

# Mediating global reforms locally: A study of the enabling conditions for promoting active learning in a Maldivian island school

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*This paper explores active learning reform in the small state of the Maldives. Acknowledging the implementation challenges of active learning approaches globally, the study explored the policy-practice intersection by examining the experiences of one island school and its approach to promoting active learning pedagogy. The school was selected for its proactive approach to adopting innovation. Within the overarching methodology of design-based research, a study of the context was undertaken to investigate the enabling conditions for reform. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, this paper considers factors within the school and island context that played an enabling role in the implementation of active learning pedagogy. Data were collected through interviews from key stakeholders within the school. The findings identified the following key features in developing a change-welcoming school: the role of school leadership in leading change; the importance of parent-school collaboration; the school's proactive approach to managing existing resources; and the critical role of leading teachers in providing classroom-based support. The findings were converted into design principles, an output of design-based research, that are intended as guidelines for others implementing similar reforms in related contexts.*

*Keywords: Small states; Maldives; education reform; active learning; design principles; school leadership*

## INTRODUCTION

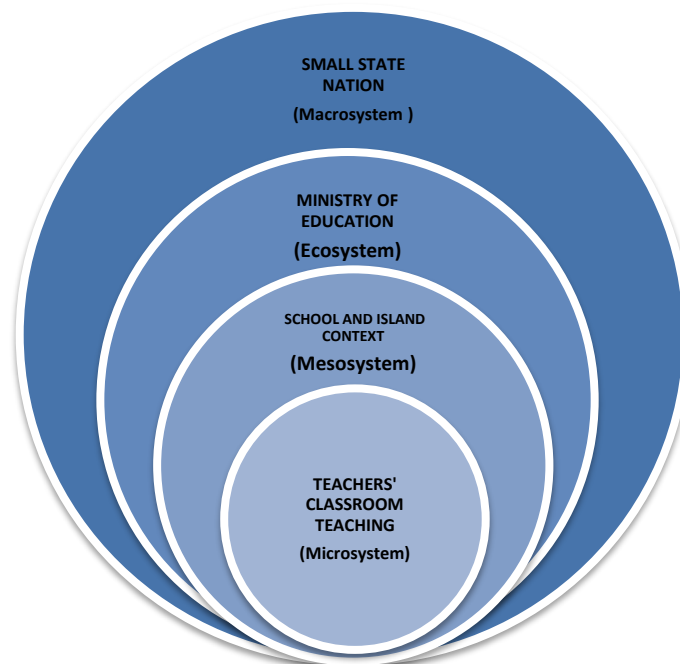
The distinguishing features of small states highlight the necessity for greater attention to contextual and cultural factors in educational reform initiatives (Crossley, 2010). One prevalent reform is learner-centred education (LCE), which has found widespread currency across many developing and middle-income countries where traditional teaching practices remain entrenched. Yet the promotion of LCE, also referred to as active learning, has often made little inroad into changing classroom practices (Schweisfurth, 2011) from traditional transmission approaches to teaching. Amongst the well-documented challenges is the need for greater attention to contextual factors (O'Sullivan, 2004; Schweisfurth, 2011). This need is brought into particularly sharp focus in small states, with their own distinctive educational ecology, yet have tended to be heavily influenced by increasingly powerful global paradigms of 'one-size-fits-all' educational policy (Crossley, 2010). Brock and Crossley (2013, p. 388) argue that it is the uniqueness of small states that draws attention to the limitations of a one size fits all approach and the need to 'appreciate the significance of multi-layered contextual

factors in educational development'. Consequently, small states provide a rich context for research on education reform by illuminating the tensions between global travelling reforms and local realities on the ground.

This paper examines the contextual influences on the enactment of active learning pedagogy in the Maldives, a small island state. It explores the policy-practice intersection by investigating the experiences of one island school in the small state of the Maldives. The paper begins by outlining some key features of the Maldives. It then provides an outline of design-based research (DBR) as the overarching methodology and reports the factors found to influence reform within the school. It concludes with a series of design principles, an output of DBR, that are intended as guidelines for others implementing similar reforms in related contexts.

### ACKNOWLEDGING CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework provides a way of conceptualising how teacher practice is influenced by multiple layers of context (Figure 1). This nested model acknowledges that factors operating outside the immediate classroom setting impact the use of active learning methods by teachers inside the classroom. Consequently, active learning as an innovation can be analysed as part of a complex whole and thus 'enhanced or limited by the social ecology of the interacting systems' (Jónsdóttir & Macdonald, 2013, p. 276).



**Figure 1: An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework representing levels of influence on classroom teaching**

These layers are conceptualised as: the mesosystem (the school and local island context); the ecosystem (the Ministry of Education, representing the policy environment); and the macrosystem (the broader Maldivian society). As such, recognition is given to the multiple factors that influence the implementation of innovations in school settings (Jónsdóttir &

Macdonald, 2013). In sum, ‘to implement active learning pedagogy, there need to be favourable contextual conditions’ (Casale, 2010, p. 27).

## **THE MALDIVES CONTEXT**

The 200 inhabited islands of the Maldives form part of an archipelago of 1,190 coral islands formed into 26 naturally occurring atolls. Most islands are small with an average area of 0.7km. The capital, Malé, an island of two square kilometres, has a population of approximately 120,000 people. These features mean the Maldives face particular vulnerabilities that are unique to the country. The most recent Human Development report of the Maldives (UNDP, 2014, p. 44) notes that:

[t]he geographic and spatial dispersion of the population poses major challenges to policy-makers in the delivery of high qualities services such as education, health and other infrastructure such as power, at economical costs.

Small states have particular contextual features (Crossley, 2010), such as remoteness, small populations and a narrow resource base, and, therefore, face distinctive priorities and dilemmas. The particular challenges of small states mean they tend to be more outward looking, seeking innovative approaches beyond their borders to help exploit the slender resources they do have (Bacchus, 2008). As such, small states are usually ‘takers’ rather than ‘makers’ of world policies (Bacchus, 2008). Moreover, the geographic dispersion of the Maldives poses challenges for those providing education across the country. The spread of islands makes equitable distribution of resources difficult and services are heavily concentrated in the capital.

Every island has at least one primary school, so no-one is denied access to schooling. Yet islands face a vicious cycle in terms of education outcomes. Maldivians have a strong connection to the island of their birth (UNDP, 2014), therefore trained teachers tend to return to their islands to teach. Thus, schools with students that achieve stronger academic outcomes usually have more qualified teachers. Ahmed (1994, p. 29) asserts ‘almost all atolls have “richer” and “poorer” types of schools created by this process’ creating a self-perpetuating cycle for islands. Across the country, there is a shortage of qualified teachers, resulting in a costly reliance on expatriate teachers, mostly from India, who are employed to cover the shortfall. This difficulty with human resources is a recognised challenge for small island states (UNDP, 2014).

### **Implementing active learning in the Maldives**

In a recent World Bank report (Aturupane & Shojo, 2012, p. 1), the successes and challenges of reforming education are summarised in the first paragraph:

The country achieved the first-generation objective of providing universal access to basic education through rapid expansion of enrolment . . . the second generation challenge is to provide education of adequate quality. Evidence, from a variety of sources, shows that education quality in the Maldives is weak, and needs urgent attention.

Several challenges in the system have been identified: low educational attainment in O/A-level examination results; teacher demographics with a shortage of trained teachers; the reliance on expatriate teachers to meet this shortfall and the associated expense; and disparity between Malé and island schools with schools in the capital having better human and

material resources. Given the geographic and demographic constraints of the Maldives, these are major challenges (Aturupane & Shojo, 2012).

The Child Friendly School (CFS) project was initiated in 2002 to address the needs of the most disadvantaged in the country. Following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, additional UNICEF funding resulted in a wider reach across the country. The CFS approach was perceived as one means of addressing issues of quality in education across the country, and it consequently became a major driver of pedagogical reform, with child-centred active learning being a prominent feature of the CFS approach in the Maldives. Like many other nations promoting such pedagogical reform, the Maldives has experienced challenges in its implementation. Schweisfurth (2013, p. 65) refers to four broad obstacles in her comprehensive book on the topic: 'the nature of the reform process; resources; teacher capacity; and national, institutional and professional cultures'.

The history of how CFS was introduced to the Maldives, has some bearing on how active learning was understood and the scope of the intended changes. The introduction of CFS into the Maldives was based on the Gonoshahajjo Sangshta (GSS) model from Bangladesh, which promoted the use of learning corners in lower primary classrooms (Grades 1-3). Extra resources were provided by UNICEF, including tiles to allow for floor work and additional teaching resources. The change to the daily lesson structure, along with the physical arrangement of learning corners in the room, came to represent the CFS model in Maldivian schools (Shareef, 2007). However, the learning corners were reported to work 'better in theory than in the current practice' (Shafeega et al., 2005, p. 2). An evaluation of the 22 schools pilot project reported:

Teachers are not using active learning techniques but rely heavily on textbook work pages which indicates that they are not sufficiently trained in the methodology. Whilst the elements of the model are in place, teachers are not yet equipped with the skills needed to make it a child centred, active learning environment. (Wheatcroft, 2004, p. 14)

Yet this model of CFS has brought some changes to the traditional structures in classrooms and greater flexibility. It has also brought increased opportunity for teachers' professional development through the establishment of Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) in each atoll, with support from UNICEF following the 2004 tsunami. These were intended as a professional development (PD) hub for each atoll to decentralise PD opportunities. While some schools are close to the TRC island, outlying islands may still face limited access and opportunities and, consequently, remain isolated.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate how teachers can enact active learning pedagogy in the Maldivian education system. DBR, as the overarching methodology of this study, acknowledges the critical role of context in enacting innovations. This is an interventionist methodology, which examines the conditions that influence how educational innovations work in real-life practice. In DBR the context is richly delineated (O'Toole & Beckett, 2009) and serves as an integral part of the research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). Whilst not reporting on the intervention in this paper, the characteristics of DBR provide a framework for acknowledging the various layers of influence impacting teachers' practice and the use of active learning in the Maldivian education system.

### *Mediating global reforms locally*

The study of the surrounding context was designed to provide details of the mesosystem context and elucidate conditions in the school regarding the introduction and use of active learning and the factors supporting its use. The study took place on a local fishing island (Figure 2), referred to as the Research School. It was selected as offering optimum conditions for implementing the intervention because of their proactive approach in implementing CFS. Therefore, the characteristics of this school are of interest in the context of explicating the factors that have influenced reform. It is an Atoll Education Centre, hence the education hub for the atoll. It offers two phases of primary education (Grades 1-4, also referred to as CFS grades) and Grades 5-7 (subject-based teachers) and secondary classes offering O and A-level education.



**Figure 2: Island shot taken from a seaplane**

An output of DBR is the development of ‘design principles’ (McKenney & Reeves, 2012), the theoretical output of the research. These are intended to inform the work of others interested in enacting innovations in relevant settings. The supporting contextual factors, identified within the Research School, were converted to design principles as an outcome of this study.

A range of participants, from the school and island context, were interviewed in order to understand the ‘context and surrounding systems’ (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 169). Purposive sampling was used, targeting ‘key informants who are particularly knowledgeable’ (Patton, 2002, p. 321) about CFS, the history of active learning on the island and teaching practice in the school (see Table 1). Ethics clearance, for this study, was granted by the Humanities and Applied Sciences Committee at The University of Melbourne.

Additional data, gathered from teachers during the intervention phase of the study, where it adds additional insights to the key contextual features, has also been used. This data is attributed to teachers as a group, as it does not form the main data source within the scope of this article.

**Table 1: School and Island participants**

Participants	Coding system used in text
Senior Management Team (SMT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Leading teachers (for CFS Grades 1-4, Primary Grades 5-7)</li> <li>• Teacher Resource Centre Coordinator</li> <li>• Professional Development Coordinator</li> <li>• Island Councillor (School Board member)</li> <li>• Current principal</li> <li>• Previous principal</li> <li>• Local Resort Manager</li> </ul>	SMT 1-8 <sup>1</sup>

## RESULTS

Following the 2004 tsunami and the extra funds made available from UNICEF to expand CFS nationally, the school saw “an opportunity to develop” (SMT2). This prompted the senior management team (SMT) to hold “a very big meeting with parents” (SMT4) which began a proactive consultative process with parents concerning implementing change within the school. Therefore, parents had a pivotal role in supporting the new program being introduced into the school. This is not always the case in Maldivian schools, which a visitor to the school attested:

In some of the schools they are not conducting any awareness program for the parents . . . the problem is, the school management. They don't want the parents to come into the school. The gates are closed for the parents . . . But here the school itself has given the opportunity and at the same time parents are ready. That's the reason why the school is having very good rapport with the community. (MoE Official)

Instead, this school and parents worked as a team, as one senior management person asserted, resulting in an inclusive process (SMT2).

Parents in Maldivian schools can exert a lot of influence in schools (Di Biase, 2010; Wheatcroft, 2005). As one SMT member remarked:

[T]he school, the parents, they force the teachers to use the textbook. Even when I was a teacher once I left one of the pages, I know how much parents complaining all day. But when we had a lot of meetings and explain the difference of using that and not using that, now they realize . . . yeah, the students can achieve their objectives. (SMT5)

The approach taken in this school to bringing about change with the CFS program has channelled parents' attention into positive involvement, rather than as a constraining influence. Parents are called upon whenever “any delegation comes to visit the school or the CFS program . . . to help with providing food and accommodation and sometimes to share their experience with visitors” (SMT2). “The school and parents are very proud of this program” (SMT2).

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<sup>1</sup> These codes have not been specifically allocated to individual participants to protect their anonymity, given the smallness of the island.

### **Planning for change**

The school planned strategically for the introduction of CFS. The SMT considered a number of factors impacting on their ability to carry out change, as indicated in the following comment:

The first thing that everybody must know [is] what it is—what we started . . . I think another important part is training teachers. If we don't give training I don't think they can do things in the classroom, that's another part. And also we have to see how the school budget—whether they can do certain things, so that is one area we thought. And more important part is the school management, I guess. Because if anybody in the management is not supportive in this maybe we can't do it. (SMT5)

The importance of developing a shared vision is a priority within the school with members of the SMT reporting the necessity of working as a team and providing a uniform message to teachers.

### **Leadership**

Collaboration and support within the SMT was a recurring theme. The school management took several actions that were perceived as enabling the successful introduction of CFS: they collaborated as a team at the senior management level (“whenever we are going to start new things we always discuss so we understand what is involved” (SMT2)); they collaborated with parents (“we worked as a team with parents” (SMT2)); and they were supportive in supplying resources where it was possible to do so (SMT2, SMT5). For example, the new AV projectors were obtained with the support of parents led by senior management in the school.

In particular, key personnel can be identified in this school who worked strategically to promote change. For example, one long-standing member of the management team (SMT5) was attributed to being the ‘mastermind’ behind the changes. A SMT member stated: “he is very attentive with that program and he always tries to discuss ideas with me also as well as ideas from the teachers. We work as a team” (SMT2).

### **Training for teachers**

The need for teacher training and opportunities for these island teachers to access new ideas was widely acknowledged as necessary conditions for both initiating and sustaining change. Further, as one SMT emphasized, the purpose of the training must be made explicit to teachers: “Training yeah, how to plan for this . . . So all the elements the teachers have to be trained and also they must know why they are doing that and what the purpose is”. He added that in the early stages of implementation “we brought an expert from Malé also and we gave the training for all the teachers, so all the teachers are aware of this [CFS] when we started” (SMT5). Consequently, teachers received training in the elements of the initial CFS model when it was first introduced to the Maldives. Teacher training and practical support was identified as a necessary precondition. Hosting visitors to the island also provided teachers with an opportunity to share their knowledge and discuss experiences and successes, which contributed to their professional development.

### **Adapting the model of CFS**

In the process of preparing for implementation, the SMT took the approach that the CFS model needed to be changed to fit in with the school's circumstances (SMT1). The school determined that the GSS model was inadequate “because [of] the classroom population, lack of resources and the teachers' workload” (SMT5). Consequently, the school developed a

“different CFS methodology” (SMT 2) and their own approach to the innovation. The school has aspired, over the years, to become a model CFS school and has hosted Maldivian and international educators who come to witness the progress they have made with adapting the CFS approach to their school.

### Physical changes

Parents were involved in bringing about changes to the physical appearance of the classrooms by building resources and furniture (Figure 2). These visible changes were signs of a different approach to teaching in the school community (SMT3). Parents could see that established routines were being altered and appeared open to the introduction and application of new methods. The physical changes, it would seem, were necessary at the start of the change process as an indication that the status quo was shifting. One member of the SMT, working with non-CFS teachers noted, “The main thing I found is that the classroom set-up is the main problem” (SMT4). He believed that maintaining the traditional classroom set-up sustains a certain mindset with parents which presents difficulties when promoting pedagogical change.



**Figure 2: Classroom resources for CFS classrooms**

Considerable pride is taken in the CFS classroom displays. Issues have arisen with double session school days where primary and secondary classrooms are shared as some older students do not respect the classroom displays of younger students (SMT 4). CFS classes share the same classrooms so do not face these constraints. Great hope is placed in a single session school day across the school community.

We have planned to change the classroom displays even though the floor is not tiled . . . we can change the classroom set-up and the grouping [of desk] and more display boards. Then I think there will a change . . . if we get a single classroom for us. (SMT4)

### Support and mentoring from leading teachers

Teachers articulated their need for classroom-based support. One teacher stated, “[we can] learn from demonstration by leading teachers or some others”. Teachers referred to the key role of leading teachers, also referred to as supervisors, in mentoring teachers and as a source of ideas.

I think leading teacher must support us . . . he is always supporting us to use different types of teaching methods . . . he also sometimes giving ideas so we will do.



Management side encourage a lot doing this—in each and every meeting—likes to give ideas.

One leading teacher (SMT4) outlined his responsibilities as: having a monitoring role; giving feedback; encouraging teachers; and providing new ideas. Getting such feedback was acknowledged by the teachers as an important practice in the school. The teachers acknowledged the role of school management in supporting them in implementing the new approach indicated by the following statement by a teacher: “school management enabled us to do it and supervisor” This contrasts with other schools where leading teachers may not have adequate skills or the knowledge base to provide ongoing support to teachers (Shareef, 2007; Wheatcroft, 2004), although their key role in promoting change is recognized (Shareef, 2008).

## **DISCUSSION: ESTABLISHING A CHANGE-WELCOMING SCHOOL CULTURE**

Classroom practice does not function in isolation from the context in which it is situated. The school at the centre of this study has features which provide a particular set of circumstances for teaching within the Maldivian education system. Against a broader context of the problematic implementation of CFS in the country, it is an example of a school that Schweisfurth (2013, p. 127) refers to as a ‘resilient school’, which sets itself apart from national trends. The Research School was designated as providing optimal conditions for operationalising the intervention and, for this reason, it posed particular interest in investigating its contextual features. This is consistent with Mtika and Gates (2010, p. 403) who stress the need to design and engineer pedagogical strategies to fit local contexts and the importance of a school culture and classroom structures that support LCE. Therefore, by investigating its particular circumstances and institutional culture, it provides insights into how it is possible to promote reform within the Maldives education system and the policy context that exists.

### **Leading change: The role of school leadership**

The leadership in the school is a critical aspect for not only in leading change but also for creating a ‘change-welcoming’ school culture, a term used by Megahed, Ginsburg, Abdellah and Zohry (2012) when identifying the factors that supported active learning reform in Egypt. Interestingly, Hallinger’s (2010, p. 414) notion of the ‘supreme law strategy’ and a top down implementation approach, which has the potential to result in superficial compliance, contrasts with how the leadership team in this school managed the change process. The pivotal role of leadership was seen in not only endorsing change but also evidenced in the planned and strategic approach of the CFS program and how this was managed across the school community. Embracing practices that are culturally sensitive also requires adopting an implementation method that works with and not against the cultural context. The leadership in this school, as a driving force, took an inclusiveness approach across the different stakeholder groups that facilitated buy-in of CFS. According to Schweisfurth:

If LCE implementation is taken seriously, shared clarity among teachers about its purpose and classroom workings needs to be fundamental to the process, and it needs to happen in a wider education context of purposeful order. (2013, p. 137)

The approach by the SMT created a purposeful context for change. From the initial stages, the Research School began a process of adopting and adapting the CFS innovation into the school at the lower grades. In recognising that the initial GSS model of CFS would not

adequately fit with their circumstances, the school revealed a rationale for matching the desired change to their context. The school's approach to implementing CFS highlights the power of influences within the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) when facilitating change.

### **Parent-school collaboration**

The idea of a culturally sensitive approach to reform was illustrated by Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) with reference to Thailand. The notion of 'sanook', meaning fun, was explained as having an important role in sustaining interest in change. Comparing such a culturally sensitive approach to the Maldives, the very 'islandness' of the country and the strong island identity that Maldivians hold, would seemingly offer a motivating force for change, although, as noted, this is not always practised in Maldivian schools. Yet the strong identification that Maldivians hold for their islands could potentially be harnessed to support reform:

With independent island communities, and a strong interest in education, the vested interest of the stakeholders could be a powerful force for change through community dialogue. Each island has a unique character and this would be part of the community process in developing a plan or vision suitable for their island school and an indigenous adaption of key concepts. (Di Biase, 2009, p. 290)

Working with, not around the island community, as demonstrated in the Research School is an important feature where community participation is not only welcome but sought after. Facilitating buy-in by stakeholders is an important condition for reform (Brock & Crossley, 2013). Likewise, the need for creating dialogue among stakeholders has been well-documented as an enabling condition (for example Dembélé & Miaro-II, 2003).

### **School management and organisation of resources**

The organisational conditions for learning were raised by teachers as impacting on their ability to enact active learning: school infrastructure, teaching resources, and time, one of the obstacles identified earlier by Schweisfurth (2013). Likewise, Mtika and Gates (2010, p. 402) refer to the need for 'supportive settings in classrooms', highlighting the shortage of space and resources as challenges that teachers face. Within the school, several issues around scheduling influenced teachers' use of the active learning intervention, notably lesson timing, the double session day, and teacher absences. How the school responded reveals aspects of the school which could be changed through the will and vision of the management, while other features were beyond the scope of the school to control.

For example, teachers cited lesson length as a barrier to active learning. In a responsive approach the SMT extended lesson times from 35 to 45 minutes per lesson. Rather than accepting the status quo, this troubleshooting approach by the school responded to teachers' difficulties. Seeking to solve issues where possible is a particular characteristic of this school. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) represents the intersection of the various layers of influence and, as Alexander (2001) contends in his study of culture and pedagogy, the levels of influence are interconnected. Yet, such intersections can promote a blame game, where teachers and government blame each other and, in the process, undermine their own agency. Such a scenario is also raised by Schweisfurth (2011, p. 430) where 'teachers blame policy-makers and administrators for unsuitable policy and lack of support, and policy-makers blame teachers for not implementing it'. Taking charge of the bell times is a proactive move by the school. I have visited many other schools in the country, where the

limits of 35 minute lessons were raised, but I did not witness other schools taking such a proactive approach.

The double school session was reported as a further challenge, particularly in the sharing of classrooms and the limited furniture in the non-CFS classrooms, which meant materials could not be stored. Mtika and Gates (2010) report a shortage of space and resources as a constraint to LCE. Such challenges with the infrastructure were something the school could not easily solve, but the inclusive approach with parents in the introduction of CFS helped to provide additional classroom resources. This challenge also serves to distinguish between the different levels of constraints in that some can be more easily solved from within the school, while others are more problematic. Being able to differentiate these constraints is a crucial feature of the Research School, and a distinctive element of being a ‘resilient school’.

### **Leading teachers and classroom-based support**

Leading teachers play a pivotal role in teachers’ daily work. Their endorsement and assistance are critical in supporting teachers to embrace new practices in contrast to their administrative and gatekeeper role in Maldivian schools (Shareef, 2008). Supporting the focus on the provision of support, Megahed et al. (2012) report on reform in Egypt where supervisors moved from being inspectors to a source of guidance and support to promote active learning pedagogy. In the Research School, the leading teachers clearly embraced and supported the innovation. However, even with their endorsement, the need for explicit classroom focused support was articulated by teachers. Yet, for leading teachers to provide this level of classroom-based support, their role needs to shift from an administrative and evaluative focus to one centred around mentoring (Shareef, 2008) consistent with the study in Egypt (Megahed et al., 2012). This approach begins to deal with the obstacle of supporting teachers in developing capacity to embrace LCE, another of the obstacles identified by Schweisfurth (2013).

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN SUPPORTING CHANGE AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL**

The notion of a ‘pedagogical nexus’, a term proposed by Hufton and Elliot (2000) in reference to the Russian education context, is used by Schweisfurth (2013, p. 140) to describe a set of linked, interactive and mutually reinforcing influences on students’ learning. Each context, she contends, has its own unique array of ‘ingredients’ with different levels of coherence. The Research School, I argue, comes closer to achieving coherency across the nested layers of influence of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model, particularly in the CFS grades. Situated within the Maldivian education system, this school embraced innovation in a way that has afforded it greater coherency across these ‘ingredients’ and provided an example of a proactive approach to the reform process. Drawing on Schweisfurth’s notion of the ‘resilient school’, which has gone against the dominant narrative of failed implementation, is the goal to better understand how LCE practices have been mediated to fit the local context. The Research School is framed as one such school. The success of the introduction of CFS to Grades 1-3, and the later expansion to Grade 4, emphasised the school’s proactive approach, both in its management of the process and the model they developed for their CFS classes. The findings from this study have drawn attention to the factors that led to this school’s journey toward a more coherent pedagogical nexus.

Three overarching design principles are now presented in Box 1. These are focused on Bronfenbrenner’s level of mesosystem and elucidate the features of the Research School that

make it a ‘resilient school’. These design principles, emerging from this study, can be assessed for their suitability to other applicable contexts.

**BOX 1: Design principles: Overarching principles in supporting change at the school level: *Developing a ‘change-welcoming’ school***

**Leading change: the role of school leadership**

*School leadership needs to create a vision for change and to support and lead change within the school community.*

The school leadership adopted a planned and strategic approach to implementing CFS. Adapting innovation to the needs of the school has been a feature of change in the school, orchestrated through an inclusive process. This responsive approach promotes dialogue in and between stakeholders and allows the innovation to be adapted and adjusted so that it is in harmony with the local community and fits with local circumstances. Therefore, the school leadership holds a critical role in leading, endorsing and supporting change within the school.

**Parent-school collaboration**

*Harness the support of Maldivian island communities in educational reform through an inclusive process that mobilises community participation.*

Mobilising school community support for reform is an important enabling condition in Maldivian schools. With schools forming an integral part of island life, parent support can be harnessed through an inclusive process of communication and collaboration, creating a vision for change relevant to the island community. The parents, as seen in this school, provide concrete support in the form of helping develop physical resources for the school and hosting visitors to the school.

**School management and organisation of resources**

*Organisational features can influence teachers’ enactment of active learning. A responsive approach by the school leadership in managing available resources is needed to address teacher and concerns.*

Whilst some organisational issues are beyond the scope of the school to manage, the school leadership has been responsive to teachers’ needs, accommodating requests and making adjustments where it is possible to do so.

**Leading teachers and classroom-based support**

*Classroom-based support, within the context of teachers’ work, is needed to develop teachers’ capacity.*

Leadership endorsement and support are needed to encourage professional experimentation and sustain the impetus for innovation. Leading teachers need to provide mentoring and classroom-based support to support teachers in enacting new pedagogical approaches.

**CONCLUSION**

The smallness of Maldivian islands has posed challenges for development across the country. Yet smallness also has some advantages (see Crossley & Sprague, 2012) and in this study it rendered more visible the school and island activities that influenced the uptake of active learning pedagogy in the Maldivian context. Brock and Crossley (2013, p. 399) assert that ‘the processes of mediation’ seen in some small states reveals a ‘reworked global agenda to better meet local needs’. In this vein, the Research School illustrates a process of mediation in seeking to reconcile global agendas with local needs. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) conceptualisation of context is helpful in understanding how factors outside the classroom influence what happens inside the classroom. The example of the Research School illustrates

how small states, or in this case a small island, can play a role in elucidating answers to the implementation challenges of active learning through the design principles that can inform the work of others interested in enacting similar innovations in other relevant settings.

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