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A SPACE FOR EDUCATION AGENCY

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Community Solidarity Toolkit For Change

Initiating Grassroots
Cooperative and
Alternative Education
Institutes In Lebanon

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

MEET THE TEAM

- INTRODUCTION 5
- WHO IS SCOPE 6
- WHO IS DAS 10

CURRENT REALITIES AND POSSIBILITIES

- RATIONALE 14
- CONTEXT ANALYSIS 16
- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 20
- METHODOLOGY 22
- DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS 23

CHANGE AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- PATHWAY OF CHANGE 25
- STAGES OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT 26
- MANAGING COMPLEX CHANGE 28
- STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT 29
- THE DAS STORY/SCHOOL INITIATION APPROACH 31

A PATHWAY FOR CHANGE

- TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUE
 - THE DAS STORY/TIPS AND INSPIRATIONS 37
 - TEAM EXERCISES 38
- STORY TELLING
 - COMMUNITY SCHOOLS 45
 - COOPERATIVE SCHOOLS 45
 - FOREST SCHOOLS 47
 - DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLS 47
 - THE DAS STORY/IDEA INCEPTION MOTIVATION AND VISION 48
 - TEAM EXERCISES 49
- WISDOM RECOGNITION
 - TEAM EXERCISES 57
 - THE DAS STORY/BRIDGING VISIONS 58
- MODEL TRANSFERING
 - COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP 62
 - STRATEGIC PLANNING 63
 - COOP MODEL 64
 - ECONOMIC MODEL 68
 - INCENTIVE MODEL 70
 - GOVERNANCE MODEL 71
 - TEAM EXERCISES 72
- PRAXIS
 - PROCESS EVALUATION 80
 - PERFORMANCE METRICS 81
 - SCOPE REFLECTION ON ACTION 97
 - THE DAS STORY/ REFLECTION ON ACTION 98

- BIBLIOGRAPHY 100

01



MEET THE TEAM



INTRODUCTION

This Toolkit for Change is inspired by the story of an originating cooperative democratic school in Beirut, Lebanon. The toolkit provides guidance for community groups intending to/or in the process of initiating Alternative Education Institutes (AEI). This ranges from non-formal alternative education endeavors to formal alternative education schools that are community-led. It provides tips and practical recommendations for initiatives' initiation phase, backed with evidence and analysis from action research.

The toolkit is developed by SCOPE - Solidarity Collective of Professional Educators, an education consulting group, with the participation of a community of parents and educators who have been working to establish an alternative and democratic school in Beirut. For practical reasons, this school will be referred to in this document as the "Democratic and Alternative School" or DAS. The formal and legal name of the school is yet to be defined.

The toolkit focuses on the different educational, institutional, and personal aspects of the school initiation, and taps into the opportunities and challenges of each aspect, driven from the lessons learned from the initiation process of both SCOPE and DAS.

WHO IS SCOPE?

SCOPE

Solidarity Collective Of Professional Educators



OUR STORY

SCOPE - Solidarity Collective Of Professional Educators is a group of ten educators and a lawyer who collaborated to initiate a collectively owned and democratically run civil company. SCOPE was founded in April 2022 and is registered in Lebanon. SCOPE provides educational consultancy services to communities, schools and NGOs working in both formal and informal educational settings. We act through an evolutionist paradigm of governance based on wholeness, trust, free information, workers autonomy, self-management, critical peer relationships, shared values, valorisation of diversity and continuous learning.



OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our philosophy is rooted in Critical Theory, which is a framework of belief systems that directly engages members of culturally diverse groups with a focus on social justice issues. This approach includes the perspectives of the participants and the structures within which their interactions take place (the community, the school, the classroom). It aims to improve social awareness about issues of recognition, representation, and power relationships. It focuses on dialogue to interrogate dominant views and what is accepted as 'common sense'. A methodology where all stakeholders inquire, learn and teach interchangeably is implemented. The process of co-creating a curriculum with the community through dialogue ensures building trust relationships, partnership, and the representation of both the dominant and marginalized views to empower and engage all groups and to extend the idea of community engagement.

WHO IS SCOPE?

MISSION

SCOPE is in a continuous state of self-conscientization and emancipation in order to collectively create and disseminate value-based knowledge and practice. We draw on successful international practice and research to work collaboratively to mobilize intellectual initiatives and create educational models that are rooted in the social fabric of the country. These models emerge from the community's needs. We seek to ensure that all community members have equal access and participatory roles in impacting the wider society through the inclusive values of solidarity, justice and equity.

VISION

We envision a new educational approach based on the values of justice and socio-economical equity in the distribution of resources and energies, to model an emancipatory education system stemming from the conscientization of all stakeholders in the educational process.

VALUES

Socio-economic Justice
Equity and Respect
Sustainability and
Development
Ethics and Inclusion
Autonomy and
Emancipation



Why SCOPE?

Because it is my space to dream of a better tomorrow. It gives me the opportunity to put my thoughts on change in action and provides me with all the autonomy I need to test my ideas. It believes in freedom, equity and the right of every human being to live with dignity as we paint a better future free of anxieties and oppression.

SCOPE Member

WHAT WE KNOW

- **Youth** is a critical period for creativity, independence, identity formation, social interaction, learning and growth.
- Positive long-lasting **developmental pathways** are fostered when all stakeholders in the educational process become more knowledgeable, satisfied, appreciated, respected, autonomous, self managing and connected to others.
- **Capacity building** in a positive school culture environment is a vital ingredient of school/community growth with impact across all relationships within the community.
- Impactful innovation thrives when individuals develop and **cross-pollinate ideas** that grow to scale in larger contexts. It often begins with implementation and then adaptation and adjustment as data and experience imply.
- Collaboration through **coaching** can result in new combinations of ideas and resources, reformulating traditional boundaries, and ways of thinking and behaving.



WHAT WE BELIEVE IN

- **Youth:** We believe in youth and their power to change the world for the better and their right to have a voice and be listened to. We admire their passion for justice and unlimited thinking and creativity. We focus on how to create structures and programmes to empower them.
- **Inclusion:** We respect the insights, experiences and ideas of all stakeholders in the education process. We strive to serve everyone equally as we recognize all talents and abilities.
- **Integrity:** We are committed to leading by example. Our programmes are authentic and we reflect with our partners and clients honestly and openly to continuously improve all aspects of our programmes.
- **Impact:** We aspire to be the champions of ethical education in the MENA region and the drivers of real change that matters in our education systems.
- **Participatory Approach:** We aim to Include all stakeholders in the education process.
- **Community:** We act hand in hand with the community addressing its needs while emphasizing the importance of self-responsibility and caring for others.
- **Sustainability:** We aim to tackle Sustainable Development Goals and to mobilize the community into taking action.
- **Social Innovation:** We develop and deploy innovative and effective solutions to systemic social and environmental challenges.



WHO IS DAS?

Motives behind the Democratic and Alternative School (DAS)

In 2022, a group of parents whose children attended a forest preschool in Beirut, faced a dilemma - they got informed that the school won't be offering elementary classes after kindergarten.

Frustrated by their previous experiences at mainstream schools, the parents did not want to enroll their children in mainstream school as they do not believe that education should be a top - down process based on fear. The parents met on February 18th, 2022 and started exploring options for the 2022/2023 academic year. They found some quality private schools that have alternative elements; however, these schools were elitist and expensive and their alternative dimension did not reach the parents' expectations.

These series of events constituted the catalyst for starting the DAS Project. The parents started to contemplate the possibilities of initiating a new school, while keeping in mind the obstacles they might face such as time pressure, the lack of educators within the group, the school's license and possible location. The pre-initiation phase was very slow and full of hesitancy. Yet, they started a WhatsApp group and invited all interested parents.

The factors that motivated the group to initiate the DAS Project were many. The first motive was to start a school that reflected their dreams, aspirations and values. The second motive that was proven crucial in holding the group together despite the conflicts, was the desire to foster the friendships the children built in the forest preschool. The children's social relationships, dreams and point of views were a major incentive for the initiation of the school in the face of all difficulties. The third motive was what the parents described as "the revolutionary act" of starting an education collective.

CORE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Child Led: Creating a space for children to lead their own learning journeys through self-motivation with the support and guidance of mentors/educators.

Democratic and Participatory: Promoting a democratic culture of equality and shared responsibility where participation and education are intrinsically connected.

Equality and Freedom: Treating all children as equals with dignity and respecting their free will without indoctrination and manipulation.

Diversity: Believing that diversity enriches learning hence respecting different world views, ways of thinking, social positions and identities within the group and giving voice to minorities and marginalized views to create safe and equal spaces for expression.

Freedom of Expression: Encouraging fair communication and free ways of expression.

Trust: Trusting the children to take risks and decisions in all aspects of school life including the educational processes.

Strong Social Relations: Recognizing that a healthy child development unfolds greatly in the context of a community with healthy social relationships among parents, teachers and children.

Cooperation: Encouraging cooperation instead of competition in a connected community where positive social interactions are of prime importance.

Autonomy and Sustainability: Ensuring the school autonomy through diversified sources of funding and revenue streams that do not jeopardize its values and keep it sustainable.

Horizontal organization: Building, collectively, ways of organization that are not hierarchical.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

This Toolkit-For-Change project tackles mainly 6 out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals 2030 with a focus on SDG4 - Quality Education and SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities. The SDGs related to this project are:

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



02



CURRENT REALITIES
AND POSSIBILITIES

The world has become a unipolar globalized dystopia. A war is being fought, to dehumanize the public in the favor of universalizing “the market”. Globally, and in Lebanon, quality education has become a commodity reached only by the rich. The gap of social inequalities is continuously widening. Corruption, nepotism, patronage, political favoritism and cartelism lead to a freaky defragmented educational system in Lebanon that served the needs of the oligarchy over the years in producing conforming generations who lack the skills to build a socially just country.

The public sector, and most of the private schools, face many problems such as teaching an outdated curriculum using outdated teaching methodologies (didactic teaching) and the underfunding of the schools that are underrun with crumbling infrastructures, not to mention the amount of schools controlled by political parties and religious groups.



I am less worried about the academic year as my son attends a private school where teachers are getting paid partially in fresh dollars. I am able to pay the expensive school fees because my husband owns a family business.

SA.W - 39 yo - Parent



I have many concerns about being able to pay for my child’s school fees. I am wondering what we could do if the school could not afford heating the classroom, how we will pay for books and stationary. I do not see solutions.

F.M - 33 yo - Parent

Teachers’ rights are undermined in the public schools (devaluation of end of service indemnity, absence of payment for contractor teachers). Private schools face a different set of problems such as the control of religious institutions, not paying teachers a living wage, the absence of ethics in school dynamics and interactions and the teaching of an internationally imposed curriculum that does not take into account the needs of local communities. In addition to the economic assault on education, the current neoliberal approach to education is not only changing what teachers should be doing but also creating new “Frankensteinian” teachers’ identities. Teachers, who facilitate the way the “word” enters into the students’ awareness and raise individual consciousness, are now pacified by the economic burden, anxiety, fear, ignorance and bureaucracy. Education is no longer a political act fundamental to democracy; it is neutered and bleached.



I am very worried. My salary has lost its value. I cannot afford the basics or necessities for me and my family any more. I cannot even pay for transportation to go to work. My children attend a private school. The transportation and school fees are so expensive, especially that my husband and I work in the public sector.

L.A.A - 40 yo - Public School Teacher

Traditionally, in schools, young people are denied the right to be in charge of their lives and are “excluded” from being autonomous agents of change under the excuse of immaturity and lack of knowledge and experience. In his book “School is Dead” (1971, p 18), Reimer argues that schools domesticate as “they require conformity for survival and thus shape their students to conform to the norms” and not change their reality. Students become recipients; they receive what the system offers without questioning these offers. In systematic education, students are provided with programs that have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears. Rather than empowering students with tools to help them raise their critical awareness and engage them in their own learning process, schooling – as an institutionalizing act – undermines education.



School affects me negatively; especially in the past three year. I suffered from mental health issues due to overthinking. I was always stressed because of the official exams. All this stopped me from socializing. I am finding it hard now to get back to the person I used to be. :(

J.A.I - 14 yo - Public School Student

Our vision on change is aligned with the following statement by Fuller: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

This toolkit will explore the opportunities available for us as communities to create socially just education institutes that are collectively owned and democratically run. It will also attempt to visualize an applicable paradigm and methodology to design cooperative educational institutions.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

SCHOOL TYPES IN LEBANON

Public Schools: In terms of organization, funding, and curricula, public schools are fully supervised by the Ministry of Education and are free of charge.

Semi-free Schools: They are private schools owned by religious institutions, individuals, or companies. They are partially funded by the government. These schools follow the Lebanese curriculum.

Private Schools: They are run by religious organizations, individuals, or companies. Parents are responsible for the entire tuition and other expenses. They follow both the Lebanese and foreign curricula.

UNRWA Schools: They are schools that were established for the education of Palestinian refugees. These schools are free of charge and follow the Lebanese curriculum.

Vocational Schools : There are also public and private vocational education institutes and special schools for people with disabilities.

ACADEMIC YEAR	PUBLIC	PRIVATE SEMI-FREE	PRIVATE	UNRWA	TOTAL
2020/2021	1236	331	1164	65	2796

ACADEMIC YEAR	PUBLIC	PRIVATE SEMI-FREE	PRIVATE	UNRWA	TOTAL
2020/2021	348741	116971	514988	37536	1053956

A quick glance at the numbers, sums up Lebanon's perception of private education. It becomes clear where the power to draft policies, laws and regulations related to education lies; 60% of the students go to private and semi-free schools that are owned by religious institutes, companies and individuals. The Catholic Church runs 320 private and semi-free schools, with around 185,000 students, making it the largest group of private schools.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The Big 11%

There are 133 private schools which have over 1000 students registered in each. These are the “Big 11%”, and their networks, that have the biggest impact on both public and private education as well as educational policies, legislations, and attitudes. These networks are detailed in the table below:

School Network	Numbers	Number of students	Number of educators	% of students out of their total number in 133 schools	% of students out of their total number
Catholic schools	53	97652	6594	40.2%	17.5%
Individuals and Companies	31	46363	2602	19.1%	8.3%
Organizations and Shiite parties	12	24518	1624	10.1%	4.4%
Organizations and Sunni parties	11	16506	1133	6.8%	3.0%
Baptist and Evangelical schools	10	13529	1216	5.6%	2.4%
Rome Orthodox	4	5904	436	2.4%	1.1%
French Secular Mission	3	6396	449	2.6%	1.1%
Al Hariri Institutions	3	4031	321	1.7%	0.7%
SABIS	3	3543	255	1.5%	0.5%
International College -IC (Politicians and Funders)	1	2811	305	1.2%	0.5%
Abdel Rahim and Hassan Murad	1	2115	145	0.9%	0.4%
Al-Azm Real Estate Company - Miqati	1	1380	143	0.6%	0.2%
TOTAL	133	224748	15223	100%	40.3%

The Economic Crisis' Impact on Education

In the academic year 2020/21, the number of teachers in private schools decreased by 13.3% (6917 teachers); 80% of them are under the age of 40. In the same year, 64 schools (45 private and 21 semi-free private) closed down. 35% of secondary school teachers in the public sector submitted resignations with the intention of leaving education. On the other hand, the parents are facing difficulties keeping their children in private schools due to the dollarization of the fees that became very high compared to the majority of family incomes that are still paid in Lebanese pounds. Many free public schools in cities are at full capacity making it hard for the parents to enroll their children in them as an alternative to private schools.

Between 2018/2019 and 2020/21, the number of Lebanese students in public education increased by roughly 60,470 students, whereas those enrolled in the private sector decreased by 68,925 students. The total number of Lebanese students decreased by 8,440 students due to emigration or school dropout.

UNICEF affirms that the percentage of students who will drop out, will rise to almost 55%. Father Youssef Nasr, the head of the Federation of Catholic Educational Institutions, issued a warning to MTV on June 29, 2022, estimating that private schools will lose 20% (or about 100,000) of their students in 2022/2023; this will undoubtedly have an impact on the number of teachers. With the crisis continuing, the numbers will keep on rising. The cost of transportation and child labour are additional barriers stopping students from attending schools nowadays.

The Ministry of Education may give students a place in a classroom, but fails to provide them with updated curricula, a motivation to learn, a safe learning environment and policies to lower the dropout rates and include students with special needs in public education.

The Deteriorating Quality of Lebanese Education

The results of the 2015 TIMSS and PISA international examinations revealed that Lebanon's educational performance in both private and public schools, falls below both the global and Arab averages. 66% of fifth-graders, before the COVID crisis, experienced learning poverty; the inability to read, comprehend or explain texts written in a foreign language. Public schools face additional challenges such as the rarity of curriculum development and innovation, outdated teaching methodologies and poorly qualified teachers. 40% of teachers in public schools do not have university degrees and fail to attend continuous professional development courses to update their skills. The quality of education is at its worse at primary level where learners develop the basis of their knowledge and language skills. During the Covid crisis, public schools closed for more than 25 months and private schools for 21 months. Studies show that in the academic year 2022/2023, around 80% of Lebanese students will receive inadequate education in both the private and public sectors. Not to mention the risk of not being able to start the new academic year due to financial constraints as a result of the state's unreported bankruptcy and the unwillingness of funders to cover the costs due to corruption and fraud in the country.

The Suggested Alternative Education Institute (AEI) model

So what are the possibilities available for us, as educators and communities, to take a leading role to intervene and offer community-led innovative solutions to the education crisis? How can we be agents that empower all stakeholders in the education process to get aware of their own reality, think about it critically, and redirect it to suit their needs and aspirations in an ethical and democratic way to improve the standards of living for themselves and others? Meeting our current needs and real-world issues while anticipating the needs of tomorrow is what commits us to put the communities of today and those of tomorrow at the heart of decision making and action.

In the light of the current situation in Lebanon, parents and educators should reevaluate the educational norm and come up with innovative ways to provide youth with affordable high quality education that reflects the needs, culture, values, and ability of the community. Quality education is a human right, hence this toolkit comes as a guide for communities to organize and take lead initiating collectively owned and democratically run AEIs that are not only affordable but also provide quality education.

Critical pedagogy

Critical Theory finds its roots in the critique of Marxian, Kantian and Hegelian philosophies by theorists of the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and later Habermas. According to Horkheimer (1995, p. 246) Critical theory seeks 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them'.

Adopting a critical approach to education gave rise to Critical Pedagogy that is "grounded in the first generation Frankfurt school of critical theory, Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Dewey's pragmatism, subject and counter-hegemonic practice, and politics of ethics, difference and democracy" (Wamba, 2010) as well as in the liberationist philosophies of Freire. Today, Critical Pedagogy finds resonance in the work of Giroux, Apple, McLaren and others.

Education from a critical point of view addresses not only the transmission or reproduction of knowledge but also its production (David Lusted 1986, p.3). It is also, according to Dewey (1963), "a social process of living". According to Freire (1992), it is one form of cultural action for freedom whose goal was to bring a humane future to life against and within an unjust present (A Pedagogy for Liberation, 184-187). While Giroux (2011, p3) defines critical pedagogy as follows: "It is fundamental to democracy that no democratic society can survive without a formative culture shaped by pedagogical practices capable of creating the conditions for producing citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgments and act in a socially responsive way."

Critical pedagogy is a teaching/learning approach that questions and challenges the beliefs and practices that maintain the socially unjust status quo and the present forms of domination and power dynamics in both the classroom and the educational system. It does this by joining theory and practice for the conscientization of the community. Ira Shor (Empowering Education, p129) defines critical pedagogy as: "Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional cliches, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse."



The Freirean Approach

Critical Dialogue

Dialogue is the essence of any practice of freedom. Through dialogue within a community, political and social ‘generative themes’ particular to the era and the locality will emerge. These themes are gathered by participants observing and investigating the local community. Obstacles faced during this phase could be overcome through building relationships of trust, love, faith, understanding and humility between the participants.

Generative Themes

The generative themes emerge from the interests and concerns of the participants. Each generative theme contains, and is contained in, limit-situations.

Limit Situations

Limit situations are points in the generative theme beyond which the participants cannot imagine solutions based on the awareness they have. The emerging generative themes and their limit situations alongside other more academic themes are then encoded in artifacts (e.g. action plan).

Untested Feasibility

The codified artifacts trigger challenging discussions as the participants attempt to decode their own ‘generative themes’. Through an act of comparison of one’s reality to an unfamiliar one, participants will discover the limitations of both. Through stimulating the knowledge of previous wisdom, this educational plan “transforms the untested feasibility into testing action. Through acting and challenging the power dynamics of “the norm”, the community starts a journey of conscientization.

Conscientization

It is defined as the raising of critical consciousness through developing an in-depth understanding of the social and political contradictions and the power dynamics that favor the privileged in the existing status quo. It is the process by which one understands one’s position in power culturally, economically, socially and historically. The community’s journey towards liberation is achieved by the praxis of their quest for freedom through acts of love, conscientization and critical dialogue.

TIPS

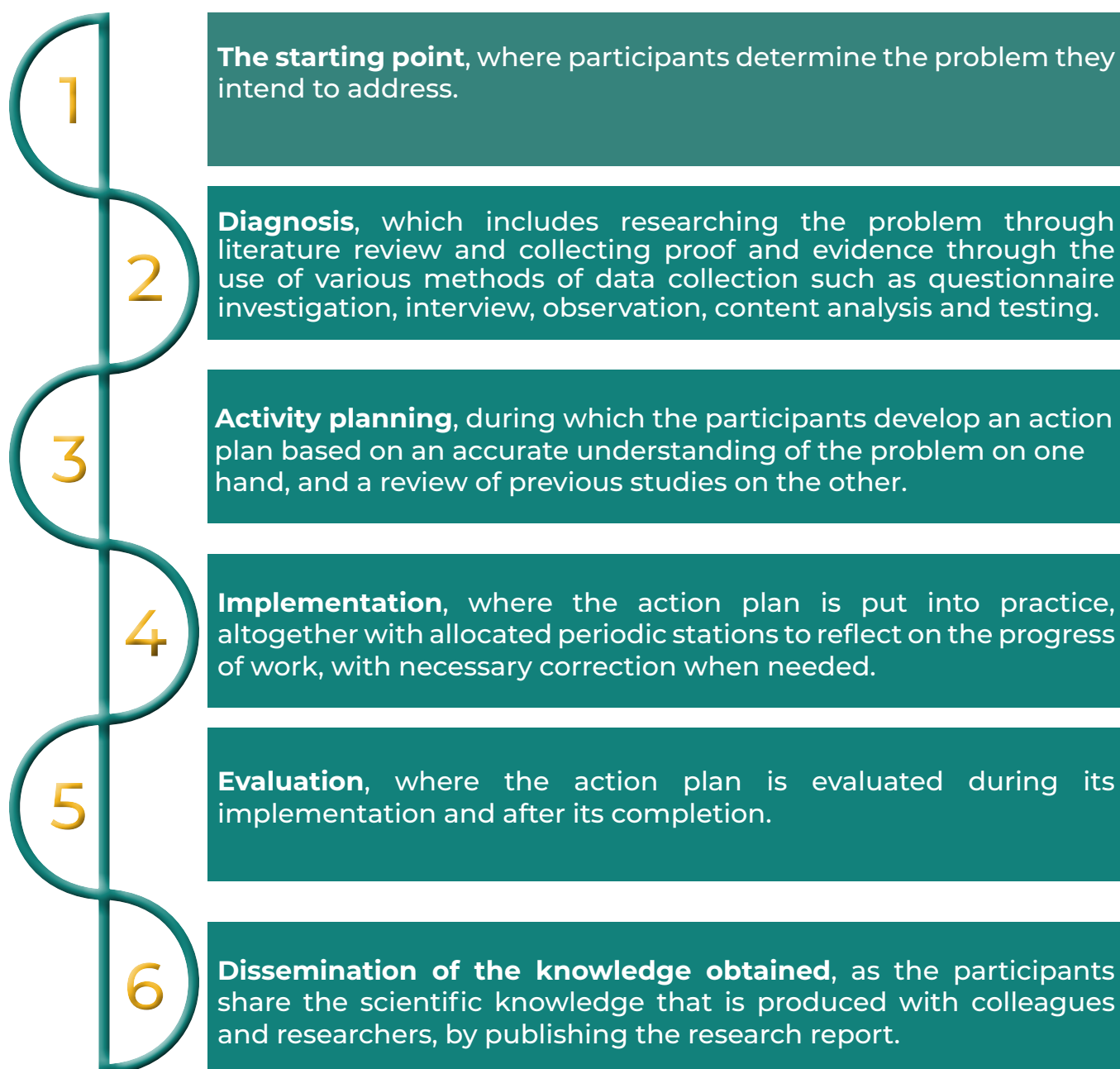
Finding an urgent solution for the education crisis in Lebanon for example, is one of many “generative themes” that are particular to our times. These themes contain “limiting situations”, such as the know-how and the economic and legal models available for communities. This toolkit will help communities respond to these challenges as the participants discover the “untested feasibility” beyond the limiting situations.



METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to create this toolkit as well as the suggested methodology for change are rooted in Transformative Action Research. This type of research seeks transformative change through the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research, which are linked together by critical reflection. It is a participatory democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge. Action research activates the communication between communities and researchers through a spiral interactive mechanism that combines action with reflection. It empowers the participants to take a central role in the change process. Researchers trust that the involvement of stakeholders in the research process develops in them a strong sense of ownership that increases the chances of success.

The Stages of a Flexible Spiral



DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

This toolkit relies on the action research methodology to collect, understand, and analyze information specific to the school initiation process of the Democratic and Alternative School. The data collected for this toolkit is a mix of secondary data from the available literature, as well as qualitative primary data originating from the first-hand experience of the group who have been initiating the school (a sort of ethnography).

The action research data has been documented, analyzed and presented in the form of storytelling, from the perspective of the school's founding group, to back the toolkit's objective of being a practical guide/example for the initiation of alternative education institutes (AEI).

It is important to note that this action research took place around 6 months into the initiation process of the school, and taps into the fresh actions and interactions that the founding group has been experiencing. This action research, written by the group itself in interaction with SCOPE, is also in itself a chance for the school's founding group to self-reflect on its process of formation, the opportunities it seizes, and the challenges it faces. As an article on group formation argues, team "effectiveness is enhanced by a team's commitment to reflection and on-going evaluation"; this action research is therefore a dynamic process that is beneficial to its targeted audience, as well as the group that has been engaged in developing it. This action research focuses on the cases on hand (the formation on both SCOPE and DAS) while going back and forth between literature (focusing on organization in community-led initiatives, non-hierarchical organization, planning on the run while holding strategic beliefs and experiences of initiating democratic schools) and the case, in what is known as abductive methodology.



03



**CHANGE AND CHANGE
MANAGEMENT**

SCOPE'S PATHWAY OF CHANGE

This toolkit offers a pathway of change that is rooted in transformative action research. This pathway consists of five phases and forms the backbone around which this toolkit will be built. These phases will be detailed throughout this publication.



Change is the only constant

Heraclitus, Greek philosopher

Transformative Dialogue

1

This phase starts with identifying community leads, establishing core community groups and then creating structures and processes to initiate dialogue in ways that are equitable, reciprocal and reflective of the needs and values of the community. Through dialogue the scope of educational and economic needs and existing resources of the community are assessed.

Story Telling

2

Successful stories of collectives, cooperatives and movements are shared with the community to establish a clear vision and mission statement and to engage community members in campaigning, advocacy and fundraising for their project.

Wisdom Recognition

3

Through this phase a research question is formulated and evidence-based best practices for team building and human resources mapping are identified. Systems to re-imagine realities, exchange knowledge, recognize wisdom and envision goals are explored with the community.

Model Transferring

4

The community leads on designing strategies for quantitative and qualitative data collection, identifying evidence-based best practices, pinpoint performance metrics, and developing an action plan. Engaging a range of stakeholders in this process will ensure the harvesting of the knowledge and assets of the community. Legal, economic, business operational and democratic models are explored and transferred.

Praxis

5

The community is supported by experts as it implements evaluation design, answers research questions, measures performance metrics and monitors success through statistical and qualitative data analysis. This continuous critical reflection process informs the adjustments applied to the action plan as the community acts, reflects, learns and acts again.

STAGES OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Urgency

Community leads create a sense of urgency and help others see the need for change and communicate the importance of acting immediately. The absence of good leadership with clear vision will lead to confusion.

A Guiding Coalition

The core community group acts as a guiding coalition whose job is to coordinate and communicate activities building competencies and capacities. Failing at this stage will generate a feel of anxiety within the group.

A Strategic Vision

This stage involves creating a strategic vision and initiative to clarify how the future will be different from the past and how you can make that future a reality through initiatives linked directly to the vision. The absence of a clear vision that is continuously communicated will cause disorientation.

Rallying

The fourth stage entails recruiting a large number of people, partners, investors, sponsors and supporters rallying around a common opportunity and moving in one direction to drive change.

Removing Barriers

The fifth stage includes communicating the vision as action is enabled by removing barriers such as inefficient processes and hierarchies to provide the freedom necessary to work across silos and generate real impact.

Short Term Wins

In this stage, the change process is maintained at an efficient pace when acting on the vision generates short-term wins that are recognized, collected and communicated. Tracking progress energizes the team. For this stage to be successful, the team ought to create obtainable targets, encourage and convince people that targets can be reached and recognize and reward the “winners”.

Acceleration

During this stage, acceleration is maintained through consolidating improvement to produce more change. Pressing harder after the first successes is recommended to increase credibility and improve systems, structures and policies. Finally, articulating the connections between the new behaviors and organizational success, is a must to make sure they continue until they become strong enough to replace old habits.

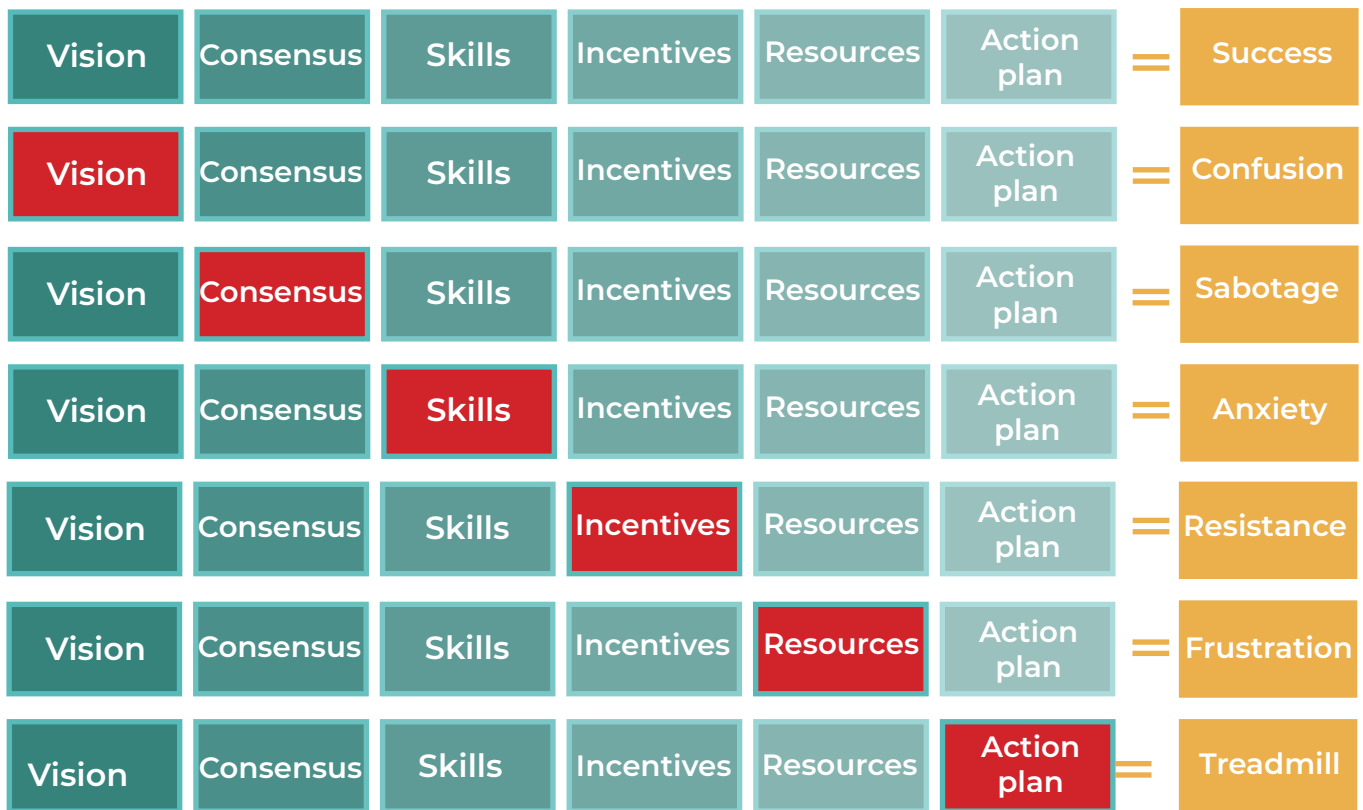
Community Culture

Empowering others to act on the vision might be challenging; that is why the team needs to create an organizational culture that encourages individuals to act, providing them with the necessary resources and trainings. This culture gives the team members autonomy and authority to act in alignment with the common vision and values. This community culture is not only reflected by the produced physical work but more importantly the intangible activities and routines and the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations.



When people are exposed to new paradigms of work, management and knowledge, they gain some understanding of how it functions. When they are persuaded by the new ways, the individual forms either favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards the work. These attitudes will inform the decision the individuals take whether to adopt or reject the innovation. If the individuals decide to adopt the innovation, they move towards implementation, putting the innovation into use. They then seek confirmation and reinforcement for an innovation-decision already made, but may reverse the decision if exposed to conflicting messages.

MANAGING COMPLEX CHANGE



The different consequences can be solved using the below effective change management solutions, mentioned in various stages of the SCOPE Pathway of Change:

- To resolve **confusion**, resulting from lack of vision, a team can work on the compelling vision exercise in the Storytelling Phase.
- To resolve **sabotage**, resulting from lack of consensus, a team can align their values and goals by completing the dialogue tools in the Transformative Dialogue Phase.
- To resolve **anxiety**, resulting from lack of skills, a team can perform the human resources mapping exercise in the Wisdom Recognition Phase.
- To resolve **resistance**, resulting from lack of incentives, a team can create an incentives rubric using the SCOPE existing models from the Model Transferring Phase.
- To resolve **frustration**, resulting from lack of resources, a team can look up funding resources using the SCOPE financial model from the Model Transferring Phase.
- To resolve **treadmill**/wasted effort, resulting from lack of an action plan, a team can apply the Evidence-Based Practices from the Wisdom Recognition, as well as the praxis tools in the Praxis Phase.

STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

1

Forming

In this phase, most group members are overly polite and are still extremely excited about what their future may hold. Since the group dynamics and team roles aren't yet established, the team leads will often take charge to direct the individual members. New team members may discuss team goals, ground rules, deal breakers, values and individual roles, but since this stage of development prioritizes people over the actual work, it's unlikely the team will be high-performing at this time.

2

Storming

The conflict often arises due to clashing working styles between team members. Some people may start to even doubt the team's goals discussed in the earlier stage and will stop performing their necessary jobs altogether. This has a negative and stressful effect on those who keep up the hard work since the pre-established group processes no longer function smoothly. Some project teams think they can skip this stage, but it's better to acknowledge conflicts now and work them out rather than avoiding them until they explode.

3

Norming

This is when the team moves past their previous quarrels and begins to recognize and value their teammates' strengths. During this stage, team members increasingly respect those who take the lead. Now that everyone has begun to bond and familiarize themselves with the team processes, teammates feel comfortable giving constructive feedback as they work toward accomplishing new tasks. Since these new tasks often come with a high degree of difficulty, it is not uncommon for groups to regress back into the storming phase. Even if a group slides back into old behavior, members' new decision-making skills and mechanisms will make conflicts easier to resolve than they were during the initial storming phase.

4

Performing

The performing phase is the happiest of all the stages of development. In this stage, the team performance is at an all-time high. This high-performance level means all team members are self-reliant and confident enough in their own problem-solving skills that they can function autonomously. Everyone is working like a well-oiled machine, free of conflict and moving in sync toward the same end goal.



Scope started as a dream of social solidarity. It felt as if the energy we bottled up during the October Revolution was directed to the right place to create more just economic alternatives. The stage following the launching of SCOPE was difficult. I felt we were diverting from our mission. I doubted my ability to work with such a team that is losing harmony. But rather than quitting I decided to share my concerns with the team. I realized that I was not the only one going through this. Immersing myself in the toolkit project was comforting as I became aware of my role, responsibilities and invaluable autonomy. I started to see and accept the abilities of other team members and their limitations. I grew more confident.

H.A.C - SCOPE Member



At the start there was uniqueness, positivity, shared dreams, excitement, common vision, hope, diversity and endless possibilities; yet there was uncertainty. As the work on internal and external tasks started, we experienced our differences; different working styles, backgrounds, experiences and ways of thinking. We clashed. It was not pleasant.

H.B.K. - SCOPE Member



When I started working on the projects I like and getting involved with initiating the Forest School in Baakline I felt involved and not left behind. The team acknowledged that I have my own way of doing the work and started respecting the effort I put in and the time constraints I have, I became more productive. I realized that working with people on the team who have similar working styles to mine gave me a sense of harmony. This doesn't mean that I am distant from other team members.

N.D - SCOPE Member

TIPS

- Restorative justice* empowers individuals to resolve conflicts on their own and in small groups through peer-mediation.
- Conflict management* is an umbrella term for the way we identify and handle conflicts fairly and efficiently. The goal is to minimize the potential negative impact that can arise from disagreements and increase the odds of a positive outcome.



THE DAS STORY

School Initiation Approach

As described by M. J. Brown community involvement and organizing is essential because it involves the active participation of the people at the grassroots level, who are the closest to the problem. This involvement requires organization working in groups with a high sense of community and/or self-motivation, to be able to do what one alone cannot do. Community organizing should also allow the space for risk and failure, and experimentation away from structured, hierarchical, traditional organizing. Community initiatives are thus not created to dictate what should be done, but rather to ask, understand, and respond to needs and circumstances. As a basis for this toolkit, and deriving from the Democratic and Alternative School experience, we identified an overall approach to a community-led initiative.

COLLECTIVE

- Ensures the involvement of a collective as opposed to individualistic work.
- Builds on collective values.
- Involves inclusive engagement with internal and external stakeholders.
- Ensures the accessibility of various social groups.
- Involves a democratic collective decision-making mechanism.
- Adopts the cooperative mindset.
- Shares information freely.

RESEARCH-LED

- Involves the review of literature, theories and empirical studies in the same field.
- Considers past experiences by other similar groups, what worked for them and what didn't.
- Involves engaging with community members, education activists and experts, similar initiatives, etc..

EXPERIMENTATIONAL

- Identifies one or more directions for action, while preserving the space for learning, adaptation, and growth.
- Identifies different possible scenarios and plans accordingly.
- Performs ongoing reflection on the process and builds on lessons learned.
- Tracks challenges and looks for new possible ways to address them.

DYNAMIC & VALUES LED

- Is open to shifts and changes whenever needed while adhering to its values and agreed on mechanisms.
- Is developed “on the run” while keeping focus on the vision.
- Views all steps as work in progress.
- Ensures a space for modifications to accommodate newly acquired knowledge.

THE DAS STORY

The rationale for following this approach, according to the founding group of the Democratic and Alternative School, is that it yields initiatives that are community-oriented, built on the values of the greater good and the cooperative mindset.

This approach comes also with challenges, given the various stakeholders involved, and the complexity of the process. Those, however, can be overcome as the community initiative-founding teams align their vision, identify their values, pay close attention to their team dynamics, and identify a relevant and convenient governance structure.

The stages of initiation will be addressed in detail in the upcoming sections, along with proposed tips, and reflections from the Democratic and Alternative School initiation experience.

Aspirations

The Democratic and Alternative School (DAS) aspires to:

- Co-build a curriculum led by the children and focused on their interests and curiosities.
- Develop the children's life skills as they learn through a practical child-led process with no imposition, indoctrination or manipulation.
- Focus on the children's holistic, physical, social, emotional, psychological, existential and cognitive growth.
- Accept children for who they are, not for who they should be.
- Allow each child to develop and learn at their own pace.
- Encourage children to take an active role in their learning journey by taking their voice into consideration regarding all matters.
- Focus on critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, inquiry, risk assessment and curiosity.



04



A PATHWAY FOR
CHANGE

Transformative Dialogue



This phase starts with identifying community leads, establishing core community groups and then creating structures and processes to initiate dialogue in ways that are equitable, reciprocal and reflective of the needs and values of the community. Through dialogue, the scope of educational and economic needs and existing resources of the community are assessed.

Identifying Community Leads

A community lead is an active individual belonging to the local community who is concerned with social development and works to enhance the community's capacity. The lead identifies challenges and opportunities within the community and addresses them in an innovative way. The lead's main mission is to establish a core community group by creating a sense of urgency to solve social issues.

Establishing the Core Community Group

The core community group is made of people who are directly affected by a certain problem in the community (e.g. the education crisis). The community members are invited by the community lead to meet as partners with shared decision-making power through a participatory approach. Introductory meetings help the community members to get more acquainted as they pinpoint their common values, goals and vision. As the group members communicate, the group bonds solidify.

Structures for Dialogue

A liberating “problem-posing” approach to the issue on hand encourages critical thinking within communities of learners, as they resolve contradictions by an emancipatory dialogue based on trust causing the emergence of citizens who stand in solidarity with one another on a mission to transform their reality. Through a dialectic relationship between action and reflection, elements for real dialogue, such as love, trust, humility, faith in the human kind and hope, are identified and discussed. Dialogue here is a tool not only to communicate, but also to achieve freedom through conscientization. In this phase, work is done to create structures, processes and channels to initiate a continuous conversation that is respectful, equitable, reciprocal and reflective of the needs and values of the community.

TIPS

- Slack and Discord phone applications are better options for communication and collaboration than Whatsapp.
- Google Sites, Sheets and Docs are good to start collective work, documenting the process and sharing information. However, applications such as Trello are more useful for this kind of work.
- ZOOM and Google Meets can be used for online meetings.



THE DAS STORY

Initiation Stages, Tips and Inspirations

The process of initiating an Alternative Education Institute (AEI) moves from the birth of the initial idea, along with formation of the team who will make this initiative happen. The process also involves the planning and implementation of action steps. After the formation of the core community group of founders who met on a weekly basis to discuss pressing issues, the parents decided to post a call for recruiting educators on Daleel Madani. Meanwhile, a continuous dialogue with educators and similar initiatives in Lebanon and around the world had already started. An engaging and ongoing partnership with SCOPE started. SCOPE offered to help in the recruitment process of the lead educator as well as designing the pedagogical approach and training collaboratively with the DAS education circle and lead educator. A new journey of unlearning and co-relearning started for all participants. DAS and SCOPE then worked with Daleel Tadamon to draft both an action plan that spans over a period of a year and a budget proposition with possible revenue streams. In the meantime, the core community group of founding parents were working on the initial internal organization model, governance model and decision-making mechanisms. The group was also engaged in an internal action research process and continuous self-reflection. The group also drafted agreed values and vision for the school (incomplete yet for the group of Founding Members). They worked on a concept note to communicate externally as they kept the search for a location to start the school for the first year and following years (incomplete yet for the following years)

Initiation Process Stages

Those stages are not linear and might overlap at different times. The breakdown provided here intends to identify and clarify milestones for the initiation phase, allowing us to dig into each one and provide practical insights.

1- Idea Inception and Motivation

- a. Responding to a local and timely need/ motivation
- b. Bridging the visions
- c. Researching existing educational approaches
- d. Defining the approach, values and direction

2- Team Formation

- a. Communicating during inception (forming)
- b. Realizing the need for organization and better communication (storming)
- c. Finding suitable coordination structure (norming)
- d. Agreeing on common ground and the group's values
- e. Defining the governance model
- f. Planning and taking action (performing)

3-From Planning to Action

- a. Resources: Identifying our revenue model
- b. Finding and developing the right skills
- c. Establishing the education approach and curriculum
- d. Exploring potential locations

4- Outreach and Partnerships (Work in progress)

TEAM CANVAS EXERCISE

OBJECTIVE: As the core community group forms, there is a need to bring team members together, clarify their goals, figure out their motivations and help them to be more aligned and productive. The Team Canvas Exercise is used to initiate a structured conversation to start smoothly shaping the team culture.

INSTRUCTIONS: The facilitator guides a conversation with the members by asking questions about the goals of the group, the roles and skills of each member, the code of conduct and the values the team shares. As team members express themselves, the facilitator fills the template. The completed template is then reflected upon collectively.

GOALS	ROLES AND SKILLS
CODE OF CONDUCT	VALUES

DEALBREAKERS EXERCISE

Objective: As a cooperative business project is all about the human value; all team members must be in touch with the core principles that manage their working relationships. A definition of deal-breakers is a necessity. This exercise guides the team to work through a list of issues that would cause them to question a person's fit with the team.

Instructions: The facilitator defines what deal breakers are, then asks questions about core principles and non-negotiable negative behaviors that would cause the team member to quit the AEI or ask for someone to leave it. This is a tough exercise and it needs a strong facilitator as it brings up all the frustrations that team members have had from previous experiences; it can be a situation that draws people together or them apart.

Dealbreakers

A Union of all what we refuse, non-negotiables, not an intersection of what we don't agree to

TEAM QUADRANT EXERCISE

Objective: This exercise is used to recognize each team member's strengths in terms of skills and working style. A strong team has members distributed across the whole quadrant

Instructions: The facilitator explains the terms generalist, specialist, strategist and executive. The facilitator nudges people to think of the way they resolve issues, handle tasks, and think about projects by asking questions such as: what is your approach to problem solving? Can you handle organizing big events? Do you like to work on specific tasks or manage a multitude of layered tasks? The facilitator then places the names of the members on the quadrant where they agree to be.



Generalists have a broad range of transferable skills and knowledge in different fields. They can see the big picture and think out of the box.



Specialists are experts in a particular field - a narrowly defined job. They tend to have internal organizational skills due to their specialized understanding of complex issues.

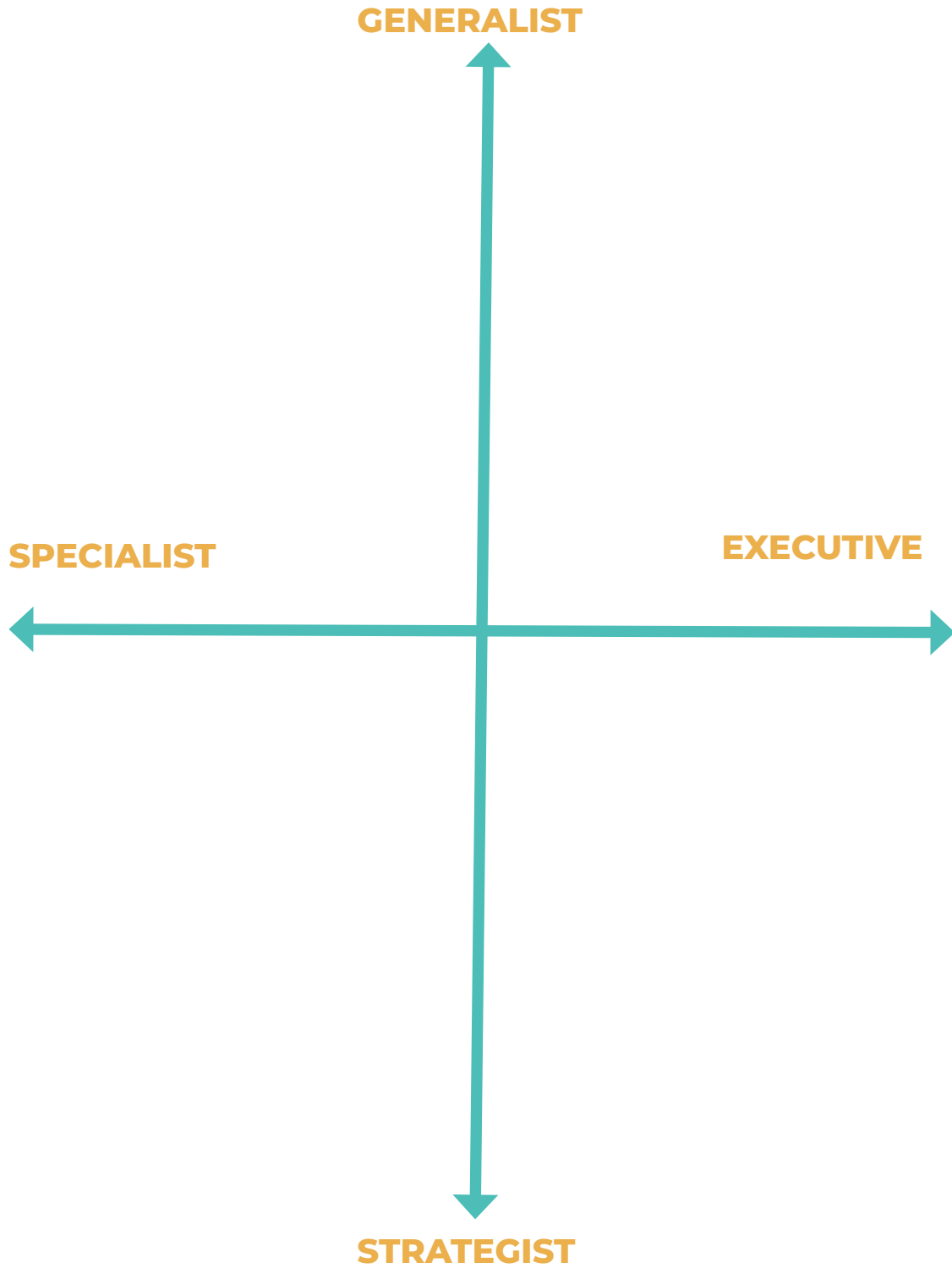


Strategists think ahead, implement strategies, anticipate problems and devise plans. Strategic thinkers focus on the team's vision and goals.



Executives are proactive and methodical. They are very well organized and create short-term value while simultaneously enhancing the long-term strength of the organization.

TEAM QUADRANT EXERCISE



COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Objective: The community needs assessment exercise is used to help the core community group determine the community needs, assess their current situation and evaluate the risks of not taking action.

Instructions: Any pathway of change should be based on the needs of the community. The facilitator meets with the core community group in-person and discuss the following questions:

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
What current problems need to be solved?	
How did we get here?	
Why is what we're doing currently not working?	
What opportunities are being missed?	
What future problems are anticipated if no action is taken?	
What are the benefits of making the change?	
What is the impact (positive and negative) to the organization/community/school?	

REFLECTION PIT STOPS EXERCISE

Over the course of the AEI initiation, several strategies can be used to provide feedback on the process, outcome or impact. The practice of periodic praxis should be implemented in set intervals to ensure timely feedback, before, during and after initiation.

Objective: The practice of stopping at regular intervals to evaluate is used to ensure that the Alternative Education Institute is moving forward in the right direction.

Instructions: These various strategies can be implemented with or without a facilitator, according to the core community group's needs and project subphase. Here below is a menu of praxis strategies detailing their purpose, advantages and frequency of use.

Modality	Purpose	Advantages	Frequency
Survey	Gives immediate feedback on the current status of the group	Reaches large numbers of people and it is easy to use	Used periodically to monitor the group dynamics for continuous improvement
Personal Reflection	Reflect on the purpose of joining the team and the role played.	It is done in a comfortable setting. It allows for personal growth through an in-depth feedback process.	Different kinds of personal reflections can be done periodically.
Open Comment Boxes	Review the work done on a dedicated google document for a specific project or task	May be open indefinitely for ongoing input	It is an ongoing process throughout the implementation period.
One to One Meetings	Assisted reflection on personal performance	It is done in a comfortable setting. It enables vulnerability for authentic feedback.	Ongoing for continuous improvement purposes
Team Meeting	Allows members to reflect on the changes in the current team dynamics (requires strong facilitator)	Creates transparency and raises group issues	Weekly or biweekly meetings to collect and share information

STORY TELLING



Successful stories of various Alternative Education Institutes such as collectives, cooperatives and movements are shared with the community to establish a clear vision and mission statement and to engage community members in campaigning, advocacy and fundraising for their project.

SUCCESS STORIES

Alternative Education Institutes (AEI) are educational initiatives that are offered to students in a nontraditional educational setting and address the social, emotional, behavioral and academic needs. AEI can take several forms such as community schools, cooperative schools, forest and democratic schools. Each of the models are explored below.

Community Schools

A community school:

- Is a continuous and productive workshop that is open at most times for all members of the community to organize and participate in activities.
- Collaborates with community members to provide medical, social and psychological support to all stakeholders.
- Encourages parents to take an active role in school life and their child's education.
- Provides high quality education.
- Aims to build solid social networks that are respectful.
- Adopts ethical and democratic curricula.
- Provides capacity building activities to all community members.
- Tackles pressing social issues and resolves them in an innovative way.
- Has a holistic approach to education that aims to benefit the society.
- Provides a safe and supportive environment to all learners (students and teachers).
- Builds a partnership with all stakeholders.
- Is equally accessible to all community members.

Community schools are most successful when they:

- Provide supportive social structures that motivate students to stay in school.
- Provide a supportive provision that develops students' skills to act responsibly.
- Create suitable learning conditions for less advantaged children.
- Focus on a student-centered approach to education.
- Provide learning opportunities for families and community members.
- Adopt a flexible approach to curriculum that fits the needs of the society.
- Extended learning time for those who need it or opt for it (after-school, weekend and summer programmes).
- Give decision-making power to all stakeholders.
- Provide professional social and psychological support for those who need it.
- Have collective leadership to create social trust and shared responsibility.

Cooperative Schools

Cooperative schools are educational institutions that implement cooperative learning, a teaching method in which students work together in small groups to attain a common learning goal under the supervision of a facilitator; its strategies allow students to learn by putting what they've learned into practice in a setting that's more akin to what they'll find in the workplace (Rigacci, 2020).

Cooperative School Values

Here are cooperative schools' best practices in learning and management.

Autonomy

- Providing effective learning, so that students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge.
- Urging teachers to devise creative teaching methods.
- Helping the students build their organizational, planning, and evaluational skills.
- Allowing students to learn by doing.
- Focusing on a positive mental health approach.
- Providing a safe place for students to express their concerns about intolerance, discrimination and injustice.
- Providing a place where everyone is valued, respected, and cared for.
- Providing all the stakeholders with the resources, tools, and opportunities to partner with larger communities in building a better future.

Responsibility

- All members are responsible for the success of the cooperative.
- Members take responsibility for their actions, and hold themselves and each other accountable to specific and high standards.
- Students are responsible for their own learning; the teachers facilitate this process.

Democracy

- Giving learners, parents and staff a voice in the way schools are run.
- Giving all members authority and the right to participate in setting policies and taking decisions.
- Giving members equal voting rights.
- Providing all members with decent living conditions.
- Encouraging communities to unite to find solutions.

Equity

- Everyone's voice is heard.
- All stakeholders take part in a continuous dialogue based on respect.

Fairness

- The School is run in a fair, equitable manner with no discrimination.

Solidarity

- Exchange of information and ideas to raise standards and life opportunities.
- Openness towards the different other

Social Responsibility

- Caring for others: treating everyone as one would like to be treated.
- Collaborating with one another is what makes communities.
- Working in ways that positively influences others.
- Ensuring that students are happy and have advanced skills.

SUCCESS STORIES

Forest Schools

Forest Schools adopt an inspirational child-centered approach to learning and offer opportunities for holistic growth through an emergent curriculum based on free play, exploration and supported risk taking. They develop confidence and self-esteem through learner inspired, hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

Forest Schools have a developmental ethos shared by thousands of trained practitioners around the world, who are constantly developing their learning styles and skills to support young and imaginative learners. Its roots reach back to the open-air culture seen as a way of life in Scandinavia where Forest Schools began.

Democratic Schools

A democratic school is a democratically-governed setting for self-directed learning, in which students have the advantage of an age-mixed community of friends and colleagues with whom and from whom to learn. This toolkit discusses democratic schools as a type of Alternative Education Institutes (AEI) and their critique in detail through the DAS

THE DAS STORY

Idea Inception, Motivation and Vision

At this very initial stage, the main motivation for the core community group was “ideas”. This is the phase where most of the thinking took place. Any community-led initiative or organization is born out of an observed need and motivation or incentive. In the case of AElS, those needs are likely linked to children, adult learners, parents and/or educators and experts who have observed a gap in the educational system that they would like to fill. Though many people have a background of seeking alternative and/or democratic education, few would start a school; where besides the motivation, there has to be catalytic events in their personal lives that push them towards thinking about starting a school. The urgency in finding or founding a school that meets the values, aspirations and dreams of both the children and the parents was the catalyst that initiated the process for the core community group.

Questions to be asked at this phase:

- What is motivating us to start this initiative?
- What problem are we trying to solve?
- Who is involved in / affected by this problem?
- How are the current circumstances around us contributing to this problem?
- What are the preliminary solutions that we can think of?
- Who can be part of this solution?
- What is our preliminary plan/idea to solve this problem?

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

DAS faced some challenges through this stage.

- The lack of common motivation or incentives for all members of the group - that is “the value in the change before it can happen”- can cause the consensus to be shaken and resistance to appear among the group.
- There might be possible discrepancies between the members of the core community group when it comes to group vision and values.
- Time constraints can stand in the way of achieving the idea.
- Some group members may lack commitment to deliver completed tasks on time.



TIPS

- Allocate as much time as needed to solidify the common values and vision of the group.
- Work on establishing efficient communication and operational models that are participatory and clear.
- Devise a conflict-resolution policy.
- Incentivise pro-bono work at the initiation stage.
- Solidify decision-making mechanisms.



COMPELLING VISION AND MISSION

A Vision sets out a dream for the world, what success looks like. It gives a picture of how one would like to see the world. It does not give details of how to achieve this. It is the ideal and motivates the group to work towards that world. **A Mission Statement** is generally a bit longer and gives the “what” (purpose) and “how” (activity) of what the group wants to do to make the vision a reality. It answers the questions who, what, where, when and how of what one wants to achieve. It tells what the team is doing to achieve its vision.

Objective: Based on success stories, this exercise aims to allow the core community group to think about the change they would like to see in the world (their Vision), what difference they want to make, and how they are going to bring this about (their Mission Statement).

Instructions: The facilitator meets with the core community group in-person and uses the template as a tool that provides the core community group with probing questions to discuss. Answers to these questions will be used to craft a vision and a mission statement.

CREATE A VISION STATEMENT (Our Dream World)

What do we hope to achieve?
How will things be better?
What are the expected benefits?
What are the potential consequences of the change?

The change we want to see in the world

Our vision statement is...

CREATE A MISSION STATEMENT (How to make it happen)

What do we do?
How do we do it?
Whom do we do it for?
What value are we bringing?

What difference we want to make and how we are going to make that a reality!

Our mission statement is...

TEAM SPIRIT CHECKING EXERCISE

As the core community group goes through the stages of group development, it is necessary to gauge the team spirit through a monthly survey.

Objective: The Team Spirit Checking Exercise, consisting of an anonymous online survey of 6 questions that have to be answered on a scale of 1-10 and one open-ended comment box, is used to analyze trust levels towards team members, their capabilities, each member's level of comfort as well as the success rate of the project. It also measures how the person's skills respond to the requirements of the project and the interest of members to make this project succeed.

Instructions: The facilitator sends the monthly anonymous survey to all the core community group members, to answer by a set date. At a later physical meeting, results are displayed publicly and discussed. Although anonymous, group members who have answered the questions variously on a scale of 1-10, may have the freedom to come forward and express their opinion openly, whether enthusiastic or fearful. This creates trust and provides a high opportunity for bonding and care within the team, as members review past actions and plan forward to keep the team spirit high. The facilitator and the team would gauge a team's status healthy if most results are within the range of 9-10. Any answers of 7-8 signify that there are issues to improve. Lower scores would raise the alarm to a serious problem within the core community group. A discussion follows to address the reasons behind such low scores.

Survey Questions

- How much trust do you have towards the team members?
- How much trust do you have towards the capabilities of the team members?
- How much comfort do you feel within the team?
- How much trust do you have in the success of the project?
- How much are your skills coherent with the needs of the project?
- How much do you feel that all team members have a direct and real interest to achieve this project and make it successful?
- List any additional comments you have on the current team spirit.

BUSINESS MODEL EXERCISE

Once the core community group has written their mission and vision, it is time to concretize them into a minimal viable business model that would maximize the AEI success rates.

Objective: The Business Model Exercise is used by the core community group to plan, assess or execute new models altogether. It enables teams to visualize and analyze their strategies, highlights the key essentials and ensures that no vital factors are forgotten. If the canvas is incomplete, then the respective strategy is also incomplete. The Business Model Canvas includes the following parts, with the possibility to adapt them to various situations:

Partners:

Who are our most important customers?

Main Missions:

What are the main activities we provide?

What are our main distribution channels?

Main Needed Resources:

What main resources do we need?

Added Value:

What added value do we provide to our customers?

What problems do we help our customers solve?

Relationship with Customers:

What kind of relationship do we hope to build with the customers?

What is the cost of the current relationships?

Channels:

What are preferred channels that customers use to communicate with us?

How do we reach our customers now?

What are the best communication channels?

Main Partnerships:

Who are our main partners?

Who are our main suppliers?

What are the main resources we get from partners?

Revenue Stream:

What value would customers pay for?

How do customers pay?

Expenses Skeleton: What are the main expenses for the project to succeed?

Instructions: The facilitator meets with the core community group and discusses each part of the business model template, filling it out as the discussion moves forward. This includes updating the model, in later intervals, as the AEI evolves, such as changes in the market, new streams or expansions.

BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS

Partners	Main Missions	Added Value
	Needed Resources	
Revenue Stream		
Expenses Skeleton		
Relationship with Customers	Main Partnerships	Channels

SWOT ANALYSIS EXERCISE

SWOT analysis is a framework for identifying and analyzing an organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These words make up the SWOT acronym.

Objective: The SWOT analysis exercise is used to increase awareness of the factors that go into making an informed decision or establishing a business strategy. It analyzes the internal and external environment and the factors that can impact the viability of a decision.

Instructions: The facilitator meets with the core community group and discusses the different parts of the SWOT Analysis Canvas. Together, they can identify a market niche in which the AEI has a competitive advantage. It can also help them plot a path that maximizes their strengths and alert them to threats that could thwart success.

Weaknesses

Strengths

Opportunities

Threats

WISDOM RECOGNITION



Through this phase, a research question is formulated and evidence-based practices for team building and human resources mapping are identified. Systems to re-imagine realities, exchange knowledge, recognize wisdom and envision goals are explored with the community.

FORMULATING A RESEARCH QUESTION

The core community members exchange ideas about what alternative education might look like. After this is imagined, a transformative action research question is posed. A research question helps the community to focus their work and document it in a scientific way for other communities to benefit from their journey.

The good research question should be:

Clear: It provides enough information for those who read it to know the purpose of the project without additional explanation.

Focused: It can be answered within the limits of the writing task.

Concise: It is written with a minimum amount of words.

Complex: It requires analysis and synthesis of ideas and data to be answered.

Arguable: Its potential answers are debatable rather than being accepted facts.

The research question is then contemplated and explored in all its facets, in order to have a crystal clear vision of the goals. A clear goal prevents going through an “analysis paralysis” phase where problems, rather than solutions seem to arise everywhere.

HUMAN RESOURCES MAPPING

At this stage the founding members of the project are finalized. The founding members are those who will sign the partnership legal contract to create a collectively owned and democratically run institute. The founding members alongside community volunteers, funders, social investors, educators, legislators, participants in previous community projects, and service providers get together to ask, “What is the capacity of our community to start a successful Alternative Education Institute (AEI)?”

In order to answer this question the following Manpower Planning Strategy is suggested:

- Set clear objectives and goals for the project.
- Create an inventory of skills and expertise within the community.
- Assess the needs for capacity building.
- Recruit new members with needed skills and expertise.
- Build new partnerships and connect with like-minded organizations.
- Consult with professionals on certain topics.

Evidence - Based Practices (EBP)

It involves integrating available scientific evidence with community knowledge and expertise, while considering the needs and values of the community_of_practice for optimal outcomes. Using Evidence-Based Practices means abandoning outdated practices and choosing effective, scientifically validated methods.

Applying EBP in SIX STEPS

- 1** Ask a question: What is working well and what could be improved? And, more importantly, why? Evaluate the processes and workflow to identify a practice gap.
- 2** Acquire current evidence by conducting a literature review. Your search will be guided by your question.
- 3** Evaluate the literature by sorting, reading and critiquing peer-reviewed articles.
- 4** Take a decision by integrating the evidence with community expertise, preferences and values.
- 5** Evaluate outcomes by reviewing data and documenting the new approach. It is important to keep a written record of the outcome evaluation of the intervention.
- 6** Disseminate the information by sharing the results of the project with others in order to promote a community of practice culture and lead new communities on a pathway that has been already traveled.

WISDOM RECOGNITION EXERCISE

Objective: When clear roles are identified, necessary skills to achieve these roles become apparent. The Wisdom Recognition exercise is used to set clearer expectations from each team member to reduce conflict. Roles, duties and responsibilities are identified by the following template.

Instructions: An assigned team member responsible for Human Resources can plan coaching conversations and training for capacity building.

What is/are your main role(s)?	
What are the authorities you need to accomplish your role(s)?	
What are your responsibilities?	
How will you be held accountable?	
What are your professional development needs and how can they be met?	

THE DAS STORY

Bridging Visions

At the beginning, there were two points of view regarding the shape of the new Alternative School. The “homeschoolers” wanted the children to meet in a forest or any other location where the parents organize homeschooling-inspired activities. The other group wanted the school to be an alternative school where educators facilitate free learning with the children.

The literature suggested that homeschoolers and unschoolers (as theorized by John Holt) could be part of a core community group that is looking at a “broader social and intellectual exposure for their children”. Homeschoolers believe that there are viable alternatives to mainstream schooling that might fit their values and needs. Homeschools are as diverse as alternative and democratic schools when it comes to their pedagogical approaches and their political implications.

After evaluating the literature and critiquing it through continuous internal dialogue within the core community group, the decision was taken to initiate an alternative and democratic school. The democratic “curriculum” that is built on free self-motivation and regards all aspects of child development, fits the diverse views within the core group on both unschooling and alternative free schooling. It was a sort of a compromise between the diverse views. Bridging the different visions and setting clear goals and objectives proved crucial at this stage to drive the DAS project forward.



I drafted the initial vision and mission statement of the group and A. integrated the other perspectives from the Google Document.

J.G created



If we were to find more people interested in homeschooling or unschooling, we would have initiated our own community of homeschools.

M.M - Parent



I started a Google Document where all parents shared their opinions, worries, questions and research findings to unify the vision of the school.

J.G.-Parent

THE DAS STORY

Questions to be asked at this phase:

What is the impact that we aspire to achieve?
Who are the specific groups that we are trying to reach?
What is the form of our initiative?
How does our intervention solve the community-level problem?
What are the values related to our initiative?

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

Possible tension between the group members because of the diversity in viewpoints on values and working styles.



TIPS

- Create time and space for ongoing dialogue.
- Start early to discuss and express the various viewpoints in order to reach a common ground on values.
- Start a shared document with questions to be answered collectively through expressing personal point of views and research findings.
- Preserve the momentum by quickly and efficiently resolving conflict that will arise during the storming phase.
- Keep the children's interests, perspectives and social relationships in mind to stay motivated to continue.
- Identify significant differences early, before anyone has made commitments. The earlier you find people who are on the same page as you, the sooner you can proceed in earnest effort.



THE DAS STORY

Reimagining Realities

To help us solidify the bridging of values and visions, we met with different possible partners, consultants, advisors and educators. These connections helped us re-imagine our alternative and democratic school's model to more suitable ways. For example, during a dialogue with S.A, an alternative educator, we were introduced to Summerhill School in the UK and the philosophy of its founder A.S Neill. We had dialogues with the founders of the Brussels Outdoor School, the Esprits Libres School in Al-Hermel and SCOPE. Moreover, A. who is a researcher and a parent from the core community group of founding parents, started a transformative action research that enriched the group's Evidence-Based Practice and moved it a step further towards becoming a community of practice. The research process may include looking at existing literature, meeting with education experts and community members, visiting existing educational organizations, documenting references and experiences, and analyzing information relevant to the different stages of the process. Research is an ongoing process that supports and guides the initiation of an Alternative Education Institute (AEI). At every stage of the initiation phase, research findings, coupled with the experimental approach, can enrich the process, help in anticipating challenges, and back decisions.

Questions to be asked at this phase:

What does the literature say about this form of initiative?

What are the different types of democratic schools?

What are anticipated challenges?

What are key learnings and good practices to keep in mind as we move forward?

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES

- Lack of expertise in transformative action research in the team.
- Possible storming



TIPS

- Keep an ongoing space for discussions and dialogue.
- Do it your way, it doesn't have to be over-organized, while benefiting from diverse sources of knowledge.
- Opinions and discussions of the group are as important as academic resources.
- Build a shared library of articles and resources on Google Drive.
- Summarize what you read



The DAS PROJECT WAS STILL AT THIS PHASE WHEN THE TOOLKIT WAS PUBLISHED

MODEL TRANSFERING



The community leads on designing strategies for quantitative and qualitative data collection, identifying evidence-based best practices, pinpointing performance metrics, and developing an action plan. Engaging a range of stakeholders in this process will ensure the harvesting of the knowledge and assets of the community. Legal, economic, business operational and democratic models are explored and transferred.

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP MISSION

Based on data collected from the community and analyzed, models that are effective for the collective ownership and democratic running of an Alternative Education Institute (AEI) are established in this phase. The group of founding members will lead this project through a collaborative leadership framework.

The duties of this group are:

- Establishing and registering a non-for-profit civil company that is collectively owned and democratically run.
- Collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data regarding the community needs.
- Orchestrating Community-level and site-specific activities.
- Devising a workable action plan for the project.
- Creating a strategic plan.
- Managing the project and coordinating its activities.
- Establishing multi-level communication tools.
- Helping members define their role, duty, responsibility and authority within the organization.

TIPS

ON MULTI-LEVEL COMMUNICATION

- Use applications like Slack for better communication and Trello and Google Docs for collaborative work.
- Ensure a transparent flow of information and real-time updates.
- Define roles and responsibilities of each member clearly.
- Assign an internal communication mentor.
- Assign a mentor for conflict resolution.

ON MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

Start from what you know. SCOPE management model is somewhere in-between being hierarchical and autonomous, with a prospect of moving towards full autonomy after building the skills in all team members.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Identifying clear outcomes and producing a results-based logical model to show how inputs interact and lead to agreed outputs to enable both implementation and evaluation of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI) model. Intensifying managerial and coordination efforts to sustain a collective leadership approach that evolves with the evolution of needs as the team grows.
- Ensuring the alignment and integration of tasks across the project by continuously collecting data, providing professional development and technical assistance, as well as updating policies support.
- Focusing on the difficult component of change: helping participants at all levels shift to new ways of thinking and behaving. Assessing progress, policies and practices and making necessary changes to the expansion plan.
- Scanning multi-site data to strengthen systemic work, ensure progress, and expand dissemination.
- Disseminating findings to different communities to facilitate the initiation of more Alternative Education Institutes (AEI). Building new partnerships and increasing public awareness about AEI through advocacy campaigns to gain more political recognition and financial aid needed to expand further.



COOP MODEL

1 COOP DEFINITION

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. Co-operatives are active in every sector of the global economy. A key distinguishing feature is that co-operatives create wealth for the many members of co-operatives who engage in co-operative businesses as service users, producers, independent business owners, consumers, and workers, not solely for the few who are rich enough to invest capital in investor-owned enterprises. Co-operatives help counterbalance the massive growth of inequality between the world's rich and poor; an issue that, if not addressed, has major economic, social, cultural, environmental, and political consequences.

2 COOP VALUES

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

3 COOP Principles

Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all people able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Individuals serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefitting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operative. They inform the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

Cooperation among Cooperatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.

Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

4 COOP TYPES

Producer / Marketing Cooperatives

The Producer Co-ops were one of the first kinds of Cooperatives developed to explore and provide solutions to the farmers' production in the early 1880s. Producers Co-ops are also known as marketing co-ops where the members provide the co-op with the same production as the co-op markets in a processed or value-added form. These Producer Co-ops include farmers, artists, harvesters and fishers seeking out and selling to end users to earn and retain the benefit of their owners/producers.

Consumer Cooperatives

This is one of the best known forms of cooperatives. They are owned and controlled by the people that buy the products and services sold, managed or distributed by the co-ops. Their mandate is to acquire the products and services required by their members at the lowest possible cost with the highest possible quality. These co-ops can operate in three different ways; as buying clubs where products and services are obtained by the co-op only when the members place an order; as retail stores where the members come in to shop; and as service providers where members order the service, such as cable television, internet access, insurance, water or natural gas.

Worker Cooperatives

Worker co-ops are identified as the third type of Cooperative owned and controlled by their employees. The purpose of the worker co-op is to create jobs for their members and allow them control of their workplace. Members provide the capital to finance the business, each sharing the costs and risks of ownership.

The management of a worker co-op is concentrated in the business part and classified as a third type of co-op where the members are employees. Usually, the worker co-ops are services co-op offering services to other businesses and they are generally printing, nursery schools, cleaning, consulting, delivery, manufacturing and food services.

Major benefits to the employee-members include involvement in the policy-making process, through the election of a Board of Directors, profit sharing through patronage allocations, and a quality of work life that is established by the membership.

Housing Cooperatives.

Housing co-ops are developed to resolve the living need by offering affordable and secure housing in a viable community. The members are tenants/owners having the ability to manage and control the co-op.

Financial Cooperatives.

The financial co-ops were initially based on consumer co-ops offering financial services to their members. Financial co-ops were started in rural communities providing farmers with micro credit during the early 1900s and they were known as the people's bank or credit unions, and saving and credit cooperatives.

These special types of co-ops often come under legislation developed for the uniqueness of the financial services being provided to their members, deposit taking, loans, trust services, and insurance. Credit Unions (in English Canada) / Caisses Populaire (French Canada) are the most recognizable or best known of the financial co-ops. Like other co-ops, democratic control is in the hands of their members/owners.

These co-ops have the mandate to provide their members with financial services at the lowest possible cost and the highest possible return. These services include a variety of deposit vehicles, mortgages, loans, lines of credit, safety deposit boxes, financial planning, estate administration and insurance.

New Generation Cooperatives

New Generation cooperative or New Formula to view and operate a Co-op are the latest buzzwords in the co-op community describing a variation on the traditional co-op, yet, retaining the critical co-op principles.

New Generation Cooperatives (NGCs) represent an emerging trend in agriculture, forestry, fishing and other industries that are supplied by producers. These are distinct types of cooperatives formed to enable members to process raw commodities. As a result, members not only receive market prices for their product, they also gain the opportunity to profit from processing and marketing these value-added products. Typically, higher equity investments are required by members in order to establish a processing plant. Furthermore, the number of members is limited to those who purchase delivery rights, as well as by the processing capacity of the plant. Because of the unique structure of NGCs, members feel a greater degree of personal ownership and a stronger commitment to the cooperative.

Multi-Stakeholder Cooperatives

These are formed by groups that normally form separate co-ops, such as workers and consumers, to combine their resources and create a co-op together. This allows co-ops greater strength and sustainability with the ability to diversify their stakeholders.

Non-profit Community Service Cooperatives

These provide services to the community on a not-for-profit basis, for example a child care center owned and operated by the parents using the center.

Education COOPs

Co-operative schools and educational institutes represent an attempt to democratize and “co-operativize” education. They provide an alternative perspective which looks both back to progressive traditions as well as forward to a democratic and inclusive education system in which pupils, parents and communities are active partners in schools and educational networks. Co-operativism and inclusion make interesting collaborators. Education COOPs belong to the Multi-Stakeholders Co-operatives. Education COOPs can date back to the early 19th century.

ECONOMIC MODEL

1 Planning for Sustainability

After studying the financial, human, political, and social resources needed to implement the project and maintain its growth and development in the face of conflicting political demands, the founding group ought to seek financial and political support, as one is dependent and encouraged by the other. Key policy makers are more likely to examine their existing resources and use them in new ways when faced with a successful initiative that is set to achieve its goals, has transparent accountability systems and has the support of its community. Financial Officers in an Alternative Education Institute (AEI), in collaboration with the stakeholders, identify funders, social investors and donors to leverage more funds and coordinate assets through a long-term financial plan.

2 Democratic Economy

The suggested economic model for an Alternative Education Institute (AEI) is circular, democratic, reciprocal, participatory and equitable. It has its roots in the principles of co-operative economy. However, it is innovative so it matches the needs of the era and the communities it serves. This model is assembled in compliance with the Lebanese laws. This alternative economic model aims to counteract the failure of both the Lebanese educational and economic systems. An AEI does not aim to accumulate wealth through investment and return on capital. It considers the capital to be the servant, not the master of the enterprise. It is designed around the concept of capital being in service of people and labor, not labor and people being in servitude to capital. Members have the right and the duty, collectively, to decide how surpluses should be allocated. The assets of an AEI are forever common property and can never be shared in the event of dissolution or liquidation. After the payment of all residual debt, the assets that remain must remain indivisible.

3 The Financial Model

Members have full control on all kinds of the organization's capital, but receive no compensation on the capital they subscribe as a condition of membership. Members can invest in a share that does not exceed 20% of the company's capital. Market return on this investment is allowed. Capital emanating from other sources should not have any implications in light of the 4th principle of Autonomy and Independence. The key concern must always be to preserve the capacity of the members to decide the fate of their organization.

ECONOMIC MODEL

Reserves

- Indivisible Capital Reserve (10% of the company's income)
- Legal Reserve (10% of the company's capital paid annually)
- Members' Mutual Aid Reserve (paid by members)
- Investment Reserve
- Retirement and Patronage Reserve

Funding Sources

- Capital paid by founders as a condition of membership (no return on capital).
- Capital paid by service users as a condition of voting rights (no return on capital).
- Capital paid by members as contribution (no return on capital)
- Members' investment that does not exceed 20% of the company's capital (limited return on capital).
- External funding for projects from funders as per a pre-agreed Sponsor Charter (30% of this capital is the common property of the company).
- Investments that are done via external contracts as per the company's bylaws. Investors will get a return on their investment agreed as per contract.
- Crowd Funding and Donations (no return on capital).
- Revenue streams generated from selling the company's products and services in the market.
- Return on the company's investments in other COOPs and/or companies.
- Community Sponsorship where community members donate to the company or any of its projects in return for receiving reports on the impact of this investment has in the community.

Surpluses

- Might be used to develop the AEI.
- Reinvested in modernizing physical and other infrastructure and in improving human resources.
- Developing new co-operative activities with the aim of diversifying the co-operative economy.
- To pay a return to members.
- To support other activities that are approved by members.

INCENTIVE MODEL

CRITERIA VS LEVELS	level 4	level 3	level 2	level 1
DURATION: *The task duration is the time expected to finish a task. This is the duration decided upon between members prior to starting execution of tasks.	The task completion duration was less than the set expectations.	The task completion was compatible with the duration we agreed upon prior to the task.	The task completion exceeded the average duration.	The task completion exceeded the duration set as an expected time by the team on task.
EFFORT VS EXPERIENCE: *It is the ratio of effort and experience put to finalize the task.* as an example, taking the effort and the experience on a scale of 10 and eliciting a quantitative ratio for a qualitative value.	The level of effort to finalize the task was beyond my level of expertise and the shared expectations agreed upon among the team members.	The level of effort to finalize the task was beyond my level of expertise in such tasks or similar ones.	The level of effort to finalize this task is equivalent to my level of expertise in it.	My level of expertise exceeds the level of effort put to finalize the task.
TIMELINESS: *The time allocated to finish the task is agreed upon prior to executing it by the members of the team on task.*The deviation from the timeline expected and agreed upon is to be measured.	I delivered the task earlier than expected	I delivered the task right on time.	I delivered the task within an acceptable delay in relevance to the timeline.	I barely delivered the task.
GROWTH SCALE: *The scale of professional and personal development tracked via self-reflection and/or peer feedback.	Achieving this task was a challenge accepted towards my personal growth.	Achieving this task was a challenge accepted towards my professional growth.	Choosing this task was an investment to develop personally and/or professionally.	This task was another practice in the medium of my expertise.

GOVERNANCE MODEL

This suggested model fits well with the evolutionist paradigm of governance based on wholeness, trust, free information, worker autonomy, self-management, critical peer relationships, shared values, valorisation of diversity and continuous learning. The Governance Model is horizontal and non-hierarchical.

Founders: These are the individuals who sign the Partnership Contract and register the company.

Members: These are the individuals who join the company after it is founded.

General Assembly: It is constituted of Founders and Members. The General Assembly has the ultimate decision making power in the company.

Board of Directors: Members of the boards are elected for a said duration by the GA. The BOD has power over work not over people. The BOD takes decisions after deliberating with the GA through an agreed mechanism. The BOD acts on the same level of Autonomous Circles and not above them. The board constitutes of:

Observers: They are the link between the GA and BOD. They ensure that the work of the Board is aligned with the values of the company set by the GA

Chief Executive Officer - CEO: Responsible for implementing existing plans and policies, improving the company's financial strength, supporting ongoing business transformation and setting future strategies.

Chief Operating Officer - COO: Responsible for overseeing the day-to-day administrative and operational functions of the business.

Chief Financial Officer - CFO: Responsible for managing the financial actions of the company. They are often in charge of tracking cash flow, analyzing strengths/weaknesses in the company's finances and overseeing all aspects of its financial success.

Autonomous Circles: They are a group of individuals who are working on a specific task. They are responsible for setting tasks, recruiting new staff, budgeting, salaries...

Circle Leads: These are the go-to individuals in an autonomous circle.

Communication Mentor: Produces internal communications materials across a range of channels, digital, face-to-face and written.

Coaches: The more knowledgeable others who help through guidance on specific tasks and in specific fields of expertise.

Tasks Managers: These are the individuals who work on the Tasks Document to ensure easy flow of information and documentation.

AEI Liaison: The person who links between the Founding Members and the team of professionals who collectively run the AEI.

MODEL TRANSFERRING TEMPLATES

Communication Modalities

Communication can be sustained through different modalities according to the needs of the group.

MODALITY	PURPOSE	FREQUENCY
Initial Group Meetings	identify identity (Goals, Roles and Skills, Rules and Activities, Values) Identify dealbreakers	Weekly
Task Force Meetings	Complete tasks Follow-up	As needed
Ongoing Group Updates	Keep the team informed	Daily
General Assembly Meetings	Discuss main issues Decide on bigger issues	Weekly
Board of Directors Meeting	Decide on timely issues	Weekly
1 on 1 Meetings	Address individual issues Follow-up Check-in	As needed

Throughout the team building process, the communication channels evolve to suit the needs. Like any other practice in the AEI, there is a need for continuous praxis to ensure we keep on moving towards the Communication Best Practices, asking ourselves:

- What do we hope to achieve by using the current communication tools we have?
- How well have we achieved the goal?
- What communication challenges do we still have?
- How do we fill the communication gaps?

EVALUATION METRICS

As mentioned above, the initiative identifies unambiguous outcomes and produces a results-based logical model to show how inputs interact and lead to agreed outputs to enable both implementation and evaluation of the Alternative

Education Institute (AEI) model. Before adopting change, evaluation metrics/standards should be pinpointed according to the success stories that inspired the initiation of the AEI.

Cooperative Schools Standards

Core Values

- Autonomy - helping oneself to improve and make a positive contribution to society
- Responsibility – taking responsibility for, and answer to one’s actions
- Democracy – through having a say in how we run our Trust and the academies
- Fairness – making sure the voice of each individual can be heard
- Equity – a fair and unbiased community
- Solidarity – sharing interests and common purposes for the benefit of all

Ethical Values

- Openness – We believe in being open, sharing information and ideas to improve the lives of children and young people
- Honesty – We are professional and respectful manner with everyone
- Social responsibility – we maximize our impact on those in our communities while minimizing our footprint on the world
- Caring for others – we treat everyone as we wish to be treated ourselves, understanding that children and young people have one childhood

1

Collaborative Leadership: Nurtures shared ownership and shared accountability.

- Interdisciplinary, cross-sector community partners share responsibility and accountability for student and school success.
- A representative site-based leadership team, including families, students, community partners, unions, neighboring community residents, the principal, teachers, and other school personnel and community partners, guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight.
- The principal works with the AEI liaison, partners and staff to actively integrate families and community members into the life and work of the school.

2

Needs and Assets Planning: Incorporates the assets and needs of school, family, and community in the School Improvement Plan.

- A commitment to a shared vision and mission of student success drives educators, families, and community partners in their planning.
- Data on school and community indicators, disaggregated by race, gender, disability, income, and other relevant factors, informs the school improvement goals and plan.
- A needs and assets assessment of the school, student, families, and neighboring community is conducted regularly to inform the School Improvement Plan.
- The School Improvement Plan explicitly outlines the role of school staff, families, community partners, interdisciplinary teams, and the AEI liaison in helping to achieve specific results.
- The academic and non-academic results and related indicators that the Alternative Education Institute (AEI) seeks to attain are specified in the School Improvement Plan.
- The School Improvement Plan identifies and aligns a range of evidence-based programs and practices to achieve desired results.
- The AEI Leadership Team plays a decision-making role in the development of the School Improvement Plan.
- A mechanism for measuring progress toward desired results and indicators is defined in the plan.
- Strong transitions support the seamless transition from early education through college and career and across schools

3

Coordinating School and Community Infrastructure: Facilitates coordination of school and community resources.

- A dedicated full time AEI liaison facilitates the alignment of school, family and community resources.
- The AEI liaison is a member of the school's leadership team and supports the AEI site-based leadership team.
- The AEI liaison facilitates close communication among the principal, teachers, other school staff, and community partners.
- The AEI liaison facilitates school and partnership data collection, sharing, and analysis.
- School personnel and community partners are organized into working teams focused on specific issues identified in the needs and assets assessment (e.g., mental health, after school, or mentoring).
- School personnel and community partners assess the effectiveness of their relationships on a regular basis in order to continuously improve opportunities and supports

4

Student-Centered Data: Guides opportunities and support to individual students.

- Data systems and protocols are in place to assure access to relevant individual and aggregate information and to assure transparency of decision making.
- Policies and procedures are in place to safeguard student and family confidentiality.
- Multi-disciplinary teams, with the assistance of the AEI liaison, use data to prioritize resources and prepare individualized plans to make sure every student gets the opportunities and support they need.
- Agreements are in place to share student data and data on services being provided to individual students among school personnel, AEI liaison and community partners.

5

Authentic Community Engagement: Gathers and galvanizes community and neighborhoods resources.

- The school is a venue for exploring assets and addressing challenges affecting the school and the community.
- The school building is open and accessible beyond the school day, including evenings and weekends.
- Families and community members recognize the school as a hub of learning and community development.

6

Sustainability: Ensures ongoing operations of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI)

- A strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the AEI among school personnel, families, and community partners is in place.
- School personnel, unions, community partners and leaders, and families publicly celebrate successes, and advocate for the AEI within their organization and across their community.
- A plan and process to sustain funding for the AEI, including both the position of the AEI coordinator and specific programs is in place.
- Principals and community partners work with the school site leadership team to prepare budgets with a view to helping sustain the AEI
- Community partners commit to a long-term relationship with the school, driven by student and school needs, and modify their organization and culture to support the AEI partnership.
- Community partners help generate funding for programs that will be operated

7

Powerful Learning: Engages students as independent learners.

- Teachers and community partners work together to provide a well-rounded and enriching core curriculum during and outside of the school day.
- Youth development principles, particularly an emphasis on student voice and choice, inform student learning and development strategies.
- Learning opportunities enable students to develop academic, social, emotional, health and civic competencies.
- Students have access to enriching summer learning experiences.
- Students have access to supportive environments as needed before school and during school breaks.
- Learning experiences incorporate a focus on real world issues and enable young people to be problem solvers in their own communities.
- Learning experiences in the AEI meet quality standards defined by specific program fields (e.g., after school, summer learning, service learning, project-based learning, common core).

8

Integrated Health and Social Support: Addressing barriers to learning.

- Students and their teachers and families are knowledgeable about the services and supports that are available at, or through, school, including physical, mental, behavioral and emotional health.
- Services and support are proactive and culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive.
- Health and social supports and services respond to the needs of students, and families, and focus both on prevention and treatment.
- An interdisciplinary student support team, including specialized instructional support personnel, community partners, other school staff, and involving families where appropriate, develops and oversees a plan to respond to individual student needs.

9

Authentic Family Engagement: Embraces families and mobilizes family assets.

- Teachers and families have trusting and respectful relationships.
- Families have equity of voice and power in the Alternative Education Institute (AEI) leadership and decision-making structures.
- Two-way, culturally and linguistically relevant communication between school and families is proactive and consistent.
- Families are empowered and supported to support learning at home.
- The AEI recognizes that all adults involved with the AEI and family members must develop the capacity to work together.
- Leadership development opportunities are regularly available to families and community residents.

10

Continuous Improvement: Deepens the impact of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI)

- Individual student data, participant feedback, and aggregate outcomes are analyzed regularly by the site leadership team to assess program quality and progress and develop strategies for improvement.
- Issues requiring policy or procedural changes and resource needs are communicated to leaders and staff at the systems level.
- Strategic opportunities for joint professional development are identified through data analysis and continuous improvement efforts and enable educators, community partners and families to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to work effectively together, share best practices and apply those practices in their work.

ACTION PLAN DESIGN

The Action Plan is done as a collective effort and involves representatives of all stakeholders.

To make the collective work run smoothly the following steps are suggested:

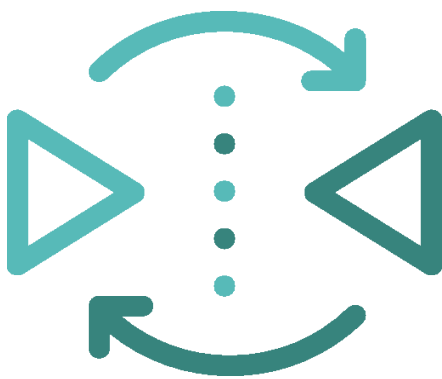
- . Choose a platform on which the work is going to be done that is accessible to everyone (Google Sheets, Project Management Software...)
- . Make sure that all stakeholders are comfortable using the platform. Provide coaching and technical support as needed.
- . Set a time frame for the project.
- . Divide the project into phases or milestones.
- . Explain the phases extensively.
- . Divide the phases into clear tasks.
- . Elect a lead for each phase. It is advised that the lead is an expert in the tasks required in a particular phase.
- . The lead will distribute the tasks to collaborators, provide coaching and make sure that the work is done on time.



WORKPLAN

Phase Number	Activity	Activity Description	Resources Required	Start and End Date (Months)																Expected Output (s)	Lead								
				Q1				Q2				Q3				Q4						Q5				Q6			
				May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug			Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec				
1																													
2																													
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PRAXIS



The community is supported by experts as it implements evaluation design, answers research questions, measures performance metrics and monitors success through statistical and qualitative data analysis. This continuous critical reflection process informs the adjustments applied to the action plan as the community acts, reflects, learns and acts again.

PRAXIS AND PROCESS EVALUATION

Definition

Praxis is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “practice, as distinguished from theory”. In education, the dialectical relationship between theory, practice, reflection and action is radical in such that if action is sacrificed, it leads to verbalism, and if reflection is sacrificed it leads to activism. But only when the word and the work are in balance then it is praxis. Freire explains praxis in the following quote: “Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world. As change is sought, the practice of reflecting periodically is necessary to maintain an accurate representation of where the educational institution stands on the pathway of change.

Process Evaluation

Was the process smooth?

What milestones were easy to achieve? Why?

What milestones were harder to achieve? Why?

Evaluate the Pathway of Change process, listing its strengths, challenges and suggestions for improvement.

Phase	Strengths	Challenges	Suggestions for Improvement
Transformative Dialogue			
Story Telling			
Wisdom Recognition			
Model Transferring			

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Using above-mentioned performance metrics/standards of the Alternative Education Institutes, stakeholders would evaluate the outcome and impact the AEI had on the community and involved individuals .

Objective: The Outcome and Impact Evaluation will be used to measure the effect of AEI had on the community as a whole, on individuals in the community, whether they are students, teachers, or parents. This evaluation would provide both qualitative and quantitative feedback on the AEI, as it consists of 52 standards across 10 domains.

Instructions: At regular intervals, an assigned member would have various The stakeholder position to the AEI would be marked on top and they would fill the impact evaluation using a scale of 1-5, marked as follows: 1 = no positive impact, 2 = very little positive impact, 3 = some positive impact, 4 = great short-term positive impact 5 = significant long-lasting positive impact

Collaborative Leadership:

Nurtures shared ownership and shared accountability.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
Community partners share responsibility and accountability for student and school success.				
A representative leadership team, including families, students, community partners, unions, neighboring community residents, the principal, teachers, and other school personnel and community partners, guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight.				
The principal works with the AEI liaison, partners and staff to actively integrate families and community members into the life and work of the school.				

NEEDS AND ASSETS PLANNING

Incorporates the assets and needs of school, family, and community in the School Improvement Plan.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
A commitment to a shared vision and mission of student success drives educators, families, and community partners in their planning.				
Data on school and community indicators, disaggregated by race, gender, disability, income, and other relevant factors, informs the school improvement goals and plan.				
A needs and assets assessment of the school, student, families, and neighboring community is conducted regularly to inform the School Improvement Plan.				
The School Improvement Plan explicitly outlines the role of school staff, families, community partners, interdisciplinary teams, and the AEI liaison in helping to achieve specific results.				
The academic and non-academic results and related indicators that the (AEI) seeks to attain are specified in the School Improvement Plan.				
The School Improvement Plan identifies and aligns a range of evidence-based programs and practices to achieve desired results.				
The AEI Leadership Team plays a decision-making role in the development of the School Improvement Plan.				
A mechanism for measuring progress toward desired results and indicators is defined in the plan.				
Strong transitions support the seamless transition from early education through college and career and across schools				

COORDINATING INFRASTRUCTURES

Facilitates coordination of school and community resources.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
A dedicated full time AEI liaison facilitates the alignment of school, family and community resources.				
The AEI liaison is a member of the school's leadership team and supports the AEI site-based leadership team.				
The AEI liaison facilitates close communication among the principal, teachers, other school staff, and community partners.				
The AEI liaison facilitates school and partnership data collection, sharing, and analysis.				
School personnel and community partners are organized into working teams focused on specific issues identified in the needs and assets assessment (e.g., mental health, after school, or mentoring).				
School personnel and community partners assess the effectiveness of their relationships on a regular basis in order to continuously improve opportunities and supports				

STUDENT-CENTERED DATA

Guides opportunities and support to individual students.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
Data systems and protocols are in place to assure access to relevant individual and aggregate information and to assure transparency of decision making.				
Policies and procedures are in place to safeguard student and family confidentiality.				
Multi-disciplinary teams, with the assistance of the AEI liaison, use data to prioritize resources and prepare individualized plans to make sure every student gets the opportunities and support they need.				
Agreements are in place to share student data and data on services being provided to individual students among school personnel, AEI liaison and community partners.				

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Deepens the impact of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI)

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
<p>Individual student data, participant feedback, and aggregate outcomes are analyzed regularly by the site leadership team to assess program quality and progress and develop strategies for improvement.</p>				
<p>Issues requiring policy or procedural changes and resource needs are communicated to leaders and staff at the systems level.</p>				
<p>Strategic opportunities for joint professional development are identified through data analysis and continuous improvement efforts and enable educators, community partners and families to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities to work effectively together, share best practices and apply those practices in their work.</p>				

SUSTAINABILITY

Ensures ongoing operations of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI)

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
A strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the AEI among school personnel, families, and community partners is in place.				
A strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the AEI among school personnel, families, and community partners is in place.				
A plan and process to sustain funding for the AEI, including both the position of the AEI coordinator and specific programs is in place.				
Principals and community partners work with the school site leadership team to prepare budgets with a view to helping sustain the AEI				
Community partners commit to a long-term relationship with the school, driven by student and school needs, and modify their organization and culture to support the AEI partnership.				
Community partners help generate funding for programs that will be operated under the umbrella of the AEI				

POWERFUL LEARNING

Engages students as independent learners.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
Teachers and community partners work together to provide a well-rounded and enriching core curriculum during and outside of the school day.				
Youth development principles, particularly an emphasis on student voice and choice, inform student learning and development strategies.				
Learning opportunities enable students to develop academic, social, emotional, health and civic competencies.				
Students have access to enriching summer learning experiences.				
Students have access to supportive environments as needed before school and during school breaks.				
Learning experiences incorporate a focus on real world issues and enable young people to be problem solvers in their own communities.				
Learning experiences in the AEI meet quality standards defined by specific program fields (e.g., after school, summer learning, service learning, project-based learning, common core).				

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Addressing barriers to learning.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
<p>Students and their teachers and families are knowledgeable about the services and supports that are available at, or through, school, including physical, mental, behavioral and emotional health.</p>				
<p>Services and support are proactive and culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive.</p>				
<p>Health and social supports and services respond to the needs of students, and families, and focus both on prevention and treatment.</p>				
<p>An interdisciplinary student support team, including specialized instructional support personnel, community partners, other school staff, and involving families where appropriate, develops and oversees a plan to respond to individual student needs.</p>				

AUTHENTIC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Embraces families and mobilizes family assets.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
Teachers and families have trusting and respectful relationships.				
Families have equity of voice and power in the Alternative Education Institute (AEI) leadership and decision-making structures.				
Two-way, culturally and linguistically relevant communication between school and families is proactive and consistent.				
Families are empowered and supported to support learning at home.				
The AEI recognizes that all adults involved with the AEI and family members must develop the capacity to work together.				
Leadership development opportunities are regularly available to families and community residents.				
Educators, families, community partners, and school personnel and leadership demonstrate trusting relationships.				

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Gathers and galvanizes community and neighborhoods resources.

Alternative Education Institute (AEI) Standards	Community	Teachers	Students	Parents
<p>The school is a venue for exploring assets and addressing challenges affecting the school and the community.</p>				
<p>The school building is open and accessible beyond the school day, including evenings and weekends.</p>				
<p>Families and community members recognize the school as a hub of learning and community development.</p>				

AEI SCORE Outcome and Impact Evaluation

To evaluate the outcome and the extent of the impact, here are some guidelines to the AEI performance.

Outcome and Impact Evaluation By Domain

Evaluation findings are strengthened when several pieces of evidence point in the same direction. Often a single data set will allow a variety of impact assessments to be made. Better still if different data sets and approaches can be used and come to broadly the same conclusion. Therefore, AEI Score Analysis is focused on only one group of stakeholders' evaluation of the whole domain; for example, while evaluating Collaborative Leadership, it's either Teachers Evaluation or Parents Evaluation, so that success stories with certain stakeholders can be highlighted and transferred and areas of concern can be triangulated easily.

Qualitative information can also reinforce findings and add depth to them. Further examination is advised through looking at the distribution of scores for each standard, to check strengths and areas for improvement.

1. Collaborative Leadership: Nurtures shared ownership and shared accountability. Evaluated through 3 standards

DOMAIN 1 SCORE COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
3-5	1	Baseline
6-8	2	Beginning
9-11	3	Developing
12-14	4	Meeting Expectations
15	5	Exceeding Expectations

AEI SCORE

2. Needs and Assets Planning: Incorporates the assets and needs of school, family, and community in the School Improvement Plan.
Evaluated through 9 standards

DOMAIN 2 SCORE NEEDS AND ASSETS PLANNING	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
9-17	1	Baseline
18-26	2	Beginning
27-35	3	Developing
36-44	4	Meeting Expectations
45	5	Exceeding Expectations

3. Coordinating School and Community Infrastructure: Facilitates coordination of school and community resources.
Evaluated through 6 standards

Domain 3 Score Coordinating School and Community Infrastructure	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
6-11	1	Baseline
12-17	2	Beginning
18-23	3	Developing
24-29	4	Meeting Expectations
30	5	Exceeding Expectations

AEI SCORE

4. Student-centered Data: Guides opportunities and support to individual students. Evaluated through 4 standards

DOMAIN 4 SCORE STUDENT-CENTERED DATA	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
4-7	1	Baseline
8-11	2	Beginning
12-15	3	Developing
16-19	4	Meeting Expectations
20	5	Exceeding Expectations

5. Continuous Improvement: Deepens the impact of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI)
Evaluated through 3 standards

DOMAIN 5 SCORE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
3-5	1	Baseline
6-8	2	Beginning
9-11	3	Developing
12-14	4	Meeting Expectations
15	5	Exceeding Expectations

AEI SCORE

6. Sustainability: Ensures ongoing operations of the Alternative Education Institute (AEI)

Evaluated through 6 standards

DOMAIN 6 SCORE SUSTAINABILITY	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
6-11	1	Baseline
12-17	2	Beginning
18-23	3	Developing
24-29	4	Meeting Expectations
30	5	Exceeding Expectations

7. Powerful Learning: Engages students as independent learners.

Evaluated through 7 standards

EVALUATED THROUGH 7 STANDARDS DOMAIN 7 SCORE POWERFUL LEARNING	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
7-13	1	Baseline
14-20	2	Beginning
21-27	3	Developing
28-34	4	Meeting Expectations
35	5	Exceeding Expectations

AEI SCORE

8. Integrated Health and Social Support: Addressing barriers to learning.
Evaluated through 4 standards

DOMAIN 8 SCORE INTEGRATED HEALTH AND SOCIAL SUPPORT	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
4-7	1	Baseline
8-11	2	Beginning
12-15	3	Developing
16-19	4	Meeting Expectations
20	5	Exceeding Expectations

9. Authentic Family Engagement: Embraces families and mobilizes family assets.
Evaluated through 7 standards

DOMAIN 9 SCORE AUTHENTIC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
7-13	1	Baseline
14-20	2	Beginning
21-27	3	Developing
28-34	4	Meeting Expectations
35	5	Exceeding Expectations

AEI SCORE

10. Authentic Community Engagement: Gathers and galvanizes community and neighborhoods resources.
 Evaluated through 3 standards

DOMAIN 10 SCORE AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
3-5	1	Baseline
6-8	2	Beginning
9-11	3	Developing
12-14	4	Meeting Expectations
15	5	Exceeding Expectations

Overall Outcome and Impact Evaluation

To evaluate the impact of the AEi across all domains and standards, use the following scaling.

Alternative Education Institutes Outcome and Impact Overall Evaluation

Evaluated through 52 standards

All 10 Domains Score	SCALED SCORE	IMPACT STAGE
52-103	1	Baseline
104-155	2	Beginning
156-207	3	Developing
208-259	4	Meeting Expectations
260	5	Exceeding Expectations

SCOPE REFLECTION ON ACTION

It has been a very long journey for SCOPE since the first conversations that took place in September 2021 with the founding members until finishing writing this Toolkit. It has indeed been a conscientization journey, at various degrees, for all SCOPE members. We learned a lot from all the small successes and failures we had. Internally, we are proud of devising our own legal, operational, economic and governing models and we are happy to disseminate them through a free public flow of information. We are still facing challenges caused by the bureaucracy of the system and the strikes of the public sector as we try to register SCOPE as a civil company. The response of the public to SCOPE was very positive and encouraging. However, when working with communities to start solidarity initiatives, we were faced with resistance and lack of commitment, even though they were the ones who requested the intervention from SCOPE. As mentioned in this Toolkit, the hardest challenge for any initiative is to shift the ways people think and behave; this change in cultural attitude is not an easy task. These challenges are not unique to SCOPE and will be faced by any AEI initiative. Another challenge AEIs will certainly face is navigating the political map of existing NGOs, Civil Companies; a bad navigation of such terrains will jeopardize financing opportunities for the initiative, as political and financial factors are interlinked.

THE DAS STORY

Reflection on Action

The initiation of the Democratic and Alternative School DAS was catalyzed by the children's wish to keep learning together after the forest preschool they were attending decided not to open a grade 1 class. As parents, we started exploring the options available for us to start a democratic school. This dialogue started slowly and grew gradually.

Reflecting back on the process, all parents wanted each child to develop at their own pace and to take an active role in their learning based on their interests and competencies. We wanted our children's thoughts and feelings to be taken into consideration as the curriculum is being created. We wanted the children to co-build the curriculum with the lead educator based on their interests, curiosities, and the topics they want to explore. We agreed that democratic learning is participatory and promotes a culture of equality and shared responsibility in which the children are accepted for who they are, not for who they should be. The parents agreed with M. M. when she suggested the child-centered teaching and self-directed learning concepts.

The process was exciting but full of challenges, concerns, and uncertainties. D., for example, expressed her concern on raising a child on democratic schooling in a society that does not respect the child's voice. F. questioned the role of parents in helping and guiding the children on their learning path. It took us, as a group, around three months to draft a clear vision and set the values that will lead our way. It took a lot of effort to attend weekly meetings, engage in continuous internal and external dialogues, reading articles, watching videos and engaging in research. At some points the whole process felt a little bit overwhelming but very enriching.

As we moved from one milestone to the other, there were more questions asked, challenges faced, hurdles jumped, conflicts resolved, lessons learned and wins celebrated. We started wondering about freedom versus responsibility, democratic education versus homeschooling, free self-motivated learning versus achievement and evaluation, democratic approach versus critical approach, and individualized democratic education vs. socially-oriented democracy. Through continuous reflections and the use of diverse reflection tools, we arrived at the conclusion that we will not strictly follow any existing alternative and democratic education model, but we will create our own; one that fits our specific needs. While drafting our vision and values, for example, we combined our specific viewpoints with the knowledge we acquired about democratic approaches. Moreover, we rejected democratic experiences that we thought might cause stress for us in our specific collective phase or on an individual level when it comes to every specific child.

We are now at the phase where we need to build strong governance, legal, operational and economic models, establish good structures that will help establish the emergent democratic curriculum, find a suitable location and jump the bureaucratic hoops of getting our school licensed.

THE DAS STORY

Similarly, the pedagogical approach of DAS and the training offered were continuously negotiated within the Education Circle that includes parents, the educator(s) and SCOPE members. There was nothing considered to be set in stone. The day-to-day routine in the school for example was imagined based on the vision and values put forth by the founding parents and a conversation with the educator(s) and SCOPE. The emergent approach was then compared with existing knowledge on democratic education to fine tune it. The same thing happened while drafting the action plan with SCOPE and Daleel Tadamon; tasks and milestones were negotiated and agreed. However, we re-visited and reflected on the action plan and modified it based on readings we did to respond to our emergent needs. From our experience we found that without an action plan, “gaining traction and moving forward is impossible”.

Recommendations

As mentioned, the DAS project is at the wisdom recognition phase and should be moving towards the model transferring phase. Further research is recommended to follow the progress of the DAS project and/or emerging AElS, like the Forest School in Baakline, to solidify the practice and help more communities start their own AElS.



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