The Story of ASG

Part I: Background

ASG, the oldest all-girls school in Amman, Jordan, was founded by a group of missionaries from the Christian Mission Society (CMS) of England in 1926. The mission statement of the school, and its *raison d’être* was “to empower Jordanian women with knowledge and, therefore, choice” (ASG, p. 2). The educational philosophy of the school rests on the belief that ASG is a learning organization that aims at “exposing its learners to a variety of enriching experiences to enhance their individual abilities within a supportive, safe and inclusive environment in an attempt to achieve excellence” (ASG, p. 4). The school, which is a non-profit organization, was run by the CMS until 1957 when it was handed over to the Arab Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and, for the first time since its establishment, it had an Arab principal and its curricula changed to include the Jordanian Ministry of Education (MoE) program. During this period and until the present, the school has remained faithful to its national ideals while maintaining, to start with, a British, and later, an international perspective.

When it first started, the curriculum taught at the school was the British National Program and the qualification the students received upon graduation was the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCE) following the University of London Board. In 1957 and upon the ‘arabization’ of the school, students also had the chance to obtain the qualification given by the Jordanian MoE. Throughout its history, the school has offered both national and international education and this has given the students a competitive edge and has enabled them to be accepted at the most competitive universities worldwide. In addition, the graduates of the school have occupied leading positions in the Jordanian society. The school, in seeking to develop the students’ personalities, personal visions, understanding and awareness, has focused on offering different co-curricular and extra-curricular activities including, but not limited to, choir, dance, creative writing, drama, and community service.
In the late eighties and early nineties, the school lost its edge at a time when investing in schools as businesses was in vogue in Jordan leading to the establishment of several good schools which offered good national and international academic programs. These schools spearheaded the educational developments in Jordan and offered parents the competitive edge they sought for their children. Many of these schools were coeducational, a quality that was attractive to ASG clients, at a time when ASG’s sister school, the Bishop’s School for Boys, was also undergoing a similar regression. ASG started losing its clients and dawdled into stagnation. Many of its teachers who believed in its mission stayed on and tried to maintain the good educational standards that were once upheld at the school while also focusing on developing the personalities of the students. However, many of the teachers left for better opportunities elsewhere and their replacements did not have a clear idea about their roles. Mostly, they thought of themselves as subject teachers whose role ended in the classroom and did not extend beyond. They were doing their jobs and seemed not to think beyond the mechanical and daily routine of the day. Staff development activities were sporadic and in many instances, it was left up to the teachers themselves to pursue any kind of development on their own.

During this period of stagnation, the school’s academic menu was not much different from any governmental school. Some British syllabi were still retained, especially the English language program, but were not taken to examination. The school achieved well in the Jordanian government exams, just like many other private schools in Amman, and was lost in the crowd. Having lost its direction, the school dwelled on its glorious past because it did not have much in its present. Luckily, the school had retained its major rituals and activities including the weekly morning assemblies, its Open Day and its Christmas Bazaar, its community service activities, its student council, its choir and drama which always helped draw the members of the school into a sense of community. These rituals and activities engaged the students fully as active participants and not as mere observers and gave
them a sense of empowerment that was a distinctive feature of the graduates of the school regardless of the strength or weakness of their academic preparation.

It needs to be emphasized that the period of stagnation at the school was a source of dejection for the small school community and for the society at large that mourned the demise of an institution that had served the Jordanian society and provided many of its leaders. This called for a change of leadership and a strategic plan that would seek to transform the school and bring it back to its former glory.

To bring the school out of this period of ‘hibernation’ and stagnation, which was felt more forcefully when the private sector in the country started rising out of its repose and presented different models of excellence in education, the school needed a new vision and a strategic plan that would help overhaul it and bring it back to the forefront of education in Jordan and the world. In the early nineties, there was a new leadership in the school with the vision to transform the school into a leading academic organization and a center of empowerment for young Jordanian women. The new vision was the fruit of the collaborative efforts of the enlightened members of the Board of Trustees from the Anglican community and the leadership team in the school.

The first task of the new leader was to know the reality of the school. Wisely, the Board of Trustees decided to look inward at the current staff of the school to find a potential leader who would be entrusted with the formidable task at hand. The new leader, who was the head of one of the smaller divisions of the school, was young, passionate, and had integrity, curiosity and daring. The leader set out to gain the trust of the followers and develop a guiding vision that would steer the school on its new course. The leader had the full support of the Members of the Board of Trustees that took upon themselves the task of guiding, coaching, supporting and molding the new leader whenever the need arose.
The new charismatic leader organized intensive collective dialogue sessions to get to know the staff members, their hopes and aspirations and professional and personal goals. These high quality exchanges and mature partnerships were transformational since they assisted the staff to move beyond their own self-interest to accomplish the greater good for the organization. As a result, trust was built between leader and staff. In addition, these dialogues, which extended over a long period of time and later became one of the rituals of the school, also resulted in producing the shared vision, which grew out of the needs of the organization, new mission statement and educational philosophy of the school. The vision, mission and philosophy were live documents that the school revisited and revised and they grew with the growth and development of the school. The first vision statement was formulated in 1998 based on various accepted ideas in the school, and several documents that were in use. As our experience deepened, we revisited this mission and vision and reformulated them in 2003. The move was from a prescriptive / descriptive mission with stated objectives into a more open ended form that focused on the change process more than its outcome.

The current shared vision of the school, which was first developed in the collective dialogue sessions, involved a high degree of uncertainty and included contradictory elements, and it still does, since it views the school as “rational and ethical” on one hand and a school of “soul and spirit” on the other. In the process of building and maintaining the vision, mission and philosophy, the school was and still is envisioned as a “live being, continuously in a process of growth” and aspiring to be “a pioneer in walking through the twentieth century with the twenty first century at the tip of our [the constituencies’] fingers.” The major challenge the school faced then was moving from a traditional school to a progressive school that aimed at “opening its doors to communicate with a larger learning community by embracing a dynamic dialectical process that will place us [the constituencies] in the heart of the world” (ASG, p. 3).
In addition to the vision of the school, the educational philosophy was developed and agreed upon. The philosophy affirmed the school’s belief in its people and revealed their new “group identity” by stating that there were no limits to the potential abilities and human capabilities of the school family. ASG also set very high expectations for itself and all its constituencies by viewing itself as a:

Learning organization that creates and nurtures a well-balanced learning environment and takes initiative through exposing its learners to a variety of enriching experiences to enhance their individual abilities within a supportive, safe and inclusive environment in an attempt to achieve excellence. (ASG, p. 3).

In viewing itself as learning organization whose members were committed to life-long learning, growing and embracing the world, the school focused, not on its limitations, but on its possibilities. This provided direction and aligned the energies of the staff members to work towards achieving the goals of the organization, which became their own personal goals through the process of transformation. Achieving those goals and moving towards the vision, the school was truly facing a formidable task considering the reality of the school and its traditional status. It also needed a lot of effort and commitment on the part of the teachers who needed to embrace the new changes and be motivated to work towards and create new realities.

The process of engaging the staff in building the new vision rather than imposing a ready-made vision on them resulted in the teachers putting in the extra effort and time needed to effect educational reform in the school. Teachers have different needs and vary in their competence, commitment and motivation. Having established open channels of communication and trust between leader and teacher, the leader was able to individually consider their needs and address them. She directed,
coached and supported them. As a transformational leader, her goal was not only task completion and accomplishment. It was assisting individual teachers and staff members to become “fully actualized.”

Establishing the vision and educational philosophy, and revisiting the mission of the school, resulted in reshaping the school’s culture and paving the ground for the larger educational work that awaited staff and leadership. A major area that needed to be addressed was the programs, curricula and assessments. As a traditional school, ASG kept the MoE program and did not encourage students to pursue the GCE program. Before 1995 interested students had to rely on private tuition if they wanted to get the GCE qualification. The MoE program was content-based and assessment depended on rote learning and regurgitation of information learned. Teachers were viewed as experts and the only source of information; learners were only receptive and the one kind of intelligence that was acknowledged was the IQ. Instructional management and control dominated the scene.

The transformation process changed the theoretical framework teachers operated within. Staff development activities aimed at bringing new learning and educational developments to the school. Workshops were held at the school to introduce concepts like active learning, brain-based learning, differentiated instruction and multiple intelligences. Teachers learned to be facilitators of instruction rather than being the only source of knowledge. Students were encouraged to engage in research activities and teachers learned to incorporate performance based assessments into their evaluation of student learning. Teachers learned to teach research skills and critical thinking. They did all this as a community of learners who experimented together, shared their learning and supported one another. The new school culture supported inquiry, experimentation and peer coaching. Transformational leadership enhanced team spirit. This process of learning, unlearning at times, and relearning is an ongoing process till the present day.
The organizational structure of the school was also affected by the transformation process. Leadership and management became distributed and participative. In addition to the Head of School, each division in the school had its own head. Departments were formed and each had its own head, whose role as a leader was to support, guide and coach teachers. Dissatisfied with the instructional leadership model that focuses on the leader as the center of expertise, power and authority, heads did not attempt to control their team but tried to emulate transformational leadership which was modeled by the Head of School. Department heads became more like critical friends sharing their expertise with their teammates without attempting to adopt an instructional leader stance and coordinate, control and supervise the curriculum and instruction in the school. Leadership in the school was conceptualized as an “organizational entity rather than the property of a single individual, accounting for multiple sources of leadership” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338).

Transformation paved the way for the revival of the GCE program, the adoption of the IGCSE program and later on the IB Diploma program, which is now internationally recognized as one of the best programs in secondary education. The school remained a national school and kept the MoE program but enriched it with British and American syllabii. The results of the students in the three programs offered at the school were very good and kept on improving. The students gained acceptances at the most selective universities in the world and the school maintained a hundred percent pass rate over the years in its international programs and just a negligible percentage of failing cases in the national program. In addition, all graduates of the school pursued undergraduate education either in Jordan or abroad. Student outcomes are greatly influenced by transformational leadership behaviors especially goal achievement and ethos (Silins, 1994, p.8).

True to its educational philosophy, ASG in attempting to create a “supportive, safe and inclusive environment” (ASG, p. 3), developed the services it provided its students. The school established a
special needs department and developed a counseling program. Inclusive education meant that students were not pulled out of the classroom but their different needs were attended to amongst their peers infusing a spirit of fairness and equity in the school. In addition, as a new approach in the country, it paved the way for experimentation and research in the field of special education. The new learning was shared with other schools in the country and in the region through certain organizations, such as the UNESCO. More recently, the school stretched its special needs program to serve gifted students and developed its relationship with Renzulli Learning, an international program that serves gifted students worldwide.

Transformation of the school affected not only the small school community but affected the school’s relationship with one of its most important constituencies, the parents, and with the society and larger community. Transformational leadership sought to involve the parents in the education of their children. It opened its doors to criticism hoping to use it in a constructive way to address weaknesses and build on strengths. The school also developed its relationships and built partnerships with the other organizations in the local and international communities, including, but not limited to, the Jordanian MoE, the British Council, universities and most recently the International Baccalaureate. ASG viewed these organizations as partners in educating future leaders.

**Part II: The Transformation at ASG**

If the previous discussion has painted a very bright and flowery picture of the state the school is in, this should not indicate that transformation is an easy process. The change was an uphill struggle all the time and there were periods of setbacks and dejection. In addition, a transformational leader, who is supposed to hold the group together in times of crisis, undergoes many struggles and has to balance many pressures while never losing sight of the main purpose of the organization. In an article
published in *Educational leadership*, entitled “Beyond transformational leadership,” C. Day discusses some of the tensions and dilemmas a transformational leader undergoes stating that the success of the leaders rests on “their personal values, and their ability to maintain and develop learning and achieving cultures while they managed ongoing tensions and dilemmas” (2000, p. 57). These tensions arise as a result of the leader having to lead and manage at the same time. The most relevant of these tensions to transforming ASG from a traditional to a progressive school were managing the “boundaries of autocratic and democratic decision making (p.57) and achieving a balance between “involving staff in decisions and providing a clear direction forward” (p.58).

Part of the reason behind this dilemma is the leader’s evaluation of the readiness of the staff to make sound decisions and the fact that the decisions can be influenced by personal agendas. To resolve these conflicts, the leader had to trust staff to “transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization” (Northouse, 2004, p. 177). Even when mistakes happened, the leader and staff embraced them as learning opportunities “necessary for actualizing… [the] vision and necessary toward success” (Bennis, 2003, p. 128). Dilemmas and conflicts are necessary for the personal development of the leader and her growth in maturity and wisdom (Bennis, 2003, p. 111). The courage to take risks is a quality leaders cannot live without. To be courageous is also to be prepared for the isolation of leadership (Koestenbaum, 2002, p. 139) and for the anxiety that develops as a result of these dilemmas and conflicting notions.

ASG does not exist in vacuum. It is part of the educational arena in Jordan and is influenced by all the social, economic, environmental and political changes in the world. As such, it is also subject to educational reform initiatives that affect education in Jordan. In an essay reviewing three books on educational reform entitled “Educational reform and the politics of change,” Jordan, S. and Jackson Oise, N. state that “educational reform…has literally gone global as we enter the 21st century” (2003,
In two of the books reviewed, educational reform is viewed as an educational science and there is a “persistent tendency [amongst reformers] to abstract schools from the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they exist” (p. 503). The third book reviewed is “informed by a critical sociology of education” (p. 506) and calls for engaging with the agents of reform (principals, teachers and other educational practitioners) and the structural conditions (social, economic and political) under which it occurs (p. 507).

Educational reform in ASG as the focus of the transformational process has to be viewed in the larger picture and against the backdrop of the educational reform initiative of the Jordanian MoE. The key issues in the educational reform initiative of the MoE include providing quality education, striving for excellence and creativity, creating lifelong learners, efficiency and effectiveness in using the country’s resources, effective use of ICT, decentralization, and creating beneficial partnerships. The vision the MoE has paints a wonderful picture of reform; but just as the view of reform, presented in the first two books reviewed by Jordan and Jackson, the MoE sees reform as an educational science abstracted from the structural conditions under which it occurs and without engaging its agents. Reform at best is an attempt to focus on external structures and factors that are directed by the same policy makers who had created the conditions that previously existed. Introducing new technologies into schools and enforcing views on what constitutes quality and lifelong learning are mere examples of reform being enforced by the policy makers without taking into consideration any social or cultural contexts or the needs of the agents of reform.

The proposed reform initiative of the MoE that seeks to introduce technology in the form of ICT and computers or e-schooling into the south of the country, for example, where poverty is rampant and students go to school on an empty stomach will not be very beneficial and will not lead to effective changes. To effect change, reform initiatives have to take the needs of students and the agents of
reform into consideration. Principals and teachers undergoing reform initiatives are given new strategies to apply, aiming to make education accessible to all and uphold equity in education without taking their structural conditions into consideration.

Reform initiatives seek to effect “first-order variables” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338) like curriculum and quality of instruction and setting nation-wide educational goals. Conversely, transformational leadership, as in the case of ASG, seeks to generate “second-order effects” like increasing the capacity of others, creating a climate that encourages lifelong learning and sharing one’s learning with others, and identification of one’s personal goals to link them to the organizational goals (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338).

Against this backdrop of educational reform in the country, transformation at ASG provides a brighter picture where change is effected from inside out and bottom up with each acting on the other and causing transformation. In the words of Hallinger:

Leadership must be conceptualized as a *mutual influence process* [italics in the original], rather than as a one-way process in which leaders influence others. Effective leaders respond to the changing needs of their context. Indeed, in a very real sense the leader’s behaviours [sic] are shaped by the school context. (p. 346)

Transformation in ASG that introduced educational reform was primarily based on the needs of the students as well as the agents of change. There were no ready-made improvements that were imposed on the school and any development and change came as a response to the needs of the constituencies involved. For example, although the adoption of a new educational program was part of the vision of the Head of School upon assuming her responsibility, the program was adopted only when the school was ready for it and its staff members were looking for a challenging program that would result in upgrading the educational standards at the school.
Transformational leadership at ASG resulted in the production of live documents that act as guides to the school community. These documents comprise the vision, mission and educational philosophy of the school. The Ethical Code of the school is another live document that was written and agreed upon by the whole school community, including the students. The writing of the Ethical Code was done in a series of workshops that involved students, and teachers. In the process, students, who are the ones mostly affected by the code, gained a sense of ownership regarding the articles of the Code and emerged with a higher level of morality, which is one of the effects of transformation (Northouse, 2003, p. 171).

In the past decade or so, what started out as a reform initiative at the school resulted in a whole school transformation affecting all school constituencies, programs, curricula, assessments, relationships in the school and the school’s relationship with other local and international organizations and entities. Currently, the school is not only about offering a rigorous academic program. It has become a center of empowerment and leadership. Transformational leadership at ASG has achieved more than what it set out to achieve and during the process has raised the morality of both the leader and followers and has motivated them to “transcend their own self-interests for the good of the team, organization, or community” (Northouse, 2004, p. 184). In this way the school has not just reformed itself but has established itself as a model for education in the country and has taken up a new role for itself which is serving its community and the world at large.

In thinking of the future, the words of Bennis come to mind. “Vision, like the world itself, is dynamic, not static, and must be renewed, adapted, adjusted. And when it becomes too dim, it must be abandoned and replaced” (2003, p. 172). The vision of the school is serving it well now. The vision needs to develop and be renewed. It is the role of transformational leadership to monitor the vision and keep it alive. It also needs to open itself more to the world and heed the changes that are taking
place in it. If changes in education and other arenas are not embraced and seen as new challenges, the school will regress into stagnation. Transformational leadership has “dealt with and continue[s] to deal with this mercurial world by anticipating, looking not just down the road, but round the corner; by seeing change as an opportunity, rather than an obstacle; and by accepting it, rather than resisting it” (Bennis, 2003, p. 161). This is the road map for the school, the one that will ensure ASG will maintain excellence and greatness and be true to its mission of empowerment.
The Current Action Research

Up till the present initiative, ASG has not engaged in any research to examine its claim of being a center of empowerment and it has not set out previously to test its supposed success. Any evidence ASG has had was merely anecdotal and mostly subjective. A suitable opportunity was availed when Dr. Sally Turki approached ASG Director General, Mrs. Haifa Najjar, and informed her about the project when it was still an idea. Mrs. Najjar was excited and indicated willingness to take part. When the project was officially made public and university staff joined it, the country representative approached our school with the idea, but by then we did not need convincing as we were already in a frame of mind to participate. The school's administration at that stage nominated us, the team (see below) who attended the first workshop in Amman (summer 2007). In that meeting, we were asked in one of the exercises to choose a topic to research. This was not intended to be the final topic but was rather a practice topic. Coming from different backgrounds in terms of specialization, we thought of a topic that represents a common ground among us. The school's mission of empowerment was a tentative title to work on especially as all three of us were passionate about it. When we suggested this topic we noticed the enthusiasm of the AUB team members, one of whom commented that such a topic is almost unique in the Arab World. We were thus encouraged to carry on with this topic. At first, we had a very broad conception of the scope of the research, but as we moved on and obtained data and got to some findings, the focus not only became clearer, but the scope of the necessary work seemed less than initially expected. Throughout the two years we were in constant contact with the AUB team (even between workshops) and they gave us pertinent advice. We were very proud that our project was one that dealt with a school wide issue and was not restricted to the micro level.

The current action research project aims at addressing the following points:
1. How successful ASG is in its endeavor to empower its students;
2. How credible and committed the adult constituency is to the mission of the school;
3. What major activities the school engages in that contribute to the empowerment of the students.

Based on the above, the action research question revolves around whether ASG is fulfilling its mission of providing quality education and experiences to its students to help them grow into empowered human beings who work on realizing their potential; and if so, what practices and activities enable the school to do so. The research aims at providing evidence to prove the claim and to collect data that would help the school gain knowledge and refine the actions taken towards the envisioned end. The outcome of the action research will be used to direct informed action plans to better achieve the mission of the school.

Rationale

Empowerment is about giving people the confidence, competence, freedom, and resources to act on their own judgments. Hence, when a person or a group of people are empowered, they undergo a change in their relationship to other people who hold power and with whom they share mutual goals (Ciulla, 2004, p. 59). If ASG students are truly empowered, we, the researchers, would be able to find evidence of the changed relationship the students have with their environment. Richard Couto, reported by Ciulla, differentiates between two kinds of empowerment: the first is psycho-political empowerment, which increases self-esteem and results in the distribution of resources and/or the actions of others i.e. to bring about real change; the second is psycho-symbolic empowerment, which raises people’s self esteem or ability to cope with what is basically an unchanged set of circumstances (p. 60). In the context of the school, it is important to find out whether the professed empowerment is
felt by the students and other constituencies and what type of empowerment it is. It is also important for the adult constituency to decide whether they want to design activities that would lead to one kind of empowerment or the other.

The research team

Mrs. Alice Abboud: The Head of the Secondary School at the time, now the Head of the School in addition to being an IB English Language teacher.
- wrote the introduction to the action research report.
- conducted the literature review on the topic.
- was responsible for the administrative part of the research and liaised between the school team and the AUB team.

Mrs. Khalida Qattash: Head of the Library and Media Center and a teacher of IB English Language and Theory of Knowledge.
- facilitated administration of questionnaires.
- processed the qualitative data.
- translated questionnaires.

Mr. Nasri Tarazi: Head of the Mathematics Department at the time, now Head of the newly established Research and Development Unit.
- drafted the student and teacher questionnaires used for the action research.
- processed quantitative data using the SPSS program.
- coordinated research processes internally.
- wrote the analysis part of the report.

The team collaboratively handled the following joint responsibilities:
- decision making.
- proofreading and editing written materials.
- sharing results with school staff.
- collecting feedback from staff and monitoring group discussions on findings.
- conducting a focus group.
**Methodology**

We, the Action Research Team, decided on the survey approach to collect the necessary data in two stages. In the first stage, the tools chosen were a student questionnaire, distributed to the students of the last two grades of Secondary School, a teacher questionnaire and a teacher focus group to delve deeper into the findings and to gain further insight into the interpretations. In the second stage (if agreed upon) the research will move on to other stakeholders in the community who are not necessarily involved within the immediate school community. These include graduates, parents, friends of the school, and the business sector, which is the real receptacle or arena where the seeds of empowerment and the proof of the school’s success or failure are reaped. The research will also study the central documents of the school to assess how well they are aligned with the activities and the claim of empowerment. In this report we will be describing the findings of the first stage only.

Accordingly, we decided to collect data first from the students through a questionnaire. The data collected revolved around the three issues identified above; namely, the role of ASG in empowering students, its credibility in doing so, and the activities that help in this endeavor. The questionnaire, which is presented in Appendix 1, was formulated by one team member and was revised and approved by other team members before it was sent to the AUB team for feedback. It is worth mentioning that informal dialogues with students helped formulate some of the questions, but the students did not know at the time that their opinions were being solicited.

The students were surveyed in April 2009, with team members going into classes and asking students to answer the questionnaire on an individual basis. One team member collected the quantitative responses and organized them into themes. A short time later, the AUB team visited us and offered to transfer the responses onto an SPSS sheet. When this was emailed back to us, we were
able to analyze the data, and the findings helped us formulate the teachers' questionnaire which solicited the views of teachers regarding empowerment of women and change; their assessment of the school's effectiveness in pursuing its empowerment goals; and their ranking of the activities that help empower students (see Appendix 2). Thus, this questionnaire was designed as a triangulation method to help us interpret some of the students' responses. This questionnaire too was revised by the AUB team. The intermediate findings were not disclosed to the teacher lest that influence their responses.

The teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaire during the training week before the start of the academic year 2008/2009. The responses of this questionnaire were entered on SPSS, analyzed and compared against the student responses by one team member, while the qualitative comments were considered by another team member. The contrast between the responses of the students and teachers highlighted some issues that needed to be addressed and/or interpreted. A focus group was held for this purpose. The focus group comprised of 8 teachers that represented the widest possible variation in gender, the school sections (elementary and secondary), the duration they had been working at the school and their outlook to life. The findings were presented to the group and their comments or interpretations were invited. The help of two colleagues was sought; Mr. Ismat Farouq videotaped the session and Dr. Janet Zabaneh transcribed it. Later, three colleagues from the clerical staff typed the contributions. The session was videotaped, transcribed then analyzed with the help of the country representative, Dr. Sumayyah Muhtaseb.

Having done all that, a staff meeting was held to disseminate the findings on a Wednesday afternoon, which is the weekly time for the internal training meetings. Mr. Tarazi presented the findings and while Mrs. Abboud and Mrs. Qattash participated in the discussion and took some notes that we thought would be helpful in giving insights into the interpretation. From that time, plans started to be laid down to address the issues that needed attention as shown by the research. In the
summer of 2009 the findings were presented to the school board meeting together with the implications of that on school administration and activities.

Throughout this work our team enjoyed a high degree of cooperation and a total lack of bureaucracy. Tasks were divided amongst us by agreement rather than holding lengthy meetings, we found that we shared a common language that allowed us to communicate effectively over the telephone or via e-mails. This was very appropriate as we were all short of time, considering that none of us got release time for the project. If one is to reflect back, one would commend the support provided by the AUB team, the encouraging remarks of the colleagues in other teams participating in the project from the three countries. Nevertheless, one should also highlight the support provided by our school director, Mrs. Haifa Najjar, who took a personal interest in the project and was most impressed by the findings and by the discussion they generated. She was the one who pushed for the presentation before the board in an attempt to raise their awareness and was encouraged by the success of the project to create a post in the school that would take charge of research and development and instill a research culture in the school that promotes evidence based decision making.
Findings and Discussion

The approach adopted in this section will tackle each objective separately and will present the students and teachers responses together. This will allow us to make conclusions regarding each constituency in addition to comparing the responses. Throughout parts I and II the numbers presented are percentages. In some cases, the percentages do not add up to 100% due to rounding, but more importantly because the percentages were calculated based on the total number that responded to the questionnaire. So, if a question was left blank by some, the no-response accounts for a percentage that is not presented in the table. Moreover, it is worth noting that the number of respondents to the student questionnaire was 140 and the number of teachers that responded to the questionnaire was 65.

Part I: How successful is the school in its mission of empowerment?

We, the research team, thought that the students’ perceptions of their futures (work and marriage) and their impression that society may not appreciate the empowered role of women are indicative of their own empowerment. Tables 1 and 2 deal with marriage and the future role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife with voluntary / charity role.</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working woman</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working woman who shares the obligations with her husband.</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Student's perception of their future role and the role the teachers encourage students to play in the future.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For the 'right' husband I would:</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>Marriage is:</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice a university education</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Necessary at a young age</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice getting a job</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Necessary even if concessions are involved</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice some social values</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>Necessary but not at any cost</td>
<td>55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unnecessary unless it causes more happiness</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not a central issue</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Better avoided</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: students' and teachers' perceptions of the relative importance of marriage.

It can be seen that there is a general agreement between students and teachers as far as that the role of housewife is not the desired role. It should be noted, however, that the qualitative comments added by the teachers in their response to table 1 (which were presented instead of ticking the box) indicated that women are capable of playing more than one role and that being a housewife is a necessary role that does not detract from a woman's empowerment. The attitude to marriage in table 2 also indicates some agreement. Again the teachers’ qualitative comments made it clear that their understanding of marriage is based on equality and the need for a family as the basic unit of society. They did not present marriage as a necessity for women per se (which is an understanding that prevails in some patriarchal circles of society). One can conclude that within the range of acceptable variation among individuals, the teachers are in harmony with the school's mission and try to relay it to the students.

Tables 3-7 deal with the respondents’ perceived position vis a vis social values and social change.
Conflict with social values is expected to a great extent, as evidenced in Table 3. The possibility of conflict with social values is highly expected by 20.7% of students and 32.3% of teachers, often by 45.7% of students and 58.5% of teachers, sometimes by 23.6% of students and 58.5% of teachers, a little by 8.6% of students and 7.7% of teachers, and unexpected by 8.6% of students and 7.7% of teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict with social values is</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>I talk about the possibility of conflict with social values</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly expected</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat expected</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little expected</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: students' and teachers' perceptions of the conflict with predominant social values.

In case of conflict with social values, students and teachers would respond as shown in Table 4. Likely, 9.3% of students would reflect on values based on their experience, while 28.6% would not. Unlikely, 61.4% of students would adhere to social values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would reflect on values based on my experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: In case of conflict with social values would you rescind your values?

In case of conflict with social values, students and teachers' perceptions are detailed in Table 5. Adhere to social values: 6.4% of students and 4.6% of teachers. Pretend to adhere to social values while privately upholding my own: 16.4% of students and 0% of teachers. Choose some issues to confront society: 72.1% of students and 56.9% of teachers. Stick to my values and confront society: 4.3% of students and 10.8% of teachers. Reconsider some values: 0% of students and 4.6% of teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adhere to social values.</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretend to adhere to social values while privately upholding my own.</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose some issues to confront society.</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stick to my values and confront society.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsider some values.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: students and teachers' perceptions of how to react in case of conflict with social values.

Students' and teachers' perceptions of how much convictions direct actions in life are summarized in Table 6. A lot: 50.7% of students and 73.8% of teachers. Somewhat: 47.1% of students and 26.2% of teachers. A little: 1.4% of students and 0% of teachers. Never: 0% of students and 0% of teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My convictions direct my actions</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: students' and teachers' perceptions of how much convictions direct actions in life.
Table 7: Students' and teachers' attitudes toward social change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social change is</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>61.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My responsibility</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not my responsibility</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows a very good match between the student and teacher responses. The 7.7% of teachers that do not refer to the conflict with social values are grade 1-3 teachers who are not expected to present issues in class that are beyond the maturity level of the students.

Tables 4 and 5 can be considered together, and jointly show that there is a healthy percentage that are either adamant or who are wise enough to choose their battles. A small minority of some 5-10% chooses to give in to the social norm which is only to be expected. A worrying percentage of 16.4% of students chooses to live two lives. Luckily, this category is non-existent among teachers which will help students appreciate the value of coherence and consistency when it comes to values. The answers in this table contradict the answers in table 6, where almost 100% of respondents indicate that they live according to their values. This might possibly mean that the few who have indicated their tendency to adhere to social norms have reached a stage where they adopt those norms as their own. This is a possible defense mechanism that is common in patriarchal societies.

Finally, table 7 shows healthy attitudes towards social change. It seems that the question regarding attitudes toward social change was unclear to students so they did not answer all three components. This difficulty seemed to be shared by teachers. This explains the relatively high "no response."

Tables 8-14 address the role ASG plays in empowering students and forming their self-image.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of ASG in shaping students convictions</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly significant</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat significant</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: The students’ and teachers’ perception of ASG’s role in shaping students’ convictions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of ASG in shaping my character</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly significant</td>
<td>45.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat significant</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: The students’ and teachers’ perception of ASG’s role in forming students' character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of ASG in forming my self image</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly significant</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat significant</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: The students’ perception of ASG's role in forming students' self-image.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The role of ASG in instilling the empowerment ideal in me</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly the most important</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligible</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: The students’ perception of ASG's role in instilling the empowerment ideal in them.
The values of my family and those of ASG are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almost identical</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tend to differ</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradictory</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: The students' perception of the school's and their family's values.

The way I am developing is a source / cause of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with my family</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with my family</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure to my family</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family does not follow up on this issue</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: The students' perception of their parents' appreciation of their development at school.

I try to instill the school's mission with the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I consciously plan this and do it often</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often, but without planning</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes if there is an appropriate moment</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have no time</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: The teachers' perception of their effort to instill the school's mission with the students.

Tables 8-11 show the students' appreciation of the role the school plays. However, one should note that the teachers expected this effect to be even higher. Perhaps it is easy to underestimate the influences that the students are affected by outside school. It seems that the teachers expect that since the school's message is so unique, as far as schools are concerned, then every success should be attributed to it and that this success is even bigger than it really is. Tables 12 and 13 remind us that there are other influences in the students' lives. Table 14 shows us that the teachers are actually too optimistic in their assessment of the school's effect given that half of them do not plan how they are
going to instill the message of empowerment. Table 8 also shows that the teachers expect the effect of
the school to be more than the students feel it to be.

The students were asked to answer a qualitative part of the questionnaire: If they thought that
ASG helped empower them, they were asked to list the areas where this change occurred. If they
thought that ASG had a negative role on their empowerment, they were asked to state why that was so.
One hundred and twenty students answered this section and the results can be summarized in table 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive influence:</th>
<th>118/120</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities: confidence, independence, responsibility</td>
<td>66/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of women as change agents</td>
<td>66/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of logical, proactive, positive thinking</td>
<td>38/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future outlook: having goals, planning, ambition</td>
<td>33/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding social realities and power</td>
<td>29/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness, accepting differences, democracy, freedom of expression</td>
<td>20/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of education particularly for women</td>
<td>19/120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative influence:</th>
<th>2/120</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School gives us an excessive dose of self confidence and a false sense of security while we are in for a shock when we meet the real world.</td>
<td>1/120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school's claims and slogans that aim to raise the morale contradict its actions.</td>
<td>1/120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: The students' perception of the areas where ASG influenced them.

Generally speaking, there is a relative harmony in the results of the questionnaires of students
and teachers showing that there is a basic understanding amongst the teacher constituency regarding
their role in empowerment. It is clear that efforts put by the teachers bear fruit and shape the students’
orientation.

One should notice that there are differences in the way the students perceive their future roles
and this is only to be expected. One can infer that there is a proportion of some 10-20% who are
aware of the mission of the school, but who are not certain they would be able to adopt it. This figure
is an estimate obtained from considering the percentage of students who would sacrifice their university education, their right to work, or some of their social values for the sake of marriage (1.4%, 9.3%, 12.1%), the percentage of students who would adhere to social values in case of conflict (6.4%) and the percentage of the students who though social change was impossible, unnecessary or not their responsibility (9.3%, 9.3% and 15.7% respectively). Those percentages are not to be added together because the responses are not mutually exclusive and one student could have responded to all those questions in such a was as to contribute to each of the percentages shown. Other students interpreted the mission of the school on the level of personal success and not on the level of being social change agents.

**Part II: How credible is the school in its mission of empowerment.**

The second point addressed in the action research was the school’s credibility and the commitment of the teacher constituency to the mission. Both teachers and students questionnaires addressed this issue.

The first question sought the respondents’ views regarding the school's work to achieve its mission. The results are summarized in table 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The school as a whole works for the empowerment ideal</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: The students’ and teachers’ views regarding the school's work to achieve its mission.
Tables 17-20 tried to explore if there is a perception of a contrast between the teachers and the administration or between the teachers themselves. The teachers were not asked to answer two of the questions as it was thought that the answers would be salutary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The administration is sincere in pursuing the empowerment ideal</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>58.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: The students' views of the seriousness of the school's administration in this endeavor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teachers are sincere in pursuing the empowerment ideal</th>
<th>% students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: The students' views of the teachers' work for empowerment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The difference between the administration and teachers regarding empowerment is</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the reasonable differences among people</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: Students' and teachers' views regarding contrast between administration and teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The difference between teachers regarding empowerment is</th>
<th>% students</th>
<th>% teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the reasonable differences among people</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Students and teachers' views regarding the contrast between the teachers themselves.
Tables 17-20 indicate that the general view amongst students and teachers is that the administration and the teachers are working to fulfill the mission of empowerment. Closer scrutiny, however, indicates that the students view the administration as more sincere than the teachers. Tables 19 and 20 indicate that the students are more critical than the teachers in the sense that they are more sensitive to the differences amongst teachers on the one hand, and the difference between teachers and administration on the other. Another interpretation could be that the teachers are more tolerant to the differences amongst individuals.

As a school that upholds the mission of empowerment and that operates in a society that does not promote this value, particularly in schools, ASG's experience has shown that teachers joining the school after having worked for other traditional school systems, find it difficult to manage their classes and usually feel that the school's mission has a negative effect on learning and on discipline. With the teachers questionnaire indicating that some 93% of teachers view this mission as having a positive effect on learning and discipline, it is clear that the teachers endorse the mission and feel that it does not adversely affect learning.

Part III: The school activities that help empower the students

The last focal point revolved around the school rituals and activities that seek to empower students. All kinds of activities were listed and both students and teachers were asked to select the top five that play a major role in empowerment. They were asked to list them in order of their importance. The top activity was given a grade of 5, the next activity a 4 and so on. The grades were then added up giving us a weighted grade that helped us rank the activities in order of importance. Table 21 shows the outcome of this ranking. This exercise had never been attempted before, and it was the first time we had evidence of the relative importance of the activities. It is interesting to see that the
activities that are either theoretical or involve a few students ranked lower in the list. In hindsight this is not surprising. However, with the annual ritual of the school play, we thought that drama would be higher up on the list, but it seems that watching a play does not empower as much as acting in one. The teachers were asked to do the same i.e. list the activities that they thought help empower students in order of importance and the data was processed in the same way giving us a different ranking (table 21).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Rank students</th>
<th>Rank teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between students and teachers irrespective of subject</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning assemblies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way teachers and students interact</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discourse used by the administration with students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discourse used by the teachers with students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methodologies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports activities and camps</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The philosophy and mission documents</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The values adopted by the teachers that become evident in class</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student initiatives</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural activities</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way the ethical code is implemented</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections and the students' council activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way the teachers and administration interact</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: Students and teachers views regarding the activities that they thought help empower students.

The major conclusion drawn from this comparison is the fact that teachers are insufficiently aware of the student preferences and activities outside class. Some thoughts were expressed to the effect that the teacher responses were influenced by their awareness that the school's mission statement
helps direct and design all activities. There is no evidence that this is necessarily so. Some voices expressed concern that the vote may have been tilted by the weight of the elementary teachers who deal with students before they engage in a wide range of activities. So, to assess this claim, the votes of the secondary teachers alone were taken and the general picture did not change. In fact, the secondary teachers thought that the top activity was the language used between the administration and the students. This finding gave more credibility to the thought that the teachers (in general) see themselves detached from the empowerment process.

The obvious conclusion was that the teachers need to be more involved in the activities to arrive at a better understanding of the students.
The issues emerging from the focus group

As described above, a focus group comprising 8 teachers was assembled and the results were presented gradually and comments and interpretations were sought. The session was transcribed and coded. The emerging issues from the focus group were as follows:

Regarding the success of the school endeavors:

1- Despite the work consistently done on empowerment, the results appear in the upper school more than in the lower or middle schools. Therefore, some activities that seem to be unpopular at the time may emerge as a significant input when considered in retrospect.

2- How the student develops after school is subject more to her home values than to the school values. This is considered so because the input of society is a significant constant factor, and in general this input is not in favor of the school's mission. However, school values could leave a mark on the student if they were delivered consistently. Of course, the student has a choice in the end, but all other factors being equal, the challenge is bigger in the case of a student whose home values are different from the school values. The students who said that they were not influenced by the schools mission could have done so for two reasons: either they come from homes that adopt this mission, or they come from homes that oppose this mission and in both cases the students internalized their home values.

3- It is worth noting that some parents do choose ASG because it is an all-girls school for the 'wrong' reasons i.e. opposing coeducation. This segment has not been identified in our questionnaire as we have not interviewed the parents.
Regarding the credibility of the school:

1- The girl's judgment of herself may not be very accurate, as the answer is influenced by age and character; some students may deny the effect of the school even when they feel it, and some may answer according to how they felt at the time of the survey.

2- On the other hand, the teachers' responses regarding the effect of the school were guided by their historical experience and that includes their follow-up on what the graduates have achieved.

3- The teachers could have answered according to their wishful thinking in the sense that they conceived their effect as more than it really is or were driven by other motives, whereas the students had no interest in decorating what they see as the truth.

4- When it comes to interpreting the discrepancy in the assessment of the teachers and administration, it should be noted that the stability of the administration and its small number helps in giving it a credible stance in the eyes of the students. In contrast, the number of teachers is much higher, and they are in constant contact with the students which would allow the students to view them differently from the administration and may even expose differences between them.

5- A possible reason for teachers responding differently than students could be that the practices of the teachers are different from their discourse (and this discrepancy may not be evident to them). In addition, each teacher is isolated in his/her class and is not fully aware of what other teachers are doing, so s/he lacks a vantage point that the students have.

Throughout our discussions we found that we, members of the research team, can provide two quite different explanations of the same set of data. The lesson that was learnt was that the data
does not speak by itself and the interpretations offered by individuals are often tinted by their outlook to life. This helped highlight the richness and diversity of the school community and is a refreshing lesson in itself.
Future Action and Follow up

The results of both questionnaires were presented to the teacher body in a staff meeting. This drew teachers’ attention to the discrepancy between the responses and gave them a better understanding of the students’ perspective. When the findings were presented to teachers, a healthy discussion ensued that showed that there is a general agreement in most cases. Some tried to offer interpretations of the findings. The discussions helped shape this report and the formulation of the implications of the findings on the school practices that are presented below:

1. The school should focus more on its community service programs that the students listed on the top of the empowering activities and should exert more effort on their design and execution. Discussions should be conducted after such activities with the students to discuss their ethical implication and instill the values the school seeks to teach.

2. The morning assemblies should be reflected upon and greater care should be given to the way they are planned and conducted to yield better results.

3. In-service staff development activities should concentrate more on discussion of the school’s philosophy and mission to find ways for teachers to understand them better and to find ways to fulfill them.

4. The student questionnaires should be repeated every two years to compare results.

These conclusions were not only disseminated to the teachers but were also discussed with the teacher that is responsible for community service and with the teacher that arranges the morning assemblies. They consequently showed increased awareness of the influence of their task. The conclusions were also presented at a meeting with the board members and the data helped them approve Mrs. Najjar's idea of the establishment of a Research and Development Unit aiming to
provide the school with data to help decision making and make it more evidence based. The Unit is currently being set up and its role and vision are still being developed.
Appendix I: The Students' Questionnaire

Part 1: Myself
Please select the answer that best expresses your opinion:
1. The role I imagine myself to undertake in the future is that of a:
a) working woman
b) housewife with social and voluntary work
c) housewife catering for her family
d) working woman, sharing life responsibilities with her husband
e) other (please specify)

2. If I were to meet the man of my dreams at university, and he asked to marry me on condition that I leave my university studies, I would:
a) refuse him
b) accept him

3. If I were to meet the man of my dreams at university, and he asks to marry me on condition that I stay at home after graduation, I would:
a) refuse him
b) accept him

4. If I were to meet the man of my dreams at university, and he asks to marry me on condition that I adopt social values and behaviors I do not share with him, I would:
a) refuse him
b) accept him

5. When I think of the social role I will play in the near future, I expect to clash with the social norms in my society:
a) never
b) seldom
c) often
d) frequently

6. If I expect that my current set of values is going to clash with social norms, I will most likely,
a) change my values
b) cling on to my values
c) modify my values in light of my experiences

7. The best way to handle the difference between my future expectations and the limits set on me by society is to:
a) pretend to follow social norms, but follow my own beliefs and convictions in private
b) follow the norms set by my society
c) select some issues that I can manage to confront my society with to change them
8. Kindly choose a combination of responses from both columns below to complete this statement.

**Social change is:**
- Possible [ ] impossible [ ]
- Necessary [ ] unnecessary [ ]
- My responsibility [ ] not my responsibility [ ]

9. My lifestyle is based on my own personal convictions and beliefs:
   a) to a large extent
   b) to an extent
   c) in a limited manner
   d) not at all

10. I believe my own convictions will play a role in my future path in life:
    a) to a large extent
    b) to an extent
    c) in a limited manner
    d) not at all

**Part two: me, ASG, and its activities**

Please select the answer that best expresses your opinion:

If you believe that ASG played a positive role in shaping your values, personality, and self-image, please respond to questions 1-4, and refrain from answering question 5. If not, please move on to questions 5 immediately.

1. The Ahliyyah School for Girls played a role in shaping my beliefs and this role is:
   a) very significant
   b) significant
   c) minimal
   d) unmentionable

2. The Ahliyyah School for Girls played a role in shaping my personality and this role is:
   a) very significant
   b) significant
   c) minimal
   d) unmentionable

3. The Ahliyyah School for Girls played a role in shaping my self-image and this role is:
   a) very significant
   b) significant
   c) minimal
   d) unmentionable

4. The most significant change the Ahliyyah School for Girls influenced in me in terms of my personal beliefs and future role is: 

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
this part is for students who believe that ASG played a negative role in shaping them.

5. The Ahliyyah School for Girls played a negative role in shaping my beliefs, personality and self-image for the following reasons:

The following questions are to be answered by all.

6. This question aims at taking your opinion in the activities that have an impact on empowering students. Please check the item that you believe has a positive impact on empowering you. Tick items that had a negative impact with (×). If an item has no impact on you at all, leave it blank.

| a. school philosophy and mission statements |   |
| b. language used by administration to address students |   |
| c. language used by teachers to address students |   |
| d. the way teachers interact with students |   |
| e. values teachers adopt and implement during teaching/learning |   |
| f. academic/nonacademic discussions between teachers and students |   |
| g. interactions between administration and teaching staff |   |
| h. teaching methods |   |
| i. morning assemblies |   |
| j. sports activities and school camps |   |
| k. cultural activities (seminars and exhibitions) |   |
| l. drama |   |
| m. students initiatives |   |
| n. students council and elections |   |
| o. community service |   |
| p. implementation of the ethical code of conduct |   |
| q. other; please mention. |   |

7. Please prioritize the five most important items from the box above, from the most important to the least important.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
8. the overall impact ASG has on me in terms of empowerment is:
   a) obviously the most significant
   b) very significant
   c) minimal
   d) unmentionable

9. The values that the school adopts in comparison to those my family adopts are:
   a) almost identical
   b) similar
   c) tend to be different
   d) contradictory

10. the way I have developed at school, and the values I adopt are a source of:
    a) conflict with my family
    b) dialogue with my family
    c) satisfaction for my family
    d) irrelevant to my family

Part three: The Ahliyyah School for Girls
This part aims at assessing the way the school empowers students who are capable of making informed choices concerning their own future. Kindly select the response that best expresses your opinion.

1. in general, the school strives to achieve its goals in a deliberated, planned manner.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

2. ASG’s administration is honest and sincere in adopting its goals.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

3. ASG teachers seek to achieve this goal in general through their daily dealings.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

4. there is a discrepancy between the teachers and administration in accomplishing this goal.
   a. A huge discrepancy
   b. Some discrepancy
   c. An acceptable degree of discrepancy due to diversity among people
   d. No discrepancy at all
5. there is a discrepancy among teachers themselves in accomplishing this goal.  
   a. A huge discrepancy  
   b. Some discrepancy  
   c. An acceptable degree of discrepancy due to diversity among people  
   d. No discrepancy at all  

6. in comparison to other students from other schools, ASG strives to achieve this goal:  
   a. a lot more than other schools  
   b. more than other schools  
   c. less than other schools  
   d. a lot less than other schools  

7. I believe the ability of ASG graduates to confront society and undertake leadership roles in  
   comparison to other schools is:  
   a. More  
   b. Less  
   c. Similar  
   d. Not clear since I do not know any graduates
Appendix II: The Teachers' Questionnaire

Part one: Please fill in personal and professional information

1. Gender
   - Male [ ]
   - Female [ ]

2. If you are male, are you:
   - married? [ ]
   - single? [ ]

3. If you are a married male, your wife is:
   - A housewife [ ]
   - A housewife with social and charity work [ ]
   - A working woman [ ]
   - N/A [ ]

4. If you are a married female, your decision to work at ASG is due to:
   - Your husband's consent [ ]
   - mutual agreement between you and your husband [ ]
   - your own convictions [ ]

5. Years of service at ASG:
   - 1-3 yrs [ ]
   - 4-8 yrs [ ]
   - more than 8 yrs [ ]

6. The highest grade level you have taught during the past 2 years is:
   - 1-3 [ ]
   - 4-6 [ ]
   - 7-10 [ ]
   - 11-12 [ ]

Part two: convictions and values:
Please select one response that best expresses your viewpoint for each question:

1- The role I encourage my students to undertake in the future is:
   - A housewife who cares for her family [ ]
   - a housewife with social and charity work [ ]
   - A working woman [ ]
   - a working woman who shares household responsibilities [ ]
   - Other (please explain)-----------------------------
2- the significance of marriage for your students in the future is:
- absolutely necessary, and at an early age
- absolutely necessary, even if she has to offer compromises
- absolutely necessary
- necessary but not at any cost
- unnecessary unless it's a source of happiness to her
- not a central issue
- unnecessary at all

Please justify your choice; if you chose "absolutely necessary, even if she has to offer compromises", kindly explain what kind of compromises you consider acceptable.

3- Do you probe the possibility of clashing with societal norms and values after graduation with your students?
constantly ☐ sometimes ☐ rarely ☐ never ☐

4- If you chose one of the first three responses to the previous question, how do you prepare your students for such a clash?
- I encourage them to abide by societal norms and values
- I encourage them to hold on to their values and face society
- I encourage them to pretend they follow society's value system, and privately live their own values system
- I encourage them to reconsider some of their values
- I encourage them to select some issues to challenge society with and work on changing them

Other: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

5- Social change is
Possible ☐ Impossible ☐
Necessary ☐ Unnecessary ☐
My responsibility ☐ Not my responsibility ☐
6- My personal convictions lead my path in life:
Very much [ ] To an extent [ ] A little [ ] Never [ ]

7- The values I carry concerning empowerment of women and women's role in social change have been influenced by the school's Mission Statement:
Very much [ ] To an extent [ ] A little [ ] Never [ ]

8- When I began to work at ASG, my values concerning empowerment of women and women's role in social change were:
Totally contradictory with those of ASG [ ] Somewhat different than those of ASG [ ]
Somewhat similar to those of ASG [ ] Almost identical with those of ASG [ ]

9- I attempt at instilling the mission and values of ASG in students:
Constantly and deliberately [ ] A lot, but without planning to do so [ ]
Sometimes, when opportunity allows [ ] Time rarely allows it [ ]

If your response was among the first three choices, kindly explain the steps you follow to instill the school's mission and values on part of students:

Part Three: The Ahliyyah School for Girls

1- From your own perspective, the role ASG plays in shaping students' values concerning the role of women empowerment in social change is:
Very significant [ ] significant [ ] minimal [ ] unmentioned [ ]

2- In general, ASG deliberately strives to fulfill its aim in empowering students who are capable of choosing their own future:
Strongly agree [ ] Agree [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly disagree [ ]

3- The gap between administration and teachers in adopting this goal and enacting it is
Huge [ ] minimal [ ] within a normal range of diversity [ ] nonexistent [ ]
4- The gap between administration and teachers in adopting this goal and enacting it is
Huge [ ] minimal [ ] within a normal range of diversity [ ] nonexistent [ ]

5- What are the reasons behind such a gap, if it exists, in your opinion?

6- If, in your opinion, such a gap exists, how can you deal with such a gap, if at all necessary?

7- The school's mission and striving to empower students has an impact on their discipline
Agree [ ] Disagree [ ]

8- If you agree with the statement in question 7, this impact is:
Negative [ ] Positive [ ]

Please comment on your response.

9- The school's mission and striving to empower students has an impact on their learning
Agree [ ] Disagree [ ]

10- If you agree with the statement in question 7, this impact is:
Negative [ ] Positive [ ]

Please comment whatever your response is.
11- Please select five of the following activities and organize them in descending order according to their significance and positive impact in empowering students. Use letters to indicate your choices.

(If you feel you know little or nothing about the school's activities, please tick this box)

| a. school philosophy and mission statements | i. sports activities and school camps |
| b. language used by administration to address students | j. cultural activities (seminars and exhibitions) |
| c. language used by teachers to address students | k. drama |
| d. the way teachers interact with students | l. students initiatives |
| c. values teachers adopt and implement during teaching/ learning | m. students council and elections |
| e. academic/nonacademic discussions between teachers and students | n. community service |
| f. interactions between administration and teaching staff | o. implementation of the ethical code of conduct |
| g. teaching methods | p. other; please mention. |
| h. morning assemblies |

1. (most important)
2.
3.
4.
5. (least important)

Thank you!
References


