



Exploring collaborative interaction and self-direction in Teacher Learning Teams: case-studies from a middle-income country analysed using Vygotskian theory

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Abstract:	This article explores teachers' learning from a Vygotskian perspective which emphasises collaborative interaction and self-direction. The article describes case-studies of three Senior Teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged Egyptian primary schools where collaboration and self-direction were systemically discouraged. It analyses how, through a teacher development Intervention, the teachers learned to use collaborative interaction to support their own learning and felt more creative, authoritative and powerful after being guided to exercise self-direction.

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3 **Exploring collaborative interaction and self-direction in Teacher Learning Teams: case-**
4 **studies from a middle-income country analysed using Vygotskian theory**
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12

13 **Abstract**
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16 This article explores teachers' learning from a Vygotskian perspective which emphasises
17 collaborative interaction and self-direction. The article describes case-studies of three
18 Senior Teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged Egyptian primary schools where
19 collaboration and self-direction were systemically discouraged. It analyses how, through a
20 teacher development Intervention, the teachers learned to use collaborative interaction to
21 support their own learning and felt more creative, authoritative and powerful after being
22 guided to exercise self-direction.
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32 **BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**
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35 Extensive literature on sustainable professional development has indicated that
36 participating teachers must have capacity for both collaborative interaction and self-
37 direction (Leahy and Wiliam 2011). This article re-explores these aspects of learning in the
38 Egyptian context where, as in many middle and low-income countries from Nigeria to
39 Jamaica to Myanmar, neither collaborative interaction nor self-direction have systemic
40 support (Hammad 2010). The article offers a novel approach to exploring teacher
41 development, through a Vygotskian lens. Vygotsky's (1986; 1978) theories about how
42 people learn were originally applied to pupils' learning rather than teachers' (e.g. Yandell
43 2007). In the case of pupils, the target is the development of academic (or scientific)
44 concepts. However, for adult teachers, learning and pedagogy become the focus instead. As
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3 our professional development Intervention proceeded, Vygotsky's theories proved to be
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5 significant.
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For Peer Review Only

Academic significance of the article

This article provides case-studies of the professional learning and development of three Senior Teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged Egyptian primary schools who took part in the TLT-Intervention. It investigates their own views of learning and development. It explores how they described collaborative interaction and self-direction influencing their professional learning across the eight-month Intervention. By professional learning, we borrow Rogers' (1951) definition of change as in 'the organisation of self' (390): that is, of a shift in how they perceived and enacted their own learning and their support for others' learning. Where their change seemed significant and irreversible, we refer to their learning as transformative, in Mezirow's (1990) sense:

Becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world (14).

Transformative learning involved re-defining themselves, in relation to others, thereby potentially moving beyond localised learning to long-term development.

The relevance of this research lies in its task of more fully understanding the complex interplay between individual teachers' professional development and Vygotsky's emphasis on collaborative interaction and self-direction. The findings will be particularly relevant to the many countries of the world where teachers' collaborative and self-directed learning are dismissed in favour of conformity to those with more powerful hierarchical positions. Some authors suggest that such a hierarchical approach has prevailed in Egypt (and other countries in the global south) partly because beliefs there about the individual's role in society are 'diametrically opposed to Western or at least mainstream US assumptions' (Atkinson 1977, 80, cited in Ab Kadir 2017, 242). Hammad (2010, 108) described how

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3 Egyptian teachers' fears of 'chaos' and 'conflict' seemed 'to be rooted in a greater societal
4 emphasis on social cohesion and harmony'. Pratt (2007) proposed that, for ex-colonial
5 countries such as Egypt, this was a *result* of previous subjugation. Thereby, there has
6 seemed to linger 'a deeply entrenched culture of obedience and conformity... that compels
7 the rights and privileges of the larger society over the individual' (Ab Kadir 2017, 237).

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14 These assumptions tend to be in tension with constructivist models of teachers' learning,
15 where teachers' creativity and diversity may be more highly valued than conformity to
16 existing structures.
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20 21 **Professional development Intervention using Teacher Learning Teams [TLTs]**

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24 The processes which we call here the "Intervention" included the introduction into six
25 Egyptian primary schools the system of Teacher Learning Communities [TLCs] or "Teacher
26 Learning Teams" as they were re-named in Egypt (hence "TLTs"). We adapted Leahy and
27 Wiliam's (2011) design for TLCs but replaced their focus on formative assessment with
28 learning and teaching English as a foreign language. After spending time in Egyptian primary
29 classrooms (see Hargreaves, Mahgoub and Elhawary 2016), as a team of researchers, we
30 perceived that some essential ingredients for professional learning were missing from
31 teachers' experiences: specifically, opportunities for collaborative interaction; and for
32 directing learning according to individual need and interest. Recent reviews of teacher
33 professional development suggest that TLCs (or TLTs) embody characteristics closely
34 associated with sustained improvements in teachers' development (Belibas, Bulut and Gedik
35 2017; Earley and Porritt 2010; Leahy and Wiliam 2011; Philpott and Oates 2017; Stoll et al.
36 2006; Tannehill and MacPhail 2017). This improvement is attributed to the fact that TLCs are
37 founded on teachers identifying their own focus for, and process of, professional
38 development. In this model, teachers are expected to collaborate with each other in order
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3 to learn; input from beyond the school is also helpful, although the main site for
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5 development is the school. None of these foundational aspects characterised teachers'
6
7 planned learning in Egyptian schools (see also Hammad 2010).
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10 **Vygotsky's theories about collaborative interaction**

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12 Collaborative interaction among teachers has been frequently described as a key feature of
13
14 successful professional development (Bellibas et al. 2017; King 2014; Tannehill and MacPhail
15
16 2017) and is central to the structure of TLTs [TLCs]. In Vygotskian terms specifically, the term
17
18 'collaborative interaction' refers to any situation in which the learner is being offered
19
20 interaction with another person or people. This person or people provide support for a
21
22 problem that the learner wants to solve: '... through demonstration, leading questions, and
23
24 by introducing elements of the task's solution' (Vygotsky [1987, 209] in Chaiklin [2003, 54]).
25
26 How much each teacher could benefit would depend on their existing levels of perception,
27
28 thought and will. As Chaiklin (2003, 49) suggested, existing levels would reflect
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30 'institutionalized demands and expectations that developed historically in a particular
31
32 societal tradition of practice'.
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39 **Vygotsky's theories about self-direction**

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41 Reviews of teacher development through TLCs (e.g. Philpott and Oates 2017; Tannehill and
42
43 MacPhail 2017) indicate that effective teacher professional development depends on
44
45 teachers exercising proactive self-direction; in particular, it is effective when a learning need
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47 is identified as important by participants themselves and action taken and supported
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49 accordingly. This is an often-overlooked aspect of teacher professional development,
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51 particularly in countries like Egypt where theoretical, university-based training still has the
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53 dominant place in the hierarchy of valued knowledge (see Hammad 2016). The organisation
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3 of TLTs, in contrast, focused explicitly on strategies identified by teachers themselves as
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5 useful for their own classrooms.
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8 Vygotsky emphasised that volition and interest led the developmental process. Chaiklin
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10 (2003, 47) described how, from a Vygotskian view, learners noticed their current capabilities
11
12 and compared these to their '*needs and desires, and the demands and possibilities of the*
13
14 *environment*'. In trying to overcome this gap between current and desired capabilities, and
15
16 to realize particular action, the learner willingly engaged in tasks and interactions which
17
18 allowed 'the formation of new functions or the enrichment of existing functions' (2003, 47).
19
20 Teachers thereby perceived themselves more as subjects than as objects of development
21
22 (Philpott and Oates 2017).
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26 As Vygotsky stressed, self-direction may begin during collaborative interaction: through
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28 speaking with others, any simple action was raised to a higher level and subjected to the
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30 power of the learner who 'puts upon the action the stamp of will'. It was this stamping,
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32 during interaction, that made the learner's action 'free' (Vygotsky 1933, in van der Veer &
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34 Valsiner 1991, 345). In other words, reflection by the individual could be spawned from
35
36 collaborative interaction (Shayer 2003, 481) which led to freely adopted action. Rewards,
37
38 punishments or persuasion would not substitute the teacher's own volition and interest
39
40 (Niemic and Ryan 2009). Self-direction therefore suggests creating, or controlling for
41
42 oneself, a situation, by taking an informed initiative, rather than waiting for things to be
43
44 done *for or to* oneself. Important tools that support the taking of initiative are collaborative
45
46 interaction with peers; as well as the teacher's own observation of how their actions are
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48 making change which 'can give teachers an authoritative basis for their views' (Philpott and
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50 Oates 2017, 327). However, as Philpott and Oates (2017) point out, in a tightly controlled
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3 system, such as the Egyptian system, these 'alternative discourses' may have to be learnt
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5 from beyond the school (327).
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7 8 *Application to the research* 9

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11 In the TLT-Intervention on which this research was based, the researchers led the
12
13 Intervention (while at the same time carrying out the research *on* the Intervention) as 'More
14
15 Capable Instructors'. They aimed to awaken 'a variety of internal developmental processes'
16
17 in each Senior Teacher through collaborative interaction during meetings (Vygotsky [1978,
18
19 90] cited in Shayer [2003, 471]). Collaborative interaction implied the valuing of each
20
21 teacher's insights and contributions to others' learning. In our TLT-Intervention, this
22
23 unselfish respect for others' aspirations, without thought of personal gratification, was a
24
25 particular challenge for Senior Teachers, in a context where participants often faced fierce
26
27 competitiveness among colleagues who were used to being oppressed by those with power
28
29 over them (see also Hammad 2010). Our research therefore explored whether teachers
30
31 could learn and develop professionally despite these tensions, benefiting from collaborative
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33 interaction as well as self-direction.
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38 39 **RESEARCH DESIGN** 40

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42 The following sections describe the principles according to which this research was
43
44 conducted. It used an interpretivist approach. Without denying the existence of one 'reality'
45
46 underlying people's interpretations, we were interested in exploring how this reality was
47
48 constructed by seven Senior Teachers in Alexandrian primary schools and how we could
49
50 make sense of these constructions (Guba and Lincoln 1985; Maxwell 2012).
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53 54 *Sample* 55 56 57 58 59 60

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3 Our research sample of Senior Teachers consisted of all the teachers signed up for the TLT-
4
5 Intervention: four female teachers from three National Institute schools, which were
6
7 government schools with some private funding. We also worked with three male teachers
8
9 at AlAzhar schools which were government-controlled with support from AlAzhar university
10
11 and mosque in Cairo. All participating schools were relatively disadvantaged socio-
12
13 economically, but the AlAzhar schools took some of Egypt's poorest children. The Senior
14
15 Teachers involved were those who had been teaching for an extended period, who
16
17 monitored the learning and teaching of less experienced teachers.
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20 21 22 *Context of the research: the Intervention*

23
24 Funded and directed by the Education Development Trust, we as consultants led the
25
26 Intervention as a team of Egyptian and English educators (two of whom are authors of this
27
28 article, one Egyptian, one English). The TLT-Intervention aimed to support the learning and
29
30 teaching of English. We academic researchers, however, also used the TLT-Intervention as a
31
32 means to investigate teachers' professional use of collaborative interaction and self-
33
34 direction.
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38 As described also by Hammad (2010), there tended to be a lack of trust among Egyptian
39
40 teachers, as well as a lack of experience, in making professional decisions. Therefore the
41
42 following three initial training sessions for the Senior Teachers were considered essential for
43
44 the success of the TLT-Intervention and took place towards the end of 2015:
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48 1) Two days on leadership generally, to explore alternatives to the dominant autocratic
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50 model;

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53 2) Two days on "Coaching" specifically (Carnell, MacDonald & Askew 2006). This was a
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55 leadership approach which entailed empathetic listening to others rather than the giving of
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3 instructions or making demands (as in the normal image of “leadership”). This approach
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5 demanded a more equal relationship between leader and led and assumed more self-
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7 direction on the part of the led; and
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10 3) Two days on leading TLTs as communities in which the Senior Teacher and her/his Team
11
12 of teachers shared/developed practices and reflections.
13
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15 From each school, one Senior Teacher attended initial training sessions.
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17

18 In February 2016, we then hosted a workshop to which Senior Teachers brought all their TLT
19
20 teachers to share and demonstrate their new ideas with others: this turned out to be an
21
22 extremely unusual but highly appreciated occurrence in their context (see also Hammad
23
24 2016). In March, the seven Senior Teachers made a presentation at an international
25
26 conference in Jordan: this was also a rare and valuable opportunity that was normally left
27
28 only to those in higher hierarchical positions.
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31
32 Apart from these discrete training sessions, the seven Senior Teachers met together every
33
34 month to discuss and reflect on how their professional development was progressing; and
35
36 how their support to other [TLT] teachers’ professional development was flourishing under
37
38 their guidance. Each Senior Teacher had been initially observed by one consultant as they
39
40 carried out an innovative five-minute ‘action’ in their classroom which was integrated to
41
42 support their tightly-prescribed syllabus. The action was planned on an Action Plan to meet
43
44 self-identified goals. Goals included, for example, improving speaking, focusing on struggling
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46 pupils, making learning more active.
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50 TLTs had been set up in each school by the Senior Teacher. In mid-November, each Senior
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52 Teacher had led their first TLT meeting, supported by consultants. After this TLT meeting,
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54 the TLT teachers had also tried out their own innovative five-minute actions in their English
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3 classrooms. Teachers observed each other during these actions. In each subsequent TLT
4
5 meeting, the Senior Teacher invited the group to:

- 6
7 • Describe, then analyse as a team, what happened when they tried out the planned
8
9 five-minute action in their classroom.
- 10
11 • Decide on a revised Action Plan for the forthcoming month and decide which
12
13 colleague would observe it.
14
15

16
17 As consultants, we provided ongoing input to support Senior Teachers' coaching skills; and
18
19 attended TLT meetings and observed classrooms if invited.
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21

22 *Data collection during the Intervention*

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24 In this article, we present the cases of only three Senior Teachers who led TLTs, drawing
25
26 exclusively on interview data. We refer informally also to our attendance at their TLT
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28 meetings in their schools. We chose to use our available space here to focus in detail on
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30 three participants rather than to collate our findings across all seven, because the
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32 development journey itself, and each Senior Teacher's specific environment, were
33
34 important for understanding how they used collaborative interaction and self-direction. The
35
36 decision also reflects our belief that each teacher's journey across the year was original and
37
38 whole in itself (Fielding 1996) and needed to be narrated holistically. Findings relating to all
39
40 seven Senior Teachers can be found elsewhere (Hargreaves and ElHawary 2018).
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46 The three Senior Teachers we selected did, however, represent all seven as much as
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48 possible. For example, they included two women and one man of different ages, who came
49
50 from three very different schools and who responded diversely to the TLT-Intervention
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52 activities. They were (using pseudonyms): Laila, Saif and Farida. We carried out three in-
53
54 depth interviews in November, January and May, 2015-16, with each Senior Teacher plus an
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3 additional one with Saif in September 2015. All interviews were transcribed and translated
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5 from Arabic by the dedicated Intervention translator, in constant dialogue with one author
6
7 of this paper (who is herself bilingual).
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9

10 *Data analysis*

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12 There were several stages to our data analysis, which the two main researchers carried out
13
14 collaboratively. As interviews were transcribed, we studied the transcriptions and prepared
15
16 our next interview schedule accordingly [September, November, January, May]. By May, we
17
18 were very familiar with the data. Basing our strategy on Grounded Theory (Glaser and
19
20 Strauss, 1967), we then looked inductively for themes raised in all the interviews. Our focus
21
22 had always been collaborative interaction and self-direction, but we noticed a range of
23
24 unanticipated aspects to these as they developed across the Intervention. Other themes
25
26 emerged in interviews too. We therefore drew aside those instances where collaborative
27
28 interaction and self-direction were clearly addressed and re-examined these texts for sub-
29
30 themes. We found that often these sub-themes linked directly to our understanding of
31
32 Vygotky's theories about learning. For example, our sub-themes included:
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- 38 • Appreciation/encouragement;
 - 39 • Enjoyment, curiosity, innovation, creativity;
 - 40 • Confidence in self/gaining a sense of authority;
 - 41 • Teamwork/listening to others;
 - 42 • Consultants' demonstration.
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51 We therefore re-analysed the dataset, with these sub-themes in mind. This time, we looked
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53 specifically for how each of our participants talked about the sub-themes we had
54
55 developed. During this process we selected those three leaders whose journeys we
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3 believed would best represent the whole group's professional development across the TLT-
4
5 Intervention. [After each citation below, the month of interview is noted to highlight
6
7 chronological progression e.g. 'JanInt' denotes an interview carried out in January].
8
9

10 *Ethical issues*

11
12 This research, both in its design and fieldwork, adhered to the BSA ethical guidelines (2002).

13
14 We explained to Senior Teachers that the purposes of our research were to explore means
15
16 for developing English teaching. It appeared that they were not worried about the specific
17
18 details of the research but most interested in working with academics from outside their
19
20 schools who could give them support for English teaching. They had ample opportunities to
21
22 withdraw from the research which ran from September 2015 to May 2016; but they were all
23
24 keen to take part and signed their consent willingly. Their identities have been disguised so
25
26 that only the participants themselves could detect their real roles.
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31 **FINDINGS**

32 **Laila**

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34
35 Laila was a mature teacher of Year 6 pupils in an English language school. Laila was an
36
37 interesting case because, when she started the TLT-Intervention, she seemed professional
38
39 and well-organised in terms of her own learning, teaching and leadership. However, during
40
41 the TLT-Intervention, she noticed significant progress in all three. The goal of Laila's own
42
43 five-minute activities for pupils was to improve the learning of her lowest-attaining pupils.
44
45 She therefore experimented with differentiation by giving pupils a choice of task, without
46
47 deciding for her pupils who should choose which level of task. This was extremely
48
49 innovative in her context.
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55 **Laila's learning through and about collaborative interaction**

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3 Laila's description of her collaborative interactions at the start of the TLT-Intervention
4
5 suggested that, unusually, she already had interactive relationships with her teachers and
6
7 pupils and considered their contributions as sources for her own learning. As Senior
8
9 Teacher, she consulted even her youngest teachers and gave them choices. She also valued
10
11 collaborative interaction with pupils, parents and the wider community, including those
12
13 outside the system:
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16
17 I like the new and crazy ideas from the younger generation... I like to take feedback
18
19 from parents by asking our relatives, friends, neighbours; and getting their feedback.
20

21
22 They are distant from the process itself so their feedback can be very helpful
23

24 [NovInt].
25

26
27 During the TLT-Intervention, Laila felt that she gained by conversing with teachers from the
28
29 different Intervention schools because she noticed that everyone had similar problems and
30
31 this made her feel 'normal'. However, in November, she told us that teachers from her
32
33 school could not learn from the teachers in the AlAzhar schools because English there was
34
35 of a lower level. However, after interaction with these teachers at the February workshop,
36
37 Laila's view shifted:
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39
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41 [My teachers] were very affected by the [AlAzhar] groups. They saw in the videos
42
43 how basic their facilities were and how weak their students were and they still
44
45 managed to do something! This really motivated them [MayInt].
46

47
48 Laila also changed how she collaborated with her teachers. Unlike any of the other Senior
49
50 Teachers, prior to the TLT-Intervention she already gathered together her teachers in a
51
52 weekly meeting where they discussed more than just the syllabus. In November, she
53
54 described those existing meetings as very useful because in them she was able to find out
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3 'what people are thinking and feeling' [NovInt]. In these meetings, she had always treated
4 her teachers as colleagues, reflecting her developmental rather than hierarchical
5 perspective. However, she perceived the situation as follows: 'They sit with me and I make
6 things easier for them by telling them what to do' [NovInt]. By May, she displayed a
7 difference: now, she emphasised that she learnt more from her teachers than they gained
8 from her. In particular, they gave her encouragement. She suggested that the learning by
9 each person, including herself, exceeded that which could have been attained by each
10 individual in isolation. She explained:

21 As a leader, I learnt how I can help the people around me *and how they can help me*.
22 Actually, they might have helped me more than I helped them... I felt we were really
23 helping each other. If that could occur more often, what would happen? We were
24 four, and we all benefited. If that had been applied more widely – imagine the
25 effect!

33 Laila also described the common phenomenon in the Egyptian context, that many teachers
34 did not know *how* to collaborate and sometimes chose to work alone because it was easier.
35 As she came to see how others enhanced her own learning, she had changed the mentality
36 among her own teachers and was now hoping to prepare the pupils in their classes for a
37 more collaborative outlook that they could take with them into adulthood.

45 **Laila's learning through and about self-direction**

47 Laila illustrated self-direction as 'new spirit' whereby, because of the TLT meetings, she and
48 her teachers came to see a clear development goal and feel inspired to reach that goal
49 [MayInt]. The 'new spirit' often included enjoyment and curiosity; and was closely allied to
50 innovation and creativity. In Laila's view:

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3 Anything that doesn't change will fail. If you don't develop it, it will die. You must
4
5 innovate in everything or it won't have spirit ... Over time, teaching the same thing,
6
7 you get bored of what you are doing. It becomes simply a routine... I used to use the
8
9 same activities each time. I was not creating anything. I started after the TLT-
10
11
12 Intervention to think of other things [MayInt].
13

14
15 She described how innovation might increase exponentially, moving teachers from choosing
16
17 just *how* to teach to deciding how and *what* to teach. This illustrated Vygotsky's idea of
18
19 gradual independence from a More Capable Instructor. In addition, and in contrast with
20
21 local tradition, Laila felt that older teachers needed to capture the spirit of self-directed
22
23 experimentation from their younger colleagues:
24

25
26
27 Those who have been teaching for 10 to 15 years are stuck and need to go to
28
29 courses and need to widen their horizons. They need to get out of their staffrooms
30
31 and meet new people and discover new ideas [MayInt].
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35 However, she was clear that, to ignite this spirit, the school's administration needed to give
36
37 teachers the chance to choose which programmes they wanted to attend rather than
38
39 imposing training programmes on them. The fact that the current TLT-Intervention had
40
41 been voluntary was a vital part of its benefit. Laila seemed to suggest that the spirit of
42
43 innovation ignited a determination to improve; and as improvements occurred, confidence
44
45 increased which bred further spirit and stronger determination.
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49 For herself, she found the experience at the conference in Jordan encouraging especially
50
51 after Senior Teachers 'stood up and did our own things' [MayInt]. Then she started to feel
52
53 that she could do workshops for other teachers herself, because of a new sense of her own
54
55 authority. In any workshops that she proposed to give, she said that she would use the
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3 model demonstrated by the TLT-Intervention: allowing participants to identify their own
4
5 needs; making sure that they were engaged and enjoying the workshop. She was building
6
7 on her own growing awareness of the need for choice, participation and enjoyment in
8
9 development:
10

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12 First, I will give them the choices for what topic I will talk about. Then think about
13
14 the steps of the presentation. And prepare handouts so the presentation isn't
15
16 boring. And think about how to get them to participate [MayInt].
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19
20 She claimed that choice, enjoyment and participation were essential to her TLT teachers'
21
22 learning too, and they experienced these when doing peer observations. Laila came to see
23
24 that the unannounced lesson observations that she used to conduct as Senior Teacher were
25
26 neither useful nor fair. Now she perceived that each teacher should choose who observed
27
28 them, and also which lesson, if they were actually going to *learn* from the experience.
29
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31
32 Laila explicitly expressed how, during the TLT-Intervention, she and her teachers gradually
33
34 progressed towards a new level of conceptualisation in relation to professional practice.
35

36
37 This included formation of new functions and enrichment of existing functions. As she
38
39 summarised it: 'When [people] work in pairs and groups, they get lots of ideas. Or, the ideas
40
41 were already there, but they needed to bring them out' [MayInt]. She saw how through
42
43 processes of collaborative interaction and self-direction, she could overcome gaps between
44
45 her current and her desired capabilities. For example, when she became Senior Teacher,
46
47 she found herself responsible for a whole department but had not received professional
48
49 training to grasp her new responsibilities. Supervisors visited from the Ministry of Education
50
51 but came 'just to do paperwork'. It was the TLT-Intervention which helped to clarify for her
52
53 how to be a better leader of teachers by supporting her to use certain tools. This was a
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1
2
3 classic example of how guidance from a More Capable Instructor [in this case, the
4 Intervention consultants] allowed her to achieve more with their support than she would
5 have done alone, as she crossed through her Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky
6 1978). In another example, in relation to coaching, she noticed that she was already doing
7 coaching when the TLT-Intervention began. But she reflected:

14 I wasn't very aware of the way to do it. I was doing it randomly. But you made it
15 more comprehensive and organised. You organised my ideas [MayInt].

20 **Summary of Laila's Case**

21
22 In Laila's case, learning meant nurturing 'spirit' which was ignited by collaborative
23 interaction, choice, enjoyment and participation, which led to an unfolding sense of self-
24 direction and awareness of her own authority. The guidance she received from the
25 consultants took the form of demonstration and clarification of concepts and practices that
26 had been vague in her consciousness. Consultants and other teachers also provided
27 encouragement and stimulus for her learning and development.

39 **Saif**

40
41
42 Saif was a male teacher in his thirties who taught middle school girls in one of AlAzhar's
43 Islamic schools; and was Senior Teacher in their primary school too. He was an enthusiastic
44 member of the TLT-Intervention's cross-school Senior Teachers' group and never missed
45 sessions. The goal of the five-minute activities that he developed for his pupils was to
46 improve his pupils' interaction in English. The activity consisted of pupils writing their own
47 short play-scripts and performing them in class. This activity seemed to revitalise his classes

1
2
3 and his own learning significantly. However, Saif's TLT appeared somewhat fragmented and
4
5 keeping it coherent became a struggle.
6
7

8 **Saif's learning through and about collaborative interaction**

9

10 Saif described having 'spiritual aims and motivation' [JanInt] and explained that the Qur'an
11
12 itself eulogised education as a means for improving people's lives. One reason for caring
13
14 particularly about English teaching was so that his students could 'explain Islam and Islamic
15
16 civilisation to others' [MayInt]. He also believed that Egyptians could learn from English-
17
18 speaking countries and people. Saif talked extensively about connecting with other people
19
20 to 'exchange experience' [JanInt]. He described how at school, before the TLT-Intervention,
21
22 he was not asked to express his opinions, there were no discussions and, most importantly,
23
24 no shared educational goals towards which to strive. Yet, he himself seemed to learn from a
25
26 wide range of others in his environment, despite this lack of systemic encouragement. Saif
27
28 described how other teachers in his TLT, and also of different subjects in his school, helped
29
30 him think about changing his teaching. Over the course of the TLT-Intervention, he came to
31
32 realise that students too had a lot to offer him for improving the way he taught.
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38 The Intervention consultants' apparent confidence in him and exchange of ideas with him
39
40 also helped him change. His exposure to other English speakers from a range of countries
41
42 during the conference in Jordan, also motivated him as he perceived himself to belong to a
43
44 wider community of English speakers. In contrast, not many teachers felt valued in Egypt,
45
46 according to Saif, and they therefore lacked confidence and also lacked the will to develop.
47
48 He described the teacher as being 'the lowest person in the state... perhaps less than the
49
50 rubbish collector' [JanInt]. However, Saif suggested that his increased sense of professional
51
52 authority was due to the TLT-Intervention and due to the educational research that
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1
2
3 underpinned it. He believed that the 'academic' input of the TLT-Intervention, based on
4
5 research, gave the TLT-Intervention power, because teachers had learnt 'something real'
6
7 [JanInt].
8
9

10 Saif recounted that the TLT-Intervention allowed him and his teachers to benefit from
11
12 teamwork and so progress towards development. Already in September, Saif himself
13
14 advocated an egalitarian view of teamwork as essential for learning. Whilst he recognised
15
16 his approach as unusual for his culture, his insight was that an open exchange of ideas had
17
18 to happen in order for learning to flourish:
19
20

21
22 We can work together and see the strengths and weaknesses among us and try to fix
23
24 them... I might suggest a way of teaching as an idea: not as an order. We might do
25
26 brainstorming: I say my ideas, the teachers say their ideas. We consider what
27
28 emerges from it; and what will be in the best interests of the students [SepInt].
29
30

31
32 This unusual openness to others' views even extended later into his classroom, despite the
33
34 hierarchical traditions of his teaching-learning environment. He mentioned several times
35
36 that he aimed to nurture a family-like culture in his classrooms where pupils and the teacher
37
38 learnt from each other on a continuous basis.
39
40

41 Saif recognised the role of demonstration in the consultants' support for his own learning
42
43 as part of a different 'family': the group of the Senior Teachers from the six different
44
45 schools. It is fascinating that he attributed the 'family approach' to the consultants' *greater*
46
47 *experience*:
48
49

50
51 The family spirit – we [Senior Teachers] felt like a family. This encouraged us a lot.
52
53 There wasn't a sense that anyone was inferior... I learnt it from you and your
54
55 academic background. You supported us like your younger siblings. So, we were able
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1
2
3 to apply this in practice, not just in theory... What we do with you [consultants], we
4
5 do with our teachers, and the teachers do with the students. It's a chain [MayInt].
6
7

8 **Saif's learning through and about self-direction**

9

10 Saif was already very aware that learning should start where the learner was positioned
11 socially and psychologically. He saw clearly that when learners perceived their learning as
12 'personally meaningful' (Rogers 1951, 427) they made the effort to progress. Saif could
13 obviously see Vygotsky's point that learning must be subjected to the will of the learner. He
14 saw that coercion blocked development:
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22 The best thing [about the TLT-Intervention] was that you didn't force anyone to
23 participate. If I was forced to join, I wouldn't participate well. When you feel you are
24 there by choice, this makes you want to try. We felt we could go and try, and we
25 didn't have to continue if we didn't like it. So we had nothing to lose. There were no
26 penalties for not joining... When you are forced to attend, you just sit there, and you
27 won't apply what you hear [MayInt].
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37 Saif noted that when his TLT teachers *wanted* to learn and then got the support from him as
38 Senior Teacher, then it would happen: so long as he gave his support willingly without hope
39 of personal gratification. Saif told us about the success of peer observations in which each
40 teacher chose who would observe them, as they practised a new teaching activity, and
41 looked only at the points requested by the practising teacher. These helped teachers to
42 think of ways to improve their practice. This contrasted with past observations, whereby
43 supervisors had deliberately looked for weak points in order to assert their superiority,
44 thereby tending to block development.
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3 However, in order to develop their teaching approaches fruitfully, Saif reminded us that he
4
5 and his teachers needed more time, more space, more support from the school
6
7 administration and, most importantly for Saif, they needed to remain in one school for a
8
9 predictable length of time to build up collaborative relationships. Saif suggested that five
10
11 years would be an appropriate amount of time for genuine change to happen. Significant
12
13 change could not occur in his own situation where he was working in two schools at once
14
15 and could be transferred to another at any time. During one TLT in Saif's school, we saw a
16
17 young teacher being taken away from the TLT to attend a different training session, against
18
19 her will and against Saif's will. This disrupted the group's collaborations and reminded Saif
20
21 of the systemic limitations to self-direction.
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25
26 In relation to the importance of the learner's own will as the driver of learning, Saif
27
28 mentioned on numerous occasions how sharing a specific goal inspired his own and his
29
30 teachers' drive to learn. Choosing and clarifying a goal collaboratively seemed to open him
31
32 up to richer interactions in order to achieve his goal. One way to support the achievement
33
34 of this agreed goal was by teachers asking each other questions:
35
36

37
38 The most useful thing [in the TLT] was that everyone could ask their questions and
39
40 get answers. If someone, for example, had a problem controlling their class,
41
42 everyone would suggest an idea. We would get new and real-life ideas. We weren't
43
44 working alone. We had set steps to follow. We were focused on one point [MayInt].
45
46

47
48 In order to learn, Saif worked with the demands and possibilities of all aspects of his
49
50 environment and tried to make best use of these. He talked about proactively researching
51
52 'new developments' in pedagogy, online. He also constantly asked us whether we as
53
54 consultants could provide him with more English language and pedagogical training. We did
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1
2
3 note that Saif sustained some deference to foreigners' authority which he perhaps
4
5 associated with the authors of the educational research he valued. While approval from any
6
7 person in a high position was greatly valued in Saif's system, approval from 'native' English
8
9 speakers was especially desirable for Saif. Saif explained that his pupils waited eagerly for
10
11 our visits to their school because of the opportunity of being seen by fluent English
12
13 speakers. On each visit by consultants to his school, many photos and videos were taken
14
15 and courtesies exchanged, sometimes to the point of obstructing formal learning. At first
16
17 we tried to avoid being given this special treatment, but on reflection we wondered
18
19 whether it was actually one aspect of Saif working with the demands and possibilities of his
20
21 environment and making best use of these. Saif was quick to point out that he would not
22
23 necessarily import foreigners' ideas wholesale into their system. He added, 'We might
24
25 change them to suit our circumstances and materials'. However, it was clear that
26
27 collaborative interaction with fluent English speakers was an important means towards his
28
29 developmental goals. And it was also a satisfaction of that goal itself.
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35 **Summary of Saif's Case**

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37
38 In summary, Saif expressed a view of learning as leading to a higher development of himself
39
40 as a person, in terms of his authority, knowledge, ways of supporting others and as part of
41
42 an English-speaking community. While he was already a collaborative professional when
43
44 the TLT-Intervention started, he told us that he had learnt to value collaborative interaction
45
46 further during the Intervention as he saw how it supported him to engage with and listen to
47
48 a range of insightful views. He also began to believe in the power of his own self-directive
49
50 capacities as he gradually perceived their effects. Despite many systemic obstacles to his
51
52 collaboration and self-direction, Saif became extremely driven during the TLT-Intervention
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3 to achieve his ambitious, but strategic, goals of becoming an authoritative, supportive
4
5 leader and teacher with a good command of the English language; and he pursued all the
6
7 means to learning that he could access.
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9

10 11 12 13 **Farida**

14
15 Farida was a female teacher in her thirties who taught Year 6 in a small National Institute
16
17 school which prioritised English. She had two teachers in her TLT who seemed committed
18
19 to Farida's leadership and to the TLT, although unfortunately one of them was on sick-leave
20
21 to Farida's leadership and to the TLT, although unfortunately one of them was on sick-leave
22
23 for some time during the TLT-Intervention. Farida had a low profile initially but nearer the
24
25 end of the TLT-Intervention, she seemed suddenly to perceive learning and teaching
26
27 differently and take a more active role. The five-minute activities she developed focused on
28
29 the goal of improving writing in English. She experimented in using groupwork in class for
30
31 creative writing. A turning point for her was when she realised that pupils did not need to
32
33 copy lists from the black-board and that collaborative groupwork was a better use of time.
34
35

36 37 **Farida's learning through and about collaborative interaction**

38
39 Farida was clear that for her pupils, learning was more than passing exams but she felt
40
41 pressured by parents who did not share her vision. She believed that learning English
42
43 included interacting in English as well as developing personal skills such as decision-making
44
45 and supporting peers. Her own most valued learning and development goal was to act as a
46
47 motivational source to others:
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49

50
51 The [Senior Teacher] sets the atmosphere from the beginning. If they don't do this,
52
53 there won't be any collaborative interaction. We have to set the atmosphere and try
54
55 to collaborate. This will result in new ideas and development [MayInt].
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3 One of Farida's most significant learnings was discovering that discussion of ideas was
4
5 developmental: for herself in Senior Teacher meetings; for her teachers in TLT meetings;
6
7 and for pupils in lessons that incorporated groupwork:
8
9

10 I wasn't convinced by peer learning. I didn't understand how it could work. But it
11
12 really worked. Sometimes they were able to explain to each other better than I was...
13
14 How do they learn from each other? I didn't know they could learn from each other!
15
16 [MayInt].
17
18

19
20 Farida was emphatic about how supportive to her own learning the cross-school Senior
21
22 Teacher meetings were. She had never sat with teachers from other schools more than in a
23
24 one-day training event. She came to realise that they all had similar difficulties but that it
25
26 was possible to negotiate ways of dealing with these. She became very motivated when she
27
28 saw how driven and enthusiastic teachers from the AlAzhar schools were, which she
29
30 described as 'those who have the least facilities in the world' [JanInt]. She began to
31
32 acknowledge to herself that her school was more privileged than theirs and that she actually
33
34 had more support than they did, thereby redefining how she perceived her own position;
35
36 and also giving her hope. In fact she started to see that her teachers were also doing
37
38 valuable activities like the teachers in other schools.
39
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41
42

43 This learning boosted Farida's self-confidence and her confidence in her teachers. She told
44
45 us that this seemed to affect teachers of other subjects in her school too, who were 'curious
46
47 about what we were doing'. She also felt connected to a much wider, highly respected
48
49 community of English teachers, after making the presentation at the international
50
51 conference in Jordan. As she expressed it: 'All of this added to *me*' [MayInt]. In other
52
53 words, these factors changed how she viewed herself professionally in relation to others.
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3 One aspect of learning that was important for Farida was observing the *impact* of her
4
5 actions among her teachers and pupils. This was the basis for her increasing confidence and
6
7 sense of authority which led, in turn, to further action. She perceived that this was because
8
9 she was 'solving real problems'. In terms of how Farida perceived support to be provided for
10
11 her own learning, she saw a significant role for 'experts' outside school. She appreciated
12
13 the consultants' visits very highly but wanted more of these and more direction from
14
15 consultants. Even at the end of the TLT-Intervention, she continued to ask consultants to
16
17 provide ready-made pupil activities, even though at other times she recognised the
18
19 importance of self-direction in her own learning, as described below.
20
21
22

23
24 An important aspect of her learning was having a specific, shared goal and feeling that she
25
26 could reach it, with support. When she first started leading TLTs, she thought there would
27
28 be little to talk about but then: '... Found we talked about many important things' [MayInt].
29
30 What made discussion powerful for learning, she claimed, was that it was a very focused
31
32 discussion with each person working towards the same goal. This contrasted with the
33
34 fragmented system she experienced beforehand [JanInt].
35
36
37

38 Farida described perceiving her teachers in a different, less critical way than before:
39
40

41 After I went to Gamila's class and saw her classes and how the students reacted to
42
43 her, I respected her a lot more. Why had I limited her role and not realised how good
44
45 she was? ... She also had new ideas ... She developed the ideas. I don't have these
46
47 ideas! My view of my teachers changed [MayInt].
48
49

50 Farida also mentioned the important role of appreciation. Her TLT teachers were motivated
51
52 by the fact that, when presenting their work among colleagues at the February workshop,
53
54 Farida encouraged her TLT teachers by mentioning all their various achievements. This was
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1
2
3 something that she reported her own school's administration did not do well but which
4
5 could have encouraged her own development.
6
7

8 **Farida's learning through and about self-direction**

9

10 It was noticeable that Farida lacked confidence in herself at the start of the TLT-
11
12 Intervention. A coercive approach during the TLT-Intervention would probably have
13
14 undermined her greatly. In November, Farida described how the consultants' friendly, easy-
15
16 going manner encouraged her to persevere and try to learn through the TLT-Intervention. In
17
18 January, she revealed that she had been afraid that consultants would judge her teachers'
19
20 classrooms negatively because sometimes the junior teachers used Arabic instead of
21
22 English. By May, however, she explained how she had eventually dared to engage with new
23
24 ideas. Her fear had transformed into a sense of powerfulness through the gentle
25
26 collaborative interactions she had engaged in:
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30

31 I used to be afraid of new ideas. I didn't know how to apply them. Now I can try
32
33 anything! ... Before, I felt I couldn't do it. Then I saw we could do whatever we
34
35 wanted and the result would be very good... I found it simple, not hard [MayInt].
36
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38

39 **Summary of Farida's Case**

40

41
42 Farida's problems at the start of the TLT-Intervention were her lack of both confidence and
43
44 motivation, partly due to inadequate encouragement experienced at work. It seemed that
45
46 these factors were blocking her learning and development. However, she claimed that a
47
48 mixture of non-coercive engagement with a range of others aided her to overcome her lack
49
50 of confidence which in turn enhanced her motivation to learn and develop. She completed
51
52 the TLT-Intervention with a new sense of powerfulness and authority that she had not
53
54 known before which she then built on to pursue further development.
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Discussion

This article has explored how three case-study Senior Teachers developed professionally across the eight-month TLT-Intervention. The TLT-Intervention was based on the findings from previous research that collaborative interaction and a sense of self-direction were essential for fruitful learning outcomes (Belibas, Bulut and Gedik 2017; Earley and Porritt 2010; Leahy and Wiliam 2011; Philpott and Oates 2017; Stoll et al. 2006; Tannehill and MacPhail 2017). These aspects of learning were also at the heart of Vygotsky's theories about how learning and development occurred. This article has considered whether these three Senior Teachers used collaborative interaction and self-direction in their own attempts to learn and if so, how they used them, with what awareness and with what consequences.

In all seven of our cases, even when we first met them in September, these Senior Teachers displayed a conception of learning as larger than academic learning or learning how to carry out techniques. They all considered their role as teachers as being about developing people: who loved learning and could function in and contribute to their environments socially. This was perhaps surprising since their education system focused heavily on memorisation for exams.

How participants' perceptions changed regarding collaborative interaction

Without exception, these Senior Teachers came to appreciate in a transformative way, how much more they could learn from others than they had appreciated. They all started with good intentions, but by the end of the TLT-Intervention, they could clearly see that the potential for their own learning lay partly in the ideas of their more junior colleagues or pupils. Learning started to appear to them to be a two-way process (Brown et al 1993;

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2
3 Wells 2000). One important finding was that it was not only the content of what others said
4
5 which had influence: their enthusiasm or creativity could provoke learning too. When the
6
7 teacher from a more advantaged school saw how the less advantaged teacher still took on
8
9 enterprising challenges, this boosted her own drive to learn (Hart, 2000).
10

11
12 Having their own views valued by others also inspired the Senior Teachers' learning (Mercer
13
14 2000). It seemed to give them confidence and help them feel that they had some
15
16 professional authority. This was the case, even when appreciation came from less senior
17
18 teachers. That was a transformational insight within the Egyptian system where only praise
19
20 from those with senior authority roles tended to be valued (Hammad 2010). But when
21
22 working as a team, as one member's activities were clearly successful, all members of the
23
24 team felt driven to learn more. Unlike models of 'success' in the existing system, as the TLT
25
26 supported each other, the group of teachers abandoned personal gratification in favour of
27
28 mutual benefit (Rogers 1951, 283).
29
30
31

32
33 Another way that the case-study teachers described learning was by being demonstrated to
34
35 or having a practice exemplified in real life. At the start of the TLT-Intervention, some of the
36
37 Senior Teachers expressed the belief that it was their job to show junior teachers how to
38
39 carry out tasks correctly. However, they later related that the 'coaching' approach
40
41 promoted by the TLT-Intervention transformed this early belief. They came to notice how
42
43 being asked by the consultants to express themselves, and being listened to, supported
44
45 them to act proactively. Then, by exemplifying coaching behaviour themselves, they
46
47 themselves learnt more from their colleagues while also supporting their colleagues'
48
49 learning more. However, in order to make 'reflective interaction to flow freely without
50
51 trying to impose her/his own values or wishes' (Shayer 2003, 481), time and space needed
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3 to be made systemically available for such coaching conversations. These commodities
4
5 were in short supply in all the case-study schools, a lack that seemed to obstruct all
6
7 teachers' learning.
8

9
10 *Participants' perceptions of self-direction as a trigger for learning and a means for achieving*
11
12 *their own goals*
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14
15 One strong message that came through our interviews was the enjoyment experienced by
16
17 the participants during the TLT-Intervention meetings and activities, which enhanced their
18
19 curiosity, innovativeness and creativity. As Vygotsky emphasised, volition and interest led
20
21 their developmental process. In fact, it was this spark, this 'spirit' as Laila called it, that set
22
23 learning into motion. It was this energy that led the participants to try to overcome the gap
24
25 between their current and their desired capabilities. Participants all commented on how
26
27 they had previously slipped into boring routines which the Intervention had shaken up.
28
29 They all remarked that this flame was born out of their own volition, not as a result of
30
31 rewards, punishments or threats (Niemic and Ryan 2009). They had come to see why
32
33 these latter motivators did not entice them to engage in the big and sometimes difficult
34
35 process of learning. A good explanation lay in their experiences of the classroom
36
37 observations made by their peers, in which they had chosen their own observers, whose
38
39 views they had specifically requested. Because they themselves initiated these
40
41 observations, they felt encouraged to make them useful and make changes based on the
42
43 observer's comments. This was in stark contrast to the judgemental observations by
44
45 supervisors that they were accustomed to.
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52 This exercise of their own agency seemed to transform participants' sense of professional
53
54 self and their confidence. As they directed their own actions and observed the changes they
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3 inspired, they seemed to feel more authoritative as professionals. Their professional
4
5 identities transformed as they became entrepreneurs who drove their own learning agenda.
6
7 This was perhaps the area in which transformation was most evident: participants seemed
8
9 to move, in Paulo Freire's famous words, from spectators to actors, from followers of
10
11 prescriptions to makers of choices, from silent participants to outspoken collaborators
12
13
14 (1972, 25).
15

16
17 Participants noted that an important ingredient in this shift was the setting of a specific,
18
19 clearly explained, shared goal in the presence of their colleagues who would provide
20
21 ongoing support. It appeared that the setting of their owned and clearly identified goal,
22
23 helped them to feel that they were progressing towards a new level of conceptualisation in
24
25 relation to their professional practice. They came to notice the formation of new functions
26
27 or the enrichment of existing functions, in relation to this goal, with the support of their
28
29 Team. Prior to their experience in the TLT-Intervention, their work had seemed less
30
31 purposeful. They had carried out routines but did not always know what they were working
32
33 towards or why.
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37
38 Once purpose was established, with collaborative support systems in place, the participants
39
40 sought diverse opportunities for developing towards their goal. This drive to find every
41
42 possible opportunity was especially clear in Saif's case. Rather than waiting for things to be
43
44 done for them and to them, now the Senior Teachers sought ways to make things happen
45
46 themselves. This may seem obvious to those of us who enjoy some autonomy in our work,
47
48 but to the teachers in this study, it was largely a novel idea that learning had to start where
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50 the learner started and be subjected to the will of the learner.
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3 However, we questioned whether we had fostered a new hierarchy among the participants.

4
5 The Senior Teachers reported that the consultants' guidance bestowed value and status
6
7 onto all the TLT-Intervention activities. This in turn seems to have led some Senior Teachers'
8
9 development to have become inextricably linked to the consultants' approval, a
10
11 dependence which might be assumed to limit their capacity for self-direction. Yet, from a
12
13 Vygotskian perspective, given the restrictive context within which these Senior Teachers
14
15 worked, perhaps they were doing exactly what Vygotsky depicted: they were working with
16
17 the demands and possibilities of the environment and making best use of these. They had
18
19 found someone to interact with, who could provide a way to move beyond their experience
20
21 of low status and low authority as teachers. And in the Egyptian case, status was easily
22
23 bestowed through contact with 'native' English speakers. This would explain Saif's constant
24
25 emphasis on having contact with native English speakers and the fact that all the teachers
26
27 found it very encouraging when we, as TLT-Intervention consultants, physically visited their
28
29 teachers at school. Perhaps this should be seen as a clear manifestation of proactive self-
30
31 direction itself, rather than dependence. An unquestioning acceptance of 'decisions from
32
33 above' was a long-established cultural behaviour; by associating strongly with the
34
35 Intervention consultants, the participants were perhaps using this culturally embedded
36
37 custom to achieve their own, self-directed goals, even when these appeared different from
38
39 the TLT-Intervention's goals.
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47 It is against the backdrop of these deeply embedded hierarchical customs that the academic
48
49 significance of this article needs to be considered. This research took place in the context of
50
51 a middle-income country, where typically collaboration could be considered threatening
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53 within inflexible hierarchies of power; and conformity was emphasised to the exclusion of
54
55 development (Hammad 2010). As in other recently independent nations, in Egypt there has
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2
3 seemed to linger ‘a deeply entrenched culture of obedience and conformity... that compels
4
5 the rights and privileges of the larger society over the individual’ (Ab Kadir 2017, 237). None
6
7 the less, the research vividly illustrates that personally fulfilling and developmental learning
8
9 still occurred when the individuals within these constraints engaged in collaborative
10
11 interaction with others in their environment; and when they directed their own ways
12
13 forward. Although Vygotsky’s views are Eurocentric and therefore not universally
14
15 applicable, our research seemed to confound this exclusionary assumption. Despite hostile
16
17 cultural tradition, despite obstructive locally-reinforced habits, when given the
18
19 opportunities flagged up by Vygotsky, professional learning and development flourished,
20
21 with the support of a More Knowlegable Other and a Team of colleagues.
22
23
24

25 26 **Acknowledgements**

27
28
29 Many thanks are due to the Senior Teachers who allowed us to research their practice over
30
31 the course of the Intervention. Thanks are also due to Prof. Alex Moore and Dr. John
32
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34
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2
3 **Exploring collaborative interaction and self-direction in Teacher Learning Teams: case-**
4 **studies from a middle-income country analysed using Vygotskian theory**
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6

7
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12

13 **Abstract**
14

15
16 This article explores teachers' learning from a Vygotskian perspective which emphasises
17 collaborative interaction and self-direction. The article describes case-studies of three
18 Senior Teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged Egyptian primary schools where
19 collaboration and self-direction were systemically discouraged. It analyses how, through a
20 teacher development Intervention, the teachers learned to use collaborative interaction to
21 support their own learning and felt more creative, authoritative and powerful after being
22 guided to exercise self-direction.
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32 **BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**
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34
35 Extensive literature on sustainable professional development has indicated that
36 participating teachers must have capacity for both collaborative interaction and self-
37 direction (Leahy and Wiliam 2011). This article re-explores these aspects of learning in the
38 Egyptian context where, as in many middle and low-income countries from Nigeria to
39 Jamaica to Myanmar, neither collaborative interaction nor self-direction have systemic
40 support (Hammad 2010). The article offers a novel approach to exploring teacher
41 development, through a Vygotskian lens. Vygotsky's (1986; 1978) theories about how
42 people learn were originally applied to pupils' learning rather than teachers' (e.g. Yandell
43 2007). In the case of pupils, the target is the development of academic (or scientific)
44 concepts. However, for adult teachers, learning and pedagogy become the focus instead. As
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our professional development Intervention proceeded, Vygotsky’s theories proved to be significant.

For Peer Review Only

Academic significance of the article

This article provides case-studies of the professional learning and development of three Senior Teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged Egyptian primary schools who took part in the TLT-Intervention. It investigates their own views of learning and development. It explores how they described collaborative interaction and self-direction influencing their professional learning across the eight-month Intervention. By professional learning, we borrow Rogers' (1951) definition of change as in 'the organisation of self' (390): that is, of a shift in how they perceived and enacted their own learning and their support for others' learning. Where their change seemed significant and irreversible, we refer to their learning as transformative, in Mezirow's (1990) sense:

Becoming critically aware of how and why our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world (14).

Transformative learning involved re-defining themselves, in relation to others, thereby potentially moving beyond localised learning to long-term development.

The relevance of this research lies in its task of more fully understanding the complex interplay between individual teachers' professional development and Vygotsky's emphasis on collaborative interaction and self-direction. The findings will be particularly relevant to the many countries of the world where teachers' collaborative and self-directed learning are dismissed in favour of conformity to those with more powerful hierarchical positions. Some authors suggest that such a hierarchical approach has prevailed in Egypt (and other countries in the global south) partly because beliefs there about the individual's role in society are 'diametrically opposed to Western or at least mainstream US assumptions' (Atkinson 1977, 80, cited in Ab Kadir 2017, 242). Hammad (2010, 108) described how

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2
3 Egyptian teachers' fears of 'chaos' and 'conflict' seemed 'to be rooted in a greater societal
4 emphasis on social cohesion and harmony'. Pratt (2007) proposed that, for ex-colonial
5 countries such as Egypt, this was a *result* of previous subjugation. Thereby, there has
6 seemed to linger 'a deeply entrenched culture of obedience and conformity... that compels
7 the rights and privileges of the larger society over the individual' (Ab Kadir 2017, 237).

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14 These assumptions tend to be in tension with constructivist models of teachers' learning,
15 where teachers' creativity and diversity may be more highly valued than conformity to
16 existing structures.

17 18 19 20 21 **Professional development Intervention using Teacher Learning Teams [TLTs]**

22
23
24 The processes which we call here the "Intervention" included the introduction into six
25 Egyptian primary schools the system of Teacher Learning Communities [TLCs] or "Teacher
26 Learning Teams" as they were re-named in Egypt (hence "TLTs"). We adapted Leahy and
27 Wiliam's (2011) design for TLCs but replaced their focus on formative assessment with
28 learning and teaching English as a foreign language. After spending time in Egyptian primary
29 classrooms (see Hargreaves, Mahgoub and Elhawary 2016), as a team of researchers, we
30 perceived that some essential ingredients for professional learning were missing from
31 teachers' experiences: specifically, opportunities for collaborative interaction; and for
32 directing learning according to individual need and interest. Recent reviews of teacher
33 professional development suggest that TLCs (or TLTs) embody characteristics closely
34 associated with sustained improvements in teachers' development (Belibas, Bulut and Gedik
35 2017; Earley and Porritt 2010; Leahy and Wiliam 2011; Philpott and Oates 2017; Stoll et al.
36 2006; Tannehill and MacPhail 2017). This improvement is attributed to the fact that TLCs are
37 founded on teachers identifying their own focus for, and process of, professional
38 development. In this model, teachers are expected to collaborate with each other in order

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2
3 to learn; input from beyond the school is also helpful, although the main site for
4
5 development is the school. None of these foundational aspects characterised teachers'
6
7 planned learning in Egyptian schools (see also Hammad 2010).
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10 **Vygotsky's theories about collaborative interaction**

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12 Collaborative interaction among teachers has been frequently described as a key feature of
13
14 successful professional development (Bellibas et al. 2017; King 2014; Tannehill and MacPhail
15
16 2017) and is central to the structure of TLTs [TLCs]. In Vygotskian terms specifically, the term
17
18 'collaborative interaction' refers to any situation in which the learner is being offered
19
20 interaction with another person or people. This person or people provide support for a
21
22 problem that the learner wants to solve: '... through demonstration, leading questions, and
23
24 by introducing elements of the task's solution' (Vygotsky [1987, 209] in Chaiklin [2003, 54]).
25
26 How much each teacher could benefit would depend on their existing levels of perception,
27
28 thought and will. As Chaiklin (2003, 49) suggested, existing levels would reflect
29
30 'institutionalized demands and expectations that developed historically in a particular
31
32 societal tradition of practice'.
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38 **Vygotsky's theories about self-direction**

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40 Reviews of teacher development through TLCs (e.g. Philpott and Oates 2017; Tannehill and
41
42 MacPhail 2017) indicate that effective teacher professional development depends on
43
44 teachers exercising proactive self-direction; in particular, it is effective when a learning need
45
46 is identified as important by participants themselves and action taken and supported
47
48 accordingly. This is an often-overlooked aspect of teacher professional development,
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50 particularly in countries like Egypt where theoretical, university-based training still has the
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52 dominant place in the hierarchy of valued knowledge (see Hammad 2016). The organisation
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3 of TLTs, in contrast, focused explicitly on strategies identified by teachers themselves as
4
5 useful for their own classrooms.
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7
8 Vygotsky emphasised that volition and interest led the developmental process. Chaiklin
9
10 (2003, 47) described how, from a Vygotskian view, learners noticed their current capabilities
11
12 and compared these to their '*needs and desires, and the demands and possibilities of the*
13
14 *environment*'. In trying to overcome this gap between current and desired capabilities, and
15
16 to realize particular action, the learner willingly engaged in tasks and interactions which
17
18 allowed 'the formation of new functions or the enrichment of existing functions' (2003, 47).
19
20 Teachers thereby perceived themselves more as subjects than as objects of development
21
22 (Philpott and Oates 2017).
23
24

25
26 As Vygotsky stressed, self-direction may begin during collaborative interaction: through
27
28 speaking with others, any simple action was raised to a higher level and subjected to the
29
30 power of the learner who 'puts upon the action the stamp of will'. It was this stamping,
31
32 during interaction, that made the learner's action 'free' (Vygotsky 1933, in van der Veer &
33
34 Valsiner 1991, 345). In other words, reflection by the individual could be spawned from
35
36 collaborative interaction (Shayer 2003, 481) which led to freely adopted action. Rewards,
37
38 punishments or persuasion would not substitute the teacher's own volition and interest
39
40 (Niemic and Ryan 2009). Self-direction therefore suggests creating, or controlling for
41
42 oneself, a situation, by taking an informed initiative, rather than waiting for things to be
43
44 done *for or to* oneself. Important tools that support the taking of initiative are collaborative
45
46 interaction with peers; as well as the teacher's own observation of how their actions are
47
48 making change which 'can give teachers an authoritative basis for their views' (Philpott and
49
50 Oates 2017, 327). However, as Philpott and Oates (2017) point out, in a tightly controlled
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3 system, such as the Egyptian system, these 'alternative discourses' may have to be learnt
4
5 from beyond the school (327).
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7 8 *Application to the research*

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10 In the TLT-Intervention on which this research was based, the researchers led the
11
12 Intervention (while at the same time carrying out the research *on* the Intervention) as 'More
13
14 Capable Instructors'. They aimed to awaken 'a variety of internal developmental processes'
15
16 in each Senior Teacher through collaborative interaction during meetings (Vygotsky [1978,
17
18 90] cited in Shayer [2003, 471]). Collaborative interaction implied the valuing of each
19
20 teacher's insights and contributions to others' learning. In our TLT-Intervention, this
21
22 unselfish respect for others' aspirations, without thought of personal gratification, was a
23
24 particular challenge for Senior Teachers, in a context where participants often faced fierce
25
26 competitiveness among colleagues who were used to being oppressed by those with power
27
28 over them (see also Hammad 2010). Our research therefore explored whether teachers
29
30 could learn and develop professionally despite these tensions, benefiting from collaborative
31
32 interaction as well as self-direction.
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38 39 **RESEARCH DESIGN**

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41 The following sections describe the principles according to which this research was
42
43 conducted. It used an interpretivist approach. Without denying the existence of one 'reality'
44
45 underlying people's interpretations, we were interested in exploring how this reality was
46
47 constructed by seven Senior Teachers in Alexandrian primary schools and how we could
48
49 make sense of these constructions (Guba and Lincoln 1985; Maxwell 2012).
50
51

52 53 *Sample*

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3 Our research sample of Senior Teachers consisted of all the teachers signed up for the TLT-
4
5 Intervention: four female teachers from three National Institute schools, which were
6
7 government schools with some private funding. We also worked with three male teachers
8
9 at AlAzhar schools which were government-controlled with support from AlAzhar university
10
11 and mosque in Cairo. All participating schools were relatively disadvantaged socio-
12
13 economically, but the AlAzhar schools took some of Egypt's poorest children. The Senior
14
15 Teachers involved were those who had been teaching for an extended period, who
16
17 monitored the learning and teaching of less experienced teachers.
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20 21 22 *Context of the research: the Intervention*

23
24 Funded and directed by the Education Development Trust, we as consultants led the
25
26 Intervention as a team of Egyptian and English educators (two of whom are authors of this
27
28 article, one Egyptian, one English). The TLT-Intervention aimed to support the learning and
29
30 teaching of English. We academic researchers, however, also used the TLT-Intervention as a
31
32 means to investigate teachers' professional use of collaborative interaction and self-
33
34 direction.
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38 As described also by Hammad (2010), there tended to be a lack of trust among Egyptian
39
40 teachers, as well as a lack of experience, in making professional decisions. Therefore the
41
42 following three initial training sessions for the Senior Teachers were considered essential for
43
44 the success of the TLT-Intervention and took place towards the end of 2015:
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47
48 1) Two days on leadership generally, to explore alternatives to the dominant autocratic
49
50 model;

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53 2) Two days on "Coaching" specifically (Carnell, MacDonald & Askew 2006). This was a
54
55 leadership approach which entailed empathetic listening to others rather than the giving of
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3 instructions or making demands (as in the normal image of “leadership”). This approach
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5 demanded a more equal relationship between leader and led and assumed more self-
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7 direction on the part of the led; and
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10 3) Two days on leading TLTs as communities in which the Senior Teacher and her/his Team
11
12 of teachers shared/developed practices and reflections.
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15 From each school, one Senior Teacher attended initial training sessions.
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18 In February 2016, we then hosted a workshop to which Senior Teachers brought all their TLT
19
20 teachers to share and demonstrate their new ideas with others: this turned out to be an
21
22 extremely unusual but highly appreciated occurrence in their context (see also Hammad
23
24 2016). In March, the seven Senior Teachers made a presentation at an international
25
26 conference in Jordan: this was also a rare and valuable opportunity that was normally left
27
28 only to those in higher hierarchical positions.
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30

31
32 Apart from these discrete training sessions, the seven Senior Teachers met together every
33
34 month to discuss and reflect on how their professional development was progressing; and
35
36 how their support to other [TLT] teachers’ professional development was flourishing under
37
38 their guidance. Each Senior Teacher had been initially observed by one consultant as they
39
40 carried out an innovative five-minute ‘action’ in their classroom which was integrated to
41
42 support their tightly-prescribed syllabus. The action was planned on an Action Plan to meet
43
44 self-identified goals. Goals included, for example, improving speaking, focusing on struggling
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46 pupils, making learning more active.
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50 TLTs had been set up in each school by the Senior Teacher. In mid-November, each Senior
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52 Teacher had led their first TLT meeting, supported by consultants. After this TLT meeting,
53
54 the TLT teachers had also tried out their own innovative five-minute actions in their English
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3 classrooms. Teachers observed each other during these actions. In each subsequent TLT
4
5 meeting, the Senior Teacher invited the group to:

- 6
7 • Describe, then analyse as a team, what happened when they tried out the planned
8
9 five-minute action in their classroom.
- 10
11 • Decide on a revised Action Plan for the forthcoming month and decide which
12
13 colleague would observe it.
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15

16
17 As consultants, we provided ongoing input to support Senior Teachers' coaching skills; and
18
19 attended TLT meetings and observed classrooms if invited.
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21

22 *Data collection during the Intervention*

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24 In this article, we present the cases of only three Senior Teachers who led TLTs, drawing
25
26 exclusively on interview data. We refer informally also to our attendance at their TLT
27
28 meetings in their schools. We chose to use our available space here to focus in detail on
29
30 three participants rather than to collate our findings across all seven, because the
31
32 development journey itself, and each Senior Teacher's specific environment, were
33
34 important for understanding how they used collaborative interaction and self-direction. The
35
36 decision also reflects our belief that each teacher's journey across the year was original and
37
38 whole in itself (Fielding 1996) and needed to be narrated holistically. Findings relating to all
39
40 seven Senior Teachers can be found elsewhere (Hargreaves and ElHawary 2018).
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46 The three Senior Teachers we selected did, however, represent all seven as much as
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48 possible. For example, they included two women and one man of different ages, who came
49
50 from three very different schools and who responded diversely to the TLT-Intervention
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52 activities. They were (using pseudonyms): Laila, Saif and Farida. We carried out three in-
53
54 depth interviews in November, January and May, 2015-16, with each Senior Teacher plus an
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3 additional one with Saif in September 2015. All interviews were transcribed and translated
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5 from Arabic by the dedicated Intervention translator, in constant dialogue with one author
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7 of this paper (who is herself bilingual).
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9

10 *Data analysis*

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12 There were several stages to our data analysis, which the two main researchers carried out
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14 collaboratively. As interviews were transcribed, we studied the transcriptions and prepared
15
16 our next interview schedule accordingly [September, November, January, May]. By May, we
17
18 were very familiar with the data. Basing our strategy on Grounded Theory (Glaser and
19
20 Strauss, 1967), we then looked inductively for themes raised in all the interviews. Our focus
21
22 had always been collaborative interaction and self-direction, but we noticed a range of
23
24 unanticipated aspects to these as they developed across the Intervention. Other themes
25
26 emerged in interviews too. We therefore drew aside those instances where collaborative
27
28 interaction and self-direction were clearly addressed and re-examined these texts for sub-
29
30 themes. We found that often these sub-themes linked directly to our understanding of
31
32 Vygotsky's theories about learning. For example, our sub-themes included:
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- 38 • Appreciation/encouragement;
- 39 • Enjoyment, curiosity, innovation, creativity;
- 40 • Confidence in self/gaining a sense of authority;
- 41 • Teamwork/listening to others;
- 42 • Consultants' demonstration.
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51 We therefore re-analysed the dataset, with these sub-themes in mind. This time, we looked
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53 specifically for how each of our participants talked about the sub-themes we had
54
55 developed. During this process we selected those three leaders whose journeys we
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2
3 believed would best represent the whole group's professional development across the TLT-
4
5 Intervention. [After each citation below, the month of interview is noted to highlight
6
7 chronological progression e.g. 'JanInt' denotes an interview carried out in January].
8
9

10 *Ethical issues*

11
12 This research, both in its design and fieldwork, adhered to the BSA ethical guidelines (2002).

13
14 We explained to Senior Teachers that the purposes of our research were to explore means
15
16 for developing English teaching. It appeared that they were not worried about the specific
17
18 details of the research but most interested in working with academics from outside their
19
20 schools who could give them support for English teaching. They had ample opportunities to
21
22 withdraw from the research which ran from September 2015 to May 2016; but they were all
23
24 keen to take part and signed their consent willingly. Their identities have been disguised so
25
26 that only the participants themselves could detect their real roles.
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31 **FINDINGS**

32 **Laila**

33
34
35 Laila was a mature teacher of Year 6 pupils in an English language school. Laila was an
36
37 interesting case because, when she started the TLT-Intervention, she seemed professional
38
39 and well-organised in terms of her own learning, teaching and leadership. However, during
40
41 the TLT-Intervention, she noticed significant progress in all three. The goal of Laila's own
42
43 five-minute activities for pupils was to improve the learning of her lowest-attaining pupils.
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45 She therefore experimented with differentiation by giving pupils a choice of task, without
46
47 deciding for her pupils who should choose which level of task. This was extremely
48
49 innovative in her context.
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55 **Laila's learning through and about collaborative interaction**

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2
3 Laila's description of her collaborative interactions at the start of the TLT-Intervention
4 suggested that, unusually, she already had interactive relationships with her teachers and
5 pupils and considered their contributions as sources for her own learning. As Senior
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8
9
10 Teacher, she consulted even her youngest teachers and gave them choices. She also valued
11
12 collaborative interaction with pupils, parents and the wider community, including those
13
14 outside the system:

15
16
17 I like the new and crazy ideas from the younger generation... I like to take feedback
18
19 from parents by asking our relatives, friends, neighbours; and getting their feedback.
20
21 They are distant from the process itself so their feedback can be very helpful
22
23
24 [NovInt].
25

26
27 During the TLT-Intervention, Laila felt that she gained by conversing with teachers from the
28
29 different Intervention schools because she noticed that everyone had similar problems and
30
31 this made her feel 'normal'. However, in November, she told us that teachers from her
32
33 school could not learn from the teachers in the AlAzhar schools because English there was
34
35 of a lower level. However, after interaction with these teachers at the February workshop,
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37
38 Laila's view shifted:

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40
41 [My teachers] were very affected by the [AlAzhar] groups. They saw in the videos
42
43 how basic their facilities were and how weak their students were and they still
44
45 managed to do something! This really motivated them [MayInt].
46
47

48
49 Laila also changed how she collaborated with her teachers. Unlike any of the other Senior
50
51 Teachers, prior to the TLT-Intervention she already gathered together her teachers in a
52
53 weekly meeting where they discussed more than just the syllabus. In November, she
54
55 described those existing meetings as very useful because in them she was able to find out
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1
2
3 'what people are thinking and feeling' [NovInt]. In these meetings, she had always treated
4
5 her teachers as colleagues, reflecting her developmental rather than hierarchical
6
7 perspective. However, she perceived the situation as follows: 'They sit with me and I make
8
9 things easier for them by telling them what to do' [NovInt]. By May, she displayed a
10
11 difference: now, she emphasised that she learnt more from her teachers than they gained
12
13 from her. In particular, they gave her encouragement. She suggested that the learning by
14
15 each person, including herself, exceeded that which could have been attained by each
16
17 individual in isolation. She explained:

20
21 As a leader, I learnt how I can help the people around me *and how they can help me*.
22
23 Actually, they might have helped me more than I helped them... I felt we were really
24
25 helping each other. If that could occur more often, what would happen? We were
26
27 four, and we all benefited. If that had been applied more widely – imagine the
28
29 effect!
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31

32
33 Laila also described the common phenomenon in the Egyptian context, that many teachers
34
35 did not know *how* to collaborate and sometimes chose to work alone because it was easier.
36
37 As she came to see how others enhanced her own learning, she had changed the mentality
38
39 among her own teachers and was now hoping to prepare the pupils in their classes for a
40
41 more collaborative outlook that they could take with them into adulthood.
42
43

44 45 **Laila's learning through and about self-direction**

46
47 Laila illustrated self-direction as 'new spirit' whereby, because of the TLT meetings, she and
48
49 her teachers came to see a clear development goal and feel inspired to reach that goal
50
51 [MayInt]. The 'new spirit' often included enjoyment and curiosity; and was closely allied to
52
53 innovation and creativity. In Laila's view:
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3 Anything that doesn't change will fail. If you don't develop it, it will die. You must
4
5 innovate in everything or it won't have spirit ... Over time, teaching the same thing,
6
7 you get bored of what you are doing. It becomes simply a routine... I used to use the
8
9 same activities each time. I was not creating anything. I started after the TLT-
10
11 Intervention to think of other things [MayInt].
12
13

14 She described how innovation might increase exponentially, moving teachers from choosing
15
16 just *how* to teach to deciding how and *what* to teach. This illustrated Vygotsky's idea of
17
18 gradual independence from a More Capable Instructor. In addition, and in contrast with
19
20 local tradition, Laila felt that older teachers needed to capture the spirit of self-directed
21
22 experimentation from their younger colleagues:
23
24

25
26 Those who have been teaching for 10 to 15 years are stuck and need to go to
27
28 courses and need to widen their horizons. They need to get out of their staffrooms
29
30 and meet new people and discover new ideas [MayInt].
31
32
33

34 However, she was clear that, to ignite this spirit, the school's administration needed to give
35
36 teachers the chance to choose which programmes they wanted to attend rather than
37
38 imposing training programmes on them. The fact that the current TLT-Intervention had
39
40 been voluntary was a vital part of its benefit. Laila seemed to suggest that the spirit of
41
42 innovation ignited a determination to improve; and as improvements occurred, confidence
43
44 increased which bred further spirit and stronger determination.
45
46
47

48 For herself, she found the experience at the conference in Jordan encouraging especially
49
50 after Senior Teachers 'stood up and did our own things' [MayInt]. Then she started to feel
51
52 that she could do workshops for other teachers herself, because of a new sense of her own
53
54 authority. In any workshops that she proposed to give, she said that she would use the
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1
2
3 model demonstrated by the TLT-Intervention: allowing participants to identify their own
4
5 needs; making sure that they were engaged and enjoying the workshop. She was building
6
7 on her own growing awareness of the need for choice, participation and enjoyment in
8
9 development:
10

11
12 First, I will give them the choices for what topic I will talk about. Then think about
13
14 the steps of the presentation. And prepare handouts so the presentation isn't
15
16 boring. And think about how to get them to participate [MayInt].
17
18

19
20 She claimed that choice, enjoyment and participation were essential to her TLT teachers'
21
22 learning too, and they experienced these when doing peer observations. Laila came to see
23
24 that the unannounced lesson observations that she used to conduct as Senior Teacher were
25
26 neither useful nor fair. Now she perceived that each teacher should choose who observed
27
28 them, and also which lesson, if they were actually going to *learn* from the experience.
29
30

31
32 Laila explicitly expressed how, during the TLT-Intervention, she and her teachers gradually
33
34 progressed towards a new level of conceptualisation in relation to professional practice.
35

36
37 This included formation of new functions and enrichment of existing functions. As she
38
39 summarised it: 'When [people] work in pairs and groups, they get lots of ideas. Or, the ideas
40
41 were already there, but they needed to bring them out' [MayInt]. She saw how through
42
43 processes of collaborative interaction and self-direction, she could overcome gaps between
44
45 her current and her desired capabilities. For example, when she became Senior Teacher,
46
47 she found herself responsible for a whole department but had not received professional
48
49 training to grasp her new responsibilities. Supervisors visited from the Ministry of Education
50
51 but came 'just to do paperwork'. It was the TLT-Intervention which helped to clarify for her
52
53 how to be a better leader of teachers by supporting her to use certain tools. This was a
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1
2
3 classic example of how guidance from a More Capable Instructor [in this case, the
4 Intervention consultants] allowed her to achieve more with their support than she would
5 have done alone, as she crossed through her Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky
6 1978). In another example, in relation to coaching, she noticed that she was already doing
7 coaching when the TLT-Intervention began. But she reflected:
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15 I wasn't very aware of the way to do it. I was doing it randomly. But you made it
16 more comprehensive and organised. You organised my ideas [MayInt].
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20 **Summary of Laila's Case**

21
22 In Laila's case, learning meant nurturing 'spirit' which was ignited by collaborative
23 interaction, choice, enjoyment and participation, which led to an unfolding sense of self-
24 direction and awareness of her own authority. The guidance she received from the
25 consultants took the form of demonstration and clarification of concepts and practices that
26 had been vague in her consciousness. Consultants and other teachers also provided
27 encouragement and stimulus for her learning and development.
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40 **Saif**

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42 Saif was a male teacher in his thirties who taught middle school girls in one of AlAzhar's
43 Islamic schools; and was Senior Teacher in their primary school too. He was an enthusiastic
44 member of the TLT-Intervention's cross-school Senior Teachers' group and never missed
45 sessions. The goal of the five-minute activities that he developed for his pupils was to
46 improve his pupils' interaction in English. The activity consisted of pupils writing their own
47 short play-scripts and performing them in class. This activity seemed to revitalise his classes
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3 and his own learning significantly. However, Saif's TLT appeared somewhat fragmented and
4
5 keeping it coherent became a struggle.
6
7

8 **Saif's learning through and about collaborative interaction**

9

10 Saif described having 'spiritual aims and motivation' [JanInt] and explained that the Qur'an
11
12 itself eulogised education as a means for improving people's lives. One reason for caring
13
14 particularly about English teaching was so that his students could 'explain Islam and Islamic
15
16 civilisation to others' [MayInt]. He also believed that Egyptians could learn from English-
17
18 speaking countries and people. Saif talked extensively about connecting with other people
19
20 to 'exchange experience' [JanInt]. He described how at school, before the TLT-Intervention,
21
22 he was not asked to express his opinions, there were no discussions and, most importantly,
23
24 no shared educational goals towards which to strive. Yet, he himself seemed to learn from a
25
26 wide range of others in his environment, despite this lack of systemic encouragement. Saif
27
28 described how other teachers in his TLT, and also of different subjects in his school, helped
29
30 him think about changing his teaching. Over the course of the TLT-Intervention, he came to
31
32 realise that students too had a lot to offer him for improving the way he taught.
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38 The Intervention consultants' apparent confidence in him and exchange of ideas with him
39
40 also helped him change. His exposure to other English speakers from a range of countries
41
42 during the conference in Jordan, also motivated him as he perceived himself to belong to a
43
44 wider community of English speakers. In contrast, not many teachers felt valued in Egypt,
45
46 according to Saif, and they therefore lacked confidence and also lacked the will to develop.
47
48 He described the teacher as being 'the lowest person in the state... perhaps less than the
49
50 rubbish collector' [JanInt]. However, Saif suggested that his increased sense of professional
51
52 authority was due to the TLT-Intervention and due to the educational research that
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1
2
3 underpinned it. He believed that the 'academic' input of the TLT-Intervention, based on
4
5 research, gave the TLT-Intervention power, because teachers had learnt 'something real'
6
7 [JanInt].
8
9

10 Saif recounted that the TLT-Intervention allowed him and his teachers to benefit from
11
12 teamwork and so progress towards development. Already in September, Saif himself
13
14 advocated an egalitarian view of teamwork as essential for learning. Whilst he recognised
15
16 his approach as unusual for his culture, his insight was that an open exchange of ideas had
17
18 to happen in order for learning to flourish:
19
20

21
22 We can work together and see the strengths and weaknesses among us and try to fix
23
24 them... I might suggest a way of teaching as an idea: not as an order. We might do
25
26 brainstorming: I say my ideas, the teachers say their ideas. We consider what
27
28 emerges from it; and what will be in the best interests of the students [SepInt].
29
30

31
32 This unusual openness to others' views even extended later into his classroom, despite the
33
34 hierarchical traditions of his teaching-learning environment. He mentioned several times
35
36 that he aimed to nurture a family-like culture in his classrooms where pupils and the teacher
37
38 learnt from each other on a continuous basis.
39
40

41
42 Saif recognised the role of demonstration in the consultants' support for his own learning
43
44 as part of a different 'family': the group of the Senior Teachers from the six different
45
46 schools. It is fascinating that he attributed the 'family approach' to the consultants' *greater*
47
48 *experience*:
49
50

51 The family spirit – we [Senior Teachers] felt like a family. This encouraged us a lot.
52
53 There wasn't a sense that anyone was inferior... I learnt it from you and your
54
55 academic background. You supported us like your younger siblings. So, we were able
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3 to apply this in practice, not just in theory... What we do with you [consultants], we
4
5 do with our teachers, and the teachers do with the students. It's a chain [MayInt].
6
7

8 **Saif's learning through and about self-direction**

9

10 Saif was already very aware that learning should start where the learner was positioned
11 socially and psychologically. He saw clearly that when learners perceived their learning as
12 'personally meaningful' (Rogers 1951, 427) they made the effort to progress. Saif could
13 obviously see Vygotsky's point that learning must be subjected to the will of the learner. He
14 saw that coercion blocked development:
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22 The best thing [about the TLT-Intervention] was that you didn't force anyone to
23 participate. If I was forced to join, I wouldn't participate well. When you feel you are
24 there by choice, this makes you want to try. We felt we could go and try, and we
25 didn't have to continue if we didn't like it. So we had nothing to lose. There were no
26 penalties for not joining... When you are forced to attend, you just sit there, and you
27 won't apply what you hear [MayInt].
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37 Saif noted that when his TLT teachers *wanted* to learn and then got the support from him as
38 Senior Teacher, then it would happen: so long as he gave his support willingly without hope
39 of personal gratification. Saif told us about the success of peer observations in which each
40 teacher chose who would observe them, as they practised a new teaching activity, and
41 looked only at the points requested by the practising teacher. These helped teachers to
42 think of ways to improve their practice. This contrasted with past observations, whereby
43 supervisors had deliberately looked for weak points in order to assert their superiority,
44 thereby tending to block development.
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3 However, in order to develop their teaching approaches fruitfully, Saif reminded us that he
4 and his teachers needed more time, more space, more support from the school
5 administration and, most importantly for Saif, they needed to remain in one school for a
6 predictable length of time to build up collaborative relationships. Saif suggested that five
7 years would be an appropriate amount of time for genuine change to happen. Significant
8 change could not occur in his own situation where he was working in two schools at once
9 and could be transferred to another at any time. During one TLT in Saif's school, we saw a
10 young teacher being taken away from the TLT to attend a different training session, against
11 her will and against Saif's will. This disrupted the group's collaborations and reminded Saif
12 of the systemic limitations to self-direction.
13
14

15
16 In relation to the importance of the learner's own will as the driver of learning, Saif
17 mentioned on numerous occasions how sharing a specific goal inspired his own and his
18 teachers' drive to learn. Choosing and clarifying a goal collaboratively seemed to open him
19 up to richer interactions in order to achieve his goal. One way to support the achievement
20 of this agreed goal was by teachers asking each other questions:
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38 The most useful thing [in the TLT] was that everyone could ask their questions and
39 get answers. If someone, for example, had a problem controlling their class,
40 everyone would suggest an idea. We would get new and real-life ideas. We weren't
41 working alone. We had set steps to follow. We were focused on one point [MayInt].
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48 In order to learn, Saif worked with the demands and possibilities of all aspects of his
49 environment and tried to make best use of these. He talked about proactively researching
50 'new developments' in pedagogy, online. He also constantly asked us whether we as
51 consultants could provide him with more English language and pedagogical training. We did
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3 note that Saif sustained some deference to foreigners' authority which he perhaps
4
5 associated with the authors of the educational research he valued. While approval from any
6
7 person in a high position was greatly valued in Saif's system, approval from 'native' English
8
9 speakers was especially desirable for Saif. Saif explained that his pupils waited eagerly for
10
11 our visits to their school because of the opportunity of being seen by fluent English
12
13 speakers. On each visit by consultants to his school, many photos and videos were taken
14
15 and courtesies exchanged, sometimes to the point of obstructing formal learning. At first
16
17 we tried to avoid being given this special treatment, but on reflection we wondered
18
19 whether it was actually one aspect of Saif working with the demands and possibilities of his
20
21 environment and making best use of these. Saif was quick to point out that he would not
22
23 necessarily import foreigners' ideas wholesale into their system. He added, 'We might
24
25 change them to suit our circumstances and materials'. However, it was clear that
26
27 collaborative interaction with fluent English speakers was an important means towards his
28
29 developmental goals. And it was also a satisfaction of that goal itself.
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34 35 **Summary of Saif's Case**

36
37
38 In summary, Saif expressed a view of learning as leading to a higher development of himself
39
40 as a person, in terms of his authority, knowledge, ways of supporting others and as part of
41
42 an English-speaking community. While he was already a collaborative professional when
43
44 the TLT-Intervention started, he told us that he had learnt to value collaborative interaction
45
46 further during the Intervention as he saw how it supported him to engage with and listen to
47
48 a range of insightful views. He also began to believe in the power of his own self-directive
49
50 capacities as he gradually perceived their effects. Despite many systemic obstacles to his
51
52 collaboration and self-direction, Saif became extremely driven during the TLT-Intervention
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3 to achieve his ambitious, but strategic, goals of becoming an authoritative, supportive
4
5 leader and teacher with a good command of the English language; and he pursued all the
6
7 means to learning that he could access.
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9

10 11 12 13 **Farida**

14
15 Farida was a female teacher in her thirties who taught Year 6 in a small National Institute
16
17 school which prioritised English. She had two teachers in her TLT who seemed committed
18
19 to Farida's leadership and to the TLT, although unfortunately one of them was on sick-leave
20
21 to Farida's leadership and to the TLT, although unfortunately one of them was on sick-leave
22
23 for some time during the TLT-Intervention. Farida had a low profile initially but nearer the
24
25 end of the TLT-Intervention, she seemed suddenly to perceive learning and teaching
26
27 differently and take a more active role. The five-minute activities she developed focused on
28
29 the goal of improving writing in English. She experimented in using groupwork in class for
30
31 creative writing. A turning point for her was when she realised that pupils did not need to
32
33 copy lists from the black-board and that collaborative groupwork was a better use of time.
34
35

36 37 **Farida's learning through and about collaborative interaction**

38
39 Farida was clear that for her pupils, learning was more than passing exams but she felt
40
41 pressured by parents who did not share her vision. She believed that learning English
42
43 included interacting in English as well as developing personal skills such as decision-making
44
45 and supporting peers. Her own most valued learning and development goal was to act as a
46
47 motivational source to others:
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49

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51 The [Senior Teacher] sets the atmosphere from the beginning. If they don't do this,
52
53 there won't be any collaborative interaction. We have to set the atmosphere and try
54
55 to collaborate. This will result in new ideas and development [MayInt].
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3 One of Farida's most significant learnings was discovering that discussion of ideas was
4
5 developmental: for herself in Senior Teacher meetings; for her teachers in TLT meetings;
6
7 and for pupils in lessons that incorporated groupwork:
8
9

10 I wasn't convinced by peer learning. I didn't understand how it could work. But it
11
12 really worked. Sometimes they were able to explain to each other better than I was...

13
14 How do they learn from each other? I didn't know they could learn from each other!

15
16 [MayInt].
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18
19

20 Farida was emphatic about how supportive to her own learning the cross-school Senior
21
22 Teacher meetings were. She had never sat with teachers from other schools more than in a
23
24 one-day training event. She came to realise that they all had similar difficulties but that it
25
26 was possible to negotiate ways of dealing with these. She became very motivated when she
27
28 saw how driven and enthusiastic teachers from the AlAzhar schools were, which she
29
30 described as 'those who have the least facilities in the world' [JanInt]. She began to
31
32 acknowledge to herself that her school was more privileged than theirs and that she actually
33
34 had more support than they did, thereby redefining how she perceived her own position;
35
36 and also giving her hope. In fact she started to see that her teachers were also doing
37
38 valuable activities like the teachers in other schools.
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43 This learning boosted Farida's self-confidence and her confidence in her teachers. She told
44
45 us that this seemed to affect teachers of other subjects in her school too, who were 'curious
46
47 about what we were doing'. She also felt connected to a much wider, highly respected
48
49 community of English teachers, after making the presentation at the international
50
51 conference in Jordan. As she expressed it: 'All of this added to *me*' [MayInt]. In other
52
53 words, these factors changed how she viewed herself professionally in relation to others.
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3 One aspect of learning that was important for Farida was observing the *impact* of her
4
5 actions among her teachers and pupils. This was the basis for her increasing confidence and
6
7 sense of authority which led, in turn, to further action. She perceived that this was because
8
9 she was 'solving real problems'. In terms of how Farida perceived support to be provided for
10
11 her own learning, she saw a significant role for 'experts' outside school. She appreciated
12
13 the consultants' visits very highly but wanted more of these and more direction from
14
15 consultants. Even at the end of the TLT-Intervention, she continued to ask consultants to
16
17 provide ready-made pupil activities, even though at other times she recognised the
18
19 importance of self-direction in her own learning, as described below.
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21
22

23
24 An important aspect of her learning was having a specific, shared goal and feeling that she
25
26 could reach it, with support. When she first started leading TLTs, she thought there would
27
28 be little to talk about but then: '... Found we talked about many important things' [MayInt].
29
30 What made discussion powerful for learning, she claimed, was that it was a very focused
31
32 discussion with each person working towards the same goal. This contrasted with the
33
34 fragmented system she experienced beforehand [JanInt].
35
36
37

38 Farida described perceiving her teachers in a different, less critical way than before:

39
40
41 After I went to Gamila's class and saw her classes and how the students reacted to
42
43 her, I respected her a lot more. Why had I limited her role and not realised how good
44
45 she was? ... She also had new ideas ... She developed the ideas. I don't have these
46
47 ideas! My view of my teachers changed [MayInt].
48
49

50
51 Farida also mentioned the important role of appreciation. Her TLT teachers were motivated
52
53 by the fact that, when presenting their work among colleagues at the February workshop,
54
55 Farida encouraged her TLT teachers by mentioning all their various achievements. This was
56
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1
2
3 something that she reported her own school's administration did not do well but which
4
5 could have encouraged her own development.
6
7

8 **Farida's learning through and about self-direction**

9

10 It was noticeable that Farida lacked confidence in herself at the start of the TLT-
11
12 Intervention. A coercive approach during the TLT-Intervention would probably have
13
14 undermined her greatly. In November, Farida described how the consultants' friendly, easy-
15
16 going manner encouraged her to persevere and try to learn through the TLT-Intervention. In
17
18 January, she revealed that she had been afraid that consultants would judge her teachers'
19
20 classrooms negatively because sometimes the junior teachers used Arabic instead of
21
22 English. By May, however, she explained how she had eventually dared to engage with new
23
24 ideas. Her fear had transformed into a sense of powerfulness through the gentle
25
26 collaborative interactions she had engaged in:
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30

31 I used to be afraid of new ideas. I didn't know how to apply them. Now I can try
32
33 anything! ... Before, I felt I couldn't do it. Then I saw we could do whatever we
34
35 wanted and the result would be very good... I found it simple, not hard [MayInt].
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38

39 **Summary of Farida's Case**

40

41
42 Farida's problems at the start of the TLT-Intervention were her lack of both confidence and
43
44 motivation, partly due to inadequate encouragement experienced at work. It seemed that
45
46 these factors were blocking her learning and development. However, she claimed that a
47
48 mixture of non-coercive engagement with a range of others aided her to overcome her lack
49
50 of confidence which in turn enhanced her motivation to learn and develop. She completed
51
52 the TLT-Intervention with a new sense of powerfulness and authority that she had not
53
54 known before which she then built on to pursue further development.
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Discussion

This article has explored how three case-study Senior Teachers developed professionally across the eight-month TLT-Intervention. The TLT-Intervention was based on the findings from previous research that collaborative interaction and a sense of self-direction were essential for fruitful learning outcomes (Belibas, Bulut and Gedik 2017; Earley and Porritt 2010; Leahy and Wiliam 2011; Philpott and Oates 2017; Stoll et al. 2006; Tannehill and MacPhail 2017). These aspects of learning were also at the heart of Vygotsky's theories about how learning and development occurred. This article has considered whether these three Senior Teachers used collaborative interaction and self-direction in their own attempts to learn and if so, how they used them, with what awareness and with what consequences.

In all seven of our cases, even when we first met them in September, these Senior Teachers displayed a conception of learning as larger than academic learning or learning how to carry out techniques. They all considered their role as teachers as being about developing people: who loved learning and could function in and contribute to their environments socially. This was perhaps surprising since their education system focused heavily on memorisation for exams.

How participants' perceptions changed regarding collaborative interaction

Without exception, these Senior Teachers came to appreciate in a transformative way, how much more they could learn from others than they had appreciated. They all started with good intentions, but by the end of the TLT-Intervention, they could clearly see that the potential for their own learning lay partly in the ideas of their more junior colleagues or pupils. Learning started to appear to them to be a two-way process (Brown et al 1993;

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2
3 Wells 2000). One important finding was that it was not only the content of what others said
4
5 which had influence: their enthusiasm or creativity could provoke learning too. When the
6
7 teacher from a more advantaged school saw how the less advantaged teacher still took on
8
9 enterprising challenges, this boosted her own drive to learn (Hart, 2000).

10
11
12 Having their own views valued by others also inspired the Senior Teachers' learning (Mercer
13
14 2000). It seemed to give them confidence and help them feel that they had some
15
16 professional authority. This was the case, even when appreciation came from less senior
17
18 teachers. That was a transformational insight within the Egyptian system where only praise
19
20 from those with senior authority roles tended to be valued (Hammad 2010). But when
21
22 working as a team, as one member's activities were clearly successful, all members of the
23
24 team felt driven to learn more. Unlike models of 'success' in the existing system, as the TLT
25
26 supported each other, the group of teachers abandoned personal gratification in favour of
27
28 mutual benefit (Rogers 1951, 283).

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33 Another way that the case-study teachers described learning was by being demonstrated to
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35 or having a practice exemplified in real life. At the start of the TLT-Intervention, some of the
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37 Senior Teachers expressed the belief that it was their job to show junior teachers how to
38
39 carry out tasks correctly. However, they later related that the 'coaching' approach
40
41 promoted by the TLT-Intervention transformed this early belief. They came to notice how
42
43 being asked by the consultants to express themselves, and being listened to, supported
44
45 them to act proactively. Then, by exemplifying coaching behaviour themselves, they
46
47 themselves learnt more from their colleagues while also supporting their colleagues'
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49 learning more. However, in order to make 'reflective interaction to flow freely without
50
51 trying to impose her/his own values or wishes' (Shayer 2003, 481), time and space needed
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3 to be made systemically available for such coaching conversations. These commodities
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5 were in short supply in all the case-study schools, a lack that seemed to obstruct all
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7 teachers' learning.
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10 *Participants' perceptions of self-direction as a trigger for learning and a means for achieving*
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12 *their own goals*
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15 One strong message that came through our interviews was the enjoyment experienced by
16
17 the participants during the TLT-Intervention meetings and activities, which enhanced their
18
19 curiosity, innovativeness and creativity. As Vygotsky emphasised, volition and interest led
20
21 their developmental process. In fact, it was this spark, this 'spirit' as Laila called it, that set
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23 learning into motion. It was this energy that led the participants to try to overcome the gap
24
25 between their current and their desired capabilities. Participants all commented on how
26
27 they had previously slipped into boring routines which the Intervention had shaken up.
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29 They all remarked that this flame was born out of their own volition, not as a result of
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31 rewards, punishments or threats (Niemic and Ryan 2009). They had come to see why
32
33 these latter motivators did not entice them to engage in the big and sometimes difficult
34
35 process of learning. A good explanation lay in their experiences of the classroom
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37 observations made by their peers, in which they had chosen their own observers, whose
38
39 views they had specifically requested. Because they themselves initiated these
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41 observations, they felt encouraged to make them useful and make changes based on the
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43 observer's comments. This was in stark contrast to the judgemental observations by
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45 supervisors that they were accustomed to.
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52 This exercise of their own agency seemed to transform participants' sense of professional
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54 self and their confidence. As they directed their own actions and observed the changes they
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3 inspired, they seemed to feel more authoritative as professionals. Their professional
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5 identities transformed as they became entrepreneurs who drove their own learning agenda.
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7 This was perhaps the area in which transformation was most evident: participants seemed
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9 to move, in Paulo Freire's famous words, from spectators to actors, from followers of
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11 prescriptions to makers of choices, from silent participants to outspoken collaborators
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14 (1972, 25).
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17 Participants noted that an important ingredient in this shift was the setting of a specific,
18
19 clearly explained, shared goal in the presence of their colleagues who would provide
20
21 ongoing support. It appeared that the setting of their owned and clearly identified goal,
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23 helped them to feel that they were progressing towards a new level of conceptualisation in
24
25 relation to their professional practice. They came to notice the formation of new functions
26
27 or the enrichment of existing functions, in relation to this goal, with the support of their
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29 Team. Prior to their experience in the TLT-Intervention, their work had seemed less
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31 purposeful. They had carried out routines but did not always know what they were working
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33 towards or why.
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39 Once purpose was established, with collaborative support systems in place, the participants
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41 sought diverse opportunities for developing towards their goal. This drive to find every
42
43 possible opportunity was especially clear in Saif's case. Rather than waiting for things to be
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45 done for them and to them, now the Senior Teachers sought ways to make things happen
46
47 themselves. This may seem obvious to those of us who enjoy some autonomy in our work,
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49 but to the teachers in this study, it was largely a novel idea that learning had to start where
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51 the learner started and be subjected to the will of the learner.
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3 However, we questioned whether we had fostered a new hierarchy among the participants.

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5 The Senior Teachers reported that the consultants' guidance bestowed value and status
6
7 onto all the TLT-Intervention activities. This in turn seems to have led some Senior Teachers'
8
9 development to have become inextricably linked to the consultants' approval, a
10
11 dependence which might be assumed to limit their capacity for self-direction. Yet, from a
12
13 Vygotskian perspective, given the restrictive context within which these Senior Teachers
14
15 worked, perhaps they were doing exactly what Vygotsky depicted: they were working with
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17 the demands and possibilities of the environment and making best use of these. They had
18
19 found someone to interact with, who could provide a way to move beyond their experience
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21 of low status and low authority as teachers. And in the Egyptian case, status was easily
22
23 bestowed through contact with 'native' English speakers. This would explain Saif's constant
24
25 emphasis on having contact with native English speakers and the fact that all the teachers
26
27 found it very encouraging when we, as TLT-Intervention consultants, physically visited their
28
29 teachers at school. Perhaps this should be seen as a clear manifestation of proactive self-
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31 direction itself, rather than dependence. An unquestioning acceptance of 'decisions from
32
33 above' was a long-established cultural behaviour; by associating strongly with the
34
35 Intervention consultants, the participants were perhaps using this culturally embedded
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37 custom to achieve their own, self-directed goals, even when these appeared different from
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39 the TLT-Intervention's goals.
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47 It is against the backdrop of these deeply embedded hierarchical customs that the academic
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49 significance of this article needs to be considered. This research took place in the context of
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51 a middle-income country, where typically collaboration could be considered threatening
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53 within inflexible hierarchies of power; and conformity was emphasised to the exclusion of
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55 development (Hammad 2010). As in other recently independent nations, in Egypt there has
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3 seemed to linger 'a deeply entrenched culture of obedience and conformity... that compels
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5 the rights and privileges of the larger society over the individual' (Ab Kadir 2017, 237). None
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7 the less, the research vividly illustrates that personally fulfilling and developmental learning
8
9 still occurred when the individuals within these constraints engaged in collaborative
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11 interaction with others in their environment; and when they directed their own ways
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13 forward. Although Vygotsky's views are Eurocentric and therefore not universally
14
15 applicable, our research seemed to confound this exclusionary assumption. Despite hostile
16
17 cultural tradition, despite obstructive locally-reinforced habits, when given the
18
19 opportunities flagged up by Vygotsky, professional learning and development flourished,
20
21 with the support of a More Knowlegable Other and a Team of colleagues.
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24

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30
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34
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