



Evaluation of impact of Iqra' Association's 'Inclusive and Enabling Learning Environment for Displaced Syrians and Underprivileged Lebanese Students' project on target teachers' views and practices

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of the training and ongoing support provided by Iqra' Association as part of the 'Inclusive and Enabling Learning Environment for Displaced Syrians and Underprivileged Lebanese Students' project on target teachers' views and practices. This evaluation focuses on whether target teachers had developed active learning approaches in their classrooms which is one of the project outcomes to which Iqra' Association is committed.

The main body of the research consists of data obtained through observations, questionnaires, focus-group interviews, informal conversations, and workshop activities designed to elicit responses regarding the content and process of training and implementation. This evaluation took place during the training and implementation phase of the project particularly between April 1, 2013 and August 31, 2013.

The core research questions of this study focus on whether the training effectively impacted the underlying views and practices of the participant teachers and enabled them to apply active learning approaches in their classrooms. In effect, the following main research question was addressed by this study: were the training and ongoing support provided by Iqra' Association effective in improving the capacity of teachers in the target schools to teach literacy through interactive methods while providing psychosocial support in a welcoming, safe, enabling and inclusive school and classroom environment?

The observational criteria, questionnaires, activities and focus-group questions were designed to explore the various views of the participant teachers about teaching and learning as they engaged with the content material of the workshops as well as the implementation of these methods and activities in their classrooms. The findings suggest that by the end of the project, the teachers' views and practices were developed to be more consonant with active teaching and learning approaches to literacy.

Based on the data obtained, this study recommends that in addition to the training and support program provided by Iqra', more opportunities for real-life observations and hands-on experiences be provided for teachers to better develop their practices.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	p. 2
INTRODUCTION	p. 4
PURPOSE OF STUDY	p. 5
EVALUATION DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS .	p. 5
FINDINGS	p. 7
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	p. 17
APPENDIX	p. 19

INTRODUCTION

This evaluation comes as part of a project undertaken by Iqra' Association to support and rehabilitate the displaced Syrian children as well as at-risk Lebanese students from host communities into the public school system by providing them with the necessary language support as well as an enabling and inclusive learning environment. The aim was to provide the target students in elementary public schools in the Bekaa, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and South Lebanon with remedial afterschool language classes in addition to in-school activities that foster building an inclusive learning environment. In effect, Iqra' Association undertook the training of teachers at these target schools to implement after-school remedial classes during the academic school year as well as literacy summer-camps in several host schools around Lebanon during the summer.

Using the model of Columbia University's Readers' and Writers' workshop, the program aimed at building the capacity of teachers at the host schools to make thoughtful, focused and deliberate choices every day about the best way to help each child become a better reader and writer. The program's goal was to introduce both teachers and students to new differentiated learning environments. The Balanced Literacy approach adopts a workshop approach to teaching reading and writing and therefore regards students as reading, writing and thinking apprentices while recognizing that teaching and learning are active social processes. In effect, this approach attempts to provide schools with an integrated and comprehensive standards-based literacy program for elementary students. This is achieved through developing a learning environment and providing the support and structure that enable students to acquire the knowledge, as well as develop the skills, habits and dispositions needed to meet or exceed standards in reading, writing, listening and speaking. This approach resonates closely with one of the main tenets of the current official curriculum ratified by the Ministry in 1997 that stresses the adoption of pedagogies that foster differentiated learning in the classrooms.

To achieve this, Iqra' Association undertook the recruitment, training, and placement of a team of coaches/coordinators whose responsibilities were to provide training and support for the teachers at the host schools as well as overlook the full implementation of the program at these schools. The team of coordinators along with the program director and project manager

organized training workshops for the teachers as well as ongoing coaching and support during the remedial intervention and summer camps.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study focuses on the impact of such an intervention on the views and practices of the target teachers. This was achieved by exploring how effectively the teachers' views and practices were developed by the program to resonate with differentiated and active learning approaches espoused by the program's main objectives. The main purpose of this evaluation is therefore twofold:

- 1- to provide Iqra' Association with feedback and recommendations regarding their teacher training program;
- 2- provide partners and other stakeholders in this particular project with an evaluation of the impact of this intervention on the views and practices of the target teachers.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data for this evaluation was collected through observational methods, questionnaires, focused activities and focus-group interviews. The evaluator relied on a participant-observational approach for collecting data. Observations were guided by the criteria of the Teacher Observation Form developed by Iqra' Association. A copy of this form can be found in the appendix of this document. Furthermore, observations were also partially guided by questionnaires that were completed by a number of participants during field visits and follow-up workshops. A copy of this questionnaire is also found in the appendix.

Furthermore, five focus group interviews were conducted at five public schools: al-Marj School in the Bekaa; Laylaki School in Beirut, Wata al-Msaytbi School in Beirut, Sarba School in Jounyeh, and Jarrahiya School in the Bekaa. A total of 46 teachers participated in the focus group interviews (45 females and 1 male). The participants were recruited by Iqra' Association coordinators who were overlooking the implementation of the program in the respective schools. The participant teachers taught English, Arabic and French 'subjects' in the Remedial program. Some of them however were other subject teachers in mainstream classrooms. Some had

undergone the training with Iqra' Association a year earlier while others were new to the training. All the focus-group interviews took place at the schools where teachers were implementing the program. The principals or supervisors of the individual schools were present intermittently in most focus group interviews. Furthermore, the coordinators delegated by Iqra' Association to overlook the implementation of the program were present and at times participated in the focus groups. All the participants provided information through guided group discussion. A copy of the focus-group questions bank is included in the appendix.

The discussion in each focus group was designed to gather information from the teachers regarding to the following outcomes:

1. Evaluate the teachers' understanding of the main principles and the individual components of the literacy approaches adopted by the program.
2. Understand how teachers perceive the program's (in this case the Reading and Writing Workshops) effectiveness in meeting their needs for the Remedial Literacy Program.
3. Understand what motivates teachers in applying the Reading and Writing Workshops in their mainstream classrooms as well as in the remedial classrooms.
4. Understand teachers' experience in implementing the program and what has helped or hindered their success.

All the instruments and methods used to gather data for this evaluation were designed to explore the following main themes and issues:

- a- Teachers' emerging views of children's learning and literacy and the teachers' roles in this process.
- b- Teachers' developing practices in relation to active learning principles.

In effect, the data obtained through the different methods and instruments mentioned above were organized according to the following guiding questions:

- a. Was the program effective in impacting the views of the participant teachers regarding teaching, learning and literacy in general?

- b. Did the program effectively support teachers to develop their practices to become more consistent with active and differentiated learning approaches?

Following is a discussion of the main findings of this evaluation.

FINDINGS

The following findings are based on (1) classroom observations as well as coordinator reports, testimonies, and focus-groups conducted during the first half of the implementation phase of the project and (2) focus-group interviews conducted at five representative partner schools (a total of 46 teachers) during the second half of the implementation process. These interviews were conducted to gain insight into the teachers' views and practices in response to the various aspects of the program. The following main research question was explored by the focus-group sub-study:

- Were the training and ongoing support provided by Iqra' Association effective in improving the capacity of teachers in the target schools to teach literacy through *interactive* methods and provide *psychosocial support* in a *welcoming, safe, enabling and inclusive* school and classroom environment?

Following are summaries of the main findings of the focus-group interviews supported by representative quotes from participant teachers:

A- Teachers recognize children's individual differences and have shifted their (teachers') views towards differentiated learning approaches:

Representative examples from interviews with teachers:

Teachers from Laylaki School:

IM: "[This approach] gives you more freedom and time to focus on individual differences amongst students. It also gives students more opportunities to learn from older or more advanced students especially when working as part of the group."

MB: “The fact that students are writing about things from their own lives is very important. One girl cried when she wrote her story! She wanted to talk about her concerns and then she felt much better! When I was a student, they used to constrain us to specific topics and that’s it. Conventional topics such as write about nature, write about your mother, traditional themes. Bottom line, children are doing things they like to do, and this facilitates the teaching of any concept.”

Teachers from Wata al-Msaytbi School:

SM: “I feel that students are interacting more in the workshops than in regular classrooms because they get a chance to link what they learn here with their everyday lives.”

FTN: “Instead of giving the child a fish I am giving him a fishing rod. The problem with regular classrooms is that when you are teaching a certain skill, you don’t have enough time to make sure students have properly developed it. But with this approach, you can follow up on individual progress.”

NS: “I teach Arabic. A very important component of this approach is the individual writing exercise. In it, I feel that the student can actualize/express himself. I feel that this component really represents the student and his actual background. So I feel that the students get totally immersed in this exercise which is a great thing.”

Teachers from Jarrahiya School:

TCH6: “And I felt that with the varying levels of the students, collaborative work is so important. I now pair weak and good students together to help each other.”

Teachers from Sarba School:

MCH: “I like the fact that this approach focuses on individual practice and this helps students progress quickly.”

EL: “After we did assessment the first four days, I identified the individual levels and differences and so I divided them into groups. So for example group B would sit with 2 groups A and have them learn from one another. And I used to give them incentives for each group to work.”

Teachers from Al-Marj School:

KHN: “[...] with this program, it is as if you are studying the psychology of every student and you are working on every child’s psychology indirectly ...”

ROL: “What really changed my mind about this program is not a particular idea but the approach. The way we approached students in the traditional sense did not foster creativity. When I adopted this approach, I discovered in them talents and things, for example I have a student who cannot write a word but has beautiful drawings! This means they have great potential that could be channeled in many ways. So you see we did not think this way before! My previous approach is what blurred my vision; my vision in the past was that these are his limits, but now ... you know it was as if there was snow and it melted and now I see things more clearly.”

LMN: “I always give this example. It is as if I have a jacket my size and I come to class wanting to dress all the children with it instead of bringing the right-size jacket to every student. This is the main difference. So the approach we are adopting now involves tailoring to every child the right-size jacket.”

ROL: “The other important thing is assessment which we really did not know. For example, in my son’s school which is a very good private school here in the Bekaa. They were not properly assessing my son for a certain weakness and I approached the administration and they were astonished I knew about such assessment methods. I mean my son was making the same mistake in the first, second and third semesters. I said this should have been dealt with through proper assessment and they asked me if I could provide them with the proper tools! It felt good that I knew these new things!”

LMN: “In my regular classroom although I do not teach languages but mathematics, I have incorporated many techniques that I have learned from this approach. For example, I dedicate at least 5 minutes to the morning conference. When I instruct them to do something, I ask every couple to tell each other what I had just asked them to do [active engagement] ... even when a student actually understands how to do something, he still has the curiosity to ask his friend to make sure he understood what is required ... and every day I get close to a couple to see whether they understand the strategies I am teaching them and I believe this is very successful and students understand what is required of them ... This way I make sure they understood what is required of them before engaging in a certain activity ... I really believe that this program can be applied in mainstream classrooms.”

Summary of finding: the above sample accounts indicate a shift in teachers’ perceptions and practices regarding the importance of differentiated learning and active teaching approaches and the importance of activities and ongoing assessment in this process. The above accounts demonstrate that teachers have developed the mindset for skills and strategies as the main learning focus of the workshops and recognize individual differences in students and are consequently responding to them.

B- Teachers recognize the importance of creating a safe, familiar, organized and enabling environment that fosters learning and collaboration:

Representative examples from interviews with teachers:

Teachers from Laylaki School:

MB: “[This approach] has to do a lot with the feeling of safety for both children and teachers ... The fact that the general motto of this approach is ‘mistakes are ok’ puts both students and teachers at ease.”

“Also on a behavioral level, many students whose teachers complained were really aggressive in [mainstream] classes really calmed down throughout this program.”

ID: “What I loved most about this approach is that the teacher is extremely close to the child. This closeness creates a very safe feeling. And the fact that whatever happens, the child will not be punished gives him the confidence to give and to innovate. You give him ideas but then notice that he is learning in his own way; and sometimes you discover you are learning from him too!”

Teachers from Jarrahiya School:

TCH3: “Children are so happy to come to the program whereas in mainstream classrooms, they are usually reluctant to come to school.”

TCH4: “And students feel safe here unlike in regular classrooms where they fear their teachers. With this approach, the child is giving and the teacher is agreeable.”

Teachers from Sarba School:

MCH: “The morning meeting is very important for me. I think it is very effective.

It helps students integrate well and feel close to their teachers and peers and be able to adapt to their environment. It also served classroom management and behavioral learning. Class rules were agreed on and other things that facilitated learning ... Now I tell my students that the relationship between us should be based on a kind of friendship. They feel safer and freer here.”

Teachers from Al-Marj School:

XYZ: “But I really feel that this approach is much more effective than the mainstream approach because I think that students feel comfortable and safe and this gives them the incentive to give more.”

ROL: “[...] furthermore, the morning meeting, I felt, has become fundamental! It gives kids a sense of safety; they feel close to one another, if someone has a certain worry or concern they can voice it.”

KHN: “In a regular classroom, a student with difficulties retreats back into his seat and avoids being engaged or in the forefront. Usually they are scared, shy and remain distant. Notice how weak students usually sit in the back of a classroom; they avoid being in the forefront. With this approach, it is different! For example I had a student at the beginning of the remedial program who was scared and shy but because our approach is different and we get them all engaged, he started to interact and now loves to participate and accept making mistakes! As if thinking ‘I will let my classmate correct my mistakes’. However, in regular classrooms, students would not normally allow their classmates to correct their mistakes. But in this program, it’s become automatic; it has become an intrinsic need or desire where a student would actually seek his classmate and ask for help or feedback. Students are not ashamed of not knowing. But in the past [i.e. in regular classrooms] student normally do not accept help from others and are ashamed of not knowing but in this program, it is not the case.”

NDY2: “Another important factor to have clear class rules. In the remedial program, the approach and behavior of the teachers is consistent. Students feel that all the teachers are treating them the same and there is a positive spirit amongst the teachers. But in regular classrooms, that’s not usually the case.”

The above insights were confirmed by observations reported by the coordinators of these schools. Below are a few representative comments:

Many students in Grade 3 who were shy when it comes to participating took the lead today due to the “I shy” topic that was discussed in circle time.

Today, the children during the circle time applied the rules, communicated in the provided time, shared their thoughts, and gave their opinions without fear; example: how they spent their weekends, what do they like to do, etc ...

When passing in two of the classes, the principal commented: “I am very much impressed by the class environment; our children are much disciplined and more at ease...”

Summary of finding: the above accounts demonstrate that the training has helped teachers understand the importance of creating safe, organized and enabling environments and recognize the positive impact of this on students’ as well as teachers’ experience in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers’ recognition of the importance of building a collaborative spirit amongst

students that fosters learning is evident in their accounts. The sample accounts above also reveal a shift in perception regarding struggling students and what motivates students to do well in general.

C- Teachers' shift in perceptions of reading and writing in particular, and teaching and learning in general:

Representative examples from interviews with teachers:

Teachers from Al-Marj School:

NDY2: "I had a Syrian student who could not read a single letter [in English]. During the read-aloud, it was her first day in the program, she wanted to read but she said 'Miss I don't know how to read, what can I read?' I said 'Yes you know how to read!' She looked astonished at me as if saying 'no I can't read!' And I said 'Look at this story, look at the cover, what do you see?' She said 'A boy going to school'. I said 'You have just read what is written!' I read to her what was written in the story: 'I am going to school'. She said 'Is this really what is written in the story?' and I said yes. We flipped the page and looked at the pictures and ... she was flipping through stories trying to read them through the pictures and asking me questions when things were hard to understand."

YZ: "There is a major difference in perspective here. What we are [traditionally] trained on is how to deliver a certain curriculum to students in one way or another. However, in this program, it is important to teach a child a certain skill, and that's the difference. For example teaching a certain skill can be done with a book, a story, or a newspaper. You are teaching him a skill of how to deal with this thing [book, text, etc] ... you are teaching a child a skill; how to engage with a book or with the act of reading, or the act of writing, for life. We do not do these in our schools. It is very rare to find a teacher who does this; the teacher receives a curriculum and a number of students and a room composed of four walls, and he is responsible for this ..."

YZ: "With this approach for example, we are teaching him how to deal with a story ... and all those who were newly exposed to this program including myself were very skeptical of it. I thought 'What, I have been teaching for 11 years and I am supposed to teach him how to open a book?' And I noticed that instead of me going down towards their level or age I was expecting them to be at mine. But with this program, we are going down to their level and abilities ... but in a main classroom, we just ask them to open their books to a certain page number or ... and we do not check if the student is on the right page. But in this program, you are teaching the students this and you are checking to make sure they are all learning this."

Teachers from Laylaki School:

MB: “Most of our students have not been taught strategies for thinking. These strategies can be taught in English lessons, math lessons, art lessons, anywhere really.”

ID: “Teachers are guides and helpers. They must complement each other. I learn so much from students really. Sometimes, a five-year-old might inspire you with an idea you can apply in another lesson or class.”

MB: “I do not like the metaphor that a child is like a blank page. He is not. He has a background from his home environment, from neighbors, relatives. This knowledge must not be considered null. He is not a blank page. Others say a child is like a sponge, meaning that he sucks up everything you give him. But that’s not accurate either; a child can give also, and not just take.”

ID: “A good reader should be able to read properly, understanding what he is reading and know that there is an aim to what he is reading; to read for comprehension and to think about what he is reading. A good reader uses strategies like using illustrations, etc to read, through predictions, etc. Students now look at other things the same way that they perceive the stories they read. For example, they now expect a movie to have a story, a plot, a sequence of events, etc so this engages them more with things from their environment.”

Teachers from Sabra School:

SUP: “It is a great approach because it avoids inculcation.”

SUP: I felt that the mini-lesson was a great idea because this allowed students to learn something new every day. The students learn something through the mini-lesson and then have the chance to immediately apply it. I thought this was a very good thing.

EL: “I feel that this program is accelerated and what usually takes months in regular classrooms to achieve, we are doing in a couple of weeks through the workshops (ALP); this is regarding the mini-lesson because it actually teaches them skills (strategies).”

Teachers from Jarrahiya School:

TCH4: “One very important thing is modeling for teachers. In a regular classroom, it is as if the student is a receiver/listener and the teacher is a deliverer/inculcator. In the workshops, we are modeling to children and this makes a huge difference. And with this, we place the main role of learning in the hands of students. With this approach, the student is the center of the classroom.”

TCH5: “[...] in the workshops, I feel that what we do is give students the skills for him to unleash his abilities, unlike regular classroom where we are supposed to tell him what to learn.”

TCH5: “I now tell my students that they are writers! They are writers!”

TCH1: “The good thing about the workshops is that they introduce strategies in a gradual way. And the stories we have access to are leveled whereas in a regular classroom, you have the book and you have to stick to it. In the workshops, I have strategies and materials and I have the choice to use the materials for the intended strategies. The flash cards we use, the posters, all these are enabling for the children.”

TCH2: “The books and stories we now have are more relevant to the child’s environment and background. In effect, he is interacting better with the read-alouds and other activities. All these have helped him become a better reader. Now he resorts to strategies such as looking at pictures, etc to read better.”

Several observations by coordinators confirmed this as the following anecdotal accounts reveal:

A grade 4 teacher; Miss S from Class Red, had a mini-lesson today about hygiene. The lovely thing about it was that she actually brought soap, a towel, wipes, water, and much other stuff from the kid’s surroundings so learners would practice being hygienic. The thing that I liked is that she wrote down a story about being hygienic to read aloud. Moreover, she had a funny music break related to the mini-lesson. And finally the students who actually can’t write letters wrote sentences about hygiene.

During the circle time, teachers sometimes start with an ice breaker by telling things about themselves and then ask the students to do so at their turn. For example teacher says:” I like reading during the weekend, what do you like to do during the weekend?” In the first week, most of the children gave the same answer as the teachers for all the questions, whereas this week amazingly most of them started to give a different answer that is a subjective one.

Summary of finding: the above sample accounts demonstrate a shift in teachers’ perceptions of reading and writing to become more aligned with the Balanced Literacy approach; i.e. the emphasis on teaching strategies and skills for reading in order to help students develop into independent learners, as well as learners “for life.” A shift in views of teaching and learning is also evident where children are seen more as active learners with background knowledge that must be recognized and activated in the learning process. Furthermore, the view that the teacher must act as a model is evident.

D- Teachers developing a sense of ownership and autonomy in their practice:

Representative examples from interviews with teachers:

Teachers from Al-Marj School:

NDY2: “I feel that a teacher applying this approach is more committed because I feel that the students ‘belong’ to her; she feels that the children are wholly her responsibility.”

ROL: “In a regular classroom, the teacher feels she has ownership over the good students only! But only the good students because you regard the weak students as reflecting badly on your own performance as a teacher and you put them all in one block on their own ... With this approach, I feel that all the students are *my* students, the good ones and those who are struggling [emphasis added].”

HYM1: “I think the main difference between the mainstream academic lesson and the workshops is that with mainstream lessons, the subject is imposed on teachers while in the workshops, and this is from what I hear the teachers discuss, the method is prioritized over the subject and this, I feel, gives teachers more freedom and therefore feel happier to give more. The subject that the teacher can choose may emerge from the situation in which she finds herself while in a regular academic lesson, a teacher has to abide by what is laid out in front of her. In a responsive classroom, the teacher is much more enthusiastic and energetic about her work because she feels that she has chosen the subject.”

Teachers from Jarrahiya School:

TCH2: “I have adopted these techniques in my regular classrooms. I have looked at American classrooms on the internet, and many of these things we have learned are applied in mainstream classrooms. Why doesn’t anyone here apply them?”

Teachers from Laylaki School:

ID: “I tried to apply what I have learned in this workshop and program in my mainstream classrooms; the activities, the drawing and coloring, the materials, the games, the riddles. This really made a difference with students in my mainstream classroom.”

MB: “I took many ideas from this program and applied them in my mainstream classrooms. For example, I consider the morning meeting the key activity of the rest of the day. I, as a teacher, know that if this activity does not properly proceed, the rest of my day will be out of tune. Also, I used to restrict-the read alouds to the

assigned lesson from the curriculum. Now, I integrate some of the stories provided by Iqra' into my read aloud activities.

ID: "Students previously used to not listen properly to instructions. They would all want to participate haphazardly rather than engage with the activity at hand. The morning meeting helped me focus on these strategies and guidelines and have made a huge difference in my mainstream classroom as a teacher. So I do apply this approach in my own mainstream classroom. Also, I now coordinate with the other teachers so that there is a continuation from one lesson to another. We agree that Miss S. teach certain strategies in her classroom and I continue with those in mine."

ID: "I have a lesson on the urinary system which I have been teaching for several years now. It focuses on how the urine forms. I usually struggle a lot with this particular lesson with the kids. This year what I did, and I have to thank Iqra' Association for this and my experience through their program, I decided to divide the children into two groups, and I made cards containing the constituents of our blood like sugar, proteins, water, etc. I put these on the board and I said: 'all these are in our blood' I mean really, this is how I proceeded and it was so effective honestly, 'all these cards are in our blood. Now this blood will enter the kidneys, ok! This group will choose which of the cards my body needs and will not be expelled from my body, and the other group have to choose the cards which are bad and toxic for our bodies and expel it'. And all of a sudden, the children were all engaged in choosing which ones go where and after this moment, I never struggled with this lesson again. I spent all these years trying to convince students of the importance of this question and how important it is for their lives yet to no avail! But this way, they learned this much more effectively ... it worked because I did not inculcate, instead they were engaged in an activity. To be honest, I wished I could roll back time and teach this lesson to all the students this way because it is so exciting and allows you such freedom."

MB: "The mat activity brings the teacher closer to the students. Eye contact and the language of the eye is more important than words I believe. Now we used to do these things before the workshops provided by Iqra' but we could not organize them in the [effective] way that these workshops do. So for me as a teacher, I am much more structured now and things are more organized. And as a teacher, I feel much more at ease. First, I used to run after the curriculum; now the curriculum runs after me!"

Several observations by coordinators confirmed this:

In one of my schools, each teacher along with the kids named her class by getting inspired from nature and decided to change it every once in a while. For example, one of the classes was called the butterflies; the other was called the flowers. And so the teachers are going to set the rules and prepare the circle time using butterflies and flowers themes.

One of the teachers in my school had a very creative way to teach kids not to use bad words: she cut out the shape of a small person and asked each student to take one, say a bad word to it and then rip it in half. Then she asked each student to try to stick back the two halves of the paper together. When they all finished she asked her students if the person is back like it was before ripping it and all the students answered no. Then the teacher said: “when you say a bad word to your friend, he's going to be hurt and sad and will not go back like he was before which is why we should not use bad words with each others.”

Teachers in turn are themselves more confident and closer to their students.

Summary of finding: the above sample accounts reflect a sense of ownership in teachers over the methods and activities that training has introduced. This is evidenced in their integration of such activities and approaches into their mainstream classrooms as well as in the changing nature of their relationships with their students as well as the subjects they teach. The last statement made by a teacher above; “First, I used to run after the curriculum; now the curriculum runs after me!” is quite telling of this sense of confidence, autonomy and ownership that this approach has provided the teachers.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

This evaluation was conducted to assess the impact of the teacher training and support program provided by Iqra’ Association to support displaced Syrian children as well as at-risk Lebanese students from host communities by providing them with the necessary language support as well as an enabling and inclusive learning environment. Based on the gathered data, the following findings were reached:

The data revealed a significant positive impact of the project on teachers’ views and practices in response to the delicate needs of the Syrian refugee students as well as struggling Lebanese students in public schools. Data suggests that a qualitative shift was effected in teachers’ perceptions and practices regarding the importance of differentiated learning and active teaching approaches and the importance of activities and ongoing assessment in this process. The data also suggests that the target teachers did develop a mindset for skills and strategies as the main learning focus of the (literacy) workshops while recognizing and attending to individual

differences in students. As such, it was observed that the support and ongoing training provided by Iqra' Association has helped teachers understand the importance of creating safe, organized and enabling environments and recognize the positive impact that this has on students' as well as teachers' experience in the classroom.

Furthermore, it was observed that a number of teachers now recognize the importance of building a collaborative spirit amongst students that fosters learning and development. There was also evidence that a number of teachers had changed their views about learning and teaching and by the end of the intervention regarded learning and teaching as active and interactive processes.

Finally, this evaluation provided evidence that a number of teachers have developed a sense of ownership over the methods and activities that training has introduced. This is evidenced by the teachers' integration of such activities and approaches into their mainstream.

In conclusion, this report recommends that in addition to the training and support program that Iqra' Association has so far undertaken, it is important that the Association designs and integrates lab-like classrooms into its training process to more effectively engage teachers with active learning and teaching methods and techniques. It is also recommended that teachers undergo training that focuses on aspects of classroom management and other psychosocial dimensions of teaching and learning. This was emphasized by a number of teachers especially in light of the emergency situation and resulting exceptional circumstances in which they found themselves.

APPENDIX

SAMPLE 'VIEWS AND ATTITUDES' QUESTIONNAIRE FORM:

- 1- تَعَلَّم القراءة يعتمد بشكل اساسي على _____
،
ويتضمّن او يشمل بشكل خاص _____

- 2- الهدف او الاهداف من تعليم القراءة والكتابة هو/هي _____

- 3- القراءة وسيلة لـ _____
- 4- الدور الرئيسي الذي يلعبه/تلعبه المعلم(ة) في تعليم القراءة هو _____

- 5- يمكننا ان نشبّه عقل الطفل بـ _____
- 6- قدرة الطفل على التعلّم مبنية عموماً على _____

7- لتعلم القراءة والكتابة، يعتمد الطفل بشكل اساسي على

8- التقييم يساعدني على

9- الهدف او الاهداف الرئيسية للتقييم هو/هي

10- التعليم الفعال مبني بشكل عام على

11- برأيك، ما هو الدور الرئيسي الذي يلعبه المعلم:

في الصف: _____،

في المدرسة: _____،

في بيئة الطفل العامة: _____؟

12- بايجاز، ما برأيك هي اهم صفات المعلم الفعال؟

13- ما هي توقعاتك من ورشة العمل هذه؟

COORDINATOR QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

Please read the following before proceeding:

*All of the information provided below will be treated with utmost **confidentiality**.
Your feedback, suggestions and concerns will be communicated with maximum **anonymity** unless you otherwise specify.*

*All the raw data below will **only** be processed by the project evaluator (viz. Mahmoud Natout).*

Coordinator name: _____

*The following questions invite you to express your opinions, insights and concerns about the **preparation** and **organization** phases that led to the workshop conducted on the 1st of April as well as the actual **implementation** of the workshop. Please do not restrict your answers, if need be, to the blank spaces provided below. If you wish, you may organize your answers according to:*

- I- Preparation phase (this includes coordinators' training and orientation, materials preparation, etc)*
- II- Organization phase (organization of events that culminated in the workshop)*
- III- Implementation phase (workshop day)*

What factors, in your opinion, contributed to the success of the workshop?

What factors, in your opinion, contributed to the shortcomings or limitations of the workshop?

What factors, in your opinion, contributed **positively** to your own **personal** performance during the workshop?

What factors, in your opinion, contributed **negatively** to your own **personal** performance during the workshop?

What are **your** most crucial and pressing **needs** at this stage of the project?

What are **your** most crucial and pressing **concerns** at this stage of the project?

General reflections: please use the space below to express any concerns, reflections, 'A-HA' moments, or insights about the workshop or the project in general:

Finally, I would be very grateful if you could share some of the feedback, concerns, suggestions, reactions, etc that you received from some of the **teachers** that attended your workshop [any feedback from teachers that you can remember, or have jotted down, or have shared with other team members]:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND EFFORT

Sample Questions Bank

The semi-structured focus-group questions below were developed based on research literature, indicators that were established from the Teacher Observation Form developed by Iqra' Association, as well as pilot focus-group interviews conducted at a number of public schools in Lebanon working in conjunction with Iqra' Association.

- In your opinion, what are the major differences between your regular classroom and the Responsive Classroom model that this workshop promotes?
- From your observation and experience, how do/would students react to the Responsive Classroom approach in comparison to traditional academic approaches? Why do you think they (would) respond that way?
- Do you feel that the relationship amongst student peers differs (or would differ) in a Responsive Classroom in comparison to traditional academic classrooms? Why do you think?
- In your opinion, what kind of a relationship does a Responsive Classroom model assume or expect amongst student peers in comparison to conventional classrooms?
- How would you compare the relationship amongst students and between student and teacher that the Responsive Classroom model tries to foster with that of a regular classroom? What are in your opinion its advantages? Its disadvantages?
- What would you liken the relationship between student and teacher and amongst student peers that this workshop promotes? How does it compare to regular classrooms?
- How would you compare the general environment in a Responsive Classroom as demonstrated by this training to that of a regular classroom?
- Describe your role in a regular classroom. Please feel free to use metaphors or similes in doing so.
- Describe your (would be) role in a Responsive Classroom. Please feel free to use metaphors or similes in doing so.

- What do you feel is your role in a Responsive Classroom? How is it similar or different from your role in a regular classroom? Please elaborate.
- In your opinion, how are the (Reading and Writing) Workshops different from regular lessons? Please explain.
- How are the activities in the workshops different from what you normally do in your classroom?
- Several people have mentioned the inapplicability of these methods in regular classrooms. I'm curious about what the rest of you have to say about that?
- And if so, could you identify specific components or activities that you believe are inapplicable in a mainstream classroom and explain why?
- Which components of the Workshops would you rather not do and why?
- Which components of the Workshops do you feel are essential and therefore not dispensable and why?
- Which of the new methods (workshops, etc) you think have made (or will make) your work as a teacher easier for you and which activities, methods, etc have made (or will make) it harder? How? Why do you think?
- What are in your opinion the strengths of this approach? What are some of the weaknesses?
- When you were first exposed to the components and principles of this approach, what did you think? Why? Could you please elaborate?
- Do you feel you can integrate some of these materials and activities into your mainstream classrooms? Why or why not. Please elaborate.
- Many teachers sometimes make the following objection; that these workshops are easier to apply in lower grades such as K.G., but become more and more impossible to apply in higher grades. Do you agree? Why or why not? Which components do you feel can be

applied in higher grade levels and which components are not applicable in higher levels and why?

- Which parts of the workshop you thought ARE applicable in a mainstream classroom? Why do you think? Please elaborate.
- Which parts of the workshop you thought are NOT applicable in a mainstream classroom? Why do you think? Please elaborate.
- Which of the activities you were exposed to in the workshop you already implement in your classroom? What do you usually use them for? How? Please elaborate?
- Which of the activities you were exposed to in the workshop you DO NOT implement in your classroom? Why? Please elaborate?
- What did you feel is different about this workshop in comparison to other training you have undergone? What is similar?
- Some have complained that the structure of the workshops is too much of a routine and causes students to get bored. Others have pointed out that this routine is very important for students to foster learning and a sense of safety and familiarity. What are your impressions of the structure of the workshops? Do you feel this routine in the structure is positive or negative and why? Please elaborate.
- Based on what you have experienced in this workshop, what did you think of the overall structure of the approach? How would you restructure it? Why?
- What are in your opinion the most fundamental challenges that struggling students in your classroom face in regards to literacy learning?
- In your opinion, what does the activity of 'reading' involve? Please elaborate.
- What are the most important prerequisites for reading in your opinion?
- What are the most important prerequisites for writing in your opinion?
- What does the activity of 'writing' involve? Please elaborate.

- Why do children fail in your opinion?
- What distinguishes a good reader from a struggling one?
- What distinguishes a good writer from a struggling one?
- Based on what you have experienced in this workshop, what do you think makes a good reader/writer? Please elaborate.
- Why do we use assessment in the workshops?
- What do you think are some of its strengths? What are some of its weaknesses in your opinion?
- What would you do differently? Why?
- How do you usually address individual student differences and levels in your classroom?
- One of the things that we are especially interested in is the read-aloud. From your experience in this workshop, what can you tell us about this activity?
- What in your opinion are the main aims of this activity? How does it relate to other activities in the workshops?
- Based on your experience in this workshop, what do you feel is the main aim of the ... [component or activity]? Please elaborate.
- In your opinion, how will mini-lessons help with your teaching? What do you believe are some of their main strengths? Weaknesses? Please elaborate.
- How can this workshop be made more effective?
- How could we improve our training and preparation?

Teacher Observation Form



Teacher's Observation Sheet

Date		Comments:				
Name of teacher						
Name of Monitor						
		4	3	2	1	0
Behavior	Applies positive discipline to manage classroom					
	• Maintains and follows agreed upon posted class rules					
	• Uses the proper tone and language while addressing the learners					
	• Encourages and reinforces positive action generated by a learner					
	• Invites learners to participate					
	• Explains clearly and posts the instructions regarding classroom procedures					
	• Invites learners to take responsibility					
	Helps learners to express themselves freely					
	• Listens carefully to the learners' opinions					
	• Gives learners constructive feed back when making mistakes					
• Performs circle time on a daily bases						
Application of Readers Workshop Components	Reads Aloud a chosen book that will serve the mini lesson					
	Teaches reading strategies in a seven minute mini lesson while properly modeling the strategy					
	Gives readers independent reading time to practice reading strategies					
	Observes readers independently reading and jots down observations					
	Conferences with a reader to reinforce, prompt or reteach a strategy or to assess this reader					
	Meets a group of readers in guided group session to reinforce, prompt or reteach reading strategies					
	Reteaches the strategy/teaching point when majority of readers did not/could not perform independently					
	Reading partners					
	Closure: concludes by inviting readers to share their reading experience (reader's chair) at the end of the session					
Application of Writers Workshop Components	Teaches a writing strategy in a seven minute mini lesson while properly modeling the strategy					
	Gives writers time for independent writing to practice the strategy (20 - 30')					
	Observes writers independently writing and jots down observations					
	Conferences with a writer to reinforce, prompt or reteach a strategy or to assess this writer					
	Meets a group of writers in guided writing session to reinforce, prompt or reteach a writing strategy					
	Reteaches the strategy/teaching point when majority of writers did not/could not perform independently					
	Writing partners					
	Closure: concludes by inviting writers to share their stories (writer's chair) at the end of the session					

Sample edited data transcripts

Following are excerpts from Focus-group interview at al-Marj School (May 9, 2013):

00:00

HYM1: “I think the main difference between the mainstream academic lesson and the workshops is that with mainstream lessons, the subject is imposed on teachers while in the workshops, and this is from what I hear the teachers discuss, the method is prioritized over the subject and this, I feel, gives teachers more freedom and therefore feels happier to give more ... or the subject that the teacher has can choose may emerge from the situation in which she finds herself while in a regular academic lesson, they have to abide by what is laid out in front of them. In the remedial program, the teacher is much more enthusiastic and energetic about her work because she feels that she has chosen the subject.”

KHN: “You feel that the behavior of the teacher differs between a regular classroom and this classroom [referring to workshops] ... the kids have noticed that my behavior changes between my regular classroom and the remedial classroom. A few days ago, students in the remedial classroom said: ‘Ah Ms. KHN is very compassionate!’ and I replied: ‘Why you do not think I am usually this compassionate [in the main classroom?].’ But I think that the structure of the program, even the way students sit in these classrooms, and the components of the program help you become more organized and composed; you can better control your reactions [as a teacher]; you can structure your lesson [communicating a sense of control and autonomy over the progression of the lesson/workshop] and not feel that you have to go in and just give a lesson and leave. And with this program [the Workshops], it is as if you are studying [meaning being engaged with] the psychology of every student and you are working on every child’s psychology indirectly ... you are working on the child’s psychology indirectly ...”

05:00

KHN: “I think the morning meeting is extremely important and not dispensable. I feel it is important not only to break the ice between teacher and student but also amongst the students. It also improved their behavior outside of the classroom because they feel that they know each other and feel as sense of community with each other. However, I don’t feel that this activity leaves much room for pure teaching. I know sometimes the morning meeting might entail a behavioral goal or a learning goal but I don’t feel that it gives us room for teaching in the strict sense of the word.”

IMN: “The program has really helped me a lot and my teaching this year has dramatically changed from last year ... one of the challenges I find in mainstream classroom when applying the workshop approach is the number of students in mainstream classrooms.”

NDY1: “The program is great. And I feel the students are responding very well to it to the extent that during our morning meetings when we try to prompt and link what we are learning to the day before, the students are very responsive ... they are so happy with what they have learned ... when they are writing their story, they write it fluently and they imagine what they are writing and are expressing things that they have actually experienced firsthand. They are responsive to instructions and they are applying what they are learning very effectively. Of course there are students who are facing some challenges but we are working on them individually and they are able to detect positive change. They are able to make connections with what they are learning for example, one student recognized the name of an author and linked it to a previous story we had read. I asked him to remember which story and he went and picked it from the library and brought it to me ... they are able to detect recurrent and frequent words ... this really motivates you as a teacher. This is possible in the remedial because of the relatively small number of students. But in mainstream classrooms, although I am trying so hard to apply what I learned from the program in the mainstream classroom and using stories and so but the problem is the number of students in the classroom especially that the seating creates, I feel, a sort of barrier between the teacher and students. I once tried to restructure the classroom into a U-shape, because the number of students is high, that restricted their mobility. The classrooms are just too tight for the teacher to be able to reshape it into a U. But we are trying to apply whatever we can in the mainstream classrooms. But I really feel that the program is great, really!”

10:00

MNA: “In a regular classroom, we are expected to integrate skills such as with reading and writing ... however in the workshops, time is dedicated to every skill and students are given time to perfect it, that is a major difference. Regarding the workshops, the reading part is just for reading and the writing part is just for writing. I think this allows students to be more creative and to be more expressive than in mainstream classrooms.”

HYM2: “At first, I noticed a huge difference between regular classrooms and the afternoon [remedial] classrooms ... The numbers are much greater in the mainstream classrooms and we have to commit ourselves to the lesson which is long and does not permit much leeway [versatility]. However, I felt that for the remedial classes, they are more gradual and incremental, step by step. For example, I was telling my colleagues that I was going to teach the components of the story such as place, time, characters, etc and they said ‘no you can break them up over different lessons’. But I thought that they are connected and I should teach them together and then the next day I repeat this with the students so that a connection is made. This will help the information stick better in their heads. But if I go over the components one by one every day, they might get confused because these should be linked [connected]. Now this is an issue. However, a positive aspect of this approach is ... there are many and they outweigh the disadvantages. But one limitation is time. I feel to implement this program, you need so much more time! They say that the morning conference should be about either a behavioral or an academic topic. Fine, but if I were to tell them a story or read one for them, how long will that take me! Especially that sometimes we get into a conversation regarding the topic and students want to raise their hands and contribute their opinions, and I cannot ignore them,

this alone will take more than ten minutes ... any activity that involves groups will take a lot of time ... then we moved to the writer's workshop, writing stories; I really like this because you feel students have developed their creativity and ideas but the problem is their writing is still weak to be honest. Their writing is very weak. And for them to write this story, write, illustrate, color, make mistakes and repeat ... it will take more than a week to finish! This is my problem, time is too limiting. Regarding read-alouds; of course we do apply this in mainstream classrooms, the teacher models and gradually this will be transmitted to the students ... this will happen automatically little by little. But perhaps because a story has a special feel to it different from a reading lesson, it involves more enjoyment and fascination and therefore students learn more through it [story]. But in general, it is good and I feel, although we teach six hours a day before we get to the remedial and we are usually tired and exhausted, we are still able to control ourselves in this remedial classroom and even enjoy it. And I feel if I am never too harsh on a student in the remedial classroom, I worry that he might drop out and so I try to appease and placate him but in regular classrooms you don't feel the same personal commitment because perhaps of the large number of students and the program is completely different. Yet I am trying to merge my approach in both classrooms. But the number is I guess a predicament and the lessons are broader [in mainstream classrooms]. There is a set curriculum which I cannot break up as I wish or see fit. I have to commit to it. But in the remedial program ...”

XYZ: “But I really feel that the remedial program approach is much more effective than the mainstream approach because I think that students feel comfortable and safe and this gives him the incentive to give more.”

NDY2: “I would like to add to this discussion the following. I feel that a teacher in the remedial classroom is more committed because I feel that the students ‘belong’ to her only. While in regular classroom, she feels she shares the children with six other teachers. With the remedial class, she feels that the children are wholly her responsibility. They are hers! With homeroom teachers, I guess, this is how she feels.”

20:00

NDY3: “I feel that the main difference between the mainstream and remedial classrooms is that children come to the remedial program feeling relaxed, not worried about homework and lessons. I felt that the students are more responsive towards the remedial classrooms than mainstream ones ... and this is the major problem we face in mainstream classroom, children need personal attention but I can't do this with a classroom of 27 ...”

KHN: “In a regular classroom, a student with difficulties retreats back into his seat and avoids being engaged or in the forefront. Usually they are scared, shy and remain distant. Notice how weak students usually sit in the back of a classroom; they avoid being in the forefront. In the remedial program, our approach is different; for example I had a student at the beginning of the remedial program who was scared and shy but because our approach is different and we get them all engaged, he started to interact and love to participate and *accept making mistakes!* [emphasis added

by interviewee]. As if thinking ‘I will let my classmate correct my mistakes’. However, in regular classrooms students would not normally allow their classmates to correct their mistakes. But in this program, it’s become automatic; it has become an intrinsic need or desire where a student would actually seek his classmate and ask for help or feedback. Students are not ashamed of not knowing. But in the past [i.e. in regular classrooms] student normally do not accept help from others and are ashamed of not knowing but in this program, it is not the case.”

NDY2: “Another important factor to have clear class rules. In the remedial program, the approach and behavior of the teachers is consistent. Students feel that all the teachers are treating them the same and there is a positive spirit amongst the teachers. But in regular classrooms, that’s not usually the case.”

LMN: “In a regular classroom, we get asked why are you doing this that way while another teacher does it differently? In a single day, five teachers enter the same classroom each with a different personality and attitude. But in the remedial program, a single teacher is there and in my opinion one of the main reasons for why this program is a success is routine! Routine regarding the teacher, the activities, the idea of ‘building’ and that every day you recap everything the students have learned ... I feel that all students can feel this. There is a routine.”

ROL: “When I first entered the training for this program, I felt that it resembled more Plato’s ‘Republic’! I felt this involved so many challenges and it was different from the world I live in. Yet when we started with the program, I told the students that the reason we are here is to become better readers and writers and that put them at ease. And after reading a story called ‘Thank You’, we decided every time we finish our workshop to say ‘thank you Iqra’”. One time I forgot to say thank you Iqra’ so one of the students reminded me that we should do so. Furthermore, the morning meeting, I felt, has become fundamental! It gives kids a sense of safety, they feel close to one another, if someone has a certain worry they can voice it. Once I was not feeling well because my son and I had a quarrel so I shared it with them. This gives you a sense of purity because all are sharing what has happened to them. I thought this was beautiful and I wish we could dedicate more time to this activity ... and I am normally very positive with students and I felt that this program is of a world on its own. It is as if at the peak of ... I mean I am really enjoying my experience ... When we first started, I had a student from 4th grade who could not write his own name. He said that he did not know a single letter in English and that in fact he hated English. Then after a few days, he was able to write his name. His grandfather was astonished about this and gave him 2000 L.L. for writing his name in English ... and what I consider a huge strength of this program is organization; I believe this produces innovation and gets you to reach the top. The students have memorized the structure of the program, they know that now it is time for the reading workshop, then it’s time for the writing workshop. And one thing I noticed is quite different from regular classrooms is the fact that they don’t notice the time. When it is 4 pm they say ‘Miss we are done! No!’ This you don’t find in regular classrooms; they can’t wait till it’s time for class to be over. The other important thing is assessment which we really did not know. I once mentioned my son’s school that is a very good private school here in the Bekaa. They were not properly assessing my son for a certain weakness and I approach the administration and they were astonished I knew about such assessment methods. I mean my son was making the

same mistake in the first, second and third semesters. I said this should have been dealt with proper assessment and they asked me if I could provide them with the proper tools! It felt good that I knew these new things! [...] and my husband was at the parents' meeting at my son's school, my husband told them that the program my wife is teaching in is different and student enter it in one state and leave it in a totally different other state ... and regarding the student I was telling you about, he said he wanted to write a story about what he sees, and I said okay. He said 'I can write pen, I can write ...' then he got to 'car' [used the word in Arabic} and he said he did not know how to write it. I pointed to a word on the wall and asked him to read it. He said: 'can'. Then I said 'car' and he jumped to say "ah instead of 'n', 'r'!" So I am trying to hold on to this boy because he started out by hating English. I have really discovered that it you get close to a person you capture him [his attention] and this is not always possible in regular classrooms, I have dictation and whatnot; you know I'd rather give him a boost in self-esteem and support him instead of just giving him the whole assigned book ... he really feels engaged and involved ... First I really thought that many of the things in this program are impossible to apply but now, really, I will be applying many things in my regular classroom ..."

30:00

LMN: "In my regular classroom although I do not teach languages but mathematics, I have incorporated many techniques that I have learned from the remedial program. For example, I dedicate at least 5 minutes to the morning conference. When I instruct them to do something, I ask every couple to tell each other what I had just asked them to do [active engagement] ... even when a student actually understands how to do something, he still has the curiosity to ask his friend to make sure he understood what is required ... and every day I get close to a couple to see whether they understand the strategies I am teaching them and I believe this is very successful and students understand what is required of them especially that normal classrooms and large and I can't run around to check if all have understood the instructions. This way I make sure they understood what is required of them before engaging in a certain activity ... I really believe that this program can be applied in mainstream classrooms."

ROL: "I first thought that this could not be applied with such students, but then when I saw that you are communicating with them, engaged with them, you break the ice with them, you talk about everything you want ... I never expected Syrian refugee students who first could not write their names to end up writing stories. The student I mentioned above has made me promise that when Iqra' Association visit the school, he wants to read to them his story."

35:00

ROL: "What really changed my mind about this program is not a particular idea but the approach. The way we approached students in the traditional sense did not foster creativity. When I adopted this approach, I discovered in them talents and things, for example I have a student who cannot write a word but has beautiful drawings! This

means they have great potential that could be channeled in many ways. So you see we did not think this way before! My previous approach is what blurred my vision; my vision in the past was that these are his limits, but now ... you know it was as if there was snow and it melted and now I see things more clearly.”

NDY2: “I had a Syrian student who could not read a single letter [in English]. During the read-aloud, it was her first day in the program, she wanted to read but she said ‘Miss I don’t know how to read, what can I read?’ I said ‘Yes you know how to read!’ She looked astonished at me as if saying ‘no I can’t read!’ And I said ‘Look at this story, look at the cover, what do you see?’ She said ‘A boy going to school’. I said ‘You have just read what is written!’ I read to her what was written in the story: ‘I am going to school’. She said ‘Is this really what is written in the story?’ and I said yes. We flipped the page and looked at the pictures and she said ‘he is riding the bus’ and I read the words to her and we did this till then end. Then I said good job, you have read the story and I praised her in front of her classmates and she felt so happy and confident. After that she was flipping through stories trying to read them through the pictures and asking me questions when things were hard to understand.”

40:00

KHN: “Regarding the question of whether this program can be implemented in mainstream classroom, I still think you need to innovate a way to integrate purely academic lessons into the program. We need an academic period that is broad. It does not have to be strictly academic in the narrow sense of the term, but the absence of a purely academic period despite the techniques and approach that the program offers, I think is a main challenge for students to get the information, or the ideas, or the letters ... because if you want to adopt this approach in [mainstream] school, you cannot just adopt this [the program’s] approach right? Let’s be real and practical here ... so perhaps the lack of time and the absence of a purely academic period is not facilitating that students get broader [more comprehensive] ideas, or certain words, or certain letters, and such.”

XYZ: “There is a major difference in perspective here. What we are trained on is how to deliver a certain curriculum to students in one way or another. However, in this program, it is important to teach a child a certain skill, and that’s the difference. For example teaching a certain skill can be done with a book, a story, or a newspaper. You are teaching him a skill of how to deal with this thing [book, text, etc]. In my opinion, the main aim of this [Iqra’] Association is broader than what we see. Because a story is short and a [text]book is long, and normal class periods are long whereas the program’s periods are short. So this notion of ‘short’ or ‘long’ is still not very clear to us. But the main aim is much broader than this; you are teaching a child a skill; how to engage with a book or with the act of reading, or the act of writing, for life. We do not do these in our schools. It is very rare to find a teacher who does this; the teacher receives a curriculum and a number of students and a room composed of four walls, and he is responsible for this; how? He has to finish the program based on a structure that the education inspector will come and inspect, and the teacher sets a personal plan for this program based on the mindset and personality of the inspector, or the principal, or the coordinator, or this or that. So the educational process is

infiltrated by 60 or 70 people without one even noticing; and 60 or 70 opinions. Whereas, when one focuses on teaching a student a skill to deal with a certain social context or ... I mean we are teaching him how to deal with a story ... and all those who were newly exposed to this program [Workshop approach] including myself were very skeptical of it. I thought 'What, I have been teaching for 11 years and I am supposed to teach him how to open a book?' And I noticed that instead of I going down towards their level or age I was expecting them to be at mine. But with this program, we are going down to their level and abilities ... but in a main classroom, we just ask them to open their books to a certain page number or ... and we do not check if the student is on the right page. But in this program, you are teaching the 16 students this and you are checking to make sure they are all learning this."

45:00

XYZ: "So here I am trying to respond to KHN's comment on the necessity of academic periods. But what is an academic period, it is something that is forced on us which we are asked to transmit to this student ... I force them to be at my level rather than going down to theirs."

LMN: "I think the approach is the difference which ROL is referring to. I always give this example. It is as if I have a jacket my size and I come to class wanting to dress all the children with it instead of bringing the right-size jacket to every student. This is the main difference. So the approach we are adopting now [Workshops] involves tailoring to every child the right-size jacket."

Mahmoud: "I am specifically interested in your description of how the work of a teacher in mainstream classrooms is infiltrated by so many others whereas in the program you feel the teacher has more ownership over his/her classroom. Could you please elaborate more on this point?"

ROL: "In a regular classroom, the teacher feels she has ownership over the good students only! But only the good students because you regard the weak students as reflecting badly on your own performance as a teacher and you put them all in one block on their own ... now we did a workshop with the government lately and they want to train teachers who can teach all subjects."

Amina: "Let's pick up on an important comment made by KHN regarding academic material that is important for students to continue with their education. How can this be incorporated into for example the workshops or the read-alouds? How can read alouds in your opinion be an entry point or perhaps a hurdle, I don't know for material from the set curricula?"

LMN: "Depending on the subject I am giving. I can use the approach for any subject. I teach science and I worked with students to turn the science lesson into a story. We used the animals as characters and wrote a story."