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DEFINING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

By Leah Anyanwu

The success of a school is tied to its leader. The impact of school leadership is constantly researched and studied. Research shows that "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning." Yet, the role of a school leader has become more complex than ever before. Current school leaders must be able to prepare critical thinkers, innovators, and literate citizens who positively contribute to the growth of their community and the world. The government and parents alike demand that schools readily and skillfully meet these ever-changing challenges and school leaders are doing their best to juggle the ever-growing list of responsibilities. Moreover, non-government organizations often require school leaders to support their programming in addition to their existing requirements.

Recognizing these challenges, the Learner-Centred Teaching Thematic cluster in RELI Kenya, an initiative sponsored by Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, convened to discuss school leadership and its role in improving student learning outcomes. Representatives from Dignitas, Dupoto-e-Maa, Zizi Afrique, PAL Network, and the Kenya Union of the Blind attended the training. During this collaborative classroom style session, attendees discussed the role of a school leader; read and reflected on the current "school leadership crisis"; and contributed to a panel discussion. The following educators participated on the panel:



Panel Contributors (From left to right): Esther Kimani, Tom Parry, George Okeyo, Peter Ndoro, Charles Kado, and Lucy Maina

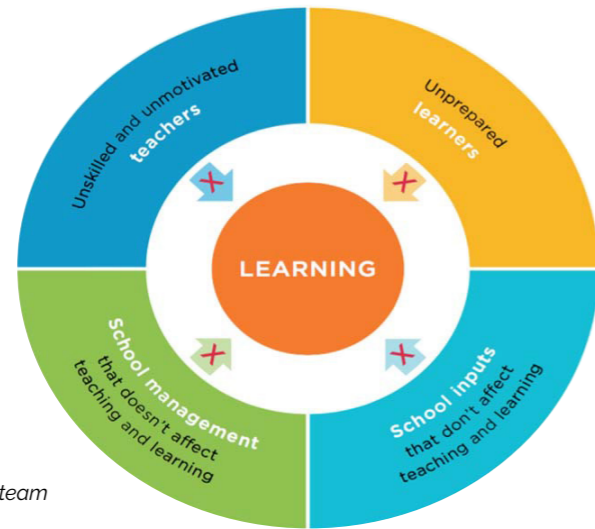
- Lucy Maina, the former Director of Programs for Africa Education Trust
- Tom Parry, the managing director and co-founder of Instill Education, a teacher training organization based in South Africa that seeks to reimagine the way that teachers are trained across the continent.
- Esther Kimani, a veteran educator who graduated from Dignitas' Stawisha Instructional Leadership Institute and serves as the head-teacher and director at Angaza Buena Vista.
- Peter Ndoro, the CEO of Kenya Private Schools Association (KPSA)
- Charles Kado, an official from Kenya Primary Schools Head-teachers Association (KEP-SHA) and head teacher at Milimani Primary School in Nairobi, with over 31 years of experience.
- George Okeyo, a representative from the Ministry of Education.



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School Leadership Crisis

The session began by unpacking the crisis in school leadership. In Learning to Realize Education's Promise, the World Development Report identified poor leadership as one factor that inhibits student learning. The report highlights that schools in low income countries are adversely affected by poor management. Poor school management undermines the quality of schooling, affects teaching quality, and prevents teachers from setting and meeting school learning goals. These challenges are only compounded after factoring in the effect of poverty on learners in marginalized communities. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders in marginalized communities receive comprehensive training for them to create positive school environments where teachers and learners can prosper.



Source WDR 2018 team

Figure 1: Why learning doesn't happen: Four immediate factors that break down- WDR, 2018

Defining School Leadership

From there, attendees created mind maps outlining the various roles and responsibilities that school leaders manage. The role of a school leader is two-fold: including the teaching and learning foci of instructional leadership and the support and direction of transformational leadership. Traditionally, school heads only led the school – overseeing administrative tasks. But now, school leaders are expected to serve as the instructional leader within the school while acting as a visionary and directing the growth and success of the school. This requires two distinct skill-sets and the willingness to grow. For school leaders to realize the goals of the school, they must receive support across all the assigned responsibilities.

Impact of School Leadership

With the right skill set, school leaders are able to positively support their team. Successful school leaders must shift their focus from administrative to more instructional leadership tasks. Training, observation, coaching and feedback sessions are key to helping teachers to improve their practice. Furthermore, teachers must model best practices such as data driven instruction. School leadership extends beyond head teachers and the board of management (BOM), but also includes learners, parents and the community. Much is expected from school leaders and for them to be successful, educational organizations must increase their capacity.

After each group read and discussed the role of school leadership and the challenges faced, we reflected on the impact of school leadership on the various programs. The success or demise of school-based programs lay in the hands of the head. Before an NGO implements an educational program, the school leader must be consulted. The organizations in attendance agreed that educational programs cannot succeed without the support and buy-in of the school leader. Therefore, even if the program does not directly support school leadership, the school leader must be engaged and invested. Furthermore, school leaders have influence over the school. While NGOs usually target learners or teachers, programs can leverage school leaders to offer additional accountability.

Supporting School Leadership at Scale

In Kenya, few talent pipelines exist for cultivating school leaders. Oftentimes, school leaders are promoted sporadically or because of seniority. The Ministry of Education and KEMI offer some trainings to upskill head teachers but supporting school leaders at scale is not currently in practice. If we want to consider scaling school leadership support, non-state actors must work in tandem with the government. Scaling without government is futile. NGOs must build the capacity of the government in order to strengthen the systems in place. KEPSHA holds an annual conference and invited the organizations present to contribute to the conversation around school leadership. KEPSHA also invited members to establish a club that focusses on how to improve the learner. Furthermore, school leaders can learn from and grow with their peers. Peer learning drives reflection and behavior change. Peer learning and sharing is easy to sustain as it does not require intense resource investment. By visiting a neighboring school, school heads have an opportunity to benchmark standards against other schools. When learning transcends schools and communities, school leaders will continue to grow and develop.



Panel Contributor Tom Parry shares his experience developing school leaders at Instill Education.