

**Applicability of the NSW Quality Teaching Model
to the Abu Dhabi School System**

by

Pauline Greaves-Aylward

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of New England

27 February 2013

Pauline Greaves, PhD Candidate

Student # 220048316

Declaration

I Pauline Greaves, PhD candidate certify that the work has not been and is not being submitted for any other degree than to this one or to any other university.

I also certify that all help received in preparing the thesis and all sources used, are duly acknowledged.



Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank Professor Kelvin McQueen for his support, guidance, and academic leadership throughout my research, and to Professor Ros Littledyke, co-supervisor for her support and contribution to the completion of this thesis.

A special thanks to my husband, Murray Aylward without whose support and assistance I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I thank him for his unwavering support, generosity of time and his steadfast belief in my ability to complete this work.

Finally, to my son David, my gratitude for being who you are and for being so forgiving for my long absences. Your presence in my life has been both an inspiration and a blessing.

Table of Contents

<i>ABSTRACT</i>	3
<i>CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY</i>	6
1. Introduction	6
1.2 The context of the research	7
1.3 Background to the study	7
1.4 Purpose	15
1.5 Significance of the study	16
1.6 Statement of the research problem	19
1.7 Institutional reforms	27
1.7 Summary	35
1.8 Thesis structure	38
<i>Chapter 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</i>	40
2. Introduction	40
2.1 Purpose of the Research	42
2.2 Aims of the research	43
2.3 Research questions	43
2.4 Research Methodology: Background	44
2.5 Limitations of the Study	48
2.6 Research Methodology: Application	49
<i>CHAPTER 3: FOCUS AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY</i>	50
3. Introduction	50
3.1 Brief country profile	51
3.2 Institutional structure	52
3.3 Overview of the education system	59
3.4 Past research and frameworks	62
3.5 Challenges within the system	67
3.5.1 Student population	67
3.5.2 Quality teaching, teacher qualifications and training	70
3.5.3 Professional development	72
3.5.4 Supervision of teachers	72
3.5.5 School leaders	74
3.5.6 Curriculum	76
3.5.7 Students' under-achievement	77
3.6 Current educational reforms and frameworks	80
3.6.1 Abu Dhabi's mandate for educational reform	81
3.6.1.1 New school model	82
3.6.1.2 Bilingual education	83
3.6.1.3 Curriculum	84
3.6.1.4 Quality teachers	85
3.6.1.5 Quality school leaders	87
3.7 Summary	88
<i>Chapter 4: LITERATURE REVIEW</i>	90
4. Introduction	90
4.1 Theoretical Perspectives	90
4.2 Purpose of education & quality education	91

4.3	Reforming schools: leaders and teachers	108
4.4	Education in an Arab-Muslim Context	115
4.5	Role of school leaders	128
4.6	Quality teaching	132
4.7	Comparative Education-Learning from others	148
4.8	Summary	156
<i>Chapter 5: ANALYSIS OF THE NSW MODEL OF QUALITY TEACHING</i>		158
5.	Introduction	158
5.1	Quality Teaching Model (QTM)	158
5.2	Background to the Model	159
5.3	Characteristics of the NSW QTM	163
5.4	Dimensions of the Model	164
5.5	Analysis of the Model	168
<i>Chapter 6: COMPARISON BETWEEN HOW QUALITY TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IS DESCRIBED IN UAE AND THE NSW QTM</i>		178
6.	Quality teaching and school leadership in the UAE	178
6.1	Current teaching practices and perspectives in the Abu Dhabi system	181
6.2	Constructivist approach in a traditional teaching and learning environment	199
6.3	How is quality teaching described in the NSW model?	204
6.4	Summary	209
<i>Chapter 7: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</i>		211
7.	Introduction	211
7.1	Findings	213
7.2	Discussions and Recommendations	256
7.3	Quality teaching	258
7.3.1	Policy implications	261
7.3.2	Academic Standards	262
7.3.3	Professional Teaching Standards	263
7.3.3.1	Framework for Teaching Standards	264
7.3.3.2	School Leaders' Professional Standards	267
7.3.3.3	Professional Development	270
7.3.3.4	Induction Program	273
7.4	Summary	274
<i>Chapter 8: CONCLUSION</i>		277
8.	Introduction	277
8.1	Summary	281
Bibliography		282

ABSTRACT

Applicability of the NSW Quality Teaching Model to the Abu Dhabi School System

Introduction

Educational reform and sustainability is a top priority for the federation of the United Arab Emirates as it seeks to establish itself at the forefront of educational excellence and the building of quality education for the country in the 21st Century.

The focus of this research is on Abu Dhabi Emirate as it seeks to bring its education system and the achievement of its students in line with international standards. The restructuring agenda which started in 2000, has an emphasis on quality education focusing on teaching and learning approaches, modernizing the curriculum, and improving the quality of its teaching workforce. To facilitate this reform agenda, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) plan to implement a new education model to underpin the new strategies for system improvement. The United Arab Emirates like other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has been influenced by western education which has informed both their policies and practices as a means of addressing low student performance. With its focus on best practice and active learning pedagogies the Emirate has tried to emulate education systems/models that it perceived as being successful. Over a 10 year period the Emirate has reviewed, adopted or/and attempted to implement various models of education, mainly those of Finland, Singapore, Australia, Canada and the United States. Similar to other national education systems worldwide, the UAE policymakers' responses to low student performance have been to focus on teacher quality and teacher improvement as a key to educational reform. The NSW model was one of preference as it was standard based, could be easily aligned to the NSW curriculum that was being implemented in the schools, and a measure by which teachers and school leaders quality could be measured.

This research is exploring and examining the applicability of a quality model that focuses on best practices in teaching such as the NSW model of quality teaching. The impetus behind the education strategic reform was due to external factors and external views of educational

development from a variety of agencies (nevertheless, accepted for implementation by the leading UAE policymakers and the Ministry of Education) have fundamentally informed how the UAE and Abu Dhabi has decided to reform its education system, and thus this led to the trialling of the QTM. There is no need to examine the QTM's natural cultural context in any detail, but some contemporary references to the theory underpinning the QTM and its cultural assumptions are needed. The NSW Quality Teaching Model (QTM) is a model of 21st century best-practice as it is based on both an approach to teaching and a theory of learning. The theoretical foundation of the model is a constructivist approach to education that provides strategies for teachers to develop mechanisms for effective teaching while keeping the development of students as its focal point.

The applicability of the NSW (QTM) has the potential to move the current Abu Dhabi education system towards a new synthesis of educational transformation as it would ensure the development of a robust quality teaching model to support an effective and quality teaching workforce, thereby elevating students' achievement and alignment of the system to international standards. Analysis of the NSW quality teaching against the Abu Dhabi context indicates that the applicability of the QTM is not feasible. Similar to other educational transfers, the implementation of foreign examples and the context itself have collided with the deep-rooted characteristics of the current system. The main findings of the thesis is that when it comes to internal reform of the Abu Dhabi system there are cultural barriers and pre-existing institutional rigidities and policymaking stances that reduce the possibility for successfully implementing a non-Abu Dhabi-developed form of teaching and learning, like the QTM, especially for providing a process for reworking teaching and learning institutionally. The study finds that the model's structure and the interrelationship of the elements to achieve excellence are too complex for the existing environment to benefit from its optimum strengths. It further finds that the model, its context and concepts are not relevant as the policies and practices that are espoused could impact cultural beliefs, practices and local understandings.

The findings indicate that such educational reform may have little, if any, success as it has been introduced into a system with characteristics that are ingrained and resistant to change, and into a system that is far too challenging and disoriented. An attempt to implement the QTM could affect its integrity, as too many assumptions on which the model is based would have to be severely modified or eliminated at the onset. The final analysis is that while the QTM is designed and structured to achieve the targeted outcomes and mechanisms, and could be

accessed to support the innovative strategies and activities that support the components of the system, it is not feasible to do so without major compromises to some of the key principles and practices.

The research found that there was scope within the system for change and improvement in the quality of education and its teaching workforce; this change could be initiated through a more appropriate and contextually relevant approach such as the development and implementation of a professional standards framework. The Emirate is confronted with the need to sustain the quantity achievements while improving the quality of teaching and learning. ‘The capacity of teachers and their supervisors, particularly the school leaders, in facilitating effective teaching and learning processes highly depends on the content to which enabling structures and systems are in place and operational’ (Gallie, & Keevy, 2013). A professional standards framework could provide a transformative structure, in the first instance, to deal with some of the immediate restructuring issues with regards to professional skills and competencies that are required in the classroom, and therefore made available the relevant conditions for quality improvement. Upon achieving some milestones of stability, then complementary components from the NSW QTM that increase the focus on what’s working with further aspects could be trialed to obtain continuous improvement in significance and meaningful contribution to students’ achievement. It could also provide a structure for benchmarking of teacher quality, and allow Abu Dhabi to select the key quality components that are important to their specific system and that connect to previously implemented standards. This alternative framework may provide a way forward for the Abu Dhabi system, but it is merely a suggestion that would need much more research.

Finally, the paper summarises some of the challenges that are being faced by the Abu Dhabi education system and suggests a possible option for addressing deficiencies in the quality of its teaching workforce with a focus on improving students learning and academic achievement. It is only with further research that the government and educational leaders can determine if an education reform such as a quality teaching model is having an impact on improving student achievement, and also what kind of actions can be taken to have a meaningful and positive impact on student learning?