

Towards an MIS Community of Practice in Jordan

Concept Note and Implementation Strategy

Tuesday, March 28, 2006

Background: To build the human resources necessary for the successful implementation of its Education for the Knowledge Economy Reform program (ERFKE), the Jordan Ministry of Education is considering the introduction of an innovative professional development framework that promises to stand out as one of the most ambitious in the Middle East and North Africa Region. While the framework builds on international best practice, its provisions were driven by the accomplishments and needs of the country itself.

One of the most innovative approaches that the new professional development framework proposes is collaborative job-embedded learning –that is the both the intentional and incidental learning that occurs as teachers engage in their practice. Job-embedded learning is the result of teachers reflecting on what works and what does not in their practice to uncover or consolidate understanding, sharing this understanding with other colleagues for feedback and collective improvement, and engaging in collaborative actions to improve practice. Job-embedded learning is learning by doing –it is therefore highly conceptualized. It offers the teachers the opportunity to reflect on their practice, and then generating new insights about the practice, which they share with other fellow practionners. Examples of school-based professional development designs that promote job-embedded learning include whole faculty groups, action research, joint planning, case discussions, mentoring, administrators’ walk-through, and peer coaching.

ESP is supporting this innovative professional development framework by proposing designs that create opportunities for job-embedded learning through collaborative structures at the school and system levels. At the heart of the ESP solution are the learning teams that are created and consolidate at the school-level by peers who serve as subject-matter leaders, MIS community champions and coaches of fellow-team members. The educational power of the individual school-based learning teams is leveraged nationally through the creation and consolidation of a national MIS community of practice/learning that is solely dedicated to teacher professional growth through practice-derived collective learning.

Concept of Community of Practice/Learning: All the research seems to indicate that when teachers have opportunities and institutionalized structures for collaboration and knowledge sharing over issues related to instructional practice (subject-matter, pedagogy, assessment, school management, school-to-work connections, or community involvement), they tend to benefit in major ways. Communities built around practice – whether bound to a school, span an entire system or are global—provide the ideal environment for the teachers to engage in meaningful learning; develop a sense of belonging and common purpose; and focus on issues most relevant to improving student

learning. Promoting communities of practice/learning is also a cost-effective and sustainable strategy for nurturing teacher growth compared to the traditional training-only approaches. Communities of Practice/Learning are therefore of multi-faceted value to both the individual practionner, the community of fellow practionners, and to the practice itself. Given the importance for supporting the new professional development framework in Jordan, ESP proposes to work with the ministry to pilot of these collaborative job-embedded learning structures.

Goals of the MIS Community of Practice/Learning:

1. Improve the knowledge and skills of the teachers; and deepen their understanding of all the dimensions of their practice (subject-matter, pedagogy, assessment, technology integration, etc) through collaborative job-embedded learning;
2. Improve the learning achievement of the MIS students by building the capacity of the teachers to collectively reflect on instructional challenges in their practice; analyze their nature, and seek solutions to address them;
3. Provide the environment for the teachers to develop and use a shared member-populated repository of digital assets (lesson plans, notes, multimedia nuggets, etc) that is accessible to all;
4. Setting the ground for the emergence of a sustainable life-long culture among the MIS teachers; AND
5. Provide an safe non-threatening environment for the educators to develop a sense of belonging and common purpose; and alleviate their sense of isolation.

Building Blocks: Building sustainable collaborative structures for the teachers to engage in collective job-embedded learning requires putting in place six important “building blocks”: school-based learning teams, leadership, incentives, value-added products and services, organizational alignment, and technology infrastructure.

Building Blocks	Description
School-based Learning Teams	MIS school-based subject matter learning teams constitute one the most—if not the most—important element of the ESP approach to practice-derived job-embedded teacher professional learning. School-based MIS teams focused on learning add tremendous value to the individual and the group; and help teachers focus on students’ learning –the end goal of the practice itself.
Leadership	Communities –whether school-bound, system-wide, or global—thrive when they are driven by strong dedicated leadership. At the school-level, community champions/instructional leaders/subject-matter coordinators help create, consolidate and lead the learning teams; provide coaching to fellow teachers on issues of instructional practice; focus the team’s attention and energy on student learning; promote a safe non-

	threatening feeling of camaraderie for all; and understand the developmental stages of his fellow teachers and help them manage change and growth. At the national-level, the MIS community –fueled by the energies and support of individual learning teams—will be led by an MIS community leader who is able to provide vision and leadership for the entire MIS teaching community; mobilize all the school-based learning teams around issues of instructional practice; strengthen communication and create linkages between MIS schools, teams and individuals country-wide; organize and manage structured and semi-structured learning events for the community members; etc.
Incentive System	School-based learning teams and other wider community configurations depend on the voluntary participation of individuals with commitment to furthering the goals and aspirations of the group. Because participation is voluntary, the institution of an incentive system is important for energizing community involvement. Reducing teacher loads, official recognition, and community awards are some of the examples of the incentive elements that can be considered.
Value-added products and services	The creation of value-added products and services –such as structured online learning events, newsletter, access to experts, etc—is an important strategy for boosting involvement in the MIS community. With an incentive system in place, community members themselves could take the leadership in creating those products and services.
Organizational Alignment	The growth of school-based MIS subject-matter learning teams and any wider community configuration depends on the existence of an enabling environment at the school and system level. At the school level, the principal's buy-in and support of these structures through flexible scheduling for the team member; the provision of space for meetings; the official recognition of their importance, etc provide an enabling environment for the teams to grow and thrive—and for the principal to transform his/her school into a learning organization. At the system level, policies recognizing and promoting collaborative job-embedded learning as a venue for promotion; the provision of resource to support them, etc, are very important for institutionalizing them.
Technology Infrastructure	Modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide unprecedented capabilities to support collaborative job-embedded learning in an effective and

	cost-effective manner. Portals with tools for communication, collaboration, and knowledge management can be leveraged to support collaboration at the local, national, regional and global levels.
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Implementation Plan: The implementation of the approach outlined above requires capacity building at multiple levels; the provision of resources; the introduction of new processes at the national, sub-national and school levels; the sequencing and phasing of the activities; the development of a monitoring and evaluation plan, etc.

To minimize the risk of failure –given the enthusiasm of MOE towards the concept, the ESP team will be implementing the approach in phases with solid transition indicators from one phase to the next. One option is to begin implementation with a small number of MIS schools by working with the instructional leaders directly, and use the opportunity to learn before the approach is scaled up to the rest of the schools using the first cohort of instructional leaders to spread the innovation to other schools. The second approach is to start with the training of cadre of trainers who operate at the district level to train other teachers. A third approach is to incorporate the COP-related training in all the trainings that the MIS teachers would receive, including project-based learning, technology integration, etc, without having to develop an independent training program. Decisions about which options to consider depend not only on technical considerations, but also on budgetary considerations.

Irrespective of the option that we adopt, here is a tentative implementation plan with a set of activities under each building block. I have not put any dates on the activities, because this requires coordination with the field.

MIS Team

Building Block	Activities	Start Date	End Date	Outputs/Outcomes
Leadership	-Identify 2 instructional leaders/community champions from each MIS school	Late June	Early July	-Instructional leaders identified
	-Train the instructional leaders on team formation, change management, leadership and coaching techniques –with ongoing support online	Early September	Late Sept	-Instructional leaders trained
	-Identify and coach the MIS community leader	Early October	Mid October	-Community leader identified and trained
School-based learning teams	-Form school-based subject-matter learning teams	Mid October	Late Oct	-Learning teams formed and functional
	-Organize 4 (approx) online learning events for the learning teams	Late Oct	Late Nov	-Online events organized
Incentive System	-Partner with the private sector (especially those operating in fields related to MIS) and other non-government groups to put an incentive system for encouraging teacher to collaborate nationally	Jan 2007	February 2007	-Partnerships established with the private sector and non-government organizations -Establish system established at the

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	-Identify a set of incentive options at the school and sub-system level (to be incorporated in the training program for principles) -Work with MOE on an incentive system to support learning teams and therefore sustain their work at schools	Feb 2007	March 2007	school and sub-national level
Value-added products and services	-Identify partners and entities (universities, schools of education, private sector, NGOs, teachers, practionners (accountants, e-commerce professionals), etc) willing to participate in the production of content-related products and services for the teachers - Produce and disseminate 50 (approx) knowledge products -Organize 5 (approx) structured learning events online for the community	Early April 2007 May 2007	Late April 2007 July 2007	-Partners identified who are willing to provide incentives to the MIS community -knowledge products produced and disseminated
Organizational Alignment/support	-Develop a short training program for school principals to support the learning teams and the national COP.	Late August 2007	Mid September 2007	-Training program developed

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	-Provide the district resource centers with the necessary resources and capacity to support the learning teams and individual teachers at the school level			-Capacity of the district resource centers strengthened to support learning communities and individual MIS teachers
Technology Infrastructure	- Design and develop an MIS portal -Use GLP to support regional and global collaboration	April 2006	October 2006	-Portal designed and developed -Online learning environment established on GLP