Process and product in educational innovation: Implementing standards in Egypt

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ABSTRACT

What does it mean to be a ‘qualified’ English teacher in Egypt? This article addresses the question by describing a project charged with developing educational standards for teachers, teacher trainers, educational leaders, and in-service training courses within the Egyptian public school EFL context. Tied to a larger school reform effort, the Pharos Project was charged with developing EFL standards as a means to improve the delivery of English language instruction. Standards were defined as what educators should know and be able to do as a result of instruction or training in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for effective EFL education. The authors present sample standards developed by the project and explore both planned and unplanned aspects of the development process. A major component of this effort has been close collaboration between project staff and Egyptian educators from throughout the educational system. Through discussions about teaching and standards, educators and project staff have co-constructed meaningful and contextualised descriptions of effective instruction. While the sets of competencies developed may provide others with a starting point for their own standards, the authors suggest that the more lasting legacy may rest with the process of engagement that underlay the development of the standards.

Introduction

This article describes a process for educational change, an educational reform agenda in Egypt designed to improve English language learning in public schools. We present our experiences as American consultants working closely with Egyptian colleagues on a project called ‘Pharos’ after the ancient lighthouse that illuminated the harbour in Alexandria. The Pharos Project was charged with developing sets of standards that would lead to improvements in EFL classroom instruction and teacher education systems. For the purposes of the project, we defined standards as what educators should know and be able to do as a result of instruction or training in the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for effective education. Such standards would
provide a framework for supporting training, offer a set of consistent criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of such training, and serve as a model for the reform of other content areas, such as mathematics or science. Three sets of position-based standards (for EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and educational leaders) and one set of program-based standards (for in-service training courses) were drafted. The process of developing and refining these standards provides a window into the interplay of institution and individual in defining language policy and underscores both the planned and unplanned nature of a change process. The following sections explore the process used to develop the standards and the planned and unplanned features of the process.

**Educational change via standards-based reform**

Initiatives world-wide have produced documents describing what learners should know and be able to do with language as a result of instruction. In English-medium countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, these initiatives have produced documents describing ‘band scales’, ‘benchmarks’, and ‘standards’, respectively (Brindley 1998; McKay 2000). The Council of Europe’s Common European Framework similarly describes what language learners have to learn in order to use another language for communication and what knowledge and skills they must develop to use the language effectively (Council of Europe 2001).

In the United States, the language initiative is part of broadly based reform efforts that have been on the national agenda for over a decade. Since 1989, the United States has been engaged in a major effort to improve the quality of education delivered to primary and secondary students. The key premise of this reform is that all students can and should achieve to a high standard of learning in the content areas. Standards-based educational reform has spurred the development of content standards across the curriculum, including standards for English as a Second Language (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages 1997). Content standards describe what students should know and be able to do in specific content areas across the range of grade levels. They also illustrate learning environments that will lead to increased student achievement. More recently, the focus has shifted to the skills and knowledge that teachers need in order to implement a standards-based curriculum. What do teachers need to know and be able to do as they guide students to achieve high content standards? In response to this shift in focus, performance standards have been developed setting out criteria for teacher competence that will support student learning (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards 1998; TESOL 2002). For teachers to be successful in standards-based schools, then, teacher preparation and development programs need to reflect these competencies.
Standards-based educational reform in Egypt

The need for EFL standards has also been articulated widely in non-English dominant countries (Fujimoto 2000; McKay et al 2001a; McKay et al 2001b). In Egypt, as in the United States, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has tied the initiative to develop standards to the need for education reform to improve the delivery of instruction. Dr Hesseen Kamel Eldine, Egypt’s Minister of Education, underscored the necessity for improving English language education during a 1999 videoconference broadcast to teachers in Egypt and the United States. Focusing on the role of teachers in improving instruction in Egyptian schools, he explained, ‘Educational reform is the greatest national project of Egypt … [and] teachers are the pillars of educational reform’ (Monem et al 2001: 26).

Developing English language skills has been identified as a national need since English is seen as the lingua franca of commerce and thus, key to economic development. Perceived as an essential course for Egyptian school children, English is the main foreign language taught in Egyptian schools throughout the country. Currently, students who complete the secondary level will have taken eight years of instruction in English as a subject area, and plans are underway to lower the starting age for beginning the study of English from the fourth year of primary school to the first year. While students spend a great deal of time studying English, there is widespread dissatisfaction with their ability to use English, especially for the purposes targeted by the MOE.

Students’ lack of English proficiency has been attributed to a shortage of qualified English teachers and supervisors, particularly in the primary schools where there are fewer teachers who are specialists in English. While a widespread belief equates ‘qualified’ with the level of a teacher’s proficiency in English, the essential question remains: What does it mean to be a ‘qualified’ English teacher in Egypt?

Building on the MOE’s interest in educational reform, the Integrated English Language Program-II (IELP-II), a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that has actively worked in English language teaching in Egypt for about 15 years, addressed this question by commissioning the Pharos Project. As mentioned, our project was charged with developing educational standards for teachers, teacher trainers, educational leaders, and in-service training courses. The standards project is designed to achieve two broad aims: to enhance the work undertaken so far by IELP-II in improving the delivery of English language instruction and to increase the probability of sustaining change in classroom practice.
The Pharos Project: The process and its products

In keeping with IELP-II’s overall objective to increase the number of qualified English teachers in both the public and private sectors, the goals of the Pharos Project are to develop standards that will:

- Lead to improvement in English classroom instruction and teacher education systems
- Provide a framework to support training
- Offer a set of consistent criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of such training, and
- Serve ultimately as a model for other content areas such as mathematics, science, Arabic, and foreign languages such as French and German.

The project team, consisting of two American TESOL professionals and two Egyptian professionals, reflected complementary roles and expertise. The American consultants had worked on various components of TESOL’s United States-based standards projects and the Egyptian consultants were very knowledgeable about the pre-service and in-service contexts of English teaching in the Egyptian setting. The project unfolded along both pre-planned and unplanned lines. Both will be discussed in detail in the next sections.

PLANNED PHASES

The first planned phase commenced in June 2001 and consisted of a review of existing standards documents developed by associations and agencies for both language and subject-area teaching. Our purpose was to get a sense of the scope, formats, and categories previously used in other large scale standards projects and to determine their applicability to the Egyptian EFL context. Making extensive use of web-based standards documentation and resources, we aimed to avoid reinventing the wheel and use existing materials as a catalyst for new ways to think about standards development.

From this review and the discussions that ensued, the team designed a framework that could be applied to all four sets of target standards. The framework entailed three conceptual levels: (1) The first level, ‘domain’, was defined as general, overreaching or crosscutting areas broad enough to account for the various audiences and settings involved in English language teaching in Egypt, but narrow enough to be useful in developing a complete system of standards; (2) the second level, ‘standards’, were the statements indicating what educators should know or be able do as a result of training. In the case of in-service-courses, these were defined as the standards that might be incorporated into planning and implementation; (3) the third level, ‘indicators’,
consisted of observable, assessable behaviours or activities that educators or programs may perform to show progress toward meeting a particular standard.

Seven domains were ultimately selected to form the conceptual framework of the standards, domains that seemed capable of accounting for the four targeted settings: teachers, teacher trainers, educational leaders, and in-service programs. The domains and their definitions are listed in Figure 1 below.

| DOMAIN 1 | Vision and advocacy are defined as the beliefs and directions for learning shared and supported by stakeholders who are committed to acting as agents for excellence in English education and training. |
| DOMAIN 2 | Language proficiency is defined as the level of English language competence that enables educators to perform their tasks and duties. |
| DOMAIN 3 | Professional knowledge base is defined as the core principles and methods of the professional disciplines that underlie effective instructional programs for the teaching of English or the training of English teachers. |
| DOMAIN 4 | Planning and management of learning are defined as the setting up and delivery of appropriate learning and teaching experiences to achieve instructional objectives in English teaching and training. |
| DOMAIN 5 | Assessment and evaluation are defined as the systematic process of planning, collection, analysis, and use of data to make decisions to improve English teaching and learning. |
| DOMAIN 6 | Learning community and environment are defined as settings where learning takes place. All members of the learning community – students, educators, parents – are respected regardless of differences and encouraged to actively participate throughout the learning environment. |
| DOMAIN 7 | Professionalism is defined as modelling ethical professional conduct, engaging in reflective practice, and pursuing life-long professional growth and career opportunities. |

**Figure 1: Seven domains of Pharos Project standards**

With the draft conceptual framework in place, we began Phase Two, the actual writing of the standards. Over the next six months, each consultant took responsibility for preparing a draft of one set of standards. When the four drafts were ready, we exchanged the sets of standards and commented extensively on one another’s drafts. By January 2002, the first draft of the four sets of standards was produced, representing merged input of both content and form and reflecting the voices of the American and Egyptian writers. The drafts also contained sample indicators that provided more specific descriptors for each standard. Examples are provided in Figure 2 of sample standards and indicators for Domain 4, Planning and Management of Learning, across the four settings (teacher, teacher trainer, educational leader, and in-service training program).
### English teacher standards

**Standard 1:** The English teacher plans instruction according to the Ministry’s educational goals, English curriculum, and assessment framework.

**Indicator A:** The English teacher develops lesson plans consistent with curriculum goals, and taking into consideration the nature of learning and learner individual differences.

### Teacher trainer standards

**Standard 1:** The teacher trainer demonstrates how to facilitate and monitor learning through instructional planning, implementation, and management.

**Indicator A:** The teacher trainer models effective instructional planning including the alignment of assessment and instruction.

### Educational leader standards

**Standard 1:** The educational leader manages the organisational unit and resources to ensure a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

**Indicator A:** The leader sets clear parameters for acceptable practices in the work unit.

### In-service training program standards

**Standard 1:** The program design adheres to the principles of the knowledge base and is appropriate for the needs of program participants.

**Indicator A:** The program utilises needs and performance analyses to determine the needs of in-service teachers.

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**Figure 2: Sample standards and indicators for Domain 4, Planning and Management of Learning**

In the third planned phase, we engaged in a series of field discussions and workshops to seek feedback on the draft standards, thereby ensuring a collaborative process between the consultants and Egyptian professionals in the field and focused input from those most knowledgeable of the target settings. The bi-directional approach (illustrated in Figure 3) included top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top elements to achieve two goals: (1) dissemination of the draft standards to the field through focus workshops, meetings, and conferences; and (2) review of the draft standards and indicators and development of additional standards and indicators from the field. The next section describes the content of the field discussions in more detail.

The field discussions were held with designated Egyptian partners representing the English language teaching community. The partners, selected by IELP-II, had participated in various training courses over the years and were considered leaders in the EFL field. They included English teachers,
supervisors, teacher trainers, training courses designers and monitors, educational leaders, representatives of the Ministry of Education, professors from university faculties of education, and staff members of IELP-II. Most were ‘specialists’ in English language teaching, that is, they had graduated from Faculties of Art or Education where they studied both the English language and took education courses. The field discussions sought to familiarise the invited partners with the background of standards-based educational reform, to introduce and discuss the terminology associated with standards-based instruction and assessment, to discuss challenges and strategies for implementing standards in Egypt, and to review and critique the domains, standards, and indicators contained in the draft standards document.

In a series of workshops, the partners also wrote additional indicators as a way both to involve them more actively in the development of the standards and to ensure that the standards and indicators truly reflected the needs and conditions of the Egyptian context. While the development of the first draft of the domains and standards was a top-to-bottom process, the development of indicators was primarily a bottom-to-top process. In the workshops, key criteria emerged by which to review and critique the draft indicators. These criteria included considerations of content in terms of the full coverage of knowledge, skills, and attitudes within each domain, and language in terms of clarity and comprehensibility. Other criteria also emerged:

- **importance** (Is the standard a critical and necessary component of English language teaching in Egypt?)
- **relevance** (Does it help to focus efforts to improve English teaching and learning?)
- **reality** (Is it attainable and consistent with what is necessary and expected by the Ministry of Education?)
- **consistency** with the Egyptian educational context (Is it linked to Egyptian educational goals?)
- **understandability** (Does it use the language of the educational field, yet is free enough of jargon to be accessible to a variety of audiences?)
- **focus** (Does it say exactly which specific actions and results are expected?)
The extensive feedback from the field discussions was incorporated into the draft document and a second draft was prepared in June 2002. The second draft contained finalised domains, revised standards, and expanded indicators. This draft was subsequently disseminated to selected partners for further refinement and for continued development of indicators, the level of the document most sensitive to local contexts and their stakeholders.

The final planned phase was a series of awareness-raising seminars aimed to disseminate standards-based reform efforts further throughout Egypt. In keeping with IELP-II’s objective to build in sustainability by developing the skills and expertise of Egyptian EFL professionals, the seminars were planned and carried out wholly by a core of Egyptian partners, most of whom had been involved in the Pharos Project since the earliest stages. The awareness-raising seminars were conducted in selected local governorates in four sessions by Egyptian trainers who had previously attended various ‘train the trainer’ sessions conducted by project consultants.

In sum, the planned phases of the project incorporated a bi-directional strategy of standards development following a cyclic process of draft, feedback, and revision. During each cycle, we consulted veteran partners and added new partners to extend the project’s reach, both numerically and geographically, and to build the long-term capacity of Egyptian professionals for meaningful reform.

Discussion thus far has concentrated on the planned phases of the Pharos Project – steps that were anticipated early by the project manager and instantiated in IELP-II’s annual workplans. Unplanned challenges, however, arose and led to alterations in several phases of the project. These will be discussed in the next section.

UNPLANNED CHALLENGES, CRITICAL NEEDS
As with most educational reforms, both small and large scale, many unplanned needs are revealed in the course of implementation. Unanticipated challenges became apparent as the Pharos Project matured. Four are detailed below.

1 Building background knowledge or creating a shared discourse
The array of terminology in the standards document proved to be overwhelming to the partners in the field discussions. We thought we had anticipated terminology problems by creating a short glossary in the introduction to the standards document; it included such terms as ‘standard’ and ‘indicator’. In the field discussions, however, we discovered that other terminology was also problematic. Terms such as ‘stakeholders’ and ‘advocacy’ prompted many questions. The term ‘stakeholders’, while used commonly
in ESP circles in Egypt, does not cover the breadth we had envisioned – such as teachers in a very centralised educational system or parents who have typically been relatively uninvolved in school affairs in Egypt. We purposely included the term to ‘push the envelope, to challenge reform efforts to cast a wider net. The term ‘advocacy’ proved to be even more problematic. It is a term, we are told, without a clear direct translation from Arabic to English. Moreover, its pronunciation is difficult for speakers of Arabic. Most importantly, the concept aroused much discussion and disagreement. The notion of teachers serving as advocates for their students or parents as advocates for their children was new to many, and disconcerting to some. Other terms such as ‘informal assessment’ and ‘rubric’ required extensive elaboration as well. In the end, we agreed that an expanded glossary was needed both for use in training activities and for inclusion in the dissemination of the standards document.

We also discovered during the field discussions that it was critical that all partner meetings and workshops contain a substantial experiential component. Participants needed time in small groups to grapple with the meanings and applications of the standards in the various domains. Perhaps the best learning tool we designed was to have the participants actually write their own indicators and then rationalise the need for the additional indicators. Overall, the lesson learned – standards are not a subject for lecture! The most productive sessions for enhancing the understanding of the participants and for receiving the most valuable input came from interactive, task-based workshop formats. We also found, not surprisingly, that the best feedback on the standards typically came from the stakeholders most familiar with the context of the particular set of standards – practising teachers for the English teacher standards and supervisors for the teacher trainer set, for example. Finally, it became clear to us that presenting and discussing all four sets of standards in field discussions was just too much at once and contributed to a sense of overload. At this point, we made the decision to concentrate on the English teacher and teacher trainer standards to create a tighter focus for the field discussions and to take advantage of their more immediate application to IELP-II's objectives.

2 Status quo versus forward thinking?

An on-going challenge was the tension between producing sets of standards reflecting the current state of English teaching in Egypt or pushing forward an agenda for changing the status quo. Clearly, the latter was the goal, yet we were confronted early in the field-testing with this dilemma. As noted in the section above, certain terms were hot buttons for discussion in meetings and workshops with practitioners. In one of our first workshops, in reviewing
the definition of Domain 1, Vision and Advocacy, participants suggested deleting ‘acting as agents for excellence’ and substituting ‘who are committed to excellence in English education and training’. The concern, we were told, was that it was unrealistic in the short term to set such lofty goals for educational agents such as teachers, supervisors, and headmasters who work within institutional structures impervious to innovation, particularly from the bottom. As vision and advocacy entail new responsibilities for all players in the educational context, we were cautioned to use verbs that did not overburden them. At the same time, participants acknowledged that without such goals, one achieves nothing. The challenge, all agreed, was figuring out how to implement change in the Egyptian context.

As this discussion of the notion of vision and advocacy suggests, change is perceived as difficult since teachers, supervisors, and headmasters must follow directives from the MOE even when those directives may not be appropriate for specific contexts. A suggested revision of the educational leader standards stems from a similar concern – namely that the standard should recognise the principal’s limited influence within such a centralised institutional structure. The original draft version of Standard 2 under Domain 1 read, ‘The educational leader understands, responds to and can influence the larger social and cultural context within Egypt for English language learning’. As a result of discussions with workshop participants, a revision circumscribing the ‘influence’ portion of the standard was crafted. The revised standard now states, ‘The educational leader understands and responds to the needs of English language programs and promotes the programs within the larger context of education in Egypt’.

This revision illustrates the challenge faced by practitioners interested in change yet aware of the limitations inherent in their educational context. Egyptian educational institutions reflect top-down management and control, and often, outmoded ideas are embedded in those structures. The teachers, supervisors, and leaders in schools, on the bottom of that structure, feel mired in a plethora of rules and regulations, unable to effect change. While standards may offer a doorway to change, experienced players continue to express caution in taking giant steps through the opening. The next section describes several aspects of the educational system that demand such caution.

3 Reconciling the standards with existing structures

Over the past few years, a textbook series published specifically for Egyptian schools has been gradually introduced across grade levels. *Hello* is based on a communicative approach to teaching language. Sample objectives for one of the units include having students talk and write about a topic, read for targeted
information, ask and answer questions, and listen to tapes for main points. Teachers are expected to use technology (a cassette player), have visuals that prompt student interest and provide real starting points for language use, and engage students across skills areas in language use. Yet teacher evaluation systems are still based on how closely teachers conform to traditional notions of appropriate student or teacher behavior. While the activities in Hello may suggest that students engage in dialogues to practise and extend the learning of a new language item, classrooms are expected to be quiet places with students in orderly rows. Teachers know their performance will be rated on the basis of how well they manage their teacher-centred classrooms. Supervisors who visit the English classroom are usually selected on the basis of seniority and/or English language proficiency scores (remember the popular definition of a ‘qualified’ teacher) rather than their understanding of how to support learning.

National assessment agendas are another institutional feature inhibiting change in the classroom. The National Centre for Educational Exams and Evaluation, which is a separate entity from the MOE, writes the specifications for the examinations such as the national English exam given at the end of the junior year of high school and again at the end of the senior year. These exams do not match MOE English content standards, the new textbooks, or innovative ideas for teaching and learning embodied in the draft standards. Teachers willing to make change do so in the face of a system that may not reward them for their efforts and may in fact be a disservice to their students on the rigidly traditional national assessments.

Our challenge was to address the tension between what reality is today in Egypt and what reality should look like tomorrow. To prevent potential users from dismissing the standards as unattainable because they do not match the current context, we realised that we needed to sell the standards as adaptable to real life contexts. We came to understand that the enduring project legacy may be a process for change, a process that can support users in adapting the standards to their own contexts to create change and develop their own programs. We reoriented our focus from the standards as ‘product’, that is as a document containing standards and indicators to be disseminated wholesale, to the standards as ‘process’, that is how standards could be used, for example, by individual teachers for their own professional development. Standards as process focus on helping potential users understand that standards are designed to spur innovation, not to highlight inadequacies or limitations.

For standards to be useful in creating change and developing programs, they need to be fitted to local contexts. While the standards themselves are written in language general enough to apply across contexts, indicators for
each standard describe observable classroom behaviours. Thus, one productive area for shaping standards to local needs is through locally developed indicators. For example, in a country of regional variation such as Egypt, what is acceptable in a classroom in the Nile delta region might not work in upper Egypt, a more rural area where students may come to school with different levels of home literacy in Arabic or degrees of religious conservatism. Or, due to the varying availability of resources, teachers’ application of a standard like technology might necessarily be very different. Teachers in some schools may only have cassette tape recorders at their disposal for listening practice; other teachers may have access to modern computer laboratories in which students can make use of CDs to take a virtual trip to an English-speaking country. Encouraging adaptation of the standards to these varying contexts provides a way for educational practice to move forward yet still respect local sensibilities. One means for demonstrating how to adapt the standards has come through the workshops described in an earlier section. Another way has been by applying the standards to a specific course. The next section describes how we used the standards to review and reshape an IELP-II training course.

4 Piloting the standards

As we continued to collect feedback from surveys and workshops to refine the sets of standards, the consultants and IELP-II staff began to examine how this initiative could be used in a real-world setting, in this case, in-service training. Could the teacher standards, for example, be used to review an existing IELP-II training course to see how closely the course would prepare participants to meet those standards? We met with experienced Egyptian trainers and formed an Application Team that was charged with reviewing a successful IELP-II course, Communicative Reflective Methodology (CRM), with the teacher standards at hand, and suggesting revisions to the existing course. Based primarily on a textbook by Rosie Tanner and Catherine Green entitled *Tasks for teacher education* (1998), the CRM course had been offered several times by IELP-II and there was a cadre of experienced and knowledgeable Egyptian trainers available to work with us.

As the team met, it became apparent that we brought complementary strengths to the task. As trainers, our colleagues understood the CRM course and its tasks in terms of how well they did or did not work with the teachers in their governorates. As principal writers of the standards, we were very familiar with the theoretical frameworks underlying the teacher competencies reflected in the standards. In our work as a team, we drew on these different perspectives to revise indicators and develop new ones for Domains 4
(Planning and Management of Learning) and 5 (Assessment and Evaluation), the sections of the teacher standards we had determined would be most useful in aligning the CRM course to the teacher standards.

From these indicators, we created a checklist to use in rating each section of the course book. After a norming session to give team members practice in using the checklist and to ensure consistency in the actual task analysis of the course book, we broke into small groups to complete the analysis. The results were then used to determine which course tasks best covered the standards. In light of these findings, the CRM course syllabus was revised accordingly to ensure a closer alignment with the teacher standards. The standards-based CRM course was then offered in the next training cycle and feedback from both the trainers and the trainees was generally favourable. More detailed analysis, however, is in progress.

**Conclusion**

As we have moved through the work plan for this project, it has become clear that the emphasis has shifted from product to process. We are not suggesting that others adopt the Pharos standards *wholesale*, but rather, consider the process modelled above when we addressed real educational issues. Through our discussions of teaching standards, we co-constructed meaningful and contextualised criteria for determining the effectiveness of a training course. Our successful experience with this application of the standards suggests that the standards may be a useful tool in other areas as well. The following are possible applications:

- providing criteria for dealing with promotion issues, from novice to senior teacher, for example, as a question of competence rather than seniority;
- determining the effectiveness of in-service trainers and training programs;
- unifying in-service training portfolios;
- providing a means to contextualise in-service training to the needs of different audiences;
- providing opportunities for capacity building for educational reform of a new generation of leaders;
- delineating criteria for curriculum and materials development;
- describing the characteristics of effective teaching in other content areas.

In these applications, we see standards not merely as a document but as a means of increasing awareness of what teachers – or trainers – or leaders should know or be able to do in the course of their work. Rather than focus...
on wide-scale reform per se, the entry point might better be conceptualised on an individual basis. In other words, standards can help practitioners become more aware of the key professional competencies of their positions. This awareness can then lead to the formation of individual plans for professional development.

Standards need to be discussed nationwide, with practitioners as well as with policy makers. Workshops and training forums, we feel, are key to the process of raising awareness and developing an understanding of what ‘competence’ really means. In addressing the challenge of how to change the status quo, our Egyptian partners suggested that we engage in awareness-raising efforts with all stakeholders, including parents. They also recommended that, for standards to have an impact, they must be accompanied by training opportunities for teachers and others to acquire the desired competencies embodied in the standards documents. We were advised to reference our work to MOE documents on excellence in Egyptian education, meet with decision makers, and work with post-secondary institutions to incorporate English language instruction programs in training for principals as part of quality control.

While the development of standards may not revolutionise the institutional structure of Egyptian schools in the near term, it is clear that bringing standards to the table for discussion offers opportunities to break into the system, from the side, so to speak, if not from the bottom or the top. In considering the role of standards in classrooms, Katherine Samway (2000) notes, ‘standards act as a reminder – a very important reminder – of the range of issues to consider when making instructional decisions’ (Samway 2000: vii). Rather than limiting educators, she says, they keep us alert to what we should be doing to ensure quality learning occurs. Similarly, we have come to see the relevance of the Pharos Project as more than sets of competencies for educators. To have lasting impact, the standards will need to provide opportunities to engage educators in a range of discussions to define these competencies and apply that thinking to local contexts.

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