

# Enabling Teachers to Lead Change in One School in Palestine: A Case Study

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**Abstract** This article examines the interim outcomes of a year-long intervention that aims to develop teacher leadership as a means to professional development and school improvement within the educational and socio-cultural context of Palestine in one private school in the Ramallah area. Teachers Leading Change (TLC), the name of the program, draws on a non-positional approach to teacher leadership in which all teachers regardless of delegated role are supported to lead educational change and teaching innovation through situated learning and leadership activities. The investigation is part of an ongoing doctoral study that employs a participatory, action-based research design entailing periodic cycles of deliberation on program activity outcomes and ways for improvement. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and a reflective journal. The evidence thus far indicates that teachers have responded positively to the program's structured support, relevance to workplace realities, opportunities for classroom improvement, increased collaboration and enhanced teacher agency. Challenges have included time limitations and difficulty conceptualising process-led professional development. The provisional conclusion to be drawn from this study is that a non-positional approach to teacher leadership has positive implications for educational reform at the professional, organizational and system levels. For education in Palestine its significance emanates from the capacity to help shift reform from internationally sponsored initiatives infused with foreign agendas to locally-driven, inquiry-based development efforts that foster nationally effective policies.

**Keywords:** *teacher development, teacher leadership, professional learning, educational reform, action research, palestine, Middle East/Arab World*

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## 1. Introduction

This article examines the interim outcomes of an intervention that aims to develop teacher leadership as a vehicle for professional development and school improvement in one private school in the Ramallah area, Palestine. Teachers Leading the Way (TLW) is the name of the year-long program facilitated and guided by myself, school director. TLC invites teachers to act as agents of change in the drive towards education innovation for enhanced student performance. The intervention is part of a doctoral study aimed at investigating the means and processes of developing a teacher leadership development program within the educational and socio-cultural context of Palestine as an approach to context-driven education reform.

The article attends to several gaps in the education and leadership literature. First, it responds to recent calls for studies on leadership in societies that are underrepresented such as predominantly Muslim countries of which Palestine is one [1]. Second, by employing an action-based methodology it meets recent appeals for utilising action research in Arab countries [2]. Third, through investigating and reporting on topics in the Palestinian

context it begins to remedy the historic under representation of the Palestinian narrative [3]. As such, this inquiry has implications for teacher leadership in Palestine, the Middle East and Muslim world, and beyond into developing countries, emergent education systems and conflict areas. For an appreciation of the significance of teacher leadership development to Palestinian education it is important to understand the forces that shaped education in Palestine, which I now examine.

## 2. The Context: Palestine

Education in Palestine is a site of international and regional interests. From the arrival of the Ottoman Empire in 1517 until the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, education has been controlled and administered by foreign rule [4]. Under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, education deteriorated severely [5]. Thus, when the first Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE) was established in 1994, the Palestinians inherited an outdated and dysfunctional system that was inadequate for the needs of an emergent state and its aspirant citizenry [6]. Education reform in Palestine necessitated articulating a national education philosophy and agenda, and access to resources. In the

Palestinian context these components are highly subject to foreign influence.

Since its formation the MoE has had to rely on politically motivated foreign assistance for education reconstruction. International donors' advocacy of a global education agenda advanced foreign values and interests over local ones, thus weakening the establishment of a distinctly Palestinian education vision [7] and leading to a conflict of values at the local level [8]. In turn, this compromised autonomy in policymaking, quality of education and advancement of a national education identity [9]. Multiple providers and delivery sources impeded the development of a unified Palestinian strategy for relevant and sustainable teacher reform policy [10]. As of yet, the impact of reform efforts on enhancing teacher development by the MoE's National Institute for Educational Training Institute's remains uncertain [11].

In February 2014 the Ministry launched the third Education Development Strategic Plan 2014-2019 (EDSP). Subtitled, Palestine 2020: a Learning Nation, the new EDSP calls for a learning-centered strategy [12]. It is hoped that the Plan will be a catalyst for moving education reform beyond a patchwork of globally informed programs with a shift towards context-relevant and problem-based approaches. This entails teachers addressing classroom practices and how to improve student learning through local knowledge-building efforts [13]. Such a shift in reform policy is likely to free the MoE from continued reliance on foreign initiatives and enable establishment of a Palestinian evidence-base from which to articulate a national education philosophy and strategy.

Teacher leadership has the potential to play an important part in transforming Palestine into a 'learning nation.' This is predicated on two significant factors. First, 'teacher quality' is widely accepted as the single most important school variable influencing student achievement [14]. Second, increasingly effective school leadership is being viewed as key to large-scale improved education outcomes and reform [15]. Accordingly, teachers exercising leadership represents mobilisation of the largest and most pivotal segment of the school workforce in the drive towards school improvement and enhanced student performance [16]. By empowering teachers to become agents of change in reform efforts policymakers will have access to locally-based evidence. The resultant formulation of a national agenda advances prospects of establishing an independent, self-sourced Palestinian education system. However, enabling teachers to effectively lead education reconstruction requires a reformulation of the understanding of teacher leadership, to which I now turn.

### 3. Conceptualising Teacher Leadership

The overwhelming majority of the literature conceptualises teacher leadership in terms of traditional, one-person forms that assume a hierarchical role. Although many authors claim new approaches to the concept [17] there is nothing inherently different about leadership exercised by teachers from that by traditional top-down senior leaders [18]. Functionally, teacher leadership can be seen to fall into formal and informal categories. Formal ones include mid-level management in conjunction with a teaching schedule. Less agreed upon,

however, are concepts of informal leadership to which some attribute in-class practices and outside classroom involvement [19].

Alternatively, Frost and Durrant [20] distinguish between functions that are designated as leadership and deliberate activity that is individually planned and exercised by teachers. They suggest the terms positional and non-positional as more useful for differentiating between appointed teacher leaders and self-guided teachers intentionally acting to influence their colleagues and school environment [21]. The non-positional approach to teacher leadership rests on a deliberate and self-directed activity to create change at the professional, organisational, cultural and policy levels [22]. Far from a haphazard activity, it is rooted in principles and based on strategies that involve procedures and tools, and requiring the support of school members and external expertise [23]. By inviting all teachers in the exercise of leadership to mobilise individual creative forces, this form of teacher leadership (henceforth TL) distinguishes itself from other forms. The collective activation of teachers' potential within schools is extended beyond top-down implementation of impersonal and non-contextual teacher development programs, and leads to teacher empowerment, self-efficacy and professional transformation [24].

The proposal for the non-positional method is an extension of the debate about distributed leadership and leadership capacity building. Drawing on distributed leadership theory to help provide greater conceptual clarity, the unit of analysis is not leaders and what they do but the leadership activity itself and how it is played out [25]. Accordingly, TL can be viewed as an interdependent activity of agency, structure and situation. The focus on contextuality and relationality assist in foregrounding local realities of teacher practices, work environment and policy climate, which in turn facilitates locally-based reform. A process-oriented development strategy exercised through leadership activity effectively serves to support local workplace realities [26]. The teacher-led development work (TLDW) model is an example of successful enactment of the non-positional approach to TL, my next discussion.

### 4. Teacher-Led Development Work

TLDW is a process-based teacher leadership development strategy designed to improve teaching practice and enhance professional knowledge [27]. In this model influence occurs through consultation, reflection, evidence collection, knowledge dissemination, and ultimately adoption by others of innovative practices [28]. Knowledge building embeds learning in a social process of dialogue, collaboration and networking that reinforces participatory practices [29] and enhances leadership capacity [30].

The TLDW framework is founded on the three components of values, visioning and action. Teachers are guided to identify, articulate and act on these components through specially designed activities and exercises that lead to knowledge building and program certification. Fundamental to TLDW is the focus on process-oriented development, where teachers are encouraged to consider how they are improving practice in addition to what they are improving. This shift enhances professional and

intellectual capacity, and is embedded in everyday practice and sustained after program completion. The model's successful enactment in the UK-based HertsCam Network and International Teacher Leadership initiative in over 15 countries has led to the refinement of a set of context-friendly tools and procedures, confirming its international appeal and adaptability to varied educational systems and socio-cultural contexts [31]. I draw on this framework as the foundation for my intervention in Palestine to enable TL, and adapt its methods and tools to accord to my school setting [32].

Teachers Leading the Way (TLW) is a year-long, school-based intervention facilitated and guided by a tutor from the school staff, in this case myself. TLW is made up of a group of members ideally ranging between eight and 12 in number, where participation is voluntary and composed of teachers but may include school staff. The program consists of the following elements: seven school-based group sessions where participants are guided in their development work, four one-to-one supervisions with the program tutor to provide individual support and feedback, one network event that enables members to present their projects to other teachers in order to facilitate knowledge-building, an annual conference that provides an opportunity for sharing project outcomes on a larger scale, and submission of an end-of-program portfolio of evidence that leads to certification. Senior leaders in the school and myself comprise the Program Team and are involved in monitoring, evaluating and improving TLW provision periodically. This review process is the basis for the investigation approach I employ, explained in the next section.

## 5. Methodology

The approach of this investigation aims to reinforce TLW's goal to develop TL for improving educational practices and student outcomes at my school. Accordingly, it is located in the tradition of critical social science [33]. I draw broadly on action-based research by utilising a three-cycle review design, each consisting of the five steps of problem identification, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation [34]. Individual cycles involve deliberation on gathered evidence in order to improve the program, which is fed into the subsequent intervention cycle until a satisfactory state of illumination and change is reached.

This article represents the outcomes of the first cycle review conducted a third of the way into the TLW program. The Program Team examined data that was gathered both deliberately and opportunistically. These consist of semi-structured interviews, participant observations, documents and the research journal that were used to record opportunistic, random evidence captured during program activity that would otherwise have gone undocumented. This method was sought in order to preserve the iterative nature of the study and facilitate progressive focusing. The analysis of data led to the identification of a number of themes, which I discuss below.

## 6. Emergent Themes

At this early stage in the program the significance of emergent themes lies in its implications for TL development

in the socio-cultural and educational setting of Palestine and similar contexts. Themes are divided into two broad categories: opportunities and challenges. Opportunities include project relevance, structured support, enhanced agency, changes in teaching practices and collaboration. Challenges consist of time and conceptualising development as process-led. I draw on evidence gathered during program activities with group members and in my capacity as program leader and tutor to illustrate sources of the emergent themes.

The school comprises three grade levels: kindergarten, primary and secondary. Program participants were selected from a list of volunteers by the Program Team from all three stages and included management in an effort to broaden impact. Twelve members make up the program group: nine teachers, six from the primary level and three from the secondary; and three from management: two from school middle management and the kindergarten principal. The accounts below are theirs but personal names are fictitious to protect confidentiality.

### 6.1. Opportunities

The TLW program provided opportunities for teacher leadership to emerge. These can be categorised under the heading project relevance, structured support, enhanced agency, changes in teaching practices and collaboration. I elaborate on each below.

#### 6.1.1. Project Relevance

In order to mobilise teachers to lead change and innovation, TLW facilitates solving issues that emanate from school realities and matter most to teachers. Relevance thus is crucial for attracting teacher interest and ensuring program completion. Teachers choose a workplace problem around which to base their development work. Solving classroom and school-related problems improves opportunities for all students to learn.

Teachers are thus enabled to develop their practice, build knowledge and improve student outcomes in line with their personal values, and professional interests and concerns. By restricting participation to a voluntary basis TLW enhances teacher decision-making capacity and leads to empowerment. Relevance contrasts with top-down reform initiatives that are disconnected from workplace realities, and delivered by outside experts and trainers similarly unaware of teacher problems and student needs.

The following participant conveys the significance of both the values-based and problem-oriented dimension of the program:

*This is the first time that I have a problem that concerns me and I'm working on finding a solution for it... Now I feel that any problem I face I can inquire into and find solutions to. Honestly, I didn't have this before. I would search for a ready-made solution, or ask someone older... Now I feel the need to search for a solution that is better than what's available, which suits my needs (Munir).*

Another member identifies problem solving as a more authentic method of development for goal achievement. He explains:

*I feel that this is authentic learning... The most important thing is that it gives us the ability to develop*

*teaching practices and reach goals that we never dreamed of reaching... Now this program opened the door to express our thoughts and advance in our educational endeavours (Nabil).*

Both teachers indicate an appreciation for the opportunity to develop their teaching practice based on individual concerns. Problem-based development is recognised as a means to resolve factors that limit their capacity to improve opportunities for students learning. Participant reflections suggest that the school's previous approaches to continuous professional development (CPD) may have neglected the provision of effective channels for meaningful problem solving.

A senior leader recognises in problem-based development a transformational way of thinking. She states:

*Now one feels that every problem has a solution in a unique way. So we entered this [new] mode [of thinking]... Problems are not solved in just one way. We don't stop at one method. Someone else may have different solutions... depending on the context and environment (Huda).*

Her realisation of the different methods to solution finding has implications for her leadership style. She continues:

*In the future you will have a new mode of thinking... where steps enable you to solve problems. You develop a strategy in the future that you can teach to others... such that people don't ignore problems, rather they analyse every problem and find solutions... (Huda).*

Participant recognition of the value and impact of diverse learning styles is not exclusive to management. Teachers exhibited a similar awareness.

While this is a common perception to several program members, it is not taken lightly. One teacher poignantly describes the challenges involved in shifting to this way of learning. He posits:

*I don't see a magic wand that's going to solve my problems. It's a method that goes against the way we do things around here, which I've been used to learning in for many years. All of a sudden I'm going to learn in a new way. I'm going in the opposite direction. Like someone who's always been driving on the right side now has to drive on the left (Munir).*

Problem-based, value-laden development is already impacting the way teachers view 'the way we do things around here' in one school in Palestine. Reconceptualising school cultural practices is a theme that is taking root among participants. Program elements are facilitating this shift.

### 6.1.2. Structured Support

The effective exercise of teacher leadership requires reflection, deliberation and planning. Developing TL entails providing structured support for teachers who may not be familiar with these practices. TLW offers a clear and methodical strategy to guide teacher development work. This is done using specially designed activities and tools that are led by a school-based tutor experienced in the TLDW method. Among the tools are guides for action planning, evidence collection, and portfolio construction, questions to prompt reflection and group discussion, vignettes of teacher leadership activity, and others. The network event and conference provide opportunities for

teachers to exercise leadership through presentation of their projects, knowledge building and networking. Tools are introduced and activities held in line with a provisional year-long plan.

Early on members noted favourably the program's structured support and clear strategy. One member identifies this as a crucial feature in the face of arbitrary approaches:

*When we start building a project on strong bases it is stronger than working haphazardly (Sahar).*

Elsewhere she explains:

*When a person climbs the stairs they need to go up one step at a time. When you climb it quickly you feel lost, not on strong grounds... But when it's based on a foundation you feel like you're walking on solid ground, not on water (Sahar)*

Feeling grounded and guided is a theme that runs throughout the individual supervisions:

*When the [program] steps were clarified I felt more capable of doing the work. I felt like I could... start solving my problem. Now it's my turn to work (Huda).*

For another participant clarity and practicality are program essentials:

*It's very strategic; it's very to the point. It's more hands on (Ramia).*

Reference to program strategy and clarity suggest the random nature of teachers' previous attempts at development. One member was quick to point to implications for impact on thinking modalities:

*I have now developed a deep understanding that solving problems requires mechanisms and isn't done haphazardly. You need to create a strategy and proceed accordingly... we have entered this mode [of thinking], which involves strategies and is no longer haphazard... (Huda).*

She is keen to shift away from haphazard attempts at improvement to planning:

*Before [the program] a person was working in an unclear, haphazard way. Some things work, others don't. You think of problems but can't find solutions to them because you don't have a method or strategy. Once the strategy became available now you present your problem in a methodical way. Now you can deal with a problem by following steps (Huda).*

Several members' views were conveyed succinctly by one teacher in the following:

*Now I know exactly what to look for.... I have put my foot in the right path... (Ramia).*

Participant perception of the contrast between TLW's effectiveness and the school's previous CPD program is significant despite the early stage of the intervention, as the next statement indicates:

*...we took a lot of workshops [at school]. Many of them called for involving students in the learning process. I implemented some of the ways but students didn't like them. I considered myself not having succeeded... [after involving students in the learning process.] Now I feel that students are happy (Noura).*

Unestablished impact of the school's existing CPD was confirmed during individual supervisions I held with program members. Particularly when guiding participants on how to focus their action plans, I noted that not one teacher linked their project to the school's current CPD program, despite its relevance to their development work.

Overall, there is evidence of the impact structured support is having on members' self-efficacy and agency, another emerging key theme to which I now turn.

### 6.1.3. Enhanced Agency

Teacher leadership as an exercise of deliberate and planned influence is founded on enhanced human agency. The program is designed to provide supportive activities and opportunities for increasing teacher self-efficacy. Several group members, again early in the intervention, are exhibiting the beginnings of professional self-efficacy. Participant observation of group sessions and entries in the research journal provide clear evidence of enhanced agency, marking the precursor of teachers exercising leadership.

In consulting a teacher of another subject on her development project, one member reveals:

*It's not something that I would have done before (Ghadeer).*

Elsewhere she reflects on her previous passiveness:

*In the past if a person said something that didn't help me I would stop there. Whereas now I will stop and think that this is not working for this person maybe it'll work for me. I analyse it (Ghadeer).*

This teacher is clearly starting to feel more competent in her abilities to be critical and explore better practices.

For others self-efficacy is key to problem-solving:

*I now feel that I can face any problem (Huda).*

This simple yet powerful statement demonstrates the propensity for professional transformation. Another teacher confirms this:

*In all honesty, major a transformation has taken place in my thinking. The idea now has to emanate from me and not be ready made from elsewhere. This for me is the biggest thing. I am the source of ideas. After I've collected the information properly then I will come up with some correct solution (Munir).*

Elsewhere he contrasts this to the passive learning style of traditional local teaching and learning methods:

*I'm not used to doing something and evaluating it for myself. Usually, we're used to being asked to do something by someone and to have someone else evaluate it. For me to change in the way I find information on my own makes me re-evaluate my confidence... this will give me inner strength (Munir).*

In the following passage one participant analyses the impact of transmission-based pedagogy on Palestinians and neighbouring societies:

*The mind has developed in a way that isn't flexible. Teaching wasn't done in a way that enabled creative thinking or the ability to solve one's problems. It was all a lot of information packing (Huda).*

Responsibility is extended beyond schools and towards local society as illustrated in the following participant reflection:

*Our society doesn't allow us to think on our own or express our individual thoughts. All of a sudden [through involvement in the program] I'm going to solve my problems. I'm the owner of the idea and the solution... it contradicts the local environment. It's from this reality that one has low confidence. I have confidence in a lot of things but I'm doing this for the first time and God willing it will develop and succeed (Munir).*

The role of socio-cultural norms and practices on learning style is mentioned by several members. In the following statement, a participant provides a profound critique of what he perceives to be intellectual disempowerment:

*It's like someone who was shackled and this program removed these restraints and opened the door for me to work freely. I will obtain outcomes that I want without being afraid ... this program opened the way for my ideas to be investigated in practice (Nabil).*

Cultural critique has implications for the kind of professional culture needed if teachers are to act agentially. Facing fears and challenges, and going against local society requires the presence of a supportive and non-judgemental working environment. At the individual level enhanced agency and emerging self-efficacy appear to be having affect in the classroom, which is the next key theme.

### 6.1.4. Changes in Teaching Practices

The fundamental aim of TL is to enable teachers to improve teaching practices and promote innovation in the drive towards enhanced student performance. Ultimately, this needs to translate into change in the classroom and beyond. In development work one way this is done is by experimenting with new practices or improving on old ones. A few participants who are advanced in their projects indicated trying out new teaching practices.

One group member says:

*I have changed. My steps have changed in class... I think the program... has helped out (Ramia).*

Another teacher, who earlier indicated having tried new methods that led to student enjoyment of math, is changing how she perceives the nature of her subject. Reflecting on her students as a source of innovation for her practice she says:

*I didn't used to think to take students' opinions or ideas because my subject doesn't give me the option of really doing so (Noura).*

Since commencing the project she began involving students in her teaching. She continues:

*I started thinking that we need to involve students in the learning process. How do I get them to become part of the lesson, not just me explaining things to them... I never thought that they could suggest a new method... Before the program I didn't know how to do this (Noura).*

Program provision of structured support for individual development in place of generic formulae increases prospects of professional development. Trying out new practices for this teacher has led to participatory approaches to teaching and improved teacher-student relations. She explains:

*Today I discussed with the 8th grade students how to use technology and multimedia in learning. Some of them were concerned... [others] apprehensive.... I learned that when you get closer to students you learn how they think and how you can help them in a way that reduces their fears. Some students volunteered to help me with my work, and gave me new ideas. It's nice because it brings you closer to the students... You add new methods to your teaching and ways to improve on it... now when I give them a word problem I ask them to imagine (Noura).*

Additional examples of teachers changing practice underscore a professional culture of risk-taking and trust, essential features for enabling TL.

In the following excerpt one teacher illustrates the level of impact on her classroom practice:

*I've progressed in the way I'm approaching my students. I think I'm now walking on the ground more than I was before. [Before] I thought I was walking on water. I didn't know what levels [students] were at in reading and communication skills. Now I have a certain view of where they are and where I can begin informing them (Ramia).*

Asked to elaborate on what she meant, she continues:

*Walking on water you don't know what's underneath. You're always guessing. Walking on the ground you have solid facts and proof, you know where to begin. Before I felt like I didn't know where to begin. I didn't know who to ask and who to consult. Now I do (Ramia).*

This observation and entire section illustrate the extent to which teacher development work enhances teacher agency and raises confidence to explore new and improved ways of teaching and learning. Innovative practices are also outcomes of collaboration among teachers and staff, the next theme.

### 6.1.5. Collaboration

The TLDW model encourages peer and extended collaboration among school teachers and staff. As a form of situated learning, it reinforces the need to share ideas and practices with teachers as co-creators of innovative practice and co-builders of professional knowledge. Group sessions and social media foster discussions that establish mutual support and critical friendships.

All 12 TLC participants praised the mutual peer support generated by the program, as exemplified in the following statement:

*What's nice is that I'm not working alone. I discovered that Ramia, Ghadeer and Munir are working on similar topics. So it's great to get help and different ideas, and try different approaches. Maybe the techniques that don't work for me will work for Munir or Ramia (Amal).*

A collective ethos is similarly expressed by the senior leader among group members:

*Now we feel like a team. When we run into each other we ask about each other's progress. We learn from each other... We support each other regardless of [project] focus. If you remain isolated you don't learn. (Huda).*

Breaking down teacher isolation through opportunities for discussion and engagement is crucial for program effectiveness. Through group dialogue and activities members come to discover that the process of development binds their work together, replacing divisions of subject and grade level. A participant explains:

*We're separated... I feel that primary teachers are in one world and secondary in another. So when we met during the session and talked about our work it was the first time we sit and listen to each other. Otherwise we meet during periodic staff meetings and listen to management speaking.... I liked that I got to listen to Noura and others (Sahar).*

Commenting on a group session that was devoted to members sharing their development work, another teacher concurs:

*The last session was really nice because we had the chance to hear what other teachers are working on and discovered that many of us are really connected (Ghadeer).*

Another member confirms this newfound support network:

*It was like a chain. I felt like we are all linked (Ramia).*

The capacity for collaboration to enhance social relations is illustrated in the following teacher reflection:

*It brings us closer on a personal level - Ramia, Manar and me. I felt something on a personal level drawing me closer (Sahar).*

Collaboration among group members is extending into a sense of collective self-efficacy, as poignantly conveyed by another teacher:

*Now we can finish each other's sentences. I start an idea and Munir may say, 'Have you thought of doing it this way, maybe it would be better if you added so and so' (Amal).*

The capacity to act as critical friends appears to reinforce self-confidence and self-efficacy in some members, which the following illustrates:

*My self-confidence has increased because I saw that I can help them [colleagues] to solve their problems... Since I'm the one that faces my problem the most, I'm the one best at solving it. At the same time my colleagues may be privy to aspects that I'm not. So I gather the different ways and come up with something new (Munir).*

Critical friendships were extended onto social media as participants responded positively to a TLW Facebook group page. A convenient and accessible forum facilitated sharing ideas and feedback between peers.

During the first of three programme stages, collaboration seems to be generating mutual support, collective self-efficacy, critical friendships and enhanced social capital. Evidence generated from members' comments and reinforced by the research journal indicates that with the exception of improved social relations, these features are new to the school's professional culture.

## 6.2. Challenges

An intervention of the nature of TLW in the Palestinian context is not without its share of challenges. These are represented by two themes: time and conceptualising development as process-led. I discuss both below.

### 6.2.1. Time

Nearly all participants identified finding time for conducting their development work to be the most difficult. This is despite senior leadership's support and facilitation of the program. The reasons and sources for this problem varied.

The following is a recurring account indicating time as the main source of pressure for participants:

*It's time. The project needs time. And what with work, it gets tight. But it's not [the project] pressuring me (Amal).*

What is noteworthy is that the program itself is not being perceived as the source of pressure, rather the shortage of time, as is echoed in the following excerpt:

*As a project it's not difficult. However, in our circumstance the limitation of time is creating the*

*biggest challenge, as we're employees. As a project I feel that it's manageable if a person has time (Huda).*

That members identify time to be the main challenge and nothing intrinsic to TLW is encouraging given the unfamiliar nature of some program features.

Others pointed to a commonly felt issue related to the timing of activities, namely the difficulty of conducting their project during the academic school year, as one participant explains:

*[One] barrier is the nature and duration of the time that we have in which to conduct the program, which won't be sufficient or may be hindered by events that may unexpectedly occur to derail the project course (Nabil).*

There is a growing concern that the coinciding of the program with the school year, as opposed to holidays, is creating anxiety for some teachers. One member looks forward to winter recess for an opportunity to work on her project:

*Something that is helping a bit is that I'm going to start implementing my project during the second semester, which will have given me time to sit and reflect [during winter recess], when I'm not under the pressures of school work days. Sometimes a person needs to reflect calmly... During school days we're usually pressed for time. My goal is that in the coming few weeks, before the start of second term that my action plan will be ready. This is my challenge (Rema).*

Thus, both the lack of time and timing represent program limitations. This reinforces the significance of voluntary participation wherein only those committed to program aims are involved. A member's impassioned remark succinctly summarises the importance of commitment:

*You have to make time for something new that has entered your life... It's an investment in thinking and development of the mind... to change your mentality isn't done quickly... You can't just keep ignoring problems because there's no time, [like people who complain] 'What can we do. There are too many problems to solve. We can't manage it all.' This is the problem. So, one needs to push oneself a little... in spite of life's pressures... Investing in one's mind will make one's life easier (Huda).*

One of the more enthusiastic teachers reflects on the values of making time to improve practice:

*I didn't used to think to take students' opinions because we were pressured by time... I never asked them how would you like me to teach you... we explain the lesson, we give homework [and] we give a test. But today they gave me an idea that's amazing. They told me, 'Miss, we want to act out the word problem.' The suggested something amazing (Noura).*

While this teacher worked within the same time allotment as prior to the program, through leading her own development she learned to optimise usage of class time. Regardless of how it is managed, time remains the most common challenge facing teachers exercising leadership. Nevertheless, it is more concrete than the abstract challenge of conceptualising process-based development work, which I now explore.

### 6.2.2. Conceptualising Process-Led Development

One of the challenges of presenting TLW to the school teaching staff during the introductory session was

portraying professional development as both process oriented and results based. This required that teachers consider the impact of development and leadership dimensions in addition to program results. In other words, their professional development needed to be understood as equally important and leading to improved student learning. A common concern by teachers was the extent to which program certification is tied to project results. Accordingly, to ensure program effectiveness it is fundamental to guide teacher thinking from one focused on measured results to a broader emphasis on outcomes, processes, and capacity building.

Shifting mind-sets is a difficult task. The majority of participants struggled with this aspect of the program. One teacher describes below the source of his self-doubt:

*The first [challenge] is the barrier within a person which always whispers to him, 'Will the project work or not?' This inner impulse creates fears and trepidations... (Nabil).*

His thoughts are not uncommon to the other participants. The fixation on project results seems to be deeply entrenched as an evaluation criterion. Trepidation appears to arise out of the uncertainties of working with a self-guided and individually designed development project not subject to traditional right or wrong assessment measures. The following passage explores possible sources of this anxiety:

*There continues to be a lack of confidence on the personal level because this is the first project I work on where I conduct the inquiry and search for the information, and evaluate my work. [It's as though] I make my own exam and correct it myself. For me this is the challenge (Munir).*

The notion of a single correct response appeared during activities when questions intended as prompts for reflection were viewed as queries requiring answers. In an attempt promote process-oriented and veer away from expectations of formal assessment I deliberately postponed reviewing their projects for a later stage in the program.

The following statement exemplifies a case wherein a participating teacher has actually conducted significant development work but believes that she has yet to make any progress because she does not have results to show for it. Asked about her work, she complains:

*Well, I think it's not actually progressing. I feel like I'm focusing more now on the reading and how to get them [students] to read without being graded or assessed. I've tried two different approaches with them... [I'm] trying to see what attracts them the most. But it did narrow down which students need the most attention (Ramia).*

After I explained to her the extent of her progress she responds:

*Yes, if I looked at it that way, yes. I'm sort of... I don't know (Ramia).*

Like other members of the group, what Ramia may be finding more difficult than anything is the uncertainty and fluidity of conducting self-guided development, a recurrent theme in group sessions and individual supervisions. This is one of several cases wherein participants unfamiliar with the concept of processes-led learning struggle with professional development.

## 7. Discussion and Implications

The first cycle review of outcomes are significant on several levels. First, they reveal the capacity for developing the non-positional approach to teacher leadership in Palestine and similar socio-cultural and education settings. In terms of the TLW program, they provide feedback for improvement and further development. Similarly, they demonstrate my own professional development in facilitating teacher leadership at my school. Themes that emerged from analysis of the evidence underscore impact on all three levels to varying degrees.

Enabling teachers to act as agents of change in a setting such as Palestine requires sensitivity to context [35] in this case to the historic suppression and underrepresentation of Palestinians in all facets of life, with only recent control of certain sectors like education [36]. Compounded by a Ministry of Education that has had to rely heavily on international funding and programs bearing foreign reform agendas [37] the education system and teaching force may not be accustomed to self-empowering and participatory practices. Social-historical setting thus represents a challenge to the very essence of teacher leadership development [38]. Accordingly, TLW needs to allocate sufficient activities and time to enable teacher enactment of program elements and control of development trajectory, and for tutors to fully develop facilitative capacity [39].

At the beginning of the intervention my main concern as program leader and facilitator was for teachers to become convinced of their capacity to improve practice and influence others in the process. Such a shift in self-perception requires that participants engage in highly meaningful activity both for themselves and the school community. Teachers and school staff who volunteered to participate in the program cited the relevance of their development project to their work realities as a fundamental feature. Published teacher accounts [40] and education literature further support this claim [41]. The evidence is clear: teacher leadership that focuses on values-articulation sparks teacher interest. Prospects of solving real, school related problems plays a major role in encouraging teachers to conduct development work to improve teaching and learning.

The burdens of a demanding job and limitation of time are common features in the life world of teachers [42]. The willingness of some group members to take on additional responsibilities and spend precious time suggests the extent to which program relevance and usefulness play a role in teachers' positive response. This is supported by recent TALIS Report [43] outcomes, which posit that support of teacher development through individual feedback on work instead of whole-school or system-wide reform offer scope for considerable improvement of teaching and learning, and are preferred by teachers. Program members who recognise it as a means to improve the future of their practice and enhance their intellectual capacities illustrate its profound appeal in generally disempowered and resource-limited settings. The evidence suggests that values-based, reality-focused program features may be essential in encouraging teachers to lead improvement in contexts like Palestine, such as developing countries and emergent education systems

where foreign, non-context-driven reconstruction efforts, policy transfer and education programs are pervasive.

Relevance similarly served to sustain teacher interest in development work. Despite being overwhelmed with schoolwork, members noting the threat of workplace problems persisting unless resolved may be a factor in encouraging some to remain in the program during moments of self-doubt. The literature demonstrates that individual development work appears to rely to a great extent on values articulation [44]. The fact that the projects mattered deeply to participants both professionally and personally compelled some to seek immediate classroom outcomes early on.

The evidence indicates that the self-directed and process-based nature of TLW represents a challenge for the majority of participants. The reason may be members' exclusive exposure to results-based learning as opposed to process-oriented development. While it may be the case for teachers regardless of context, in Palestine it is compounded by traditional transmission modes of pedagogy that leave many practitioners insecure in the face of self-improvement and education innovation. This may be explained by the nature of teaching in the Arab Middle East, which is predominantly conducted using rote and transmission style instruction [45]. In this regard, process-led development work represents a challenge for TLW participants due to their limited exposure to opportunities for self-directed learning. Accordingly, participant identification of the program's structured support as a crucial feature for problem solving and professional development suggests members' perceived limited capacities to lead education change. Group members' praise of program strategy, procedures, and tools underscores TLW's supportive framework. In an education and socio-cultural setting where individuals are rarely granted opportunities or means to determine development pathways, mechanisms of structured support appear to be crucial in enabling teacher leadership as a means to improved pedagogic practices for enhanced student performance.

Leadership activity regardless of the form is fundamentally founded on the act of human agency [46]. Teachers influencing their colleagues, school organisation, educational system and the community require a great deal of deliberation and action taking [47]. However, the common belief that influence requires authority inhibits many teachers from venturing to lead change [48]. For this reason the emergence of self-efficacy among TLW members in the early stages of the program is promising for several reasons. First, it reveals participants' enhanced agency, which some argue is the precursor for leadership activity [49]. Similarly, in seeing the positive effects on oneself so early on in the program it may reinforce commitment to the program and encourage project completion. Participants that voiced a previously limited self-efficacy illustrate the beginnings of TL. Conveying a sense of being unshackled from silencing societal norms and restrictive educational methods suggests the potential for TLW to unleash individual and collective teacher potential for innovation. Professional learning communities frequently cite teacher agency as a key component in facilitating improved teaching [50]. Facing inhibitions and challenges, and going against society restrictions requires a non-judgemental, trust-filled professional culture



supportive of risk-taking activity [51]. At this early stage of the program enhanced agency may be a key factor leading teachers to exercise influence at the classroom level.

Teachers experimenting with new classroom practices and improving on old ones may be the first tangible outcome of the program. Members attempting to improve teaching methods indicate a newfound self-efficacy [52]. The fact that several teachers began doing so before completing their action plans suggests enthusiasm and willingness to improve student learning. Involving students in change processes indicates teachers' diversifying teaching approaches and expanding their resource base. There is support in the literature for teacher leadership activity having a positive influence on teacher effectiveness and student engagement [53]. Some participants discovered new teaching methods that foster participatory and collaborative ethos among students, and between students and teachers. Student involvement generates a contextually valid and robust evidence base [54] from which to draw on for organisational change. This has implications for local policymakers by redirecting the attention of policymakers towards those who are immediately affected by reform, the practitioners and students [55].

Classroom evidence prompted some of the most lively and engaging discussions among members. TLW activities such as the school-based group sessions offered opportunities for dialogue that fostered learning and knowledge building. The literature supports the role of dialogue in professional knowledge building [56]. Challenging questions by way of critical friendships prompt self-reflection and reappraisal of teaching practices [57]. Most teachers praised occasions when they were given opportunities to clarify their narratives and hear colleagues' accounts. Collaboration facilitates linking of interests and concerns among school members and establishes common goals as indicated by the evidence [58]. This reinforces the interconnectedness of schools as communities [59] not just organisations. Projects that relate to one another break down divisions of subject and grade level between teachers, and teachers and management, wherein genuine collaboration fosters collective self-efficacy [60].

Occasions for discussion break down teacher isolation and facilitate learning about each other's work [61] that teachers otherwise do not have time for during their busy work schedules. The evidence illustrates collaboration to help establish mutual support among TLW participants and enhance social ties, reducing isolation in the face of a 'new way of thinking.' Similarly, a community of learners provides affordable and relatable sources of knowledge that are conveniently accessible and in members' primary spoken language. This is important in settings of scarce financial resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and a limited tradition of participatory practices.

## 8. Conclusion

Teachers Leading the Way is a program designed to enable teachers in one school in Palestine to lead education innovation as a means to school improvement for enhanced student outcomes. In the first of three phases, evidence illustrates the capacity for teachers to develop dimensions of teacher leadership, most notably enhanced

agency, empowerment, individual and collective self-efficacy, and collaboration. Program elements such as dialogue, reflection, problem solving and values-articulation are key in enabling participants to begin undoing transmission modes of learning, and confronting restrictive socio-cultural norms and practices. In settings with an underdeveloped tradition of democratic practices, learner-centred pedagogy, continuous self-improvement, or locally driven development initiatives, TLW group members' positive response is very promising. Indeed, the educators of this TLW group in Palestine are demonstrating the capacity to lead education innovation, and develop improved teaching and learning given the right conditions are provided. Interim outcomes assist in developing the remainder of the intervention. As program leader and tutor, I will draw on effective TLW activities and tools to reinforce TL among participants and develop new ones.

Program outcomes are equally significant for policy makers in Palestine and in developing countries and emergent education systems for several reasons. First, development of TL in Palestine underscores the potential for trans-cultural adaptation and cross-system application of the TLDW model. Teacher leadership, participatory practices, and professional development no longer remain exclusive to Western and industrialised nations but can be facilitated in less advantaged countries. Second, knowledge building leading to creation of a context-driven, problem-centred evidence base is likely to foster more effective and sustainable national reform efforts. Third, in addition to promoting more relatable education programs, enlisting the local teaching force is financially feasible by freeing under-resourced governments from reliance on foreign education agendas and conditional funding sources. The evidence so far is clearly in favour of developing teacher leadership in Palestine.

## List of Abbreviations

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
MoE	Palestinian Ministry of Education
TLDW	Teacher-led Development Work
TL	Teacher Leadership
TLW	Teachers Leading the Way

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