

Training Kuwaiti Teachers to Lead: A Case Study of Competitive Debate at the Basic Education College

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of a competitive debate program designed for teachers-in-training at the Basic Education College in Kuwait. Stakeholders at different levels have expressed an interest in introducing more constructivist-based pedagogies into the Kuwaiti national education system, but institutional and ideological challenges have hindered implementation. Teachers at the college designed and implemented a debate program based on constructivist principles of authenticity, student meaning-making, collaboration, and high performance expectations. Survey data suggest that participants experienced debate as a transformative experience, changing their perception of themselves, of the world, and of their ability to effect change in it. Participants came to imagine themselves as future system leaders preparing future generations with higher-order skills involving complex solving, which an increasingly complex social reality demanded. From 2015 to 2018, a group of professors formed debate teams at the Kuwait University National English Debate League. This endeavour formed the empirical research presented here as evidence to support a move from instructivist teaching to constructivist learning for future teachers in Kuwait.

Keywords: transformative education, constructivist education, debate, Kuwait, transformative leadership

1. Introduction: Training Teachers for the Kuwaiti Context

Like other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Kuwait is a small but global society, with a minority population of Kuwaiti citizens living among a larger population of residents hailing from, or otherwise connected to, other countries. The Kuwaiti economy is likewise international, with most of its revenue coming from the export of petroleum products and the import of internally traded goods and services through commercial networks spanning the globe. From the mid- to late-twentieth century, petroleum provided the financial means to rapidly improve the standard of living for Kuwaitis, including the extension of free, universal education. Studies Kuwaiti leadership funded have repeatedly asserted the limited sustainability of this 'distributive model' (Hvidt, 2015, p. 25) and envisioned processes for repositioning Kuwait as a *knowledge economy* in the twenty-first century through the development of a *national innovation ecosystem* (Brinkley et al., 2012). Educational reform is a necessary component of such efforts. Educational leaders across the globe have been forced to rethink how best to prepare students for a world in which information is copious and free, whereas the ability to sort, evaluate, synthesise, and effectively act based on that information is in high demand. What is clear is that traditional educational systems, focused on the memorisation of raw information, provide students with information that they could easily access elsewhere, while failing to challenge them in the application of higher-level critical and creative skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to an increasingly complex world. Porcaro (2010) argued that citizens of late-developing countries are placed at a particular disadvantage by traditional educational practices, which 'assumes the effectiveness of passive reception of sanctioned information through memorization and recall' (p. 40). Innovation is, by definition, a response to a demand produced within a cultural, political, economic, and even ecological context. Because the national industries of late industrialisers are geared toward consumption and reproduction of the products and services of innovation (rather than innovation itself), those products and services are less likely to meet the needs of communities far removed from that original context. This research acknowledges that while the 'well-formulated, teacher directed, didactic learning' of instructivism has been of benefit to our learners, for students to reach a globally recognized potential in problem-solving and knowledge creation (Bereiter, 2002), constructivism's 'student-centered forms of instruction, including social, situated, knowledge creating, and intersubjective' (Porcaro, 2010), will support

Kuwait's move beyond a singular 'knowledge economy' (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

The study was carried out at the Basic Education College in Kuwait, where students aspiring to be teachers in the Kuwaiti national education system are trained to meet the above challenges in their future classrooms. However, preparing students to innovate is only one of the goals of the Kuwaiti education system. As mentioned previously, Kuwait is demographically diverse. Besides foreigners, the Kuwaiti citizen population is composed of multiple, sometimes overlapping identities, each of which carries socioeconomic implications. Some identify themselves as Bedouin to distinguish themselves from settled people, whereas others identify themselves as original Kuwaitis as opposed to those who are naturalised citizens. The Ministry of Education explicitly designed its national curriculum to address this demographic challenge by prioritising concepts of social integration and national unity. This has taken the form of asserting a set of beliefs and values as essentially Kuwaiti and promoting loyalty to those ideas and values (Al-Nakib, 2015). In the ministry's 2010 *Strategy for Reinforcing the Concepts of Citizenship, Loyalty and Belonging Among Young People Through Educational Curricula in Kuwait*, the ministry presented this policy as necessary in the face of 'multiple citizenships and ideological, tribal or class affiliations that create cracks in the structure of the state and in the ties of national unity' (as translated in Al-Nakib, 2015, p. 7). In this context, diverse perspectives and lifestyles are sometimes seen as a potential challenge to Kuwaiti identity. In the same strategy document, the ministry expressed concern about 'the cultural, economic, political and intellectual effects of globalisation on cultural identity, the nation state, borders and sovereignty' and the need for 'protecting Kuwaiti essence' against 'deviant behaviours that are foreign to Kuwaiti cultural identity and that threaten our intrinsic constants' (p. 8).

In practice, the desire to implement a national unity curriculum has taken the form of a highly centralised and didactic national curriculum. The Ministry of Education produces textbooks that present material as fact claims, and assessment as closed-ended questions for which only one answer is accepted as correct. In class, students work toward mastery of that material through teacher-led activities, such as call-and-repeat exercises, where students respond to questions in unison. Porcaro (2010) would characterise this as an *instructivist* pedagogical approach, in that it approaches knowledge as fixed and finite. The instructivist approach, besides structuring course material, also sends an implicit message to students that they are meant to be passive in the education process, and by extension in their societies and the rest of the world. *Constructivist-based* pedagogies, by contrast, include material and activities designed to encourage student participation in the process of creating new knowledge, even as they master new facts and concepts. Constructivist approaches introduce open-ended questions and problems to which there are a theoretically unlimited number of solutions. Students are assessed based on not only their efforts to build their own knowledge but also their ability to deploy what they learn effectively to propose solutions to complex problems and enrich the class for everyone.

A series of statements and initiatives by the Kuwaiti government suggests an awareness of the need to better align the national curriculum with desired outcomes. In 2008, the Ministry of Education issued a report in which it resolved to cede more authority to individual schools in the interest of updating approaches to teaching (Alsaedi & Male, 2013). Even the 2010 strategy report that stressed the need for a national unity curriculum proposed 'human rights, democracy, cultural diversity, equality, participation, dialogue and critical thinking' as overarching goals (Al-Nakib, 2015, p. 14). Kuwait's National Youth Project held a conference on the topic of 'Kuwait Listens' (*al-Kuwait tisma*) to invite young people to voice their ideas about pressing issues, such as the definition of citizenship as well as tolerance and respect for all religions. This initiative led to the creation in 2013 of the Kuwait Ministry of State for Youth Affairs. As of May 11, 2018, the ministry's website states that the vision of the ministry is to develop a 'generation of creative young people who are committed to national values and who are ready and willing to become co-partners in the nation's plans for sustainable development'.

At the level of individual schools, a recent study suggests that principals in Kuwait are generally amenable to the idea of encouraging teacher autonomy and student creativity. The same study found that obstacles to such change include lack of autonomy for individual schools, lack of a reward structure for creativity and innovation among learners and teachers, and lack of funding for the kinds of projects that would foster such behaviour. Others point to the importance of training teachers to think critically and encourage their students to do so early on in their careers, because those in the middle, or near the end, of their careers are unlikely to be interested, willing, or able to implement new teaching strategies (Alsaedi and Male, 2013). Another barrier for teachers and educational leaders who wish to integrate more constructivist activities into the curriculum is the potential negative short-term consequences for individual students. Standardised examinations the Ministry of Education produces and grades typically count for as much as 75% of students' final grades (Al-Nakib, 2015). This highly centralised performance assessment encourages students and schools to stay keenly focused on mastering textbook material. In short, the desire

to prepare young people to be innovators and participants in the creation of knowledge is present in principle, but in practice, the inertia of the centralised and didactic national curriculum presents significant obstacles to such change. These obstacles in institutional structure and culture suggest that change may be easier to implement outside of highly regimented classroom time, through extracurricular activities such as competitive debate.

The training program examined in this study aimed to create an engaging learning environment that welcomed diverse perspectives, giving students the tools to develop complex critical thinking and meaning-making skills in debate. The aim of creating these learning environments was to provide primary material that offered an objective resource and supported change for future teaching in education.

2. The Case Study: Debate at the Basic Education College

The Basic Education College is a college of applied education run under the auspices of the Kuwait Ministry of Education. The college prepares students for careers as teachers in a range of subjects offered in Kuwaiti schools. Qatar Debate, a member of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, was instrumental in funding and organising the English debate league at Kuwait University: it provided for the training of judges and the development of debate materials available online, including activity ideas for coaches, hand-outs for students, and a dictionary of debating terms (Quinn, 2010). These resources were provided with the express mission of promoting ‘intellectual creativity, as it encourages students to research, study, cultivate their leadership qualities and language skills and practice critical thinking’ (QatarDebate, 2017).

Debate can refer generally to any process of articulating and defending opposing views. It is used here in the more restricted sense of training and participation in a competition in which procedural rules limit and structure argumentation. From 2015 to 2018, three professors formed trained debate teams to represent the women’s campus of the Basic Education College at the Kuwait University National English Debate League.

In each of the years included in the study (2015, 2016, and 2018), students at the college were invited to join the team through a campus-wide call for participants. Those interested were interviewed, and participants were selected based on the coaches’ assessment of their potential as their speaking skills and self-presentation demonstrated. The team of coaches whose work is described here trained a total of 18 participants over these three debating seasons for competition in English and Arabic language debates in Kuwait and Qatar. Training involved weekly meetings lasting approximately four hours every Saturday over a period of three months, as well as two or more sessions of two to four hours on weeknights. Coaches met with the students for a total of approximately 65 hours over a period of eight weeks. Students also trained independently of coaches for as long as four hours per night as the competition date approached. After the completion of this course of training and participation in an international competition, first-time participants were surveyed about their perceptions of the experience, with a total of 13 responding. Numbers were assigned to survey responses (designated parenthetically in the text below by the letter *R* and the assigned number), and common patterns and themes in survey responses were identified and interpreted in light of teaching practices.

A significant body of research argues for the utility of competitive debate as a tool for teaching critical-thinking and communication skills, including how to construct and defend logical arguments and how to analyse others’ arguments and evidence (Fandos-Herrera et al., 2017; Field, 2017; Healey, 2012; Williams, 2010). For these reasons, and because debate is a process through which any academic content could potentially be examined, Bellon (2000) has made the case for its implementation across the curriculum. Higher-order thinking skills are precisely those the instructivist orientation of Kuwait’s national curriculum marginalises. At the same time, when the focus on winning competitions overshadows these pedagogical goals, debate has been found to lead to polarisation and entrenchment of perspective (De Conti, 2014) and even to hostile and exclusive learning environments (Field, 2017). To maximise the benefits of the debate experience, sessions with students from the Basic Education College were organised to reflect research-based principles of effective constructivist pedagogy: participant learning was geared toward developing creative solutions to authentic problems, participants engaged in collaborative meaning-making with peers, and coaches set high performance expectations. Coaches helped participants achieve those high expectations by scaffolding instruction, beginning with more instructional, coach-led components (introducing procedural rules of debate and basic principles of argument analysis and presentation) and proceeding to participant-led, knowledge construction activities, as participants gained confidence in their ability to work independently and creatively.

The following open-ended questions were circulated to participants at the completion of the debate competition electronically, and the responses were collected by email. The answers provide information for the proceeding discussion.

- (1) What do you like about debating?

- (2) What do you dislike about debating?
- (3) Do you feel more confident expressing yourself in public?
- (4) Did it help you analyse information in a different or more critical way?
- (5) As a teacher, would you consider including debate in your curriculum? Why?
- (6) Tell me about your most frustrating moment as a member of the debate team.
- (7) Tell me your most rewarding moment as a member of the debate team.
- (8) What motivated you to be a part of this team?
- (9) Do you have any regrets?
- (10) Do you have any recommendations for future teams?
- (11) Do you think this experience enriched your education? How?
- (12) Do you think that debating on a competitive level is different than debating as a pedagogy? Explain.
- (13) Did public competition change your experience? Explain.
- (14) What surprised you the most during the competition? Explain.
- (15) Does it have any pedagogical value to you? Explain.

2.1 Constructivist Principle: Authentic Problems

Studies have shown that students are more motivated, and achieve better learning outcomes, when learning involves tasks that develop competencies perceived as useful outside school (Field, 2017). Coaches structured the debate course around authentic problem-solving in several ways. First, students used their skills in competitions where excellence led to the success of their team. One respondent mentioned that the competitive format motivated her to push herself to read more: 'I researched a lot. Sometimes I would wake up at 3 am to open my mobile and research something' (R1). Another attested that the competitive format encouraged her to make a 'commitment to work hard and give my best' (R2). All survey respondents reported that the most rewarding aspect of debate was winning the competition and, for one, being voted best speaker: 'Feeling that I represented my country motivated me to work harder to be a good representative' (R9).

The exercise was also authentic in that it mimicked the format of discussions through which real-world leaders advocate for and make policy decisions that affect real stakeholders. More important, practice motions focused on issues of authentic, contemporary controversy. QatarDebate materials provided a list of general topics (Quinn, 2010), which coaches used to elicit potential motions from participants, as well as a list of potential controversies surrounding those motions. From there, participants were divided into teams to research and practice defending or opposing those motions.

Motions practiced included the following:

- This house will not allow governments to own or manage any media outlets.
- This house regrets the creation of the United Nations.
- This house will grant refugees similar social and economical rights as citizens.
- This house will link assistance and donations to developing countries to the implementation of a birth control policy.
- This house will not allow the usage of underage social media celebrities for profit.

The complex, contemporary, and dynamic nature of the motions, as well as their orientation toward culturally contingent values, presented debaters with a theoretically unlimited number of solutions to a problem. The format of argument and counterargument created implicit rewards for more creative solutions, with the potential to surprise opponents or catch them off guard. For this reason, one respondent advised fellow debaters to be creative and take risks: 'Don't be afraid to make mistakes; it's all about expressing your opinion' (R5).

2.2 Constructivist Principle: Outcomes

The challenges first-time debate participants were faced at the college suggest that the local geographical focus and the instructivist pedagogical culture of the national educational system limit even post-secondary curricula. First-time debate participants were unfamiliar with the concepts and stakes at the heart of some of the most salient debates about current global and international issues. After researching such topics, one respondent found, 'I need to

have more knowledge about the world and how it works. For example, before debate I had no idea about simple matters like the Winter Olympics, G8, veto rights in the UN, and many more issues. So it is not enough to be a good student and know the textbook material. To be smart you must know about the world' (R7).

Another found that working outside the usual constraints of the college curriculum allowed her to 'gain new knowledge on different topics, as well as get up to date on topics of local and international interest' (R10). One respondent was most surprised by 'how little we all knew, which is why now I follow the news and listen to the news on the radio' (R13). Another offered advice to 'never stop learning. Read everything you can get your hands on. Follow the news, always!' (R6)

Another said, 'I have gone from knowing nothing about the world to knowing so much, in many different fields—from politics to sports to health. We were encouraged to read and learn about diverse topics, and I feel that is what has given me my voice now' (R7).

Those who were familiar with controversies around the world were unused to being asked to take a position on certain issues and therefore lacked the tools to defend particular positions. One respondent saw this as a direct result of the broader educational culture: 'Teaching in Kuwait is highly dependent on memorisation; not on critical thinking. Being part of the debate team added this new dimension to my learning' (R11). Another said of debate, 'I love that it gives me the space to discuss and argue, and to come up with new points of view different from what I personally believe in, without restriction' (R6).

2.3 Constructivist Principle: Construction of Knowledge and Meaning

Participants were encouraged to act as partners in framing and organising information at every stage of their training. When a motion was introduced, they brainstormed different possible strategies for approaching positions for and against it. In brainstorming sessions, participants experienced the broad range of approaches to, and perspectives on, complex issues that emerged even within their relatively homogeneous peer groups. They were then responsible for finding, evaluating, and analysing real-world arguments various stakeholders there were produced and published, taking different stances related to a given motion. They practiced comparing and evaluating multiple logical frameworks and types of evidence brought to support those perspectives. Participants researched each topic independently and in teams, allowing them to frame their investigations themselves. Coaches encouraged participants to think broadly about different stakeholders and their positions in reference to the motion.

When the respondents were asked what they liked about the process of debate training and competition, they unanimously pointed to activities that require creative knowledge construction. One attested to her gains in 'reasoning and critical thinking' (R4), and another announced, 'I am more analytical now' (R8). One participant noted, 'Since gaining the opportunity to debate I have started thinking more logically and critically. I now want to know more about everything I hear. I feel the need to ask questions' (R5). Meanwhile, elements of the experience that respondents reported as frustrating still resulted in a positive sense of self-motivation to develop higher-order thinking skills. Specifically, despite respondents at first being worried because of the pressure to *think on their feet* and prepare a creative argument in the short preparation time they were allowed, they later described the ability to perform under pressure as an area of growth. One student found the arbitrary assignment of positions in opposition to, or in support of, the debated proposition (as opposed to being allowed to 'express our thoughts and feelings') frustrating, whereas another 'appreciated not choosing a side. It made me think more and look at life and motions from a whole new perspective' (R5). One participant recognised that this forced her to 'see things from multiple perspectives' (R4). Another said, 'Debating makes me think about what the other person is thinking. It enhanced my critical thinking' (R11), whereas her colleague learned to appreciate another person's opinions, adding that when forced to 'think of the motion from the other individual's perspective, we became able to think through the same motion from both positions' (R3).

2.4 Constructivist Principle: Collaboration

All survey respondents mentioned the centrality of teamwork to the debate endeavour. Fandos-Herrera et al. (2017) found that the interactivity implicit in debate activities improves learning outcomes. The same study finds that US students find it fun and satisfying for the same reason. In practice sessions at the college, students practiced problem-solving in pairs and small groups. Preparing their team's argument required the collaborative construction of new knowledge found, through negotiation, to be satisfactory to that particular group of peers. Several participants mentioned that the experience of collaborating with peers was not only essential to successful competition but was also enjoyable. For R12, working as a team and supporting each other was the most rewarding part of her debate experience.

The respondents found teamwork challenging but important: ‘This is not an individual sport; you need to be a strong team to win’ (R8). Another advised other debaters to ‘get to know their teammates before beginning to practice together, and find your rhythm as a team. Even after knowing each other well, you will face some miscommunications, but at least when you know each other well, this will not become a larger issue’ (R3).

R12 had similar advice: ‘Work hard and work together. There is no “I” in team’. Coaches encouraged participants to practice listening to their peers and expressing themselves clearly and concisely. Measuring listening and speaking time is essential to teamwork in debate. During team practice, students developed sensitivity to the value of speaking time. They paid more attention to the time they took with their own speech and learned ‘to respect others’ (R8) by reducing their own time and listening to others. Students mentioned listening as a skill that they had previously had few other opportunities to develop: ‘In the debate, we must listen in order to find any holes [in the opponent’s argument]; we must listen to debate their points’ (R2).

Each session culminated in a mock debate, where participants brought their perspectives, reasoning, and evidence into direct conversation with their teammates. Coaches provided verbal feedback to participants at the end of these sessions. Hearing the different approaches of their peers to similar problems was equally instructive.

2.5 Constructivist Principle: High Expectations

Participants were held to high expectations in competition, but they were provided with the tools to succeed in the form of scaffold drills. Preparation for competition began with collecting new information about topics with which some participants were unfamiliar, and then proceeded to analyzing and synthesizing that information. This preparation culminated in the cogent presentation of supported positions to peers in a competitive context. Participants practiced collecting evidence through independent research; building arguments; and defending those arguments using appropriate word choice, tone, and argumentative logic.

Coaches provided practical tips, such as how to prepare presentation notes as key words and phrases rather than writing a script in complete sentences. This technique produced more lively and powerful presentations. Speaking from notes composed of key words requires the ability to think on the spot. Practicing partially extemporaneous presentation, incorporating peer feedback, and listening to presentations of peers led to rapid gains in participants’ ability to improvise under pressure. One respondent explained, ‘I learned to keep emotions aside, and think rationally’ (R3). The constraints of competition, the intense pressure, and losing to another team were reported as the most ‘frustrating’ parts of competitive debate. However, one respondent stated that this ‘competitive spirit’ made the experience both meaningful and enjoyable (R2). Coaches also set high expectations by providing frank criticism and encouraging participants to critique each other. Coaches observed rapid improvement in the ability of participants to constructively apply criticism to improve performance. One respondent advised future debaters to ‘take any criticism with an open mind. It is just there for you to grow, not to put you down’ (R9). Another noted that ‘getting feedback and criticism from [peers] made me stronger and better’ (R13). Having met high expectations with the help of resources, encouragement, and constructive critique, R5 stated, ‘I’m not afraid to say “I don’t understand” anymore’ (R5).

Participants responded with conviction to the psychological impact of succeeding in the face of high performance expectations. They reported surprise or elation at the success of their team: ‘I never thought that we would do so well, never thought that I could be this confident’ (R3). Students also reported a heightened sense of self-efficacy, responding ‘yes’ to question 3. One mentioned that the program ‘got me out of my shell’ (R1), while another stated: ‘I’m extremely shy, but somehow I got over it and a whole new person emerged. I’m not as limited by my shyness as I was before’ (R3). Similarly, one attested that ‘before I would always be hesitant and not sure of myself, but with the encouraging feedback I got from my friends and coaches. I became more and more confident’ (R8). R13 reported, ‘I feel I grew so much and have so much more ideas to say and express’.

All respondents viewed meeting what appeared at the start to be impossibly high expectations as a transformative experience. As one respondent put it, ‘This competition represents a milestone for me. I can honestly say that this revealed things to me about myself that I either ignored before, or didn’t even know. From now on, whenever I evaluate or categorise myself, I will be doing it with a whole new perspective of myself’ (R3). R6 stated, ‘It has changed my life. I am so much more confident now. I have become a better student! I participate more during my lectures and feel more able to express myself, which has helped me in many of my courses’ (R6). One respondent sensed a change in the way others perceive her: ‘People have started to look and see me the way I always wanted to be seen. My family always saw me as young and naïve, and it was hard for them to take me seriously, but when I was competing, everyone looked at me as an educated person that had something to say’ (R1).

3. Discussion: Implications for System-Wide Transformative Leadership from Below

The created learning environment within the Kuwaiti educational context found recognition among educators of the long-term social benefits of preparing young people to be innovators and participants in the creation of knowledge. Survey participants' responses reflected a similar view: that the skills and perspectives acquired through participation in debate are much needed in Kuwaiti society in general. Responses to question 1 ('What do you like about debating?') highlighted that listening more closely to the views and rationale of others is much needed 'in a society where we really do not listen to each' (R2). R1 brought out the same theme in her response to the same question: 'Debating is an art that is missing in our society. In our society, they take not agreeing with their opinion so personally. I like being a part of changing our society's perspective' (R1).

Perhaps the most striking survey result was the responses to question 5 ('As a teacher, would you consider including debate in your curriculum? Why?'). All respondents linked their role as teachers to an ethical responsibility to serve their communities by preparing their students for effective civic engagement. All respondents replied 'yes' to this question, citing their desire to transform their society. As one participant said, 'Most of the conflicts happening around us, whether locally or internationally, resulted from a simple disagreement on a single policy. As a teacher, I would help my students by telling them that it is normal to disagree. It is healthy to swim against the tide, and this is why we need to debate our thoughts' (R2).

In the same vein, another respondent expressed the view that debate holds the potential to make young Kuwaitis more accepting of 'people who do not share our beliefs' (R1). R10 stated that 'In our society, there is this tendency to judge a person based on his/her religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. By debating, the student has the chance to meet a member of another group and get to know him. I'm sure that all the myths he or she thought about [that] group will fade'.

One respondent advocated for debate: 'All teaching should be based on the things we have learned in debate: speaking clearly, logically, and confidently. Doing research, while respecting the other person even when we disagree with them' (R7). R11 asserted that 'teaching should be about valuing what we believe in and learning to express it with confidence without being scared of not pleasing or conforming with others'. One respondent reasoned that if everyone was trained in the practice of debate from an early age, people in our society would question things more often. As R4 said, 'It is a great way of directing people to start questioning rather than obeying and agreeing'. Another respondent imagined using debate in her classroom to develop in her students 'the ability to make choices, discuss, and argue in a polite way' (R8). Similarly, R9 saw debate in the classroom as a way to demonstrate to students that 'not agreeing on the same topic doesn't necessarily mean that we are fighting'.

In these responses, students implicitly viewed teaching as a position of *leadership*. Understanding, is not in the sense of assigned authority roles, but 'as intentional activity that either maintains the reproduction of practices or instigates or guides change in them' (Boylan, 2016). Boylan's study is a part of a growing body of literature attempting to describe and measure the efficacy of new forms of educational leadership more suited to the information age than traditional top-down bureaucratic systems. Because of the centralised and didactic nature of formal educational planning in Kuwait, what Boylan calls 'leadership from below' (57) may be a more realistic framework with which to envision the implementation of such change. Concepts such as 'complexity leadership' (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007) and 'adaptive system leadership' highlight the more interactive and dynamic forms of leadership that new technologies make possible and the resulting changes in social relationships. Taylor et al. (2011) finds that because the needs of individual schools are dynamic and specific to the communities they serve, change that teachers drive can be more responsive to those needs.

Boylan (2016) asserts that effective teacher leadership in education reform starts with precisely the sense of civic responsibility reflected in the survey responses. However, for teachers to implement change in their classrooms, they must first be trained in the higher-order skills they wish to impart to others. Ideally, this will occur at an early stage in their development, before they become used to more traditional techniques (Al-Issa, 2005). However, Kuwaiti teachers also require confidence in their ability to develop new and better ways of approaching their responsibilities as teachers, as well to transform their students and colleagues. This outcome is particularly significant for women at gender-segregated institutions.

One respondent stated, 'In Kuwait, we still suffer from the ideology that a woman can never be better than a man. By debating, however, I strongly believe that we can help to change that idea and let Arabs know that a woman is no less than a man. Sexism is on the way to vanishing, hopefully' (R2). Through debate, teachers-in-training came to see themselves as not only classroom teachers but also ethical activists capable of innovation and the creation of new knowledge that is useful in their society.

4. Conclusions

The observations and insights from this study are preliminary. They are based on the first iteration of a program that has, since the time of implementation, already proven to have significant staying power. The success of the debate team from the Basic Education College in its first year, 2015, led to increased interest from other faculty and from the college administration. This resulted in the increased allocation of funds and in opportunities to professionalise the position beyond the volunteer format used in 2015, as well as a grant for establishing a new debate centre at the college. The voices of participants, included here, are important for determining their level of commitment and passion, but a larger sample is needed to generalise the voices to the population of Kuwaiti debaters. Because of gender segregation in the tertiary educational system, these debates offered participants a unique opportunity for students to work with, and compete against, members of the opposite sex. Further study should address the question of how such interactions changes the way participants think about gender and other identities, if at all.

Although there is some consensus about the need to better train Kuwaiti students in the higher-order thinking skills necessary for success in a global and complex society, the impetus for such change is unlikely to come from above. Debate training based on constructivist principles of assignment authenticity, student meaning-making and collaboration, and high performance expectations, yielded rapid results in this case study. Coaches found that over the short weeks of preparation for the debate, participants made noticeable strides in assimilating the rules of debate and developing a poised debating persona. Their ability to think quickly under pressure also vastly improved. Coaches also noticed a significant expansion in the diversity of perspectives that participants were able to anticipate and voice when addressing motions over the course of the training period. All respondents reported that the debating experience left them feeling transformed. Students' survey results revealed an enhanced sense of civic responsibility, an increased belief in their ability to lead, and a sense of greater self-efficacy in collaborative and creative skills needed for effective advocacy. Debating programs, when implemented as part of a course in teacher training, can be an effective tool for bringing constructivist-based pedagogies into the Kuwaiti national educational system. Support should be increased for competitive debate as an extracurricular activity to help tertiary students develop the skills that will allow them to implement credit-bearing debate assignments and modules in their classrooms.

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