

Supporting Teachers to Educate Marginalized Children: Teachers and Teacher Education in Afghanistan

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Abstract

The Taliban effectively marginalized the school population of Afghanistan, particularly girls, who were legally forbidden to attend school. Since the fall of the Taliban Government, education has become one of the key priorities in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction and development agreed to in Bonn (Government of the Federal Republic of Germany 2001). The Ministry of Education has had to respond to a number of crucial issues in the drastic and rapid reconstruction and transformation process. Not least of these are issues related to quality—classroom teaching, the curriculum, teacher preparation. The Ministry’s Compilation and Translation Department was charged with developing a new Curriculum Framework for basic education in Afghanistan, and, with the assistance of international organizations, revising textbooks in light of that new framework. This paper considers the gap between *intended curriculum* as represented by an ambitious and progressive new Curriculum Framework and the *implemented curriculum*, as observed in primary school classrooms. These observations were carried out during the course of a JICA project, STEP or Strengthening Teacher Education Program, which set out to prepare teachers’ guides and train teachers in their use. The paper reports on the processes by which teachers’ guides were developed and teachers trained and on largely positive effects of the introduction of these teachers’ guides. The paper concludes with several recommendations as to improvements in the quality of teaching and teacher education in Afghanistan.

Introduction

A long period of civil war and the subsequent Taliban Regime disrupted the national system of education in Afghanistan. Many citizens were deprived of access to education, but the case was even more devastating with girls and females. Although females’ access to education had been severely limited throughout its history, “female education left national agenda” during the time of the Taliban. (Intil et al. 2006, p.4) Still, in spite of statistics indicating that no girls were enrolled in schools in 2001, some female teachers took the risk

of teaching girls secretly in their homes. (Ministry of Education 2006) However, for most girls, even the most basic education was unattainable.

Since the fall of the Taliban Government, education, especially for girls, has become one of the key priority areas, not only as a basic human right but as the foundation for reconciliation, reconstruction and development. (International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan 2002; National Oversight Committee 2005; Ministry of Education 2006) Education is given a central role in the reconstruction processes agreed to in Bonn (Government of the Federal Republic of Germany 2001). The Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for basic education (Grades 1-9). It has had to respond quickly to a number of crucial issues involved in this rapid and drastic reconstruction and transformation process. Clearly, Afghan children, especially girls, have been marginalized as have teachers and others in the educational endeavor.

In late 2001, when UNICEF first started the back to school campaign, 60 per cent of more than 7,000 schools in Afghanistan were seriously or partially damaged. Since the reopening of schools on March 23, 2002,¹ the number of children and young adolescents enrolled has drastically increased. As of 2005, almost five million children were enrolled in Grade 1-12 classrooms across the nation, 2.5 times more than that in 2002. At the same time, the Compilation and Translation Department (CTD) of the MoE has been working to develop a new Curriculum Framework with the assistance of international organizations such as UNESCO and UNICEF (CTD 2003; IBE-UNESCO 2003). After development of the Curriculum Framework, CTD's next urgent task was to revise textbooks accordingly. Even so, these were the first of many steps in assuring access and quality. The issue of quality raises serious concerns about teachers because many of them have little or no training or preparation for teaching.

The quantitative and qualitative challenges associated with teachers and teacher education were anticipated from the very first days of the Transitional Government.² According to a recent document, the number of basic education teachers in service rose dramatically from 21,000 in 2001 to 128,000 in 2005. During these years, two-year Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) throughout the country trained only 1,646 teachers out of 128,000. (Ministry of Education 2006) The majority of the teaching workforce is either untrained or trained under a system with totally different goals and policy orientations. Yet the introduction of a new curriculum is likely to encounter great difficulties without teachers able to implement it effectively in the classroom.

In response to these needs, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded the Strengthening Teacher Education Program (STEP 2006a) from 2005 to 2007. STEP

¹ See "Afghanistan's schools triumphantly open: UNICEF calls it 'reminder to all of us'" (UNICEF 2003). Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/newsline/02pr09afghanistan.htm> on Nov. 28, 2006.

² The Transitional Government was inaugurated on June 22, 2002. It convened a National Constitution Loya Jirga in December 2003 where the new constitution was ratified. After presidential election in October 2004 and national legislative elections in 2005, Hamid Karzai, the first elected president, leads official government.

seeks to build capacity among teachers, to improve instruction along the objectives/goals of new Curriculum Framework through the introduction of teacher support material, namely teachers' guides. To evaluate the impact of STEP, data were collected through the observation and video recording of classrooms before and after the introduction of the teachers' guides. As background to the research, the new Curriculum Framework and other relevant information were also analyzed.

The New Curriculum Framework

As soon as the Transitional Government was endorsed by the international community in 2002, the ministry launched a major revision of the curriculum.³ A Core Curriculum Team of ten education specialists⁴ was commissioned to finalize the first draft, which was presented at the National Workshop for Sharing Perspectives on New Curriculum Development in Afghanistan⁵ in December 2002. More than 100 Afghan participants took part in the workshop—representatives from various departments of MOE, education institutions, and teachers. In addition, international NGOs and international donors such as UNICEF and UNESCO were represented. In early 2003, the newly established Academic Council on Education was tasked with revising and finalizing the document. The new Curriculum Framework was put into effect in June 2003. (Ministry of Education 2006)

Although the document is titled “Curriculum Framework”, it essentially contains the objectives of a new education policy, rather than an outline of “curriculum”. In fact, while the Framework defines curriculum as “all the learning activities and targets regarding students’ development that have to be achieved in schools” (CTD 2003, p.4), it fails to do so, by grade level and subject, or in overall terms. However valuable it is as a policy statement, the Curriculum Framework is too broadly written to guide to development of instructional material.

At this point, it may be useful to provide a brief overview of Framework’s policy objectives. See Box 1.

Obviously, the objectives cover a wide range of issues and dimensions. If the order of the statements reflects national priorities, the Framework gives most importance to national identity and a solid religious faith (1, 2, 5). If the number of items counts most, equal opportunity of access to schools is a most important policy goal. Of 20 statements, 1, 6, 9, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20 refer to equal access and opportunities for all sub-groups, classified by

³ A first draft of the document was discussed in a curriculum development seminar in Tehran in October 2002 organized by UNESCO. In this seminar, 30 Afghan education specialists mostly from the Ministry of Education were exposed to key issues involved in curriculum development process, discussed important global trends “such as the shifts from a teacher- and subject-centered perspective to a learner-centered perspective and the shifts from knowledge-based curriculum or an objective-based curriculum to a competencies-based curriculum”. (IBE-UNESCO 2003, p.1)

⁴ The team was chaired by General Director of CTD. Of 10 members, 7 including the chair were appointed from the department.

⁵ CTD was authorized in the workshop to develop syllabi and the textbooks in compliance with the Curriculum Framework.

Box 1. Educational Policy Objectives in the Curriculum Framework

The Curriculum Framework identifies equal and fair opportunity, the nurturing of Islamic morals and values, Afghan identity, as well as peace and anti-discrimination as important policy objectives.

#1. Education should provide equal opportunities for all students, males and females, children, youngsters and adults to develop as persons worshipping God, demonstrating self-confidence, patriotism and national unity, solidarity and respect of human rights.

#2. Education has to promote patriotic virtues, such as the defense of national independence, National Governance and sovereignty and to develop an interest to protect and enrich the national heritage. At the same time it has to promote values such as peace and equip students for fighting against all forms of discrimination.

#3. Educational institutions have to be restored and rehabilitated countrywide.

#4. The reconstruction of the education system in Afghanistan has to be based on international accomplishments and good practices in education.

#5. Successful and progressive education experiences in the region and worldwide have to be adjusted to the Afghan context.

#6. Primary and intermediate education (Grade 1 to 9) are compulsory and free for all, regardless of gender, tribe, mother tongue, religion, race and social status.

#7. Languages of instruction are the official languages of the country, in compliance with the country's Constitution.

#8. The teaching and learning of local languages is provided through a separate subject in the curriculum in all local schools.

#9. Special needs education and education for internally displaced people are part of the public education intervention.

#10. Schools for general education, religious schools, vocational schools and teacher training institutes will benefit of improved facilities.

#11. The academic and professional skills of the teachers have to be upgraded.

#12. All efforts have to be made to improve residential and living conditions for teachers.

#13. Campaigns against illiteracy will be launched, and functional literacy and employment skills will be promoted for both males and females.

#14. The support to education of friendly countries, the international community, NGOs and the private sector has to be enhanced. The reconstruction process in the country has to be based on a broad process of capacity building. It has to be based also on the reform of administration in compliance with the new constitutional and legal framework in the country.

#15. The education system has to be balanced and provide equal opportunities for all.

#16. Fair education opportunities have to be assured in the capital as well as in the provinces.

#17. Equal opportunities have also to be assured for students from under-developed and developing regions and communities in the country.

#18. Schools should give orientation to students about the negative and destructive consequences of wrongdoing through engaging in terrorism, drug abuse, conflicts and acts of discrimination.

#19. Equal education opportunities have to be provided for both males and females both urban and rural areas, and all necessary solutions have to be addressed for increasing girls' enrolment in schools, including in higher levels.

#20. Students should be educated to fight against discrimination of all kinds and demonstrate gender sensitiveness.

(Curriculum Framework 2003, pp.18-20)

diverse criteria such as gender, tribe, language, social status, and others. The list also emphasizes the importance of fighting discrimination (goals 2, 18, 20). Interestingly, both equal access to education and gender equity are somewhat foreign to the Afghan context.

Indeed, in our baseline survey in 2005, support for gender equity in schools was very low among both in-service and pre-service teachers. (STEP 2006b) A majority of the teachers answered that they had never heard of or read the Curriculum Framework. (STEP 2006a) Here is one source of the gap between intended curriculum (national policy) and implemented curriculum (teacher practice in classrooms).

Box 2. Principles in Curriculum Development

Guided by the objectives, the Curriculum Framework outlines the principles in developing curriculum as follows:

- Cultivation of traditions, and of religious and moral values
- Centralized and unified curriculum
- Quality assurance
- Relevant/useful and updated knowledge
- Fostering appropriate skills and attitudes
- Student-friendly curriculum
- Stimulating learning environment
- Increasing access and participation
- Acquainting students with new information and communication technologies
- Preparing students for work and adult life
- Fostering life-long learning

Curriculum Framework 2003, pp.16-7

Again, it is useful to consider the principles that the Curriculum Framework states should be used in developing the curriculum. (See Box 2)

The first principle affirms that the curriculum should be based on Afghan tradition, its religious and moral values. It emphasizes the importance of developing and rooting the curriculum in the Afghan context. The curriculum should be “centralized and unified” and quality should be assured, again clearly reflecting the policy objectives of the new Curriculum Framework. The next five principles relate to the “competencies” the curriculum should aim to develop among children. The last three principles indicate long-term goals to prepare Afghan children for life beyond school in a local, national, and global communities.

The Framework goes to specify the subjects and school hours to be spent on each subject at each level of education.⁶ For instance, first cycle of primary education (Grades 1 to 3) is to study a total of 24 hours per week:⁷ 4 hours in Islamic studies, 8 hours in the first language, 5 hours in Mathematics, 2 hours in Life Skills, 2 hours in Calligraphy, 2 hours in drawing and home economics, 1 hour in Physical education/Sports. The Framework does describe the general objectives of each education cycle in brief (CTD 2003, p.29), but no substantive statements are found on what is to be learned in these subjects in each grade level. No objectives or content is specified, by subject or grade. In spite of this ambiguity in *what* is to be taught, the document places a great emphasis on *how* to teach. (CTD 2003, pp.37-40) Approaches and types of learning which the Curriculum Framework believes

⁶ Primary education consists of first cycle (Grades 1 to 3) and second cycle (Grades 4 to 6). Lower secondary or intermediate school is from Grades 7 to 9, and Grades 10 to 12 are upper secondary school.

⁷ The total school hours for the second cycle of primary education and secondary schools are 30 and 36 per week respectively. Official unit of school hour is 45 minutes.

foster quality learning include:

- Learner-centered approach
- Constructivist approach
- Motivation/Positive reinforcement
- Learning conducive environment
- Fostering higher-level intellectual skills as well as spiritual, emotional and social development
- Integrated learning
- Life-long learning

Again it is worth noting that although these approaches and types of learning are discussed as means to achieve the objectives/goals of new curriculum, they are not part of the tradition of Afghan education. Instead they derive from modern western pedagogy. As the Framework's policy objectives and curriculum development principles emphasize first of all the importance of *Afghan* tradition and values, one might expect some difficulty in accommodating both traditional Afghan traditions, values, and practices, on the one hand, and modern western pedagogical conceptions of teaching practice, on the other.

The expected role of teachers is, according to the Curriculum Framework one of "facilitating learning" by using diverse methods of instruction. This is quite different from the traditional Afghan mode of instruction, where the teacher has the knowledge and the authority in the classroom, and students try to reproduce what the teacher delivers to them. The Framework's list of suggested methods is ambitious: concept mapping, use of ICT, experimenting, videotapes and slides, posters and maps, role playing, case studies, inquiries and surveys, project work, brainstorming, group work and group discussion, co-operative learning (pp.39-40). One might expect that the introduction of a variety of new teaching methods without preparation has little chance of being adopted by teachers, especially those with little or no training. The teachers we surveyed were not knowledgeable as to what these instructional methods were nor did they understand what they were for or how they were to be used in the classroom. Group work in many classrooms, for example, was understood as answers by a group of 15-20 children instead of the whole class or individuals.

Assessment and Evaluation

One critical issue in improving quality in the classroom work is the assessment and evaluation of student learning. The Constructivist approach on which the Curriculum Framework is based argues that students construct understanding. This has direct implications on how students learn: students are active learners and make meaning when encountering or experiencing something new by using prior knowledge and experience. Experiencing new situations or phenomenon in classrooms does not always lead to constructing correct concepts. Teachers must observe students carefully and be able to correctly assess how students are thinking and what has caused any misconceptions. Such an understanding of teaching and

learning differs from traditional “frontal” approaches, likely the only type of teaching most Afghan teachers have experienced.

The Framework document explains the difference between assessment and evaluation, indicates why assessment is necessary, and briefly describes what types of assessment are available for different goals. Traditionally, Afghanistan has used “summative” approaches, either oral or written in form, as the main tool for evaluation. Assessment, that is, early, low-stakes tests of student learning to inform teaching practice, are not part of traditional Afghan education. Teachers have seen evaluation of student learning not as a means to help students improve or develop their understanding of the subjects or to help teachers improve their practice, but rather as punishment (p.42).

The Framework points to the need to train assessment and evaluation professionals in the Ministry so that the MoE can give relevant guidance to those concerned. It also notes the importance of addressing assessment and evaluation issues both in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs (p.42). The new curriculum requires teachers to assess students’ learning and progress in competencies of knowledge, skills and attitude/behavior. Each lesson may focus on some or all of the competencies, and assessment strategies may vary, depending on the concept or content to be taught. Different competencies—knowledge and behavior, for instance—may require different assessment strategies. Teachers and prospective teachers need to learn what assessment strategies are available and appropriate.

Development of Textbooks

Most critical perhaps is the development of textbooks. Research has demonstrated that in many developing countries, textbooks are the single most important positive factor affecting student learning. (Reynolds & Teddlie 1999) This likely holds true in Afghanistan as well.

As discussed earlier, the new Curriculum Framework presents the pedagogical orientations of the Ministry in terms of the kind of education Afghanistan aims to acquire and the ways it should be approached. However without clearer guidance as to what to teach, many teachers and teacher educators do not know how to apply the new teaching and assessment strategies in actual classroom settings. The Curriculum Framework must be translated into course syllabi and textbooks in such a way that there is the smallest possible gap “between the intended curriculum, as it is stated in the Framework, and the curriculum provisions in the textbooks”. (IBE-UNESCO 2003a, p.2) This was the rationale for the International Workshop on Curriculum and Textbook Development in Afghanistan.⁸ Because CTD had drafted some textbooks in primary education by then, the workshop was hoped “to provide a framework for reflection and revision (of draft textbooks)”. (IBE-UNESCO 2003a, p.3)

⁸ The workshop was conducted from July 5-17, 2003, with more than 100 participants. Of 15 international experts, six were from Teachers College, Columbia University. Teachers College provided technical assistance in textbook preparation under UNICEF.

The agenda of the 11-day workshop was comprehensive, encompassing many basic aspects of curriculum and textbooks development. Participants spent the first three days discussing the fundamental issues in textbook development, for example, the meanings of Curriculum Framework, Syllabus, and teaching aids (textbooks); the links between knowledge, skills and attitudes as student competencies. The group was then divided into subject-specific groups to write syllabi for four days and then to develop model textbook units over the final four days (IBE-UNESCO 2003b). It was expected that the sample chapters thus developed would serve as a template for subsequent work. (Columbia Teachers College 2003, 9/2)

The production of primary school textbooks was prioritized, and two grades produced at a time: Grades 1 and 4, Grades 2 and 5, Grades 3 and 6. As of December 2006, all new textbooks for primary schools subjects were completed in the two official languages, Dari and Pashto. It was confirmed that some of the textbooks (Grades 1 & 2) were in use at that time,⁹ while the others were being distributed or ready for printing. (Ministry of Education 2006, pp.40-1)

It was difficult to learn much about the writing process, but an account posted on the Columbia Teachers College website¹⁰ describes several challenges and difficulties the Afghan curriculum and textbook writers faced across different subject areas, as teachers' guides were being developed for grades 1-3 in 2005/06 (Columbia Teachers College 2003, 10/31):

- *The need to have a syllabus as the foundation for textbook development- that is the need to have an overarching concept for the textbook*
- *The need to make the texts academically interesting and effective for students through the development of numerous and varied student activities*
- *The need to help teachers understand what is to be taught by stating each lesson's objectives clearly, by offering concrete suggestions for teaching strategies, and by using a standard lesson format that is easy to comprehend and follow*

(Columbia Teachers College 2003, 10/31)

The teachers' guides were conceived to provide sample lesson plans for teachers who have little formal education or training. Still, it was difficult for many of writers of the teachers' guides themselves, individuals who had been involved in the development of the textbooks, to write lesson objectives, to suggest questions probing prior knowledge of students, or to ask questions involving more than rote memory. Assessment of student learning, to be carried out in the course of engaging activities in each lesson, was a particular challenge. (STEP 2006b)

⁹ Grade 2 textbooks were used in one classroom but not in the others in the same school in Kabul City in August 2006. Availability of new textbooks in other provinces and rural area is questionable.

¹⁰ Columbia University signed a contract with UNICEF to work as consultant to develop textbooks. Occasional newsletters were posted on the page of the Afghan Project in the university website.

An Example: The Life Skills Textbook

The Life Skills¹¹ textbook is a good example of how one of the new textbooks is organized. The Grade 1 Life Skills textbook is multi-colored like other textbooks, but with illustrations drawn by one of the writers. The textbook has a total of 86 pages with five large sections: the basic morality expected of a human being; personal attitudes such as individual autonomy; public morality and behavior necessary for civic life; positive attitudes in support of environmental education; and peace education.

On the one hand, Life Skills is moral education for the teaching of Islamic morality, but at the same time, it teaches character education, peace education, and health education. The subject has immediate relevance to the new curriculum's objectives such as "fighting against any kind of discrimination". The international community and the government repeatedly express the need for girls' education and girls' equal access to education. It is thus of particular interest to see how girls and females are described in the textbooks. There is no specific unit that focuses on gender equity, but girls are dealt equally with boys in units such as, "What we want to be in future", "Expressing feelings", "Roles at home" and "Helping with Housework". Another issue of course is how teachers teach these units. To some teachers, the concept of gender equality may conflict with Islamic morality or traditional Afghan values, hence another possible gap between intended and implemented curricula.

How Teachers Teach Using the New Textbooks, 2005/06

The question of how the new textbooks are used and whether they change teaching practices in classrooms as envisioned by the Curriculum Framework is an important one. We investigated this question using classroom observation and analysis of videotaped lessons.

For monitoring and evaluation of its own project, STEP visited Grade 1 classrooms in Kabul City and in other provinces in 2005 and 2006 to collect baseline data on lessons before the introduction of the teachers' guides. Classes were observed and videotaped for later comparative analysis. We were interested in the structure of lessons, what kind of activities teachers planned and provided in classrooms, and how teachers assessed student learning. (See Appendix 1 for a rubric used in examining subsequent classroom observations.) Box 3 quotes from the observational notes of the authors.

The lesson lasted for 30 minutes, although officially lessons should continue for 45 minutes. The teacher did not communicate the objectives of the lesson to the children. The teacher began by writing problems on the board. One student at a time was called to solve a problem. We observed no questioning of students, and no other student activities were conducted. The teacher stayed in front, and paid no apparent attention to whether any students had problems understanding the concept of addition. After four months of learning, the

¹¹ The Life Skills team is a part of social studies while the subject is taught from Grade 1 to Grade 3. Weekly class hours are 2 and total number of lesson units is 42. Life Skills is a new subject in the curriculum.

Box 3. Observation Notes I

Class A: Girls

Kabul City on August 4th, 2005

6:30: 7 girls. All in black uniform with white scarf. All come to school with a backpack. A middle-aged lady supervises students in hallway. A classroom is dark without light, but with windows. Packed with old long desks and benches.

6:40: Teacher (female) arrives. A principal with a microphone walks through the hallway and tells the students to go into classrooms. The teacher hangs posters on wall and on the door with students help. Two children carry a water cooler in the classroom.

6:45: 17 girls. Some children are wiping the desk and chair of the teacher. Many girls carry a small bottle of water. Some of the girls are quite large. All of the children have new textbooks. A few have a ruler.

6:50: 35 girls. Some children have a small blackboard, some have a notebook.

7:00: 37 girls. Teacher starts to teach Dari. A principal quickly talks to her and the teacher switches to math.

7:15: Teacher calls a girl, she comes to the blackboard, solves a problem. An addition of 1 digit numbers. Teacher uses concrete objects such as beans and sticks. The same activity continues. The children sitting at the back are not able to see how they manipulate the concrete objects.

Lasts until 7:30.

students were still studying addition of one digit numbers. We wondered if the teacher would be able to cover the material in the textbook by the end of the school year.

A similar pattern was observed in other classrooms. See the observation notes in Box 4. In this classroom, the teacher didn't use a textbook (although the students did have textbooks). He started without explaining what they were going to study in the math class. No student activity was observed other than individual work, mostly copying problems in notebooks to solve. The teacher gave some feedback when he worked with individual students, but he didn't monitor students to see if everyone understood the concept. In this classroom as well, students were doing addition of one digit numbers without carrying, two months after the beginning of the school year. Again the lesson period varied: Dari lasted less than 20 minutes while math continued for 37 minutes.

Box 4. Observation Notes II

Class B: 40 Boys

In Mazar-e-Sharif on June 3rd, 2006

Arrives a little after 7 am. Greets the principal of Primary school section. A bell rings around 7:23, as a sign to go into classrooms. All female teachers come to school with a burka but leave them in the staff room before they go to their classrooms.

A Grade 1 classroom under a tent. A male teacher! They have only benches, no desks. Some boys sit on the floor. The classroom has a blackboard, but no other teaching aides such as posters or concrete objects as we saw in Kabul City. All children have a few notebooks and a ball-point pen or a pencil.

7:38: Teacher writes a sentence on the board, asks students the spelling and reading of the words. Calls students to come to the front to answer.

7:43: Teacher calls a few students to come to the blackboard, and copy the words on the board. When necessary, teacher corrects.

7:45: Students read the sentence after the teacher twice.

7:48: Teacher tells the students to copy the sentence in their notebooks. The teacher writes the date on the board.

7:50: Teacher walks around to check the writing. He shows good students work to us.

7:55: A bell rings. Teacher walks through the children to check the work.

8:00: Teacher erases the blackboard. Math begins without any notice. He writes numbers from 10 to 20 in Dari.

8:03: Teacher calls students to come and write the numbers. The other children sit and watch. Teacher looks at his watch for the first time. All children look at the blackboard quietly. Teacher reads the numbers together when the child has difficulty.

8:10: Students take their notebooks and copy the numbers.

8:12: Teacher writes the questions of addition without carrying (one digit numbers). Write numbers vertically. No attention to the position of plus sign. Teacher corrects the writing of numbers. Individual work.

8:20: Teacher dictates questions, then writes on the board. Students copy in notebooks.

8:30: Teacher calls some students to write answers. He tells to use fingers to add numbers, and confirms the answers. He shows some students work to us.

8:37: Teacher draws an apple on the board. Students start drawing an apple individually. A boy is eating a cucumber. Another brings a mango as snack. Some students hold their notebook to show their drawings. Some of the works are colored.

8:55: Switch to calligraphy. Students take ink and pen, copy a sentence on the board written by teacher. Without a desk, this looks a little difficult. Some students don't have the calligraphy instrument, do nothing.

9:15: Students bring the work to show teacher. A bell rings. They do nothing, but look to be waiting for the time to dismiss.

These two classrooms are different in terms of physical conditions, location, and teacher qualifications.¹² But the instructional pattern of these two classes was surprisingly similar: Teachers stood in front of the classroom, explained, gave instructions to solve given questions or to do specific things (read or write word/sentences), and they evaluated student responses. Teachers dominated the talking, rarely asking thought-provoking questions. No substantive group work or cooperative learning was introduced. Such teaching patterns were widely observed in the baseline data¹³ regardless of the location of classrooms or the subject. Indeed, the MOE concludes:

Teacher-centered classrooms and rote learning can not be overcome by introduction of new textbooks because “[t]eachers either do not know how to implement more student-centered methods or are not motivated to change their teaching style.” (Ministry of Education 2006, p.8)

¹² The female teacher completed TTC with a diploma, but the other is not.

¹³ STEP observed and videotaped lessons by Grade 1 teachers in 17 schools in Kabul City and five provinces (Kabul, Nangharhar, Balkh, Herat and Kandahar). The lessons included 54 math, 16 Life Skills, 35 Islamic Studies, 28 Dari and 13 Pashto lessons.

More specifically, the baseline data were collected in 2005 for five schools in Kabul City selected by Ministry of Education to field-test new textbooks; and two local schools selected by provincial department of education in 5 provinces. STEP visited two classrooms per school, one boys' classroom and one girls' whenever possible. Dari/Pashto, Math, Islamic lessons were videotaped. Life Skills was not available because it was introduced in 2006. In 2006, national staff returned to the same schools to videotape Grade 1 lessons. However almost all Grade 1 teachers in the 2005 sample had shifted to Grade 2 with the same students, as is common across the country. Teachers in Phase 1 (Grade 1-3) move from Grade 1 to 2, 2 to 3, and the return to Grade 1. In the assessment workshop, STEP tried to assess as many lesson as possible within four days. Teachers with the least experience were selected to assess impact on the least prepared teachers. STEP understands that the effectiveness of the teachers' guides must be validated by assessing a larger number of lessons. The school calendar and work schedule did not permit that in 2006, but plans are to continue the research in 2007.

This insight applies to pre-service teachers as well. The current teacher preparation curriculum at TTCs does not teach the objectives and strategies that the Curriculum Framework encourages, nor does it discuss how textbooks are written to achieve those objectives. Pre-service teachers in Afghanistan may have little choice but to teach the way they were taught because the current TTC curriculum does not train them to teach as the Curriculum Framework advocates. (STEP 2006b) When asked what values or ability they promote in basic education, pre-service teachers selected “Islamic morals” and “peace” most frequently. Gender equity and democracy, which the international community is eager to see spread in Afghanistan, were identified by less than 10% of the respondents (N=113).

Effectiveness of Teachers’ Guides

In previous sections, we have made the argument that the new curriculum may not be implemented as intended because many of the pedagogical concepts introduced are new and/or foreign to the Afghan context and teachers have had little training in their use. We hypothesized that teachers might be better able to implement these new methods if provided with more structured guidance, that is, teachers’ guides.

When JICA proposed an education development project in Afghanistan, it focused on classroom practice. Based on research on the Afghan context and a needs analysis, JICA initiated a project consisting of three main components: development of teachers’ guides to go with the new textbooks; offering of training workshops on how to teach lessons using teachers’ guides; and study of the teacher preparation curriculum with subsequent policy recommendations. (JICA 2005)

The development of teachers’ guides began in August 2005. Borrowing the framework of teachers’ guides in Japan, a photocopy of pages to teach in one lesson is printed in the center of two-page spread. The teachers’ guide is organized according to a common framework: a lesson topic, objectives, new concept, introduction, student activities, assessment, exercise and homework. Having the least trained teaches in mind, the team emphasized concrete, practical writing. STEP training workshops were conducted by the cascade model from July 2006.

For STEP training workshops, the team developed a two-week full-day training program for the holidays, and a four-week half-day program for teachers at work. Unlike training workshops conducted by other donors or NGOs, STEP focused narrowly on teaching teachers to use the teachers’ guides. The facilitators’ training manual was designed to expose participants to a variety of instructional strategies, brainstorming, discussion, role play, case methods, and reflection. Two full days were allocated to a single subject. In STEP training workshops, participants were taken through the Curriculum Framework, the features and organization of new textbooks and of course the Teachers’ Guides. Half the total training time was devoted to writing lesson plans and micro teaching.

STEP developed a draft lesson assessment rubric in November 2005 based on the framework of STEP Teachers’ Guides and the actual lessons videotaped from July to October

2005 as baseline data (see Appendix 1). The rubric was developed to assess project impact. A score of 0 corresponds to lessons by novice teachers in Afghanistan, while a score of 2 suggests an ideal lesson.

In 2006, STEP videotaped two different groups of Grade 1 teachers, one group of which was offered both teachers' guides and training workshop, while the other received teachers' guides but no workshop training. In November 2006, STEP carried out a four-day assessment workshop for Afghan educators to evaluate as many lessons as possible and to train Afghan educators in providing feedback based on classroom observation.

In the workshop, the participants first watched a math lesson and practiced lesson observation using the rubrics. The scores of 14 Afghan evaluators varied greatly. So, STEP facilitated discussion among participants about their scoring. The evaluators rewrote their answers and added descriptions of each scores' criteria until there was agreement. Thus, the workshop revised, contextualized and finalized the rubrics to better represent Afghan teachers.

Table 1 shows the results of our assessment. The impact of STEP Teachers' Guides on teacher behavior is observable. Though not shown here, the impact was more visible among younger and less experienced teachers. The effects on Life Skills lessons is less obvious than in other subjects probably because the subject is new and the lessons videotaped in 2005 were taught by experienced teachers in exemplary schools in Kabul City. Only 5 schools collaborated to field test Life Skills textbooks in 2005. Even so, the use of teachers' guides appears to have positive effects on teachers' teaching behavior.

Table 1. Average Assessed Scores (maximum of 10, number of observed lessons in parentheses)

| | Dari/Pashto | Islamic | Math | Life skills |
|--|-------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| 2005 before STEP | 6.8 (5) | 3.5 (11) | 4.4 (5) | 8.25 (4) |
| 2006 with Teachers' Guides only | 8.0 (3) | 8.0 (3) | 7.5 (4) | 9.67 (6) |
| 2006 with Teachers' Guides & Training WS | 8.0 (6) | 8.0 (3) | 8.5 (6) | 8.50 (6) |

Teachers need support in their teaching, especially in a traditional context where they have been marginalized by conflict and devaluation of education, especially when they have little training of any sort, and most especially when new classroom behaviors is expected.

Concluding Remarks

We have argued that there is a substantial gap between intended and implemented curricula in Afghanistan. There are many reasons. Some, if not all, values in the new curriculum, are of western origin and may conflict with Islamic morals and Afghan traditions. Gender equity and equal access to education for girls are good examples. Many of the

pedagogical concepts are new to many Afghan teachers: e.g. learner-centeredness, constructive approach to learning, teachers as facilitator, formative assessment.

Indeed, while textbooks may be the most effective resources teachers have to help students learn, for many teachers who were marginalized for so many years, it is difficult to change the way they teach, even with new textbooks. This is well supported by our observation of lessons and analysis of videotaped lessons. However preliminary data show that teachers' guides may have positive impacts on teachers' classroom behavior.

If the Afghan people are determined to improve the quality of teaching, the first measure we would suggest is to support in-service teachers by providing teachers' guides to all teachers. Teachers' guides will serve as teacher support materials and are especially useful for those in least advantaged conditions—teachers in rural areas and too far to attend workshops, and teachers with little preparation. It is the task of the MoE to take the initiative to coordinate donor projects and NGOs so that disadvantaged teachers will benefit from such materials.

If the MoE believes in a constructivist approach, teachers must be supported at the classroom level. Teachers themselves can only construct knowledge on new pedagogical concepts—teachers as facilitators or cooperative learning, or whatsoever—by testing them out in classrooms. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to undertake more clinical experiences in schools and should be supported to reflecting on their classroom experiences. If constructivist approaches to learning work, this may be the fastest way to develop understanding of a new approach and strategies to education, which Curriculum Framework aims to promote.

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Appendix 1. Revised Rubrics

| | |
|---|------------|
| (1) Lesson objectives and Introduction | Grade mark |
| <p>2: The teacher communicated the objectives of the lesson at the beginning of the lesson either by writing on the blackboard or orally, together with its relation to previous lesson. Consequently, students understood objectives clearly.</p> <p>1: The teacher communicated the objectives of the lesson at the beginning of the lesson by writing on the blackboard or orally. Teacher told the lesson title only.</p> <p>0: The teacher didn't communicate the objectives of the lesson at the beginning of the lesson.</p> | |
| (2) Introduction of New Concepts and Terms | Grade mark |
| <p>2: The teacher explained the new concepts and terms in the lesson to the students and made sure that the students understood them.</p> <p>1: The teacher explained the new concepts and terms in the lesson to the students. But only some students understood them.</p> <p>0: The teacher used the new concepts and terms without explaining them to the students.</p> | |
| (3) Lesson Structure (Consider just presence or absence of lesson structure. Not consider the quality of its elements) | Grade mark |
| <p>2: Introduction, development and consolidation were clearly identified in the lesson.</p> <p>1: Either introduction or consolidation was not identified.</p> <p>0: No lesson structure was identified.</p> | |
| (4) Activities and Practice | Grade mark |
| <p>2: Each individual student was involved in the activities enthusiastically. This means all students participated in lesson eagerly and concentrated to the lesson.</p> <p>1: Some students were involved in the activities, but the rest of the class sat indifferent.</p> <p>0: The teacher talked/explained, but not much activities and practice by the students was observed.</p> | |
| (5) Assessment/Evaluation | Grade mark |
| <p>2: The teacher used various measures (cf. raising hands, blackboard writing, oral answering, checking homework, etc.) to evaluate the work and understanding of the students and she/he utilized the information in the subsequent teaching. Teacher assessed both during the lesson and at the end of lesson.</p> <p>1: The teacher evaluated the work and understanding of the students, but she/he didn't utilize the information in the subsequent teaching. Teacher assessed either during the lesson or at the end of lesson.</p> <p>0: The teacher didn't evaluate the understanding of the students in the lesson.</p> | |