A Second Chance: Accelerated Learning

IRAQ

Creative Associates International
A Second Chance:  
Accelerated Learning in Iraq

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This paper provides an account of the implementation of accelerated learning in post-war Iraq from 2003 to 2004. Government schools resumed operations in October 2003 after the US-led conflict that overthrew Saddam Hussein’s regime. It was an opportune time to introduce new teaching and learning techniques into a long neglected, regimented education system.

Creative Associates International, Inc., already implementing accelerated learning in post-war Afghanistan, was tasked with administering a one-year pilot accelerated learning program within the USAID-funded Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and Stabilization of Education (RISE) Project.

This paper provides the basis for implementing the pilot Accelerated Learning Program in Iraq from the outset of the new school year immediately following the end of the 2003 conflict that ended the regime of Saddam Hussein. It presents the strategies designed to attract students and teachers into the Accelerated Learning Program and to mitigate high drop-out rates of long-term out-of-school youth. It highlights the use of the Accelerated Learning Cycle and core principles for learning success. The paper discusses the syllabus compression of the national curriculum in order for students to achieve two grades of schooling in one school year. It also outlines student incentives and program interventions designed to increase the enjoyment of learning, free from the regimented, punitive instruction of Saddam’s regime. The paper also outlines critical factors for implementation, ownership, and sustainability of the program and concludes with lessons learned in the implementation of an Accelerated Learning Program in a country in crisis.
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Creative Associates International, Inc. administered the USAID-funded Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and the Stabilization of Education (RISE) Project from April 2003 to May 2004. The Accelerated Learning (AL) Program of RISE commenced in August 2003 and was implemented from November 2003 to end May 2004, coinciding with the end of the government school year. Its primary goal was to recruit and train teachers for a pilot program to enable out-of-school youth, prohibited from entering government schools due to their inability to cater to over age students, to have a second chance at education.

The Accelerated Learning Program aimed to address the following key issues:

- The return to school of out-of-school youth;
- The elimination of physical punishment in the classroom;
- The lack of a receptive learning environment for students; and
- The lack of relevant training for teachers.

The Accelerated Learning Program in Iraq enabled students to undertake two years of schooling in one school year to catch up to their appropriate grade level, thus providing them with the opportunity to re-enter the government school system after successful completion of standardized examinations at the end of the school year. The AL Program also introduced innovative teaching and learning techniques such as ‘action learning’ and ‘cooperative learning’ to make school a more pleasurable experience for students who had previously been subjected to physical punishment and abuse in the classroom.

In addition, the Accelerated Learning Program in Iraq provided students with a relaxed yet receptive learning environment to assimilate previous educational material, facilitate absorption of new material, and retain information for longer periods. This method is said to improve the speed of learning by 200-300 percent (Peterson, 1977) and is endorsed by UNESCO (1979, cited in Da Silva & Esposito, 1990; Rose & Nicholl, 1997). UNESCO maintains that accelerated learning programs can increase enjoyment of schooling while having beneficial health side effects.

Hence the Accelerated Learning Program comprised two main elements:

- A condensed curriculum whereby students undertook key topics from the national curriculum, prepared by the Ministry of Education, to complete a composite of two grades in one school year (e.g., grades 3/4); and
- The principles and practices of accelerated learning.

Staff of the Ministry of Education condensed, or compressed, the syllabus of the Iraqi national curriculum to cover relevant topics in each subject for each grade. In addition, teachers were trained in accelerated learning techniques, as well as updated, best practice teaching method-
ology. The embodiment of accelerated learning was to ensure that students were in a supportive environment, conducive to learning: one in which the former methods of punishment were replaced with classroom management techniques that encouraged students to participate, question and engage in debate and discussion with respect under democratic processes.

Students, in a learning environment that differed markedly from their past experiences, attended classes more regularly and were less inclined to drop-out of the program. This was further enhanced, in addition to encouragement by teachers, through the recruitment of Community Workers that provided a link between teachers and parents and actively maintained regular attendance by promoting the importance and relevance of education to the community and to students of the program, previously long-term out-of-school youth.

The program was built upon teacher training, community outreach, accelerated learning techniques, and ministry cooperation and support, to ensure that students achieved two years of schooling in one year and enjoyed the experience.

Finally, the Accelerated Learning Program in Iraq used the following strategies for success:

- Engaged the Ministry of Education at the regional level to design and implement a program of relevance, responsive to the needs of the target group with the local community; (Each location had a different intervention program.)
- Engaged and trained local expertise in the implementation and management of the program for ownership and sustainability;
- Engaged community workers to work closely with local communities to mitigate high drop-out rates;

- Provided continuous in-service teacher training and support in accelerated learning teaching and learning methodologies; and
- Developed a creative approach to instruction to mitigate the lack of resources while maintaining low-cost techniques for sustainability.
Under the Presidency and oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein since 1979 and the onset of wars in the early 1980s, the education system in Iraq deteriorated from one of high standard and repute in the Middle East to one of the worst in the region, with depleted resources, neglected facilities, stagnant curricula, inefficient management, corruption, political influence, and under-trained teachers. Declining enrollment and attendance rates, particularly for girls (with only a 50 percent attendance rate in rural areas) resulted in poor literacy levels; 24 percent of girls and 56 percent of boys are literate (with a total literacy rate of 40 percent across the country). A high drop-out rate resulted in youth missing years of schooling. The Minister of Education, Dr Ala’din A.S. Alwan, appointed in September 2003 by the Coalition Provincial Authority, estimated that more than 800,000 six to eleven year-olds were not attending primary school in 2000 (Alwan, 2004). However, in a population estimated at 26 million and a student population of six million in 2003, the out-of-school population was estimated during the RISE Project preparation of inventory data to be as high as 1.8 million.

The country, divided into 18 governorates, accommodates provincial Education Directorates, each headed by a Director General (DG) of Education. The Ministry of Education was bureaucratically and hierarchically structured in Saddam Hussein’s regime to follow orders of a top-down command system. Personnel were evaluated and promoted on their functional ability, their political affiliation, and their unquestioning obedience. Teachers’ wages were poor, and hence were often supplemented by “bribes” whereby teachers asked students to pay for extra tuition, classroom attention, and passing grades. Encyclopedic education practiced in oversize classes with chalk-and-talk styles of teacher-pupil relationships had debilitated skills such as teacher leadership, student leadership, personality development, critical thinking, and knowledge acquisition. Inadequate attention had been paid to co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, information technology, remedial education, pastoral care and counseling, teacher training, education planning and research, and effective non-punitive discipline at both primary and secondary levels.

The school year operates from late September to the end of May. Kindergarten, a voluntary two year program, had less than seven percent of children aged four to five years enrolled in 2001 (Alwan, 2004). Primary schooling, compulsory and free for six years, is mostly held in single-sex schools. If schools are coeducational, the girls and boys are separated. Students of all grades are required to take two major examinations each year: mid year examinations in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Iraq Population Estimates, 2002</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Group</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary school age (6-11 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary school age (12-17 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 school enrolment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and the Stabilization of Education (RISE) Project inventory data
January and final examinations in May. Success in all subjects is essential to move to the next grade. End-of-year examinations are held for every grade level, with critical and rigid government examinations in the sixth, ninth, and twelfth grades. It was estimated in 2001 that only 45 percent of expected primary students undertook the government sixth grade examination (Alwan, 2004) that provides entry into intermediate schooling.

Three years of intermediate schooling concludes with government examinations in the ninth grade, after which there are three years of preparatory/secondary school, culminating with the final government exam in twelfth grade. In the second and third year of secondary school, students can choose one of three tracks: (1) scientific, (2) literary, or (3) vocational. The vocational track provides topics such as home-craft, agriculture, industry, and commerce. The system of primary and secondary school examinations in Iraq has therefore led to high dropout rates and subsequent decreased enrollments to the end of secondary school, limiting student access to higher education.
At the dawn of the Third Millennium, societies throughout the world are moving towards a global information and knowledge-based economic and cultural structure. Of vital importance is an education system that leads to the enrichment of the individual personality by developing their full potential while preserving respect for others and for themselves.

Before schools can provide the optimal education for students, the issues of access, equity, and opportunity must be addressed. Students worldwide must have the opportunity to gain access to school and to basic education. Hence a rising “catch-cry” to support this belief is the “Education for All” philosophy currently permeating in developing countries.

Schools and classes should be established where students have not only the opportunity to attend, but also the opportunity to develop their potential and acquire relevant knowledge. Students should also be given the expectation that they can succeed. Students will not succeed, in general, until they have experienced some measure of success at some important stage of their life. Educators maintain that these measures of success are developed as a result of school environmental factors in which students are nurtured, encouraged, and provided with best teaching and learning practices in a safe, non-threatening environment.

School-based factors influencing measures of success and the acceleration of learning encompass four main areas: (Charlick, in press):

- Teachers and administrators (their knowledge, skills, attitudes, assumptions, behavior, practice-oriented staff development, leadership, and cooperation);
- Instructional strategies and classroom management (application of accelerated learning approach, equitable treatment of students, motivational strategies, assessment and feedback, time on task in class, use of media);
- Instructional materials (variety, quality, coordination with curriculum and assessment, availability); and
- A safe and orderly school environment (physical and emotional; community involvement).

Student-based factors include physical well-being, emotional well-being, and attendance.

The role of education therefore, in developing and developed countries, is to provide an environment in which the following will be cultivated:

- Strong instructional leadership;
- A clean and safe environment;
- Ongoing, diagnostic assessment of students;
- Remedial education;
- Cooperation and peer grouping in classrooms;
- Teachers working according to national curriculum, regional school needs, and relevant lesson plans;
- High levels of interaction with the community and parents;
- Sense of belonging to a school and dedication to its achievements;
- Teachers as role models (student leaders, counselors, and mentors);
- Planned extra-curricular activities; and
- Low class capacity.

The maturing of any complex talent requires a happy combination of motivation, character and opportunity. Most talent remains undeveloped.

(John Gardner)
Accelerated learning (AL) is a formal or non-formal program of study incorporating a variety of educational methodologies relevant to the needs of an individual or group to enhance and accelerate their learning.

Specifically, accelerated learning is an umbrella term for a series of practical, student-centered approaches to learning. These approaches and theories have developed from a range of disciplines including the study of brain function, theories of human attention and motivation, the psychology of optimal performance, and intelligence theory.

Accelerated learning has the expectation that, when motivated and appropriately taught, all learners can reach a level of achievement that may currently appear beyond them. It provides a breadth of proven life-long learning skills based on an understanding of how students learn – i.e., learning styles. It also encompasses teaching styles.

The concept of accelerated learning first came to prominence in 1966 through the work of Dr. Georgi Lozanov who provided practical knowledge on enhancing learning through music (Smith, 1996). The relaxation induced by specific music left the mind alert and able to concentrate at a greater capacity than in a non-relaxed state. Other methods of relaxation and enhanced learning were studied and comparisons were documented. Research into the effectiveness of accelerated learning, conducted by Dr. Schuster, Professor of Psychology, and Dr. Peterson at Iowa State University, indicated that it improved the speed of learning by 200-300 percent (Peterson, 1977).

Researchers and educators have been developing accelerated, or speed learning practices over the past 25 years that help students to achieve their full potential and learning capacity. These included the use of learning styles, teaching styles, multiple intelligences, student-centered learning, student-based learning, multi-grade teaching, cooperative learning, active engagement in relevant problem-based learning (action learning), and de-stressing schooling (Charlick: in press). Techniques such as group work, peer learning, motivational groups, interest-based groups, interactive learning, multi-media, adult education, and distance learning were also studied and developed with a focus on the student, rather than on the teacher. The terminology was

Table 2: Teacher Effectiveness Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Technique</th>
<th>Student Retention after One Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>5% (of what we hear)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>10% (of what we read)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-visual</td>
<td>20% (of what we hear and see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>30% (of what we see)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Group</td>
<td>50% (of what we see, hear and say)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice by Doing</td>
<td>75% (of what we do)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Others or Immediate Use</td>
<td>90% (of what we say and do)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Vernon A. Magenesen, 1983

You don’t understand anything until you learn it more than one way. 
(Marvin Minsky)
globally accepted as the “student-centered approach” to learning. The student-centered approach engages the student as a whole person in their learning capacities as expressed by Magnesen’s teaching effectiveness scale.

UNESCO, in its “Education for All” campaign, endorsed accelerated learning, or speed learning, and other methods of the student-centered approach to learning that could readily be adopted and adapted in developing countries, primarily for literacy programs (1997, cited in Da Silva & Esposito, 1990; Rose & Nicholl, 1997).

In previous aid projects for post-conflict countries and countries in crisis, accelerated learning programs generally condensed or compressed the national school curriculum to accelerate the learning of long-term, out-of-school youth in a tangible way, i.e., to undertake two years of schooling in only one year, or to undertake six years of primary education in half the time. Long-term out-of-school youth are generally excluded from government schools because they are ‘too old’ for their appropriate grade level. Hence 15-year-old youth who have missed years of schooling and attempt to re-enter schooling at the grade last completed, such as grade 5 where the average age of students would be nine or ten years, are often denied access to education. Therefore accelerated learning or advanced learning programs are specifically designed so that students can ‘catch-up’ and re-enter government schools at their age-appropriate grade level. This practice of accelerated learning focuses primarily on a condensed curriculum, rather than methods and styles of instruction and learning.

However, in addition to condensing the curriculum, the principles of accelerated learning can be applied, particularly the critical, underpinning principle of creating a supportive learning environment, free from high levels of anxiety and threat. Establishing an atmosphere of safety, trust, friendly cooperation, and appreciation enables students to be receptive to new ideas, willing to explore and experiment without fear of ridicule. Students are therefore most likely to retain the experience in their long-term memories.

Hence, the idea of velocity in learning provides one aspect of accelerated learning. The critical approach is to engage the ‘whole person’ in the process of learning that facilitates more enjoyment and therefore more efficient and rapid learning. Engaging the ‘whole person’ is to engage students in active, participatory ways of learning through increased instructional interactions between teachers and students and among students.

Student-centered (or ‘whole person’) instruction usually involves:

- Increasing the amount of student talk and decreasing the amount of teacher talk;
- Organizing instruction so that students sometimes teach other students, including their peers;
- Assisting students to connect new knowledge with what they already know;
- Helping students to relate lesson content to their personal lives and to create personal meaning and relevance; and
- Providing students with choices in what they study or how they study (Charlick, in press).

The concept that people have differing learning styles has been extensively researched. The VAK model highlights different learning styles based on senses: Visual (seeing), Auditory (hearing), and Kinesthetic-tactile (moving and touching). Throughout the learning experience people are generally more dominant in one mode while usually employing several of the senses. To cater to the potential of all children in the classroom, a variety of teaching styles and sensory experiences are thought to allow for a fuller appreciation for individual student differences.

Wolfe (2001) maintained that music activates our cognitive, visual, auditory, emotional, and motor
systems to varying degrees as we listen, sing, play, beat a rhythm, read, or compose music and that our brains are predisposed to search for patterns in music. The search for patterns is also evident in language and math learning. When information is connected with music, it is likely to be recalled more easily (Wolfe, 2001).

Core accelerated learning practices defined in education literature and put into practice in developing countries, that specifically outline preferred approaches to teaching and learning are as follows (Charlick, in press):

- Addressing the different learning styles in instruction;
- Centering classroom activities on students as learners more than teachers as providers of information;
- Actively engaging students in their own learning and providing constant feedback;
- Increasing interactions during class between teacher and student and among students;
- Attending to students’ emotional states;
- Incorporating problem-based learning and teaching critical thinking and teamwork skills;
- Putting students in small groups to practice;
- Using both formal and informal assessment; and
- Using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modes in instruction, such as objects, music, and movement.
In Iraq as part of the 2003-04 USAID-funded, Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and the Stabilization of Education Project, the Accelerated Learning Program aimed to pilot a one year program to re-enter out-of-school children into mainstream education through accelerating their learning. Students undertook a program of two years of the national curriculum compressed into one calendar year.

In the Iraqi context, accelerated learning therefore addressed two critical aspects:

- Condensed curriculum – in the form of syllabus compression of the national curriculum; and

**SYLLABUS COMPRESSION**

A major thrust of the implementation strategy for the Accelerated Learning Program was to ensure that it was delivered through well-designed and locally relevant syllabi, lessons, and activities. Curriculum development was not part of the program. To implement the program at the start of the school year (two months from project commencement), the focus was on combining educational material for two grades, in accordance with the national curriculum, to accelerate the learning of children from two years of schooling into one school year. Syllabus compression was, therefore, based upon compressing the national curriculum into key topics and concepts for each of the two grades being combined. For example, the grade 5 syllabus and the grade 6 syllabus were compressed (condensed) to form a composite grade 5/6 syllabus. The syllabus compression was undertaken for each subject in grades 1/2, 3/4, 5/6, and 7/8. The syllabus strategy included:

- The development of a compressed two-year syllabus into one year of accelerated learning syllabus materials;
- The introduction of a locally produced syllabus compression booklet (teachers’ guide) showing each subject in the specified grades covered in the AL program; and
- The development of special purpose teaching materials as required.

Local subject specialists from the Iraqi Teacher Training and Development Institute (ITTDI and now known as the National Institute for Educational Training and Development – NIETD) within the Ministry of Education formed a Syllabus Development Working Group to review textbooks in consultation with the Director General of Curriculum and the Director General of Examinations. After reviewing the textbooks, the Working Group compressed the syllabus for each subject of each grade and prepared a teachers’ guide that outlined the following:

- The subjects;
- The topics to be taught;
- The recommended order in which the topics should be taught; and
- The duration of the teaching period for each topic.

The syllabus compression guide and the Accelerated Learning Cycle provided the core instruction tools for the implementation of the AL Program in Iraq.
AN ACCELERATED LEARNING CYCLE FOR EDUCATION INTERVENTION

A pre-condition of the Accelerated Learning Cycle (Smith, 1998) is that teachers create and sustain a positive and supportive learning environment where the individual learner feels safe and nurtured. A summary of the Accelerated Learning Cycle for teachers (as a mechanism to facilitate lesson planning as well as core teaching methodologies) is as follows:

- Be relentlessly positive and scaffold all learning challenges;
- Give an overview of what is to be done first;
- Connect to previous learning and current understanding;
- Embed questions and essential vocabulary into the learning experience by structuring lots of learner questions and language exchanges;
- Provide a variety of inputs through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (VAK) modes;
- Review throughout the lesson or activity both individually and collectively; and
- Preview what is next as you end.

The Accelerated Learning Cycle, in full, appears below:

**Accelerated Learning Cycle**

**PRE-STAGE: Create the supportive learning environment**

This stage helps learners feel free from high levels of anxiety and encourages them to be challenged. Challenges are structured so that a perceived threat never overwhelms the students.

**STAGE ONE: Connect the learning**

The lesson is connected with work that has gone before and with what is to come. This stage:

- Helps learners explore connections with previous work;
- Makes new information easier to assimilate; and
- Provides learners with outcomes, essential vocabulary and questions they will be able to answer by the completion of the experience.

**STAGE TWO: Draw the big picture**

An overview of the content and processes of the lesson is given. This stage:

- Provides a set of landmarks for the learning experience;
- Continues to engage with the questions embedded earlier;
- Makes links between content and process; and
- Continues to alleviate anxieties over the material.

**STAGE THREE: Describe the outcomes**

The learners are informed of what they will have achieved by the end of the lesson and given an opportunity to set personal performance outcomes. This stage:

- Declares the outcomes;
- Begins to put the content into ‘bite-size’ pieces;
- Has the learners affirm for themselves personal performance targets; and
- Encourages learners to make choices and measure their own progress.

**STAGE FOUR: Provide a range of inputs**

The content of the lesson is given in Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) modes. This stage:

- Inputs new information through the use of sight, sound and movement/action;
- Is distinctive and promotes active engagement;
- Requires lots of opportunities for structured language exchange; and
- Is limited in duration to allow for added reflection, assimilation and review.
STAGE FIVE: Provide activity
Different activities are used to allow learners to explore the content in a variety of ways. This stage:

- Accesses a range of intelligences over time;
- Provides a ‘balanced diet’ of activities (over time);
- Encourages learners to reflect on their own learning preferences; and
- Immerses language in the learning activity itself.

In Iraq, the Accelerated Learning Cycle provided the key stages and principles of student-centered learning and a teachers’ guide for lesson planning.

STAGE SIX: Demonstrate
The learners demonstrate their understanding of the new knowledge. This stage:

- Further optimizes purposeful language exchange;
- Requires learners to share understanding through a variety of outcomes;
- Encourages further reflection on processes used; and
- Creates opportunities to ‘model’ success.

STAGE SEVEN: Review for recall and retention
The learners review individually and in structured groups. This stage:

- Consolidates the learning through individual, paired and shared review;
- Teaches different memory and recall techniques;
- Provides feedback for performance improvement; and
- Previews what is to come next.

The Accelerated Learning Program was implemented in five locations. The five programs were determined in consultation with the Ministry of Education and the regional Director Generals of Education in each location, after a survey of 4,500 out-of-school youth across Iraq was conducted in August 2003, before resumption of the school year in October.

**Figure 1: Structure of the Accelerated Learning Program in Iraq**

1. **Accelerated Learning Team Leader**
2. **Syllabus Compressors** (to compress the national curriculum from 2 years into 1 year)
   - NGO (field-based)
   - Master Trainer/Mentors (1 per program)
   - Community Workers (1 per program)
   - Accelerated Learning Teachers
**Average age of students**

The out-of-school youth enrolled in the AL Program missed up to six years of schooling and hence the program was designed to incorporate the teaching of multi-aged, older students. The age comparisons of enrolled students appear in Table 3. The average age of students in the Accelerated Learning Program in Iraq was 14.5 years (14.7 years for boys and 14.2 years for girls).

**The five pilot programs**

In each of the five pilot programs there were 100-150 students in four to seven classes. Hence, across Iraq there were about 700 students and 70 teachers involved in the pilot project. A Master Trainer/Mentor worked in each location to assist a team of teachers. There was also a Community Worker in each location to relate closely with the families and communities to mitigate a high dropout rate by encouraging regular attendance in the program.

The AL Program was implemented in Baghdad (urban capital), Diwaniyah (rural south-central), Kerbala (rural south-central), Nasiriyah (rural south), and Erbil (urban north in the Iraqi-Kurdistan Region).

A summary of the five Accelerated Learning pilot programs is as follows:

**PILOT PROGRAM: One**

In the urban poor Kadhimia neighborhood of Baghdad (central Iraq), a Creative Arts program was offered to girls and boys of grades 1/2, 3/4, and 5/6, in conjunction with the condensed national curriculum. Students exposed to the trauma of war and the previous restricted regime were able to explore their personal development and individual expression through art. The objective was to assess the simple, yet profound, ways that art could be used to improve self-esteem, reduce aggression, and provide relief from anxiety, disorientation, and claustrophobia in an urban post-war environment.

**PILOT PROGRAM: Two**

In the rural poor, south-central city of Diwaniyah, there were six classes for boys and girls: elementary grades 3/4, 5/6, and the intermediate grade 7/8. The intervention included an Activity Program in addition to the condensed national curriculum that involved a combination of activities such as art, sport, and visits to local parks and museums. Students were able to select a range of activities to supplement their educational curricula which involved dance or music activities that had otherwise been unavailable to them.

**PILOT PROGRAM: Three**

The religious, conservative area of Kerbala in south-central Iraq offered six classes for grades 1/2 and 3/4 boys and girls and focused on students who had missed years of schooling and were not permitted to return to the regular school system. The program provided them with the opportunity for a second chance to return to school. The grade 5/6 girls

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**Table 3: Average Age of Accelerated Learning Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>USUAL AGE OF STUDENTS IN REGULAR SCHOOLS</th>
<th>AVERAGE AGE OF AL STUDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 1/2</td>
<td>6 and 7 years</td>
<td>11 and 12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3/4</td>
<td>8 and 9 years</td>
<td>13 and 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 5/6</td>
<td>10 and 11 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 7/8</td>
<td>12 and 13 years</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
undertook a Computer Skills program while the
grade 5/6 boys undertook a Sports Program in con-
junction with the national curriculum.

PILOT PROGRAM: Four
The fringe dwellers in Sadir City of Nasiriyah in
southern Iraq were offered accelerated learning
classes for boys and girls of grades 3/4, 5/6, and 7/8.
These were children who lived on the city out-skirts
where it was too far to travel to school. Transportation arranged by the program took them
to and from school. The intervention included an
Activity Program in addition to the condensed
national curriculum. The Activity Program involved
a combination of activities such as art, sport, and
visits to local parks and museums. Students were
able to select a range of activities to supplement
their educational curricula which involved dance or
music activities that had otherwise been unavailable
to them.

PILOT PROGRAM: Five
The fifth program was located in a disadvantaged
region in the northern city of Erbil in Iraqi-
Kurdistan. The poor and disadvantaged children of
grades 3/4 and 5/6 were targeted. The intervention
focused on grades 3/4 and 5/6 for boys and girls,
with a handicrafts and sewing program for girls,
while inculcating basic skills such as reading, writ-
ing and mathematics. All students undertook the
national curriculum and sat examinations that
would enable them to return to the regular school
system.

INCENTIVES AND INCENTIVES: EXAMPLES

Teacher incentives
The Ministry of Education agreed that accelerated
learning teachers should receive an incentive salary
per month, pre-service and in-service training, and
a certificate for participating in the AL program.

Student incentives
There were differences of opinion on the issue of
student incentives and the recovery of family
incomes reduced or lost as a result of students
attending school instead of working. Initially, par-
ents had mixed feelings regarding sending their chil-
dren to school if their family income and support
were compromised. This included the support girls
provided to the family by caring for younger chil-
dren and the household. However, the program was
held during the afternoon shift, enabling students
to work before school. While student salaries were
favored to replace family incomes, they were not
provided.

Incentives suggested by the Ministry of Education
included transportation for students, salary costs to
students, or the provision of material goods such as
uniforms and sports shoes. Students suggested
sports clothing, sports shoes, salaries, computers,
calculators or school supplies. No group (MoE,
teachers, Director Generals, teachers or students)
mentioned food as an incentive. Classroom equip-
ment was seen to be essential for the success of the
AL program and an incentive to return children to
school. (See Table 4 for selected incentives.)

Table 4: Program Incentives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCENTIVE 1</th>
<th>INCENTIVE 2</th>
<th>INCENTIVE 3</th>
<th>INCENTIVE 4</th>
<th>INCENTIVE 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRANSPORT</td>
<td>STUDENT KITS</td>
<td>TEACHER KITS</td>
<td>HYGIENE KITS</td>
<td>EQUIPMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Hire of bus to transport students to and from school</td>
<td>● School bag with notepads, calculator, pens and pencils</td>
<td>● Set of geometry equipment and classroom ledgers</td>
<td>● Soap, washcloth, brush, comb, toothpaste, toothbrush and band-aids</td>
<td>● OHP &amp; screen; computer &amp; printer; sets of Deniz cubes (for mathematics)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher training was a key component in implementing the principles of accelerated learning. After 25 years of a restricted regime, teachers had not received professional development and training in effective teaching, including instruction, assessment, and classroom management skills. It was important, therefore, to include significant training in the principles and practices of effective teaching, as well as those that accelerate learning.

Teacher training focused on upgrading the skills and methodological knowledge of Master Trainers/Mentors and teachers through pre-service education for teachers (PRESET). The first three days of the five-day PRESET was focused on general teacher training, video examples of different teaching methodologies, questioning techniques, student participation and involvement, lesson planning, and classroom management. The discipline techniques of teachers used during the previous regime was reviewed and other methods were discussed in order to focus on a student-centered approach to learning in a non-threatening environment.

During the last two days of training, syllabus compression guidebooks, developed by the Ministry of Education, were issued to teachers. Ministry staff advised teachers on how to use the booklets, reinforcing a range of subject-related methodologies.

There was also a session on strategies for teaching students of various ages within the one class; as well as core principles of accelerated learning and the accelerated learning cycle as a lesson planning tool. Pre-service training was seen to be the beginning of a gradual process of change and learning for the newly-recruited teachers in a range of teaching methodologies that could be practiced during the pilot program.

In-service education for teachers (INSET) involved:

- Reinforcement of the accelerated learning cycle;
- Innovative learning methodologies;
- Use of the compressed grade level syllabus; and
- Monitoring and evaluation techniques and methods.

Ongoing support and training throughout the program for teachers, Master Trainer/Mentors, and Community Workers included:

- Orientation/induction into the AL Program for newly recruited teachers;
- Peer coaching;
- Classroom observations by Master Trainers, ministry, and project staff; and
- Post-observation follow-up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Summary and Location of Accelerated Learning Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baghdad Kadhimia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 boys* (2 classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/4 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/6 girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/6 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A critical factor in the success of any education system is the active and integrated participation and cooperation of stakeholders. The key players in the system are the students. Without their participation and cooperation in working towards goals which they see as interesting and relevant to their life and needs, investment in the system can produce only a poor return. Beyond the students are the parents, teachers, communities, and the Ministry of Education.

A participatory approach in the education system was the key to a successful program. This chapter outlines the expectations from the various stakeholders in a participatory approach with an emphasis at the regional and school levels.

**NGO Partner Roles and Responsibilities**

NGO personnel that supported the Accelerated Learning Program were predominantly field staff, such as Master Trainers and Community Workers, to provide support to teachers, families, and students in each location. Support by the NGO during the program included activities such as:

- Registering students into the AL Program;
- Providing constant contact with families and students to mitigate a high drop-out rate;
- Supporting teachers;
- Providing a conduit between teachers and students, and the project team leader;
- Providing logistics support in distributing equipment and learning materials;
- Collecting weekly student enrollment and attendance figures;
- Collecting any other statistics/information relevant to the monitoring of the program;
- Notifying the project team leader of issues and concerns;
- Assisting in sourcing, interviewing, and recruiting teachers and AL staff (such as cleaners and security staff);
- Sourcing suitable transportation companies to provide bus services in each location;
- Assisting with teacher training - venues hire and set-up, training sessions, etc; and
- Hosting visiting guests.

The key members in the AL program were local Community Workers (who worked with their team of 100-150 students in each location) and the Master Trainers/Mentors (who worked with 8-14 teachers in each location).

**Community Involvement**

Community involvement was important for increased student attendance. Students carried out learning projects in their communities that resulted in concrete benefits to the communities and subsequent support for accelerated learning, especially by parents of girls. This understanding, appreciation, and support helped to increase student attendance and achievement.

Parents and teachers interacted regularly to discuss school matters, specific student problems, and the needs of individual students. Participation by parents and community members as mentors helped to demonstrate the value that parents and the community placed on the education system.

The intervention programs specific to each of the five locations involved different aspects of community involvement. The computer skills program in...
Kerbala, for example, involved the community in a supportive role where they established a secured room, assisted in the provision of desks, and provided supervisory assistance during lessons. The handicraft program for girls in Erbil led to increased interest and participation from the community, particularly mothers who initiated a collection of fabrics, threads, and other materials for the program.

The role of community workers in each location was to enroll students, promote the program to parents and the local community, liaise with ministry staff and the regional education directorates, and offer support and advice to students. When student absences were noticed, the community workers maintained a close link with the family to discern reasons for student absence and to encourage the student to return to school. Community workers were active throughout the entire program.

**TEACHER COLLABORATION**

Collaboration aids learning. Most people are more efficient and effective learners if they work with others. Collaboration can take many forms. It can involve students doing together what they would otherwise do as individuals to reinforce learning sourced by the teacher. Teachers, also can enhance their learning experiences, by collaboration with each other and the community and parents to facilitate shared learning. This approach, where teachers resolved issues and shared successes, was part of the teachers’ professional development, as well as a continuous improvement mechanism for the Accelerated Learning Program.

Teacher collaboration involved them gathering in interest or subject groups to participate actively in their learning of their own subject matter and methodology or to share experiences in other subjects. This was the approach in the pre-service training workshop and one that the teachers were highly committed to and wanted more involvement in. They suggested more interaction between individuals or groups of teachers from different locations. This was not undertaken during the life of the program, predominantly due to security reasons which limited mobility, but would be encouraged in future programs.

An example of teacher collaboration from a different perspective was that of the Erbil teachers. During the program a teacher was newly recruited who was then inducted into the Accelerated Learning Program by the existing teachers. When payments were delayed, the teachers shared their earnings with the new teacher until payments were received, thus embedding their own strong sense of community and cooperation.

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

The Minister of Education was appointed in September 2003. The newly re-formed Ministry of Education set a goal of re-establishing education standards reflecting optimum levels internationally through revitalizing national and regional strategies for development. Existing Regional Education Directorates were reviewed by the Minister of Education that led, in many cases, to new appointments or a change in staffing.

The Regional Education Directorates were critical in the decentralized and participatory model. Through this approach, there was devolution of responsibility thereby reinforcing the sense of participation by the stakeholders at the regional and local levels. The coordination of education issues was undertaken by the Regional Education Directorates which, in turn, had firm links with the Ministry responsible for national priorities. Hence close cooperation with the Regional Education Directorates during the development and implementation of the AL program facilitated beneficial cooperation and mutual assistance. The Regional Education Directorates each had a planning director responsible for the education infrastructure development in their region and ensured optimum utilization of resources allocated.
In addition to regional support, the Minister of Education established an Accelerated Learning Ministerial Committee to facilitate the implementation and continuous improvement of the program. The role of the committee was to provide guidance with implementation issues, such as teacher recruitment and registration, the provision of district supervisors, staff to register students for mid-year and end-of-year examinations, and the provision of examination rooms and supervisors.

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE**

**Student enrollment**
At the commencement of the Accelerated Learning Program on 15 November, 566 students were enrolled in five locations across Iraq (in Baghdad, Kerbala, Diwaniyah, Nasiriyah, and Erbil). This was 66 students (13 percent) over the target of 500 students. Enrollments increased by 21 percent to 685 students within the first month of the program’s implementation. This included an increase in the enrollment of girls by 7 percent (from 294 to 315) and of boys by 36 percent (from 272 to 370). On 20 December, 685 students were enrolled (37 percent over the original target of 500 students and 98 percent towards the revised target of 700 students). Of the 685 students, 54 percent (370) were boys and 46 percent (315) were girls. The greatest increase in student enrollments occurred in Baghdad due to the establishment of three grade 1/2 classes (one for girls and two for boys).

Student enrollments increased since the beginning of the program from 566 to a peak of 699 on 3 January 2004. This represented an increase of 24 percent and 40 percent over the initial project target of 500 students. Since the peak, enrollments stabilized at 644 (a decline of 8 percent). Fifty-two percent (52 percent) of students enrollments were boys and 48 percent were girls. Boys were predominantly registered in Baghdad and Diwaniyah.

On 10 March, student enrollment numbers were 612, which represented a decline of 87 students from peak figures (12 percent decline from peak figures) with two months of the program remaining. Half of the students who dropped out said that they could no longer handle working and studying at the same time. A further 30 percent said that they were disappointed that they did not receive payment for going to school. Others dropped out due to illness or moving away from the AL Program location.

**Student attendance**
On program commencement, 262 students attended school. Some children did not attend because they had no clothes or shoes to wear. In Diwaniyah on 29 November, none of the 123 students registered went to school due to heavy rains that flooded the area and school grounds. The student attendance was also low in Baghdad on 29 November due to heavy traffic returning after the Eid holiday whereby students could not travel to school. The students who did attend said that it took them one...
and a half hours to get to school. Soon after Eid, transportation was arranged for students in Baghdad.

In the first month, student attendances increased by 129 percent across the country (from 262 to 599). This represented an increase of 172 percent by girls (from 106 to 288) and an increase of 99 percent by boys (from 156 to 311). The increase in attendances was due to factors such as:

- The establishment of three additional classes in Baghdad for grade 1/2, including two classes for boys;
- Students enjoying the program and their teachers without fear of physical punishment;
- Students making new friends with the same motivation to learn;
- Mothers spreading the news of the commencement of the program to other families;
- The attraction of student incentives such as student bags, hygiene kits, and soccer balls;
- Students having essential study materials, such as textbooks, notebooks and stationery, some for the first time;
- The realization by mothers and students that the program was a ‘genuine’ program and a second chance at education;
- The professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers and staff; and
- Progressively increased support from ministry staff, particularly in regional governorates.

At the end of December, the attendance rate for girls was 91 percent and the attendance rate for boys was 84 percent. On 24 January, the attendance rate across Iraq was 98 percent, with 99 percent attendance rate for girls and 97 percent attendance rate for boys. The attendance rate for boys increased markedly due to examinations week from 17-24 January.

Attendance in the Accelerated Learning Program decreased significantly at the end of February (71 percent of registered students attended) due to the religious festival of Ashoura. Many children remained home to help their families cook in preparation for the national holiday. This particularly affected the Shi'ite locations of Kerbala and Baghdad (Kadhimia) and the attendance rate of boys (58 percent of registered boys attended school on 28 February and 84 percent of girls attended school). Attendance rates stabilized in March.
The Accelerated Learning Program took into account the following challenges in the establishment of the program:

- The program was closely tied to the Iraqi national curriculum and would be largely bound by the innate strengths and weaknesses of the present system.
- The teachers were working within a framework of the ministry curriculum and were bound by ministry regulations.
- Teaching in Iraq stemmed from a long tradition of rote memorization and choral recitation found in local communities.
- Teachers had, to date, little or no training in a range of improved and emerging teaching methodologies.
- There was no scope in the program for curriculum development.
- The political environment was complex with escalating security threats.
- There were insufficient resources, particularly textbooks, within the Ministry of Education and regional governorates to meet the high demand for school rehabilitation/improvement and educational equipment.

DEMAND FOR THE PROGRAM

Initially, accelerated learning was a new concept for parents, teachers, regional directors of education, and ministry staff. Community Workers knocked on doors in each location to promulgate information about the Accelerated Learning Program and enroll students. As mothers in the communities spread news that the Program was “genuine,” particularly by mothers, the demand grew and intensified. In some locations, parents were lining up outside the school to register their children into the program. The demand was strongest from boys over fifteen years and parents of girls.

QUALITY OF TEACHERS

As in any educational program, the motivation of teachers is a major indicator of success. The quality of the Master Trainers, Community Workers and teachers was unknown at the commencement of the project. The teachers in the AL Program were either out-of-work professionals returning to the workforce or new graduates with no teaching experience. However, with pre-service and in-service teacher training, the quality of teachers improved dramatically, as did their enthusiasm and commitment.

ACTIVE LEARNING

The basic concept is that students learn by participating in relevant activities. In Iraq’s previous regime, teaching was predominantly a passive experience for students, where teachers taught and students listened. Learning is more motivating and interesting when it is active and “hands-on.” However, with limited resources and educational equipment, it was difficult for teachers to introduce many resource-intensive lessons, such as building, creating, and making activities. Nevertheless, the active learning that was undertaken in the AL classes included students acting, singing, dancing, painting, drawing, clapping, demonstrating, tutoring, miming, skipping, doing sport, and playing games.

ACCELERATED LEARNING

Students and teachers were expected to fulfill an immense workload in achieving two years of study in one calendar year. Students chose not to have breaks
between classes. They also asked for more homework and were committed to completing assignments. Students and teachers in the Iraqi-Kurdistan Region chose to work throughout the mid-year vacation. An expectation of accelerated learning is that, in a productive environment, students take on the learning capacity that sustains them in order to reach a level of achievement that may initially appear beyond them, and this was evident in the AL Program in Iraq.

**MIXED AGES AND PEER LEARNING IN THE AL CLASSROOMS**

Government schools are generally organized by age groups in separate grades. It is convenient and easy to manage. However, in the AL classrooms, the ages of students were mixed due to students missing several grades of schooling and registering in the AL program according to their last grade completed. This resulted in students being several years apart. Students, anecdotally, expressed great satisfaction with their peers, citing their classrooms as emulating “real life.” Students learned from each other and also appeared to perform better when grouped in this way. They all had the same motivation to learn and therefore peer learning developed naturally as a means to assist each other. Hence students viewed the classes as a “family” environment.

**MITIGATION OF THE DROP-OUT RATE**

Master Trainers and Community Workers working within communities were instrumental in retaining students and mitigating a high drop-out rate. Community Workers communicated with families to determine reasons for students dropping out of the program and convinced parents of the children and the children themselves to remain in the program. An example of this includes a girl from Baghdad whose parents kept her home because she had learned to read and write and there was no further reason for her to be at school. The Community Worker told her parents that the girl had achieved top marks in the mid-year exam and that she could achieve greater success. Her parents were convinced that education was the best option for her and she continued the program.

**STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND INTERVENTIONS**

Initially the intervention programs (computing, sport, creative arts, and handicrafts) were designed to attract students to the AL classes. This was the case, particularly for girls in Erbil who were keen to participate in the handicrafts program. However, the intervention programs were not critical in retaining students in the program, with the exception of the handicrafts program in Erbil. Anecdotally, students initially came to the program to learn to read and write, and for a second chance at education. However, encouraged by their successes, they then developed aspirations to continue their education in order to achieve career dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, lawyers, and so on. In Erbil, the handicraft program captured a high demand from girls to join the program and was also a critical factor in their high attendance rate.

**SUPPORT FROM REGIONAL DIRECTOR GENERALS OF EDUCATION**

Generally the support from Director Generals of Education (DGs) was varied in each location. This mostly depended on their understanding of the program and their commitment to its outcomes. As the program’s successes became more evident, DGs were more committed to providing equipment, textbooks, and upgraded facilities and classes. Students in three locations (Erbil, Diwaniyah, and Nasiriyah) moved to upgraded schools due to the support of the DGs. In all cases, the schools were cleaner, larger, and had been recently renovated.

**COOPERATIVE LEARNING**

Effective and cooperative learning occurs in groups when teachers include (1) a group goal and (2) indi-
individual accountability (Slavin, 1983). Students are likely to learn more content and increase their self-esteem, interpersonal communication skills, and teamwork skills. Attendance also generally increases because students feel personally needed at school. It was found that cooperative learning in the AL Program led to students overcoming their reluctance to ask for help and the tendency for low achievers to avoid participation.

**SELF-ESTEEM**

Self-esteem is called “the heart of learning” (Dryden and Vos, 1997) and needs to be nurtured to accelerate learning. Connecting learning with positive emotions improves the learning process. Schools and teachers that expect and support every learner to succeed can greatly improve student achievement. This was evident in the AL Program by the high attendance rate and the willingness of students’ to achieve their best results.
LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence. (Helen Keller)

LESSONS LEARNED

- Intervention programs tailored to specific regions and communities in consultation with regional education directorates led to greater community participation and support.
- The regional Director Generals of Education recommended specific requirements to meet local needs. However, independent of each other, a set of core requirements emerged. These included a focus on elementary grades, separate classes for girls and boys, the provision of incentives such as transportation, and teacher training.
- NGO expertise in the country is essential to the success of the program at the local level.
- Community Workers proved to be a vital component of the design of the AL Program. They were able to work with local ministry staff, teachers, parents, families, and students to mitigate a high drop-out rate, retain enthusiasm for the program, and remain responsive to local concerns and issues.
- Classroom equipment was essential to the program’s success and more was required. Many activities that would generally be associated with accelerated learning, such as making and creating, conducting experiments, and building models, could not be undertaken due to lack of resources. Practical low-cost materials would have provided more stimulating and rewarding activities for students.
- Teacher training was in demand, particularly for extra advice on subject specialties in order to increase the motivation of students and provide a greater diversity of methodologies. Hence more in-service teacher training was required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dramatic transformations of teaching and learning methodologies were impractical to expect in Iraq after decades of a strict, regimented education system. The way forward is through a continuous, evolving process of design, implementation, and reflection that gradually emerges throughout implementation of accelerated learning and student-centered philosophies, principles, and practices. By applying accelerated learning principles to education within countries in conflict and crisis, students can achieve a sense of achievement, enjoyment, and shared experiences in a safe, non-threatening environment.

Recommendations for the implementation of accelerated learning in countries in crisis include the following:

- “Ground truth” the program before finalizing the design and implementation so that the core principles of accelerated learning can be adapted to the country under existing conditions.
- Engage the Ministry of Education at the regional level to provide a program of relevance, responsive to the needs of the target group in each specific location.
- Engage and train local expertise in the implementation and management of the program for ownership and sustainability.
- Engage community workers to work closely with local communities to mitigate high drop-out rates.
- Provide continuous in-service teacher training and support in accelerated learning teaching and learning methodologies.
- Develop a creative approach to instruction to mitigate the lack of resources while main-
taining low-cost techniques for sustainability.

The above approaches are outlined in more detail.

**“Ground truth” the program**

The initial design proposal phase was not able to be prepared in-country in Iraq, as the war had just finished. It was therefore essential to determine the degree of support for the program, the resources available, and the capacity of the Ministry of Education, once the international staff were in-country. For example, as the program was being developed, the Minister of Education had not yet been appointed and it was two months into the program before the appointment was made. At this time, staff was uncertain about their tenure and role in the ministry. Accelerated learning was a new concept to the Iraq education system; so too was the concept of a compressed syllabus. It was therefore essential to determine the appropriate staff who could assist in the development of a compressed curriculum for each subject in each grade. Regional staff in the ministry provided support in recruiting teachers to the program and in providing facilities, but this was a gradual process with varying levels of assistance.

**Engage the Ministry of Education at the regional level**

Regional staff in the ministry provided support in the selection and recruitment of teachers to the program and in providing facilities, but this was a gradual process with varying levels of assistance. However, it was essential in order to work simultaneously in each region for a quick adoption of the program for the start of the school year. It was also necessary to recruit teachers trusted by the community, particularly in the current climate with potential for disengagement by communities in a post-war situation.

**Engage and train local expertise**

All teachers, educational staff, security officers and cleaners were recruited from the local community. Knowledge of their community and the families was critical in building rapid rapport, identifying potential students, and promoting the program in areas of high need and demand. The teachers were also familiar with each other and were able to bond quickly to provide a supportive environment in which to test the accelerated learning methodologies and adapt to new methods of teaching.

**Engage community workers**

Community workers were also recruited from within each location of the Accelerated Learning Program to work closely with the communities and families to mitigate high drop-out rates. Each community worker was familiar with the targeted group of students and their families to identify students who were long-term out-of-school youth, willing to re-enter the education system. Rapport was developed rapidly to ensure that whenever a student missed school, the community worker could respond to the situation by engaging in discussions with the family. Cultivating an attitude to education and school was a prime role as many students had been out of school for up to five years. Community workers also worked closely with teachers to promote the principles and practices of accelerated learning and a system of learning that was new to students and their families.

**Provide continuous in-service teacher training and support**

Teachers were continuously trained and supported on the principles and practices of accelerated learning, as well as best practice teaching methodologies. This was particularly important where teachers had previously worked under the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein where corporal punishment was strictly enforced and encouraged. The teaching hierarchy was also inculcated into the system. In-service training provided techniques in classroom management that essentially eliminated the need for corpo-
ral punishment and student abuse. Continual support in the new methodologies led to increased confidence in the teachers and a learning environment for the students that resembled a family situation, where older students assisted younger students, and teachers provided the nurturing stimulus for enhanced learning.

**Develop a creative approach to instruction**
A creative approach to instruction mitigated the lack of classroom and teaching resources to maintain a low-cost approach to the implementation of the program. For example, the arts program in Baghdad used recycled materials and unused items from the community. Multi-media equipment was not available in the classrooms and other approaches to instruction were necessary to provide the stimulus to enhance student learning. These included drama lessons, singing lessons, the use of charts and maps, and the use of improvised materials in the classroom.

**LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Curriculum reforms**
Curriculum reforms are needed with a focus on areas such as languages, critical thinking, information technology, living values, health and physical education, as well as vocational and technical education.

**Pre-schools**
Pre-schools within primary schools with an agreed, standardized curriculum based on the principles of early childhood development are also required. The flexible focus may be on psychomotor and sensor-motor development, discovery of the child’s environment, team spirit development, identification of forms, sounds, colors and early artistic revelations through creative arts and living skills.

**Primary schooling**
Primary schooling should be provided within a framework of continuous assessment of performance, remedial education, pastoral care, and counseling focusing on the principles of accelerated learning. Specific accelerated learning classes for out-of-school youth could be added that accelerate students’ learning from two years of schooling to one calendar year as a “catch-up” program to re-enter students into age-appropriate classes.

**Secondary schooling**
Secondary schooling should be designed to promote the general development of students by helping them to acquire knowledge, insight, skills, and values to prepare them to make the appropriate choice at upper secondary level and for an active adult life in the future. Principles of accelerated learning can appropriately be introduced to classes with outcomes focusing on: (1) re-entry into secondary school in an age-appropriate class; (2) entry into vocational programs; or (3) entry/re-entry into work.

**Academic credit**
Academic credit could be introduced for in-service teacher training resulting in individual teachers gaining credit towards MoE certification. Peer coaching could supplement in-service training through the appointment of mentors to recently-qualified staff, guiding them in their early years of teaching in matters of curriculum content, classroom practice and relationships with other staff, students, parents, and the community.


Martina Nicolls has 25 years in education and management training in developing countries. Her experience includes primary, secondary and tertiary education. She served as the Creative Associates’ Team Leader of the Accelerated Learning Program under the USAID-funded Revitalization of Iraqi Schools and the Stabilization of Education (RISE) Project. Her additional expertise includes capacity building, institutional strengthening, teacher training, vocational education and training, and community development. Martina has experience in quality management, monitoring and evaluation, database management, systems management, and change management for education and health infrastructures. Her skills include: strategic planning, facilitating participatory reviews, and gender mainstreaming.

Martina has worked in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Iraq, Kashmir, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, and Syria, predominantly in basic education, accelerated learning, multi-grade teaching and the education of girls, as well as providing assistance to ministries of education.
Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII)

CAII addresses urgent challenges facing societies today. Whether they are shifts in demographics, the workplace, the classroom, technology, or the political arena at home and abroad, CAII views change as an opportunity to improve. CAII helps clients turn transitional environments into a positive force – an impetus for creating more empowered and effective systems and institutions. CAII approaches change as an opportunity to transform and renew.

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Around the world, the ravages of war and poverty have left many education systems without textbooks, classrooms, or properly trained teachers – the basics for a child’s education. But with an eye on the needs for immediate remedies and long-term foundations, Creative Associates International’s Education, Mobilization, and Communication (EMC) Division has been a driving force in school reform and development that benefits children and the societies that they will someday inherit. From Latin America and the Caribbean to Africa, the Middle East, and South Central Asia, EMC has helped improve student access to education and retention, participation, equity, quality, and access.

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