.” She said that this issue keeps her from practicing her “role in that area—in the academic…And I am sorry for that. If it’s to me I would be with the teachers, with the children and everything but I am not involved, that much with them. I’m trying but I can’t.”

Just before the vice-principals entered their schools, Dr. Paul retired and the [XXXX] Professional Development Program was suspended. Hessa was particularly disappointed by the lack of follow-up from the program, especially the trip to the U.S., since she had already asked her brother to accompany her, as is proper in the Emirati culture. She said she hoped to “Go to America, to London to take those courses … about leadership. … And I think these are… will make a difference.” Goals for Hessa include becoming more involved with the academic aspects of KG, and working more with the teachers. She said:

This is one of the things that I think I will tell the teacher, also to put their heart out when they are teaching, and to teach from their hearts…. Because they will get the result at the end of the year, they will be satisfied. And this is the major thing that you can gain after finishing the
year, reaching your children, reaching the level that you have set at the beginning of the year, maybe sometimes exceed it... this is like a reward.

Hessa identified her relationship with her principal as a strength in her current situation, stating, “If you ask me to [about being] professional yes I’ve learned a lot from Gina. She helped me with… to understand things—academic things,” concluding “I have a wonderful principal here that helps me a lot, She helps me a lot. So I am Alhamdulillah... content.”

Experience as a First-year Vice-principal—Khawla

Khawla faced a similar situation to Hessa; she was assigned to a school building “that is not yet finished so it’s like a construction site in somewhere that is so far from my house.” She was assigned several classrooms in “another KG, which was built in the 70s, and the system is... people with old traditional mentalities although they are doing the New School model.” She described her initial situation as a “school within a school,” which she managed with the help of a HoF-E. At the beginning of the process, she said, “I had to visit like the [ADEC] office on a daily basis ... [Staff members] started to come in and ... they didn’t have the experience, the attitude and so this was like a challenge.” She and the HoF worked together, “just fighting for everything.” Finally, Khawla “had my desk, I had the HoF, I had my teachers, I had to manage them, I was responsible for their attendance, everything, and we didn’t know who is our principal.”

With the help of the HoF, Khawla began to learn about KG, since “KG is a different world for me. I was in Cycle 2, and ... it was different. It was like a totally different world for me.” To learn more and accomplish her tasks, she “used to stay in that building ... until like three and I was just searching and doing.” Staff members asked her, “Why you have to stay? Why you have to stay? ... [They] thought like local
VPs are not like that, they are not doing this. These are not their concerns.” Khawla responded by saying, “Okay, this is my concern and the role has changed and you need to understand that… I needed to grab their attention you know… I have authority.” The Cluster Manager told Khawla, “Don’t get overwhelmed, just relax, the real work is coming, when you will be [at the new school].” However, Khawla said:

    I am glad I was not relaxed, yes, sometimes it’s dangerous that you are relaxed, you shouldn’t be relaxed in some situations because it concerns kids, teachers, so we did our best actually with the help of the HoF. So when I had the Principal and just like… [she said] I am the Principal so I just started a little to back off.

Once the school was organized and running, Khawla focused on building her knowledge of KG, stating, “When I started … I told them I am just like a student here, I want to know what is going on in the KG … So when [the HoF-E] did a PD with them I was like one of the teachers.” Like the other VPs in the program, Khawla additionally faced difficulties with registration and ESIS and in communicating with the community, which will be addressed in a later section.

Khawla, who expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the support provided in the initial portion of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, felt abandoned when that support was withdrawn. She said, “They told us there would be an induction program for us but when we graduated, they just, they forgot about us … graduation and then ma salama [good-bye]. … And we felt so bad because we were just nobody, you know, they neglected us.” In the difficult situation she faced as a new vice-principal, she felt that ADEC had a responsibility to her, asking, “Okay what did you do for this leader as a support?” She went on to say, “We need to have mentors. Yes, who come and tell us this is right, this is wrong.” She said, “There should be a follow up from
Khawla’s relationship with the rest of the school leadership team, after her new principal arrived, was sometimes a source of frustration and difficulty for her, although she consistently expressed admiration for both the HoF-E and her principal. Initially, she said:

At the [ADEC] office, honestly, I don’t know if, they told me that the real leader of this school is you, they told me that. … I am also a leader here so I am not like a vice-principal. I am a leader. I have to know everything—I have to.

At the beginning of the year, Khawla sometimes felt excluded by the principal and the HoF-E stating “sometimes I felt that they are ignoring me, ignoring me, they don’t want to include me in everything. That stressed me a lot; I have to be in everything. You shouldn’t hide things from me.” In response to this issue, Khawla “addressed my fears, my concerns, I told them I have to know, this is my responsibility.” After she addressed her concerns, Khawla’s principal “admired that, she said nobody… you are like the first vice-principal who wants to know everything.” Over the course of the year, her relationship with the principal evolved—“Step-by-step I realized no, she is wise, in every decision that she is taking, so Khawla, step back and observe.” After some time spent observing, she began to request feedback, asking her principal “if you feel that there is something I am not doing in a right way please tell me, come and tell me and if you feel that you want to give me advice about something please do.” This approach met with some success; Khawla said “I think [the principal] tries now…after when I had to talk and… and to a limit she gives feedback [but] we need more support.” By the end of the school year, Khawla said that she was:
Now working with my Principal and she is very knowledgeable, she knows but she can be like, my way or the highway. But she is knowledgeable and I really admire her and she is wise in a lot of decisions that she takes and I learned a lot of things from her.

In addition to building her relationship with the rest of the school leadership team, Khawla enhanced her content knowledge. She said, “Alhamdulillah, I am very good now, in KG curriculum. I even can go and help and I can do the observation by myself. I can write a very good instructive, constructive feedback for the teachers.” Her future goals at the school include development of the Arabic and Islamic curriculum because she said, “We have a challenge in Islamic, people teach Islamic in a very boring way and we want to encourage them to do it in a more New School Model way.” Khawla takes pride in her accomplishments in her first year, particularly breaking negative stereotypes about Emirati leaders. She says many people think Emirati leaders “don’t want to learn, they don’t want to do, they just come here and I think I broke that, that image that they have put us there.” She described a conversation with a teacher that made her feel proud, stating that the teacher, a local, “told me I am really proud of you. She said, like we have an Emirati and who is dedicated, who is a good leader, who tries and learns and who is very active. I think... she really made me happy.”

**Experience as a First-year Vice-principal—Fatima**

Fatima faced very different challenges than Hessa and Khawla. However, out of all of the participants, she exhibited the highest degree of frustration with what she perceived as her lack of preparation for the difficulties of being a first-year vice-principal and with a lack of ongoing support. She appeared to face a very resistant teaching faculty and seemed to lack support from some other members of her school leadership team. Fatima described her induction into the school:
In my case I came here, I didn’t meet with the [previous] vice-principal. I came here, she was resigned from this work, I just spent few hours with her, she was working with the schedule, she print it out and she gave it to me and she said bye, see you, okay. So imagine that. I was here in her office alone and my principal also she’s a new principal [to this school] … and then I was in her office with all files for last year and I don’t know what to do, I have no one to tell me, I have no one to tell me this is your role, you have to do this and that.

This reality seemed to conflict with the perception of her new role; she said, “For example, they [other teachers?] told us, ‘Ah you are vice-principal now. You are relaxing now, don’t have much work like teachers,’ but it is the opposite. Yes, I have many things to do at home for my work as a vice-principal.” Fatima “was alone for one whole semester, the only vice-principal in this school. So I was doing almost everything, academic and student service.” Like the other vice-principals, Fatima also described ESIS and community relationships as an ongoing issue. Additionally, she spoke frankly and consistently about the challenges she faced at her school site concerning teacher absenteeism, refusal to cover classes, resistance to professional development, attendance taking, and duty coverage:

You have an unexpected number of teacher who are absent without telling you anything, you expect them to come and then they are not here, where are they? They are absent, oh my god.

Covering substitutions it’s oh my god. … So daily since I came here it’s the same routine … you put a substitution you want a teacher to cover a class, she will send back, no I am sorry I cannot take it, so I have to find another way, I have to find a solution, you know.

Most of the time [teachers] refuse to attend [PD] so you force them to attend by diplomacy. And they think what, you are not serving them, you are hurting them by keeping them … So in their opinions I am you know treating them badly.

I know over the world, teachers should take the attendance for her class. … When you take that class you should know how many students do you have in your classroom. [...] It’s really important. Do I have to convince them to do this? See, yes it’s really hard.
Fatima expressed a high level of frustration, stating:

Sometimes people … don’t accept that you are new you are fresh, you have no experience at all about this job … and in the meantime you are in charge of taking care of the whole school and you are new and you are alone.

She described specific details of information, which she wished she had known before starting work, such as, “which files do I have to keep in my office? … I don’t know how to write a report to my principal about particular things. This stuff we need to train people to do it before they join the workforce.” She went on to describe her lack of preparation concerning:

SIP, budgeting, the budget of this school and the maintenance of the school, it is really, you have like security that will have contract, cleaners, the companies, canteen, these… all stuff… I have no idea how to run this stuff.

She summed up her feelings, stating that she would like to “focus more on the students’ learning, you know, and the students themselves. But until now, I am far away from them because I am busy with other stuff that maybe I should learn from the beginning, before I started my real job.”

Particularly before the arrival of the second vice-principal, Fatima attempted to assume the responsibilities of several others. When she tried to ask teachers to take attendance online, “the principal said okay they cannot do it, because they are busy. I said okay, I did the attendance for one whole semester by myself.” Additionally, she and the principal often cover classes when teachers refuse. When the second VP arrived, Fatima said that the VP was surprised by “teachers refusing to take substitution.” She said, for example “in [the U.S.] teachers don't refuse taking substitution.” Fatima replied, “Here, no- [the] teacher can say ‘No, sorry I cannot take it, I am tired’ and… I don’t
understand because I didn’t work outside my country, so... but according to what I hear from others it’s not the same.”

Fatima was realistic about change, stating, “As a leader, you will not make the change by yourself. It depends on other people. …I don’t want [teachers] to follow me just because I am their vice-principal. … They have to believe about the change, change their mentality, change their way of thinking.” Despite her positive beliefs about teachers’ ability to change, she explicitly referenced her belief that cultural pressure for women to teach was affecting the profession negatively. She said, “So who responsible about [students’ low performance]? People. In my opinion, teachers.” She said:

I become a teacher because my parents encouraged me to become a teacher. It wasn’t my desire. But when you do something you really like and you really feel that you can give the best as you can, you will do it in a fabulous way, in a good way.

However, she still hopes to have a positive effect on the mentality of teachers, stating:

I don’t accept if someone tell me this is, that student is lazy or he cannot understand or they are t-o-o s-l-o-w.....Don’t say that child cannot learn. And we see this a lot. When ask the teacher they say no no no don’t bother yourself, that student will not understand anything, don’t give anything to her.

She hopes to inspire positive change at her school, ensuring a better education for all students; she believes, “a real teacher, they will not leave any students in the classroom without help, they will try, they will kill themselves to help the students. To improve.”

Despite the difficulties she faced, Fatima described herself as a change agent and expressed her commitment to her work as a divine calling, stating, “It is my destiny I think. It is from God. He puts me in this position and this place to do something useful I think, yes.”
Experience as a First-year Vice-principal—Mariam

Like the other vice-principals, Mariam faced an unsteady start at the beginning of the school year. She was placed in an old Cycle 1 boys’ school, which was feminized at the beginning of the school year. She described the reception the female staff received from the community, stating that feminization was “really a shock for [this] community.” Many parents reacted angrily, believing “we are not trustworthy… some of them [were] shouting, ‘Why are women here? Women are not strong; they cannot control the boys.’” Feminization meant not only a transition for the community but also that every single teacher and school leader was new to the school. This issue was exacerbated by the fact that the principal arrived in November, after the school began. Mariam described some of the challenges she faced:

The most difficult challenge was really the school system, the school rules, to put everything in its place, even with the teachers, even with the children because most of them were new teachers, new teachers even for the EMTs and AMTs. I was lucky to have English HoF but I did not have Arabic HoF, so I was with them, was working with them so everything was new so I was running here, there and there.

Like Hessa, Mariam and her principal seemed to function well together. She said, “My responsibility is everything the principal does. I am with her. I try to support her… report everything to her, especially since she is a Westerner so sometimes communication is a barrier, sometimes with fathers or teachers.” Mariam indicated that her principal often provides her with readings, and that she is a positive force in the school; she said, “We are fine. She’s [the principal] with us now and we are fine.” Similar to Fatima, Mariam reported resistance from teachers as a problem but one that she believed that she was addressing successfully. She said, “I will not again go outside and say I’ve had teacher resistance. Why do they resist? Because they are not satisfied about something. Fix it in
the school, that thing, and they will be satisfied and you will see the wonderful
performance from them. It is not a challenge.” She described her approach to managing
relationships with teachers:

I was leading students, 30 students, now I am leading maybe 35 teachers. It is the same … [as] in the classroom … I have high achievers, I have low achievers, I have stubborn teachers, I have really enthusiastic teachers, I have lazy teachers so it is the same but you have to be very careful with them because … most of the teachers are… sensitive once they are dealing with the administrators.

She provided an example of overcoming resistance to attending professional
development, particularly for first-year teachers. She said:

We need to investigate why this teacher is complaining … maybe the training is really boring, is really, she doesn’t need it. Because those new teachers I am thinking of something that really they need … Being a caring person in our field will produce a responsible person.

The idea of caring was a consistent theme in Mariam’s discussion of her own role. She said, “Actually being responsible in our field [means] that you really care, so responsible mean caring, caring, so you care for those kids.” Mariam described the children at her school as “really lucky because they have that New School model. … They are playing, enjoying their time, projects… They early learn how to be responsible and they learn how to be self-confident.” Despite her generally positive comments about her school, Mariam described some negative consequences in her personal life because of her increased commitments as a vice-principal. She described her feelings:

Only one word, really I felt alone, I felt alone so when you are vice-principal in this world I can’t join to that group they will say Mariam is with that group and I can’t take coffee with that teacher because they will say why she call that teacher. …Really I miss my friends, I miss the teachers’ life, the teacher’s lounge I miss that life, drinking, eat… taking lunch together, chatting about students, working, helping each other, I miss that.
She also described feeling isolated from her family because of the burden of taking work home, stating, “I can’t concentrate [around the family], I have to stay alone. So that’s no life.” However, she appeared to see this as a temporary situation, saying, “I miss a lot of things I know, but I enjoy it Sarah, maybe it is the first year. I will say I don’t know.” Mariam described a great deal of hard work and effort undertaken in concert with her principal over the course of the year to build a school community and to connect with parents. By the end of the year, she said that the parents, many of whom were very angry or upset at the beginning of the year, “are fine. … Most of them [now say] Alhamdulillah, thank god that we have mothers for our children. We have mothers, and we need mothers.”

Electronic Student Information System (ESIS)

All of the program participants who were interviewed referenced the student information system (ESIS) as a major part of their job responsibilities. Their comments indicated that this system was extremely cumbersome and several participants expressed frustration regarding the drain on their time and energy, which they believed was a result of their responsibilities with ESIS. Fatima summarized the tone of the group’s feelings about ESIS, saying, “ESIS, oh my god it’s a whole different story. ESIS, they have to train new vice-principals how to deal with ESIS.” Hessa was so frustrated that she recounted an incident when she asked Dr. Mugheer personally for help with registration using the system:

“Stop, Dr. Mugheer listen,” [she said]. He said, “What?” I said, “[You] already opened ESIS?” He said, “I opened ESIS, from the first day.” I thought, “Yes, thank you—he opened ESIS first day and I am the one who is supposed to register. I don’t know how to register. Nobody trained me. I have taken training to be an academic vice-principal, I am not student vice-principal!” [She said] “Dr. Mugheer, I don’t have a secretary, I don’t
have a principal, I don’t have a student services vice-principal, I am alone.” He said, “No, we are not going to let you be alone, we’ll help you.” [He tells a staff member], “Help her.” He said just that, okay.

Khawla, Mariam, and Fatima all indicated that ESIS interfered significantly with their family life. Khawla said:

Registration … for each child I have to spend like from one hour to one hour and a half and this, my time is valuable. … I just do it at home which is my valuable time with my kids is taken and with my husband.

Hessa and Khawla both indicated that they were unable to engage fully with the academic aspects of their job because of ESIS. Khawla said, “I have to be in the classrooms, not here, sitting on the desk!” Fatima expressed a high degree of frustration with the system and with the lack of training. She said, “There’s no time that you will take your time to learn, no, you have to do it, find a way to learn about it and just finish with it. They will not give you a time.” Mariam said, simply, “You know, Sarah, most of our work now [is] in ESIS.” Program participants uniformly expressed a high degree of frustration with ESIS, which they perceived to be an inefficient and time-consuming system for which they had received inadequate training.

**Community Relationships**

Another issue, which was a major theme across all of the interviews, was a lack of support from ADEC for building and maintaining positive community relationships. It is possible that one of the limitations of the study—the fact that three of four participants were in a similar geographic area—amplified this issue; however, it was addressed in detail by all program participants. ADEC initiatives, such as feminization, the introduction of co-education in Cycle 1, and inclusion for students with special needs were cited by participants as areas in which they needed additional support. All of the
program participants expressed a high degree of commitment to the idea that parent involvement is essential to student success, such as Hessa, who said:

> It is important for [schools] to hear, to listen to the parents because they are, I know from ADEC the parents are the most important and they should be involved in the school and the school should be involved with the community and with the parents a lot.

Mariam said, “If we are looking for high outcomes from the students we need their parents’ support so they need to know about the New School Model to support us with it.”

Fatima believed that a large part of her role as a vice-principal was to ensure parent satisfaction; she said:

> Yes, as we know parents are our clients. ... You don’t want one parent to go out from your school and he feel angry or mad or sad. You always want to please them and satisfy them. So I tried to help them as much as I can.

Fatima stated that in her experience, most parents believe, “teaching is the school responsibility, it is not our responsibility.... [Parents think] we take care of his health, his food, clothes you know but not education part, it’s the school responsibility.” However, Hessa believed that ADEC shares responsibility for not building relationships with parents. She asked, “Why do we ask [parents] to participate when it is suiting us? And when it is something really concerns their children like [mixing the genders in Cycle 1] we do not need their opinion, we just force it.” She suggested “ADEC—they should consider the parents’ opinion, to listen to all of their concerns, [and] come up with a solution in the middle. ...And then the problem will be solved and this anger will be more... lesser and lesser.” Khawla provided some suggestions for improvement, such as “having a TV, like a channel that is only for ADEC that talks about accomplishments, ... like a newsletter which can be, which goes with the newspaper, like it can be monthly...
for example. Which about, like our vision, what are the things we are aiming for.” She also expressed her belief that, “A lot of changes that are happening and which will be through us, which will be our responsibility to enlighten [the community]. … We need Emirati committed teachers actually.” Mariam provided an example of a situation at her school that was emblematic of the need for greater communication with parents, regarding inclusion for students with special needs:

Some of them [parents] are here in my office shouting and yelling. [One parent asked], “So why you have this boy? He’s abnormal! Take him to the hospital or take him to those centers. Why is he with us with our children in the school? He doesn’t hear. He doesn’t speak. So why he is here?” [She responds], “No. It is inclusion, it is inclusion program.” [The parent asks,] “What is inclusion? Why he is here? … Who is at ADEC? Dr. Mugheer? I will ask Dr. Mugheer—I will go to the Sheikh or somewhere!”

Mariam said, “the problem [is] that we need ADEC’s support or we need ADEC to help us with the community. So it is the culture. A lot of things, we need to change but it is the culture. … So I think we need ADEC to support us with the community.” Despite many challenges, Khawla referenced the progress made by ADEC, specifically concerning Arabic language and culture. She said:

Now ADEC is stressing on national identity so this made [people] feel a little secure that, no we are not going to lose it, we are not going to lose our language, Arabic language, our religion, our beliefs … [this] let them feel secure, more secure that no you are not going to lose it, they will be at ease.

She went on to state, “I think what we have accomplished in ADEC is phenomenal and in a very short time… It has to do with having good leaders actually … who believe in this program, who believe that the change can happen with the resistance.” All of the program participants expressed a strong belief in the work ADEC is doing and in the importance of parent and community support in enhancing student achievement; they
expressed a desire to have more support from ADEC in order to support these essential relationships effectively.

Suggestions for Program Improvement

The program participants offered several specific suggestions for improving the program in the future, including more practical information, mentorships, internships, communications skills, and guest speakers. In particular, Fatima hoped that future programs would concentrate more on practical issues, such as SIP, budgeting, maintenance, security, safety, and ESIS. Several participants mentioned site visits and internships as a way to make the training more connected to practice. Khawla said:

I think if it is more practical [the program will be better] I think. Practical. They thought it would be practical if we just observe our schools but no... it would be more practical if we go to other places, I think.

Hessa suggested that it would be good, "If they involved us more in the administration to go there and to stay with some people and to work with them for like, for a period of time to see what they are doing, to get experience." An internship, Fatima said, would provide scaffolding for future vice-principals; she said:

Let them work or stay in a school for few months ... as a trainee. ... You are responsible and learning at the same time, it is really difficult. Give them time to train and learn and then put them in a real situation.

She also suggested that a different school (not their own) would be better because, it could be difficult with “their colleagues you know because they used to be with them as a teacher you know. But if they go to a different school they will have a different experience also." Khawla suggested sending future vice-principals:

to different like very good performing schools with very good performing leaders and let them learn from it. ...And... mentoring. When you do something and you want to know, is it going to work, am I doing a good job?
Communication, which several participants referenced as an area for their own growth, was also an area in which more training might be helpful. Fatima said:

Yes, you need to be able to communicate with different mentality, you communicate with teachers differently than you communicate with students, with parents and also with parents you have educated parents, you will have err, not educated parents you know so it depends on the people, that you are communicating with.

Mariam suggested including more guest speakers, including “Western principals…who face really the challenges here and we would like to hear from them … and even the successful Emirati principals. …they have wonderful practices in their schools, so we want to know those practices.”

Development and Growth as Leaders

After completing the initial six-week program and acting as vice-principals, the program participants shared their beliefs about the qualities needed for future leaders in ADEC. Fatima said:

You need to have these skills: to be good listener, to be able to communicate with different people, different backgrounds … to be able to solve problems … also to be patient. …be flexible, to have a common sense … and ask for help.

Mariam said that leaders need to be responsible, confident, updated, patient, wise, humble, and, she said, “Can I add that to have a sense of humor sometimes.” Hessa said, “I think the successful leaders who are the leaders who know the people, very well and they can convince them and you cannot convince anyone unless if you are convinced first.” Khawla stated that leaders should be focused on improvement, have good interpersonal skills, be bilingual, hardworking, and be tolerant, which she believed was very important. She said, “We need our leaders to understand the others …
because this is what we want to teach our children.” She illustrated her idea with imagery:

We are not standing on this river bank and we just point to that people that they are not good enough, they are not doing good job or whatever or they are better than us or they are superior or inferior whatever, no you need to mix up with them, if you can benefit from them try to benefit from them, try to listen and try to understand the others and so this is my idea.

All of the participants highlighted their commitment to their own ongoing growth and development, using several important strategies, including reading and research, networking, and taking advantage of professional development opportunities. Mariam said that reading is essential in keeping “up to date with everything, especially our field, it is education, the same as health. You have to know what is the latest, what are things which are really new in our field.” She said, “When I am leading my students, teaching my students and leading my school, it is reading… I can’t stop reading! I discovered now I have to read more and more, more than when I was a teacher.” Khawla highlighted how reading has helped her as well, saying:

I’ve been into like how many essays and research… [about] early childhood, the curriculum, the teaching and learning, the good practices and you know. …So I was just striving to know as much as I can, whatever I can.

In addition to the personal benefits of reading, Khawla also highlighted it as a leadership tool, stating “you need to be a lifelong learner [and] … your staff needs to know that you are a lifelong learner.” Although the cohort group began as a class, all four participants interviewed indicated that a strong network had emerged, which was a source of information and support. Mariam described her experience:

From that day [at the beginning of the program] I established my network. … Sometimes we share a lot of our problems, our issues, our concerns…. I can say it is network—a strong network, really a strong network and it is
really starting to be bigger and bigger, [from Al Ain] to Abu Dhabi zone and ADEC and even sometimes in the West region.

Khawla wished for greater opportunities to network, saying, “I wish if we could be able to network better with others so they can help us. It helped a lot. …Networking is one of those things that really helps.” Mariam and Hessa indicated that they would like to focus on communication as an important area for continued personal growth. Mariam said:

Sometimes for us as leaders we have to be careful when we are communicating. So, we don’t want at the end to say it was a miscommunication, no… So that is what I want, something that [builds] our skills … to be smarter with people like this.

Mariam also thought that time management training would be helpful, although she said that maybe her “colleagues will say, ‘Mariam, you are very silly! No, we are vice-principals and we need a course in time management?’ Yes, we need time management, maybe.”

Khawla and Fatima both referenced current and future training as a potential precursor to the principalship, although Fatima indicated she might prefer to remain as a vice-principal. Khawla concluded:

We are not meant to be VPs forever. We are being trained as far as I know to be leaders in the future. So if people they give you the confidence and the trust that you can do it and you have someone who tells you, someone who mentors you like once a week comes to see you and you feel that he’s like a critical friend, a coach, like a life coach or someone professional who can help you without judging you then you will feel very comfortable and you will benefit a lot.

Mariam also hoped to avail herself of future training and mentorship opportunities; she suggested that she would benefit from further training in leading people and leading strategically, although she said, “Just tell me and I will do it. So, I went to learn, about myself, so what can I do more, just to be a good leader or better leader.”
Summary of Findings

Research question one is “What are the perceptions of members of the cohort group of candidates for the vice-principalship who are involved in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, regarding the effectiveness of the program?” Findings indicate that all four program participants interviewed believed that the program increased their preparedness to address the rigors of the first year of the vice-principalship. However, participants identified a large gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in the program and the often-harsh realities they faced as vice-principals. Additionally, the gap in programming mid-year was perceived by some participants as an abandonment of ADEC’s responsibility to support them. Particular areas in which much more training was needed include: ESIS/online registration, curriculum (for those assigned outside of their teaching cycle/area), school management (e.g., duty schedule, substitutes, budget, busses), parent/community engagement, and communication. Aspects of the training that were perceived to be most helpful were; guest speakers; the practical tasks that participants completed at the schools; caring, encouraging, and nurturing relationships with program leaders/teachers; and the opportunity to form a caring and collaborative network with their peers. Although the program participants faced many challenges in their first year as vice-principals, they all exhibited a high degree of personal belief in their ability to enact positive change, in order to support student achievement and ADEC reform efforts.

Concerning sub-question one, “What are participants’ perceptions about the cultural appropriateness of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program?” all of the program participants indicated that the training was culturally appropriate and
contextualized. One participant, Khawla, suggested that further contextualization (e.g., a review from an informed Emirati national or small committee) would strengthen the material further. She cited one incident when the material seemed “so, not to UAE context,” stating, “I think the program is very good … just not to bring like a ready-made experience and put it here.” The remaining three participants were adamant in their belief that the material was appropriately contextualized. Several participants lauded the program leaders for their attention to cultural appropriateness and efficacy. Mariam said, “They [the program leaders] considered our identity, they considered our culture, everything, everything…. They know, I think they know about our culture and understand everything.”

Concerning sub-question two, “What are participants’ perceptions about the relevance of the information presented in the [XXXX] Professional Development Program, as it relates to their experience in the UAE context?” the participants generally indicated their belief that the training was helpful to them in preparing to become vice-principals; however, the degree to which each participant truly struggled through the first trimester indicates that beyond information, they needed a much greater degree of mentorship and support in order to be successful. Participants indicated that an internship before placement, ongoing mentoring and coaching, more practical information, and communication training would benefit future trainees.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the conclusions reached from the review of the literature and interviews with program candidates. First, conclusions will be discussed. Next, considerations for future program designers and recommendations for future training will be provided. Finally, considerations for further study will be made.

It is clear that the development of future leaders in ADEC is an essential component of ADEC’s vision and mission and accords with national priorities, in terms of Emiratization. After a review of the literature and interviews with four participants in this program, it is my conclusion that several important areas should be taken into consideration by future program designers. These are: participants’ educational background, leadership role models, reality in ADEC schools, and some gender issues (particularly as they relate to the decision to join the teaching profession). Additionally, the participants voiced the need for much more support for ADEC’s electronic systems (such as ESIS) and for communicating with the community.

Program participants had many similarities in terms of their background. Program designers may want to consider these background characteristics specifically when designing program activities, particularly with regard to supporting participants with moving beyond the rote pedagogy and poor leadership role models that all of the interviewees referenced having experienced. Khawla explicitly referenced the temptation for Emirati teachers to “get back to the way their teachers taught us and we were taught in a very traditional way.” Poor role models are not unique to the Emirati context; Buskey and Topolka-Jorissen outlined the danger of new leaders “emulating” poor role models in their work in the U.S. (Buskey & Topolka-Jorissen, 2010, p. 115).
However, all of the program participants referenced having experienced almost exclusively rote traditional teaching and authoritarian leadership. This may be a shared history, which provides context to program designers. Additionally, leading teachers who have experienced this type of teaching may require a unique skill set.

In the U.S., participants in a principal development program were cited by Brown University as finding training that was “too theoretical” as a “minus” (Brown University, 2003, p. 10). Several of the program participants, particularly Fatima, found some aspects of the [XXXX] Professional Development Program to be not practical enough; Fatima said, “If you have theories without [implementation]… there is no use for reading or studying about this theory if you are not going to apply it.” Brown University quoted a principal who said, “The support I received was minimal. My feet hit the floor and I learned by doing.” This experience was echoed by several program participants, who felt abandoned when the six-week intensive program was over and they found little further support in a very difficult situation. Khawla said, “When we graduated, they just, they forgot about us … And we felt so bad because we were just nobody, you know. They neglected us.” Fatima said, “I didn’t find the support that I wished to have. So I tried to work at home many hours, reading, searching.”

Although only one program participant said that she believed the program would benefit from more contextualization, the disconnection between theory and the reality faced by practitioners in ADEC schools was a consistent theme, both in the literature review and as voiced by participants. Clarke, an education professor in Abu Dhabi, cites the “‘pedagogical gulf’ between existing and aspirational levels of schooling” (Clarke, 2006, p. 226). Sowa and De La Vega ask, “How does one go about collaborating to
change a system that has deep roots in a traditional format of memorization, repetition, and classroom management based on physical punishment and fear?” (Sowa & De La Vega, 2008, p. 103). Khawla recounts her own experience, stating that in her master’s degree program, “we talk about something, we study something and the reality is disastrous, it was disastrous, like the leadership, the school, the system, everything.”

After the [XXXX] Professional Development Program showcase, Khawla said that she knew “the theoretical part of it but in practice it would be different, we realized that. But it was so different, so harsh…” Again, a disconnection between theory and reality in education is not unique to this context; however, the degree to which this issue was raised both in the literature and by participants suggests that this issue may warrant further consideration by program designers.

Much further study is warranted to assess the contextualized needs of female leadership candidates in the UAE context. Research by Abdulla indicates that there is a high degree of preference for female-only working environments, both by Emirati families and by the women themselves. Three of four program participants interviewed indicated that family pressure played an essential role in their decision to enter education. Hessa indicated that as a vice-principal, who needs to work with men from ADEC as a part of her role, she needed to learn “to face the men...you have to be firm, when you say no which means no. If they are willing to negotiate you have to convince them but... with etiquette which suits the culture.” Further study is needed to determine what type of communication training may be necessary, if any, to support female leadership training fully. Fatima indicated her belief that societal pressure for women to become teachers is a detriment to the profession. She asks, “So who are responsible
about [students’ low performance]? People. In my opinion, teachers.” She continues, stating, “When you do something you really like and you really feel that you can give the best that you can, you will do it in a fabulous way, in a good way.” Leading teachers in this context may require contextualized training; further study is needed concerning this contextual issue.

As a researcher, there is a natural desire to find an “aha” moment, a “so-what” that will change the world, even just a little. In narrative research, this moment is elusive. It is hoped that the power of the work is in the journey itself, in the participants’ words, which the researcher attempts to capture and record as faithfully as possible. What I found through my research is that these women describe themselves as ambitious and dedicated, and that they evidence care for the students and the teachers they lead. They are fairly well versed in educational theories and even jargon, but have rarely experienced good teaching or high-quality leadership themselves. They are trying hard—very hard—to become leaders for the next generation, for their children, their students, and for their country. They read about educational theories; they learn about the theories, but the reality they face is fundamentally different from the reality described in their books. The parent communities are far different, and the background knowledge and training of many of the teachers they lead often is lacking seriously. The cultural issues in this context concerning gender mean that the power dynamics and the social interactions faced by these women are far different from what is described in a Western context. This is not to say that the canon of educational knowledge from the West is not valuable or applicable here; it is just to raise the issue of contextualization, which I see as being of paramount importance to successful change efforts in ADEC.
This is a high power-distance culture, in which status is given to Western “experts” who are sometimes viewed as the “keepers of knowledge.” What I have learned from my time spent with these four dedicated future leaders is that there is value in asking their opinions. There is value in time spent learning about their experience and there is value in engaging them in the development of future training experiences, both for themselves and for other future leaders. As Khawla said, including voices from local participants can ensure that professional development leaders do not just “bring like a ready-made experience and put it here.” As a program leader myself, my conclusion is that I need to spend more time listening and engaging with local educators and leaders; I hope that others will learn from my experience and spend more time listening to the educators we serve.

**Recommendations for Program Leaders**

1. All participants, either implicitly or explicitly, indicated their belief that the program was helpful and should be continued; however, several potential program modifications were suggested.

2. Training should be revised to prepare more specifically aspiring leaders for the reality they will face in schools and should include an increased focus on day-to-day school operations.

3. The follow-up phase of the program is critical; ongoing support needs to be built not only into this program but also into a continuum of services for aspiring leaders. No leadership training should be provided in isolation; all programs should be aligned carefully to ensure scaffolded support throughout the future leaders’ careers.

4. Leaders should have access to training and follow-up particularly concerning practical needs (e.g., registration, ESIS, scheduling, budgeting, time management, report writing) in addition to ongoing leadership training.

5. Aspiring leaders should be paired with a mentor as a part of a structured mentoring program. Training should be provided to both the mentor and the mentee, in addition to ongoing follow-up to gauge the effectiveness of the relationship.
6. Aspiring leaders should be provided with the opportunity to see successful schools in action. This could involve trips inside of the UAE to visit successful schools, both government and private, and to schools outside of the country.

7. Specific communication supports and training should be provided to aspiring leaders. Aspiring leaders should be provided with training and support materials to ensure their ability to communicate effectively with stakeholder groups, including ADEC personnel, teachers, students, and parents. This training may need to address specific contextual issues.

8. Training cohorts should be kept intact.

9. Networking activities between and among both aspiring leaders and current leaders (particularly nationals of the same gender) should be fostered and encouraged.

10. The continuum of services for aspiring leaders should be tailored to meet the unique needs and goals of the trainees and should allow them to access high-quality research-based leadership programming that is contextualized to the UAE.

11. ADEC Professional Development division should conduct periodic and systematic program evaluations (including both qualitative and quantitative measures) to ensure that leadership development programs meet the needs of the participants and the organization.

Recommendations for Future Study

The field of study in leadership development throughout the world is narrow; in the UAE context, it is non-existent. Every facet of education in this context would benefit from far greater study. Some specific issues raised in this work include:

- why teachers enter teaching and what effects this has on their career development;
- the relationship between university teacher preparation programs and the reality in government schools;
- the relationship between university leadership preparation programs and the reality in government schools;
- the unique issues faced by female leaders in the UAE context in the workplace;
- family/work balance, particularly for female leaders in this context;
- parents’ perspectives on current school reform efforts
- the role of the parent in supporting learning in this context;
• the effectiveness of various professional development programs and initiatives (program evaluation);

• pathways to leadership (Who becomes a leader? Why? How?); and

• relationships between and among Arabic-speaking and English-speaking school faculties.
Verbatim greeting/background information for participants:
Thank you for your time [this morning/afternoon]. I value your time and I appreciate you sharing your time with me. The purpose of this interview is to learn more about your experience in the [XXXX] leadership development program. I will not use your name or the name of the program in any part of my writing. I hope that you will feel free to share with me your thoughts and feelings about the program, in detail. Even if something seems like a small detail, it may really help me to understand your experience, so please share it! I will audiotape and then write down the thoughts that you share with me during our conversation. Then I will send you a copy to make sure that it reflects what you said. You will have a chance to make changes if anything is not accurate. When I finish writing my dissertation, I will share a copy with you, if you would like. The purpose of this work is to learn more about your thoughts, experiences, and feelings about the [XXXX] program. When it is complete, I hope that this work will help educational leaders to learn more about participants’ experiences and create professional development experiences, which are beneficial for all participants.

Questions

1. In your current role, what are your major job responsibilities?
2. What professional development programs have you taken in the past?
   • Were these programs helpful to you? Why or why not?
3. What qualities do you believe are necessary for future leaders in ADEC? Why?
4. Why did you want to join the [XXXX] program?
5. If I was an aspiring VP and I wanted to take part in this program, how would you describe the program to me? Please describe the program in detail (location, times, participants, etc.).

6. What aspects of the program have been the most and/or least helpful to you?

7. Sometimes, Emirati participants in PD programs find that some aspects of the training are not consistent with the UAE culture. Please describe any aspects of the [XXXX] program that you found to be inconsistent with the UAE culture.

8. Please tell me about how your professional learning community with your colleagues in the course has developed during this program.

9. How have you developed as a leader throughout the [XXXX] program?

10. What are some of the specific challenges at your school?

11. How do you think the [XXXX] program has or will help you address these problems? What would you like to learn more about, in order to be an effective leader or teacher-leader at your school?

12. If you were speaking to the leadership at ADEC about developing future leadership development programs, what would you tell them?

13. Overall, please state your feelings about the [XXXX] program.

14. Please share any additional information that you think would be helpful.

15. In your opinion, what are the biggest problems facing education in Abu Dhabi right now?
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Bond was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and attended Steel Valley High School, before attending the University of Pittsburgh, to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre Arts. She studied drama in London, where she met her husband, Cameron. She also studied drama and teaching in Queensland, Australia. Sarah taught International Baccalaureate Theatre Arts at Mira Loma High School in Sacramento, California, where her son, Lachlan, was born. She also taught in Lewisville, Texas and was a Media Specialist, a Gifted Education Specialist, and a Program Evaluator for the Collier County Public Schools in Naples, FL. Sarah received her Master of Arts degree in English from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2008. Currently, Sarah is a Senior Professional Development Specialist for the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC). Sarah is profoundly grateful for the support and mentoring of her professors and colleagues during her professional journey and for the support she has received from ADEC for her research. Sarah’s research interests include teacher preparation and education, leadership development programs, public/private partnerships, and program evaluation. Sarah feels incredibly blessed to have a family who shares her love of travel and new adventures. She looks forward having more time to spend with her family, now that her degrees are complete, and to continuing to pursue an international career in education.