

# EDUCATION 2.0

CHRONICLES OF TECHNOLOGICAL  
AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN EGYPT

EDITED BY  
LINDA HERRERA





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# II. A Life in Education from Academia to the World Bank: Interview with Juan Manual Moreno

*Linda Herrera*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Juan Manual Moreno served as the Lead Education Specialist in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region for the World Bank during the initial years of the Education 2.0 reforms. He reflects on his life in international education and ponders Egypt's particularly securitized approach to its schools and the resilience of the Thanaweya Amma exam. He addresses misconceptions about the Bank and explains how it negotiates sectoral strategies with each country. He cautions that even with advances of digital transformation, nothing can replace the face-to-face school, classroom, and teacher, and stresses the value of research and data to diagnose problems and form an inclusive vision of education which is needed for a country's future survival.

## Keywords

cultural capital gap, COVID-19, digital transformation, human capital, equity, quality of education, security, teacher professional development, Thanaweya Amma

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1 This interview took place on 21 May 2020 via Zoom. Many thanks to Nelly El Zayat and Nairy AbdeIshafy, members of the Education 2.0 Research and Documentation Project team, who assisted with background research and questions. For a video excerpt of this interview see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMPQ3xP8OFM>.

## 1. A Family of Educators

*LH* How did you get involved in the field of education policy and research?

*JM*<sup>2</sup> In my case, you do not have to explore deeply, it is pretty clear. I am the fourth generation of teachers in my family. It goes back more than a century. My father was a university professor in the field of education. My mom was an education supervisor in the public-school system in Spain. My grandma was a multigrade rural schoolteacher somewhere in La Mancha. The street where she lived is named after her. There are not that many teachers who have got a street named after them, right? So that has got to be a small town. There is another branch of the family with all the doctors, nurses, et cetera. We are the education branch of the family. Education is a matter of identity and a certain pride for the family. I have been surrounded by this world ever since I was born. I was particularly influenced by my dad. After high school, I chose to study education in Madrid. I got a scholarship to study at Teachers College, Columbia University, where I got in contact with a very good scholar and did my Ph.D.

After the Ph.D., I got into academia at the National Open University of Spain. I then made the mistake of getting into university politics which I experienced at the highest level for four years as Vice Rector. That almost killed me in terms of stress. As you know, university politics are dirtier than real politics. There is a very famous quote by Henry Kissinger during a speech he was giving at a university. Someone asked him, 'Dr. Kissinger, why are university politics so dirty?' He answered, 'University politics are vicious precisely because the stakes are so small'. I think that is a brilliant response.

Somebody sent my CV to the World Bank during a batch-recruitment of mid-career education professionals. I interviewed and was offered the job. I went to the Bank straight from the experience of university politics. The first year I thought I was on sabbatical. I initially planned to be there for two years, but I have been there now for eighteen years. I will go back to academia at the end of this calendar year (2020), should

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2 Disclaimer: The responses of Juan Manuel Moreno reflect personal opinions and analysis and in no way represent the official position of the World Bank. See Moreno's LinkedIn profile for more details about his professional trajectory, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/juan-manuel-moreno-50200017/>.

the situation permit and should universities survive this situation (the COVID-19 pandemic) (laughs). So, that is a long answer to your question, and just to tell you how easy it is to explain how I got into this sector and into this world.

*LH Prior to joining the World Bank, were you involved in international education?*

JM My university had a lot of international activity. I ended up being responsible for international relations and international projects. The university is huge, it has 1,000 employees, sixty centers throughout Spain, and sixteen centers in different countries, mainly in Europe and Latin America. So, once I was engaged in the international dimension of the university, I got into all sorts of international development projects. I also served as a visiting professor at universities in Mexico, Cuba, Costa Rica, and other countries. We had doctoral programs in many of these countries. I started working internationally very early in my career as an academic and a researcher.

## 2. Working Globally

*LH In your position as Lead Education Specialist at the World Bank, you have been in the unique position of seeing education policy reforms in action in different parts the world. What regions and countries have you worked in?*

JM I have worked in thirty-one countries. In some countries I have worked for seven years, and in others for seven weeks. Most of this occurred during my tenure at the World Bank, but some started before, like in Cuba, Costa Rica, and Hungary. Hungary was an interesting case. In the early 1990s, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the European Union started very aggressively working with the former Warsaw Pact countries in Eastern Europe with all sorts of programs and projects for universities, research institutions, bringing these people into the European game. There was a lot of work in countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, with lots of money flowing in that direction. There were incentives for academics to bring those people into their professional communities. For a couple of years, I was going to Hungary every other month, that was one of my very first countries.

Then at the Bank, I got into the Central Office, the central department of education which is the control tower. This is where people form ideas, write reports, and all that. When you are there, you get cross support from the other regions. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union was dismantled in 1991/early 1992, so the transition politically speaking, happened at this time. But socially and culturally, the most important stages of the transition had already taken place. Between 2003 to 2006 I had been giving cross-support to Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Starting about 2006, I spent nearly four years in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region, working primarily in the Stans and the Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. I moved from ECA to MENA (Middle East and North Africa) in 2009. MENA was quite a different story. The years in MENA from 2010-2013 included the so-called Arab Spring and then immediately thereafter, the Syrian war and the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and in Lebanon, plus everything that was going on in Palestine. I have been in MENA for eleven years and been the team leader first for Lebanon and Jordan, and then I added Palestine. I ended up with the Jewel of the Crown which is Egypt.

*LH When you start work in a new country, how do you orient yourself? What are the ways you identify the key education issues?*

JM You know, different institutions have different comparative advantages, different strong points. One clear comparative advantage of the World Bank is that the education economists of the world are there. You have the good ones who are very sophisticated, and you have the bad ones, in the sense that they are more traditional, less sophisticated. In any case, one of our comparative advantages is to be able to do public expenditure reviews, to see how much money is going to the sector, who is making decisions about it, how that money is allocated, how much of it is actually spent, what is the impact of those expenditures on quality and on equity, and how you measure that. There is no other education donor out there who has this kind of expertise. When you see one of these public expenditure tracking reviews—which follows the donor from parliament to the most remote classroom—that gives you an amazing view of what is going on.

You add to that getting to the country and going to two, three, or four schools and sitting down with school principals. By definition, school

principals are the people who know more about the system. They are right there at the front lines between the managers, administrators, and politicians. They speak both languages and they understand both. Sometimes they are heavily confused, sometimes they are very angry, but one thing for sure is they know what they are talking about. So, once you find your school principal, the one who is really good, every time you go to the country you go and see that person. That is the first thing you do. You touch base with that school principal.

If you put together information from your school principal with those technical reports on public finance and governance structures, add to that international testing programs if you have them—which is not the ultimate most important thing for me though for many of my colleagues they are—you have a very good view. I would also turn to public records. You also have access to the minister, deputy ministers, et cetera, and you can sit down with them and have meaningful conversations and get a very good sense of what is going on. And then, you are able to mobilize the resources of your institution and your team to try and add value to the situation. I find that when you combine quantitative information with all the qualitative sources of information that you get visiting schools and talking to people who know the system, who have been there for decades in some cases and who can distill all their wisdom in a conversation, that is fantastic. Sometimes I learn way more about the system by talking to a principal than reading reports. So, that has been my approach in whatever country I have worked with for the Bank.

### 3. Working in Egypt

*LH* In Egypt, do you have that local level understanding of education that comes with visiting schools and getting to know school principals?

*JM* No, in Egypt that has been one of my problems. When I started working there in 2017, there was all this urgency to prepare these projects. One of the issues was, you know, the so-called ‘security clearances’. For example, earlier this year (2020) in a mission with Andreas Blom, the new Manager in the World Bank’s Education Global Practice for the MENA region, he asked if it was possible to go visit a couple of schools. It needed some back and forth to get the security clearance and you have to respect it. But the transaction cost of getting a school visit is

huge. And then, the whole thing is so inflexibly arranged that part of the purpose is lost. So, this was something that I missed during my time in Egypt. I was aware of the security issues in Egypt, but I still cannot understand why it is so complicated just to go visit a school. As I said, I am the son, grandson, and great grandson of teachers. I am not going to bite anybody (laughs) even if I work for the World Bank. But anyway, security is security. My own institution is extremely risk averse, so I can only understand that other people are too. But I have missed that part of the story in Egypt, and I think I am way less knowledgeable about education in Egypt precisely for this reason.

*LH Is the security situation in Egypt comparable to other countries you have worked in?*

*JM* It is way worse. I never had this problem before. I would arrive in a country and sometimes go to the school on my own. No, no, I have never seen this before. I think this is a delicate matter, but I guess it has to do with the relative lack of trust from the government towards international organizations, NGOs, et cetera. And then everybody gets put in the same package, even though World Bank officials are not the same as, you know, teenagers from an NGO. But somehow from a security point of view, they are all lumped together. So, I think it is that lack of trust combined with this sense of protection of a national institution which is considered very delicate from a security point of view. To be honest with you, I do not know what else can be behind it. There is a political agenda behind it that you need to understand, and you need to respect. You need to work with what you have. So, that is what you have. I have seen a lot of very strange things all over the place, and I am not going to be surprised, but this was certainly a loss.

*LH In the absence of talking to school principals and making school visits, how can you assess the quality of education in Egypt?*

*JM* One thing I try to do is ask people what counts as quality education in this country. I do a lot of presentations and public speaking in countries in the MENA, in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. I ask the audience, 'What is quality of education for you?' I have asked this question many, many times to different audiences. I ask if quality of education means that your kids acquire the competencies of the

twenty-first century or is it that your child scores 99% in the Thanaweya Amma, or the *Tawjihi*, or the BAC (Le baccalauréat general), depending on the school leaving exam of a given country. If the score is what counts for families, teachers, or policy makers, then you are going to need to factor that into your dialogue, otherwise people are not going to understand what you are saying. Overwhelmingly, they say that the student scoring 99% in the exam is the marker of quality. If you ask my colleagues at the World Bank, they will tell you that quality is what PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) measures, which is a very similar answer by the way.

#### 4. Barriers to Changing the Thanaweya Amma

*LH From the start of Education 2.0 (2017) reform, the Minister Tarek Shawki has been trying to change the Thanaweya Amma exam and system but has encountered a lot of resistance. Based on your experience in the region, are there pathways to changing these kinds of high-stakes high school exit/university entrance exams?*

*JM This is an interesting question. In 2006, the team leader for the World Bank in Egypt was my colleague, Michel Welmond.<sup>3</sup> He had been working with me in 2005 as a peer reviewer of the first report produced by the Bank on secondary education.<sup>4</sup> He said, 'Look, I am working in Egypt. It is amazing what is going on with this Thanaweya Amma exam. I convinced the Minister to have a closed-door session with you. You can present your views on this exam with very concrete options on what to do'. In fact, my Ph.D. dissertation was a comparative study of secondary graduation/university access examinations or tests in six countries. I have been working on that particular issue for thirty years now.*

*I went to Egypt in September 2006 and had that session with the minister Yousry El-Gamal<sup>5</sup> about the Thanaweya Amma. That*

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3 Michel Welmond joined the World Bank in 2002 and served as a Lead Education Specialist. He is a co-author of the MENA flagship report, 'A Road Not Travelled' (The World Bank 2008).

4 See Moreno and Ernesto 2005.

5 Yousry Saber Hussein El-Gamal was Egypt's Minister of Education from 2004 to January 2010 during the presidency of Hosni Mubarak. He was replaced by Ahmed Zaki Badr, the son of the former Minister of Interior (2010-2011).

PowerPoint presentation is as relevant today as it was fifteen years ago. The response of the Minister was, 'This is a great analysis. I agree with everything you are saying. But I do not dare touch anything on this matter because I would be eaten by the wolves and my remains would be scattered in the streets (laughs)'. This was September of 2006. He basically said that even though he agreed with what I was presenting, he did not have the political capital to push in this direction. That was the conclusion of the meeting.

*LH What changes to the Thanaweya Amma were you proposing?*

*JM* I was making an analysis of the situation and suggesting that at the end of high school you ensure that the student graduates on the one hand, and after that, you get people to compete for programs in the university. I have been suggesting this more recently in Jordan and Palestine with the *Tawjihi* exam. You can combine some kind of equity approach so that people are not forced to fail high school. This way, you have your school graduation certificate. And if you want to keep your highly competitive exam for university admission, you keep it.

I think Dr. Tarek had this in mind at the very beginning of the reform. Dr. Tarek, Deena Boraie, and I had lots of discussions on these matters back in 2017 and throughout 2018. Dr. Tarek's initial idea is very similar to what I had proposed in 2006. This was essentially for the exam to serve a double function, the first being to make sure that everybody leaves high school with a piece of paper, a high school diploma. This certificate would open the door not only to the low-skilled labor market, but to further education opportunities. Then, for those who wish to compete for a place at the university, either at that point or later, you can keep the competition open, but it should not be forced onto the entire student population. This decision cannot only be decided by the Ministry of Education. You also have the Ministry of Higher Education. In many countries basic education and higher education are under a single ministry and this makes things a little bit easier. But this is not the case in Egypt (see Chapter 6 in this volume).

*LH Where did this idea for a double function exam like the Thanaweya Amma come from? Have countries that originated this model shifted to something else?*

JM If you go to the history of Western Europe this double function of the examination made sense. For a very long time, everybody who made it to the very last year of secondary school, about 5% or 6% of the student population, was meant to go to university. Splitting up the exam to serve a double function was not really necessary. Put it this way; graduating and getting into university was one and the same thing. The two oldest exams are the Abitur in Germany and the BAC in France. The BAC was established by Napoleon in 1808, and the Abitur was established in Germany in 1788, just before the French Revolution when there were German states. There was not even a Germany back then, so the Abitur is even older than Germany. And these two exams, especially the BAC, no longer have the double function. The BAC is officially considered not only the high school degree, but also the first tertiary education degree. Legally, it is already a higher education degree. So, when you have a small elite getting to that point it is not an issue.

However, when you are approaching universal high school and want 70%, 80%, 90% of your student population to get to the last year of the secondary stage, then the game changes completely. You need to do something about it, because those people, those 80-90% are not going to or even aiming for, those top schools or faculties. Even if they were, they would not stand a chance. So, you need to get that articulation between secondary and tertiary education way more sophisticated, flexible, and inclusive, otherwise you are going to have trouble. If you look at western European countries, they have de facto made sure that the masses reaching the end of high school are able to graduate first and then compete for places in higher education.

In the United States, you have an expanding tertiary education sector with non-competitive or non-cut-throat competitive places made possible, for example, by the community colleges. After you graduate from high school you can go to a community college. If you do well, you can jump from the community college to the state university and get a very prestigious degree. And then you can be eligible to move to graduate school in an Ivy League university. That can be done. You do not need to be a sheer genius to do that. That is the kind of thing that we need in Egypt and in many of the MENA countries where they are in many cases still following a nineteenth century approach about how to succeed academically. In this approach, there is only one way to succeed, and it is

a hard, high-stakes way that was designed precisely to leave most people out. It is not that this system is failing, it is doing exactly what it was designed to do, to skim the 3-4% of those academically able students and leave everybody else out. So, when you reach the twenty-first century and you have all this rhetoric of inclusiveness, universal education, and quality for all, this elitist system by design cannot be kept in place.

Egypt is a great example of this fantastic contradiction, this sheer clash between the political rhetoric of inclusiveness and democratization and universalization of education skills and competencies, with a nineteenth-century design. In both Morocco and Egypt, up to the late 1960s, a university graduate would get a public sector job automatically. That was not that long ago. It is like being in a time machine with the twenty-first century and the nineteenth century co-existing in the same classroom.

## 5. The World Bank and Education Reform

*LH You were the World Bank's Senior Operations Officer as the loan 'Supporting Egypt Education Reform Project' was being negotiated.<sup>6</sup> How does the World Bank work with recipient countries on education policy and reform?*

*JM This is probably one of the many misunderstandings about the Bank. I get lots of invitations to speak about World Bank education policies in ECA or MENA. But the Bank does not have any policy, the Bank has strategies, and these are sectoral strategies, regional strategies, and country strategies. The country strategies are called 'Country Partnership Strategy' or 'Country Partnership Framework' (CPF), which is a more recent name for this. The Bank engages in a dialogue with the country, with the government, about all sectors.*

*The Country Director is the one who is responsible for that dialogue. Then, you have those people working in the sectors along parallel dialogue lines. You work together with the government to come up with a vision for the country where you can exploit the comparative advantage and contribution of the Bank. It is true that the Bank influences policy for those who want to be influenced, let us put it that way. Iran is less amenable to influence than Egypt, and North Korea is*

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<sup>6</sup> For more details on this loan in Egypt, see Moreno 2018 and Chapter 12 in this volume.

way less amenable to influence from the Bank or from anybody else. So, that is an easy one to grasp. So yes, there is influence, but there is no setting up of a policy.

I have been involved in that dialogue in all the countries that I have worked for. The thing I have learned is that you need two things for somebody working in development, whether with the Bank, UNICEF, a small NGO, it really does not matter. First, you need very strong technical knowledge, and second, you need to be able to communicate very well with your counterparts.

*LH In the context of the Bank, what does it mean to have strong technical knowledge in education?*

JM There are many things, but in general technical knowledge means that you know your sector and you are not just a specialist. It can help a lot if you are a specialist when you are doing something like a learning assessment. In this case, you should know a lot about literacy tests. That is fantastic and you can be a very good consultant. But when you are leading the dialogue with the government, in the ideal situation, you are a kind of a shadow minister, but a shadow minister that is there to help.

You need to have a broad view of education policy issues in that country to the same extent as the minister. That means you are strong on education finance, strong in what they call the 'political economy', which is what normal people may call 'dirty politics'. In other words, you know the political game in terms of who wins and who loses, what the risks are, who has political backing to dare to be brave, and who does not. You can go down all the issues of equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, school leadership, school improvement processes, the financial and governance choices that you have before you to push in this or that direction. You need to be able to have a policy dialogue which is well-supported by technical knowledge of different areas, topics, and challenges in your sector.

*LH You mentioned good communication with your counterpart as the second quality. What are some features of that strong communication?*

JM You need to be wearing their T-shirt. For example, in Mexico you need to be wearing the tricolor. Unless they feel that you are wearing their T-shirt with a number and your name on the back and you are glad and

proud to do that, you do not have a chance. It does not matter if you are the World Bank or you are, you know, Idiots Without Borders (laughs), it really does not matter. This is even more true with the more sophisticated countries with more capable counterparts. So, when you are working with large countries, medium-income countries like Indonesia, Egypt, Brazil et cetera, these are sine qua non conditions. When somebody says, 'Ah, you are imposing...' I am sorry, I am not going to Mexico or Egypt to impose anything. They would put you in a car and send you to the airport.

## 6. COVID-19 and the Acceleration of Digital Transformation

*LH We are speaking during the COVID-19 pandemic which has upended schooling as we know it and accelerated change. For example, students in Grades 4-9 have recently completed research projects instead of sitting for end-of-year exams, something entirely novel. Could this crisis present an opportunity to get students and teachers in the practice of more competency-based learning?*

*JM They say, 'Never waste a good crisis'. I think there is a space here to get meaningful change in an area where it is very difficult to make changes. We know this, and Dr. Tarek knows this very well. You said COVID-19 is an 'accelerator' and I agree. This is a crisis which is going to accelerate processes that were ongoing before, but it is going to accelerate the risks too. Everything is being accelerated, the good things and the bad things. The opportunities and the risks are equally accelerating, so you need to be double, triple, skillful as a policy maker to take advantage of the good things accelerating while keeping the accelerating risks at bay.*

The tempo of the projects in primary and middle school education is pretty good. On the one hand, you are pushing for something which is maybe very important, having a completely different approach to assessment that does not have to do with scores on a test and memorizing facts. Even more important, it is a different philosophy of what counts as premium skills. It is a different format with more focus on acquisition of competencies, rather than the score on a test. Pushing for that was the right thing to do.

The other thing is that the old curriculum for primary through high school is what I call, 'an obese curriculum'. It needs to be put on a diet. It has got a lot of fat, and you need to get down to the fiber, with the fiber

being the competencies you need to acquire if you want to be a citizen and you want to be included in society and the labor market. So, this is a great opportunity to change the philosophy of assessment and to put the curriculum on a diet and shake off all that fat.

*LH Of course one of the downsides of the projects has been the scale of cheating which turned out to be pretty widespread (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 25 in this volume).*

*JM Dr. Tarek has been doing the right thing, but what happens? You see a kind of cheating revolution. I was talking to him the other day and he was so angry. He said he was going to fire all the teachers, everybody (laughs). I told him, 'Calm down, calm down. These are civil servants. You cannot fire them'. He was really angry and with good reason. You have to ask how some of the stakeholders in the system react to the changes. Here, we see teachers and school principals not only boycotting the changes in practical terms but pushing for all sorts of cheating or corrupt practices which are on the edge of illegality.*

So, I think it is a great example of what we are talking about here which is cultural change. We are not talking about ministerial decrees, regulations, and procedures that we are going to tweak. We are not talking about a choice between TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PISA. We are talking about cultural change, and this is why the work you are doing (with the Education 2.0 Research and Documentation Project) is so important. And Dr. Tarek needs to listen to it carefully because this is the only way we are going to understand what is at stake and how it needs to be handled.

*LH Egypt was quick to transition to online learning when schools closed due to the pandemic. The Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB) became a hub for resources, a learning management system, and virtual classrooms. Do you have concerns about the pace of digital transformation of education?*

*JM My concerns are pretty clear. There is nothing that can replace your face-to-face school, classroom, teacher, students, etcetera. There might be advantages and there might be opportunities to this situation. With education technology, there are potential innovations with student assessments. When schooling is online, those kids who are bullied in school, are able to take a break. This is also important. With that said, those opportunities and those good side effects aside, there is nothing that can*

replace your primary school, especially for the early years, the KGs, and Grades 1 to 4. Nothing can replace that. All these online on-screen virtual platforms, WhatsApp, et cetera, we have to do it now, and we should keep doing it. But let's make no mistake that this distance remote learning is good for adults, it is not good for children. Those who have been working for open universities and distance universities for many, many years know this is good for adult learning. This is not good for a six-year-old.

Let's face it, there is going to be a huge loss of learning for many students and that learning loss is not going to be distributed equally, no matter how hard we try, no matter how sophisticated the learning platforms, no matter how sophisticated the EKB and any other knowledge banks you can come up with. There is going to be a learning loss, and the losers are going to be the same people who always lose. And it would be absurd to think now, 'This is a great opportunity, we are going to the utopia'. No, no, we are not going to utopia. We are going to dystopia, and this needs to be acknowledged. Now, as long as the dystopia lasts, there are opportunities, and from a very pragmatic point of view you need to grab them. But let's not fool ourselves that this is going to be hunky-dory because it is not. This is going to be a huge blow for our education systems, and the same people who always lose are going to lose big time again. I am sorry to say this, but this is what I believe.

*LH In the absence of being able to attend the physical school, are there better ways to manage remote education, especially for more vulnerable members of society?*

JM In the core education schooling ages, from five to thirteen or fourteen, there is nothing that can replace your physical school. After that there is more room for maneuver. Mitigation is always pragmatic but it is imperfect. You can have all the sophisticated things with technology, that is fine. Now in that mitigation there are mediating institutions, the family and the school. With the family, the main problem is not the digital gap, though you have that too. What you have is a cultural capital gap and a social capital gap. So, if you are twelve people living in sixty square meters and the parents do not read, these online platforms with messages about how parents should read to their kids before they go to sleep is what we call in Spain here, 'a toast to the sound'. The baseline inequality is exacerbated by the cultural capital gap, and there is really nothing that the Ministry of Education can do about that, certainly not

in the short term. You can provide online support to parents, but if they are not able to take advantage of it, they are going to be left behind.

*LH What about the risks for teachers?*

JM We see the professional capital gap for teachers. The one thing we have seen so far, and the hard evidence is still forthcoming, but it will come, is that those schools and those teachers who were well organized before the pandemic, who were already using technology, had a common institutional project of what to do, had a vision, the resources, they have quickly adapted to the situation. They have quickly managed to come out with a way forward to keep their students engaged in even more individualized ways than before. But in the school next door, with the same financing and the same hiring procedures, without the vision and a practice of using technology, 20%, 30%, 40% of their students will have vanished. I am calling that a 'professional capital gap'.

If you happen to be a seven-year-old, regardless of how many devices you have or whether or not there is an Internet connection in your home, those are just to begin with but regardless of those, if you have a cultural capital gap in your family and a professional capital gap in your school, this is like Dante's work getting into Hell, no? Lose all hope, lose all hope. I mean even with the many millions Dr. Tarek invested on the Egyptian Knowledge Bank, for that seven-year-old it is not going to make a difference at all. I see this cultural capital gap on the side of the school system, and the professional capital gap as the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, in any country.

*LH The position of teachers in Egypt is more complicated because many of them, especially ones who teach in middle school and high school, participate in an 'informal' and rather predatory private lesson market. What is the place of education technology in all of this?*

JM Dr. Tarek was so angry not only because of cheating on the projects, but also because of all the online private tutoring schemes that have cropped up lately. He rightly thinks that there is a very large number of teachers in public schools in the country, not a majority but many, who are not recuperable, let's put it that way. They need to be fired because they are just a source of corruption, cheating, and they are sticks in your wheels. These teachers are a liability. The situation is complicated, right? Let's say you could possibly educate 50% of the teachers in a country like

Egypt, which has the population of many small countries combined. But do you think you can fire half of them and the day after, bring another batch of people who are going to be pristine, immaculate, clean, and do the right thing?

Even if it was possible politically to get those people out of the system, the public system where they are protected, how do you replace them? Dr. Tarek thinks 'technology will replace them', but if there is only technology to replace them, be sure that those who have the 'right' family and those who have the right resources, they will make do without schools as a mediating institution. But for those who do not have the 'right' family, who did not choose to be born in the 'wrong' family, then there is no hope here. There is no hope because the technology is not going to be enough, at least not for the time being. So, that is the tremendous dilemma that we have in Egypt right now.

*LH In your opinion, how do you think the professional capital gap in Egypt can be addressed?*

JM Well, even the Bank finance project has an entire component on Teacher Professional Development and school principals' development.<sup>7</sup> We have Teachers First and lots of things have been done in the many trainings and professional development for teachers. I am sure that you have a huge capital of good teachers in the country. But it seems that when it comes to the examination system and the assessment system, many of those teachers do not have the motivation to do the right thing. They are not focused on student learning. They are focused on something else, so I think there is a fundamental governance and cultural issue in the country that underlies this situation with the teachers.

I am just brainstorming with myself, but you cannot handpick every teacher in the system. But you should be able to handpick every principal in the system and make sure that you have the right leaders

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7 In 'The World Bank Supporting Egypt Education Reform Project' (P157809) Component Two deals with 'effective teachers and education leaders. This component aims to improve the pre-tertiary education effectiveness of teachers, education leaders, and supervisors through two subcomponents: improved quality of continuous professional development (CPD) system; and expanded CPD opportunities' (see <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P157809>).

and then empower those leaders to enable the right teacher teams in the schools. What we are seeing right now is that those schools that were well-organized with a clear vision, with a clear project, and are doing pretty well, had strong principals. They are even able to overcome digital gaps because they find ways around it. This is not something you can do on the systems level, but you can do it at the school level. You can offset those digital gaps if you are organized, and you have a clear vision and a clear project as an institution. That is the way you build up professional capital, by coming up with professional accountability systems. The best example of that is a conduct code, an ethical code for the profession that is enforced, not be a tribunal, but a code by the profession itself with principals, supervisors, mentor teachers, external support sent to the school. Because there are very few things more influential in your behavior than what your peers think of you, right?

*LH Can you elaborate on how research can be used in decision-making, particularly in ways that can support greater equity and fairness in education?*

*JM* The first thing we need is data about what teachers and school leaders are doing and how to deal with them. But without the data, quantitative or qualitative, we do not have a vision or a diagnosis of the problems. Then, the inclination is to keep throwing money to the EKB feeling that you are doing the right thing, and you are, but 25%, 30%, 35% are going to be left behind. We have to think not only about the lives of those people, which is the most important thing, but how this translates into human capital accumulation and the wealth and future of the country. And nobody, even in Saudi Arabia with all that oil wealth, is going to save you. Can you afford to throw 30% of your human capital to the trash? You cannot. You cannot. So, we are talking here not only about the survival of those people, but the survival of the country. And we are investing. I was trying to convince my fellow Bank economists that we are not spending money, we are investing in survival. And that is really the most worthwhile investment you can think of. We need to make this case with ministers of finance and others, that we are not just being romantic with this equity talk about all these poor kids being left behind. This is something way harder and more serious than romanticism. This is survival for many countries.

## 7. Bibliography

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## 8. Companion Video

Video 11.1 Juan Manuel Moreno: 'A Life in Education from Academia to the World Bank', Interview by Linda Herrera, Education 2.0 Research and Documentation Project, 21 May 2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMPQ3xP8OFM>