EXPERIENCES IN EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the schooling experiences of eleven graduates from the rural south of Egypt with primary community schools in Assiut. The study used individual interviews and focus groups to examine how community school graduates understood their experiences. The community schools were found to have removed previous obstacles of distance and cost. The quality of education that the students received allowed them to flourish in education rather than falter, and that was largely influenced by the quality of their relationship with their teachers. The students learned academic skills, as well as attitudes and dispositions that serve as cultural capital. They have more opportunities than before, yet also face significant challenges as they transition to the public system. The model of community schooling is also facing significant challenges as differences with the public schooling systems are exerting tension on the community school model to converge.

Keywords: community school, Egypt, rural education, social immobility, social inequities, life prospects, cultural capital, impact, education reform, EFA, NGOs, neoliberalism.
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1. INTRODUCTION

*Education is political because it is about life chances and life changes...*

*Robertson, 2012*

Human capital theory is the dominant theory of national development in Egypt (Hanieh, 2011; Dixon, 2010; Birks & Sinclair, 1980; Mubarak, cited in Cook, 2000), and for good reason. At the macro level, the theory of human manpower as productive capacity that can be invested in for economic returns positions Egypt’s relatively large population as a resource rather than a burden. At the micro level, economic return on investment in education fits well with Egyptian socio-cultural and religious attitudes that value the educated\(^1\) (Cook, 2000), particularly in a country with a 72% adult literacy rate (UNICEF, online). However, the rate of return to education in Egypt is actually negative and characterized by high cost, even in the supposedly ‘free’ public sector, and low returns (El-Baradei & El-Baradei, 2004). As a personal example, after my husband finished his PhD and he returned to his university position in Egypt, his university salary barely covered his cell phone bill. In the face of such huge disparities between the economic return on education and its cost, economic returns take precedence over any other human development and the neoliberal precept of linking education to the labor market becomes the most urgent and overshadows all others (such as citizenship, love of

\(^1\) During my study one of the research sites, Manfalut Township, was the site of a tragic train collision with a school bus carrying preschoolers. They were travelling 24 km in their bus on unpaved roads to get to their school. Fifty-one children were killed.
learning, critical thinking, holistic development of the self, inclusion, and social empowerment).

It is not that the economic dimension of education is unimportant. The need to earn a decent living is a basic human need. It can be seen in the hordes of Egyptian youth who risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean to become part of the illegal underclass where they still earn more than they can in Egypt. They are a marginalized class whose access, survival, output and outcome of education (Farrell, 2003) are far from equitable. However, the narrow focus on economic return to everything in Egypt, including education, ignores the moral, social, cultural, emotional and physical dimensions of education. It defines the individual and society solely in terms of income and consumption (Apple et. al, 2009). This focus on individual factors for success or failure, such as sacrifice, hard work and discipline, ignores structural realities that block and justify the marginalized and the poor (Fagerlind & Saha, 1989), such as poverty, ill health and lack of opportunity. The neoliberal policies carried out by brute force of Mubarak regime (Joya, 2011; Hanieh, 2011) resulted in an “economic Neo-Darwinism of neoliberalism” (Giroux, 2010, p. 185) characterized by the have-everythings and the have-nothings, the Eloi and the Warlocks\(^2\) (Wells, 2011). They are disempowered through the double whammy of having no income, but also no worth according to society’s materialistic measures. The human capital model has perverted Egyptian

\(^2\) In his novella, *The Time Machine*, HG Wells travels forward in time where class inequity has reached an extreme. There are two groups of people: the Eloi, beautiful creatures who do no work; and the Morlocks, subterranean creatures who live in toil and drudgery to produce food and clothing for the Eloi. Periodically, the Morlocks come to the surface and take Eloi to feed upon. The picture it draws of extreme inequity is not far off from the disparity between the slums and mansions in Cairo, the functions of each in society, and the class tensions between them that periodically bubble to the surface.
society, dehumanizing the poor and the rich. One of the three stated goals of the Egyptian revolution was social justice\(^3\) for a more humane society.

To that end, education reform in Egypt must develop towards becoming more holistic and develop the economic human as but part of the whole. Malak Zaalouk relates becoming human to developing the whole person in her account of the Community School movement she started in Egypt (2004). Community Schools have been operating on the periphery of Egyptian society, targeting the very poor, marginalized communities in Upper Egypt (south Egypt), since 1992 in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the Egyptian Ministry of Education (MOE) (Zaalouk, 2006). It has increased access to education for over 7000 previously marginalized children (Zaalouk, 2006), and the Ministry of Education has adopted the model in light of Education for All and Millennium Development Goals. Before outlining the Community Schools further, however, a brief background to the Egypt and its education system is necessary.

**A GLIMPSE OF EGYPT**

Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world and North Africa, and its current population stands at 84 million people with a GNP per capita of $6,060. 98% of the population lives along the Nile Valley (MOE, 2007). Agriculture is the main employment sector for Egyptians, comprising 40% of the workforce (MOE, 2007).

\(^3\)The two other stated goals were bread and freedom.
However, growing water scarcity, coupled with expected population increases will mean a further loss of agricultural lands due to urbanization and need to move out into the desert.

It is a predominantly Sunni Muslim country, with 90% identifying as Muslim, 9% as Coptic Christians, and 1% other Christians. The youth literacy rate is 88% and the adult literacy rate is 72%, which means there are 15.63 million adults who are illiterate in Egypt (UNESCO, 2013). The numbers are even higher if regressive illiterates (those who have lost their ability to read and write through disuse) and functional illiterates (those who are unable to absorb a minimum amount of information from reading) are included (Akkari, 2004). There are an estimated 490,000 children out of school (UNDP, 2010).

Egypt faces significant educational challenges pertaining to its socioeconomic and demographic contexts. Almost two-thirds of secondary students are in technical and vocational education (Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009), and industry in Egypt employs 22% of the workforce, but even the government acknowledges that their education is useless as the students do not learn anything (MOE, 2007). Until recently, Egypt was the undisputed media leader of the Arab World. However, with other countries now vying to establish themselves as principal players, Egypt requires that its education prepare Egyptian graduates as competitive players in this changing field.

EDUCATION IN EGYPT

Egypt's first schools on record date back to the time of the Pharaohs, the First Intermediate Period (2181-2055 BC) where there is evidence of whole classes run to train
scribes (SIS, 2013). Education was seen as a privilege and held in high regard. Between the 7th and 13th centuries, when Europe was in its Dark Ages and culture and learning flourished in the Arab world, scholars enhanced and developed the arts and sciences, preserving the knowledge of the ancient Greek and Roman cultures and making their own contributions. Madaris (schools) were open to men and women, rich and poor.

Egypt's first modern schools were started in the 1800's, and free public education was available since the 1940's and widely available after the 1952 revolution. With fertility rate of 5.7 births per woman in 1970-75 (MOE, 2007), Egypt was faced with a huge number of children entering school in the late 70s and early 80s, which required a matching increase in the number of schools. When this did not materialize, student-teacher ratios increased markedly. At the same time as government spending on education went down, the nearby Gulf nations spent more of their newfound wealth on their education sectors. This, coupled with increasing costs of living, served to hollow out the public school system as teachers in Egypt struggled to make ends meet, and many teachers left for better pay in the Persian Gulf. The quality of education in Egyptian schools declined dramatically during the 80's, as did the surge in the number of private schools during the early 90's.
Quality

*Ma fish ta’aleem (There is no education, referring to the schools)*

*Heard ad infinitum, ad nauseum in Egypt*

As described earlier, the quality of public education in Egypt is extremely low. The Egyptian curriculum is focused on rote memorization with little assessment for higher level thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis (MOE, 2007) and sole reliance on textbooks as sources of learning. In fact, 88% of Egyptian households do not read books apart from school textbooks, and three-quarters do not read any newspapers or magazines (A Slow Learning Curve, 2010). The high-stakes testing environment has skewed education towards test taking skills at the expense of absorbing and assimilating learning (MOE, 2007), and students resist any efforts to bring in other sources of knowledge, as they are only interested in what will be on the exam. Some estimates put the proportion of students that graduate from the nine years of compulsory schooling and functionally illiterate at one-third (Sobhy, 2012).

**Egyptian Teachers**

*Man a’alamany harfan, sirt laho a’abdan*

*(Whomever teachers me a letter, I become his serf)*

*Arabic proverb*

Today, entrance into university faculties depend entirely on the high school score, or the *Thanawiya Amma*, with the highest scoring students go into medicine and
engineering, and the faculties of education accepting students on the lowest end of the scale, reflecting the current undesirable status associated with becoming a teacher in Egypt. There is no system in place to certify teachers (MOE, 2007), and the salary of public school teachers is very low, even by Egyptian standards. Salary varies according to governorate and pay scale, but some examples are teachers receiving LE 730 ($104) a month after 15 years, and LE 1,229 ($175) a month after 29 years of service (Egypt Independent, 2012). Since the 2011 revolution, teachers have repeatedly gone on strike to call for better pay, demanding a starting salary of LE 3000 or about $428 (Egypt Independent, 2012) a month. To add insult to injury, teachers at international schools receive internationally competitive salaries and benefits packages. To make a living, teachers must resort to a second job, which can range from taxi driving to giving private lessons. As Sobhy (2012) notes, the pressure to give private lessons stems from the low pay of teachers as much as the low educational quality of the schools.

La’anit el Doros el Khususiyya: The Curse of Private Lessons

Private lessons have turned what used to be free public education and the pride of the Arab world into a two-tier system where only the well off can get a good education. Whether in the general secondary schools or in the technical track secondary schools that cater mostly to the working class, private lessons are a reality of schooling in Egypt. Although the rise of private tutoring is a global phenomena, the level and spread of tutoring in Egypt is at levels few other countries are at, where 80% of students are in tutoring year-round (Sobhy, 2012). Estimates of how much the average Egyptian household spends on private tutoring varies, but a 2004 study estimates that the figure is 61% of household expenditures (Bray, 2009) and aggregate spending on tutoring in 2002
was $18 million, approximately 1.6% of GDP (World Bank, 2002, p. 26). A close personal friend of the author of this paper in fact is a full-time 'private' tutor of engineering, teaching to classes of over 300 undergraduate students in tutoring centers, complete with Smart Boards and a website.

**Gender and Class Educational Inequality**

Although current gender disparity rates for primary education are nearly at par, with primary school participation for 2008-2011 for males and females at 103% and 98% respectively (UNESCO, 2013), gender disparities in higher education exist. This will probably continue as 81% of the 11% of youth aged 18-29 who have never been to school are girls (Population Council, 2010), and it is girls living in rural areas who are the most likely to have never been to school, 80.4% (UNDP, 2010). Other examples of gender disparity in education in Egypt are seen in the disparity between male and female literacy rates, 91% and 84% respectively for the 15-24 year age group (UNICEF, online); as well as continued higher education disparity (Megahed & Lack, 2011). Reasons given by communities themselves to account for the gender disparity included: direct and indirect costs of schooling, unsafe routes and boredom with the rote memorization pedagogy, as well as more mundane but crucial reasons such as no toilet facilities for girls and small playgrounds which the boys take over (Sultana, 2008).

Income and regional disparities are reflected in the 3.2% of children aged 7-18 in Egypt that have never been to school, or about 490,000 children (UNDP, 2010). Those who come from the poorest households in Egypt are distributed amongst three main educational outcomes: 29% have never enrolled; 24% dropped out before finishing basic
education; and 29% completed technical secondary education, (Population Council, 2010). In fact, those who come from poor households constitute only 0.5% of achievers in the general academic stage (UNDP, 2010).

The education system provides differentiated quality of schooling and the poor cannot keep up with the necessary direct and indirect costs, especially private tuition. The low return on investment associated with schooling also makes it untenable and unattractive for children of poor parents. Moreover, a World Bank report found percentages of students who complete Grades 1, 5 and 9 were significantly higher among children of middle income families than the poor and even higher among children of the rich. Of children from households classified as 'poor', only 86.5% completed Grade 1, 74.2% complete Grade 5, and 47% completed Grade 9, while for children from households classified as 'rich', 99% of children complete Grade 1, 94.3% completed Grade 5 and 80.7% completed Grade 9 (World Bank, 2005, p. 226).

The question of how to deal with the complexity of this situation is a difficult one that academics and policymakers will no doubt continue to debate, enact, and work at for years to come. It is claimed the Community School model can contribute towards widening access, improving quality, and reducing these social and gender inequalities, while offering education reform in Egypt insight on meaningful learning.
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN EGYPT

"I would cry because I didn't go...I could feel that they are better than me because they went to school...I wished to go but honestly one day I sat down and wished it and my wish came true.

Susan

Zaalouk (2004) described the aim of Community Schools (henceforth referred to as CS) “driven by a core assumption what it means to be human” (p.29). She described its genesis and development in her book, The Pedagogy of Empowerment, which can be seen as a practical response to Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed. To summarize Zaalouk’s (2004) narrative, CS were set up in villages that did not have easy access to public schools (or ministry schools, henceforth referred to as MS). There may have been an MS close, but the walk to the school meant leaving the safety of the community. The community was consulted in the establishment and running of the school through a process that respected their autonomy and culture, and enabled different voices. The would-be teachers were recruited locally, and were not certified teachers. They often had schooling up to the ninth or eighth grade only, and were chosen for their characteristics of motivation, sensitivity with children and respect in the community. They were trained for several weeks in practical, pre-service training, then provided with ongoing support.

Zaalouk (2004) described many key differences between CS and MS. The teachers’ support network and self-reflections to learn from their mistakes were key characteristics that distinguished CS from MS. The pedagogy of teaching was very much based on active learning, with the children learning individually and in small groups in multi-
grade, multi-age classrooms; the content of the teaching used government textbooks as one of a variety of sources that also included local knowledge and research based learning. The cost of the school to parents was functionally free, not nominally free, with no hidden costs such as uniforms and supplies. Thus, children that would not normally be allowed or afford to go to school have been able to access it. CS were primary, meaning they go up to Grade 6 only. The students were still subjected to the same government tests that those in MS must take, and went to those schools for testing. The CS were developed through a bottom-up process that involved a great deal of trust and relationship building (Zaalouk, 2006).

As the CS model mainstreamed into the public education system, the curriculum of MS was changed as a result of the materials developed by the CS teachers (Zaalouk, 2006) and incorporated active learning into the national curriculum (UNICEF, 2010). This was been one of the most significant contributions of the CS to education reform in Egypt. Students who graduate from the CS went on to complete their education in the preparatory (middle school) MS. CS proliferated throughout Egypt, through the many agencies that copied and adapted the CS model. In 2009 UNICEF’s involvement ended, and the project was handed over to the Ministry of Education. For the 94 CS in Assiut, the schools were handed over to the MOE with no other organization offering technical or financial support for one year. An Egyptian NGO began management, technical and financial support for the CS in Assiut in 2010.

Much of the literature regarding NGO education work is done through an advocacy, rather than an academic, lens (Hammer, Rooney & Warren, 2010), and this applies to the CS model in Egypt also. Literature of this type in the form of assessments, project
evaluations and donor support that is not intended for publication is termed gray literature (Wright, 2011), and much of the literature on CS is of this nature (Farrell, 2004; DeStefano et. al., 2007; Hartwell, 1998). While a problem-solving and advocacy lens is understandable, it lacks critical examination. There is a dearth of independent, non-advocacy literature on the CS. This is especially important as NGO’s have more recently been critiqued on several fronts: self-promotion (Klees, 2010); being inequitable in their outlook even as they work towards equity (Brehm & Silova, 2010); and being top-down planners who dictate foreign answers rather than bottom-up searchers who acknowledge complexity and learn through an incremental discovery process (Easterly, 2008; Niyozov & Dustambuev, 2012). Also, the neoliberal discourse, so prevalent in Egypt, continues the perpetuation of social inequalities even as it tries to work towards social justice. This is because the worldview of working to ‘save’ the inferior Other is an imperialist one that creates those who need to be saved even as it claims to be working towards their liberation (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011; Klees, 2010).

CS Forms, Statistics, and Geographic Spread

Hoppers (2005) makes an important distinction between different forms of the CS model, as they are usually all grouped together, whereas they often differ in fundamental ways. Some schools are variations, delivering regular public education in different modes; others are adaptations in terms of curriculum and pedagogical content; alternatives can be transformative, aiming at promoting education in ways antagonistic to regular system; and finally some enculture in dominant worldviews of another culture, such as in indigenous or Islamic education. These distinctions are important to note because as the term ‘CS’ becomes used increasingly widely, it is important to distinguish
between those that aim only to widen access to schooling such as the first two, and those that aim to redefine what it means to be schooled. The proliferations of models in Egypt based on the CS are all variations or adaptations.

Alternative education in Egypt today covers a wide spectrum of non-mainstream schooling. As of January 2013, there were 659 CS runs by NGOs in Egypt (MOE, 2013). Assiut had the highest number of CS run by NGOs in Egypt, with 316 schools (MOE, 2013), of which 94 are run by an Egyptian NGO and the remaining number by international and other NGOs (B.G., personal communication, 2013). Sohaj has the next highest number of CS at 127, and Qena has the third highest number at 86 schools, while other provinces in Upper Egypt have between 10-25, and Cairo has 38 CS (MOE, 2013).

However, these figures alone do not adequately reflect community schooling as a trend in Egypt. The success of the CS model gave legitimacy to alternative ways of providing schooling recognized by the MOE (Sultana, 2008), These schools now far outnumber the ones started by UNICEF based on Zaalouk’s model and the MOE created a Community Based Education (CBE) department at the ministry to bring all the CS and variations on it under one umbrella (El-Deeb, personal communication, 2013).

Other examples include Girl-Friendly Schools, which were directly based on the CS model to scale up and diffuse (Sultana, 2008). Girl-Friendly Schools were implemented through the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, funded by the MOE and donations from corporations (such as Apache, the American oil company and the largest
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foreign investor in Egypt⁴; CEMEX, the Mexican owned cement company and Hamza Associates, an Egyptian architecture and engineering firm). These schools currently number at 1,119 (MOE, 2013). Additionally, the MOE started its own community schooling program, the One-Classroom Schools with 3,291 such schools distributed all over Egypt. These schools focus on school dropouts and offer vocational training as well as academics.

Figure 1: Community-based Education in Egypt, 2012/2013.

Source: MOE, 2013

⁴Interestingly, Apache builds schools to educate marginalized girls as it extracts the oil and gas using hydraulic fracturing, or fracking (Reed, 2011; Viney, 2012, 2013; EIPR, 2012), that may be contaminating ground water used for drinking in those communities and Egypt at large (Viney, 2012).
Ginsburg et al. outline the history of CS school development in Egypt after the development of the first CS in 1992 (2010). The World Bank also cooperated with the European Union and the MOE to initiate the Education Enhancement Program, in 1996, that moves teaching towards a more active-learning pedagogical style (Ginsburg et al., 2010). Additionally, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in Egypt also started two programs similar to the CS in terms of single-grade schools and active pedagogy: the New Schools Program (NSP) in 2000 and the Alexandria Education Reform Pilot Project in 2001 (Ginsburg et al., 2010).

In spite of this proliferation, the current schools numbers only serve at best 20% of the actual needs, as over 490,000 children are dropouts, under-served, or not reached (UNDP, 2010). Yet, these variations have impacted the CS. The most widely known, the MOEs One Classroom Schools, have been abysmal in terms of quality of education and are seen as second class education compared to the government schools, and being on a technical track rather than academic. Since they are the most widely known, and they are called 'community schooling', the public's impression of their quality encompasses all the CS programs.

WHY STUDY THE STUDENTS?

Students are the ones under whose names education is designed, money spent, and teachers’ trained, schools built, curricula developed; they are the ultimate receivers of education. The ultimate value of the CS is to be based on its outcome of impact on students. The students’ voices are, however, scarce. This study aimed to develop a deep understanding and thick description of the students’ experiences. Thiessen & Cook-
Sathers (2007) describe a lack in the wider literature on children’s school experiences of close examinations of their daily lives and how they make sense of their lives as students. This is necessary to develop a better understanding through a lens that see students as active agents in their own development, co-constructing their learning, not as recipients but as advocates, “not culture and policy takers, but culture and policy makers” (Thiessen, 2007). An understanding of students as active collaborators co-constructing knowledge and learning with their environment, will help educators and researchers better understand how to best support their learning and development. Cook-Sathers (2007) extends Wilson & Corbett’s invitation to listen to the “remarkably consistent and elegantly simple” (2007, p.854) ways that low-achieving, urban U.S. students describe what they need in school. This is vital because students experiences and their interpretations of those experiences are often two different things (Cook-Sathers, 2007).

Additionally, these students are in a fluid stage of their lives, one that has the potential for social mobility. High quality education is a primary tool against poverty reduction and promoter of social equity as it enhances the only asset the poor have, namely their productive labor (UNDP 1999). The CS model was created in part for social justice reasons. I wanted to see if and how the schools had fulfilled their goals.

As this study is concerned with how students make sense of their schooling in the CS and how it has impacted their lives, I talked with students who had graduated in the last two years. These students had a chance to experience the world after their CS experience and reflect on how it changed their expected experience and compare to others who did not. I was interested in probing their reflections and understandings on what school meant to them, how it impacted their lives, families, and relationships, particularly their
relationship with the wider community and how the program could be made more relevant to them. I was interested in how they received their “educationally acquired capital” (Luke, 2003, p. 98), those benefits taken from education that enhance their economic productive capacity, open their minds to new ways of thinking, extend their social network, and develop them as humans. I wanted to see if and how these things had consequences on their lives, and whether they went on to preparatory (middle) school or terminated their education after the CS program. As such, I tried to select participants who had a variety of different outcomes since graduating. I also attend informal observations at several schools to provide context for the interviews, as well as an opportunity to witness the program dynamics in action.

In The 18th Brumaire, Marx says, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past,” (cited in Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 40); this study aimed to examine CS claims through exploring how they have affected their graduates, how those CS graduates understood and experienced their schooling and how they fared within the circumstances and structures of their lives.
MAJOR QUESTIONS

Motivated by the possibility of a new model that can offer hope, I explored the following questions:

Central Question

How did graduates of the CS understand their schooling and how has this understanding influenced their lives?

Sub-research questions

• What features of the program were relevant to them?
• What skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions (confidence, creativity, critical thinking, love of learning) did they learn?
• How do they see their life being impacted as a result of the things they learned at school, and if so, how?
• What do the students’ experiences tell us about CS as an education model?
• What are the opportunities and challenges the CS model offers education reform in Egypt?
• What are its possible implications for curriculum development and teacher training?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant for academic, policy and personal reasons. From an academic standpoint, it brings the voice of rural students in community-based education into the academic conversation on non-traditional schooling and relates the CS and the
schooling experiences of its graduates into the wider societal and global changes and context.

From a policy standpoint, the most recent comprehensive evaluation of the CS, the UNICEF assessment of 2010, stressed the need for the administration to prioritize quality education as quality risked slipping at the expense of the current priority of mainstreaming. As well, the report criticized the program’s failure to spot changing conditions in and around the CS program and highlighted the need for further research in classrooms to improve the quality of education (UNICEF, 2010). Understanding how the CS graduates experienced their schooling through actual testimonies is a key component to a deeper understanding of the schools’ current conditions, the contexts in which they are situated, and lived experience with the program.

In addition, the CS had an influence disproportionate to their size on mainstream Egyptian education reform and other international NGO education development. The model is the basis for all community-based education (CBE) in Egypt in the Strategic Plan of the MOE (2006) and the schools have received many foreign visitors to emulate the program in other countries (Zaalouk, 2006). Identifying factors influencing the CS graduates’ experiences is a key contribution to knowledge for practitioner and policy makers working with CS and MS.

On a personal level, the massive and growing income disparity and social immobility evident in Egypt has always disturbed me deeply. My own history of my parents’ education and hard work to improve our futures made me profoundly conscious of the
potential of education to change lives and the acute unfairness of being ‘locked in’, or at least supported, in my current privileged position, while others are ‘locked’ into theirs.

But my parents were not born into the class I am in right now. My grandparents’ background was more modest, and it was education that provided a channel for my parents’ hard work and risks to become upwardly mobile. If the opportunities available today were all my parents had in their youth, my life right now would be very different. I would probably be just another face in the millions of middle class Egyptians, caught between global and national forces, squeezed and pushed downward. I would be struggling to educate my children well, live in a neighborhood with clean air, drink clean water, be treated with dignity in shops, public transport, walking down the street, anywhere.

Finally, it was especially important to me to understand and experience CS firsthand. Like millions of Cairenes, I had experienced Egypt in the Cairene bubble, whose awareness of Egypt does not extend beyond Cairo and the coasts. I had never heard of CS before graduate school, although I am a native Egyptian. The discovery of CS as a way to restore the possibility for social mobility touched me deeply. Doing the theoretical coursework, readings and fieldwork for this study have made me aware of invisible structures, barriers, enablers and systems that work to reproduce the existing class structure of Egyptian society that I was oblivious to before, and made me see why it matters so much to address inequalities to maintain human dignity. I hope it helps others do the same.
OUTLINE OF STUDY

In this chapter, I have provided a rationale for the topic by providing background on Egypt and its education system, differing theories of development and education, the CS and why I chose to study the students. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature issues influencing CS. My research methodology and justifying why I will be using qualitative interviews will follow in Chapter 3. I will also take this opportunity to position myself in the research. Chapter 4 is the start of my findings and introduces the reader to my participants through their profiles. In Chapter 5, I present my findings on the students’ community schooling experiences, and Chapter 6 presents their schooling experiences post-community schooling. Chapter 7 covers the attitudes and disposition I encountered, and in Chapter 8, I respond to my original research questions and discuss my findings and the implications for researchers, policy makers, and myself.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide context and a conceptual framework for this study, I will review the setting as well as critical themes relating to the central question, how did graduates of the CS in rural Egypt experience their schooling and what has its influence been on their lives? I will begin first by framing the study in terms of what has been reported about those students’ experiences by the project founder and NGOs in the grey literature, followed by a review of several key concepts related to CS specifically and education in general.

One of my main arguments in this chapter is that the CS are facing significant challenges, and tensions that are exerting fundamental changes on the CS. I illustrate these forces here looking at literature that has explored the neoliberal ideology prevalent in the Egyptian educational system today, streaming/tracking students into reproducing social inequities, and the difficulty in using qualitative research to inform policy.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLING IN EGYPT

Zaalouk (2004) defines outputs as the immediate, quantifiable results deriving from the program, and the outcomes as the short-term qualitative results. Impact as defined by Zaalouk is the long-term personal and societal positive transformation. She speaks of the program as a social movement that initiates change through a process of diffusion, proactively recreating a new society in one’s personal and professional life.

According to Zaalouk, in terms of output, the CS are successful. The number of schools started off with four in 1992, and grew to 201 in 99/00. The dropout rate was
2.4%, and the average daily attendance is 95% in 1994 for the program as a whole. The schools are present in 154 communities. Outcomes of the CS according to Zaalouk are exceptional success rates compared to MS: 98% compared to 80% for 3rd grade government exams in Manfalut for the year for the year 01/02, 100% compared to 73.12% for MS in 5th grade government exams in Sohag for the same year; ninety-nine percent of the CS graduates in Manfalut also go on to secondary (2004).

In terms of the impact of the CS on its graduates’ lives, Zaalouk reports that she used an ethnographic approach to center the process on self-perceived transformations and relationships with the self and the other. She examined documents produced by the children, such as essays and diaries, conducted observations and interviews, and did case studies, thus using triangulation to corroborate. From these, she observed that the children, and in particular the girls, have had a transformation in their self-image and self-confidence. They gained more respect in their relationships with their families, particularly the males, and developed social networks and social capital with members outside of their families. They gave more respect to others and tolerated their differences, and had developed a sense of citizenship, love of learning and become agents of change. They encouraged their parents to attend illiteracy classes, and have campaigns to educate about the dangers of early marriage.

Other reports on the CS in Egypt, (Farrell, 2004; DeStefano et. al., 2007; Hartwell, 1995; Hartwell, 1998) reiterate Zaalouk’s findings of CS as schools of the future, but a closer look reveals that they are also advocacy in nature and/or draw heavily on Zaalouk’s study. The UNICEF assessment report (2010), done as UNICEF was winding down its involvement with the project, gauged the program’s contribution to educational
access and equity, learning conditions and outcomes, and community interactions. It found that the CS have been effective at reducing age, gender and socio-economic disparities. However, it also identified limitations such as that funding has led to dependency; mainstreaming has strayed from the original goal of reaching the hard to reach; and curricula mismatched with the MS is causing difficulty for the students who go on to preparatory MS schools. In addition, it found that there is a need to increase weak community linkages and relevance of the CS. It stressed the need for further research the children who are not in school and on classroom processes and transmission of pedagogical techniques to the facilitators.

**CS ISSUES**

**Neoliberalism and Education in Egypt**

While the national curriculum of the public schools systems is often characterized as “sterile, ineffectual and useless,” (Naguib, 2006), and students must extol the virtues of the latest government project when writing compositions, there is an obsession with ‘critical thinking’ in the private schools, and the latest imported Western curricula. The trendy taglines for all the elitist schools are some version of teaching kids how to think, not what to think, rendering thinking the domain of the very wealthy, but this is ‘critical thinking’ of the neoliberal brand. It is of the superficial problem-solving variety, not the meta-thinking about the assumptions and structures on which their societies are based. While the pedagogy of the public system can be summed up in the book title, “Stand Up! Sit Down! Cultures of Education in Egypt” (Herrara, 2003), elite private schools are centers of child-centered pedagogy. The goals of the CS run counter to the social
reproduction of oppression and obedience in the public schools, and the elitism in the private schools. However, it is difficult for the CS to not be influenced by the neoliberal direction in education.

The discursive effects of neoliberal ideology on the CS can be seen in two ways: how teachers are viewed and how the CS almost starting charging fees. The distinction made by Zaalouk (2013) illustrates how ideologies of neoliberalism and progressiveness drove CS teacher recruitment, training and autonomy within their classrooms in different ways. Prior to the embracing of neoliberalism by the MOE, teachers at the CS were recruited locally and did not need to have a higher education degree, (B.J. & F.E. , personal communication, 2012). They were trained, inducted and mentored into teaching and then given a great deal of independence in their classrooms. After the development of the Professional Academy of Teachers, with its focus on testing the teachers, and a new law that made higher education qualifications mandatory for teachers, the teachers at the CS were seen as “compliant technicians” (p. 203) who needed to comply with human capital outcomes-based education in their classrooms. In the current study, I am concerned primarily with how the CS graduates regarded their teachers and how this shift driving teachers may influence the schooling experiences of the CS students.

That teachers are now regarded as inputs in a market-based view of education brings us to the second consequence of neoliberalism on the CS. Incredibly, in its 2010 assessment on the CS project, UNICEF suggested that “each student pay full fees, [with] more privileged community members increasing their contributions” (p. 115), and used the example of West and East Africa, where local communities cover teacher’s salaries. And that,
Children from families who can pay for education could be charged for a range of items, from learning materials to registration fees…Compensatory funding schemes require careful implementation and should not serve as a tactic to admit only paying students or misuse incoming funds. Moreover, care needs to be taken that disadvantaged children are not stigmatized and contributors are not resentful (p. 115).

It is remarkable that an NGO, especially UNICEF, should promote fee-based education, particularly to a segment of society that, although not monolithically disadvantaged, is nonetheless not wealthy by any standards. That this can somehow be managed so that “disadvantaged students are not stigmatized and contributors are not resentful”, when classism and arrogance are already a part of the school culture without a tiered system of paying, is wishful thinking at best.

Hoppers (2005) discusses the fee-charging CS of West and East Africa also in his critique, and points out the irony of off-loading the costs of the CS teacher salaries to the communities in which they serve, in that are the poorest segments of society to start with. Cummings (as cited in Hoppers, 2005) described them as schools of the “periphery” (p.120). Importantly, the parents paid for teacher salaries for these schools, and this created a huge financial burden where payments to the teachers were frequently late. Hooper characterizes this relationship of the parents’ paying for the schools’ expenses as the state off-loading its responsibility to the parents, especially as they are getting inequitable access to government funding. And yet, it also demonstrates that the very creation of CS among the poorest is a demonstration of their capability to mobilize for the provision of social services. All CS in these countries experienced exponential
growth during the late 90’s, just as the Egyptian ones did, and resulted in widening educational access to substantial numbers of children (Hoppers, 2005).

Taken together, these studies illustrate the incompatibility of neoliberal ideology with the ideals of the CS, and I will be analyzing how they affect into CS graduates past experiences and future cohorts’ expectations.

**Social Mobility, Hidden Curriculum, & Cultural Capital**

Allan Ornstein’s (2003) characterization of a society with excessive materialism and competitiveness, a permanent underclass, and inter-generational poverty is like reading a pale version of the situation in Egypt. You would be hard pressed to find many living in the luxury mansions and compounds in Cairo, Egypt who had their roots in such privileged circumstances. Most of these homeowners came of age at a time when a good education was free and widely available, and many of those who worked hard and took risks moved up. Although imperfect, education was the primary means for social mobility. And yet, the possibility for social mobility through public education has been virtually erased from Egyptian society, and is only available through expensive private education that educates to upward class expectations.

Apple (1990) argues that the hegemonic power structures in schools are for social reproduction of that same hierarchy in wider society. Naguib describes this in Egypt, showing how the Egyptian education administration system is composed of a complex pyramid hierarchy designed to reproduce the oppressive power relations of control and submission seen in larger society, (2006). Thus, tyranny by proxy is done by the Ministry commanding school directors with directives that are unrealistic if not
impossible, school directors coercing the teachers frequently through pay deductions, and the teachers control the students through humiliation (Naguib, 2006), who develop hopelessness, passive-aggressiveness and criminality. Whether the teachers believe that the system is stacked against meritocratic social mobility or not, their reaction is inaction (Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009). The structure of relations in the private school system also replicates the power relations children of the wealthy are expected to live as adults: learn the skills and cultural capital to speak and think like the West in order to access the privileges of social, cultural and financial capital.

Educating children to different class expectations is neither new nor uncommon. Anyon’s (1980) study on five different schools in the same area, but from different social classes, revealed how the “hidden curriculum” socially reproduces the current social structure of society through its different expectations of the children, different focus on their skills, and their resulting cultural capital. Anyon’s study was in a school system where the curriculum is mandated to be more or less the same for all children.

In Egypt, however, there is no mandate that the children all cover the same material. Megahed and Ginsburg (2009) highlight how educational access and attainment in Egypt are strongly related to socioeconomic status of the students’ families. Furthermore, the teachers they interviewed hold one of two ideologies for explaining social stratification: a functionalist perspective, which holds that the schooling system allows for social mobility based on meritocracy and natural ability; and a conflict perspective, which states that the schooling system is biased towards the privileged and reproduces and justifies their advantage at the expense of the poor. Even for the minority of teachers’ whose ideological background was a conflict perspective, and therefore aware of the negative
effects of socioeconomic inequalities in disadvantaging their students, those teachers were passive, expressing no interest in providing special help to those affected (Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009).

In terms of CS, Hoppers (2005) finds that the programs are explicitly designed to provide education that is of higher quality but also of greater relevance to rural children. This creates a tension for the schools and parents, who appreciate the alignment of the curriculum with their own background, but also seek to educate their children so that they can transfer to the formal system in a context of equal opportunity. Hoppers (2005) concludes that they can be called ‘private schools of the poor’ (p. 133). This tension creates differing lenses in interpreting the spread of CS as either providing a terminal, sub-standard form of education that may be contributing to the entrapment in cycles of poverty and marginality; or a viable modality of extending basic education where it would not otherwise be offered often producing better if not similar results. Is this a ‘kinder’ way of streaming students? Although CS make a significant contribution to increasing access, the tension between whether to prioritize locally relevant or dominant group knowledge highlights the problem of streaming according to expectations (Hoppers, 2005).

A mixed-methods study in Mali looked at statistics and test results comparing MS and CS, and found that Mali CS schools provide an education comparable in quality to the MS at a lower cost to the government (Muskin, 1996). However, the tension between academic track schooling leading to continuing education and later white collar jobs, and practical ‘village’ oriented knowledge that also allows for the evolvement and satisfaction in one’s home village was also apparent (Muskin, 1996).
Delpit (1988) illustrates that there is a tension between locally relevant learning and dominant group learning that may be neo-colonial, but that parents desire for their children because it inculcates them to deal with larger society successfully (Delpit, 1988). Sticking to only locally relevant knowledge and progressive pedagogy can leave students feeling cheated in that they did not learn about the ways of society at large which is where they need help (Delpit, 1988). Delpit (1988) advocates articulating power dynamics based on dominant group norms and even prejudices so students are educated in how to deal with them effectively.

Bourdieu (1984) describes these other forms of knowledge that parents may wish their children to learn at school as relating to the *habitus*, dispositions particular to different classes. He sees it as capital that encompasses cultural, linguistic, and physical forms, and that these forms of capital have material consequences in people’s lives. Bourdieu (1984). Linguistic capital is a form of cultural capital based on socially approved language, for example based on origin of accent.

These concepts will be useful in seeing how graduates of the CS experience the cultural capital, habitus and hidden curriculum of the schooling, and whether they have implications for their social mobility.

**Translating Qualitative Findings into Policy Recommendations**

The importance of translating qualitative differences into ‘legible’ and ‘valid’ numbers for policymakers is illustrated by literature on statistically establishing causality of the CS, (McEwan, 2008), quantifying qualitative outcomes, (Psacharopoulos, Rojas & Velez, 1993), and using quantifiable proxies for measuring things that are unmeasurable
McEwan’s (2008) critique of CS reform in Latin America is based on a worldview that the only real way of establishing causality is through statistical analysis and numbers, a positivist view stated succinctly by Cannella and Lincoln (2011) as “know and save”. McEwan cites McGinn (1996) who posits that the process of design and modification of the schools creates a sense of ‘ownership’ among the teachers and McEwan ascribes this “difficult to describe” process as being challenging to replicate on a large scale. Similarly, it is possible the results are because of the motivation of the volunteers rather than the CS model, biasing the causality of the CS at improving student outcomes. He also objects to the selection of which geographic areas are to receive the intervention and describes it as a poverty selection bias: because any intervention would make a huge difference in such impoverished locations, it is unlikely less isolated and impoverished areas will replicate the results obtained. Although quite positivist, McEwan’s critique highlights compelling concerns in the CS research: are the improved scores and attitudes resulting from the model itself or from other factors?
Psacharopoulos, Rojas and Velez (1993) try to quantify qualitative outcomes of the CS in Colombia such as civic participation through statistical indicators measuring participation in community celebrations. The challenge in approaching qualitative outcomes through statistical indicators is that they do not necessarily connect to meaning. The very meaning the statistical indicators were intended to measure in the first place can quickly disappear when they are relied on as proxies for outcomes that are unquantifiable. Psacharopoulos et al. (1993) also measure positive outcomes resulting from the CS by an increase in the participation level of athletic competitions and health campaigns. However, depending on these indicators to measure qualitative outcomes does not distinguish between mechanistic and meaningful involvement by participants. In fact, motivation and understanding the meaning people make and take out of experiences and actions is one of the goals of qualitative research.

Murphy-Graham (2008) attempts to take the positivist measurement of empowerment and explore it through a qualitative case study. Importantly, Murphy-Graham indicates how education is used as a proxy for empowerment without investigating variations in schooling experiences and the content of what is learned. She points out that empowerment is often seen as an outcome of education whereas it is access to financial resources that are more likely to empower. Murphy-Graham (2008)’s case study and observations exploring women who experienced an empowerment program, the meanings
they took from it and the changes it made in their lives is a strong study that makes a case for qualitative case studies to study qualitative factors that impact empowerment-type schooling.

Although positivist, the McEwan, Psacharopoulos et. al. and Murphy-Graham arguments illustrate the difficulty of simplifying findings from qualitative studies for general policy use and the disconnect that happens between those in research and policymakers. In other words, they are implying that qualitative studies are not useful to policymakers. The question of how to “translate” and make these qualitative findings accessible (Cook-Sathers, 2007, p.830) and “legible” (Scott in Lingard, 2011, p.356) into guides for policymakers is an important one for my analysis.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This literature review links together very different types of research: ethnographic studies, evaluation reports, and advocacy literature reporting on the effectiveness of the schools; theories of education and social mobility, and issues of research that is legible to policymakers, with the goal of better understanding the context of the schools. The duration since the start of the program (2x years), the current drive to expand the schools, and the scarcity of independent, critical research on this experience provide a ripe time to examine the schooling experiences of graduates of the schools.

The neoliberalism in Egypt today poses a challenge to the CS as it is an ideology that influences the training, autonomy, and supervision of its teachers, and the way it finances the schools, and the fuelling of the consumerism and classism that serve to entrench stratification in Egypt even more. Anyon (1981) spoke of the ‘hidden curriculum’,
Bourdieu (1984) spoke of cultural capital and *habitus*, and Hoppers (2005) and Muskin (1996) found tension in the choice between locally relevant or dominant group knowledge. Ultimately, parents and students want to know about ways of the dominant group in order to succeed in the wider world, as well as their validation of their own “expertness” (Delpit, 1988, p.295).

Challenges for research on CS are also apparent in the way policymakers refuse findings that are not easily understood and applicable to a wide variety of situations.
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Those who want to use qualitative methods because they seem easier than statistics are in for a rude awakening.

Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.53

OVERVIEW

The central research topic is how graduates of the community schools in Egypt made sense of their education and how it was helpful to them. The study was framed within the central question, which was how they experienced their schooling and how it influenced their lives. My goals were to draw out influential factors about their experiences, and to uncover the assumptions in themselves and others that work to limit or expand their situation. This will hopefully give educators, researchers and policy makers a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges of receiving an education in the community school model, and support efforts to increase accessibility and quality education for all.

To investigate the central question, I conducted one-on-one interviews with eleven students, six from one school and five from the second school, followed by focus group discussions with the students as a group. As I wanted the data to speak for itself, I used grounded theory to transcribe, code and categorize my data to identify themes that highlighted the common and divergent experiences amongst the students in the study. As well, I will highlight the opportunities and challenges community schooling provides to NGOs and policy makers.
METHODOLOGY RATIONALE

Qualitative researchers seek *how* social experience is created (Denizen & Lincoln, 2011), and do a better job at capturing the richness of human experience. They employ a variety of methods as *bricoleurs* who use different tools and methods to construct a more rigorous mode (Kincheloe, 2004, p.5) and thorough understanding of knowledge of education and its processes than quantitative research. To do so, I combined one-on-one and focus group interviews both to triangulate for validation and as a substitute to validation as a method of adding depth by combining multiple methods (Denizen & Lincoln, 2011). I engaged deeply with the community school graduates to understand their perspectives and reflections on their experiences and make sense of its complexity and avoid the “rationalistic and reductionistic quest for order [that] refuses in its arrogance to listen to the cacophony of lived experience, the of diverse meanings and interpretations,” (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 5) to gain a deeper understanding of the CS graduates motives, circumstances, and psychological and social processes. This approach proved to be the best suited to making sense of the meanings and processes by which community school graduates experienced their education, in its complexities and contradictions.

As mentioned in the literature review, qualitative benefits such as civic participation that indicate the richness of the community school experience are often measured through quantifiable activities such as adult education, athletic competitions, health campaigns and community celebrations (Psacharopoulos, Rojas and Velez, 1993). However, it is important to note that these remain proxies for things that are impossible to measure
through numbers and that there is an important role for qualitative research assessing such factors that cannot be measured quantitatively.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE/POSITIONALITY

As “an interpreter of the scene, and not the ultimate author” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p 52.), it is important to situate myself in the research. My worldviews, experiences and values are the lens through which I will see, interpret and analyze. Rubin says of her interviewing, “No matter how far we travel, we can never leave our roots behind. I found that they claimed me at unexpected times, in unexpected places.” (cited in Warren, 2001, p. 13). As such, two key factors in my background stood out as being significant: my previous career in business, and my class location in Egypt.

Qualitative Studies, Quantitative Minds

During one of my OISE graduate classes, a guest lecturer from the Brookings Institute was remarking that measuring educational quality is not rocket science, and how this lack of accurate measurement tools to measure is holding education back, that it is not rocket science and researchers need to come up with some indicators soon. I had to counter that I think it is in fact much harder than rocket science as it tries to quantify things that are unquantifiable.

It has been interesting coming to the position of a qualitative researcher from a business background. Business is a science and an art, as the saying goes, and I had always been aware of the limitations of reductionist rules and formulas that cannot produce business success. It was in economics where I found the use of oversimplification to produce models that fit a neat mathematical formula, which is then
used to determine policy in real life, beyond my common sense. I recently read a reference to the ‘Queen of social sciences’, and I guessed it was sociology, which opened my eyes to structures I benefited from, and was later limited by, but had no framework to understand. I was very surprised to find that the term is commonly used to refer to economics, which I find ironic since economists spends much of their time trying to prove it is a ‘real’ science i.e. as objective and quantitative as the physical sciences. Yet economics is the superstructure of the present (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011), and frames the dominant discourse through its focus on measuring and accountability.

Too often quantitative economic models oversimplify to fit a neat mathematical formula, which are then used to determine policy in real life, which is beyond the ability of those models. To what extent do the economists realize that socially constructed indicators are not the same as physical realities? Not very far, in my experience. When numbers reduce a complex situations and landscapes, such as the output of a country or even how many people cannot find work, to a single number economic indicator and push the richness and heterogeneity of it to the background, it is a short step to making that number the only thing that matters, even as its users protest that it was supposed to be a proxy for something much more. Its shortcomings and limitations are rendered invisible (Lingard, 2012) when the simplicity of the indicator and the ability to focus on the single number crowds out room for understanding the heterogeneity and nuances masked behind it, that causes, circumstances, and contexts may be very different and thus ‘one size fits all’ solutions will not be successful.

The over-reliance on particular quantitative indicators reduced complexity to single number indicators that masked heterogeneity and the more fundamental problem of
increased income inequality. People with power and authority picked indicators that gave them even greater power and authority and ignored indicators that illuminated not so rosy pictures, such as those that show how wealth is distributed in a country (T. El-Raghy, personal communication, July 29, 2013). While economic indicators per se cannot be blamed for the disconnect between the picture they painted and reality, the indicators were overrelied on. They were touted as being definitive, only to discover shortly after that they were one step behind reality. This has been the case not only in the booming Egyptian growth indicators of the early 2000’s, but also in the Asian stock market crash of 1997 and the US crisis of 2008. Giving voice to lived reality is vital to keep economic indicators connected to the real world.

Quantitative studies and economic indicators are indeed vital to making issues ‘legible’ (Scott, cited in Lingard, 2011, p.357). However, qualitative studies keep quantitative portrayals connected to reality. They expose the power dynamics, social reproduction and resulting social injustice that is felt by those taking the brunt of it. They give voice and complexity to people and issues that would not otherwise be on the radar.

Qualitative and quantitative research are often pitted against one another, with quantitative being the objective, scientific methodology and qualitative the fluffy, subjective one. ‘There are lies, damn lies, and statistics,’ as the saying goes, for statistics and numbers can be just as subjective as any narrative. Egypt focused only on economic indicators such as income and income growth, and this ability to measure only the quantifiable made it the top priority, and it soon became the only priority, even in the face of its blatant failure.
It is easy to believe how clear it is that qualitative research is best suited for unquantifiable, complex outcomes and constructs, until one leaves OISE. Outside academia, there is a strong demand for numbers to makes issues, as Lingard describes it, ‘legible’ for them (2011). I had one such experience that moved me deeply and made the importance of ‘translating’ qualitative findings a compelling imperative for me.

I had recently met the person now in charge of the CS in Egypt after the UNICEF term on the project has ended. This gentleman, an engineer by training, told me in very clear terms that he had had enough of all the accounts that kept touting how wonderful the schools were without any objective assessments done on them (B. Saleh, personal communication, April 4, 2012). I responded that quantitative research is not the only way to assess the initiative, and that there are things that cannot be measured by numbers. It is also true that many calls for ‘rigorous research’ are, unfortunately, often a thinly veiled call for quantitative research as opposed to qualitative studies. However, in Saleh’s view, as well as many others, there was no distinction between advocacy based accounts and qualitative research. One reason may be that good qualitative research is lumped together with non-rigorous assessments, too broad generalizations or that the social sciences are held up to the physical sciences measures of quality. However, research limitations and conditions of context and conditions qualify even results from the physical ‘hard’ sciences (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). The laws of physics are not ‘soft’ because water does not boil at 100 degrees Celsius on a mountaintop. They are not

\[ \text{[Psuedonym used for privacy.]} \]
expected to universally apply under different contexts and conditions such as room temperature and atmospheric pressure.

This conversation, together with critiques of community school experiences elsewhere, motivated me to make it a key goal of my study to produce systematic, traceable and justifiable qualitative research and ‘translate’ that research into knowledge that has practical implications.

I also believe that education research has a moral imperative to get off the page and into the lives of the children and people it claims to help. In many of my sociology of education classes at OISE, classmates have echoed my own feelings of frustration at being able to take practical tools to use in their practice, “I came to get something practical, give me something I can use.” I understand and agree with the arguments for complexity but am not satisfied with how they are reconciled. I cannot justify spending money and time to do research and not come up with applied knowledge.

**Class Difference in Egypt**

Egypt is an extremely classist society, where how one is treated depends on one’s social class and social class is determined by dress. Proximity to ‘Western-ness’ is a one marker of higher social class, and when I decided to wear hijab (Muslim headscarf) six years ago I lost the ‘elite’ status. Pre-hijab I didn’t need to prove myself. Now the way I dress in Egypt determines what kind of response I will get that day. Whereas before people would be delighted if I began a conversation, now the usual reaction is a first look sizing up my class based on whatever I am wearing and other so-called markers of class. I am not an elite member of the Egyptian upper class. But I passed for one before I wore
hijab and that afforded me all sorts of privileges I attributed to my person, not my supposed location. It still remains that many people recognize social class with the hijab, but now that I am less ‘Western’ than before the reaction is less awed. This is the case in elitist and cosmopolitan Cairo.

For my research in rural Egypt, I felt my hijab supported the authenticity of my interest in them since we were dressed the same way, and helped make them comfortable talking to me.

Describing my proposed research to a friend, she told me how convenient it was that I would be able to put my own children in the schools I was researching. Though that was not practical for geographic reasons, I had not and would not even consider it for language, culture, and yes, class reasons. The strength of my emotional response surprised me, and revealed the chasm between different schools in a visceral way beyond the intellectual. I clearly remember judging Al Gore in the run up to the 2000 presidential elections for not putting his children in the DC public school system. Now I understand. I can do many things, but when it comes to my children only the ‘best’ will do. Even as I know that the school we chose was a neoliberal for-profit educational institution that reproduces the class hierarchy in Egypt that I so deride, I panic to even think of giving my children less than the ‘best’. The irony and double-standards made apparent by this is not lost on me. All parents have the right to want and receive the best for their children.
RESEARCH SETTING

The governorate of Assiut stretches for 120 km along the banks of the river Nile, and has a population of about 3.5m, of which 2.2m are rural. Its population relative to the Egyptian population is 4.3%, and its capital is also Assiut the city. The city has the largest Coptic Christian concentration and is sometimes called the Coptic capital of Egypt, with almost 50% of the population believed to be Christian (Al-Ahram Weekly, 2013) as well as being home to several monasteries and the sojourn of the Holy Family. The principal economic activity is agriculture.

For the first site, I travelled 32km north of Assiut city, where I was staying, to the village of El-Hemma in Manfalut Township\(^{11}\). For the second site, Abu Tig, I travelled 35km south of Assiut city. Thus, the schools were in opposite directions and about 70 km apart. For El-Hemma, the interviews were all conducted in the students' old classroom, and as such they were able to show me many of the projects. The Abu Teeg school had since been taken down and the school moved, and as such I met with the students at another school close by.

MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS/DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative research is useful for people who have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These suggest that the first part of the research

\(^{11}\) As mentioned in Ch. 1, Manfalut Township was the site of a train collision with a school bus carrying preschoolers that killed 51 children on November 2012 at the Manfalut railway crossing. The children were travelling 24km in their bus on unpaved roads to their kindergarten, as there are none in town.
discovers the important questions, and I would add, themes. As such, I used semi-structured interviews first and focus group interviews second. In total, I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews individually, and had a focus group interview with the students I had interviewed from each school. Additionally, I was able to have a second focus group with some of school B participants when I went on a subsequent visit.

One on one semi-structured interviews gave room to profoundly engage and deeply understand what the CS meant to them and drew out how they made their meaning rather than what information they had. It was not easy for participants to open about deep personal experiences or choices in focus groups, especially with sensitive topics such as their own financial stress or the opposite sex. However, it was also the case that focus groups encouraged some participants to open up more as they perceive a shared background or experiences with others and this gave them the confidence to open up. I also visited the CS to deepen my own understanding of how the schools function.

Throughout this thesis I have used the word teachers even though in the community school system they are called facilitators. This is a term that was developed to circumvent issues the Ministry of Education had with the CS teachers not having a higher education degree. The term is still in use today to emphasize that the teachers are not teaching didactically, but rather facilitating the student's discovery and learning process. However, in such a classist society as Egypt, it also has a lesser status than teachers, and given the extra-ordinary professionalism and dedication I saw from the individual teachers, I find the term teacher more appropriate facilitator.
SAMPLE PARTICIPANTS

In my study I engaged with eleven participants, five from one school and six from the second school. This allowed me to engage deeply with the participants within the time constraints of a master’s thesis. I chose people who seemed to communicate well during my meeting with the entire cohort, and represented diversity in age and gender. Exploring groups from two geographically distant locations allowed me to compare the differences between the two communities. Esterberg describes how she selected participants who represented both the “center” and the “margins” of the community she researched (cited in Warren, 2001, p. 88). I tried to run the gamut from those who stayed at home once their schooling in the community school was completed, to those who went on to continue their studies and other options such as marriage or work.

However, I faced a problem in recruiting students who had terminated their education after the community school years and it was only possible to interview one student who terminated her schooling after the community school. She was my very first interviewee and it did not go well. We were both nervous, and she became visibly upset when I brought up her ending school. I immediately changed the subject and asked her if she wanted to stop. She said no, and I asked her about other things. I tried to ask about it again in a while and she became distressed once more. I felt it wrong to stop the interview while she was still so distressed and asked her about things that made her happier to talk about, such as her art projects while at school. I then ended the interview without having had a chance to talk about the most relevant aspect to me, and later discovered I had not obtained her verbal consent on my recording. Thus I was obliged to remove her interview from my data set.
All in all, I chalked it off as a valuable learning experience, both in terms of my interviewing sensitivity and in terms of being more confident.

The students I did interview had a chance to experience the world after their community schooling experience and reflect on how it changed them. This permitted me to see what was shared in their experiences that may be attributed to structure or culture and what was distinctive and may be personal.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The key to my data analysis was reading and rereading transcripts and material as they came in, and writing analytic memos and thoughts on an ongoing basis. Since my participants were talking in Arabic, I translated as I was transcribing. This proved extremely time consuming, but I could not trust anyone else to translate the transcription as there is so much context and nuance in translating to start with and I did not want someone else’s lens brought into it. I coded and analyzed my data using NVivo. Delamont (2002) recommends that I (as a researcher) consistently stop and think as the data is being collected because the analytic work needs to be done concurrently with the fieldwork to clarify, revisit, or explore further emerging issues. I found this to be extremely useful and my field notes and reflections were rich with seeds of analysis for later. I used constructivist grounded theory, an approach that recognizes social and historical constraints that influence people’s actions, as well as recognizing that the researcher must be sensitive to concepts of power, privilege, and equity, among others (Charmaz, 2011). This obliged me to constantly reflect on the power and privilege
dynamics inherent in our different social locations, and how it might be influencing what I see and how the interviewees responded to me.

I proceeded in stages and iterated those stages, from the subthemes, insights, ideas and questions, to making connections to larger themes and insights in light of the theories, literature and my personal experience; to discerning a pattern in these themes to generate categories, and discerning stories around the themes to arrive at conclusions (S. Niyozov, personal communication, July 2, 2012).

Thus, my data and theory were mutually informing and transforming, going through iterations before making a final decision about how to analyze. By iterating the data I systematically explored what the data was telling me, using paradoxes and contrasts to see what is going on, and how they interacted with the broader issues and each other to reveal the dynamics and structures.

ETHICS

I see ethics on two levels. The first is adhering to the standards set out by the University of Toronto’s Ethics Board committee and process. I followed the highest standards set out for participant approval, privacy, and reduced distress to the participants. However, since signing papers such as consent forms is an uncommon practice in Egypt, one that is usually reserved for serious commitments such as marriage contracts I obtained verbal, audio recorded consent instead.

Right away I was warned against giving the financial compensation I had planned, or indeed any financial compensation at all. Unfortunately, armed robbery had become widespread in post-2011 Egypt, and I was advised by many that it was not a great idea for
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word to get out that I am in the village alone with a relatively large amount of cash. I offered the students chocolate bars after our interviews, which after being refused by the first four, decided was a bad idea. While writing up my research I noticed that many of them loved to read, and was able send to take a good stash of books.

More profoundly, however, on another level, I see ethics as a critical social justice orientation, not a positivist objective reality orientation from a position of power that ignores that power. Recognizing those historic power structures and how they structure the present power relations was a critical ethical imperative in my research (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, working to save the inferior Other creates the inferiority of those it claims to ‘help’ and ‘save’ (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011; Klees, 2010) and this is fundamentally an ethical issue. My starting point was, “Taking societal structures, institutions and oppressions as subjects of research (rather than human beings), [so] perhaps we can avoid further creation and subjectification of the other.” (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011, p. 88). Thus, throughout my research I constantly reflected on and sometimes reoriented myself to the fact that I was researching the justice or oppression of the system, rather than the students I was researching as victims.

TIMELINE

I traveled to Egypt for a period of one year from August 2012 to August 2013. This decision was based on personal reasons that fortunately coincided with my research. Before travelling I had contacted many people who would be able to help connect with the community schools but received no reply. Once in Egypt, I was fortunate to then make several connections within a short period of time.
Between November 2012 and February 2013, I attended a series of workshops by the Egyptian NGO on setting standards for community education. The workshops proved invaluable in establishing further contacts and conversations with community school teachers from several governorates, NGO and MOE technical support staff, NGO administration, the MOE officials and literacy experts. As well, the workshops gave me an inside look at how the community schools are being managed and what their plans are for the future.

Once I received my permit, I made three trips to Assiut, during which I visited the CS daily, in three different sites. I interviewed my sample participants, teachers and NGO staff. I conducted observations for school days at the sites also, Grades 5, 4 and 1. As well, I visited a community school in Aswan and was able to conduct an observation of a fledgling community school and its first grade class. All these interviews, observations and workshops proved invaluable and educative, and enriched my understanding of the contextual framework of the schools and the students' experiences in them. My fourth and final planned trip had to be cancelled because of the volatile security situation in Egypt during June 2013.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In conceiving and thinking about this proposal I had an internal struggle between wanting to research CS in a way that will carry weight and be ‘valid’ to those with the power to set and change policy, i.e. qualitative research grounded in a positivist orientation; and researching CS using an approach that was more “local, personal and political,” (Denizen, 2004, p 452.) By choosing to go the second route, I ultimately de-
legitimizing my findings for those who maintain a more positivist attitude. This is difficult as policy makers and those with the financial power usually appreciate sweeping generalizations of the positivist kind, as well simplistic pronouncements that are more palatable to the public. However, Luke (2003) and Lingard (2011) both take issue with the simplification of complex realities for policy making. It is with a strong influence from these two writers that I approach my qualitative work.

In my choices of what I have written about, and how I chose to represent them I am showing only what is filtered through me, and this is a limitation of any research, particularly within the relatively narrow time frame of a Masters’ thesis. By constant reflection and an acute awareness of my interpretive lens, I hope I have put my influence on the interpretation in its proper context.

It was important to constantly remind myself of the power dynamics that existed between me and the students I interviewed, and that despite my best efforts, who I am and what I stand for influenced everything before a single word was said, in addition to attitudes and things I may have actually said that cemented that. I had a clear opportunity to see this when I attended the workshops for setting the community school standards at the NGO. The workshop was participatory, and included teachers and administrators from all over the country. The dynamics of the conversation was all too clear to me in terms of what was said, who had ‘voice’ and who was listened to, what was capable of being said, and dealing with differences. I picked up on unfinished sentences, hints, and silences and talked with the teachers later. I found that they had plenty to say that presented much more complex and nuanced views. I reflected this onto my own later experiences later and felt that despite anyone’s best intentions, it is not easy to strip away
all the markers of power differential when we were talking. As an example, during one focus group it came up that one student said something in reference to their background being peasants. I told them my grandparents were peasants too. In fact, they were modest landowners, but I felt that they were shy of their backgrounds in front of me and that I wanted to dispel that and show them that it was nothing to be ashamed of.

The students pride did not allow us to freely discuss the financial dimension of attending community schools. The schools being functionally free was only talked about in a general sense, not a personal one, as if it was someone else's issue, not theirs. Any attempts I tried to ask about it diverted to the community schools other advantages. Although there was a spectrum of financial capability, in general the majority of the students' families were not financially well off as can be seen in the profiles in Chapter 4, as well as Table 2 in Chapter 5.

Also, not all the participants were equally chatty. In particular, two of the boys were reticent, and two of the older girls had lots to say. Thus, some of the interviews were uneven. Another limitation is that I went to the showcase schools. These were probably the best schools and the best teachers. Having said that, from interviews with the students and their siblings’ experiences in other community schools, it is apparent that the best schools are not anomalies. Although there is variation amongst all the schools, all parents of the students I interviewed were striving to put their other children in the community schools also.

In the following chapters, I illustrate my findings and elaborate on the dominant theme emerging from each chapter, as well as relating other themes that surfaced to the
literature. The dominant themes that emerged are gender in relation to the student’s profiles, chapter 4; teacher centrality in relation to their CS experiences in Chapter 5; the need for private lessons and the consequences of that in Chapter 6; and the cultural capital associated with getting an education in Chapter 7.
4. FINDINGS: STUDENT PROFILES

In this chapter, I share the CS graduates’ backgrounds and our encounters. I aim to give insight into the lives of village students by describing their daily activities, home life, and ambitions. Although each participant provided a different lens into the life of Egyptian rural youth, being a community school graduate meant that they shared similar challenges in accessing school and continuing their education, and I illustrate their mutual challenges and triumphs, and the larger context common to all.

The final interview sample consisted of eleven CS graduates. The characteristics of their school starting age, their age when we met, and family size, as well as the students’ ambitions, can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. As can be seen from the tables, the ages of the students when they started school ranged from 6 to 10 years old. All of the students represented here were now in middle school, although I targeted students who terminated their education after the CS also. They were more difficult to contact and interview because of their mobility constraints, and home and work responsibilities, which I explained earlier in Ch. 3. All the students were from large families, with the number of children per home between 5 and 7. All of the students’ career ambitions were to become professionals, with six students aiming to become physicians, three engineers, one student a teacher and one student a police officer.

It is important to note that although diversity in age and gender were represented, the villages I went to were monolithically Muslim villages and thus all the participants were Muslim. Due to the large Christian minority in Assiut (about 50%), I did not expect to
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encounter villages that were monolithic in faith and therefore did not specify this to my coordinators during the planning stage.

Table 1: Participant Information School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym &amp; sex</th>
<th>Age started</th>
<th>Age at interview</th>
<th>No. of siblings</th>
<th>Ambition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali M M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohamed M M</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farah F F</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma F F</td>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soha F F</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shams F F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Participant Information School B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym &amp; sex</th>
<th>Age started</th>
<th>Age at interview</th>
<th>No. of siblings</th>
<th>Ambition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saeed M M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia F F</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shereen F F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan F F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Physician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasan M M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Police officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I turn now to the student profiles.
ALI: “[FATHER] MAKES ME STUDY ALL THE TIME”

Ali was a confident and articulate 14 year old who had just come back from receiving his first term report from the preparatory (middle school) MS. His grades were all ‘Excellent’ and he was very happy. The second of four siblings, his younger sister also went to a CS, one next door to his old school. His older sister was in industrial high school. In addition, there was a younger brother who wanted to join a CS but was refused entry.

Ali was one of the financially better off students I interviewed. Although his father was a day laborer, the family was in the process of building a new house. His father encouraged his learning, following up with his studies and chiding him if he took too much time off studying. His siblings also encouraged him and he occasionally helped his sister with her studying. His day consisted of going to school and going to the house they were building or the kutab (Quran memorization class) after school. He dreams of becoming an engineer, so that he "can plan and build things for my country and build good and useful things that benefit it." Although he dreams of becoming an engineer, he was more flexible than the other students in that there was a variety of other careers he was willing to consider, such as teacher or physician. A love of country and desire to benefit Egypt was very apparent with Ali and indeed all the students when discussing their hopes for their futures. Ali also had grave opinions on the political situation in Egypt.
MOHAMMED: “I USED TO GO FOR ONE DAY AND BE ABSENT FOR TEN”

Mohammed was also 14 when I interviewed him, and had started school when he was 8 years old having been rejected by the primary MS. He was one of four siblings, and his sister also went to a CS in the neighborhood. His father died while he was young, and his mother had completed his application for the CS and forced him to go for the first year, during which he was frequently absent: "I used to go for one day and be absent for ten," until he came to like it. His mother is adamant her children receive an education and continues to encourage him in his education, as well as his older brother, who is in El-Azhar University, the religious university. Mohammed worked outside of the home, at an herbalist store in the holidays, and was the only student I interviewed who did work outside the home. He worked about five hours a day on school holidays, and appreciated the value of work, saying, "work is worship." He also helped his uncle, a peasant, with the farming. His love of country was also very evident, his favorite subjects being social studies because, “we need to know about our ancestors the Pharaohs.” His favorite activity was to read. Mohammed was not very chatty, and I would have much preferred to meet him later on, when I was more comfortable interviewing.

FARAH: ANGUISHED AT SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Farah started the CS when she was 8 years old, having been denied her desire to go to school by her parents who did not believe girls should get an education. She had four other sisters and none of the older sisters had received an education save for illiteracy classes, and her older brother dropped out after two years in the preparatory MS. Her
neighbors encouraged her parents to send Farah to school saying she was smart and it was a shame she was missing out. Her mother still did not agree but Farah was present and insisted. The school's proximity, its reputation for teaching well, and it being a last chance for Farah convinced her mother to let her go. Before going to school she used to be very upset, and she was ecstatic to finally go to school. When she completed the primary cycle her other members of her family tried to discourage her parents from allowing Farah to continue at the government middle school because of the long route coupled with the general decline in security in Egypt post-revolution. Despite their initial resistance, her family was very proud of her, especially her handwriting. Her favorite subject in the CS was English and she claimed to be top of the class when she was in the CS.

Farah's day, as for all the girls, consisted of school, studying and helping with the housework. It was her dream to become a physician, "to help the poor, there are many poor. Their kids get sick and I feel sorry for them and they don't have money to see the doctor." Farah's father was a day laborer, and it was obvious from our conversation that they were financially strained, yet she did not mention that the CS being functionally free was one of the reasons she personally was able to attend. She mentioned that it was an important reason for the poor in general. I wondered if the many tears shed during her talking about why she wanted to become a physician were related to something she had seen or experienced.

Farah's older brother dropped out of school during the preparatory stage. Farah explained that he was being failed unfairly and this upset and discouraged him, and also his younger brother who was in Gr. 5 at the time. Their father offered the older brother
the chance to continue his education through the homeschool system, but he refused. I was surprised to hear of the homeschool offer, since when I inquired about it I was told it was rare and not part of the culture in the area.

Of all the students I interviewed, Farah was the one who exhibited the hardest time adjusting to the prepatory MS. The lack of teaching by the teachers during class time to force students to take private lessons affected her deeply. Her family could not afford to pay for more than a few private lessons, which cost 3 Egyptian pounds, or about 42 Canadian cents, per lesson. She was well aware that if she could afford to take private lessons in all the subjects, a ubiquitous practice, she would do much better. Her anguish at the injustice of the inequality was very evident, and she was also deeply upset by the arrogance shown by the relatively richer students towards the poorer ones, and the students who were doing well towards the students who were struggling. She contrasted it bitterly with the CS, where being smarter or weaker was not a differentiator, "there's no differentiation, everyone gets the same grade, they had it divided into groups, for example, here is the smart group, so they get more learning aids made especially for them, the medium group, would get something and the weaker group...when we were finished the teacher told us to help them so that they can be smart like us and they really did become smart like us...”

Farah initially seemed quite tough, so I was very surprised when she teared up a lot. She teared up when talking about the lack of teaching in the new school, the poor who can't afford doctors and then can't afford the expensive prescriptions that they write, about not being able to afford enough private lessons. I asked her if she wanted to stop, and she responded with an emphatic No! She also came back for the focus group.
Towards the end of the interview she showed me some of her projects and art work, intricate collages made with repurposed material, drawings, and a book she made with the some of the other students in a campaign against smoking, where they used cigarette butts to make a warning.

**SELMA: HAPPY GO LUCKY**

Selma is an upbeat and cheerful girl who started school around 11 years old and was 17 when I interviewed her. Her family had not agreed for her to receive an education because, "girls don't leave the house" before they get married. She had been upset to see other girls go to school and when her maternal uncle heard of the CS, he convinced her family to send her and take the chance to get a good education, having heard about the previous cohort. Her parents are illiterate. She is one of five siblings, three of whom are boys, and a sister. Her sister is younger than her and will start school soon; Selma hopes it will be at a community school.

Selma's younger brother had started primary MS at the same time as Selma and when she outsmarted him her parents “knew their mistake.” They now raved about the CS and how much better it is than the MS, although initially the CS had a poorer reputation.

Her activities outside of school also revolve around housework, studying and TV. She loves English, as do many of the students, and the learning corners. She described how, since going to school, she gained more respect in her family, her opinion now being valued compared to before. Motivated by news of collapsing buildings, it is her hope to become an architectural engineer so she can competently design safe houses.
SOHA: “SHE HAS TO GO TO LEARN”

Soha started school when she was 7 years old, and was 13 when I interviewed her. When she was young, her mother was afraid for her to go to the town alone, and did not let her go to school. Her uncle, a lawyer, encouraged her mother to apply to the CS for Soha, which she did and Soha was refused. Her uncle then applied for her again and she was accepted. It was not clear why she was refused the first time and accepted the second. Before going to school, Soha could write her name, as well as her mother and father's name. Her mother is illiterate and her father can read.

Soha is the second of five siblings, and her older sister is studying commerce. Her older sister took private lessons in every subject, as often as the family could afford, and, according to Soha, she was given a poor score for the subjects that she did not take private lessons in all the time. Her younger sister tried to enroll in a CS but was refused and went to a primary MS where she was struggling in Grade 3. Her sister wanted to take private lessons, was scared to go to school, and tried to be absent when she could. Soha spoke of her sister's fear at going, the corporal punishment, her excessive homework, and her routine helping her sister with her schoolwork every Friday. She described how she insists that her sister go because, "she has to go to learn".

Her favorite subject was English, being the easiest, and her favorite activity at the CS was when they discussed things together as a group. She said that she enjoyed hearing everyone's opinions and sharing her own.

Soha taught her mom to pray, and her mom encouraged her education in general. She gave her daughter an allowance, and Soha was the only student who mentioned receiving
an allowance from her parents. They also rewarded her academic achievements by buying her new things like a new school bag and new shoes.

When Soha described her day as revolving around studying, housework and TV. She said her favorite channel to watch was Birds of Paradise, a religious channel for children.

Soha was the only interviewee who wanted to become a teacher. Her reasons were, "so that I can teach kids properly, they are taught wrong, I want to teach them right like I was taught here and show them how I learned and how I became a teacher." When I asked her why she didn't want to become a physician like everyone else she pointed out that there are many incompetent physicians, and that she wanted to be a teacher who excels at what she does.


Shams' beautiful eager face made it easy to pick a pseudonym for her, which means the Sun. Her speech was severely stuttering, however, and this made it difficult to decipher what she was saying at times.

Shams was 15 at the time of our interview, having started at age 9. Shams came the closest to alluding to the fact that financial hardship was a big factor her parents refused to send her to the primary MS using the word *imkaniyat* which means financial capability, but when I tried to explore it further she attributed their refusal to the distance. I let it be. She also attributed her parents’ initial refusal to their belief that girls don't need an education. For Shams, it was her paternal uncle who talked her parents into
letting her go. Their initial intention was to let her go to the 6 years of CS only. She then insisted that she continue onto preparatory MS, saying, "all the girls are getting an education, why not me?" They were happy when she proved to be clever and hard working. Her favorite subjects were Arabic and social studies and her most challenging subject was math. She loved the group discussions during her time at the CS because they taught her to talk with older people. Her life after the school day also revolved around housework, studying and TV.

Shams was the second of five siblings, and her older sister had gone to school, but dropped out because, "they made her fail for half a mark, they made her hate school."

Shams' dream was to become a physician also, so she can help people and prescribe low-priced cures for the poor.

SAEED: ODDS IN HIS FAVOR

Saeed was a 12-year-old boy who started school when he was 6. He was the fourth of five siblings, two of whom are in university right now. Saeed was the only student I interviewed who both had siblings in university, and his father's job as an inspector at the kontrol (the body that corrects governorate-wide exams) at the Ministry of Education was the most prestigious. His siblings were in the faculties of Social Work and Law. He also had a sibling in high school, as well as a younger sister who was also in a CS. This was clearly a family who had their educational plans going well, in contrast with most of the other students I interviewed. Saeed dreamed of becoming an engineer and probably has the best chances of becoming what he wants, given his family previous success in educating their children and his love of math. His favorite activity in the CS was the
learning corners and group work. His day after school consisted of doing his homework and studying, and leisure time. He made no mention of helping in the housework, and he enjoyed playing in the holidays.

**NADIA: “LIKE A MAN, NO ONE CAN CONQUER YOU”**

Nadia was a girl I wished I could video as part of my study. Outspoken, spunky and sassy, she was very easy to talk to and interview. Nadia was 14 years old when I interviewed her and had started the CS when she was 7, having gone to a primary MS the year before and hating it. The teachers beat the children and, not surprisingly, she remembers it as "horrible". Nadia was the third of five siblings, and her older sister had almost completed her third year of high school before she dropped out and married. Her older brother left school at third year of prepatory MS, and was working with her father, who was a painter.

Math was causing Nadia a lot of grief in middle school, and she wistfully recalled having gotten the full marks for it in her final year of CS. She described herself as understanding it all in class then by the time she gets home “it’s all gone”. Nadia described her day as coming home from school, doing homework, studying and housework and enjoying a lot of TV. Nadia did not face opposition from her parents going to school, whether it was the primary school or the middle school, saying that although her parents were not educated and her mother was illiterate, her mom encouraged her as she wished she herself had been able to go. Her mother had been to illiteracy classes, but could not actually read. Her mother said Nadia had to earn going to school, otherwise the long walk and risk was not worth it. It was Nadia's dream to
become a “big” physician, "not just any physician, with [my own] hospital, my ambitions are very big," although she acknowledged the value of other professions such as teachers and her father's own profession as a painter. All three of her other siblings were in CS. Her favorite subject in the CS was English, and her favorite activity was to read, reading all the primary school textbooks over the summer, the only books available to her.

Nadia was the most forthcoming on her feelings regarding the route to school, when I asked her about the safety of it, she replied, "frankly if anyone does anything to me, his day will be black," and that she was often told that she, "was like a man, no one can conquer you," because some boys are badly behaved and she needs to be able to take care of herself. Although she came across as a very strong personality, she did not have many friends and in fact made a point of saying that she did not need any. This seemed to me to be more related to a recent spat with her walking buddies that had mushroomed into a quarrel between the two families.

SHEREEN: “I MUST SUFICE MYSELF”

Shereen was a soft-spoken, thoughtful young woman who had plenty to say on everything. The sixth of seven sisters, she was the first one in her family to go to school. Her father had died when she was two years old, and her family initially did not agree to send her to school, they being of the opinion that daughters don't need to go to school. None of her older sisters or mother are literate despite having been to literacy classes and don't know how to write their own name. Shereen’s younger sister had also started school with her at the same time. Shereen commented on how she is a big deal within her family, and how they do most of the housework and that her sisters wished that they
could go to school also. Her mother is quite proud of her and loves saying that her
daughter is in the first year of prepatory school. Her mother has also told her she wants
Shereen to become “something very big”, and that she will support her all the way.
Shereen had her hopes on becoming a pediatrician, because she love kids a lot, and to
help the needy. Shereen also described how becoming a physician would give her status
and make her famous in her community.

Shereen recalled her time before joining school as very sad, crying when she saw the
other girls going to school because, "they have become better than me, because they have
learned and are going to get a degree and a job...but I will be a peasant woman." She
attended the CS with her younger sister. Her day after school also consisted of studying,
and in the holidays she helps with the housework. Her mother's income is a peasant's
pension, and for this reason she can't ask her mother for the private lessons she feels she
needs, believing she has to suffice herself with her own efforts at school because she can't
ask her mother for private lessons’ money. She also described how she tries to be
considerate of her mother in not asking her for breakfast and other housework.

Her favorite subject is Arabic and her most difficult subject is English, since she can't
read it. She said her favorite activity was finding out about things in the encyclopedia and
that she wished she could learn to draw. Of all the girls I interviewed, life as she
described it had the least amount of housework and it did not feature very largely in her
description of afternoon activities. She discussed studying, having dinner and a little TV.
Shereen described how she tried to teach her mother to read and write, but it proved too
difficult for her and her mother said that she would have Shereen do any reading and
writing that she needed. She also taught her older sister how to read and write a few
things, and when an illiteracy class opened up, she encouraged her sister to go. However her sister's fiancée was not happy with her comings and goings and did not allow her to go regularly.

**SUSAN: CRITICAL THINKER**

I almost didn't interview Susan. I met with the whole class and decided whom I would talk to, and had started interviewing them when the teacher came up to me and indicated that Susan thought I would find her interesting. I was surprised, but agreed. I was extremely glad that I did. I recognized her after a while as being the focus of a documentary I had seen, though older. It proved to be one of my richest interviews and I am extremely grateful to her for coming forward. I remain very touched by meeting such a profoundly thoughtful, articulate and fair-minded young woman.

Susan indicated in the class meeting that she was 15, and then later told me that she was embarrassed to say her real age, 17, in class in front of the other students. Susan was the sixth of seven sisters, and the first person in her family to go to school. Her youngest sister also went to school with her and was currently attending middle school with Susan. Susan started school when she was ten years old since the custom in her family was to not educate. The route to the ministry school was far and her family decided it would not do to walk all that way to get there. She clearly recalled the time before she started school, saying, "I was really and truly, if you can imagine, I would see the girls going to school and cry, every morning when they went I would cry because I didn't go...I could feel that they are better than me because they went to school...I wished to go but honestly one day I sat down and wished it and my wish came true." Her family did not
immediately agree to send Susan when the social worker came to her house, but she returned, and the second time her father agreed. Susan was the only student who said outright that having no expenses in the school was a factor in joining it. Once she was enrolled in school and doing well, her family all encouraged her to continue and now have all their hopes pinned on her. Susan dreams of becoming a pediatrician also, like her cousin and best friend Shereen, who lives next door. Susan could not identify one subject as her favorite, saying that the CS had made her love them all and also excel in them all. As with other students also, math is giving her a hard time in school. Her favorite activity in school is reading aloud, and she has lots of confidence.

Susan had been the focus of a documentary on community schools, and when I asked her if she had ever seen the documentary she said no. I was able to show it to her the next day before the focus group and she was very touched to see her father, who had since passed away.

Her mother and sisters were all strongly supportive of her continuing her education, saying that all their hopes were pinned on her. Her activities after school consisted also of studying and having dinner. She did admit to enjoying a lot of TV but only on the holidays. Susan tried to teach her siblings to read and write, but it did not go very far. Susan struck me as having exceptional self-esteem, fairly judging her actions and those of others, and being realistic about her twists and turns at school. She was also the most critical thinker of the students I interviewed, questioning the assumptions of those around her, the status quo in her school and even the hypothetical questions I posed to her.
HASAN: MISSING HIS CS TEACHER

Hasan was 13 years old at the time I interviewed him. Hasan was the fifth of six children to a police ameen (cadet) father. He dreamed of becoming a police officer himself one day, the only student I interviewed who indicated that. All his siblings were in various stages of education save for his older brother who dropped out at third year of middle school. Both his parents knew how to read and write, and one of his older sisters also went to the CS. His younger sister tried to join the CS, but was refused. She walked half an hour to get to her government primary school, and was frequently walked there by Hasan for safety concerns. His favorite subjects were social studies and science, and he claimed it was easy to memorize them. His favorite activity was reading about animals in the encyclopedia. He also shared that he loved to watch animals on National Geographic TV, as well as monster movies and Transformers. English was his most difficult subject. When we met he was immensely disappointed his old CS teacher Miss Noha was not there, as he had come to our meeting expressly for the chance to see her. Miss Noha had married and relocated after teaching the Abu Tig cohort for the full six years. All the students were extremely attached to her, with the girls calling her frequently on the phone. Hasan, however, was unable to call her because, as he said, “she is now married”, and as a boy, this apparently might put Miss Noha in an awkward situation with her husband.
CHAPTER DISCUSSION: UNIQUE PERSONALITIES, COMMON SITUATIONS

This chapter explored the backgrounds and circumstances of the CS graduates and highlights the driving factors that led to these students not going to the primary MS. Themes that emerged from their profiles were related to safety, their desire for an education, their high ambitions and dislike of public schools.

Gendered Barriers

For almost all my participants, their gender put them at a huge disadvantage in having to overcome their parents’ real and perceived threats for them to go to school. Gender as a characteristic of unequal power relationships that show themselves at the household, community and national levels and often create disadvantages for girls (Unterhalter, 2012; Stromquist & Fischman, 2009), strongly applied to my participants in their parents’ concerns for their safety, views on gender roles and girls’ education.

The ‘proper’ place and role of women is a prominent issue in the minds of people in Egypt, and it is even more so in Upper Egypt. Girls’ honor, expectations of subordination to their male authorities, as well as the expectation that they will one day marry someone who will provide for them, and expected roles during their education and after they complete it, combine to create the notion that “girls don’t need an education.”

For example, Sweis (2012) refers to how Egyptian village girls are viewed as the most vulnerable of poor populations because in addition to lacking in education and health care, they are targeted for cultural and gendered forms of violence and harassment.
In addition, this is a culture where **familial male masculinity is closely tied to girls’ honor** and purity, which are tainted if she is the victim of sexual harassment (Shalaby & Roshdy, 2012). Victims of rape, for example, are seen as objects not victims, and the victim’s reputation, and that of her family, are destroyed beyond repair (HDR, 2010). Given that 23.9% of rural respondents in the Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) reported being sexually harassed (Population Council, 2010), it is not surprising that all of the parents who initially refused their daughters’ education cited safety and security reasons.

Education is also potentially unsafe because of **its potential to upset the status quo of male and parental authority** (Zaalouk, 2005). These dynamics are preserved in gender roles that are extremely **rigid and remain unaffected by education** (Mensch et. al., 2003). Mensch et. al. also found that Egyptian males and females support the belief that a wife needs her husband’s permission for everything, education does not challenge traditional gender roles for either males or females, and that women offer men obedience in return for economic support (2003). In this way, **education may be non-threatening to existing patriarchal systems as it elevates within the existing structure of society**, making education encouraged and discouraged: encouraged as means for improvement within existing societal structures, (social reproduction), discouraged as a means for change (Niyozov, personal communication, 2013).

Thus, prescribed **roles for girls as wives and mothers do not necessitate girls’ education or investing** in their earning potential since they will not be working outside the home anyway, “girls don’t need to go to school”. For expectations of such a life, it is
hard to justify the expense to the family and perceived risk to the girls’ safety and honor for an education.

Also significant is that all the girls mentioned **housework as a key part of their home life**. Assaad, Levison and Zibani (2010) found that the substantial burden of girls’ domestic work leads to lower rates of school attendance. While this did not appear to be a factor for school attendance with these participants, it was a factor in their time available for after school study.

**Desire and Value of Education**

My participants considered **education to be a key part of their life and identity**, and for those that were denied school prior to the CS, it was a turning point in their lives, in their self and social worth. They saw the value of an education in general, and their quality education in particular. Their parents all attempted to enroll their younger siblings in CS with varying degrees of success. They had enjoyed their primary years and saw education as a way to **better one’s self personally, socially and economically**.

**Dislike of Public Schools**

Nadia had dropped out of the MS because of maltreatment, however, a **general dislike of primary and middle school MS** was evident in all their descriptions, due to the low quality of education they were now receiving injustice and the discrimination they faced based on class and being from a rural village as opposed to the students from town. In addition, siblings’ negative experiences with the MS fed into their dislike.

**High Ambitions, Stratified Odds**
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The students all had big dreams and professional career ambitions. Their chosen paths will bring them face to face with **intensely high-stakes testing, long years of hard work and schooling, as well as crippling financial costs**. Elgeziri (2010) found that if poor families resisted pulling their children out of school during the primary stage, at middle school they opted for their children to go to technical high school because they realized that they could not afford the exorbitant costs of private lessons necessary to stand a chance in the general stream. In fact, Megahed & Ginsburg (2009) indicated that two thirds of students in preparatory schooling were enrolled in technical/vocational preparatory schools, a track considered “second-class” (Richards, cited in Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009), and “losers” (Sayed & Diehl, cited in Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009) with limited job prospects. Of all the students, Saeed is the one who stands the best chance of actually achieving his dream; given his family’s more advantaged socio-economic status.

**Relationship between Public Schools and Private Tuition**

One of the key issues that arose when discussing continuing their education is whether they can do well enough **without private lessons**. The term ‘public’ schooling is now an oxymoron due to the necessity for private lessons, where the average family spends between 20 and 50% of household income on these lessons (Hartmann, 2008; Bray, 1999). It is not a feasible option for most of these students, and consequently, their dreams of careers in the professions (except for teaching) are probably unlikely. This will be discussed further in Ch. 6.

Meeting these students and witnessing their tenacity, intelligence and hope, as well as how precarious their future education and dreams are, was a profoundly moving
experience for me. It brought home to me in a visceral way the injustice of social inequity, the waste of dreams and hopes and potential that is likely to follow. Juxtaposed in my mind at the same time, however, was the contrast between the opportunities afforded to these students compared with students at my own children’s school in Cairo. To be sure, their parents wanted the best for them; just I did with my own children. However, witnessing where these students are at, and becoming aware of some of the barriers they are likely to face, made me realize even more that studies like mine that aim to understand, explore and make sense of this social injustice are key to reversing it. In the following chapter, I explore more deeply how my participants’ came to join the CS, and their understandings and experiences of their schooling.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Although all unique, my participants backgrounds shared commonalities. For most of the girls, gender was a significant factor in the delay of their education. Fears for their safety and honor, gendered marriage roles, including expectations of being married and provided for one day, as well as expectations that they would need to obey their husbands, all served to support the notion in some of their parents’ minds that ‘girls don’t need an education’. However, as long as their education does not threaten the existing structure of society, they will likely be able to continue their education.

They considered education as a key part of their identity, and saw it as a way to better themselves, and had high ambitions and hopes for their futures. This is likely going confront them with difficult structural barriers, which will unfairly discriminate against those of them with fewer financial resources.
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*If the cost of schools are hard for him, it gives him a chance, if his age is older, it gives him a chance, so it's a chance for everyone for whom the costs are hard for... too old, the route is too far, so this gives everyone a chance to join.*

_Susan_

While some of the graduates of the CS cited its advantages for choosing the CS compared to the MS, others cited those same advantages as factors that made the CS an option compared to no school at all. In both cases, advantages of the CS continued to be key components of their CS life and education.

ADVANTAGES & REASONS FOR JOINING

**Proximity to Home**

For almost every single CS graduate interviewed, the CS's *proximity to home was a key advantage of the schools, in many cases the deciding factor for parents who initially refused to educate their girls*. The government primary MS was in the town, not the village, and thus a 40 minute walk away and, in some parents’ opinion, too far for girls to walk safely alone because of the risk of sexual harassment. Any kind of transportation was out of the question. When the CS opened close to home, parents relented. Both the girls and the boys consistently cited school proximity as an advantage and a reason for attending. Susan said, "it had everything good for us, no expenses, close because our home is over there and it is here, and it was close and the people know us here, so nothing would happen..." Thus, that the *school was close to home* and they
were known in the area and familiar with the people in the school gave her parents a feeling of security. One student elaborated, “There are people who put their kids in [the CS] because they felt more comfortable, because there are people who kidnap little kids. They were scared from that so they saw that these were safer, instead of the schools in town.”

Both Farah and Selma described the schools’ proximity as a ‘chance’. Farah said, "I wanted to learn like Dena [a neighbor] did, and I was very happy when she said [to my mother], ‘Take her to the CS, it’s a chance for her and very close and teaches well’, and then she [my mother] agreed…” Selma says about her parents, "my family did not agree for girls to get an education at MS, they said no, girls don’t leave the house… they refused the idea of an education for girls and as soon as we saw the school here opening up, we said these are schools close to home and a chance for us to learn and know how to read and write.” Thus, the school being close to home was the primary factor they were able to go.

For other parents, particularly those families with no brothers, not one of the daughters in the family had gone to school until the CS opened close by and the parents deemed it safe to send their daughters. Both Shereen and Susan, each the sixth of seven girls, cited it as the primary reason their parents allowed them to go to school, the first in their family to do so.

School proximity was an advantage for the boys also, though they were not bound by personal gender concerns for safety as the girls were, nonetheless it impacted them indirectly through concerns for their family members. For example, Hasan was
responsible for walking his younger sister to the government primary school a half hour away from their home when she was not able to get into his former, closer CS. For Mohammed, school proximity was still the primary reason he joined the CS, and repeatedly prioritized, "because this is close to home…I was happy that this school is close to home…because its close to home and explains well…”\footnote{I assumed this was so he could spend more time working and helping his family because his father was dead, although I did not question that.}

For the majority of the students whose families initially refused to educate their daughters and relented because of the CS’s proximity, they later allowed their daughters to go to the more distant government preparatory school after the primary cycle was finished. For example, after initially allowing Shams to go to the CS, "because here the education is close to home and not far," things unfolded differently after Shams had grown up and they saw how well she fared:

They said ok, she can go to school here and spend six years here [for the primary cycle] then no more school… and after I came to school here [and finished primary] I insisted that I go on to Manfalut [to the preparatory school].

Interviewer: You were the one who insisted, and they agreed?

Shams: Yes.

Interviewer: How did they agree, how did a little girl convince them?
Shams: I told them no, all the girls are getting an education why not me and things like that, so they told me ok, go.

Interviewer: When you came here you [learned to] object and told them. “No I want to go to Manfalut”…. so why are they happy from your education?

Shams: Because I’m clever and hard working…

Likewise for Farah,

At the beginning no one at all agreed. But when I went to Grade 1 and became very clever, they agreed. They didn’t want me to go to the Manfalut school [the prepatory school]. They said, she’s so clever, her handwriting is beautiful and she’s so clever, then my dad said ok, let her continue… and my [extended] family was saying don’t let her go and they [my parents] were following my family’s talk, they were saying education is dangerous for girls they shouldn’t go past this stage, and they were worried for me.

In Susan's case, she did not need to convince her family to go to prepatory school, "after I went to school and they knew that I was clever and it was worth it for me, they were all encouraging me to continue…” Thus the CS was a stepping-stone to allowing the daughters to later go further afield.

As discussed in Ch. 4, the notion that education is dangerous for girls stems from two main concerns: the gender specific harassment girls may be subjected to, especially given the unstable security situation in Egypt for the past 2 ½ years; and the fear that education will open girls’ minds to challenge male and parental authority.
Better Teaching

Every single participant repeatedly cited the reputation of the CS for better teaching, better than the MS. “Its education is better,” and, “the teachers explain more” was a common remark by all the participants.

However, untangling "teaching better" from teacher care and teacher attitude is impossible, and teacher quality includes teacher attitude *ipso facto*. However, while recognizing that, for the purposes of this study I limit 'teach better' in terms of how well and thoroughly the teacher explained, and will refer to teacher care and attitude in the next section.

Ali’s conversation about the notion of better teaching was sprinkled all over with comments on the teachers explaining better,

- Its education is better...we learned better things than we would have learned at MS. The teachers explain more...teach more...they really teach them [the students], they teach them and if someone doesn't understand, they repeat the lesson...frankly they used to teach us the best education we used to learn so much and were so clever.

Like Ali, all the students cited teachers explaining well constantly. The notion of what ‘explaining well’ meant comprised many aspects. For example, Soha expressed how her teachers would *explain things repeatedly*, "[for] those who understand, ok, and those who didn’t she would repeat it again several times so that he understands…” Selma explained how they *made her understand* what they were teaching, “[they] make us understand...they teach for real,” and *were not be bound by a short time span of the*
class and, as Shereen expressed, “leave without finishing the explanation properly.”

Thus, explaining repeatedly, making sure the students understood and having enough time to do these things were key.

Interestingly, Saeed's father is an inspector with the Ministry of Education, and therefore has extensive knowledge of all the MSs in the locality. However, he sent his children to the CSs,

Because the CSs teach well but the other schools don't teach well. Because they care about the kids, if we don’t understand they explain it once, twice, thrice and their way of dealing with kids is good, and they care about the kids, and here the teachers treat the kids like they’re their own kids.

In Nadia's case, the idea of the teacher having a conscience and doing her job well was central: "conscientiousness...they used to explain really well, they don't just explain it one time, they maybe used to take four days on one lesson, writing, working on the exercises, explaining, reading everything." Taking the time with the material was essential to explaining well.

Another angle on the higher educational quality was brought up by Susan, who described how having four classes a day and not seven like the MS, allowed the teachers to explain the material to the students in depth, multiple times if need be until every student had understood, she says,

In the CS we used to take four classes only, but in the MS we take seven or six.

The time [per lesson] is longer, and we finish [the school day] at the same time as
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the MS. Instead of the lesson being explained in half an hour it is being explained in an hour, everything is explained in it, so that, for example, [as a teacher] I don't give questions in the exam that were only in the private lesson, that the teacher didn't explain in class. It isn't easy for us, so in the CS they used to explain the whole lesson; nothing is stuck for us in the exams.

The time span of Susan’s lessons in her preparatory MS was too short for the material that was required in the curriculum, thus having fewer lessons and longer lesson times allowed the CS teacher to be comprehensive in the material.

Thus, the better teaching lauded by all the students covered, outside of care and attitude: explaining things repeatedly, making sure all the students understood, having enough time to spend on the lesson and cover all the material, less pressure to finish fast, and the teacher doing her job conscientiously.

“I loved Teacher Amira and when I loved the teacher I loved English”: The Student-Teacher Relationship and Learning

Consistently, the students associated their love of learning with their teachers. Their earliest learning experiences at the CSs were caring and patient. Susan says of her first days:

She [Miss Noha] took some time that she spent explaining on the board, she took some time because we couldn't read, she took some time to teach us how to read and then after that she said every two next to each other get to know each other.

So every two, whether they were a girl and boy or a girl and girl or a boy and boy,
got to know each other. After that we spent some time where she would give us a lesson, we would study it and she would write on the board, instead of, for example, everyone reading from his book, she would write on the board. And for grades 1 and 2 the lessons were small, and she would write on the board and would motivate the kids by bringing them prizes, so she would encourage the kids to learn to read.

The time taken to invest in the teacher’s relationship with the students, and the students’ relationship with each other, the manageable steps taken in lessons, the care in motivating the students and developing a love of learning in the students before heavy material, teaching them how to read before teaching them material; these are elements that are key to quality education everywhere but in short supply in both public and private schools in Egypt.

For Nadia, her early positive experiences learning to read laid the foundation for a love of reading, "when I came, teacher Noha was teaching us to read, how to read, fundamentally how to read the letters and sound them out and connect them together to be able to say the word and read it, and in that way I learned to read and write very well, and I love to read actually, and any book, even if its not mine, in my siblings bags, in primary, I like reading the lessons in primary school [books]."13

13 I was initially puzzled by this taste in books, until I learned that for 88% of Egyptian households, school textbooks are the only books available in the house (The Economist, 2010).
For students who had transferred from MS, they contrasted the treatment they received and their relationships with their teacher at both schools. School maltreatment in Egypt is all too common and familiar through sibling and friends’ experiences as well as popular culture. Nadia says, "I went to a school in town, but I didn't like it... it was horrible, the teachers there used to beat us... sometimes I didn't go at all, I would get there and not go in, I didn't like it at all." She contrasted this type of treatment in the MS with the care she found in the CS, "Teacher Noha used to deal with us as if we are her siblings and her kids... not she is the teacher and we are the students and her authority will be imposed on all." Many students echoed these experiences. Thus the relationship between the students and the teachers described is not one of subordination and control, but of love and care.

In fact, it was common for many students to contrast the treatment received at the CS with that of the MS. For example, Saeed said, "here they treat the kids well whereas there they insult them with hitting and bad language…"

Susan elaborated, "I feel there's no caring there. Here they care and here there was constant supervision and there was follow-up, we must understand, because here the CS teacher doesn’t just sign an attendance sheet…” Susan’s description is one of a vocation of teaching, not a job.

Shereen explained how care and her relationship with her teacher at the CS intertwined with better teaching,

If someone doesn’t get anything she [the teacher] explains it again until he understands, they stand beside him, not leave him. But in the MS everyone has
one class, they do it and leave, go to the next class, well, they don’t care about us like here. I can't describe to you what she [Teacher Noha] was like, she wasn't a teacher with me, she was a sister, and if I didn't know something she would explain it to me at break. They had learning aids in the learning corners for people like us, for when someone doesn't know something he can learn it. The thing that I didn't learn, she would sit with me in the learning corner and explain it to me, she would let me know what it was. When I was sad she would sit with me and tell me not to be sad, stuff like that, she was very good with me.

Shereen’s description of the relationship is one where the relationship between the teacher and student is used as a conduit for motivating and learning.

Additionally, other students also characterized their relationship with the teacher as very close, and the issue of the students first loving the teacher and consequently her teaching was made extremely explicit by the majority of the students over and over, Susan says, "she made things easy for us, so she was the one who made us love school and learning. “Hasan's explanation of why he loved school was clear, "Miss Noha got me used to it, Miss Noha made me love it, and she used to treat me well, in everything. Likewise for Selma, "because I loved my Teacher Amira and when I love Teacher Amira I love English…” as well as Abeer, "Teacher Amira made us love it…”

By sharp contrast, khallooh yikrah el madrasa, (they made him/her hate school) was a theme that surfaced for many participants’ siblings: Nadia’s brother, Farah’s brother, Soha’s sister, and Shams’ sister, as well as being a common refrain in Egypt.
In Mohammed's case, he took the slower pace of the lessons as a sign of caring, "It means that they care about it, and are constantly improving, they study it. Here they used to study it and give us a lesson, then two lessons. They’d give us half the lesson, for example if it was a poem, they would give us half, and then the rest [of the poem] the next lesson...here they explain well and properly and with effort in their work." Thus **going at the student's pace** was key to Mohammed.

Susan attributed the students' relationship with the teacher to **the long periods of time they spent together throughout the day and over the years**, in comparison to the preparatory school where each teacher spends a period and leaves,

Its different, [the relationship] dealing with teacher, here it was, and I think we were, because everyone gives a lesson and that's that, and they see you once a day and *khalas* [that’s it], but here, the teachers are with us all day, for six years, so the [relationship] and dealing with each other was closer. The CS teacher doesn't just sign an attendance sheet.

From talking to the students it emerged that many of the students remained in contact with their teachers and there were many emotional moments when they recalled their old CS teachers in both schools. In the case of Teacher Noha, who had moved away from the area after the being with her students for six years, it was particularly difficult. Hasan had thought he was going to see Teacher Noha on the day of my visit and that was why he came, "I miss her all the time actually. Yesterday I didn’t know there was anyone [i.e. referring to me] coming today, I was just coming to say hello to her, but she didn’t come (tears)."
Saeed reflected on how his CS teacher will continue to take pride in his achievements long after they were together,

Because they care about the kids, if we don’t understand they explain it once, twice, and thrice. Their way of dealing with kids is good, and they care about the kids, and here the teachers treat the kids like they’re their own kids.

Interviewer: Really? Is there really something like that? Your kids are not like anyone else.

Saeed: Yes miss.

Interviewer: How?

Saeed: Because she makes them grow up to be something good, something she can be proud of, when he graduates she can say he's my son, he was with me and now he’s an engineer.

Ahmed goes around to his old teachers Amira and Koboul quite often and helps out, "on school days, if I'm coming home and the route is quick I come here. Every three to four days…I teach them letters in English and correct their copybooks, I write things in their copybooks that they have to do.” Mohammed says, "the credit goes to them you know, we learned in this school," a sentiment echoed by Shams, "they are the ones who taught us the foundations at school and we love to come here because we love them. If we didn't love them we wouldn't have come." Farah is particularly explicit, "When we love the teacher we love the subject."
The students are effusive at attributing credit to their teachers for making them learn, and the students’ relationship with the teacher was tightly interwoven with the quality of education. Their earliest experiences were patient and at a suitable pace for the students to learn, primarily to read. From the very beginning, the teachers invested time and energy in developing positive relationships in the classroom: between the teachers and students, between the students and each other, and between the students and learning. The teachers also translated the students’ love for them into a love of learning in general. They were supported in this by spending long periods of time with the students, during the school day and consistency as their teachers throughout the years. The relationship is described as a vocation of love and care, not control and subordination. This was especially clear when contrasted with their siblings’ treatment at primary MS or even their own preparatory MS experience. The teachers invested their efforts in the children, but also the structure of the system including the school time allotments, created an environment where this effort was possible.

Findings like this are strongly and consistently to be found in other schools in different settings. Wilson and Corbett (2007) in their multi-year study with over thousands of students described almost the exact same findings, “There is no escaping the conclusion that schooling is all about relationships…Students equated caring with teaching.” (p.309-310). The student-teacher relationship acts as an umbrella that encompasses other teaching skills (Noddings, 1992; Cook-Sather, 2009).
Economic Factors

Most students were reluctant to discuss their families’ financial circumstances, yet it was another significant factor that impacted parents' decision to attending the government primary school (B.N., personal communication, February 2nd, 2013). Despite their clear economic disadvantage, it was very awkward to talk about the students' financial situations and only Ali came closest to saying it was a reason for his attending, "I found that this one was closer and also the [financial] circumstances that they told you about and the trip is closer to home and I heard that its education is better…” though he was clearly uncomfortable and was quick to stress that the school's quality was a much more important reason he attended.

My interpretation is twofold: that it is not easy to talk about difficult financial circumstances for proud people, and all the students I spoke to were very proud. In addition, the advantages of the CS are so intertwined, it was hard to single out one out of context. For example Susan said,

There are people who are very financially comfortable and going to these schools, why? Because they see people graduating from it turning out well, so they see the results. There’s no family where all the kids go to CS, there are some who go to MS, and they see what the kids who went to CS have become and what the kids who went to MS have become. So they prefer to send them to CS, like our schools, because they see a very good result. Its not about fees, the problem is in the person, the person who teaches and the person who is learning also.

She cited her neighbor's experience:
There was someone living in front of us, when they started taking the names to have us join our CS school, her daughter was young enough to go to MS, and she said no, I won’t send my daughter to these schools, at that time. At the beginning, we were the first group to join it and the first time we had heard of this project. So she said no, I won’t send my daughter to these schools I will send her to a better MS. She belittled the CS school completely, and sent her daughter to the religious primary school El-Azhar, it’s a MS. When Al-Solayman 2 [a CS] opened, she took her daughter out of the MS, wallahy (I swear), she took her daughter out of the MS and put her in this school. She saw the results that happened with us. She saw us, for example, we would get books from here without money. We also have another lady, rich, she also sent her daughter to a normal school. We used to get food supplies like rice and such, and also we got our copybooks and pencils from them [the CS]. Anything we needed from them. So she pulled her daughter out of MS and made her lose a year, [start Grade 1 over again] to put her in a school like this [CS].

Thus people who are relatively better financially off also opt to send their children to the CS, though whether it is the combination of functionally free schooling with perceived quality education, or other some other factor is unclear.

Without a doubt, however, the students I interviewed were not wealthy. The average number of siblings is 5.5. None of the fathers’ jobs pay well in Egypt, and for the students’ whose fathers are deceased, the widowed mother supports them on the father’s meager peasant pension.
Table 2: CS Graduates fathers’ job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Father's job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>Day laborer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farah</td>
<td>Works in Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selma</td>
<td>Concrete stairs builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soha</td>
<td>Peasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shams</td>
<td>Concrete stairs builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saeed</td>
<td>Teacher/inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>Painter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shereen</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasan</td>
<td>Police cadet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That the **CS are functionally free** means that the families of the students **do not** incur any extra expenses pertaining to the student's education. One cost that is not
possible to recoup in any school, particularly for the boys, is the lost income the family incurs when the student spends the day at school.

Table 3: Comparing between CS and MS associated costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School associated costs</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>MS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uniform</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School fees</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>&quot;Donations&quot; requested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO food support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School supplies</td>
<td>Provided by school</td>
<td>Student responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private lessons</td>
<td>Not necessary</td>
<td>Very important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table, it is clear that students at the ministry ‘public’ schools incur significant expenses in their education, making the CS more ‘public’ than the MS. The CS also functions as a provider of basic food and education subsidies, in comprehensive fashion closer to the state role in the 50’s and 60’s, when the quality of education did not need private lessons, and school meals were provided.

The issue of whom the CS should target came up in the second focus group interview. There were two camps: Susan said, "there are people who are not comfortable financially, they can’t send their kids to MS, also they should be able to find this school…first they need to look for the people who need it most." Here Susan made it quite clear that although the schools can accept all students, ultimately the focus should remain on those who could not go to other schools. Other present agreed with her.
Nadia, however, saw things differently, "Whoever wants to learn, so CS shouldn’t be skewed just towards the poor, not towards the ones who don't have money, everyone who wants to join should [be able to] join it."

This raises the issue of equity: how equitable is it to deny a quality education to someone because they are in a position to go to another, much worse school? Isn’t this punishing them for being slightly less disadvantaged? People who are better off financially are not necessarily wealthy. They have no qualms about sending their children to the CS seeing that a quality education is their right too and it cannot be had even for money in many parts of Egypt. No one wants to risk their children’s future.

**DISADVANTAGES, IMPROVEMENTS**

Although overall the CS offered many advantages, there were several improvements the CS graduates wanted to see.

Shereen expressed her desire to see the schools painted properly, although the teachers and students decorated the walls with their art. Some students had experienced a replacement of the second teacher several times over the course of their study, and Hasan commented, "[when] the Miss leaves the subjects it takes time while the [new] Miss is trying to learn us and stuff like that, and it becomes hard."

Ali requested that the school classroom needs to be made bigger, "the worst thing here is that there's no playground and the classroom is tight." He wished it could be as spacious as the MS but with the same educational level. When I attended the informal observation as a researcher, there was barely enough room for the 22 first graders and the
two teachers. From this, it is clear that there was far less room when the students were older and physically bigger, as well there was no playground.

Soha wished that she could have utilized the computer more, as it was usually not working. Indeed, in all the classes I attended, the computers were not working. It is easy and glamorous to give children computers, but much less glamorous and more expensive to maintain those computers so students can actually use them\(^\text{14}\). In MS schools, although a computer may be present, often students are not allowed to touch or use them (UNDP, 2010).

The students also expressed their desire to have continued their education in a prepatory CS if it had been available. There were plans for one in the second school area I visited, but it did not materialize.

VARIATIONS IN SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES

The students were aware not all CS experiences were similar to their own positive one. Ahmed's younger sister is currently in a CS next door to his old one, but with a different teacher. He remarked that the quality of education she is receiving is less than his education as diplomatically as possible,

In [my sister's] class they don’t teach like Teacher Amira or Teacher Koboul even though it’s a CS… still, they learn well and everything but… (Voice trails off).

\(^\text{14}\) In fact, I attended a conference on education where a representative from a global computer component manufacturer announced that his company had plans to give every single child in several governorates a computer. I told him of my observation. It was received politely.
Interviewer: There’s a difference?

Ali: Yes, I want them to educate her, to teach her much information.

Likewise for Nadia, whose brother is in Grade 4 in a primary school and cannot yet read, similar to one third of students in primary MS schools, (Sobhy, 2012), Nadia explains,

My brother, until now he can’t read, and he’s in Gr 4, and you know why? Because the teacher is not attending… there’s no one [no other teacher] besides her and she is absent a lot…she probably has extenuating circumstances, but she should do something to get another teacher, because [this way] she’s being unjust to the kids. Even if she has extenuating circumstances, but she should still consider the kids’ situation, they are a trust with her, she should take care of them, not neglect [the trust] and leave it and go.

Thus, from the students' perspective, being in a CS model did not guarantee a good education, rather it was subject to variation is teacher quality.

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT

From the beginning, the CS set out to sidestep the MS model, and I was curious to know what the students' experiences were with these three facets of schooling that are responsible for shaping that experience.
Pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignettes from two CS school days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Arabic group work, Grade 1, El-Hemma, April 30, 2013:**

Class is divided into three small groups. Teacher 2 (T2) tells me that they are separated by level. Teacher 1 (T1) describes what each group needs to do. The strongest group is to organize sentences to make a paragraph of the lesson. The medium group is to make sentences out of words, and the weakest group is to make words out of letters. They use learning aids made by the teachers, a board of 3 rows of plastic squares so words can slide in on the cardboard. Words of one sentence are all in the same color. T1 then asks, “What do you think the focus of the lesson is?“

Students: The letter ‘waw’.

T1: That’s right

T2: Now let’s lift the chairs [as opposed to dragging them] and reconfigure the tables. Students do this extremely quietly. Teachers go over to the groups and help set up the activity. The leader of the day is handing out the notebooks. T2 gives out placards that read “Help please” to each table. T1 is working through with one of the groups showing them punctuation. Students first copy sentences from the learning aid to their copybooks, then do the group work.

T1 is explaining *tashkeel* (Arabic grammatical marks) to a group and how it changes the word from a noun to another form of the noun, and how one is classical Arabic and the other form is the colloquial or spoken Arabic. Asked students to find the *madd* (an Arabic grammatical device) in the word. Some get it right and some get it wrong. When they get it wrong she repeats the word again, exaggerating the *madd* sound to highlight it.
T1 changes the Q around and asks students to explain why they gave the answers they did. Asks for synonyms, plurals and singles, spellings and pronunciations.

Each group presents what they did. Boy writes the sentence on the board correctly, but has a mistake in handwriting. T1 asks someone to correct. Lots of hands go up and answer. Now the Strawberry group (the weaker group) gets up. Explains that they needed to find words with a ‘waw’. The presenter for the group is following his group’s instructions. Asking kids and writing answers on the board. Most of the class has their hands up to be picked.

Wrap up the lesson by singing an alphabet song. Every person stands up and sings a letter, drawing the shape of the letter in the air. Time for break. Students pack their notebooks into a pile, put their textbooks into their cubbies, line up and leave.

**Arabic lesson, Grade 4 revising for end-of-year exam, April 28, 2013:**

Teacher writes lesson on board and class will work together on grammar rules. Passage says:

“Egypt’s youth are the hope for the future, they work for its development and progress. Every person must work diligently to achieve the goals. Children of Egypt, do not dawdle in your work, for Egypt is great because of its children, and the sincere do not say except words of love for Egypt.”

Teacher asks to pick out a grammatical device used in the passage.

Lots of students have their hand up, waving wildly to get picked.

Teacher asks for grammatical analysis. Students jumping out of their seats to come up to board to write answers.
Curriculum

For the cohorts that I interviewed, the curriculum for the CS students was different from the curriculum for the MS students. The government curriculum was revised in math, Arabic, science, and social studies to be quantitatively less, and more activity-based (UNICEF, 2010; Zaalouk, 2006), avoiding the infamously over-stuffed MS curriculum. Though having a curriculum with less material allowed the teachers to take more time and engage with the material in a deeper way, it created problems for the students when they went to the preparatory MS school in several subjects, particularly math. New material in Gr 7 built on the concepts that they missed out on in Gr 6. Susan explains,

In math there were things that were built on things in Gr 6 that we did not take, they were in the government [curriculum]. When we took them [the advanced concepts] and the teacher explained it to us, I spent a day crying, I couldn’t understand it. I spent a day crying, so I told the teacher and she said khalas [that’s it], you and the UNICEF girls, tell me your names and come to me during recess. I said ok, I told her at recess and she said khalas, you have a lesson today, either way so I will explain it to you, and she did.

In 2010, the MOE and UNICEF decided to align the CS curriculum with the MS curriculum as the mismatch between the two in skills and content was making the transfer from CS to MS difficult for the children (UNICEF, 2010). There appears to have been little discussion on the impact this would have on the active learning pedagogy, as the overloaded curricula of the MS leaves little time for constructivist learning.
Assessment

From the beginning of the CSs, assessment was always done in accordance with the exams of the MOE. Previously, the MOE exams were based on the different CS curriculum. Now, however, the curriculums are the same now, and the exams are identical also.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

Better Teaching is Steady and Straightforward

Quality of teaching includes attitude, as described earlier. However, looking at the better teaching practices outside of attitude, the CS graduates described the better teaching as explaining subject matter repeatedly, making sure the students understood, not rushing the material. This was supported by the longer lesson times and the fewer lessons in the school day (four lessons a day). These findings echo almost exactly those found by Wilson & Corbett (2007), who examined thousands of inner city students in struggling schools. They found that good teaching according to the students was unswerving and simple: “Be strict. Help. Explain clearly. Provide variety. Understand students,” (p. 307) and that the most supportive environment for this in-depth understanding to happen was when the school day had longer blocks for lessons, four blocks of 90 minutes a day, as opposed to seven lessons for 50 minutes a day. The teachers had more time to elaborate on the explanations and respond to questions. They also found that the increased time allowed the teachers’ to tailor teaching to the students’ particular needs.
"When we like the teacher we love the subject..." The Student Teacher Bond and Love of Learning

To my surprise, the student-teacher bond was at the core of the student CS experience. Every single student attributed their love of learning to the person of their teachers. This was a consistent theme throughout all of the schooling experiences: whether they were discussing the knowledge and skills they learned, the attitudes they had adopted, or showing me artwork and projects they had completed, their bond was still strong when I interviewed the students.

This bond was manifested through three ways: the caring and kindness shown by the teachers; the students progressing and learning with the teachers; and how the teachers chose to deal with the misbehaviors when things went wrong. However, it is a complex relationship, where teaching the students affects the bond they have, and their behavior in the classroom, which makes the discipline easier, and makes it easier for the teachers to care for them, and so teach them and so on in an upward spiral.

Research in psychology also attests to this relationship. According to attachment theory, all children require warm, supportive relationships with caring and receptive adults for healthy development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Studies looking at the association between the quality of early teacher-child relationships and later school performance can be powerful and enduring as research in educational psychology, as well as attachment theory, shows (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta et. al., 2008) and in diverse domains, academically, (Pianta & Steinberg, 1992), psychosocially, and behaviorally (Hughes, Cavell & Jackson, 1999). Educational research by Wilson and Corbett (2007)
also attests to the importance of this bond. **Good teachers develop relationships with their students.**

It is worth noting that CS teachers are not allowed to physically abuse the students, and, more importantly, are trained in the use of classroom management techniques that do not involve physical punishment. This is important given that corporal punishment is extremely common; with an NCCM/UNICEF survey finding that almost all interviewed school children reported being corporally punished at school (96%) at some point (2006). Nearly one in every two children (44%) had been corporally punished within the week preceding the survey, and 91% have been corporally punished during the current school year (NCCM, 2006), and the Egypt Human Development Report (2008) declared that 50% of students in rural areas and 70% of students in urban areas are subjected to physical abuse. Given that corporal punishment includes hitting, spanking, beating, kicking and many other forms, it is not at all surprising that *khallooh yikrah el madrasa* (they made him/her hate school) was a common refrain.

In both intellect and affect, the **CS teachers were central to the positive experiences the participants had with school, and with learning in general.** Their experiences reminded me of the adage, ‘People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care’. The centrality of teachers’ to the CS graduates experiences in school was the key to making their school experience positive.

**Varying Influence of the CS**

The different facets of the CS varied in their influence, depending on whether the student was from a background that had previous experience with education in the family
or not. For those families where the student I interviewed was the first one to attend school in the family, proximity to home was the primary advantage and condition for them to attend. For those families where there was previous experience in education, for example through the students' siblings, the proximity to home shared significance with the higher quality of education received in the CSs compared to the MS.

**Change in Parent Attitude**

Shereen and Susan had ten older sisters between the two of them, whom their parents had refused to educate, and were against Shereen and Susan's education because of safety reasons. Yet, both girls' younger sisters now attend school. Additionally, Farah's family was against educating girls and against sending them to preparatory MS after the primary cycle, and Selma's parents were resistance to girls' education at first, yet later enrolled or tried to enroll all her younger siblings in school. In all four cases, the families relented and supported their daughters to continue their education because they were doing very well in the CS school.

Clearly, meeting students where they are at, even if they are past the age of ten and cannot read has worked both to educate girls who could not get an education, and to change the educational trajectories for the other family members.

On the other hand, for two students from these cohorts who terminated their education after the primary cycle (and whom I could not interview), the threat to their security from vendettas was not changed by how well they did at school. The vendettas
common to this area are discussed in detail in Ch. 6. Many, but not all, problems can be solved by a good education.

**Gender Expectations and Education**

For the girls who were denied school by their parents, they had a huge desire to go to school, that sometimes lasted for years. This was not expressed by any of the boys, one of whom had dropped out of MS and for the other two, it was expected that they go to some form of schooling. For the students in this study, for girls, the problem was creating the conditions were they could go; whereas for boys, the problem was creating the conditions where they wanted to go. For example, Mohammed’s mother enforced his going to school everyday when he didn't want to go at the beginning.

The main problem for girls related to safety. As mentioned earlier, concerns about the safety of education relate to both the security of the girls outside the house, as well as threats to male authority.

**Chances: First, Second, Only**

When the obstacles going to school were removed, the students were denied entry or had dropped-out were able to go. For many of the students in the study, the CS represented their last real chance at an education.

For Mohammed and Nadia, the CS represented a second chance after they dropped out the MS after Grade 1. The environment set up by the CS, and teachers’ care and pedagogy managed to make the second chance work for them. For Farah, Selma, Shereen and Susan, the CS represented first and probably only chance at an education.
outside of illiteracy classes, and opened up a door of other chances, life trajectories, and opportunities for their siblings. Again, for those who could not go to school this chance was eagerly grasped at; for those who did not want to go to school there was resistance initially.

Change is in the Air

I was surprised to find so many changes in the CS model from what I had read about as detailed below. The original model of CS is converging with the mainstream public schooling model. The changes in curriculum and reduction of active learning time via the learning corners to accommodate the increase in curriculum, as well as teacher recruitment policies, attest to that. The length of each class is being planned for 45 minutes, down from 75 minutes. These changes are happening incrementally, for strong reasons cited by teachers\(^{15}\) as well as students, in addition to program administrators\(^{16}\).

\(^{15}\) (K.H., personal communication, Feb 3\(^{rd}\), 2013)

\(^{16}\) (O.N., personal communication, January 15\(^{th}\), 2013)
Table 4: Changes in the CS model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CS 1999</th>
<th>CS 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pedagogy</strong></td>
<td>Learning corner activities (active learning) in 2 blocks of the day</td>
<td>Currently same. Plans underway to reduce active learning blocks as more didactic learning needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Adaptation of government curriculum</td>
<td>Government curriculum as is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Government administered, based on CS curriculum</td>
<td>Government administered, based on typical government c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other changes in CS since starting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Homework</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-grade</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administration</strong></td>
<td>Intl NGO</td>
<td>Egyptian NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical property</strong></td>
<td>Basic requirements of space</td>
<td>More requirements regarding bathrooms, spacing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher education requirements</strong></td>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>Both university degree and diploma of education necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher commute</strong></td>
<td>Walking distance</td>
<td>Requires transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


For my participants, they were one of the last cohorts to use the CS modified curriculum. Subsequent cohorts have the same curriculum as the MS, and thus need more blocks of didactic learning to cover the requirements. This poses a challenge to the active learning pedagogy, as it needs more time.
Taken together, these findings call for a recognition that the changes in the CS model are bringing it closer and closer to the MS model, however, there has not been, to the best of my knowledge, a frank articulation, recognition, or discussion about this convergence. These changes may be necessary for the CS to evolve to serve its community better, and I am not arguing for or against them at the present time. However, without an open discussion between all the stakeholders of this changed direction, the model risks facing the same challenges of the MS and becoming clones of them, creating inefficiencies due to parallel systems doing the same thing, and losing sight of its original goals and target population.

The neoliberal ideology driving these changes on the CS model is hard to miss. As well as reduced autonomy for the teachers, changes such as increased teacher qualifications point to standardization of the model, as well as shorter learning corner times and an identical curriculum with the MS spell greater efficiency. In addition, the UNICEF (2010) assessment comes to mind, in which it was recommended that a tiered fee system be started, taking care so that “disadvantaged children are not stigmatized and contributors are not resentful” (p. 115). The effect of this on the classroom dynamics would be unhelpful to say the least, affecting teacher-student relationships as well as students’ relationships with each other.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The CS were found to have solved key problems the parents of the CS graduates had with letting their children go to school. Physical proximity to home was the most critical advantage cited by those girls whose parents were against girls’ education. In
those cases it was the deciding factor. It also acted as a stepping stone for these girls to later go further afield to the preparatory MS, as well as opening the door for other sisters to go to school and other siblings to join the CS. Seeing their children succeed in school changed parents’ attitudes to supportive after initially resisting their daughters’ education. The CS represented for many of the students’ their only chance at going to school, and for others who had dropped out, it was a second chance for them.

The better teaching at the CS compared to the MS included teacher attitude, explaining things repeatedly, and taking time with the material. Four classes each day supported this style of teaching reducing the pressure typical in the MS. This also contributed to the teachers and students developing a close and warm bond. The students associated their love of learning with their teachers and recalled their first experiences as caring and patient. The teachers invested time and energy in their relationships with the students.

Economic factors were also key in the CS graduates joining the CS, although they were reluctant to talk about this aspect. The CS were functionally free and supported these participants with supplies and food subsidies, as well as not requiring any school expenses such as fees or uniforms. However, the CS also attracted students whose parents were relatively well-off because of its reputation for quality education, although this quality was not uniform across other schools.

The pedagogy of the CS was active-learning, and the curriculum and assessment were adapted from the government, although this is changing. There needs to be an open discussion of the implications of these changes on the students and teachers.
6. FINDINGS - POST COMMUNITY SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Having graduated from the CS with dreams, hopes and aspirations that were previously impossible, the next step in continuing the graduates’ education was the preparatory (or middle school) MS. Here they met a new set of challenges and opportunities: differences in the learning environment with respect to teachers and classmates, and a longer route. While happy to be continuing their education and getting closer to their dreams, the significance of those challenges tempered their optimism. The responses of the students to the changes varied between the fatalistic, the bitter and the heartbroken.

TEACHING DIFFERENCES

Nadia summed up her experiences as running the gamut,

The teacher himself [at the MS] asks, is there anyone who doesn't understand?
We have teacher M, he explains Arabic and is very good…Teacher G in English, she is also very good …the teachers that I deal with, they are very good…[One teacher] when she comes [to class] and there are kids who haven't studied [the material already] she says I won't explain, when you study [at home first] then I'll explain. During the exam time, everyone wanted to tell the principal [about this] but didn't [for fear of reprisal]…[Another time] we were in math class and I solved the problem wrong and the teacher called me a name, not a horrible name but a name, something like you are stupid or a donkey or something. Since that day I ignore the [whole] subject.
Her experiences at the MS are not monolithic. There are teachers who explain well, teachers who care, teachers who don’t do their job and teachers who mistreat the students.

Saeed also expressed a similar opinion, "the teacher there [at the MS] explains, but not like here [in the CS] …some of them explain once, twice, thrice, and some just once, and some have class and don't go to [their assigned MS] class." In Mohammed's case, he does not even have a geometry teacher assigned to his geometry class. The teacher who is assigned to the other classes in his grade level comes in twice a week out of pity and, "we have to take private lessons and still [do] not understand anything." Thus, lessons, classes and ultimately students’ learning falls through the cracks as some teachers skip going to their classes altogether and other classes are not even assigned to anyone.

Farah also doesn't trust her teachers, she explains, "Once they said that for the monthly tests, we'll see the kids who have the high scores in class and we'll give her a prize or a trip…and gave us nothing. They wrote my name, I was top of my class [and] they didn't give us [anything], we have no trust in what they say,” although she expressed that some of her teachers are good. Some teachers do not keep their promises, and trust is lost.

The lack of connection with the teachers came up more than once. Shereen said, "in the government schools, everyone has one class, they do it and leave, go to the next class, they don't care about him [the student] like here [at the CS], but there the teacher gives [only] one subject to the whole school." Thus the teachers cannot have time for
establishing strong relationships the students within the time frame of one class a day.

Even teachers who want to teach face challenges from disruptive student behavior. Ali was with a teacher who selected the few students whom he decided really wanted to learn and, "We make a circle around him and he sits in the middle explaining to us and the others make noise and hit [each other] and fight. The rest, he leaves them, when he found out they don't want to learn, he left them." Hasan commented, "Imagine if she [the teacher] has 6 lessons, she goes from one class to another class and sometimes she comes in the middle of the lesson and the class is [almost] over, she doesn't have time to explain things. CS are better because the teacher can explain things well and I can understand, but there the teacher swears and she can't focus from all the moving from one class to another." As these examples demonstrate, even for teachers who want to teach, boisterous students whom teachers can't manage who are disrupting class time and the teacher does not have classroom management skills.

Although the teachers in the MS are not homogenous, any real efforts to teach are not supported by the school environment, and are complicated by the short time frame of the lesson relative to the curriculum requirements, the constant moving around, the lack of the teacher’s classroom management skills and the disruptions caused some students.

In such a learning environment, the specter of private lessons to make up for the inconsistent teaching was present in every student's comments regarding their preparatory
MS. Whether they took them or not, the private lessons significantly influenced all the students, with the students responses ranging from the fatalistic to the bitter.

PRIVATE LESSONS

*They take lesson in all the subjects, so if I take private lessons in all subjects, so when I am poor where am I ... supposed to get the money from? Where will my other siblings eat from and learn from?*

*Farah*

The need to have private lessons in the preparatory MS was found to have a significant effect on the students post CS. It threatened their ambitions and dreams of professional careers.

For Farah, the blow was very bitter,

Sometimes a whole day goes by without a single teacher coming to us…if you want to understand, you have to take a private lesson. Where is the money? Where will my parents take the money from to spend, my siblings? We went yesterday, we paid for the lesson, and we didn't learn anything at all, we asked him to explain again and he said no. He explains it once and when we tell him we didn’t get it he says [I’ll do it] at the end of the lesson, and at the end of the lesson, he says next lesson he says don't worry. We are poor people, how can we pay to learn in a private lesson? If there was money, they would have allowed me to study all the subjects in private lessons, so I can be cleverer…but there's no money…we have enough to cover basic needs. He says, “If you don't understand
EXPERIENCES IN EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

it here, understand it with money.” We are poor, where can we get the money from? Where am I supposed to get the money from? Where will my other siblings eat and learn from?

This excerpt demonstrates the extreme injustice that smart, hard-working and extremely motivated students are facing in the preparatory MS for lack of financial ability. Nevertheless, Farah says, "It should be that those who take private lessons are clever…I'm cleverer than they are…they got 600 and 700 [from 900]…I got 802."

Soha's older sister managed to take private lessons in some subjects, but "she had to take private lessons in all the subjects, and circumstances did not allow her to go to all the lessons, so she would take one or two lessons in the difficult subjects, so they would get back at her and give her a failing grade [in the others]..." As well, she spoke of the private lesson system in her own school, "they take private lessons, and the teacher who gives them private lessons gives them the exam paper, that they get in the exam." Cheating is rampant throughout the Egyptian school system, (Population Council, 2010) and in MS, and it is not uncommon for teachers to help their private lesson students cheat on the exams.

As well, with the overload in curriculum, the teacher may often skip parts in class that he will get to in the private lesson, putting students who don’t take the private lesson at a disadvantage. Susan, who is resigned to not taking private lessons because of lack of financial ability, was faced with exam questions that had been explained at the private lesson, unfairly leaving her without the information she needed to answer correctly,
They were doing graphing representation [in math], there was a condition you needed to do so that the graphic representation would turn out right, so the teacher didn’t tell us at school, but the girls who take private lessons solved it, because of course in the private lesson the teacher told them everything in the subject. But at school frankly she didn’t tell us about this, so this also is something that can make us lose points, and I don’t know whether the fault is from the teacher or whom. For sure this is a mistake that I did in the exam, but I don’t blame myself, because if she had given it to me I would have studied it and I would have understood, because it’s something small, but frankly she didn’t give us any idea about it, but the ones who take private lessons, they all solved it.

Thus, the private lessons are unjust to those who can’t take them in multiple ways: unlevelling the playing field in an extremely high stakes testing environment as well as changing the basic assumptions of the teacher to cut back on class instruction for the students who don’t take private lessons.

The decision to not take private lessons sometimes involved the student making the choice not to burden his/her family with extra expenses, Shereen says,

My dad is deceased and we have no brothers. I can't tell my mother today I need 25 LE [$3.5] to take a lesson [a months' fee for one subject's private lessons] I can't tell my mother, I need to be considerate of my siblings at home too, I need to work hard and learn through my effort, so I have my [younger] sister with me, she's with me also in the same school, and if I take a private lesson, she will need to take one too. I can't tell my mother, my mother won't object, but I must be
considerate on my own, I must be good with my mother because she said as you like, what I can do I will do to support you, so she didn't deny us anything.

The students are well aware of their families’ limitations and shoulder their challenges within those limitations. The private lessons strike at the heart of equity in education. It positions those who can’t afford it in ignorance of the material, resisting cheating, and stresses them out as they are burdened with not asking their parents as they fall behind because of financial disability.

Compensatory Strategies

The students met the challenges of the private lessons with various responses. In Shereen's case, she says,

You have to concentrate with the teacher who is explaining, if you don’t understand, this is something that comes back to you, they can't explain it to you again, they don't explain it to you again. They would say come to us at recess…you come at recess, and we'll explain it to you, sometimes if I go once to the teacher at recess I can't go again. They say, do you always not understand or what? So you have to pay attention to the teacher in front of you.

To compensate for this, Shereen said she sometimes asks her classmates, and sometimes her sister, "there are things I don't know that my younger sister knows, and she comes to tell me and I know them from her, if she doesn't I say khalas [that’s it] …"

Asking other students and making the most out of class time were common strategies.
However, these strategies were further complicated by the differences in curriculum that existed between the CS and the MS because **no amount of concentrating in class could fill in the gaps the CS graduates had as a result of curriculum differences** between the CS and the MS in primary school. This was especially true of math, the subject the majority of students cited as most difficult. As Susan explained in Chapter 5, math concepts in Gr 7 are built on concepts in Gr 6 that had not been included in the CS curriculum. In that situation, she was able to get help from the math teacher herself, who was understanding and supportive of the CS graduates. However, as just explained in her math exam, things do not always work out so successfully.

In cases where the students did not receive the textbooks prior to the term exams, Mohammed explained that they studied for the exam from a summary, one that was sold at a local bookstore. Mohammed was able to take private lessons for the subject he had difficulty with, and managed to get what he needed from it.

**ROUTE**

For students of both schools that I interviewed, the route to the preparatory school was significantly longer. Whereas the students were at most ten minutes away from their CS, the walk to the preparatory MS was 45 minutes each way. For girls in particular, safety was a concern, Nadia says, "We hear things that girls get kidnapped." The students all spoke of going together in small groups for company. For the people on the afternoon school shift, this means that by the time they get home in winter, it is close to sunset and therefore unsafe to go out. For others, the longer route spelled the end of their schooling because of the risks of *Tar*. 
Tar and the Termination of Schooling

The longer MS route combined with the Tar, or vendetta threat, led to some students ending their schooling with the end of the primary cycle in the community school.

There were three CS graduates in the two classes I met with who did not continue their education, two girls and a boy. I could not meet two of them and although I met one of the girls, I could not use our interview as mentioned in Chapter 3.

Nevertheless, the reasons students who terminated their education after the CS speak to the feelings of those students. For the girl I met, her family was involved in a vendetta, common in Upper Egypt. Although vendettas in Upper Egypt embroil only the males of the families involved, the general unrest caused by it, coupled with the long walking distance to the MS were reasons given by her family for not allowing their daughter to complete school.

A vendetta was also the reason the boy could not go to school. His oldest brother was in jail for having killed someone in revenge for his cousin, and his older brother had been shot and killed in lieu of the jailed brother as soon as he stepped outside his house the year before. Consequently, the father could not go out to work for his safety and the boy had to work as a toktok (motorcycle cab) driver to support the family.

The second girl who terminated school after the primary cycle was forced to by her father, who feared for her safety walking the longer distance to the MS.

Thus, the longer walking distance significantly compounded security concerns so much, some students were unable to continue their education.
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Right now the rich only care about money, and having the latest mobile, and the car that’s waiting for him\textsuperscript{22} downstairs. His [sic] mind is not on education. And you can find one who is poor and he has a son whom he can’t afford to send to school even though his son is clever and can read and write...

\textit{Nadia}

They have money anyway, however their parents educate them they take the words [learning] and don’t make use of it, but for us the least thing, the least advice we make use of...

\textit{Farah}

The average number of students in the preparatory MS is much larger than the numbers found in the CS. This impacts both classroom management and the class environment. For Ali, his class has 48 registered students, of whom eight are regularly absent and out of the remaining 40, he characterizes eleven as wanting to learn, and the rest, "make noise and hit each other and fight." There are 67 students in Selma's class, "the whole class is talking and stuff and we can barely write or ask questions or understand.” The \textbf{overcrowded classes create a boisterous learning environment.}

Saeed described how students in his class show no respect for the teacher, “They're always chatting and don't benefit with learning.” Teachers also respond likewise, as

\textsuperscript{22} Both vernacular and classical Arabic use the male pronoun to refer to both sexes, and I preserved this in translation of all the interviews for authenticity.
Shams describes, “Teacher F explains well, [but] they don't pay attention to her, they sit talking. She [the teacher] swears at them and says you are talking and not paying attention, and sometimes she beats them and she has to lower her manners and their grades for [bad] behavior." Shereen describes how the MS environment compares to the CS environment, “Teacher Noha taught us that the old should respect the young and the young should respect the old. For sure if they were used to, from the beginning, to respect their teachers, they would respect the teachers at preparatory school." As can be seen, for some classrooms, **there is no respect between the teachers and students** and swearing is a common form of communicating.

Farah is also put off by the arrogant attitude of her classmates, she explains,

> Our classmates consider us uneducated, they are arrogant and very arrogant, and I don’t like that because it’s *haram* (forbidden in religion) to be arrogant. They’re arrogant and when a child is slow they [the teachers] don’t give him much attention, but pay more attention to the clever kids. When it’s exam time they [the teachers] want her to come beside me so I can give her the answers but I don't agree to do that. The students over there are financially well off, they are stuck up on us; they learn everything and get stuck up on others. They have everything and are *mabsoteen* and one gets upset. They have money anyway, however their parents educate them they take the words of learning and don't make use of

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23 The word *mabsoteen* means financially well off, however, another meaning of the word is happy, and it is important to illustrate both meanings.
it, but for us the least thing, the least advice we make use of…I don't give them any trust, any word they say I don't trust them at all.

Thus, some teachers collude in cheating to support the students who take private lessons with them and exploit the clever students, bringing classist attitudes into the classroom, and influencing the CS graduates’ self-worth, and their relationships with their current teachers and classmates.

In a few cases, such as Susan, she commented that her classmates were like-minded and well behaved, "We are cleverer than them a bit, but there are also from the government schools some people who are clever on their own. They are well behaved and when the teacher comes in everyone listens and everyone gets to hear the explaining and understands and follows the teacher."

Generally, many of the students’ problems in the MS related to class size, cleanliness, lack of care of the facilities, and lack of order. Soha says, "the big kids push the little ones, so the little ones, some of them get their arms broken, half the school is in casts…there are so many injuries, falls on the stairs…here [in the CS] we used to go in with order and leave with order and here the students are few, so it’s good, but there it’s a thousand [students in the school]." Mohammed also commented about chaos in his school, "there’s chaos, its normal, when we walk, [for] the students in third year push us to fall down on the stairs." There is often chaos in the overcrowded schools.
CHAPTER DISCUSSION

Although moving on to the prepary MS was in itself a significant step forward for the graduates, significant concerns emerged about their schooling there. These revolved around not being able to afford private lessons, to lack of consistency in having good teachers, to having classmates whose behaviors were not conducive to learning.

Drawbacks of Private Lessons

*The ones who have money and can pay, pass, others don’t pass. 75% of teachers do not explain because they save their energy for tutoring, or they make students not understand so that they need the tutoring. Teachers use different official and unofficial means to harass students until they enroll...*

*Egyptian Teacher (Sobhy, 2012)*

*Private lessons are not optional for students wishing to seriously pursue their education.* For those students who can't afford it, it renders their best efforts to study incomplete, which sets them up for scoring less than their classmates. Unfortunately, their position vis a vis their classmates matters a great deal in a competitive system of very high stakes testing. Even *the government recognizes that the financial cost of a general prepary education is prohibitive due to the costs of necessary private tutoring (MOE, 2007).*

The significance of poor teaching and education is not just as a school nuisance. It is a factor that threatens their dreams of improving their social mobility based on reasons that have nothing to do with their personal effort, intelligence and attitudes and is
structurally unfair (Hartmann, 2008; Sobhy, 2012; Elgeziri, 2010). It threatens their dreams after they have been taught to dream and work for a better future in the CS. They have various socio-economic backgrounds and repertoires of strategy to compensate, however, it remains a barrier that is likely overcome by better economic circumstances, something most of these students do not have. It is social injustice in all its glory.

If these students do not get the required high scores in their preparatory school years, they will not be able to continue in the general academic stream, which leads to university. Students scoring less than the cut-off score will continue their education in the technical high schools, in the commercial, agricultural or industrial specializations where the quality of education is perceived to be substandard, and leads to dead-end jobs. In fact, two-thirds of all students in Egypt attend vocational preparatory school (Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009).

Often poor families cannot cope with the cost of the academic stream and choose to send their children to the technical school and avoid the expense (Elgeziri, 2010). The participants in my study have limited financial resources. It is likely this will be their choice also. The system stratifies based on financial capability, and the primary point of inequality in the Egyptian education system has switched from primary enrollment to secondary tracking and sorting (Sieverding, 2011). As mentioned in Ch 1, those who come from poor households constitute only 0.5% of achievers in the general secondary stage (UNDP, 2010). This is generating resentment, despair and stress with my participants.

The minister of education wrote of private tutoring in 1999:
It deprives financially limited students from receiving the necessary instruction from their teacher. This situation leads the deprived groups to become dissatisfied with their status and potentially resentful of those who have been able to have access to private tutoring or those who have successfully completed the examinations. This is a threat to social peace and is divisive. Meanwhile, those who have had access to private tutoring and were able to complete their examinations successfully will be unable to live in a peaceful environment because they will be living among a majority who had been deprived of the knowledge of the teacher, from a good education, and consequently from an honorable career. Such individuals will then be a constant threat to those who monopolized educational opportunities and this indeed is a threat to social peace in our country. Education that starts with a crime will inevitably end with a catastrophe. (Bahaa-el-Din, H.K., cited in Bray, 1999, p. 62).

Taha Hussein, the father of free education for all in Egypt said, “Education is as water and air, the right of every human being.” This idea gets more and more distant with each passing year. The high stakes testing combined with the need for private lessons that the students cannot afford colludes to keep students from low socio-economic backgrounds in their place (Megahed, 2004; Hartmann, 2008; Elgeziri, 2010).

More Challenges Ahead

For these community school graduates, the longer route leaves less time to study and help with the chores; the material is much more advanced; the school community significantly larger and less familial; and they lack a mentor figure in their education.
Their education now poses a fresh set of challenges, however, the students are responding with a variety of strategies depending on their personality, circumstances and outlook.

Public School Teachers and Students are Heterogeneous

The majority of the students expressed that they had both good and bad teachers (and in some cases, no teachers), as well as good and bad classmates. The students also described having good teachers, but disruptive classmates, and sometimes eager to learn classmates but apathetic teachers. The quality of education they are receiving is inconsistent.

Hating School, Loving School

This study shows that a cornerstone of the quality of education the students receive is the bond between the students and the teacher. Anything that supports that bond is supportive of a quality education and anything that weakens that bond detracts from it. For these students, the teacher-student bond was a primary and critical factor for them continuing their education in the MS, even after they left the CS. The teachers in the CS created a connection with the student, through respect and teaching the student elementary things, empowering the student and creating support in the student's family through pride. Likewise, the relationship worked the opposite way, as was seen for the students’ siblings who hate school mentioned earlier. For those students' siblings who left school, the relationship developed from poor relationships with the teachers into a hatred of school in general.

I did not set out to investigate the community school graduates experiences in government schools, but for all of them it was not possible to describe their earlier
experiences without referring to their present formidable challenges that threaten their once promising futures. The challenges they face are significant, momentous even, and decidedly structural. The odds are not in their favor. If there was ever a person who could not see why it is imperative equity needs be a priority of education, meeting these students would change their mind. They have and continue to work very hard, and it is their right that they should have fair opportunities.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The CS graduates met a new set of challenges in the prepatory MS school. Their teachers were inconsistent, with some doing a good job, others a bad job, and some not showing up at all. The students did not have strong relationships with their teachers as before, partly because the shorter lessons and different teachers for every subject left little time to build close relationships. Boisterous students often interrupted the lesson even when things were going well. However, the biggest stressor to the CS graduates in their prepatory MS was the need for private lessons, something many of these students could not afford. The inability to take these private lessons put the CS graduates at a significant disadvantage in terms of missing material that was only given in the private lesson, prompted teachers help their tutored students cheat on the competitive exams, and affected the teaching in school negatively. The CS graduates used various strategies to overcome this disadvantage, such as asking other students and making the most out of class time. The longer route to get to the MS reduced the time all the students had available for chores, study and free time at home, and for some, it was reason enough for their parents to terminate their education altogether.
7. ATTITUDES AND DISPOSITIONS

Getting at the deeper attitudes, skills, knowledge and dispositions the CS graduates hold is difficult, though this is one of the primary aims of an impact study. To understand the attitudes in their depth, complexity and dynamics, it was necessary to ask a lot of why and how questions.

EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SCHOOL

When discussing the students' attitudes towards education, learning and school, I found that the meanings overlapped. It was often hard to define where one began and the others ended. In addition, I asked the students about Education for All (EFA). Figure 1 shows the rough definitions I used for each while analyzing the students' comments.

It is clear that the meanings are closely knitted in symmetrical and asymmetrical ways, such as the fact that learning can happen outside of formal education and school, whereas school and education hopefully encompass learning. However, teasing out the specific boundaries of the three meanings helped me in seeing the key words in a deeper way. For example, I found school and its physical proximity or distance a relevant factor. School distance was a reason for not allowing one’s daughters to go to school, and at the same time its closeness was a reason for reversing that ban. Also, simply getting out of the house and going to school, making new friends outside of the usual circle with classmates and teachers, and seeing the wider world was a big change in the girls’ lives, even if they hadn’t learned anything.
Figure 2: School, education and learning meanings and overlap

Education
Grants a degree, takes years, government tested, curriculum

Learning
New knowledge, skills, ways of being, ex. Student to sibling, parent or other acquaintance

School
Physical building with teachers, classmates.

Certification oriented learning things over a longer time frame, ex. Homeschooling

Learning over a long time frame in school building & receiving degree, ex. Community schools

Going to school to get a degree, ex. Ministry schools

Literacy classes

Education as a Right: "We have the right to an education."

Children’s Charter of Rights, recited by Soha

The majority of students felt that all children should go to school and that they should have the same opportunity at a good education that they themselves were given.
Many of the responses to my question of whether all children should be educated pointed to their own transformative experiences as reasons why it was a positive step. Shereen said,

That would be wonderful…it lights up the mind of the girl, it makes her benefit from many things in this world. For example, if a girl goes somewhere she can read, and not get lost, there are times when girls are lost, and they can’t read… so this girl needs to be educated, because she will benefit herself. So that she doesn’t take wrong pills, she doesn’t take wrong medication, she reads it before she takes it, and stuff like that. But, if it’s a peasant girl, she drinks anything and khalas [that’s it]…

In Susan's case, she thinks that all kids should go to school because,

The feeling I used to feel, was that without education I wasn’t living, so for example, without education, it opens your mind, you won’t know what is happening around you, you won’t know how they talk, you won’t understand a lot of things, so everyone should get an education so we can understand the things around us and are able to live in this world, because this world without an education or without focus and understanding what’s happening in it…we won’t live…

In addition to having a better life, Hasan considered education as having value to everyone when they have their own children, "If someone asks him to read a lesson he won’t be able to read it, and if one of his daughters asks him to ‘read this for me’ and explain it to her, he won’t be able to do anything…” For these CS graduates, learning at
school is a transformative experience that lights up one’s mind and allows one to participate more fully in the world and in their own lives.

Being learned and having all children get an education was closely linked to Egypt's progress for many of the students, says Mohammed, "it’s a great benefit when we raise the status of Egypt up," and Saeed gives the reason "so that society progresses and lives in prosperity.” Farah said, “I want all of them [children of Egypt] to be educated…so that our nation can progress. As well, Soha recited to me, from memory, the right to education from the charter of children's rights, "We have the right to an education and to get a good education that will benefit us in our lives. It is our duty to study and work hard at our lessons, so that we can raise our country high and be useful to society. It is our duty to learn, to teach our friends and to help in eradicating illiteracy and to cooperate with others in working." Even to keeping Egypt safe, “so that our country can progress and …if there's anything, anyone who wants to fight our country from the outside we can stop them, if there's no education, no one will know anything…. If there's no education, no one will know what is coming or going.”

All the CS graduates I interviewed save one strongly supported the idea that all children should get an education. Ali showed a more functionalist perspective, "not all, we need all kinds of people, we need ordinary laborers and people to work in agriculture and things like that…” Ali was the only participant who demonstrated a functionalist perspective.
Reasons for Learning: "Supposedly one goes to school to learn, not one is already learned and goes to school."

Nadia

An assumption of those in Egypt with a functional perspective on education is that academic education should just be for clever students, because not everyone has natural ability and ambition (Megahed & Ginsburg, 2009). However, Nadia commented, “Even the ones who aren't clever should go to school to become clever. Supposedly one goes to school to learn, not one is already learned and goes to school…” She does not mean that learning is just limited to school, she also said: "[learning is] in everything, in work, at home, in work at the workplace and in everything." She was expressing her frustration at a system that belittles students’ intelligence and ability, and expects students to come to school knowing everything already, whereas at the CS learning met the students where they were at and worked from there.

In Susan's case, she said,

I am not afraid of anything, I find out everything, nothing stands in my way in knowing things. For example, if someone tells me aren’t you afraid [of school], I say why, they say because its hard, and I say no schools aren’t hard, schools are good. They are hard for those who don’t study, hard for those who don’t focus with the teachers …

Susan has decided that schools are not hard; she gives it her best shot.
Some of the students’ reasons for learning were couched in human capital and investment terms, for instance, Shereen stated that the reason one learns is, "to benefit oneself, to have a job and become a teacher or a doctor, they don’t call her by her name, for example they would say Dr. So and So, she would have status, and be famous."

Others described their reasons for learning in humanistic terms, in Susan's case, she said that one learned, “so that he can understand life and be able to live.”

Being a better parent also featured in their comments. On the impetus for learning Hasan commented, "you’ve learned, and you’ll benefit your kids, when one of them asks you to read them something, then you won’t be embarrassed when they say come read something to me and you can’t read it,” and his parents, “encourage me, they tell me when you get older you will benefit yourself.” Shereen also said, "when a woman is married and has kids, she has to make sure they eat well, get a good education, respect those who are older and younger and do not be disrespectful towards anyone and learn not to lie, and to know how to read and write and also to become clever and benefit themselves. When [her] girl grows up to become a doctor and gets a job she will be something good."

When discussing her motivation for getting an education, Nadia said, "so that one can achieve his ambitions…” and even if one can't achieve his ambitions, then, one would have benefited from a lot of things, so if I had left school at Grade 1, and not gone again after what happened in the first year in the government school, then I wouldn’t know how to read or write or anything, but when I got here, and learned here,
then I knew how to read and write, even if I hadn’t, well, its true that one hasn’t wasted his time on nothing, one learns a lot of things, not just reading and writing.

In fact for all the students, learning is described as something one does because of its present and expected benefits. In many ways that echoes of a human capital theory or banking model of education. However it is also different in important respects. Economic benefits are not the only benefits mentioned. The benefits mentioned are social, cultural, familial, personal and even religious. In fact, none of the students mentioned a moneymaking skill when asked what was the most important thing they learned. To deny the obvious benefits that accrue to the educated as per the banking model of education is to deny financial independence, self-reliance, and social mobility. A livable income is necessary for a decent life, for freedom from hunger, extreme weather and want. Without a doubt, the economic benefits that accrue from education are vital. The traditional high status associated with a degree becomes threatened when it fails to provide employment to its owner (Al-Harthi, 2011), as seen in Egypt today. The issue is not seeking economic benefit from one's education, the problem is when that becomes the only thing that matters, or that its importance with respect to the other goals of education are out of balance.

Thus, although the benefits of education were described as returns on their investment of time, none of them described economic benefits as the most important things. To illustrate, when each of the student's was asked at the individual interviews what was the most important thing they had learned at school and although their answers were all different, all the answers were of character traits. Saeed, Nadia, and Ali for instance, all mentioned that the most important thing they learned at school was to be
mohtaram, (respectful and respected). Hasan and Farah answered honesty, as did Shereen who also mentioned benefitting people. Selma and Susan both said the most important thing they learned is cooperation and Susan also added confidence at solving her own problems. Mohammed expressed that for him it working hard and punctuality. For Soha, her most important learnings were honesty, cooperation and hearing others' opinions, while for Shams it was also honesty as well as trustworthiness.

While discussing the issue of money and education and success in the focus group, the students were adamant that education was worth more than being rich. Selma said, "education can make up for money…money isn't everything…money comes and goes but education when it goes it doesn't come back. For example, if someone didn't get an education he won't be able to learn again…he will always feel like he is missing something that he can never make up…"

These students were obviously not wealthy. Such a divergence between what could expected to be a primary benefit of their education and what they discussed as being the primary benefit to them, illustrates how they think about education, earning potential and character. Though not free from want, their dignity refrains them from saying they would love to earn more money. They realize the importance of personal enrichment, enhanced social status, and a life that is more aware. They reach out to others to try to teach them, and encourage them to get their own education.

In spite of the obvious benefit of increased income should their educational plans succeed, these students all described values that were developed over time, partly learned at school through the strong influence of their teachers.
Educated people: "Everything in them is nice, the people who are educated"

Selma

Susan commented on the difference between an educated mother and an uneducated mother, "it will make a big difference, because right now my mom is not educated, I need help but she can't help me, but when I’m an educated mom, if anyone, if kids ask for help I can help them, I can help them at school, in education in homework, but when my mom is not educated she can’t help me, she doesn’t have experience in education for me to ask her." Nadia said about her mother's illiteracy classes, "it’s not of course like education when one is young… it grows in his mind. When, one, after many years, when he has more responsibilities at home and stuff, it will never be like when he is young and learns."

Selma, like all the others, was adamant that she continue her education, "I refuse to do that [marriage], I told them and they agreed…I told them I want to continue…because everything in them is nice, the people who are educated…the way they look, and when they read and write, and well, it’s a nice feeling when one is educated… parents should encourage them [their children] to go to school, and tell them that they should be educated…to stay at home and take care of the crops, that's not everything…"

Becoming an educated person is a goal of Selma and many other students.

Like many of the other students, Selma also cited not being tricked into signing things she is not aware of as a reason for learning to read and write. When I mentioned that people who can read and write still sometimes get tricked because they don't read what they are signing, she replied, "What’s the benefit of being educated if he doesn’t know, if
he doesn’t pay attention to reading." Soha also echoed those sentiments in her own interview, "School is better because one learns and reads and write but for those who are at home, you can trick them in anything, anything…but for example the educated person will read and read it word by word to know, what is it that he is signing or not signing…"

Thus, the educated person is seen as being more savvy, aware and less likely to be tricked because of his ignorance.

**School: To go or not to go?**

We discussed Shereen’s sister attending illiteracy classes even after Shereen taught her to read and write, and she said,

I told her no [my teaching is not enough], go and have your own teacher, there are some things I didn’t know how to teach you she will teach you…I wished that [her fiancée] would let her go, the things that I couldn’t teach her, her teacher would show her, she used to get more information out of her teacher than from me, and she would also take a certificate from her [the teacher] at least…the literacy certificate.

Shams compared getting an education at school to illiteracy classes, saying, "in learning all subjects and knowing new people and going to new places, this is better than illiteracy classes, in that you learn but its not learning that is big, it is medium."

Farah also said,

I would have been so regretful [had I not gone]. And I would still have tried to go to school, I would still try to get in, even at the time when … they were talking to
my mother … and my family was saying don’t let her go [to preparatory MS] and they were following my family’s talk, they were saying education is dangerous for girls, they shouldn’t go past this stage, and they were worried for me.

**Teachers: »What will make him love his subjects if his teacher to start with doesn’t come to school?»**

* N adia

A lot of the students’ attitudes towards teachers can be discerned from their descriptions of their own relationship with their CS teachers in Ch. 5. When things don't go so well with the CS teacher, however, what are the students' attitudes? I had a chance to address this during the second focus group when Nadia was lamenting her brother's education at a CS where there was only one teacher assigned who was alone and often absent.

During the discussion there were two camps: Shereen said,

The problem is in the person himself, the child himself, and if he wanted to read and learn he would read and learn with his teacher, she would help him. So he misses lessons, ok, in the days that she doesn’t come, but it must be something she can’t control, so she wouldn’t be absent of her own accord, she must have [difficult] circumstances and that’s why she’s absent. But if a person wants to learn for sure he would read and learn.

Here Shereen is attributing the student’s learning to individual ability and motivation, regardless of whether there is a teacher or not. This is similar to a functionalist
perspective in that it places the responsibility of success or failure entirely on the individual. On the other hand, Susan said,

A long time ago when I [sic] went to school, if you hadn’t found a teacher, would you have been encouraged to learn? If you hadn’t found a teacher to help you learn, you wouldn’t have found someone to teach you a fact to tell her. If you can’t find a teacher to fear and study for her sake…we used to study for the teacher…

Nadia added,

So that she would be happy, it’s not just because we were afraid from her but because we loved her...right now we are really absent from school because exam time is approaching and we don’t go to school, even if it is like this, what will I do with a child who, to start with, doesn’t have anything to motivate him to learn, to encourage him to do that, where is the desire? For example, if he loves his teacher, he loves his subjects, what will make him love his subjects if his teacher to start with doesn’t come to school?

Research in psychology attests that relationships children have with adults in families and school programs are the basis for their school success and that this effect is powerful and enduring (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Nadia would agree. She concluded, "He must have something that motivates him, in school or in knowledge or in his school, or his teacher. There’s nothing."
SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Copts: "Muslims are like Christians, they are both like our siblings but the difference is religion."

Hasan

Despite Assiut having a large Coptic population, both villages I visited were all Muslim villages, and thus all the children interviewed were Muslim. In the first school, both teachers were Muslim also, but in the second school, the cohort had at one point a Christian teacher for two years. Since the area had no Christian families living in it, the teacher was the only Christian with whom they had had previous close contact. Shereen said,

When we go to Abu Tig [the town] we see Christians in the street, but we didn’t see many here because in our village there really isn’t anyone Christian…it was the first time to live with someone who is Christian, to deal with them and talk with them…it was normal. I have her [phone] number and I call her [until now].

In response to a question about where they learned to accept someone from another faith, Susan described their teachers’ role modeling as,

She didn’t treat us differently, she loved us. Maybe if she had someone Christian in the class she would not love him like us, she loved us and she did not make any difference between us [and her], except that she has a religion and we have a different religion. And she didn’t make us feel that we were doing something different. If we had a religion class she would stay, but she couldn’t explain it to
us, because she doesn’t have information about our religion. She would sit
normally and listen normally and Miss Noha would explain.

The students’ experiences with the Christian teacher was the first close experience
they had with a Christian despite living in a governorate where there are many Christians.
Given the lack of socializing many of these students have within even their own villages,
**school provided a chance for the students to live with someone from a different faith**
**at close quarters** and see a positive interfaith relationship being modelled between their
two teachers. More importantly, **it showed them Christians as humans, good or bad.**
This lived experience and others with Christian friends at the preparatory MS school
provided a buffer against divisive preaching they were to hear later. While discussing
media reports that some Muslim sheikhs were saying that it was wrong to make friends
with Christians or extend holiday greetings to them on Christian holidays, Shereen told
me,

Their [the Christians] behavior is like our behavior, I am friends with a Christian
girl there [at the preparatory MS], she is good, maybe Muslims girls aren’t as good
as her. Not all Muslim girls love each other, no of course not. So she is Christian
yes, but she loves me and she loves Muslims…Our manners are one, no one can
separate us, nor is she less than me or am I less than her in anything. It is only
religion, her religion lesson is different from mine.

While politicians and public figures manipulate the religious divide for their own
purposes (Zeidan, 1999), these students display tolerance, acceptance and respect of their
Christian counterparts. For example, Susan reflected her position as a member of the majority religion vis a vis the Christian students,

I am asking why, I wished to ask someone, when we have the religion class, and they have the religion class too, they have their religion and we have ours, why do we stay and they have to leave? Why do we not leave and they stay? So we can leave one time and they can stay…we don’t want to make them feel that we…are more than them or they are less than us.

Shereen's opinion of this observation was it was because, "they have their own teacher so they go to her, their religion teacher and they are going to her. Plus they are not so many, they are only 3 with us in the class, so maybe they group themselves together for their teacher."

The students noted religious tensions and discrimination also. They acknowledged that they met with students, Muslim and Christian, who do not talk to members of the other faith, but, as Susan summed it up, “there are Muslim girls who object to Christian girls, I’ve seen Christians who object to Muslim girls," and Hasan expressed, "those who go to school, the ones with Christians, they meet them and befriend them, and some people don’t accept that." In Soha's case, she told me,

The wrong is that some people say, Christians are unbelievers and we shouldn't be friends with them, and they don't want anyone to be friends with them…there are some of my classmates [in the preparatory MS] that say we are not talking to you [Christian students], if you are not Muslim like us, we will not talk to you…they [the Christian students] get upset and I go and talk to them to make them feel
better, I talk to them, and greet them and say good morning to them and tell them peace be upon you…if there is a lesson for example, if I’m missing something I ask them for it, if they need notes I give it to them to photocopy.

As they go into a wider community at their prepatory MS school, CS grads are encountering Christians classmates for the first time. Their attitudes appear to be tolerant, respectful and friendly. They do witness discrimination from Muslims against Christians in their MS and encounter discrimination against themselves from Christian students, but seem equipped to stick up for themselves and others.

**Community Relationships**

*Community Learning*

References to how the CS impacted the wider community through community campaigns and teaching by the students to the immediate families were numerous in the literature (Zaalouk, 2004; Farrell, 2004; El-Sherif, 2009) and I probed to see evidence of this influence.

Hypothetically, the majority of students responded that they would talk to or advise someone whom they saw a person doing something wrong, for example, ripping plants or polluting the water. When pressed for examples, however, the reality is that it is not so easy to advise others, particularly those older than the students. Shereen recounts,

Once I told someone who was throwing trash in the water, and I told him that’s *haram* (forbidden by religion) you’re polluting the water and he said what do you know, what do you know and I said its not about what do I know, I’m not better
than you, but I’m educated but know that this is *haram* and is polluting, so he told me *ya salam* (really) so because you’re educated you’re advising me? And I said for sure because you don’t know that this is polluting or things like that so I’m telling you. That’s it, and he said ok I wouldn’t do that again. But that’s a kid…

In Farah's case, she tried talking to people about the things she was learning but,

Not everyone used to listen to us, there were people who listened to us and others who didn’t… I would talk to anyone, anyone, saying…smoking destroys health and causes cancer and …is the cause of many diseases like cancer, and they wouldn’t believe us, there were some who believed us but not everyone, so its not everyone.

In addition, getting an education was framed as an imperative for one to help their community as well as themselves by the majority of students as discussed earlier, "to benefit his family and his community." However, community links related to the student's immediate family only. The CS land donors did have an ongoing relationship, but in terms of disseminating learning, whether through the campaigns or through learning outreach to the wider community as described in the literature, it was limited by time on the part of the students, who were already very busy with their own schoolwork and lives.
Community Status: “When one is educated, it is better than to be a peasant"

Shereen

Education and learned people have respect and status in the community, and are referred to as mitnawareen (the enlightened ones). The influence of this status and respect was shown in the students comments about how their status increased within their families and also how their parents status increased within their social circles.

Nadia expressed that her mother, "wants me to become educated and become hagah kibira (something big)." Shereen said that she wanted to become a physician, as mentioned earlier, and her mother also supported her with the same phrase, "my mother wants me to become hagah kibira.” To become a physician and have the title of Dr. in Egypt, still confers tremendous status and prestige in rural areas.

In fact, six out of the eleven students I interviewed wanted to become physicians. All the students commented on the altruistic reasons of helping the poor, sometimes very emotionally when describing what they go through when they seek medical treatment, like Farah,

To help the poor, there are many poor. Their kids get sick and I feel sorry for them, and they don’t have money to see the doctor and they get horrible diseases. I want to be a doctor to help them (tearing up)… to help the patients and write cures for them, inexpensive medications not expensive ones so that the poor can get better from the ailment that he has.
However, other reasons related to the status of doctors for their ambition emerge, such as with Nadia, “I want to be a doctor…one would like, its, basically, the very word, to be told ‘Dr.’ [is a very big thing]…(laughter).” Soha also commented on the social status associated with becoming a physician, “when he is a doctor or something then people respect him.”

Other professional ambitions were a teacher, two aspiring engineers, and a police officer. Soha articulated her reason for wanting to become a teacher very clearly,

So that I can teach kids properly, they are taught wrong, I want to teach them right like I was taught here and show them how I learned and how I became a teacher so they can be useful to their country…the doctor excels at what he does, but there are many who aren’t good at their job, so I want to be a teacher who excels at what she does, to teach the kids and they can learn and grow and become whatever they want.

In another example, the students who wanted to be engineers cited the buildings that collapse and the lack of conscience in the engineers who build them. All these choices are professions that have significant community standing. It is possible that the economic returns are a consideration that the students did not mention. However, although important, it is unlikely economic concerns are the only driver of those choices as in Egypt, it is more about perceived social status, dignity, respect and esteem white collar positions confers that is more important than the income (Waterbury, cited in Elgeziri, 2010).
Recognition from the community towards the educated children also brought about status to the parents; for example, when Susan was the subject of a documentary\textsuperscript{25} her father was, "happy that there were such people [respectable people] who came to our house because of me." Susan's father, \textit{despite being against girls' education earlier}, \textit{was proud of his daughter's feature in the documentary and was showing off how clever she was} with his friends. This caused problems for Susan as she was given a reputation she felt she didn't deserve and actively set out to debunk it. She says,

When they came to film me at home, I became the clever one, \textit{khalas} [that’s it], but they [the film crew] didn't sit at school and see everyone clever…I knew this could cause me problems…if I deceived them [the community]…I would be put in a bad position with my classmates…My father was sitting in a place and my friend, her father was also in the same place, it was a coffee shop in the village, and they were talking about this [me being the cleverest] and my friend told me [how my father had bragged], and I told her I swear to you that I said so and so [set the record straight], and she believed me because there was trust between us because we are friends…She told me that your father said they filmed you because you were the cleverest one, don’t you know they didn’t come with us into the classroom and see…

Susan's \textit{education and her recognition gave her father status in the community}, which he was proud to publicize.

\textsuperscript{25} Susan was the star of a documentary on CS some years back. It illustrated the success of the CS using Susan as an example, following her at school and at home.
The status of education and its importance also gave some of the girls a respite from housework. Shereen says,

At the beginning we were peasants, we weren’t educated still, so we didn’t have anything to do besides, washing, cooking, sweeping, mopping, fixing the house, but now at school we are studying and working hard. When there are no vacations and no school [during the revision period before exams], well my mother tells me to study, and my sisters tell me to study, they don’t let us do a lot of things around the house. But in the vacation of course, and once we’ve done school, we help at home.

Susan added,

If we were at home we would be working there, but if we weren’t in school we would be working at home more, but to be honest they are taking a load off me. For me personally, they don’t put pressure to do anything because they say you are in preparatory school and this is majmoa’ (a year in which grades are important), so you must only be focused on your studies and they don’t let me do anything.

As mentioned in the profiles in Ch 4, both Susan and Shereen in particular were the first in their family to go to school. Each of them had five older sisters who had not gone to school and were illiterate. Their families respected their time constraints due to school and took over some of their housework, freeing them from the prescribed roles of housework first. The hopes of their widowed mothers were pinned on them becoming hagah kibirah (something big) in anticipation for a better future. There were
plenty of hands to do the housework, the school-goers needed to focus on something bigger than that.

These girls families are proud of their daughters’/sisters’ success even though they are uneducated and illiterate themselves, yet they realize its value. The girls’ academic success and especially recognition from outside the village, from foreigners, had conferred status and prestige on the families, even though the families had been against education initially. Social status, dignity and respect played a role in their choice of profession, especially physician, still the most prestigious profession in rural Egypt today.

**Friends and Conflict Resolution**

The girls in particular had much to say about friends. Their social life was very different as a result of going to school, Susan said,

So if we were home [and hadn’t gone to school], the furthest we would go would be to our relatives house, but when we came here we know more [people], we know more friends who are not our families, and we started to go to them and they come to us, and two days ago we were at our classmates house…

Shereen added,

We are with them in school for a long time, so we have to get used to them, we sit with our friends more than our families at home. When we go home we have dinner then study, and wake up in the morning and get dressed and go to our friends, so we finish at 2pm and spend a long time with them at school, not a short time.
Nadia described a conflict she had had with a friend during a squabble over who was walking with whom to school. Words were said, and accusations made that mushroomed into a disagreement between the two families. In reference to this conflict, Susan offered an interesting analysis,

The mistake is when people talk to each other and have an argument with each other they don’t go tell somebody [who can help]. So for example they went and told their mom and dad, but if this situation had happened and we were with Teacher Noha, they wouldn’t have needed to tell their mom or dad or make the problem bigger [between the families], they would have told Teacher Noha, but they didn’t find anyone like Teacher Noha to tell them. They would have told the teacher and the teacher would have solved the problem between themselves and there wouldn’t have been enmity between them and stuff. But [now] they are in a big school with many teachers, and each teacher gives her class and leaves, so they don’t know those teachers really well to the extent that they can go tell her, “She had a fight with me and this other one had a fight with me, so you should help us make up.” Plus everyone is in a different class [now], but in our school we were all in a the same class, all together.

Susan also discussed how Miss Noha had helped her when her father bragged in front of her father’s friend, talking to each girls individually and helping her to stand in the other’s shoes. The teacher’s role as a mentor, mediator and problem-solver was key to the girls’ relationship with each other and even had implications for their families. The teacher served as an impartial third-party who knew all the students well, who arbitrated and kept quarrels from getting bigger. She role modeled mentorship. This
EXPERIENCES IN EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

was possible because of their relationship as well as spending more time together. This is not possible in the preparatory MS with teachers who give a few lessons every week to over-sized classes.

Boys and Marriage

Their attitude towards boys in general came up when I asked them about the difference between attending a co-ed school and a girl’s only school. The majority of the students who commented said that while in the CS, they were like brothers and sisters, "We used to mingle with them normally and greet them normally," although the older girls refused to play so as not to run around in front of the boys because it is ‘ayb (inappropriate) to run around in front of the boys. In the preparatory MS, however, they do not deal with boys much, "Not everyone is like each other, so for example, are they well-behaved or not well-behaved...the boys here [at the CS] knew what were the proper manners to have, but over there we don't know…"

In rural areas in Egypt, early marriage is a widespread phenomenon with more than 70% of females in the age group 18-24 married by age 18 (UNDP, 2010), and I asked the girls about their attitudes towards marriage. The boys were present also, but they did not respond. When I asked about this in a mixed group, everyone burst into laughter, the girls were shy to respond, and the boys had nothing to say. This was likely because it was awkward for them to talk about marriage in front of members of the opposite sex. I got much better responses in the individual interviews and in the second focus group in Abu Tig, all of whom were girls. Marriage compatibility, marrying on their own terms, expected roles for them as wives and mothers: the girls had all given these concepts
serious thought. The boys, whose ages ranged between 12-14, were unforthcoming when I brought it up. Whether it was because they were too young and had not really considered it or because I was a woman, I could not tell.

Nadia was very practical, in response to my question would she like to get married, she retorted, "a suitor needs to come first!" However,

Now it’s impossible, it would be very difficult [for a girl] to get married and continue her education, maybe she gets pregnant or something, so its very hard, and then she will have a lot of responsibility, especially here in Sa’eed (Upper Egypt), they [women] have a lot of responsibilities, their responsibilities at home are even more [compared to other places], it would be impossible to continue, well, it’s not impossible but still very hard…

Since Nadia longs to become a doctor, she did not view marriage as something in her imminent future. Rigid prescribed gender roles for a wife and mother would make it impossible to marry and continue her education also. Moreover, as can be surmised from the average family sizes, family planning is not widespread in keeping with Sa’eedis preference for large families.

Shereen was 17 years old at the time of our interview and marriage a much more likely possibility for her. However, when suitors asked for her hand in marriage from her maternal uncle, he asked her opinion and she told him that she wanted to continue her education. She explained why,
Because a guy controls a girl, for example, he tells her *khalas* [that’s it] now that I am going to marry you, you can't go out, you can't go here, you can go there [as had happened with her sister]. So I remind myself that if I think of marrying anyone like that, they would say stop your education and it wouldn’t work out.

Now I have my freedom, I can continue my education as I wish, then when I’m done and join the [faculty] I want to join, then I can think about these things. So I explained to my maternal uncle and my mother, and they said *khalas* [that’s it] as long as that’s your understanding and this is what you want, then *khalas*, we won’t force any [marriage] on you.

I asked her about marrying a guy who agreed for her to continue her education, and she was unwilling to take that step until she first gets her degree. About her how her education would affect her choice or options of partner she said,

If a guy went to college, he needs to marry someone who went to college too, educated like him. So he can’t be educated with a college [degree] and marry a peasant girl, his family won’t agree, his mom or his dad, so [they’ll say] look how many years you spent, you took lessons and learning, at the end you will marry a peasant girl?? No, marry someone like you so she, so you can both be educated. It’s not possible for a peasant guy to marry an educated girl, he needs to marry a peasant girl like him…

Thus **marriage compatibility** is key for Shereen.
Susan was also 17 at the time of our interview, however she had not yet had any offers of marriage, because there are unmarried sisters before her, and the custom is for older sisters to marry first. However, when her time does come she said,

No, no, because I am decided, khalas (that’s it), my mission in life, for me, my mission in life is to continue and that’s, to reach the stage I told you about before, when I get to it then I will think about it, when I get to it…

About marrying someone who would allow her to continue she said,

That won’t be possible…there won’t be time, there won’t be a chance, according to what I see in my siblings, and stuff, there won’t be a chance for me to get an education. When I’m like this [unmarried] I am free and I can take my decisions by myself, if I’m late because I am learning something from the teacher, stuff like that…the time will be different…

Her choice of marriage partner however, was left more open, “If I get to a stage where I can set conditions that I will take, I will do that [marry], but if I am at a stage where I don’t want to be, where I can’t set conditions, it won’t work.” Thus, Susan is adamant to set not let marriage interfere with her educational dreams and set her own terms. How long her family, particularly her male relatives, will allow her to continue like this will affect that.

Selma, who was 16 at the time of our interview, echoed Susan’s thoughts in her own interview, adding, she had made her wish to continue her education and not marry clear and her family agreed: "I said to them I didn't go to school at a normal age so let me
continue my education and they said ok, as you like…” Selma was also adamant about not marrying until she finishes all her educational goals.

Shams was 15 and had reached the same conclusion, describing suitors’ expectations of a wife: "No, when I finish my education first…it is very rare that a guy will marry a girl who wants to continue her education…they want to take her to, not finish her education, to just pay attention to the things the home needs…”

For my participants, is clear that since the husband has the authority over the wife to stop her education, the girls have decided to remain with their families who so far support their education, rather than marry someone who is likely to impede it.

**Talking Well: "If I sit with someone big…I can discuss with them."**

*Shams*

Every single student discussed ‘talking well’ as a significant gain from his or her education. Classmates at the preparatory MS do not 'talk well', several students cited 'talking well' as one of the most important things they learned at the CS, 'talking well' was a key criteria for making a new friend, etc. It was key for all the students.

Shereen said,

There [at the MS] they yell a lot and don’t respect anyone, but here of course we have stayed with each other and Teacher Noha taught us that the big should respect the young and the young should respect the big.  Here we never yelled at anyone, we used to talk well and deal with each other well.  But over there, if you asked someone to come over, she’ll [rudely] say ‘What do you want from me?’
For example, if someone comes and asks me ‘How are you doing?’ and I respond what business is it of yours, this way, when she is coming to ask about me, its not my right to respond to her this way. If she asks me how are you doing I should say fine, thanks be to God please sit down. And be hospitable to her. I must talk with her well like she talked with me well, so I must start with her well, that’s it. For example if someone tells me something and I don’t reply to her and walk away, that would be wrong, because she is coming to stand with me. So I need to stand with her and tell her how I am, not leave her and not tell her anything. Bas [that’s enough], so talking well is to appreciate the person in front of you like he appreciates you.

For Shereen, talking well was responding with good manners, as it was for Nadia who gave an example of being considerate of others’ feelings also:

For example, if there is a situation in front of me, a girls is talking to me well, it is not possible that I answer her back in a bad way…to talk with her well means to tell her good things…don’t say things that make her upset…

Another student explained, "It means that you don’t just talk and khalas [that’s it], I should know what the meaning of the word I am using is…”

Susan described 'talking well' as,

Labaga (elegance) in talking…it means that I talk to the level of the person in front of me, so I don’t talk to him about issues bigger or smaller than his [understanding], I talk to him at his own level, I don’t talk to him in subjects he
might not understand. She [Teacher Noha] taught me to talk to people at their level…

Susan is describing the choice of topic, not just the manner. For her, ‘talking well’ means being **intelligent in choice of topic to consider the other side.**

For Soha, 'talking well' was talking softly, she described what she would do as a teacher, “I teach them to talk softly and not to talk loudly.” Soha also says of her most important learning, "I wouldn’t have learned anything well, I wouldn’t talk softly, I wouldn’t know how to read, I wouldn’t know how to write, I wouldn’t have known anything." Here Soha is placing 'talking well' at the same level of importance as **reading and writing.**

Soha also discussed the cultural capital of talking well,

They taught us for example, to talk with manners. Instead of saying **hadin** (yes implying subordination) to say **na’am** (yes)…**na’am** is a polite word, **hadin** is something we say at home.

While discussing what activity she liked best, Shams told me that she liked the discussions the best, "because if I sit with someone older, I can distinguish right from wrong…I can discuss with them." She described how her talking changed since going to school, "I used to talk, but not like them…they would say things that I couldn't say…[now] I talk normally like them…with my friends, and at home with my neighbors and siblings." **Talking well, as an educated person, was a skill the students used with everyone.** Shams and the other students also made a lot of references to how they did not
swear in their talking, and it was a point of differentiation between the CS and the MS, "it’s education, but not like ours. They've been to school and they’re swearing…"

Farah spoke of **rules of conversation**, “at the beginning [of my community schooling], I wasn’t listening to what my classmates were saying, I used to interrupt them and I learned here not to interrupt, and to listen to end of what they’re saying. If they’re saying things that are wrong, I can correct them, like for girls who swear, I would tell her not to swear at her classmate, she is like your sister.”

‘Talking well’ carried tremendous importance to all the students. It gave the students rules and norms of conversation – not interrupting, not swearing, knowing what to talk about, and using a good manner. Even if they had learned these things at home from their parents, the elevated respect shown to parents is not normally extended to peers, and CS was where they learned to do that. **‘Talking well’ allowed them to communicate well with people outside their normal range. It was mentioned as an advantage of the CS more than reading and writing.** This was something that was used every day and with everyone, literate or illiterate and had elevated their status just by talking.

**VALUES AND MANNERS**

Throughout all the interviews, the students consistently cited values and manners learned at the CS as the most important and beneficial things they learned, more important than the literacy skills or other academic learning.

*Mohtaram* is a word that was mentioned by a majority of the students. The word *mohtaram* comes from the word respect and encompasses respect for self and others and
expecting others to do that same. I asked the students to define what *mohtaram* meant to them, as well as what their other important values meant to them to get at their deeper attitude.

**Defining Values**

Saeed defined well behaved as "having a good manner, a good manner with his teacher…to be respectable with anyone…"

For Ali, like many others, he prioritized respect and manners, saying, "for example if someone came in we shouldn’t make noise in the classroom, we respect other people’s opinions…We need to be on time, so in the morning if our class is 8am we need to be here before 8am and not be late…if someone talks I don’t talk when he’s talking, I wait until he’s done his talk …in my opinion it means to not be a coward, [I can] say the opinion that I want to say, I say, but I mean, within the limits of respect and good manners…"

Hasan elaborated on pollution, "I don’t pollute the water, I don’t light fires…[If I did] it can’t be fit to drink, this water is not fit to drink [to start with]."

Nadia defined conscientiousness in teachers as, "It’s not just giving the lesson one time and then disappearing…” Also Selma defined doing a good job as, "doing the job with competency, with earnest…” As well as Soha, "I pay attention to teaching the kids well, and teaching them correct behavior and teach them to talk softly and not to talk
EXPERIENCES IN EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

... loudly and to obey their parents and to pray and fast, but if there are Christians I would teach them proper behavior and akhlaq (moral character) [instead of religion]…”

Selma defined cooperation as, "it’s when I participate with my classmates in their joys and sorrows and if someone asks me to explain something I help him in anything… so that the community can be, can be cooperative and well so that our country can progress…"

Selma defined respect as, " I respect my classmate’s opinion, it means that they say their opinion and I say mine and if we don’t agree then to each his own opinion…I don’t impose my opinion…I don’t impose my opinion on anyone…”

In Susan's case, she expanded on what persistence meant to her and how her teacher had taught it to her,

She taught us that every time something happens, if you are not up to this thing then from the beginning, don’t do it, don’t start it. From the beginning, if you are up to it then go and do it. But if you’re not up to it then khalas [that’s it] don’t do it, so you don’t come in the middle and say we can’t do it. No, the road that you are taking, take it until you finish it, she taught us this thing. It stuck [with me]…I did it from then on, so everything that comes before me I do this as if it’s a law in math and I’m following it. Either I finish the road I start or I don’t go…

26 Although I did not question Soha about why she singled out Christians to teach akhlaq to, it fit with Susan’s description of their Christian teacher, who taught them morals not religion since she was from a different faith.
The students were also quick to insist that they learnt values at home as well, from their parents and families, Susan pointed out, "If we say that peasants have bad behavior then we are saying things against our families." However, there was something ‘just different’ about the values they learned at school. Repeated questions to get at why values learned at school were different from those learned at home yielded answers that stressed the importance, not the difference. I will return to this in the chapter discussion.

Thus, the students defined the values they learned in a multitude of ways, and described how they were lived out in their lives. They were key to all the students: cooperation, persistence, punctuality and the ever-present ihtiram (respect for self and others).

"Tarbiyya abl el ta’aleem": Upbringing Before Education

The relationship between values and education was inextricable in the students’ minds, as can be seen from their comments on the most important things they learned at school, and in how they described their community school life as being different from their MS life, largely on the basis of differing values, manners and attitudes of the classmates and teachers. How these values, manners and attitudes helped shape their progress in education was an area of interest and here I gathered the comments that I felt spoke to that. The social and personal meanings the students' carried behind the idea of being 'educated' were also revealed in these comments.

27 The Arabic word used, tarbiyah, means rearing, upbringing or raising. I chose the word 'upbringing' for my translation because it also carries the meaning of forming a person.
Saeed described why Teacher Noha spent so much time talking to them about values, because,

The ministry is called *Wizarit El-Tarbiyya wal Ta’aleem*, the Ministry of Upbringing and Education, upbringing is before education. If someone wants to learn they have to be well behaved, it is more important than being clever; clever is worth nothing if he isn’t well behaved. He must be everything, well-behaved and clever and good with his teacher.

Thus, *tarbiyya* (being well-behaved) was a crucial component of their learning and education.

Nadia also commented on the name of the ministry and said,

The ministry is called *Wizarit El-Tarbiyya wal Ta’aleem* Upbringing and Education *Upbringing is supposed to be before education*... the important thing is not that a student is learning and better, that he is good at school, the important thing is that he is well mannered and *mohtaram* (respectable). He should even respect his teacher and respect his school and respect even [his family] at home, he should be respectful towards everyone at home, he should respect them and show respect those who are older than him…respect towards others is respect for yourself, because while you are respecting others they will respect you and manners and respect are good…she [Teacher Noha] used to always talk to us how we should always be *mohtarameen* (plural for *mohtaram*) and well-raised, more than to be clever at school…its not everything to have money or to be successful, that’s not it only, one must be have good characteristics and be well-raised.
CHAPTER DISCUSSION

Cultural Capital: "The difference between us and our families is that we got an education and learned what are the rules.”

Ali

In many ways, these students are coming to learn the dominant culture. The difference between the moral values they learned from their parents as well as their teachers, and the values and manners they learned at school that were “somehow different”, are the values and manners of the dominant culture. They are, in fact, cultural capital. The many comments about "talking well" were about learning how to communicate with people outside their social circles.

However, I found that the students viewed their school experience through the lens of Delpit rather than the lens of McLaren. As Delpit (1988) discusses, parents- and in this case students-who are not part of the dominant culture want their children to learn the discourse patterns, the interactional styles and the spoken and written language codes, i.e. the cultural capital of that dominant culture. Their cultural capital will hopefully be turned into social and economic benefits (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). The CS taught my participants to read and write, but also codes for dealing with mainstream and respected people in their community. Thus despite describing their families as good people, some of the values that are expressed relate to social class and mobility, rather than morality, for example, ‘talking well’.
Bourdieu (1984) discusses *habitus*: dispositions characteristic to different classes. People distinguish themselves by the preferences they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the classy and the vulgar. As an example, he cites how some people favor filling and economical foods, while others favor delicacies that signify luxury and each person’s choice is an indicator of the class he originates from. Linguistic capital is a form of cultural capital based on socially approved language.

Academic and gray literatures on the CS refer to skills of literacy and numeracy, confidence and self-esteem. However, it is this cultural and linguistic capital that these CS graduates emphasized above all. Even though their homes taught and reinforced moral values, their illiterate parents could not teach them this linguistic and cultural capital that they learned from their educated teachers.

These tastes, manners and ‘talking well’ are not trivial; they have significant material and life consequences. For example, a participant in Elgeziri’s (2010) study said,

When you have a BA, this is a proof that you have acquired a certain respectable culture and certain life skills. The academic subjects you learn at school are not the issue, it is the culture that you get there…. they have to know how to grow, but continue to respect others, they have to know that *el ein ma ta’alash an el hagib* ‘the eye cannot rise above the eyebrows.’ (p. 42)

In other words, the value of an education is in the cultural capital associated with an education, not the academic subjects, and one’s social class is immobile.
Anyon (1981) also suggests that even with a standardized curriculum, there will be subtle and dramatic differences between what these students are learning at their school and what they would be learning in a public school of a higher social class, that will mark them as being rural poor. The cultural and linguistic capital my participants learned at school improved their social standing within their communities, however, if they were to seek opportunities elsewhere, they would encounter plenty of filters to keep everyone in their ‘place’.

The same cultural capital is at work that privileges foreign born and bred teachers with the same exact qualifications as Egyptian teachers (as well as the broader Middle East, in particular the oil-rich countries of the Arab Gulf) to receive salaries that are many multiples higher. Parents are prepared to pay a great deal for their children to acquire Western cultural capital, the capital of knowing, thinking, living within a Western habitus. As a personal example, a close friend, with an Ivy League Masters’ degree from the US, was frequently asked at job interviews in Egypt, what school her children attended, what sports club her family belonged to, and what car she drove, as questions that sought to find out her social class. Cultural capital is used as a filter to keep the masses out, mosh ay had (not just anyone) as the phrase in Egypt goes, it must be bint nass (a daughter of respectable people, not riff raff).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The CS graduates’ attitudes showed that learning was a transformative experience for them that allowed them to participate more fully in the world and in their own lives. Most of them linked Egypt’s progress with educating all of its children. They hoped that
other students would benefit from an education like their own, that did not assume that they came to school knowing the curriculum already, and met them where they were at. Some of them centered their reasons for learning in human capital terms, others in humanistic terms, however, they all mentioned a variety of reasons for learning: personal, social, cultural, familial, and societal. Their economic reasons for learning did not crowd out the others. They appreciated that they will be educated parents some day, unlike many of their own parents who could not help them with their schoolwork. Their attitudes towards Christians were friendly and accepting of religious diversity, and respectful.

The CS graduates’ reasons for their chosen professions were described as altruistic reasons of helping others, as well as mentioning the status that comes with the professions they described. They were recognized and respected by their families and community for their academic achievements, and for some of them, their school going and studying gave them a respite from the often-rigid role of housework. The roles their CS teachers played in their lives before were sorely missed, and one role that was missed was their role as mediating quarrels between the students.

The girls had given issues of marriage serious thought. They expressed that they did not want to be controlled by a man, and so wanted to complete their education before marrying. They did not think any man would be supportive of their education, yet at the same time it raised their hopes of marrying socially upward.

The CS graduates talked about the issue of ‘talking well’ at length, and for them this meant to use good manners, be considerate of others’ feelings, and know the art of
conversation. They gave ‘talking well’ considerable importance, as they used it with everyone, some going so far as to make it as important as learning to read and write. They also defined ‘talking well’ as listening to others’ opinions. They defined manners as they saw and lived them, especially the concept of respect. Giving and being treated with respect, ihtiram was key for many of the participants, as well as being properly brought up.

I defined cultural and linguistic capital as tastes and language used to distinguish different social classes (Bourdieu, 1984) and argued that it was this capital that the students continued to refer to as being a pivotal gain from their education. Their newfound capital has given them status amongst their community, but it is not likely to support them once they leave the village, as this capital will then be likely used against them as it positions them from rural backgrounds.
8. CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The goal of this study was twofold: to draw out the key influential factors and deeper attitudes and skills the graduates had about their experiences; and to uncover the assumptions, expectations, and mindsets in their thinking and in those around them that operated to limit or expand their situations. My aim was to understand CS graduates’ experiences to provide insight to educators, researchers, and policy makers on the opportunities and challenges of receiving an education in the CS, and support efforts to increase accessibility and quality education for all.

In Chapter 1, I described the educational landscape in Egypt today, the current state of the educational system, its impact on society, its quality and current problems of rampant private lessons and inequality. The private sector has exploded on the Egyptian educational scene, siphoned off resources, and the educational discourse is couched in the neoliberal problem-solving variety of critical thinking to serve market forces. As a result, the public sector has dwindled in quality while burgeoning in numbers of students. CS were envisioned as a way to bring in the hard-to-reach students who were on the margins of society, whether because of gender or financial difficulty or geographical location, through bringing a locally supported model that offered a quality education and solved the problems associated with gender, cost and location. This model and its lauded success was the focus for my study of educational experiences of students in rural Egypt.
In Chapter 2, I traced the development of the CS in Egypt, and covered the literature on CS schooling in other parts of the world, and examined the tensions that need further investigation and exploring such as balancing academic and locally relevant knowledge and pedagogy, the powerful social inequities in Egypt and how they are maintained through education, and the life prospects contingent on cultural capital. I covered quantitative studies that aimed to measure qualitative changes by measuring proxies and pointed out the limitation of doing so as the meaning behind the proxies changes. I also discussed the influence of neoliberal ideology on the educational system in Egypt.

In Chapter 3, I outlined how and why I used qualitative methodology and grounded theory, and what the challenges and opportunities are in issues of the credibility of qualitative research for qualitative mindsets. I described my positionality as a previous researcher in business, and my class location in Egypt, as well as my motivation to bring a sociological perspective to the CS experience. I described why I aimed to develop thick descriptions to house facts shown by statistics in their contexts and reasons (Denizen, 2004), because statistics alone reduce complexity to single numbers that mask heterogeneity. Qualitative studies keep quantitative portrayals connected to reality.

Chapter 4 then turned over to a portrayal of the eleven CS graduates the study focused on, their lives at school and home, and their backgrounds. I examined the contexts and influencing factors common to them all, and asserted that their dreams are highly unlikely given how the structural inequalities will work against them. Gender emerged as the dominant theme in their accessing school, creating disadvantages against girls attending the primary MS in the first place. The perceived need to protect girls’ honor and physical safety, and the expectation that they will one day marry someone who
will provide for them, combined to construct the widely-held belief that ‘girls don’t need an education’. However, the CS graduates considered education to be a key part of their identity and life, and parents had come around to valuing their daughters’ education also. They were all hopeful about the future, despite the fact that many intense, high stakes tests and crippling financial costs, still stood between them and their dreams.

The findings in Chapter 5 related to the CS graduates’ schooling experiences: what they liked and didn’t like, what they experienced, what were helpful and mitigating factors in their education and discussed their motives. Based on semi-structured interviews with the students, I identified their reasons that were key to them attending the CS: physical proximity of the schools; reputation of quality education; and economic viability. I illustrated the CS model’s curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. I argued that the CS were largely successful in widening access to primary school and were a strong factor for increasing primary school enrollment, however, the key to reducing inequality was its educational quality that surpassed that of the MS. The quality of their education rested predominantly on their teachers.

I examined the relationship between perceived teacher and school quality and the student-teacher relationship, the effect of the first child in the family to go to school on the siblings, and the gendered expectations. The view of the CS as being substantially different from the MS is challenged in light of the increasing pressures on the CS to converge with the MS in curriculum, and the expected consequences of that convergence. Teacher quality and bond with the students was central to the CS graduates’ experience.
Chapter 6 looked at the CS graduates schooling experiences now that the participants have left the CS and gone on to the MS school, the differences they have experienced, the challenges they faced in getting and continuing their education successfully and their future prospects. Although the CS students going to the preparatory MS is a step closer to achieving their dreams, it also brought into sharp relief the structural barriers they increasingly face as they progress through the system in the form of expensive private lessons, streaming through high stakes testing, and social exclusion. The primacy of private lessons in their post-CS life was the main conclusion.

The deeper attitudes, skills and dispositions of the CS graduates were examined in Chapter 7, and I drew forth their opinions on all children getting an education, school, teachers and education in general, as well as their views on marriage, Christians, and community. I closely examined their understandings of values and manners, and discussed the key finding of the chapter, that their education granted them cultural capital that gives them a voice in the ways and norms of the dominant class in society, though it may ultimately limit them.

In this final chapter, I provide the conclusions of my data analysis in testimonies to a lived, real curriculum of schooling. I frame the major findings of the study within the central and supporting research questions. I highlight and discuss these findings and present conclusions to examine their significance within societal and global contexts.

In each chapter of the findings, a dominant theme emerged and I discussed it in depth. I turn now to answering my research questions, and analyzing how neoliberalism, cultural
capital, and quantitative ideology interact with these themes on the students, teachers and the CS model. Finally, I will draw out the implications and areas for further study.

RESPONSE TO MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My central research question, how did graduates of the CS experience their schooling and how has that experience impacted their lives? provided the overall framework for the study.

1. What features of the program were relevant to them?

The CS were found to have removed all the obstacles these students had in going to school and getting a primary education. It brought the school close to home so that the parents would feel safe letting their children, particularly daughters, go somewhere that was in their familiar vicinity. When they completed the primary cycle, both the parents and the daughters had changed: the daughters were more mature, confident and older with improved self-esteem; and the parents could see the benefits of their daughters’ education. In this respect, the CS was an excellent stepping-stone for students who would have otherwise been denied an education, and as a method that changed deep-seated resistance to girls’ education in general. The schools widened education access by changing attitudes as well as making education financially accessible.

In addition, the quality of education that the students received was relevant to their thriving. Their teachers met them where they were at and built from there. This allowed the students to flourish in education rather than falter, especially compared to their siblings and acquaintances in government schooling. In particular, the quality of
their relationship to their teachers, and how this translated into other beneficial attitudes for the students later was germane to the majority of students interviewed. The quality of educational experience they received developed them in ways beyond the economic, purely didactic, banking model of education.

2. What skills, knowledge, attitudes and dispositions did they learn?

The students learned academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, as well as attitudes and dispositions that serve as cultural capital as they move forward in life. For some, their love of learning and education was fed and grew, for others it replaced other, more negative associations with learning and school. They gained confidence, self-respect and respect from their families and social circles. They learned to tolerate and engage with others who are different from them, whether in opinion or religion. The students can now realistically dream, and they and their families hope for a better future and status. Especially for the girls, they have friends outside of their families since they have met more people and have more physical mobility. Also, for the girls, they see marriage as something to put off while they focus on building themselves to a position of more strength.

3. How has their life changed as a result of the things they learned at school?

The students’ lives have changed to varying degrees as a result of their educational experiences. For some, their lives are 180 degrees different from before, for the better as those students say. They see themselves as having vastly more opportunities, trajectories and life chances than before. For others, the respect and self-respect they
have learned from the CS, that they often do not see their classmates having learned at their government schools, has given them confidence in their families and social circles as well as within themselves.

4. What are the opportunities and challenges such a model offers education reform in Egypt?

The CS model has expanded access to education at a level of quality that is seen as significantly better than the MS system. The model offers lessons for education reform in Egypt pertaining to the centrality of teachers and the teacher-student bond, locating schools where they are needed not where the MOE happens to have lands, and moving beyond the drawbacks associated with high stakes testing education to more holistic education. The challenges associated with scaling this model and maintaining the quality of education pertain to 'planning' rather than 'searching' (Easterly, 2008; Niyozov & Dastambuev, 2012), that is to say top-down planning and decision making that is not supported by the people who live and work in the reality of developing CS every day. Previous attempts at mainstreaming the CS model into the government system, such as the One-Classroom Schools, have harmed public support for CS in general by being promoted as ‘Community Education’ without understanding and development of the pivotal role teachers’ play in the success of the school. This has unfairly tarnished the school's reputation amongst many of the educational community in Egypt.

Ninety-nine percent of the CS graduates in Manfalut also go on to secondary (Zaalouk, 2004). There they are faced with necessity of private schooling. Even the
government recognizes that the financial cost of a general prepatory education is prohibitive due to the costs of necessary private tutoring (MOE, 2007). A key challenge of the CS is to extend its support of quality education past the primary stage.

5. What do the students’ experiences tell us about CS as an education model?

High quality, low cost education has been done effectively in the unlikeliest of places: rural, patriarchal, economically disadvantaged Sa’eed. The relevant facets of quality education that made it so are to do with teachers, enabling those teachers to do their work and building relationships. CS differed from mainstream schooling in Egypt in pedagogy, curriculum and expectations and its differences were suited to its goals and challenges. For students in primary schooling, the setting in which the schools are and the students holistic development, the CS model appears to have achieved many of its goals.

However, being different from the mainstream model of schooling also created extra challenges for the CS graduates as they bridged the transition from CS to MS to complete their education. These challenges are part of the reason the CS model is converging towards the mainstream schools.

6. What are its possible implications for curriculum development and teacher training?

This study has shown that the quality of teachers and teaching is the key primary determinant of quality of education.
With regards to curriculum development, the Egyptian curriculum is famously content heavy as well as frequently outdated, and discriminatory (Radwan, 2013). In addition, it is extremely weak on thinking skills, not to mention critical thinking. This is the curriculum that the CS have recently converged to after being more focused on constructivist learning, learning in more depth, and skills. Thus, a heavy curriculum may have implications for the quality of education, as well as the student-teacher relationship, as the pressure increases to finish mounting volumes of material, as well as increasing responsibilities on the teachers. Even if the content is modified to work for active learning rather than didactic transmission, the sheer volume of it may render attempts at constructivist learning rushed and hollow.

**IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY FINDINGS**

**An Evolving CS model**

According to the CS graduates, as students they derived considerable academic, social and personal benefits from the CS, in particular the girls. They were seen as having the chance to get an education, develop their personalities, have hope for a better future, develop networks of friends outside of their home, and generally develop as humans.

My point is therefore by no means to argue that the CS are not beneficial to the students they serve. Rather, my argument is that the benefits of the CS are conditional on factors that are being overlooked in the focus on standardization and rapid expansion. These key factors (student-teacher bonding, sufficient time to engage deeply with the material, less pressure to finish the curriculum) are currently in the process of being
significantly changed, and that the implications of those factors are not a part of the discourse that I witnessed at NGO workshops. Education reform is hardly unique to the CS model in Egypt- one can hardly imagine any school model not evolving and changing with the times to meet the needs of the students-nor am I arguing for fossilizing the model in the way it was originally.

Rather, I am arguing for the voices of the students and graduates themselves, as well as the voices of the teachers, to be heard and acknowledged, not as participatory partners witnessing the inevitable march towards standardization, but as key voices in what the reform needs to be to best serve all the stakeholders. This is completely in line with educational research on populations that are difficult to reach and engage, as well as psychological research as I illustrated in Chapter 5.

I find that, as Delpit expressed, the dichotomy between student-centered, active, constructivist learning, and teacher-centered, didactic, transmission learning is false (1988). Students and teachers need both. The changes that are currently being promoted at the CS I went to are neither student-centered, nor teacher-centered. The heavy curriculum is changing the school day, the level at which the students can engage with the material, and the time available for them to constructively learn. This is curriculum-centered.

The issues of neoliberal influences on schooling are not unique to the Egyptian NGOs or even Egypt. As indicated in Ch. 2, UNICEF proposed charging students fees for attending the CS once they withdrew their financial involvement. The Egyptian NGO involvement is still keeping education at the schools free, and is expanding the number of
schools at a fast rate. The neoliberal influences and mindset are part of a wider trend in development today (Easterly, 2008; Klees, 2010; Brehm & Silova, 2010; Niyozov & Dastambuev, 2012).

Voices of Teachers

In this study I was primarily concerned with how CS graduates regarded their teachers and how teachers influence the schooling experiences of the CS graduates. Therefore, no study on the CS would be complete without mentioning the status of its teachers as a primary driver of the schooling experience. Similar to the UNICEF 2010 report, “low salary levels remain a point of contention expressed by the facilitators [teachers] at every possible occasion during the research.” (p.76), particularly as the teachers in the One-Classroom Schools, which are ineffective, receive higher pay for fewer hours of work and longer vacations, to say nothing of the minimal effort put in to educate the small number of children who register.

In addition to these points, their complaints to me mentioned the low profession grade in the Ministry ranking, as well as the difficult commute, occasional lack of bathrooms, working in rural contexts, and for some, a dead-end, exhausting, unsustainable through the years job. Their professional conduct, teaching and classroom management were of the highest order, although I realize this is not uniform across all teachers.

From teachers in the start-up schools in their first year, to teachers in established schools with several cohorts behind them, the teachers of the classrooms I met with were invested in making their classes engaging, enlightening, safe and worthwhile. The longer hours, shorter vacation times, and less pay, combine together to demotivate even the most
professional and dedicated of teachers, particularly compared to their colleagues in the MOE system, whether in One Classroom Schools or regular MS schools.

That they are forced to remain in the current situation due to a lack of opportunities elsewhere is no reason to assume they will be giving their best to a profession where affect and intellect are inseparable. It is impossible to imagine their conditions not affecting the quality of their work in all but the most dedicated cases. Such conditions may also dramatically affect the extent to which NGOs and the MOE can continue to depend on the teachers to hold the CS up to its history of quality education. While it is understandable that the CS in general are suffering from a teacher shortage and the system relies on inexpensive teaching staff to run the program, the teachers as I saw had no voice, and the channels available to them to air their grievances are negligible in a system and mentality that views them as replaceable.

In this study I set out to give the students a voice in the development of their education. I still stand by my rationale and motive for doing so. However, and ironically, in CS in particular, I found that students, while not having voice, are at least considered the center of the CS experience design by program developers and administrators. The teachers also needed to be given a voice. It is as if the students had been taken from the bottom of the pyramid hierarchy and seemingly placed at the top, while the teachers were now at the bottom of this pyramid. Whether it was with the MOE or the NGO running the program, I found a skewed understanding of neoliberal child-centered pedagogy that placed the “student” at the center of the schooling experience without really asking any students what they thought. In the meantime, the responsibilities to the already over-loaded teachers piled even higher. Given that one of
the goals of the CSP was to develop the teachers also, (Zaalouk, 2006) it would seem that this goal has been overlooked.

During my research it did not take long to discover why most research focuses on teachers and not students. Working with students requires greater sensitivity and caution against potential distress or harm, as well as more difficultly obtaining permits. Students are much harder to interview than teachers. It requires a lot of skill to be able to elicit responses from students in the 12-14 age group, and indeed, the most comprehensive and thoughtful answers I received were from the older students. However, I discovered that teachers, having seen many classes come and go and watched the students grow up before their eyes have many valuable insights that I hadn't fully appreciated before, while the students' experiences were limited to themselves and their own experience. Examining the teachers’ CS experiences is fertile ground for future research.

**Implications for Policy Makers**

*“It is better to give everyone fool (Egyptian beans) than to give only a few lahma (meat)”…*

Policy makers and administration face the difficult talk of balancing between the haves and have-nots on limited resources. To illustrate, I will show three examples: the first, a CS administrator, spoke of the need to expand the number of CS rapidly even if the quality was not high because a poor education was like a traditional Egyptian meal of fava beans, fool, and falafel, whereas a quality school was like a meal with lahma (meat), in it. His idea was that it was better to feed everyone fool and falafel than to feed only some people a meal with lahma in it, thus any school is better than no school. The
second opinion was from a high-ranking NGO administrator who had a vision of schools that builds them as futuristic schools with smart boards and solar panels, which means that some students get everything and other students get nothing or not much; and the third is Zaalouk’s (2006) vision of schools as not compromising on teacher training, but materials are basic, while other needs can be met by the community (like land and physical buildings). They all fall on a spectrum of differing ways to respond to the challenge. These are not easy choices, especially with plans for 2,000 new CS to open in the next three years (M.O., personal communication, 2013).

Is it in fact a *fool & falafel* vs. *lahma* choice? Particularly as educational stratification currently occurs on the basis of school quality? As it emerges from this study that quality is a key characteristic of the schools? The UNICEF 2010 comprehensive evaluation cautioned against the shift in scope from quality education and reaching the hard-to-reach, to prioritizing mainstreaming. In fact, this is exactly what is underway.

**Communicating Findings**

Having been through the study, I now find it elementary that the qualitative findings should be taken as authentic representations of the students’ experiences, as ‘valid’, if not more valid, than if those findings had been obtained through quantitative means. It is possible to reduce the findings to a page, a paragraph even, but as I reduced it I would be losing the depth of understanding of the multiple layers, ways, relationships, factors, and contexts that all shape the basic finding.

I started out intent on producing ‘valid’ knowledge, then intent on producing ‘legible’ knowledge, and now I find that the best, and arguably the most useful role, is to be a
good listener, one that can listen for what is said and what is implied, for what is said and what the big picture is that situates what is being said, and faithfully convey what I have heard and seen. Even though I did not come up with a number or simple recommendation for management, a positivist discipline is starting to discover that,

School-based interventions rarely focus on enhancing relationships and relational aspects of the classroom and are often overlooked in teacher education [in psychology programs] in favor of other variables that can be more readily conceptualized and manipulated…this is not entirely surprising with our current understanding of relationship, as it is difficult to provide a teacher with concrete guidelines and tools for developing emotional connections with each of his/her students…” (Toste, 2011, p.199)

Implications for Researcher

Qualitative/Quantitative

I had to confront my own biases towards this as I came to a much deeper appreciation and understanding of qualitative research, especially since this was my first experience at it. Having worked with many quantitative research methods myself and observed quantitative research methods in science disciplines also, and I was surprised how similar qualitative research is, and yet how different. While quantitative methods are often seen as irrefutable and qualitative methods seen as subjective, the quality of both rests on the research program design, on being very specific about the application of the results, and the conditions under which the results were produced. Additionally, it is important to
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respect that even while being systematic and rigorous, qualitative belongs to a different paradigm than quantitative and therein lies its value. (Denizen & Lincoln, 2011).

*Classism*

This study has given me insight into the classism in Egypt that has always riled me and left me even more disturbed, particularly given the socio-political climate in Egypt during this summer of 2013. It is simply unjust, unfair and a waste that such beautiful people with so much potential, dreams and hope of their own as well, as for their parents, will likely be dashed against the immobility, oppression and prejudices that characterize Egyptian society today. I have seen through this study that political polarization in Egypt is drawn along classist and urban/rural lines, as well as ideological ones. Ever since the January revolution in 2011, Egypt has been in the throes of acrimonious polarization, with demagoguery a key feature of any political discussion, sensationalism rather than journalism filling the airwaves, and double standards by all against the other side.

As an Egyptian liberal, I hear too many of my own ideological camp so consumed with their dislike of the Islamists that they put up straw men to tear down, generalizing, essentialising and stereotyping the class, social origins, and religious observance of people exactly like my participants. When I chose this topic for my research in the spring of 2012, it represented to me an example of a model that could tap into the huge potential of a land I dearly love and give many in Egypt a fair chance. Now it reveals to me the structural injustices, mindsets and worldviews that are entrenched in Egyptian society and, except for a lucky few outliers, will likely keep many Egyptians like my participants socially immobile.
Understanding what student voice really means

I now realize in a different way that that student voice needs to be heard and a better understanding of how research is done “with” the students not “on” them. I am not becoming an authority on CS but knowledge of the CS is something I gain as I facilitate their voice. My assumptions were a powerful filter that loomed large in my earlier interviews. I came to wanting the students’ words to “illuminate certain impressions” (Cook-Sathers, 2007, p. 861), and it was only later that the import of what they were telling me struck me differently, and my subsequent questions came from a different place, one that was more curious and open.

At first I spent time on breadth rather than depth. In the end, to complete this thesis and finish within my time constraints, I needed to engage more deeply with what I had, rather than trying to get more knowledge and experience. It felt almost like I hadn’t been listening at the beginning.

I came to educational research surprised that there is often little voice given to the students. Coming from a business background, it seemed ingenuous that the ‘client’ was not being heard. This was my main impetus to seek out the voice of the students. Through reflecting on this research however, I have come to see that although student voice is extremely relevant and lacking in the literature, my understanding of its significance has changed. I found Cook-Sathers’ (2007) explanation of the difference between the research approach and the collaborative approach apt: the first one is adults seeking students’ (or others) perspectives and then interpreting the meaning of the data themselves. But in the collaborative approach, the students are positioned as
active interpreters. This to me epitomized the difference between the business focus group style listening and bringing the student voice into the research.

When I came to see student voice as missing from the workshop discussions, it became easier to come to the realization that their voice needs academic backing. From seeming obvious to ask the ‘client’ how the program was working for them at the beginning, to noticing for the first time that hardly any research had been done on the CS teachers and how they make sense of their role, to coming back full circle, I still stand by my original choice to interview the students, but my perspective is very different.

FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Given the dearth of research on CS teachers despite their role in the front line, giving them a voice and understanding how they experience and understand their roles, and current and past changes is significant.

2. The students are given hope, then left to face the structural societal barriers on their own. There are uplifting success stories of people who made it against the odds. However, there are more who don’t make it. How do they make sense of their educational trajectory, and adapt to resuming life under the same structural discriminations as before in the village? How do they navigate between the MS and their dreams? How does their education influence their final marriage choices?

3. Also, from these CS graduates’ narratives on their families, it is the brothers who are consistently dropping out of preparatory schools. The reason given is always, “they made him hate it.” What is it that makes boys hate the MS but
the girls able to cope with it?

4. All the participants spoke of their love for Egypt, in contrast to Cairene students I met in other contexts who all wanted to leave Egypt. If people who feel loyal to Egypt are in the poor schools, and people in the rich schools are not very attached to Egypt, this has potential consequences for how the country’s wealth and power will be used, and marks an interesting line of possible future research.
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