

# **Conclusion: Lessons learnt**

# A summary of key lessons from the case studies

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In this chapter we bring together a treasure trove of good advice on examples to follow and pitfalls to avoid from four out of the five continents, covering all stages of English language project planning and implementation, from the initial stages of scoping a project through to evaluation, follow-up, and sustainability. This should not be seen as a substitute for a thorough reading of the articles and cases, but we hope that it will prove useful as a summary of the accumulated experience reported in this volume.

## Project design

### Understand the context

Identify contextual drivers for change before undertaking any design process, recognising and acknowledging personal drivers, and involving end-users in the design process (Whittaker). This theme is taken up by Reilly, who identifies the twin pillars of political will and parental demand as reasons contributing to the success of the Early Bilingual Education Project in Spain, and to its embedding and dissemination. In the Indian Tamil Nadu Project, master trainers adapted plans and materials to make them suitable for teachers in their local context.

Wedell argues that a whole-system approach to educational change is more likely to succeed. In Oman, the changes introduced by the BA Project were consistent with changes being proposed across all basic education subjects. The environment was thus at worst neutral and at best positive towards the changes the teachers were implementing. Wedell points out that this is rarely the case in the many contexts where curriculum changes are limited to English classes only.

The ELTA Project in the Balkans and south-east Europe was based on extensive research and consultation. It established that pre-service training was top-heavy on theory and addressed this contextual issue by providing practical training and a resource pack for newly qualified teachers (Leather). By contrast, Zikri attributes the failure of curriculum development projects in Egypt in the 80s and early 90s to a lack of appreciation of the uniqueness of project context: it is necessary to consider the unique physical, cultural, linguistic, and psychological variables in project design and implementation. The Egyptian curriculum development project had three fatal flaws: the adoption of a prescriptive approach by expatriate experts; the rationale for reform being focused on 'product', not 'process'; and failure to recognise the social context of reform. This meant that the project succeeded in developing curricula but failed to build ownership and develop local capacity.

In another context, O'Donahue advises, 'Go with the flow.' This is advisable and less stressful than trying to impose alien procedures which may not be acceptable or appropriate to the local context.

### **Allow adequate time for planning, design and implementation**

This can involve ensuring that you do not underestimate the length of time which will be needed to design or redesign a course if an iterative approach is used (Whittaker). Zikri quotes Bowers (1983) on the relationship between design, planning and monitoring: to compensate for the short planning phase of projects and cope with problems which arise during implementation, monitoring and evaluation should drive a flexible process of adjustment. In Spain, stakeholders, especially politicians and parents, had to recognise that patience was required and that education in two languages is a long process (Reilly). O'Donahue points out that change takes time and effort, and so one should not expect to see results overnight. If the results of the programme involves changes in beliefs or attitudes, it will depend very much on where the teachers are at the beginning of the programme and how far they may need to travel. Patel also asserts that large-scale projects need adequate time for planning, preparation and implementation, and suggests that, where a project involves major systemic change, it is advisable to use learning points from a small-scale pilot before going to full implementation.

Many projects worldwide which have focused on developing school learners communication skills have failed because of lack of understanding and communication between what Fink (2000) calls the two 'solitudes' – policy makers on the one hand and teachers on the other. On the basis of his experience in Oman, Wedell suggests it would be wise to plan for a medium- to long-term process, which is part of a whole-system change in which similar pedagogical changes are introduced across all curriculum subjects. Initiatives need to be structured in ways that make direct and indirect support for implementers (head teachers and administrators, as well as teachers) available over time, providing a positive context for the reculturing process which is needed if the desired changes are ever to become visible in the majority of classrooms. The Omani BA project was planned to cover a nine-year period from the outset. The benefits of the long project timescale were maximised by stable project leadership on both sides, while regional tutors generally stayed with the project for at least a full three-year cohort. This stability facilitated trusting personal relationships and ever more effective communications systems. Awareness of what an educational change means in practice is an evolving process for both planners and implementers. However, the generally short lifespans of most international joint ELT projects make the development of such awareness among all participants much less likely (Wedell).

### **Work constructively with partners**

Walter gives an example from Russia, where the Russian textbook project was conceived of as a Russian-British partnership from the outset. This enabled the project to weather the political storm which affected the British Council in Russia. However, partnership arrangements which unduly favour the other partner are best avoided. The partner initially chosen for the Russian publishing project had their own agenda and had to be replaced (Walter).

In Spain, a strong partnership between the Ministry of Education and the British Council set up a project with a high-level agreed strategy stating the roles and duties of each partner, the expected outcomes, and the need to allow sufficient

time for the project to embed itself bottom-up from primary and then into secondary schools before expecting its impact to become manifest (Reilly). Leather emphasises the importance of choosing the right partner at the outset and allowing them to develop ownership early in the life of the project. In the case of AzETA, the project filled a need already identified by the partner.

### **Avoid ill-considered top-down decision-making**

There is a need for greater awareness of the dynamics at work in policy formulation. For example, in Simpson's case study on Rwanda, there was a top-down process in which a key decision on language policy, whether to give priority to the mother tongue on pedagogic grounds or English as a result of political or personal/professional considerations, was taken by the government. Tensions between political and socio-economic drivers of reform and pedagogic principles informed by international research and best practice need to be resolved early on. In Rwanda a decision taken in 2009 to go straight for English as the language of instruction in Primary 1 was later reversed, in 2011, creating significant challenges (Simpson). In Malaysia, the government announced in mid-2002 that mathematics and science would be taught through the medium of English from January 2003. This 'extremely bold decision' received varied reactions from education professionals as well as the general public, but six years later in July 2009 the policy was officially reversed (Patel).

### **Ensure continuing access to decision makers**

This can be done through informal and informal networking (Crossey). Setting up a joint steering committee is another useful strategy. In the Spanish project described by Reilly, a joint Ministry of Education/British Council steering committee, convened annually, had overall responsibility for strategic decision making. This Board, in turn, appointed two project managers, one from each organisation, who were members of the steering committee and advised on strategic decisions, supported by their knowledge gained from working in both strategic and management roles. In the Indian Tamil Nadu project (O'Donahue), extensive dialogue took place between the three project partners, and clear communication channels were established in the project initiation stage.

## **Managing change**

### **Create opportunities**

An essential aspect of change management is creating opportunities for the development and empowerment of those involved. Change becomes sustainable when participants internalise the experience and translate it into the way they work, into patterns of behaviour and belief. This process of assimilating or rejecting elements of innovation is essentially a process of learning. Project ownership and responsibility are constantly created through the whole project culture of participation, sharing, and transparency (Bardi).

### **Encourage collaboration and pay attention to the environment**

O'Donahue reminds us that it is the people and not the policies that effect change. We should not underestimate the physical comfort of trainers and trainees, or the importance of selecting venues that offer the best possible facilities. In Korea, INSET was seen as something done by superiors to inferiors, rather than a collaborative

shared enterprise (Hayes). However, in India, collaboration meant recognising each other's expertise, listening to each other, valuing each other's inputs, and moving forwards together towards a shared goal. O'Donahue advises taking considerable care and attention when building up a working relationship and opening effective communication channels with those you are relying on for smooth implementation. She advocates identifying the most effective mode of communication, and adapting and using modes most effective and acceptable to the given environment, 'whether this means using cloud computing or carrier pigeons'.

## **Stakeholder buy-in**

### **Allow sufficient time for dialogue**

Create time and space for dialogue between decision makers and language policy experts, before key policy decisions are taken. If this does not happen, an information gap may be created in which decisions made by government officials may not be well informed on issues pertinent to language in education (Simpson).

### **Avoid mismatches in perceptions**

Mismatches in perception can be at the heart of many problems. Thus, in the Peacekeeping English Project, the Polish authorities wanted native-speaker teachers who would genuinely represent UK life and culture, while the UK Ministry of Defence wanted NATO-standardised testing and overall reform of curricula (Crossey). In Korea, administrators saw a need for language improvement via INSET, rather than improving teachers' pedagogic skills. These divergent perspectives on the most productive forms of INSET, teacher capabilities, and classroom needs led to a low take-up of generously funded INSET places (Hayes). In Tunisia, there was potential for misunderstanding and conflict arising from the way terminology was interpreted in different ways depending on the perspectives of the agencies and people using it. Technical terms need to be recognised as a means to an end, but can be refined and altered to suit the planning context (McIlwraith).

### **Be transparent**

Beware of neglecting to share conclusions of scoping/design studies with the host government or agency. In Peacekeeping English in Poland, this led to politicisation and lack of local buy-in (Crossey). In Tunisia, where the British Council wanted to use APM-based methodology, but the Ministry preferred PRINCE2, the project ended up with two project plans, one for the donors and the other for the MoE and beneficiaries (McIlwraith). Scholey advises not to get too hung up on project documents and to avoid what Holliday calls 'naïve notions of mutuality' and 'the appearance of agreement with regard to project documentation'.

### **Build consensus amongst stakeholders**

Scholey advocates shared ownership of decision making. This avoids the risk of 'seeing others in our own terms, not theirs' (Holliday). In India, agreeing partners' specific roles at the outset of the programme laid the foundation for a plan which recognised each organisation's expertise and set the scene for reciprocal learning. An environment of mutual trust and respect was created through consultations and

meetings involving key stakeholders working at different levels in their organisations (O'Donahue). Patel points out that the inclusion of key stakeholders in initial discussions and continued planning will create a sense of investment and ownership, and these individuals and/or groups are more likely to help towards achieving goals and results.

### **Build trust and engagement**

Ensure buy-in of people such as head teachers and others who are in a position to obstruct changes in curriculum, methods, and teacher training, and get involved with the same people over the lifespan of the project, getting to know them well and building trust (Scholey). Building trust is not easily achieved and takes time. The team in Paraná had to earn the trust to build space to develop the programme without constant scrutiny (Palmer).

In India, master trainers and teachers both needed to be convinced that the proposed changes to be made would have beneficial effects. They needed to know 'What's in it for me?' and also what the intended change in classroom practice might look like. Residential courses allowed participants to be fully engaged, to have time to reflect, and to form new friendships and bond together as a teaching community. Meeting participant expectations is also a crucial factor for success (O'Donahue).

Remember, however, that concentrating power in the project management team alone does not promote independence and autonomy, and does little for building trust. By empowering both delivery partners and teachers to take responsibility, confidence and engagement grew and strengthened the whole Paraná project (Palmer). Palmer emphasises that relationship management is very important when dealing with very complex sets of relationships. Nothing can replace direct human contact, and time invested in managing relationships is not, as it is often perceived, time wasted, but time gained in achieving your goals. Schools in the Spanish bilingual education project put themselves forward voluntarily, but had to commit themselves for the duration. Head teachers, inspectors, and parents were all expected to commit to supporting the initiative during the nine years from nursery school through to the end of primary (Reilly).

### **Leave the hard nuts to your local counterpart to crack**

In the China PETT Project, the British Council and Guangdong Department of Education provided funding and made policy, while the University of Leeds and GTCFLA were executives and supervisors. It was wise for the British Council, when dealing with local government, to act as a funding provider, but let the Guangdong Department of Education take the role of policy maker (Lin Hong).

### **Avoid the negative impact of conflict**

In Egypt, disputes over project management negatively impacted on results. Projects which fall into the trap of excluding key stakeholders will fail on this essential human factor more than any other. Projects must have a managed set of priorities, objectives, timescales, and balances between external expertise and local inputs (Zikri).

## Managing external and internal risks

### Recognise external risk factors

Political uncertainty can be an external risk factor over which a project can exert no control. Uncertainty over political leadership in Paraná had a direct impact on the project team and teachers. Local opposition to the ethos of allowing an external agency such as the British Council to lead a major change project threatened to undermine the integrity of the project (Palmer). In Rwanda, where English is a means to regional integration and economic development, and is replacing French as the language of instruction in schools, ELT reform competes for time, attention, and resources with other major educational developments, with the risk of more change in the making than the system can cope with, and the added risk that the quality of individual reforms may be jeopardised by their number and a lack of capacity and funds to implement numerous large-scale changes concurrently (Simpson).

### Mitigate internal risk factors

Internally, the Paraná ELT project faced challenges, including low self-esteem amongst teachers, a culture of dependency, which meant making teachers into independent learners was a challenging task, and systemic failures such as the perception that the university pre-service system was not successful, plus the size and scope of a state-wide project which dictated a model based largely on distance learning (Palmer).

## Project funding

### Secure funds up front and be creative

Ensure projects are fully funded for the full duration from the outset. In PEP Poland, an annual funding cycle meant there was no commitment to fund for longer than the next 12 months, which made the activity and presence highly political (Crossey). In the Paraná ELT project, funding was based on delivery of results on a year-by-year basis, with the following year's funding released only several months after the start of the year. This created a challenge for planning and continuity (Palmer). In Spain, sufficient and continued funding needed to be secured for continuing teacher support. Teachers needed time to develop appropriate resources, reflect on their practice, carry out classroom research projects, network, and attend training courses, meetings, and conferences (Reilly). In China, teachers from remote areas could not afford to pay travel and accommodation costs to attend training in the provincial capital, but this problem was resolved creatively by having trainers from the capital move around from city to city (Lin Hong).

## Project structures and systems

### Adopt appropriate structures and models

A light non-institutional structure with fixed-term contracts for staff provided for flexibility in planning the PEP project in Poland (Crossey). Scholey advises against using a cascade model of training, which he asserts can be unreliable, and proposes a model of change which involves using materials development combined with project-trained teachers as materials writers and thus agents of change. Lin Hong, however, describes a successful cascade model in China, where instead

of putting all effort into 'localising' foreign trainers, the PETT project shifted its approach to training local trainers, using a cascade approach.

Palmer reminds us that systems and planning are extremely important, but emotional intelligence, or rather emotional leadership, and being able to respond to situations and people are ultimately what makes a difference. Clear and transparent two-way communication channels helped build an atmosphere of trust and ownership in India, where all stakeholders and interested parties were equally valued. A 1,500-strong closed user group mobile network allowed free access to anyone at any level at any time in an environment where access to the internet and emails is extremely limited. This allowed instant communication, and text messaging became the modus operandi (O'Donahue).

### **Organising cascades**

Adapt the training package for cascade training each time to suit local circumstances. In the China PETT project, trainers were grouped in threes, with trainers from teacher training colleges (teacher trainers), who had a superior command of English and knowledge of ELT theory, and who led the cascade training, working together with *JIAOYANYUAN* from education bureaux in charge of local teacher training and 'backbone' English teachers from primary schools who acted as examples for other teachers to follow (Lin Hong).

In India, the limitations of the cascade model of training were fully recognised, but because of the large numbers involved and the vast geographical reach, direct teacher training was not an option. Mitigating the risk of using a cascade was a shared concern, and on the basis of the previous experience of the partner organisations, strategies for minimising transition loss were embedded into the implementation plan. Master trainers in India were strategically paired up to deliver the cascade programme. This meant less was lost in transmission, strengths of individuals were recognised, and those less confident were supported by their peers (O'Donahue).

### **Integration**

In the Romanian textbook project, the link between textbooks and teacher training was strengthened, and a complex training project was set up with new textbooks closely integrated with projects to train teachers, trainers, inspectors, and university lecturers (Popovici). The whole-system approach adopted in Oman meant that there was a mutually supportive relationship between what was taught on the BA programme, the textbooks used in schools, and the assessment principles being applied by wider educational reform (Wedell).

## **People management**

### **Assign clear roles and responsibilities**

Clearly set out and communicate the agreed roles and responsibilities of all those involved, and when action is demanded, do it quickly and effectively, and expect all others involved in the programme to do the same (O'Donahue). Pay attention to the choice of trainers, staged assimilation, and leadership and management. AzETA developed ownership of the southeast Europe ELTA project at an early stage and set up a SIG for NQTs (Leather).

### **Facilitate learning**

On the basis of the PROSPER experience in Romania, Bardi suggests a paradigm of project management that regards the process of change as a process of learning, not just a method of changing organisational structures and practices. Project managers have a crucial role in facilitating communication among team members and ensuring there is complete transparency, for all team members, about the implementation process. Communication and transparency generate better understanding and facilitate the process of task implementation. Bardi asserts that project teams do not emerge by mandate or team-building exercises, but are consolidated in the process of working together to accomplish tasks perceived as meaningful/rewarding. Delegation of responsibility to project teams has an essential role in their learning, as more responsibility generates more commitment and, eventually, more learning.

### **Stay in touch with reality**

Students on the Omani BA project continued to teach four days a week in their schools. This allowed them to consider the appropriateness or otherwise for their own contexts of the ideas and practices being introduced. It also raised awareness more widely of the project and the educational reform of which it was part (Wedell). It is important for project managers to have an overall view of progress, but they can only do so if they fully participate in task completion. In the Romanian PROSPER project, accomplishment of their management role (planning and organisation of meetings, setting deadlines, and communicating with team members) was facilitated by full professional involvement in the research process (Bardi).

### **Build capacity and confidence**

Build capacity of trainers as well as trainees. In Paraná, a university supply network was created and capacity built through training programmes (Palmer). Capacity building should be consistently developed, with initial training in the specific area of the project followed by on-the-job continuous training. Time and detailed attention given to the selection of team members pays off in that it ensures commitment, ownership, and efficiency (Popovici). One of the strengths of the curricula developed in Spain by the Early Bilingual Education Project was that, though shaped by the British Council and Ministry of Education, these drew very largely on the experience and expertise of classroom practitioners, Spanish and English teachers, from project schools (Reilly). Make use of the feel-good factor to address teachers' low self-esteem, promoting a sense of can-do (Palmer).

### **Don't forget the learners**

Patel reminds us that teachers are the main agents of change, but often we forget those at the heart of the change process, those at the very core of the change we want to bring about: the students. Ensure that students are active participants in the process and not just passive recipients, and that the change is implemented at a level and pace that will build their confidence and motivate them to want to learn.

## **Project implementation**

### **Allow time for embedding new ideas**

Allow time for reflective collaboration on experience and newly acquired skills and knowledge, and provide in-school follow up to short INSET courses. In Korea, there was no follow up, and observation was not linked to the INSET course content in a way which would assist teachers in putting into practice what they had learnt on the course (Hayes). Do not, however, try to do too much: in the Bangladesh English in Action Project, some materials were produced as additional classroom aids. This caused confusion about how to relate all the materials to specific parts of the course book. There is a need for compromise between tying materials very closely to the course book and having less material and allowing time for teacher reflection and development (Solly and Woodward).

### **Standardise the approach**

Standardise delivery across centres to provide comparable learning opportunities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, centres had initially developed their own blended learning courses independently of each other, which led to huge differences in outcomes (Whittaker). In Spain, the curriculum was a fundamental standardisation tool which gave a clear focus on the importance of literacy. The curriculum motivated and challenged, encouraged continuity, collaboration, and networking, and addressed such issues as diversity and assessment (Reilly). In Poland, there was initially a lack of standardisation, which was resolved when a curriculum framework was laid out by the National Council of Teacher Education. This allowed for standardisation but gave sufficient space for flexibility (Komorowska).

### **Introduce major changes gradually**

Change takes effort, energy, time, and sometimes courage. One big change can be substantial, two daunting, but three can be completely overwhelming. There is a strong argument for implementing one initiative first, laying its foundations, and then building on it with other initiatives over time, rather than implementing too many initiatives at one time (Patel).

## **Materials and technology**

### **Involve carefully selected local authors**

Walter advises taking care over the selection, development, and management of authors, and ensuring author teams are well distributed across a country or region by having a regional strategy and disseminating materials widely. Having a regional network built in from the start ensured appropriateness and acceptability of the finished materials in the Russian textbook project, while the fact that the Romanian textbook project was written locally was central to its success. A major output was a group of specialist syllabus designers and textbook writers who were able to extend, transfer, and diversify their professional skills and act as change promoters (Popovici).

### **Keep materials practical and useful**

In the southeast Europe ELTA Project, the resource pack produced by the project was suited to the real needs of the target group (Leather).

### **Use appropriate technology**

Technology can be problematic. In Bangladesh, mobile technology was essential in leveraging the delivery of both classroom materials and teacher development, but the iPod was not sustainable. It was replaced by a cheap Nokia mobile fitted with a 4GB micro SD card preloaded with project materials. The results achieved in the Bangladesh pilot project strongly suggest that peer-supported, practice-based learning, leveraging mobile technology both to bring ELT resources into the classroom and to deliver professional development to teachers can be an effective model for delivering English language training at scale to large numbers of learners (Solly and Woodward).

## **Project embedding and dissemination**

### **Identify and create champions**

In Paraná, teachers were identified who could act as catalysts, co-ordinating local initiatives such as self-help groups, modelling good teacher behaviours, and getting wider exposure for the project through participation in state and national events. The Pathmakers programme addressed issues of self-esteem, leadership, and action, and broke down the barriers between universities, which had been seen as carriers of knowledge, and teachers, who had been seen as consumers of knowledge. Towards the end of the project, as the message spread via conferences across Brazil, other states became interested, including Tocantins, where a major project was subsequently implemented (Palmer). In Spain, it was necessary to overcome the initial conviction teachers had that they were not good enough and that only the native-speaker teacher could teach literacy and subjects in English. This was a challenge, but Spanish teachers gradually took on more responsibilities for teaching, mentoring, and then teacher training, both within the project, and often beyond (Reilly). In China, the project made use of 'teaching and research fellows' (JIAOYANYUAN) to ensure sustainability by organising training for teachers in their districts even after the official end of the project and any external funding (Lin Hong).

### **Celebrate success**

Celebrate and communicate success and provide ongoing support for trainers and teachers to enable them to continue growing after the initial programme has concluded (O'Donahue).

### **Ensure sustainability**

Sustainability can be enhanced from the outset by embedding a project in a nexus of mutually supportive projects. A nexus of complementary projects can magnify the success of individual projects (Walter).

## **Project evaluation**

### **Start with a plan**

Dick emphasises the importance of having a detailed monitoring and evaluation plan – complete with needs and objectives matched to data collection methods – and a schedule in place from project inception. Similarly, the need for baseline evaluation in the opening stages of a project is crucial. In Sri Lanka, primary data was not initially collected on schools and grades, and thus pupil evaluation was slowed down. The ELTA project in southeast Europe provides a good management model for project delivery and evaluation, and incorporated effective monitoring and feedback systems from the outset (Leather). Two evaluation studies were built in from the start of the Spanish Early Bilingual Education Project, plus an agreement that pupils aged 16 would be prepared for specific IGCSE examinations (Reilly). Be specific about the scale of what can be achieved at the various stages of a project. In Bangladesh, the team were halfway through the pilot before they found a clear way of expressing what degree of improvement in students' English language use and in teachers' delivery of appropriate communicative teaching would be seen as a measure of success at different stages (Solly and Woodward).

### **Exploit all the available data**

Data collected and human resources used should be exploited fully. In Sri Lanka, mentors observed teachers and gave feedback, but this data was initially used only as a progress record. Only much later were comparisons done on individual teachers to reveal behavioural change. Had this been built in earlier, much stronger impact data would have resulted (Dick).

### **Use focus groups**

Focus groups can deliver useful and unpredictable information: in Sri Lanka, only teachers' views gathered from such groups prevented a potentially disastrous situation from developing when the partner wanted to jettison the Cambridge ESOL TKT exam on cost grounds (Dick).

### **Evaluate long-term impact**

Evaluation of INSET courses should go beyond the teachers, trainer, and course itself and look at impact in terms of use of knowledge and skills acquired, and longer-term student outcomes (Hayes).

### **Avoid negative washback effects**

Mathew highlights the importance of assessment and evaluation schemes capturing what goes on in classrooms. In India, the test became a de facto curriculum, different in nature and scope from the official learner-centred curriculum which the project was attempting to introduce. This negated the impact of the curriculum changes which the Central Board of Secondary Education was promoting.

### **Learn from previous mistakes**

Flaws in the evaluation of the Egyptian curriculum development project identified by Zikri include: inadequate evaluation tools and lack of evaluation instruments, disregard for Egyptian involvement in the evaluation of materials produced by the project, and failure to incorporate the results of evaluation to support adjustments. Although CDELTA had potential for sustainability and institutionalisation as an Egyptian entity (with an ideal duration of 16 years, involving distinguished ELT professionals, with established partnerships), the work management style of the foreign experts was prescriptive, sustainability plans were not built in at the outset, and a high turnover of expatriate staff led to rigid adherence to short-term plans. Only towards the end of the project was there a shift of emphasis from curriculum change to staff development of Egyptian change agents.

### **Monitor progress on a regular basis**

Regular monitoring is important and can yield unexpected benefits. Monitoring visits in Sri Lanka, initially developed as a check on mentor performance, became a valuable mentor support vehicle, building trust, generating information, and developing the respect of local teachers for project staff (Dick). In the Indian Tamil Nadu Project, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation were undertaken throughout the programme by all three partners (UNICEF, Sharva Shiksha Abhiyan, and the British Council) at all levels. Monitoring visits by representatives of each partner organisation often coincided, and this led to shared key findings and agreement on subsequent action. Good relationships were built up by this close, on-the-ground, monitoring schedule. Observation and feedback from comprehensive monitoring and evaluation throughout the programme by all the partners at all levels of the cascade were essential, as this allowed information sharing both horizontally and vertically within and across the partner organisations (O'Donahue). Monitoring and feedback systems in Oman, where the project extended over a period of nine years, enabled Leeds-based leaders, tutors, and materials writers to develop a more thorough than usual understanding of the Omani school and cultural context.

### **Make evaluation itself a learning process**

The process of carrying out an impact study was an important learning experience for PROSPER project members, both in terms of professional practice and project management. Seeking solutions together was a form of experiential learning in which team members developed their research skills by engaging with every aspect of the research in a continuous problem-solving process. Projects need to give project teams the opportunity to investigate and reflect on what they have achieved by taking part in the project – evaluation can be carried out as a developmental rather than an accountability exercise. In the PROSPER impact study, working together to carry out a task that was seen as valuable by all the team members strengthened the sense of team belonging and identity (Bardi).