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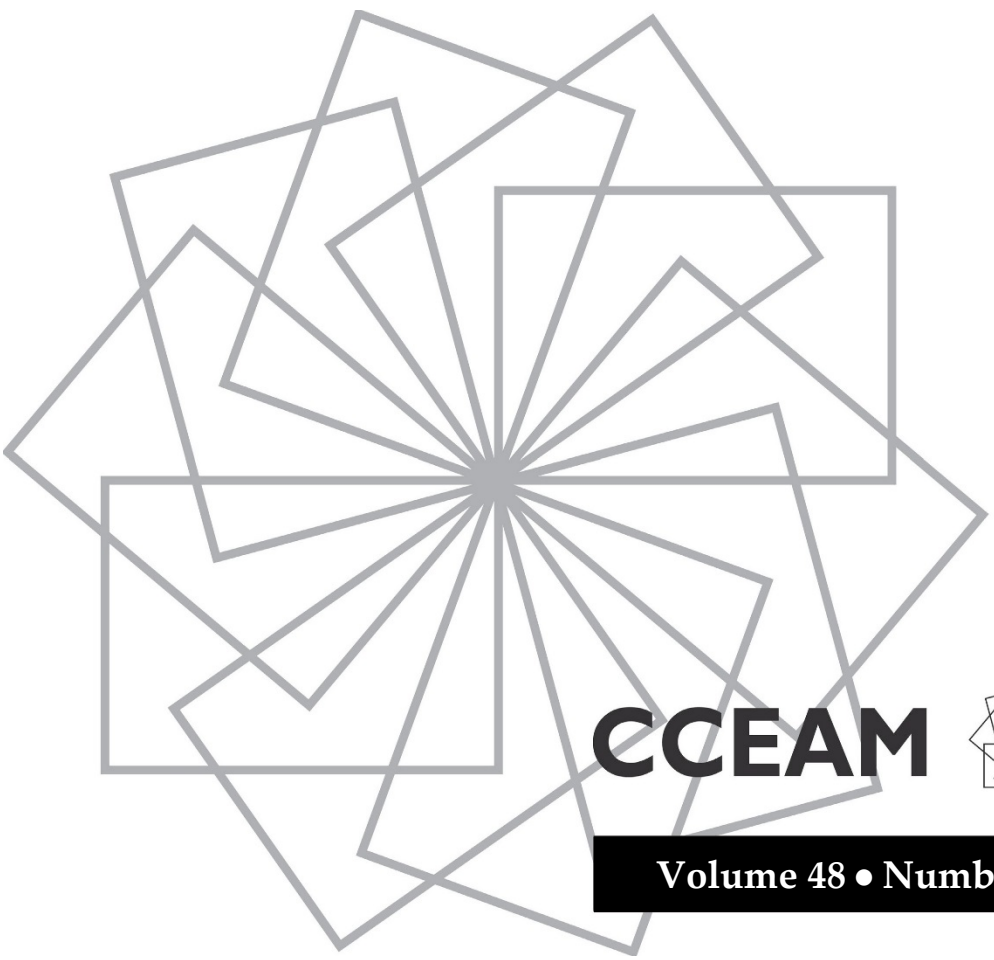

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Editorial Note

Worldwide Educational Responses to the Pandemic: Issue One of Four

In these challenging times the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) is exploring ways to help support the education community to continue to do their important work. As one of the oldest journals in the educational leadership field, the academic journal of CCEAM, *International Studies in Educational Administration* is well placed to make an important contribution and so four issues of the journal have been devoted to focusing on responses to the Coronavirus pandemic that is currently gripping our world.

As the editor, I invited short articles that either describe country or more local responses to education during the pandemic, or short articles that provide educators with knowledge to help them lead their educational organisations during this time. From more than 150 submissions, 60 papers were accepted for publication. The four issues will be published between July and September, 2020. Most of the papers are not empirical research papers, but rather informed opinion pieces documenting personal observations of local educational responses to the pandemic crisis, or about key leadership and management ideas that will help educators lead through the crisis and after.

Across the 60 papers there are 27 countries represented, including: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China (mainland and Hong Kong), Cyprus, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Liberia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Vietnam. There are papers also focusing on the broader contexts of Africa, Arab countries, Asia, and the wider world. Conceptual papers include foci on leadership ideas to do with adaption, crisis and future education. The papers were not limited to any education sector and so there are papers focusing on pre-school, school, post-school, tertiary, and other education providers.

In this first issue there are 15 papers. The issue begins with two conceptual papers. The first, from Zhao, describes his call for re-thinking schools through considering moving away from the constraints of schooling as we know it, to the broader concept of education and the extended possibilities that this allows. He provides commentary on scheduling, subjects and student grouping. In the second paper Caldwell considers special schools and the particular challenges that these schools face as a result of the school closures. Written as a conversation with educators,

possibilities and cautions arising from the disruption are raised, including increased use of blended learning, renewed calls for de-schooling, the need for strategic navigation, and changes to external student assessment. The next paper provides an illustration of how educators can provide for students with special needs during school closures. Using the story of one student with special needs in Canada, Fournier, Scott and Scott document, through a case study framed by their inclusive leadership framework, an extraordinary effort to ensure continuity of learning for this student. The next collection of three papers describes leadership ideas that might be useful to educational leaders as they work through the challenges of 2020 and beyond. The first was prepared by me and builds upon a paper by Drysdale and Gurr (2017) previously published in ISEA. It describes a seven element leadership view that is well suited to disruptive and challenging times. Similarly, in the next paper, Dunn shows how adaptive leadership and building adaptive organisations can help in times of change and complexity, whilst in paper 6, Tran, Hardie and Cunningham propose talent-centred education leadership as important because of its focus on providing support to staff. The next four papers describe country contexts and make recommendations for the resumption of schooling. In paper 7, Angelico describes the impact of the pandemic on Australian education and shows how this is exacerbating inequalities in education; she calls for greater linkage between schools and families, better provision of digital learning, and more equitable resourcing approaches. For paper 8, Sondah considers the Liberian context, and makes five recommendations for when schooling resumes after the 2020 summer break including practical strategies in regard to advancing students, developing more supportive learning cultures, and considering the needs of teachers. In paper 9, Mogaji describes the complexity of school closures in Nigeria, focusing on educational disparities and calling for a concerted government effort to address these. Paper 10 sees Adeleke proposing a possible education provision solution for some in Nigeria through the greater adoption of, and focus on, home-schooling. Dewes, also describes a context, but in paper 11 the context is England and the focus of the paper is on school governance arrangements and how the government response to use local authorities during the pandemic has stimulated the possibility of a greater role for local authorities in school governance going forward. The remaining papers focus on higher education. Eaton, in paper 12, highlights issues about academic integrity in remote and on-line environments and suggests several solutions centred on multi-stakeholder responses to improve academic integrity. Nyame and Abedi-Boafo in paper 13 consider the problems and likelihood of universities in Ghana still being able to attract international students. Again, several suggestions for action are given including improved marketing, customer relations and communication and the use of incentives. Still focused on Ghana, Anane, Addo, Adusei and Addo provide a small survey and interview study of the work of university administrators. During the shutdown of universities, most administrators still went to work because of cultural issues and lack of home and work resources, but the respondents agree that for the future that the shutdown will stimulate greater use of blended working schedules. In the last paper, Roache, Rowe-Holder and Muschette provide insights into the importance of leadership to facilitate a quality transitioning

of learners to online distance learning in higher education institutions. In a conceptual paper, the authors explore how skilled leadership is needed to sustain and expand online learning provision, and they do so by considering several areas including, policy and planning, financial management, designing and delivering lessons, student support services and student engagement.

Three more issues will be produced on education responses during the pandemic and I encourage you to read these issues also.

David Gurr
Editor of International Studies in Educational Administration

June 30, 2020

Speak a Different Language: Reimagine the Grammar of Schooling

Yong Zhao

Abstract: *The 'grammar' of schooling identified by David Tyack and William Tobin in the 1990s is the core business of schools. Despite numerous efforts by numerous smart, innovative, and sometimes even powerful individuals to make changes, the 'grammar' stays pretty much the same. There are plenty of reasons why it should not be the way to organise schooling, yet it still is. During COVID-19, is it possible to make changes to the 'grammar'? My argument is that it probably is not. I argue that instead of fixing or changing the grammar, we need to speak a different language: instead of speaking schooling, we need to speak education.*

Keywords: Grammar of schooling, educational change, innovations

Speak a Different Language: Reimagine the Grammar of Schooling

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every aspect of the human society. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost. Industries have been changed. How we live, work, and play has been changed. Schools, too, have been changed. But one thing it has not changed is the 'grammar' of schooling: 'the regular structures and rules that organise the work of instruction' (Tyack & Tobin 1994: 454).

Over a quarter of a century ago, education historians David Tyack and William Tobin (1994) made the very insightful observation that schools have a set of grammatical rules and structures just like natural languages and:

> Neither the grammar of schooling nor the grammar of speech needs to be consciously understood to operate smoothly. Indeed, much of the grammar of schooling has become so well established that it is typically taken for granted as just the way schools are. It is the departure from customary practice in schooling or speaking that attracts attention. (p. 454)

The grammar of schooling, such as 'standardized organizational practices in dividing time and space, classifying students and allocating them to classrooms, and splintering knowledge into "subjects"' (Tyack & Tobin 1994: 454) is so powerful that it has persisted despite many repeated challenges by very courageous, intelligent, and powerful innovators. It has persisted

despite mounting evidence and widespread acknowledgement that it is obsolete and does not serve our children well. It has persisted even during the most powerful pandemic—COVID-19 in this century, when students are not attending the physical school.

COVID-19 forced the closure of virtually all schools in the world for different amounts of time. But when schools were closed, when students were staying home, and when there were specific policies and restrictions for students not to be together physically, the ideal was still to offer schooling to all students, to replicate schools online, and in essence to follow the grammar of schooling. By and large, when schools were closed, governments and schools have worked together and/or independently to create a sense of 'schooling' for all students using whatever technology they had. So in essence, schools were expanded into the large society. Students were taking classes from TVs, mobile devices, computers and/or paper packages and teachers were teaching online. But the format kept the grammar of schooling: teachers were managing their students in the same way as they did before, the content of online teaching was pretty much the same, classes were offered the same way as before (with some variation of amount of time, perhaps), and knowledge was still splintered into subjects as before.

COVID-19 and Schools

Perhaps the basic 'grammar' of schooling cannot be changed just like the basic grammar of English cannot be changed. In fact, if the grammar of English were changed, it would not be English anymore. Likewise, if the grammar of schooling were changed, it would not be school anymore. And that is very worrisome to people who want a 'real school' and that worry of not having a real school is responsible for defeating attempts to reform schools because 'so powerful is the hold of the cultural construction of what constitutes a "real school"' (Tyack & Tobin 1994: 478).

But what if we cannot have schools anymore, not because we don't want them but because we cannot have them due to COVID-19. The virus is still alive and far from eradicated. Vaccines have not been developed and there is still much to learn about it. Many experts are expecting an even worse second wave. As such, schools may or may not be open as they were before the pandemic.

Many governments and school systems have been working on reopening schools with serious considerations of the impact of COVID-19. While the details of the reopening plans and strategies differ, there are a few points in common. First, students will go through serious checks to ensure that they are not infected with the virus. Second, frequent hand washing is to be implemented. Third, social distancing is to be implemented. That is, students need to sit at least six feet apart. The third one makes it impossible for many schools to have all students back to school as before. Additionally, some parents will not send their children to schools. Thus schools will have to adopt other methods to make sure education goes on for all students, even when they are home.

The system that manages schools is changing as well due to COVID-19. These changes may be short term but have happened. Hopefully they will be changed forever. Such changes include the suspension of accountability measures such as state and national assessments. Many education systems have suspended their accountability assessments. Large influential high-stakes testing such as the SAT and ACT in the U.S. have been suspended. International education systems such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) have stopped testing as well.

In essence, many schools will be different and the difference may be so big that schools are not schools as before. In this case, does it make sense to make non-schools school? Can we rethink a different grammar? Instead of changing the grammar of schooling, can we think about a grammar of learning or a grammar of education? What would that look like?

Speak a Different Language?

What the public wants and society needs is not schooling; it is education. The school happens to be the institution we built at a certain point of time to deliver education. The design was inevitably constrained by the understanding of learning and the learner, teacher and teaching, and operating of organisations as well as the resources and technology available at that moment. The rules that govern schools were made and further refined for schools, typically physical locations with a group of adults to teach a predefined curriculum to a group of youth. This arrangement defines the most basic grammar of schooling: the school has something to teach students (the curriculum); the teaching is best done with similar children (age-based as was understood); children must be managed and monitored by adults (classes); children must go through so many subjects so they need to rotate through them (class and subjects) each and every day. Moreover, schools had to respond to the needs of the human society so summer and winter vacations were built in line with the norm of the societies when schools were built.

Without schools, we can think about education. The grammar of education can be quite different from that of schooling. Because the purpose of education can be different in different societies, the education I am writing about in this paper may not apply to all societies and cultures. If the purpose of education is to help each and every individual to realise their full potential, to help each and every child to be able to succeed in modern societies, and to help each and every child to become responsible citizens of local and global communities, we could imagine a different set of grammatical rules.

These rules, for example, could start from the learner. If the learner were the owner of learning rather than a recipient of pre-determined instruction, the first rule would be the learner decides what to learn in collaboration with adults so the curriculum is not predetermined. Instead, it is emergent. When the curriculum is emergent and largely determined by the learner, the role of the adults changes. The adults or teachers do not supervise or teach the learner. Instead, they respond to the learners' emerging needs. As a result, since learning is owned and managed by individual learners, teachers/adults do not necessarily teach

prepared lessons to groups of students. Instead they can refer students to hosts of online instructions and may provide highly personalised tutoring or mentoring. If adults do not teach a group of learners, their relationship with the learner changes drastically, so do their responsibilities.

This arrangement changes other rules in schools too. When adults do not teach classes as instructors, we do not need to split a day into so many classes each day. They can meet with groups of learners or individual learner based on needs. The learners do not need to be in one place or pretend to be in one place through technology because they do not need to be in one place listening to the same instructor.

There can be many other changes as we begin to reimagine what's possible when there are no schools. I am hoping that education leaders would begin thinking about education and learning rather than keeping schools operating as before during COVID-19. Below are some examples of how to start reimagining the grammar of schooling.

Reimagine the Grammar of Schooling

To move away from traditional grammar of schooling to a grammar of education or learning can take a long time, but we need to start. To start changing, education leaders can consider how to change some of the most salient features of the grammar of schooling. These features have been discussed before and some schools have tackled them quite successfully already. So these are not new ideas or novel approaches.

Scheduling

Schooling sometimes works against education. How it structures time is a good example: a year is divided into different segments, some of which (terms/semesters) are designated for learning while others (summer/winter vacations) are not; terms/semesters are divided into different chunks marked by exams (mid-term and end of term); days are divided into class periods. When schools are structured this way, following the traditional grammar of schooling, the outcomes are not necessarily great.

For example, there is ample evidence of 'summer learning loss' (Cooper 2003; Kerry & Davies 1998; Sandberg Patton & Reschly 2013). A Brookings Institution review of research shows: (1) on average, students' achievement scores declined over summer vacation by one month's worth of school-year learning, (2) declines were sharper for math than for reading, and (3) the extent of loss was larger at higher grade levels (Quinn & Polikoff 2017).

There have been many different proposals to address this issue. But it seems apparent that keeping the schools operating all the time may be the obvious solution. Thus, could we change learning into year-round? Is it possible for schools to reorganise staff so that the learners can be with professional adults all the time, online and or face-to-face?

Another issue with school time is timetabling. Quite often deep, authentic, product/project/problem-based learning projects can last much longer than one semester, but the project must end when a semester ends because the teacher needs to give the students a grade and/or the course is not continued the next semester. Furthermore, it is known that meaningful learning requires much more than 35 or 45 minutes, but the learning must stop because students have to go to another class. Timetables have also been one of the most challenging problems when trying to introduce new ideas. Even when school leaders and teachers recognise the importance of teaching something new, they often run into the problem of lacking openings in the timetable.

In the language of education, these constraints or rules that govern schooling should be removed. There is no particular good reason to chunk school time as we used to do. When students are learning from home, they do not have to be in 'class' with others at the same time. Perhaps they can study in small groups at times of their choice.

Subjects

Another example of schooling working against education is the practice of 'splintering knowledge into subjects', which goes hand in hand with splitting learning time into class periods. While there are some subjects that may be better taught as individual subjects for some students, the habit of splintering everything into subjects and then translating subjects into courses is detrimental to the development of the whole child. It forces the development of essential competences such as creativity, entrepreneurial thinking, and global competence into isolated boxes as if these competences could be developed without deep knowledge and skills in certain domains or as if math or science could be divorced from these competences. For example, social and emotional wellbeing has to be taught as a separate class, as if social and emotional wellbeing could not be developed in other subjects.

Is it then possible for educational leaders to consider combining subjects into large projects so that the learner can learn the content of multiple subjects together? This is an excellent time to try changing this rule of the grammar of schooling. School leaders can ask teachers of different subjects to examine the essence of their subjects and work on designing large projects for the learners. To take a step further, the learners can be invited to the examination and design process so that their views are respected.

Student Grouping

Grouping students by age is another feature of the 'grammar of schooling' that runs contrary to education. We know that children's abilities vary a great deal and are not neatly aligned with their chronological age, but they are often stuck in the grade level corresponding to their age. Some children may be above and others may be below what is taught. The result is that both groups are frustrated and disengaged. While the topic of ability grouping is controversial (partly because the term has many different meanings), we cannot ignore the

fact that grouping students according to their ages does lead to poor educational experiences for a large proportion of children.

Students must be put into groups in schools because a group of students must be taught or supervised by an adult. The image of a class without a teacher in front of a blackboard violates the 'grammar' of schooling. But the need to meet the needs of each and every child has long been recognised. There has been a growing call for personalised learning (Xie, Chu, Hwang & Wang 2019). In addition, there is ample evidence of benefits of peer mentoring, social learning, and collaborative learning online and face-to-face (DuBois & Karcher 2013; Laal & Ghodsi 2012). In other words, learners can learn from each other, from the Internet, and from other adults who are not their teachers.

At a time when students cannot come to schools at the same time, it would be wonderful to rethink how to group students. Perhaps one way is to have students organise their own groups as small learning communities or project teams. Another way would be for individual students to follow their own pathways, but when they feel necessary, the teacher can group students with similar questions.

Summary

Tyack and Tobin's essay in 1994 has a depressing and discouraging message for innovators. The history of education is not filled with success stories of innovations that challenge the 'grammar' of schooling. According to them, the innovators have tried:

- to create ungraded, not graded, schools
- to use time, space, and numbers of students as flexible resources and to diversify uniform periods, same-sized rooms, and standard class size
- to merge specialized subjects into core courses in junior and high schools or, alternatively, to introduce departmental specialization into the elementary school
- to group teachers in teams, rather than having them work as isolated individuals in self-contained classrooms.

Typically, these innovations have not lasted for long. (Tyack & Tobin 1994: 455)

I hope this time can be different. The changes I propose here have been advocated elsewhere (Zhao 2012, 2018; Zhao, Emler, Snethen & Yin 2019) but I see COVID-19 as a great opportunity. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused so much damage and disruption in every aspect of human society that its impact will last a long time into the future. It will alter many industries forever. I hope it has given us the opportunity to abandon schooling for education. But the key is not to improve schooling or replicate schooling online. Instead, we should try to speak a different language so we can adopt a different grammar.

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Leadership of Special Schools on the Other Side

Brian J. Caldwell

Abstract: *This paper is concerned with leadership in special schools, that is, schools that support students with disabilities and who are not in mainstream schools. The context is Australia but experiences during the pandemic are similar to those in comparable countries, including greater reliance on online learning and a loss of equity, together with minimal attention in the media to the circumstance of these schools. The narrative is in the second person to invite a personal reflection by readers and their engagement with possibilities for the future, 'on the other side' of the pandemic. Leaders will face further calls for the abandonment of special schools and will continue to experience 'wicked problems' in pursuit of their goals. Possibilities include more 'blended' learning of online and face-to-face, responding to perennial challenges to their existence while protecting their achievements in personalised learning, strategic navigation rather than strategic planning, and new forms of assessment.*

Keywords: Special schools, school leadership, wicked problems, strategic navigation

Introduction

The changes in policy and practice during the pandemic have been far-reaching and fundamental, and you, the leader in a special school, have been challenged as never before. There are more challenges 'on the other side' when we are on top of the virus and the 'curve' has flattened. Will the changes be transformational or will the 'new normal' be very much the same as the 'old normal'? Will styles of leadership that came to the fore be sustained or be useful in the future?

The challenges have been global. For example, at a conference of policymakers from Latin America, Middle East and Africa, participants in the Global Online Learning Alliance (GOLA) reported on 2 April 2020 that '20 years of talk of digital literacy and educational preparedness for the knowledge economy has been condensed into 20 days of urgency' (GOLA 2020: 7).

This paper is for leaders in special schools, that is, schools that serve students with disabilities who do not attend 'mainstream' schools. The context is Australia, but the issues addressed are common to many countries. As leaders, your agility during the pandemic is

acknowledged. The issue of whether sufficient account was taken of the needs of special schools is canvassed. A recent proposal to abandon special schools in Australia is addressed along with 'wicked' problems encountered in special education. Possibilities for the future that may challenge the transforming leader are listed.

You Have Been Agile

As school leaders, together with staff, you were remarkably agile in responding to the closure of schools. Home schooling for all or most students and teachers working from home were unimaginable at the start of the year.

This experience runs counter to the view that educators are inflexible and slow to change. New knowledge and skills were swiftly acquired. Specifying the particular technologies is beyond the scope of this paper – the focus is on leadership – but all of the elements of good leadership (Kotter 1990) were displayed: establishing direction, securing alignment, motivating and inspiring, and effecting change.

Support for Leaders

There has been little attention in the public media to the way schools supporting students with disabilities have been challenged. In Australia, only one mention was located, in this instance (Campanella 2020) an ABC radio news story about difficulties faced by disabled students and their families. In the United States, a feature article in the *New York Times* (Levine 2020: n.p.) reported that:

> … for the millions of students in the United States who are living with disabilities – including those with autism, intellectual disabilities, developmental delays and more – this task [of supporting students] has proved especially challenging. Parents and teachers of students with special needs have reported feeling overwhelmed, with little to no instruction on how to proceed once schools shut down.

Jurisdictions are providing assistance and professional organisations have stepped up; for example, in the United States, there is the Educating all Learners Alliance (https://www.educatingalllearners.org) of many entities that can provide resources and other assistance. The Australian Special Education Principals Association (ASEPA) was active through its partnership with the UK-based National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) in March 2020 in bringing together in one place the many links to online resources that may be helpful when home-based learning was required (see https://www.asepa.edu.au/covid19). They will continue to be helpful as students return to school.

But Was It Transformational?

In the everyday use of the term, these changes were transformational, but how many will be sustained 'on the other side'? At Educational Transformations, we have adopted a rigorous

definition of transformation as significant, systematic, and sustained change that secures success for all students in all settings. Aside from the fact that, with few exceptions, schools will return to their previous mode of operation, the 'moral purpose' in the definition was not achieved during the pandemic ('all students in all settings'). Lack of equity arising from availability of technology or engagement of parents was as evident as it was before, despite the efforts of school systems to distribute thousands of machines and provide good guidance for parents. The equity issue may have been especially applicable to students in special schools under these conditions.

The Bigger Picture

One aspect of transformation that will engage leaders in special education in Australia is Kathy Cologon's (2019) updated report, the first being in 2013. Her new report has the title *Toward Inclusive Education: A necessary transformation*. The transformation that she calls for is the abandonment of special schools, offering a recommendation to 'Ensure that no new segregated settings (schools, pre-schools, centres, units or classrooms) are created' (p. 51). It is beyond the scope of this paper to undertake an analysis or commentary on her report except to note that she has adopted a strict interpretation of the UN's convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (General Comment of 2016) (United Nations 2020) which governments generally have not adopted in practice. She noted (p. 20) that, in the Australian Government's ratification of the convention in 2018, it is stated that Australia's obligations will be met

> … through an education system that allows for funding of different modalities so students with disability are able to participate in a range of education options including enrolment in mainstream classes in mainstream schools with additional support, specialist classes or units in mainstream schools and specialist schools.

Researching independently, I found that none of the 30 countries reporting to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has a 'fully inclusive system' and that there had been no decrease in the number of students attending special classes and special schools (EASNIE 2018: 7-8).

You Will Face More 'Wicked' Problems

In Australia, you have seen played out a matter that has proved virtually intractable to policymakers in most parts of the country and elsewhere, internationally. It concerned whether schools should remain open or closed during the pandemic. According to the headlines this, more than any other, was what was confusing parents. Five principles were agreed by the National Cabinet of Prime Minister and Premiers/Chief Ministers of states/territories in its attempt to determine a course of action. Two of these were as follows:

- Our schools are critical to the delivery of a high-quality education for students and to give our children the best possible start in life. Our education systems are based on the

recognition that education is best delivered by professional teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus.

- Our schools must be healthy and safe environments for students, teachers and other staff to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of education to students.

While young children appeared relatively safe from the virus, the same may not have been the case for older adults on staff, so achievement of the first principle may not have been possible if due weight was given to the second.

This is an example of a 'wicked' problem (APSC 2018) in the sense [not the evil sense] that how to successfully address both principles was unclear at the time. Information was lacking; it was an extraordinarily complex problem and different stakeholders had different views on the way forward. Subject to these agreed principles, states and territories determined their own strategies, and school and system leaders were left with the challenge of implementation. Rather than adopting authoritative or competitive strategies, the work of the National Cabinet was collaborative in nature as it came to a resolution. An even larger 'wicked' problem was, of course, how to balance the health and economic imperatives.

Educational leaders already face more 'wicked' problems than is usually recognised, and more are likely to surface 'on the other side'. An example are the conflicts and ambiguities associated with the first principle above, and another principle that recognised 'alternative flexible, remote delivery of services', of which many exciting practices emerged during the pandemic.

There is, of course, an even more 'wicked' problem in the case presented by Cologon for abandoning special schools. What can one do if one accepts the case, but governments cannot or will not implement it, for good reason, as has been demonstrated in Australia and throughout Europe?

Special education appears to be a field that is rife with 'wicked' problems (Henebery 2017). Your role as a transforming leader is indeed a challenging one.

What Changes May Be Sustained Or Expected?

What changes are likely to be sustained or emerge, including to your role as a leader in a special school? These prognostications are presented in the absence at the time of writing of rigorous research on the nature, extent and impact of changes that have occurred thus far.

1. Once things settle down, there is likely to be more extensive 'blended' learning (blend of online and face-to-face learning), given the extensive knowledge and skills acquired during the pandemic. The online variety will become more sophisticated, to the extent that individual differences are acknowledged through online contact between teachers and students, especially when artificial intelligence is brought to bear that spots students' responses and adjusts 'content' to suit. This is some time in the future. At the very least, well-designed online education can reflect the principles

of good learning and teaching. The harms of excessive use of computers (Gonski Institute 2020) need not be experienced. You have a head start in important respects, including the long tradition of truly personalised learning in special education and relatively high levels of parental engagement.

2. An informal scan suggests that many proposals for change that have been made for years, before the pandemic, are re-surfacing, not just those that call for the abandonment of special schools. Variations on the theme of 'de-schooling' society may emerge. Their merit is likely to be debated anew. You should be prepared!
3. Changes during the pandemic may have finally driven a stake through the heart of traditional approaches to strategic planning. While pandemics or similar crises will be rare, there is little point in making painstaking efforts to develop detailed long-range strategic plans that will be out of date soon after they are written. OECD (2018) is undertaking a major international study of likely/preferred curriculum change by 2030 but, understandably, no major dislocating change for schools like a pandemic or world war is foreshadowed in the intervening years. 'Strategic navigation' will be the order of the day, with short-term strategic priorities set and addressed at the system and school levels. After all, you have already demonstrated agility in the face of unexpected change! 'We need swift boats, not ocean liners' (Osborne 2020: n.p.).
4. Expect a major change in external student assessment. This may have limited application to special schools where a highly differential approach is taken to participation in NAPLAN, (Australia's national system of standardised tests of literacy and numeracy in years 3, 5, 7 and 9). The way may have been paved with the suspension of NAPLAN in 2020 but, as in other areas of potential action, there are several 'wicked' problems at play. What if NAPLAN 2021 reveals a dramatic decline in student achievement, or no change, or even an improvement? NAPLAN is under review at the time of writing so there may be important changes in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Expect more proposals for change. Some may challenge the very existence of special schools. Others acknowledge the unique contributions of special schools, and good practices during the pandemic may be ramped up to contribute to an exciting future. Transforming leadership is required of you and your successors.

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Inclusive Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic: How to Respond Within an Inclusion Framework

Elaine Fournier, Shelleyann Scott and Donald E. Scott

Abstract: *This paper explores the approach of a rural, Canadian principal and her educator-team to support the learning of **all** students within the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the suitability of the Inclusive Leadership Framework (ILF) in informing this leader's decision making in support of appropriate inclusion. Even though the ILF has been useful in guiding principals' inclusionary approaches, to date it has not been tested under the level of challenge presented by this pandemic. We describe a case where the ILF informed this principal and her team's approach to innovating their instructional approaches to meet the unique needs of a student with exceptionalities who was unable to access and/or engage in online learning. This pandemic created significant stress for all in schools; however, the ILF served as a useful reflective tool to guide this team's approach to promoting successful learning through educator–parent–child communication and instructional innovation.*

Keywords: Inclusive leadership, student with exceptionalities, pandemic, online learning, collaboration, innovation

Introduction

A number of years ago, my colleagues and I sought to solidify the theoretical and pragmatic work that we had been doing related to ethical inclusive leadership (Fournier, Scott & Scott 2016). We had explored the intersections and relationships between social justice, effective inclusionary practices, and ethical leadership and found there was a lack of cohesion in the literature related to these themes. As a result of our research we designed the Inclusive Leadership Framework (ILF) (Fournier et al. 2016: 207) which articulated the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and beliefs that school leaders (both formal and informal) should develop in order to be successful in leading effective inclusion in their schools. Importantly, the ILF includes a set of core belief statements that serves as a practical guide for leaders who are striving to enact more inclusive practices. The framework enables leaders to reflect on their beliefs and actions to see how they align with the framework's suggested core values and

beliefs. We hoped that the ILF would provide useful direction in how to approach inclusion, as well as pragmatic strategies founded on evidence-based good practice.

Since we first posited the ILF, we found that this framework has been helpful to many school leaders, has influenced our own inclusionary efforts, and has been adopted into graduate programming as a valuable model for leading inclusion. However, to date our ILF had not been tested in the extraordinary circumstances that we currently find ourselves in, that is, within the worldwide health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper presents a case of how the ILF influenced one of the author's and her educator-team's thinking and actions in addressing the unique learning needs of a student who has particular exceptionalities during this difficult time when we could not be in school.

Background

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of schools in our small rural community in Northern Ontario, Canada, educator-teams comprised of teachers and paraprofessionals (e.g. educational assistants) under my guidance, as principal, set about the task of quickly developing reliable and pertinent instructional tasks using online platforms with which students were familiar. For me, there were many complexities to consider in the transition from traditional face-to-face classes to a technology-mediated learning environment. First, most of my teachers had never been formally trained in online teaching; second, access was sometimes unstable; third, many families in this community could not afford computers or devices necessary for online learning and these complexities were further compounded by the high incidence of students with special needs in our school. This resulted in layers of complexity for me, my teachers, and our paraprofessionals. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the ILF supported my decision making related to inclusive leadership practices during this difficult period.

Before elaborating further, it is important to clarify the terms that are used throughout this paper. We have borrowed the term, Emergency Remote Teaching, from Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond (2020), who described this current teaching situation as being temporary in nature, with the goal to provide instruction in a reliable and easy to establish approach within a crisis situation. Hodges et al.'s suggested Emergency Remote Teaching offered a delivery method that is specific to the ever-changing needs faced in a crisis, such as this current pandemic.

Hodges's et al. argued that this method of teaching is not the same as online teaching and learning. They asserted, numerous research studies indicated that effective online learning was as a result of careful instructional design and planning. This theme was also highlighted by Means, Bakia and Murphy (2014) who described several key dimensions for effective online instruction. These dimensions encompassed:

- modality – online or blended modes;
- pacing – self-paced or class-paced;

- student instructor ratio – this could vary from face-to-face to extremely large classes;
- pedagogy – could be expository or move towards collaborative and/or exploratory;
- instructor/teacher role – monitors progress and motivates students, and/or students become knowledge builders;
- student role – move from listen or read to explore, collaborate, and complete assignments;
- communication – synchronous and/or asynchronous;
- role of assessment – determine if students are ready, identify students at risk of failure, provide information, and input grades/marks; and
- sources of feedback – automated, from the teacher, and/or from peers. (Means et al. 2014: 27-28)

Furthermore, interaction (e.g. student-content, student-student, and student-instructor/ teacher) in a rich online environment is of the utmost importance and contributes to positive academic achievement. When all of these dimensions are coalesced, these create an ecosystem that supports learners. Likewise, Keeler and Horney (2007) assert that it is the responsibility of online course designers (in the case of schools, this is the teachers and educator-teams) to have an intentionality in their design which would meet the individual needs of students, including those with exceptionalities.

Kerr, Rynearson and Kerr (2006) suggested there were a number of skills required for success in an online learning environment; for example, computer skills, independent learning skills, and academic skills. Deficits in these areas are frequently found in the Individual Educational Plans (IEP) of students with exceptionalities. Consequently, one could infer that learning, as it is configured in our current pandemic context, might further disadvantage students with exceptionalities. Carnahan and Fulton (2013) cautioned that teachers in an online learning environment may not be able to see or discern if a student was struggling, off-task, or simply not engaging with the task at all (p. 48). Hence, online learning may present further challenges for educators in supporting and monitoring the learning of their students with exceptionalities.

Contrastingly, Marteney and Bernadowski (2016) offered the perspective that online learning environments may provide opportunities for greater success and learning outcomes for students with special needs who were challenged by traditional learning environments. They cited features such as self-paced coursework, flexible scheduling, and the ability to repeat lessons as many times as necessary as key benefits to overcoming barriers often encountered in usual face-to-face classrooms. However, it is important to note that these authors were referring to a rich online learning environment. They were not discussing Emergency Remote Teaching; thus, it is difficult to gauge whether the benefits they describe would hold true under the current pandemic situation.

How then do we reconcile our ethical obligation to students with exceptionalities when faced with the need to quickly deliver course materials to meet this sudden change in educational

situation? Confronted with this dilemma, and the urgency to address students' special needs in as expedient a manner as possible, we returned to the Inclusive Leadership Framework since it has previously served us well. As stated previously, the ILF encompasses core belief statements that connect to a series of actions and strategies, for example:

Inclusive Leaders…

- hold fast the belief that all students can learn;
- value student voice and understand that students' motivation increases when they have a input into their learning, assessment tasks, and their Individual Education Programme/Plans (IEP);
- ensure that all students are integrated as valued members within their school community;
- actively promote teacher/paraprofessional engagement with professional development and provide opportunities for their growth;
- appreciate the importance of a broad range of diversity in learning experiences and authentic assessments;
- promote the implementation of creative and alternative activities and remove barriers to innovation; and
- foster an atmosphere of collaboration, based upon trust, respect, and courtesy, with parents, advocates, and staff members, avoiding patronisation and remaining ever mindful of the power differentials that exist. (based upon Fournier et al. 2016)

While the Emergency Remote Teaching approach was able to reach most of the learners in our rural school community, it was not effective for all. In Lawson's[†] story, we describe issues that we encountered in supporting the learning of one student, Lawson, who has an exceptionality, and the way in which we utilised the ILF to guide our instructional design to support him during the pandemic.

[†] *Please note pseudonyms have been used throughout.*

Lawson's Story

Lawson is a grade two student with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. He is imaginative, funny, and creative. In his traditional, face-to-face learning environment, he receives the support of a paraprofessional who assists him with the flow of his day using a number of specialised apps on his iPad. Lawson also has sensory needs, and as part of his daily routine, he visits the sensory room which has specialised equipment prescribed by an occupational therapist. This equipment allows for one-to-one interaction and support from the paraprofessional. Academically, Lawson is lagging behind his peers in literacy and numeracy. An effective strategy embedded into Lawson's IEP is 'task analysis', which is where the paraprofessional reinforces the lessons taught by the classroom teacher by deconstructing them into smaller visual segments.

At home, Lawson enjoys playing with his 'superheroes' and helping to take care of and riding his neighbour's horse. Lawson's mother, Mrs Fairbridge, is his sole caregiver and is also currently dealing with significant personal health challenges, which limits her capacity to provide considerable academic support to Lawson. Lawson's family does not have reliable access to the internet at home, which is partially due to their rural location and also due to the expense involved in internet connectivity.

Unfortunately, faced with no reliable internet, Lawson was not able to access the Remote Emergency Teaching that had been established by the classroom teacher. Given Mrs Fairbridge's current health issues, it was unreasonable to expect her to be able to establish and support an at-home learning environment for her son. In discussing the complexities in Lawson's situation, there was a strong temptation for the team to declare the situation 'impossible to manage' as each team member was simultaneously coping with their own stress related to the myriad of issues emerging from the pandemic.

As an educator fully committed to inclusive leadership, Lawson's situation became an important opportunity for me to demonstrate that, when we say we believe *that all children can learn,* we do believe this is true at **all times** and under **all circumstances**. I felt Lawson could not be left behind the rest of the school. The classroom teacher was feeling overwhelmed at the task of setting up the Emergency Remote Teaching, so this was the right juncture to turn to the ILF core *skills* which indicated that inclusive leaders should actively build the capacity in their educators by promoting teacher/paraprofessional engagement with professional development and provide opportunities for their growth. As the teacher was struggling, Ms Carberry, the paraprofessional who had been working with Lawson prior to closure, was ready to take on a greater teacher-leadership role in Lawson's education in order to alleviate the stress on the teacher. Ms Carberry was committed to focusing on effective programming for Lawson. Together, Ms Carberry and I (as principal), returned to Lawson's IEP. Lawson's plan had been created with his 'student voice' present and integrated throughout, and this enabled us to make revisions for authentic learning during this social distancing period within the boundaries of Lawson's home situation.

Another core dimension of the ILF is leaders' *knowledge and expertise in innovative pedagogies*. This means inclusive leaders value innovation for differentiation and promote the implementation of creative and alternative activities, while simultaneously removing barriers to innovation. This dimension served as the basis for our decision making, as we collaboratively sought to remove barriers related to the absence of reliable internet in Lawson's home, and we selected low-tech, hands-on, creative, and alternative tasks that used a voice recorder and coloured print outs, all of which remained aligned with the curricula outcomes specified in Lawson's IEP.

In collaboration with the team, Ms Carberry created a series of activities based on Lawson's interests, home toys and equipment, and usual activities such as riding and caring for the horse. The learning tasks were designed to strengthen his functional literacy and mathematics

skills. A weekly delivery schedule enabled the work to flow back and forth, with Ms Carberry taking the lead in monitoring progress, while the teacher took responsibility for assessing the completed work.

Employing the *collaboration skills* in the ILF (i.e. engaging in collaborative partnerships with parents and paraprofessionals to support their child's learning), we engaged with Mrs Fairbridge who had always offered valuable insights into her son's learning experiences at school, and even though there were more challenges now as a result of the pandemic and her own health issues, this was no time to forget the crucial role that she could play as an important partner in her child's education. More than ever, as an inclusive leader, I needed to reinforce the ILF's *ethic of care* regarding the value of parental advocacy with Lawson's educator-team by modelling and demonstrating trust, respect, and courtesy with parents, advocates, and staff members; while avoiding patronisation and remaining mindful of the power differential between educators and parents. While the trust the school had worked so hard to build was still of vital importance, it was also crucial to bear in mind that trust is best if it can be bi-directional. When a child with complex learning needs comes to school, every effort should be made to ensure that parents trust the school-collective's ability to provide their child with the needed supports and appropriate learning opportunities, and this trust is established through empathetic engagement with parents and their child, through active listening (i.e. *ILF – communication skills*). Throughout the unique conditions of the pandemic, the educator-team demonstrated they trusted Mrs Fairbridge to support Lawson's at-home learning programme to the best of her ability. While it is still early days related to Lawson's story, he has begun to engage in meaningful learning related to his interests and what is available to him at home. Both Lawson and Mrs Fairbridge remain connected to our school community and feel well-supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

The transition to Emergency Remote Teaching (Hodges et al. 2020) was, by necessity, rapid, and while it offered a reliable and easy to establish approach, it did not incorporate careful instructional design and planning which Means et al. (2014) highlighted as important. Effective inclusionary leadership requires flexibility and innovative thinking which may involve low-tech approaches. It requires a willingness to take risks, challenge the status quo, and be the voice for those whose voice is often not heard, that is, the students and parents. Whether the context is an Emergency Remote Teaching situation such as the one we are currently facing during this pandemic, a rich online learning environment, or a traditional face-to-face classroom, the core values and beliefs which guide our ethical actions must not change! Fournier et al.'s (2016) Inclusive Leadership Framework (ILF) provided a necessary structural framework to ground and guide our ethical decision making even within the extraordinary challenges presented by a pandemic. Indeed, even though this pandemic turbulence presented considerable and unanticipated challenges for me as a principal, and my educators and paraprofessionals, we found the ILF to be valuable by helping us to remain

focused on: 1) promoting the learning of **all** students; 2) implementing successful inclusion and differentiation strategies (*pedagogical knowledge*); 3) innovating our pedagogies and assessment practices (*inclusion knowledge*); and 4) maintaining respectful collaboration and engagement with parents, students, and the educator community (*communication*), which were all navigated through our *professionalism* demonstrated by our core beliefs in an *ethic of care* and *appreciation of diversity*.

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Leadership for Challenging Times

David Gurr and Lawrie Drysdale

Abstract: *In times of great change, complexity, and uncertainty, like the global response to the 2020 pandemic, school leaders are challenged to adapt and navigate their way through the tide of internal and external forces to create the best positive outcome for students and the school community. In this paper we describe the pioneering future oriented principal work of David Loader, and present a model for leadership in uncertain times. We propose that there are seven domains of practice (with underlying capabilities) that will help school leaders in this period of uncertainty. The domains are: understanding the context, setting direction, developing the organisation, developing people, improving teaching and learning, influencing, and leading self.*

Keywords: Leadership, capabilities, change, leadership practices

Introduction

In the 1990s, Methodist Ladies' College (MLC) in Melbourne, Australia was a leading school in the use of digital technology in teaching and learning. It was a 'next practice' school with the adoption of 1:1 technology and associated supporting technologies to allow a more constructivist and individualised approach to teaching and learning. David Loader was the principal during this time of intense reform. He wrote about his leadership in a remarkable book, *The Inner Principal*. First released in 1997, the book stands out for its candour and deep reflection upon what it means to be a principal. It is also prescient for the current pandemic situation in that Loader describes an approach to leadership that is deeply engaged with futures in ways that few leaders are.

As we write this, it is April/May of 2020, and many people across the world are experiencing a rapidly contracting physical world as they are confined to their homes to counter the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As teachers at all levels are being asked to use technologies to provide remote learning experiences, we have been drawn to consider how leadership can help prepare educational organisations to respond well to unanticipated future events in the short and long-term. We begin with one of Loader's leadership views, and then consider a framework that we use in our educational leadership development programmes.

Responsive Direction

Loader had developed many important ideas that helped him to not only run a successful school, but to also consider what might come next for the school. His use of technology to enhance student learning was driven from an educational view, a belief that a more student-controlled, constructivist approach to learning was desirable. In one chapter, *The Stumble Principal*, he described the process of arriving at the decision to adopt 1:1 computing, a process that included four 'stumbles'. First, there was the stumble that exposed Loader to the idea that computers could help fulfil the school's educational philosophy. Second, the idea of using laptops was developed. Third, a philosophy of personal computing evolved. Fourth, the conception of the school changed from a teaching institution to that of a learning organisation. There was a fifth and last stumble that focused on changes that were occurring in the conception of what a school should be – but more on that later. What is clear from Loader's description is that this was not uncontrolled planning, but a deliberate process of venturing forth, stumbling over the unexpected, reflecting upon this, glimpsing new possibilities, and then taking considered action. Loader's leadership involved having a driving vision or purpose, using prior knowledge and recognising the limitations of this knowledge, having a curious and reflective disposition that sought new possibilities, the involvement of many in change, and the decisiveness to act when a good idea or approach appeared. Decisiveness was important for Loader and he identified two types of regret that school leaders often experience: regret for what has happened, and regret for opportunities lost. He challenges us: 'When we next stumble, which of the two regrets will we have?' (Loader 1997: 85).

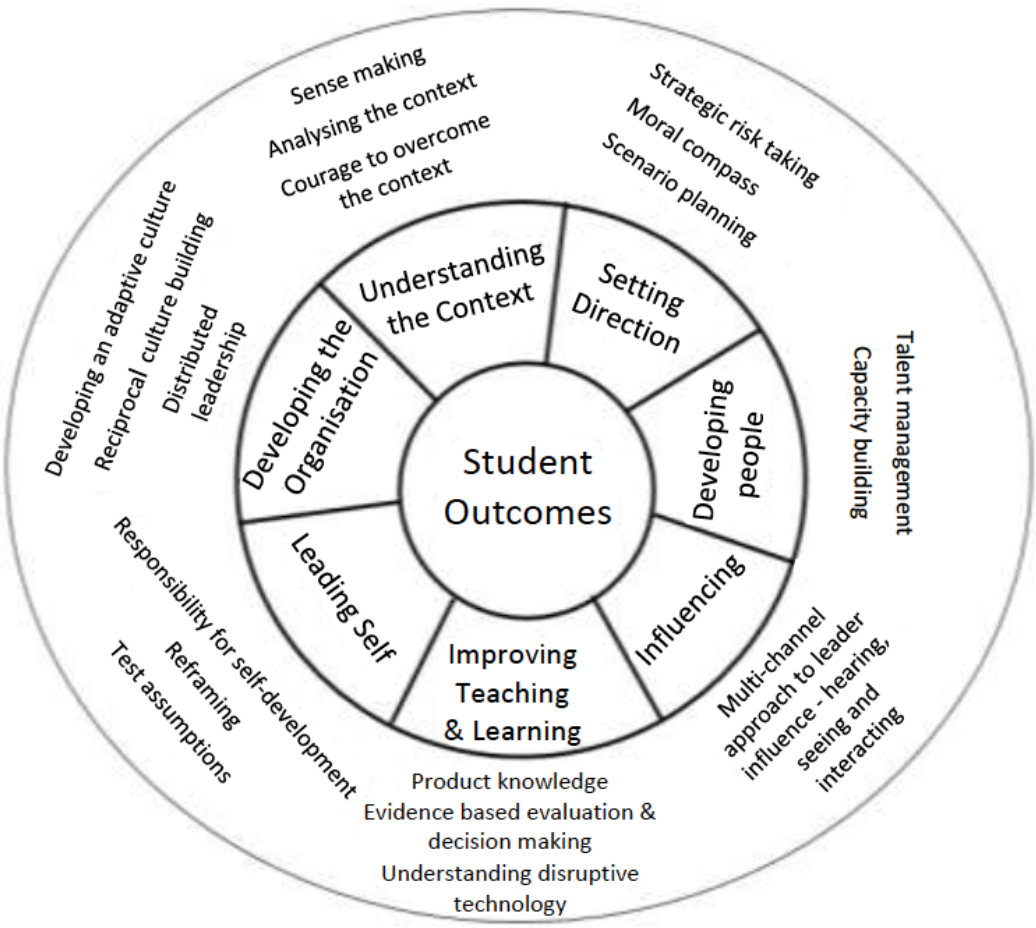
We think of this as leadership that has a responsive direction orientation to change; others may use labels like strategic intention. Responsive direction suggests that there is a clear sense of direction, but one that is flexible enough to cater for changes in the environment. As the pandemic unfolds, we do not know what the near and more distant future holds, and some, like Marginson (Global HE as we know it has forever changed, *Times Higher Education*, March 26 2020) are arguing that there will be impacts that will be enduring and which will cause fundamental changes in the education landscape. Responsive direction allows for short and long-term planning, but it also assumes that the direction is likely to change, if not in the intent, at least in the implementation. Responsive direction promotes a restless planning scheme that is constantly searching for new ideas and reassessing the intended direction. Leaders with this leadership orientation would seem to be well placed to deal with the immediate and long-term impacts of unexpected events, like school closures and mass remote learning. Loader pushed the boundaries of education further, and in his last years at MLC he was actively exploring the possibility of students attending a physical school for part of the week, with remote learning supported by learning technologies for the remainder. This was too radical at the time for the school, but in 2020 in response to the pandemic and with all schools in Australia utilising some form of remote learning, it doesn't seem such a radical idea.

Leadership in Uncertain Times Model

To provide further guidance for your own leadership in turbulent times, we now consider the model described in Drysdale and Gurr (2017) – see Figure 1. Centred on student outcomes as a worthwhile and moral purpose for schools to focus on, it highlights seven leadership domains. Four of these – setting direction, developing people, developing the organisation and improving teaching and learning – come from a line of well-established research championed by Leithwood and colleagues (e.g. Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins 2020; Leithwood & Riehl 2003; Leithwood & Sun 2012) and confirmed in other research such as that of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) (e.g. Day & Gurr 2014; Day & Leithwood 2007; Ylimaki & Jacobson 2011). Successful educational leaders tend to have a long-term view of education, and they have the skills to bring a school community together to establish an agreed direction. They are able to articulate a vision for 10 or more years, and make sense of this so that school communities not only understand what is happening in the present, but also how this fits with the future progress of the school. These leaders are people-centred, and are particularly focused on developing the staff. They are good at leading change and putting in place the organisational aspects that will lead to sustained success. Successful educational leaders know about good curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and how to help improve teaching and learning. To these four areas of practice there are at least three other areas that help promote success. Successful educational leaders understand that ultimately they are responsible for their own professional development, and they are proactive in their development and restless for new ideas. They also understand that leadership is about influencing the behaviours of others in a deliberate process that leads to behaviour change. Finally, they understand the multiple contexts in which their school exists, and they are able to respond to, and often influence, these contexts. They become storytellers and sense makers to help others understand the place of a school in a complicated set of contexts.

The paper we wrote, Drysdale and Gurr (2017), was attempting to encourage educational leaders to develop capabilities that would help them lead their organisations successfully in times of uncertainty. For each of these areas we described important capabilities. We don't have space in this paper to address all seven domains, however the full paper is readily accessible through the *Researchgate* and *Academia* share sites. However, we can briefly consider the domains of *understanding the context* and *setting direction*, as these align well with the story of David Loader.

Figure 1: Leadership in Uncertain Times Domains and Capabilities Framework



Understanding the Context

Good leaders are able to make sense of ambiguous situations. With all the forces impacting on education, leaders need to decide what is important, and to know what trends are fundamentally reshaping education. One way to do this is to consider what we know and don't know in order to cut through the clutter. The Johari Window, articulated by Luft and Ingham (1955), helps. Luft and Ingham proposed that we have aspects which are known and unknown in relation to self and others (such as the school community). If you are leading a school consider what the school now stands for (known by you and known by the school community), how the students and community view the school (unknown to you, but known by the community), what ideas you have about the school (known to you, but unknown to

others), and whether there might be disruptive innovations or context changes that could impact on the school (unknown to all, such as the current pandemic). Thinking about these and how unknown information can be obtained and/or shared can help with setting directions and responding to contextual changes. Sometimes school leaders find themselves in difficult contexts, such as the pandemic of 2020. As a leader there is a choice to be overwhelmed by the context, or to try and shape the context to promote organisational success. Bennis (2015) argued that good leaders conquer their context no matter how chaotic and disruptive. They find their way around the circumstances, or alter their circumstances, much as educators are now doing in attempting to provide quality remote learning experiences.

Setting Direction

Leadership is about setting direction and often it requires the courage to take strategic risks. We cannot move forward without taking risks or challenging the status quo, and yet there needs to be a balance between seeking and avoiding risk. While we need to push the boundaries and reimage the future, in education we also need wisdom and intelligence to minimise any risk that might endanger our students' futures. Leaders need to take decisions based on available evidence, seek new information, look for unintended consequences, and have contingency plans to change direction if necessary, and all the while without jeopardising student outcomes; much like Loader did with the transformation of MLC. A firm moral foundation for decision making will help with this risk approach. Covey, Merrill and Merrill (1994: 19) used the metaphor of the compass to help point us in a worthwhile direction, to help us understand where we have been and where we are; the compass is 'our vision, values, principles, mission, conscience, direction – what we feel is important and how we lead our lives.' Universal values such as social inclusion, social justice, equality of outcomes, opportunities for all, helping students to stretch for and reach their potential, and developing responsible students who meaningfully contribute to society, can serve as a base-line for setting direction. As we plan new directions, scenario planning can help imagine futures and help us to prepare for potential disruptions (OECD 2001). We can try to forecast the future and follow trends, but we know that events can rapidly change. For example, disruptive technology is a known unknown – we know it is there and will change the way we do things, but we are not sure how (Christensen, Horn & Johnson 2008). Constructing future scenarios (e.g. Loader imagining a school that only has in-person classes for part of the week) helps with: long-term planning; helps identify opportunities and threats; tests decision maker assumptions; provides leaders with a broader perspective through different points of view; supports organisations to preserve options; provides a future orientation through envisioning a preferred future; and helps prepare for unforeseeable events. Indeed, one of Australia's top tier Australian Rules football clubs conducted a scenario planning exercise in February 2020 in which they imagined what would happen if there was a sudden and gigantic crash in membership and finances and how long could they survive without any money (G. Baum,

Richmond prepared for a crisis ... then it happened, The Age, May 25, 2020). As a result of the closure of the football season for two months, and the absence of spectators for most of 2020, the club is anticipating losing 20 percent of its revenue. 'It wasn't quite the case that the Tigers were ahead of the game again, but it meant that they were on top of their game when the coronavirus struck' (G. Baum, Richmond prepared for a crisis ... then it happened, The Age, May 25, 2020 para. 2).

From a study involving 500 school leaders considering the idea of the future focused school, Caldwell and Loader (2010) provide a suitable conclusion to this setting direction section. They encourage school leaders to dream of possible and preferred futures, whilst being cognisant and respectful of the past, securing the present, and being responsive to the many challenges faced by schools. For them, it is not sufficient for school leaders to just manage the present; they need to be future oriented, and to do this requires knowing and articulating internal values, hopes and goals, analysing trends, and visioning preferred futures. Having a future oriented leadership approach can help all leaders navigate turbulent times.

Reflection

We don't claim that our leadership framework is the answer for navigating these difficult times, but we do know that leaders who have a deep understanding of leadership and change are more likely to lead their organisations successfully through uncertain times. We offer our view to help you in your leadership work.

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Adaptive Leadership: Leading Through Complexity

Ryan Dunn

Abstract: *There is no doubt the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the complexity schools are encountering. Complex environments lead to considerable ambiguity around what solutions might be effective. Added to this, complexity can mean challenges may not be able to be solved with the knowledge and skills that currently exist within an organisation. There is an inherent need to test ideas and learn from early implementation. Organisations that work within complex environments often utilise adaptive approaches as a response to uncertainty. This paper explores adaptive leadership as one possible approach school leaders could consider during times of significant change. It explores how the military cultivate adaptive practices to respond to complex environments as well as highlight key principles and practices school leaders could consider leading an adaptive organisation.*

Keywords: Adaptive leadership, adaptive challenges, adaptive mindset, team mental models

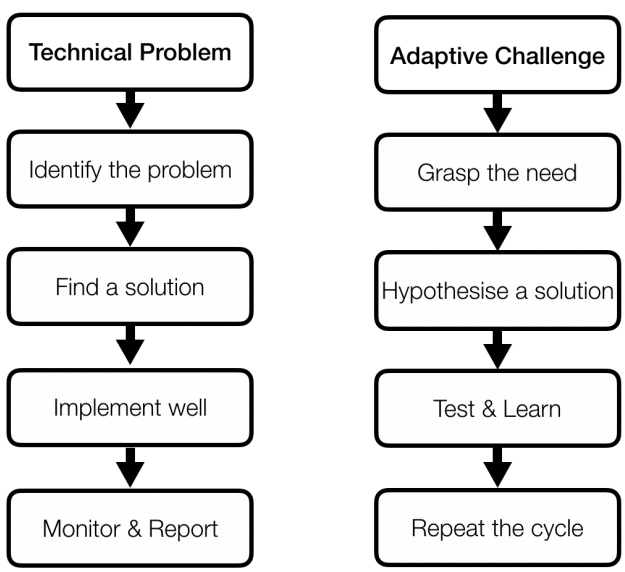
Our Current Context is Complex

A decade ago, Mulford and Edmunds (2010) described the Australian education context as a complex, challenging and changing landscape, with schools being influenced by advances in science and technology, changes in demography, globalisation, and pressures on the environment. We can now add global pandemics to this list. Harris (2020) highlighted the current predicament school leaders find themselves in by stressing 'the evidence base on school leadership practices within a pandemic is non-existent' (para. 3), however she urged schools that drawing upon the research literature would offer 'some pointers, some ideas, some reflections for those currently leading in schools and classrooms' (para 3). Drysdale and Gurr (2017) had previously outlined that in times of great change, complexity, and uncertainty, school leaders are challenged to adapt and navigate their way through the tide of internal and external forces to create the best positive outcome for students and the school community. So, while we might be dealing with increased uncertainty and complexity in both our professional and personal lives, there are specific practices we can consider to work through the ambiguity.

Heifetz and Laurie (1997) popularised the idea of two distinct types of improvement efforts in any organisation: *technical problems* and *adaptive challenges.* A technical problem is one that can be solved with existing knowledge and skills. However, not all school-based improvement efforts should be approached as technical problems and some improvement efforts are adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges are when we are moving beyond what we, as a school or individual, currently know, understand and do. While we might be able to hypothesise a possible solution, we will still need to test and learn through iterative cycles to reach a point where we establish a workable context specific solution (see Figure 1). By definition, complex problems do not lend themselves to obvious solutions. It is necessary therefore to consider how approaches and solutions are going to be developed. That is, the organisational strategy for dealing with complexity.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a recent example of a global adaptive challenge for nations across the globe. This incredibly complex problem meant we could not rely on implementing a previously identified solution or response. The problem of how to influence the development of complex situations towards favourable outcomes, and away from unfavourable ones, is arguably at the core of most of the important and difficult challenges we currently face. As nations across the world rapidly attempted to design solutions based on emerging evidence and needs, it was often approached as an iterative testing and learning cycle. As new evidence emerged, solutions were hypothesised, strategies were implemented, and evidence of implementation and impact was sought. This cycle enabled a rapid response but also created an environment where we knew things could change based on new emerging evidence.

Figure 1: Technical Problem and Adaptive Challenges: Two Different Approaches



Leading Through Complexity

Adaptive practices are best suited to complex environments, like educational settings, where there is a need to test and discover. Ideas and solutions may have been formulated in advance, yet there is still a great deal of learning, reflection and understanding that is still required. In this instance making a detailed linear plan will only make limited sense, because we know things will most likely turn out differently when we begin learning from early implementation. A clear goal is still necessary, but the pathway to achieve it will be difficult to pre-determine with specificity. Think of a sailing ship heading north using Polaris, the North Star, to guide its journey. The ship has a clear direction in mind but may veer in other directions as needed to catch the wind that will most effectively move it in the proposed northerly direction. The destination is clear, but a linear pathway is not the most effective to take. An adaptive mindset understands that taking the first step is important, as by taking that first step we then discover what the most appropriate second step could be. Research has illustrated that adaptive practices, where school-based solutions are collaboratively designed, implemented, and evaluated have benefits for teaching practice (Dunn, Hattie & Bowles 2019).

Adaptive approaches are capable of dealing with complexity, unpredictability and change. These are all aspects educational leaders recognise are evident every day in their improvement work, well before COVID-19. Initially, adaptive approaches developed and gained traction as a way to respond to the complexity of large-scale software development projects (Sutherland 2014), however they are now prominent and successfully used in many organisations and a diverse range of industries. Adaptive leaders seek to mobilise knowledge quickly, are responsive to contextual needs, and seek to empower their colleagues to act, even when the path is unclear, and the journey might be messy. Due to this, an adaptive organisation is able to respond swiftly to rapidly changing opportunities and demands as they occur. Ultimately, making them efficient to be able to respond to the learning needs of their students in an ever-changing context.

The Military, Complexity and Adaptive Teams

Theory on how complex systems function can provide insights into the nature of adaptation and how it might operate at a team level. The military in Australia and the US for example, have systematically developed more adaptive ways of working. While the strict rigid nature we sometimes associate with the military might be true to a certain extent, it is also true the military realise rigid adherence to rules and procedures can have catastrophic consequences on the battlefield. They understand key contextual factors at the coalface should shape decision making as the battlefield environment is complex. Soldiers need to know the rules and procedure well enough to recognise when they may need to move outside of these and adapt to the context specific situation. So, while the armed forces may not first appear to be a

place that educational leaders could learn and develop parallel practices, it may actually be fertile ground for the complexity we are experiencing.

The Australian Military considered adaptation in natural systems in an attempt to develop general principles of adaptation. The idea was to look to nature for inspiration because nature has solved countless complex problems through adaptation. Grisogono (2010) suggested replacing the commonly used plan for military action Observe, Orient, Decide, Act developed by American military strategist Col John Boyd with the Act, Sense, Decide, Adapt (ASDA) model. Grisogono (2010) was attempting to ensure the language of the model was accessible and recognisable to soldier-implementers, the shift to Adapt, while subtle, is important. 'Act' can be viewed as a repetitive activity, while Adapt explicitly recognises the need to change. This approach assumes that the leader may not know what the perfect course of action is and must do something to acquire information so that the team can adapt his or her actions to correspond more directly with the context they are working within. This model has many connections to how educators can conceptualise implementing evidence-informed approaches in complex environments.

It should be noted that adaption may not be as intuitive as we might like to think it is. Often the natural human desire is to 'set and forget'. Humans tend to want to make decisions and then move on to the next problem. This can work well in a complicated environment, but not so well in a complex one (Green 2011). Furthermore, by developing a framework with adaptation at the centre, we are intentionally attempting to circumvent or counteract cognitive biases that invariably sneak into the decision-making processes. This is achieved by forcing leaders and team members to continually test their assumptions and knowledge in context specific environments. Brookfield (2003) discusses how transformative experiences force us to confront the possibility that our assumptions may not actually fit. In this way, teachers and leaders will voluntarily, albeit sometimes reluctantly, critically evaluate their pre-conceived notions and practice.

Future Proofing Your School to Deal With Complexity: Cultivating Adaptive Teaching Teams

Organisation and operational adaptability require cohesive teams. Teams that are able to exhibit critical thinking, have comfort with ambiguity and decentralisation, a willingness to accept prudent risk, and an ability to make rapid adjustments based on a continuous assessment of the situation (Grisogono 2010). Recent research has advanced the notion we can create shared mental models among team members as an underlying mechanism of effective team processes and performance (Marks, Zaccaro & Mathieu 2000). Team mental models are collective knowledge structures that enable team members to understand and form expectations about other team members' responsibilities, needs, and behaviours (Mohammed, Klimoski & Rentsch 2000). They are established by taking the time to build the way the team works to a point where team members begin to organise and interpret

information in a similar manner. Teams will begin to become more adept at processes such as communication, decision making, action and contextual awareness.

Marks et al. (2000) found that leaders who spent time establishing group norms around interaction and routine ways of working, develop teams that have a sustained impact. Added to this, and which is pertinent to the current pandemic, is team mental models and communication processes strongly predicted performance when the teams encountered novel complex problems. Adaptive teams with well-developed mental models are well-positioned to perform in environments that present novel problems in which their responsibilities take them into areas that may be different from their previous experience or technical solutions they may have applied in the past. Team mental models provide teams with a common framework from which to perceive, interpret, and respond to novel situations. Adaptive teams are empowered to focus on the work they perceive as most important providing them a higher level of agency and autonomy. The underlying premise is that being adaptive enables teams to focus on the key challenges they have identified with a view to building an effective solution through iterative testing and learning cycles.

Principles and Practices to Cultivate Adaptive Ways of Working and Thinking

Many organisations are actively exploring methods in which they can become more adaptive and nimble in their approach as a response to a rapidly changing and complex world. While they might be drawing on similar guiding principles and approaches there is no one way this looks in practice. Adaptive is both a framework and a capability that includes a set of principles and practices. While working with school leaders over the past decade who have sought to utilise adaptive ways of working, some key tenets to consider have become apparent:

- ***Developing a mindset of acceptance***. We need to accept the complexity of the environment we are working within. As a leader we need to accept the ambiguity and uncertainty, by doing this you can begin to understand that nothing remains static and we are constantly evolving. This mindset allows you to deal with the unexpected, because you accept this as a normal part of working within complexity.
- ***Develop the situation through action***. Effective leaders understand that solutions are being developed from an incomplete evidence base. There is inevitable uncertainty with complex situations. As such, school leaders should be prepared to develop the situation through action. An adaptive mindset understands that taking the first step is important, as by taking that first step we then discover what the most appropriate second step could be.
- ***Focus on teams, not individuals.*** An adaptive leader continually searches for impediments that may be hindering growth of their teaching teams and endeavours to solve these. An adaptive leader supports teaching teams to make rapid progress by

assisting the team to self-organise and make decisions responsive to their context and based on best evidence. This is achieved by exhibiting practices such as deep listening, self-awareness and commitment to others. Studies undertaken by the MIT Centre for Collective Intelligence (http://cci.mit.edu/) illustrate that although the intelligence of individuals affects team performance, the team's collective intelligence is more important. They also suggest it is easier to change team behaviours rather than individual behaviours as a driver for improvement.

- ***Design lean improvement processes.*** By keeping the process as lean as possible the aim is to prototype a practice by minimising the required resources to rapidly discover if the proposed practices are proving to be effective in your unique context (or not). This can be thought of as a Minimal Viable Practice (MVP). An MVP is achieved by seeking formative feedback on the new practice or approach you are prototyping. Don't try to do too much, work on some key areas and try to get them working before moving onto other areas. By working in this way, you will see it can expedite the improvement process and results are often realised much sooner
- ***Foster psychological safety.*** Psychological safety refers to an individual's perception of the consequences of taking an interpersonal risk or a belief that a team is safe for risk taking in the face of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive. In a team with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea (Edmondson 2004). This is expressed through specific behaviours such as encouraging teachers to express opinions and ideas, promoting collaborative decision making, supporting information sharing and teamwork, and being non-judgemental (Chen, Sharma, Edinger, Shapiro & Farh 2011).

Leading With an Adaptive Mindset

Leading an organisation to become more adaptive requires developing specific personal skills necessary to enhance adaptive performance, and it requires having in place attitudes and collaborative structures that enable and foster adaptive performance. School leaders may need to develop an *adaptive stance*; constantly looking for ways to test their knowledge about the teaching and learning within their unique school context. The concept of complex adaptive systems provides a valuable tool kit for understanding and addressing a broad range of educational issues that are currently arising. There is no doubt that complexity has always permeated the educational space, but there is also not doubt COVID-19 has significantly increased the complexity and uncertainty.

An adaptive stance is both an intellectual stance that creates the preconditions for being adaptive, and a particular pattern of decision making in complex situations (Grisogono & Radenovic 2011). Operational adaptability is essential to developing situational understanding and to be able to work through complex situations as they arise. While it is

impossible to anticipate the precise dynamics of the future, cultivating adaptive teams should enable schools to adapt quickly to rapidly changing conditions and seize upon previously unforeseen opportunities. It would seem these are going to be critical attributes for every organisation to consider as we continue down this road of increased uncertainty.

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Leading With Empathy and Humanity: Why Talent-Centred Education Leadership is Especially Critical Amidst the Pandemic Crisis

Henry Tran, Suzy Hardie and Kathleen M. W. Cunningham

Abstract: *This paper draws on recent theory and practice to offer suggestions for education leaders to support teachers and other school staff when navigating dilemmas, challenges and stresses stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the Talent-Centred Education Leadership (TCEL) approach encourages education leaders to be employee-centred in their human resources management. Using this approach, leaders prioritise providing support to teachers and other school staff, who will in turn focus on student needs. This approach helps educational leaders identify, acknowledge, and address needs of teachers so they are well positioned to effectively provide a high-quality education for all students they encounter, without sacrificing their own well-being in the process.*

Keywords: Educational leadership, human resources management, talent-centred, educational administration, principals, superintendents

Introduction

From a human resource management (HRM) perspective, how organisations treat employees during crises communicates the value they have for those they employ, with their actions potentially leaving lasting impressions that persist beyond the events. In education, while student outcomes are the critical driver motivating decision making, a problem arises when there are increasing expectations for teachers and other school staff to attend to student needs when their own needs are often not prioritised or are ignored altogether. This risk is especially salient in times of crisis and unpredictability. This paper draws on new theory and practice to offer suggestions for education leaders to support teachers and other school staff while navigating these challenging times. Specifically, the Talent Centred Education Leadership (TCEL) approach (Centre for Innovation in Higher Education n.d.; Tran 2020) helps educational leaders identify, acknowledge, and prioritise needs of teachers so that they are

well-positioned to effectively provide a high-quality education for each student they encounter, without sacrificing their own well-being in the process.

At the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, many school buildings across the United States were slow to close. Despite concerns of risking their own health and the health of their family members, and against public health officials' recommendations for workers to stay home and city bans on public congregations of large numbers of people, many educational professionals (i.e. administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, staff) were expected to report to work and provide face-to-face instruction, supervision, and tend to the needs of their students. In the course of their daily practice, teachers are already exposed to unavoidable concentrations of bacteria, viruses, and other pathogens due to working in close proximity with their students. For many, the risk of contracting a life-threatening virus while at work made teaching much more stressful. This is acutely problematic if teachers themselves, or those with whom they live, are especially vulnerable (e.g. pregnant, older, with pre-existing conditions and susceptible to life threatening reactions to exposure).

In many districts across the United States, teachers were required to use personal sick leave days in order to receive pay if they planned to be absent from school, despite official state of emergency declarations. In addition, widely, teachers were (a) not consulted in crisis responses, (b) given vague communication regarding COVID-19-related precautions and decisions, (c) not often provided with sufficient protective equipment, hygiene procedures and clean facilities (regularly having to bring their own cleaning supplies to work), (d) not given guidance on *how* to enforce social distancing when students were in classes physically, and (e) not adequately prepared to provide instruction in a strictly online context.

When schools temporarily stopped in-person attendance, most were forced into an online environment or paper packet driven instruction. By-and-large, school districts lacked the infrastructure to navigate this unprecedented instructional territory. Teachers of all grades and subject levels were tasked with translating live, in-person instruction to online instruction or photocopying worksheets. With little notice and limited support or guidance, teachers saw their workload increase and the thin wall that balanced their work and personal lives crumbled even further. The end result? Many educators were unsupported, worked long hours, and felt at a loss. The issue of not prioritising educator needs existed before the current pandemic, but the problem has now been exacerbated.

A Talent Centred Education Leadership (TCEL) Approach

In arguing for the advancement of an education HRM perspective that is more in line with modern philosophies and practices by cutting-edge organisations, Tran (2020) proposed a TCEL approach that prioritises empathising with and addressing employee needs. TCEL encourages education leaders to be employee-centred, focusing primarily on providing support to teachers and other school staff, who will in turn focus on student needs. This does not mean that school leaders de-prioritise students in their decision making. Rather it means

school personnel are also included so that all stakeholders receive support. Support can be in the forms of transparency of decision making, providing instructional resources, professional development, advocacy, and effective communication. For the latter point, even when there is limited good news to distribute, organisational communication to employees should be clear, employee focused, with consistency between their tacit expectations and formal messaging.

Below, we review how TCEL strategies were employed by school and district leaders who sought to meet the needs of their educators across a Southeastern state in the United States during the recent pandemic. Names were changed to protect anonymity. Based on lessons learned from their actions, we present ways TCEL can be employed by other education leaders to provide empathetic responses to the needs of their education workforce.

TCEL Strategies Employed by Education Leaders in the Field

While examples of relationship damaging leadership practices during the pandemic abound, we seek to inspire TCEL practices by showcasing field exemplars. Although all education leaders were required to take immediate action and respond to uncertainty during the pandemic outbreak, some leaders neglected the needs of their educators and staff in the process, while others employed a TCEL approach by keeping those needs at the forefront of their decision making. In the following section, we share an example of neglectful leadership, and follow it with a provision of several counter examples that exemplify TCEL.

Neglectful Leadership

Immediately after the announcement of school closures in response to the pandemic, some leaders directed their schools with a purely top-down HRM approach, with few opportunities for employee feedback. The Martin School District superintendent sent an email to his principals prescribing the protocols that must be followed by teachers to ensure consistent educational experiences for students and to alleviate parental concerns. The superintendent emphasised the importance of communication and mandated that teachers engage in two-way communication with every student or parent in their classes more than once a week. The email then went on to dictate what would be considered two-way communication (e.g. the teacher must make contact, and unanswered calls or emails did not count), note the requirement of documenting communication, and what was considered acceptable forms of such documentations. There was no indication that teachers were consulted for input on the policy.

In contrast to a TCEL approach, this leader de-professionalised teachers by limiting their discretion in the policy's explicit statement dictating what the teachers 'will' do. It is ironic that the policy emphasises teachers' expectations for two-way communication with their students, yet this same courtesy was not afforded to the teachers. Mr Frank, one principal in the school district, exacerbated the de-professionalisation of the teachers by merely

forwarding the superintendent's email to all faculty, instead of buffering the teachers from the directive of the district office and the disregard for their input on the matter. Consequently, faculty received the one-way communication quite negatively. For instance, a seasoned teacher of 25 years in the district expressed feeling totally disrespected by this email and considered it an unreasonable demand as he had concerns about using his own personal phone to contact students and parents. The district provided no direction on options to help mitigate this concern.

Input From Employees Concerning Needs and Crisis Response

From a TCEL perspective, leaders develop and maintain employee-centred environments where there is respect for employees' expertise. In contrast to the manner in how the superintendent led Martin School District, Superintendent Albert of Sheffield School District met with all principals to establish a framework for how they could handle this crisis. After each principal met at the district level, the principals held their own school level meetings to receive feedback from teachers regarding the district's efforts to pivot from the brick and mortar school to the virtual classroom. Unlike Principal Frank in Martin School District, principals in Sheffield School District scheduled regular faculty meetings to provide updates and gather feedback. The leaders demonstrated TCEL by valuing teachers' efforts and honouring expertise through various channels, including surveying teachers for their input, especially concerning how much time teachers should be expected to spend online with students per week. That feedback was then incorporated into the guidelines created by the district office. The superintendent further hosted faculty advisory council meetings, and facilitated question and answer sessions with teacher representatives from each school and grade division, to inform the organisation's response to the pandemic. Evincing his positive reception for providing a platform for educator voice, Superintendent Albert shared, 'The feedback that resonated the most was the need for guidance, training, and patience for all.'

In Sheffield School District, Superintendent Albert demonstrated TCEL as he considered the employees and the overall work culture during the crisis. Superintendent Albert included teachers in every decision. The teachers assisted in the selection of content for grade-level packets and in determining the expected amount of time and work that should be required. Further, Superintendent Albert established five task forces comprised of teachers in the following areas: finance, graduation, school openings, school closures, and special education. This superintendent demonstrated he values teachers by inviting them to be an integral part of the pandemic response process. He understands that when teachers are meaningfully involved, he will retain higher quality teachers and his district will be better positioned to weather the storm of the crisis.

Humanise the Workplace and Provide Workers With Support

Humanising the workplace is foundational to the TCEL approach. For example, Superintendent Thread, from Alabasta School District, exemplified this when he met with

principals to ensure their mental wellness. He attended many virtual faculty meetings to vocalise his appreciation of the work of the teachers and staff. One teacher, in particular, responded to the superintendent's presence at their meeting by noting: 'Thank you Dr Thread for joining our Zoom House Meeting this morning to thank us for the work we do and for encouraging us to take care of ourselves during this time. I needed those words this morning.'

Mr Black, principal of a suburban high school in Dr Thread's school district, held a faculty meeting each week during the school closures in order to check on the well-being of the faculty and to help teachers to maintain focus on the big picture. The meetings also emphasised supporting teachers to be empathetic with the struggles of their students. The teachers were encouraged to reflect on their decisions and the impact the social isolation has had on the students. Mr Black provided direction for his teachers when he asked them to consider, given the current state, 'Will this assignment/material matter in a day, week, month, a year, etc.?' Empathy was a cornerstone of Mr Black's leadership style, and it was demonstrated to both his teachers and his students. Mr Bean, a teacher at Mr Black's school noted, 'I believe our school culture has always centred around collaboration and excellence, but now, more than ever it has centred around compassion.'

In a small, rural school district, Ms Hill and her administrative team polled the teachers' comfort levels with different virtual learning platforms as they prepared to deliver on-line instruction in response to the school closures. The teachers at Sims Elementary School did not achieve any consensus on the type of eLearning platform that they felt comfortable using, so the leaders encouraged the staff to use multiple platforms. The administrative team provided the teachers support by modelling how to use multiple platforms including Zoom, Google classrooms, Screencastify, as well as how to present information in synchronous and asynchronous meetings. The development opportunities and flexibility provided helped teachers better navigate the transition to the virtual environment.

Respect Employees and Treat Them as Professionals

As introduced earlier, another quality of TCEL is the employer's treatment of teachers as professionals, this respect engenders a sense of loyalty and commitment to the school. To illustrate, Dr Thread posted many tweets with themes centred on the work each of his teachers were doing. He tweeted, 'I want to thank the amazing professionals who have worked so hard to support our students, our families, and our community. Thank you for your willingness to take risks to try again, and to serve others.' School leaders that live the philosophy of TCEL authentically value their teachers' opinions and professional knowledge.

The pandemic crisis presented a real test to the existing culture and climate of schools, especially in relation to the employer-employee relationships. Mr Scott, a teacher in a suburban high school shared, 'Prior to the pandemic I was given autonomy, but as soon as the schools closed, the principal treated us like we did not know how to teach.' This soured Mr Scott's working relationship with the principal. While the TCEL approach is important for workforce management in general, it is especially critical during a crisis, when teachers'

anxieties are high and uncertainties abound. When a leader implements humanistic HRM practice, teachers are respected and feel calmer, which promotes an environment where they are less stressed and worried. Consequently, they are better able to focus on their work at hand. In short, teachers need support so they can provide support to their own students.

Give Employees the Space to Grow and Learn

Finally, being understanding and empathetic to the challenges teachers face is another effective way that leaders exemplified the TCEL approach to human resources management. Dr Thread, for example, provided the space and opportunity for teachers to learn and take risks in a new digital work context, as he explained that, 'It is okay to make mistakes, start over, and ask for help', especially given their inexperience with eLearning. When employees feel safe and supported, they have room to grow, learn and thrive.

Conclusion

Birnbaum, Weiler and Westbrook (2020) discuss how pandemics and crises can create the environment that results in education leaders relying on unilateral, not collaborative, decision making. The authors argue for the importance of proactive crisis management planning in advance while recognising that the effects of the crisis will continue past the actual event. Although it is too late to prepare for the onset of COVID-19, there is an opportunity to prepare for re-entry into schools following the crisis and the potential for additional waves of increased cases as health officials have warned. With major local and state revenue declines expected and impending layoffs on the horizon, changes to teaching will likely exist and persist in the upcoming years. These changes will be coupled with lasting trauma that can impact both students and the school staff even after the immediate threat passes.

During times of crisis, it is especially critical for school administrators to embrace TCEL to help lead teachers and students (Tran 2020). This paper was written to support school administrators in this work. Based on the theory of TCEL and exemplar practices from the field, we argue that the support leaders provide to teachers should not only include technological, content, and curriculum assistance, but mental health checks for school personnel who are anxious for themselves and their families, as well as their students' and colleagues' safety and well-being. Ms Hill, an exemplar principal who demonstrated TCEL, first focused on the mental well-being of her teachers and students, and then worked on the expectations for academics during the school closure. The first step should be on the well-being of the teacher, while empathising with their challenges.

In using a TCEL approach, leaders support their employees as they navigate and struggle with the uncertainty induced by the crisis. Consistent with the approach's emphasis on identifying and prioritising the teachers' needs, this paper presented several exemplar education leaders who involved their workforce in their response to the crisis. In Sheffield School District, for example, principals regularly met with teachers to convey information and gather feedback. The TCEL approach was further employed as Superintendent Albert

demonstrated authentic concern about the well-being of leaders, teachers, and students. Superintendent Thread understood that teaching was challenging under these new conditions, so he explicitly acknowledged this and gave teachers the space to learn as they shifted from traditional face-to-face learning to eLearning. The leaders demonstrating TCEL aimed to minimise stress and anxiety during this atypical learning format, so teachers felt supported enough to focus on their work during these turbulent times.

TCEL espouses that educational leaders value their employees as professionals and as people. It is not only important that this occurs with employees in less chaotic times, but is especially critical during a crisis. Organisational leaders can exemplify TCEL by modelling it from the top-down. Specifically, through a trickle-down effect, if superintendents embody the approach to be more empathetic to the needs of their employees, then principals are more likely to implement similar approaches with their teachers, which provide teachers with the capacity to be more empathetic to the needs of their students. Unfortunately, the converse is also true. As leaders discount a humanistic approach to employee management, so do their subordinates. In a time of uncertainty, school districts must keep their workforce in mind as they adapt to the changes and realise they need to support their employees who are the greatest asset in the organisation.

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Educational Inequality and the Pandemic in Australia: Time to Shift the Educational Paradigm

Teresa Angelico

Abstract: *School closures in Australia not only exposed the persistence of socio-economic educational inequality, but exacerbated it through the delivery of remote learning, which relied on family support and material and technological resources available both in the home and at the school. The abrupt and unprepared shift in learning through this emergency educational delivery mode differentially disrupted and interrupted student learning. This paper argues that the heightened public awareness of the damaging effect of educational inequality provides leaders with an historic opportunity to shift the educational paradigm by: linking schools with parents and communities to ensure inclusive educational provision for all students; investing in equitable and accessible digital learning; and advocating for resourcing approaches that better meet the needs of all students and schools.*

Keywords: Educational inequality, online learning, inclusive education

Introduction

Debate about socio-economic educational inequality has a long history in Australia, dating back to the Karmel Report (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission 1973) which reflected similar patterns of educational disadvantage identified by Coleman (1966) in the US and Plowden (1967) in England. Despite efforts to address educational inequality in Australia, it continues to persist as evident, for example, by Australia's 2018 Performance for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, indicating that 24 percent of advantaged students were top performers in reading compared with six percent of disadvantaged students. This result reflects a performance gap related to socio-economic status of 90 score points compared with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 87 score points (OECD 2018: 1). The persistence of educational inequality in Australia is reflected in the research literature, highlighting the positive relationship between not only socio-economic status of students and their educational achievement but also the level of socio-educational advantage at the school and students' academic

achievement (e.g. Chesters & Daly 2018). It is also evident in longstanding debates in Australia regarding approaches to school resourcing (Gonski et al. 2011).

School closures, aiming to contain the spread of the coronavirus, have exposed the differential access to resources by students, families and schools within and across educational systems and raised concerns about the exacerbation of educational inequality as a result of the unintended consequences of the delivery of remote learning (e.g. research reports submitted to the Australian Government in April 2020: Australian Centre for Educational Research [ACER] 2020; Brown, te Riele, Shelley & Woodroffe 2020; Clinton 2020; Drane, Vernon & O'Shea 2020; Finkel 2020; Lamb 2020). More than ever, differential access to critical resources and learning opportunities outside of the school have become evident in the public domain (e.g. ACER 2020; Martinez 2020). Reville (n.d. in Mineo 2020) argues that the exposure of educational inequality is analogous to a sudden tidal wave 'revealing all these uncomfortable realities that had been beneath the water from time immemorial' (para. 24). School closures highlighted out of school factors contributing to student learning and engagement, such as, 'families' time, income, and human, social, and psychological capital are differentially distributed across and within families' (ACER 2020: 11) and put a spotlight on the influence of family financial resources, educational background and occupation on not only educational outcomes but also employment, health and welfare outcomes.

School responses to the pandemic crisis revealed the differential level of resources available to families and schools within and across systems and nations, contributing to the differential access by students to teacher expertise, resources, curriculum and diagnostic and assessment services (Mineo 2020; Wayman 2020). The exposure of this resourcing gap between schools highlighted the role of the school as either reproducer of educational inequality or facilitator of social mobility and equitable educational outcomes. The latter role is essential for developing students' human capital necessary for social, economic and political life and social mobility (Pfeffer 2015).

School closures revealed the ways in which schools not only produce educational outcomes but also create significant social spaces (Anderson 2020) enabling connections to develop and relationships to build, thereby, supporting student and community engagement, retention, wellbeing and resilience (ACER 2020). Moreover, school closures revealed the critical role of the teaching profession, in particular, the service it provides to communities with high concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage. In these contexts, it is challenged to respond to a complex range of demands and needs (Maxouris & Yu 2020), for example, in meeting nutrition, safety and wellbeing needs (Anderson 2020) and supporting positive student and teacher relationships and student engagement in learning (ACER 2020).

Concern was expressed in Australia (e.g. ACER 2020; Drane et al. 2020; Lamb 2020) and internationally (e.g. Anderson 2020; Bergamini 2020; Mineo 2020; Saavedra 2020; Wayman 2020) about the unintended consequences of school closures. Although Australia, like other countries, kept schools partially open to support students unable to access remote learning

(Drane et al. 2020), the consensus view is that remote learning had the potential to further exacerbate differences and disparities and increase inequality (Altbach & de Wit 2020). Outlined below are three factors contributing to the exacerbation of educational inequality: reliance on family support and material resources; reliance on internet and technology; and differential impact of disrupted and interrupted learning.

Reliance on Family Support and Material Resources

The delivery of remote learning leverages on the home – school partnership, requiring greater level of input from families, both for basic material resources and human resources (Lamb 2020). Hence, the significance of material resources is enhanced, requiring families to have suitable technology, reliable broadband internet, physical spaces, and other resources essential for learning (Brown et al. 2020; Finkel 2020). As evident by a recent UK study, lower income level families were less likely to purchase additional material to support remote learning during the pandemic than those with middle income levels (Finkel 2020).

Moreover, the role of parents in the education of students was enhanced during school closures. Parents were required to provide: an environment conducive to learning, through provision of material resources and application of educational skills and knowledge (Saavedra 2020); and a greater level of support through investment of their time in motivating and supervising learning (Brown et al. 2020; Toth-Stub 2020). Undoubtedly, this new expectation placed a greater level of burden on families and students from low socio-economic backgrounds, given the differential level of resources, time available and capacities to support learning (ACER 2020; Brown et al. 2020; Mineo 2020).

Reliance on Internet and Technology

Whilst remote learning provided teachers with the potential to sustain learning and engagement (Toth-Stub 2020), as Schleicher (n.d. in Anderson 2020) observes that 'optimism for technology uptake is paired with pessimism about what this means for equity' (para. 15). Remote learning depended on student access to: technological resources (Lamb 2020), technological 'know-how' at home (Noble 2020); school technical infrastructure (ACER 2020; Anderson 2020); and teacher capability in delivering online learning, in terms of experience, knowledge, skills, and attitude (ACER 2020; Lamb 2020; Toth-Stub 2020).

Learning from home requires students to have access to 'a computer, a reliable internet connection (with adequate speed and data), and, for some, specific software' (Noble 2020: para. 10). Yet, even in Australia where 'access to digital technologies and the internet is high' (ACER 2020: 1), students from low socio economic backgrounds, many of whom are already facing barriers to learning, are more likely to experience limited access to technological resources (ACER 2020; Clinton 2020; Drane et al. 2020; Noble 2020;). For instance, the 2019 Australian Digital Inclusion Index (in ACER 2020: 8) measuring accessibility, affordability and ability, highlights widening equity gaps for social groups, in relations to these measures.

Similarly, Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicate that 'low-income households and those in remote areas have on average half as many desktop, laptop or tablet computers as middle-income households' (Finkel 2020: 3). Hence, students from low income families are more likely to rely on mobile connection to access the internet, placing them at a disadvantage (ACER 2020: 8). The closure of libraries also limited the capacity for students to access technology by sharing data and devices using public facilities (Noble 2020).

Differential Impact of Disrupted and Interrupted Learning

The widespread global disruption and interruption to student learning is another significant factor exacerbating educational inequality, caused by the sudden closure of schools and transition to remote learning. As Lamb (2020) argues, most schools 'were completely unprepared' (p. 2) for remote learning, requiring them to consider the capacities and resources available in both the home and school as well as the readiness and capacity of students to make the transition to remote learning. It was evident that this transition to remote learning was problematic for younger students in early childhood and primary education and educationally, socially and emotionally vulnerable students across all year levels (ACER 2020).

Lamb (2020) identifies an 'adjustment divide' (p. 3) to refer to the differential requirement of adjustment needed to experience success in remote learning. Hence, vulnerable groups (Brown et al. 2020), such as, low socio economically disadvantaged students, and those from Aboriginal and rural communities were identified as being at risk due to the disruption of additional educational, social and emotional services previously accessed. The capacity for students to adjust to remote learning depends also on students' readiness to learn remotely. It requires a relevant knowledge, skills and dispositions (Lamb 2020), such as, time management, and motivation to learn (Anderson 2020), and most significantly, digital-literacy skills (Noble 2020). According to Noble (2020: para. 8), 2018 PISA results indicate that '27 per cent of Australian 15-year-olds have low digital-literacy skills by international standards', making online learning more problematic for them, leading researchers, such as, Brown et al. (2020) and Anderson (2020) to argue for the importance of addressing the limitations of online learning.

There are concerns that disrupted learning will lead to: loss of learning that will need to be recovered (Brown et al. 2020: 20; Saavedra 2020); increased level of educational disengagement (Drane et al. 2020; Saavedra 2020); higher drop-out rates (Saavedra 2020); increased psychosocial challenges (Drane et al. 2020); and social isolation and disconnection (ACER 2020). The overall impact of these consequences is the exacerbation of educational inequality, due to the increased size of the vulnerable group and the degree of vulnerability of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Clinton 2020; Drane et al. 2020; Finkel 2020; Lamb 2020). Brown et al. (2020: 5) estimate that '46 percent of the student population'

in Australia is considered to be vulnerable, from an educational, health, social and emotional perspective.

Opportunity for Shifting the Educational Paradigm

The immediate priority for schools during the pandemic in Australia was to effectively facilitate continuity in learning and manage disruption using best available technological resources, whilst recognising local, national and global strengths and constraints (ACER 2020; Drane et al. 2020; Lamb 2020; Martinez 2020). Clinton (2020: 7) outlines principles underpinning an effective approach to institutional recovery based on lessons from natural disasters, such as, floods and bushfires. In essence, these principles emphasise the importance of a planned, coordinated and responsive approach to delivery of educational services. They reflect leaders' recognition of the complexity of situations; the importance of communicating, working collaboratively and enhancing the relationship with families and the community; and the significance of building on the strengths of students, families, schools and communities, identified through a process of diagnosis and assessment of needs and impacts.

Central to a recovery approach is the importance of providing intervention support to students at risk (ACER 2020; Drane et al. 2020; Martinez 2020) by: addressing pressing and basic needs (ACER 2020); maintaining connection or reconnecting with students (ACER 2020; Brown et al. 2020); continually diagnosing learning needs (Clinton 2020); and actively engaging students, through individualised learning (Brown et al. 2020). As Brown et al. (2020) stress, devising an equitable approach during the pandemic is challenging and requires schools to find the right balance between meeting the urgent needs of vulnerable groups and advancing learning for all students.

However, the desire to restore the operation of schools is natural, but this large-scale disruption to the delivery of education, not seen since World War II (Martinez 2020), also provides an opportunity for leaders in Australia to shift the existing educational paradigm. Can this health crisis bring about real change to ensure that schools facilitate social mobility and equitable educational outcomes? Is there a case for redesigning educational delivery to enable the achievement of the twin goals of educational quality and equity for all students, within an ever-changing and unpredictable environment (Mineo 2020)? Has this experience of remote learning stimulated and inspired a desire for change (Maxouris & Yu 2020)? Does the increased public awareness of educational inequality provide a moral purpose, ensuring that education works for all students, irrespective of their social background? Moreover, does this crisis put the spotlight on the value of 'equality' and the importance of advancing it to secure a sustainable future?

Some key themes underpinning these questions include: the importance of being prepared for the emergency delivery of education, as there are risks associated with crisis management; and the importance of ensuring that learning outcomes are of quality and equitable. This means that educational provision needs to be evidence-based, inclusive of all students

through the design of relevant programmes and the creation of a supportive climate and environment for learning that includes additional and targeted intervention learning to effectively cater for needs.

Investment in digital learning and the promotion of equitable access to technological resources is also critical in an unpredictable and changing environment. There is need to ensure the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is inclusive of all students, and that it builds relevant student knowledge, skills and dispositions. Also important is the equitable investment in school technical infrastructure and teacher and parent education, to facilitate confidence building and skill development. Moreover, the effective resourcing of the delivery of educational provision to achieve quality and equity goals is essential and has implications for the role of leaders in advocating for systemic reform and needs-based funding approaches that are responsive to diverse student populations. A significant theme is the enhanced importance of 'linking schools with parents and communities' (OECD 2012: 12), through relationship and partnerships building, given the centrality of the role of parents, families and communities in the education of students and the need for schools to support this essential role**.**

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A Policy Maker's Guide to Practical Courses of Action for Current and Post COVID-19 Effects in Liberian Schools

Bolumani Sondah

Abstract: *Considering how the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of Liberia's under resourced educational sector, the onus for salvaging this school year as well as starting the next one on a good footing primarily depends on the decision making and innovation of policy makers. Accordingly, they should proactively exhibit practical leadership by thinking outside the box in order to foster student and teacher wellbeing upon the resumption of school. This paper investigates the outcomes triggered by the global pandemic in Liberia's educational domain, and it proposes an exemplary framework for leaders and policy makers to implement during such a challenging time. Five recommendations are made that could be instituted when this school year resumes and when the next one starts. Those recommendations are: not restarting the academic year 2019/2020 when school resumes, establishing phased learning, managing 'conditioned' students, stimulating learner support culture, and gratifying teachers.*

Keywords: Policy makers, teachers, leadership, students, wellbeing

Since President George Weah of Liberia revealed the country's first case of the coronavirus on March 16, more than 1.4 million registered pre-primary, primary and high school students have been forced to stay out of school. Unfortunately, this has resulted in their education being halted due to the lack of virtual learning platforms in the country. As such, and writing this piece in May 2020, I believe that investigating the unfathomable negative impacts of the pandemic on K-12 schools as well as finding remedies to those problems cannot be holistically done without considering some of the immediate concerns:

- How will the students be assessed for yearly promotion when the academic year is projected to end after only four of the six academic periods, and with the fourth period assessed by tests sent to the homes of students?
- Given that remote education in Liberia is improbable for most students, how can schools help students learn while at home?

- How are schools coping financially, especially non-public schools that may find it difficult to pay staff if they can't collect the last fee instalment payments?

Since the start of this year's academic hiatus, it is important to note that a number of institutions have sought one common alternative; requiring parents to pick up hard copies of lessons and study questions for students. However, through my research I have established that such efforts have yielded little to no desired outcomes due to the following reasons: incapacity of some parents/guardians to facilitate their children studying/learning at home; lack of learning enthusiasm from students who feel 'less engaged' without a classroom setup; teachers inability to effectively assess students who may rely on parent/guardians to answer tests for them; schools' cautiousness about continuously requiring parent/guardian to pick up lessons and assessments because of safety concerns; lack of stationery supplies for schools in the rural areas; and, the inability of private and faith-based schools to continue paying the salaries of teachers who develop the notes and assessment questions.

During my first stint as a teacher in 2014, the Ebola epidemic brought schools to an immediate halt. It was that year I quickly learned that actively engaging students with academic activities while they are physically away from school proved difficult and futile. Fast forward to this year when I'm serving as a principal and Director of Education for five K-12 schools, I immediately consulted my repertoire of experience for navigating a crisis during difficult school periods like this one, and I opted against involving the schools I lead in sending hard copies of lessons to the homes of students for the reasons listed above. Interestingly, almost every school that was engaged in those activities in Liberia has discontinued because the desired results are not being realized.

Restarting this academic year will certainly be fraught with difficulties. Therefore, in the case where the school year cannot possibly resume before September, not only do I think national policy makers and local school leaders should proceed cautiously and with thoughtfulness regarding decision making, but I also believe that students who have made a pass from 1st – 4th periods should be promoted to the next class. Failure to do so may present many repercussions, among them, discouragement to diligent students and a waste of an academic year. Just by students reflecting on the fact that they've exhausted the curriculum as prescribed by the Ministry of Education (MoE), except 5th and 6th periods, their zest for learning will decrease significantly if they are required to restart this academic year during the forthcoming year. In addition, the numerous destitute parents who have exhausted their insufficient resources to support their children in school this year will bear a bigger share of the financial burden and frustration. Consequently, the illiterate and impoverished parents may decide against sending their children to school when academic activities resume because of financial constraints. More often, this unfortunate situation occurs in the rural parts of Liberia, and female students are mostly affected.

Another vital reason to promote deserving students is because of the overage factor. UNICEF characterized the high level of overage enrolment in Liberian schools as a 'civil war legacy'. They further asserted that 'approximately 40 percent of primary school students are three years older than the appropriate age for their grade' (UNICEF 2016: n.p.). As a result of this, many overaged students experience bullying or sometimes become intimidating to their younger colleagues. Therefore, policy makers' failure to implement ethical promotion for deserving overaged students could likely create a tense school environment. In addition, UNICEF also asserted that Liberia has one of the world's highest levels of out-of-school children. It estimates that 15 to 20 percent of 6-14-year-olds are out of school (UNICEF 2015). Hence, if this academic year amounts to nothing by being required to restart, the chances of overaged students dropping out of school becomes very likely.

Dr Ryan, the Executive Director of the World Health Organization Health Emergencies Program, during a virtual news conference in Geneva, Switzerland, asserted that the coronavirus could perhaps become another health endemic around the world that won't go away anytime soon (Howard & Rahim 2020). That statement unravels the harsh reality in Liberia that 'normal education' only takes place when students and teachers are physically present in a classroom or at school. Therefore, school leadership and teachers should amalgamate forces to immediately complete the school year as soon as it is safe for people to congregate. Based on the rather startling assertion made by Dr Ryan, I recommend that once it is safe for people to physically gather, policy makers in Liberia's educational sector should consider combining 5th and 6th periods in order to salvage this academic year. With about two months left on the academic calendar, combining the 5th and 6th periods is one of the most viable options that could possibly salvage this year. Based on my research, one of the most effective phased learning approaches that would work in Liberia is to require the older students (higher grade) return to school first in a phased learning approach to re-opening. When the school environment seems safe and less tense, the lower grades students should return next, and the pre-primary students should return to school last. This process will help to reduce the large crowd interaction on campus upon the reopening of school. In addition to this, schools should rigorously implement all the requisite health and physical distancing protocols.

A conditioned student is one who is in need of additional teachings, support and guidance in a particular subject they struggled with during the regular school year. Before presenting a plan for working with conditioned students, it is worth noting that an academic year for Liberian schools runs for 10 months, and those months constitute six periods. Also, each period is comprised of six weeks, therefore, six periods make a school year. However, the COVID-19 pandemic effects caused schools to shut down at the end of 4th period. The retention or promotion of conditioned students to the next class is predicated on how well they perform in the supplementary lessons. Conditioned classes usually run for 4-6 weeks after the closure of school, and the graduation of conditioned senior students is contingent on their performance during those weeks. Due to the unpredicted circumstances at hand, it is

complicated to figure out what this year's plans should entail. I propose that in the worst-case scenario if schools do not reopen before September 2020, the current conditioned seniors should be required, after schools resume, to visit campus twice a week for teaching and coaching on topics/lessons they've struggled with. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the academic year, seniors can prepare for the regional West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) as well. To further prepare students adequately, teachers should also give lots of in-class practice work and take-home work to practice whenever school resumes. Those activities will make a significant difference.

Policy makers, teachers, and school leaders should stimulate and nurture the culture of learner support systems. Most often, the primary concern of many teachers is only impacting knowledge to their students. However, in my opinion, I believe a great teacher does more by caring, listening, and developing a relationship with their students. For instance, a teacher who cares for their students and has built a relationship with them will easily recognize when a student has issues or is at the brink of dropping out of school when school reopens. It is only right to caution teachers to brace themselves for the onslaught of emotional and mental traumas they will have to grapple with upon the reopening of schools, as it was the case in Liberia during and after the deadly Ebola epidemic. In this fashion, based on the colossal impacts of the crisis, I believe that if there shall ever be a time when teachers championed the well-being of their students, this should certainly be the time.

With the bricks-and-mortar learning experience being the most typical in Liberian schools, teachers and administrators have to be more creative by passionately championing the well-being of students while practicing physical distancing. Like the Ebola epidemic, this coronavirus pandemic is affecting many disadvantaged children in Liberia by exposing them to hunger, psychological trauma and domestic violence. This assertion is evident in the fact that schools, like the ones I provide leadership for, feed their students on a daily basis when schools are operational, and the impact of that 'first meal' a day is very massive for their well-being. We know this because of the routine height and weight checks performed for the students as well as their personal verbal testimonies. Also, in difficult times like these, it is obvious to notice the physical impacts the lack of those meals have on students upon their return to school. More than that, some students share their many other ordeals with a trusted staff when school is in session. Also, many have had little or no opportunity of playing outside, or with their peers. More than that, a few may have been ill or seen a family member who suffered from the coronavirus. Hence, those situations will have negative impacts on student development and wellbeing. As such, in order for students to thrive when school reopens, teachers should kindly dedicate their service, attention and care to student well-being.

Although the MoE has increased public schools' teachers' salaries in recent years, many private and faith-based schools' teachers are still being underpaid for reasons such as: insufficient funds collected as tuition, school administrator's unwillingness to properly pay teachers, the severe shortage of qualified teachers in the field, and lack of proper oversight

that should be conducted by national policy makers. Sadly, during these difficult times, what's even more unsettling to note is that many private and faith-based schools' teachers are not receiving salaries due to uncollected tuitions. The justification given by administrators of those private schools is that salaries are generated when students pay tuition. Therefore, the fact that tuition payments were halted due to the pandemic, schools are unable to collect revenue. As such, this is causing a tremendous strain on the well-being and livelihood of those teachers, and that has led to their demotivation. However, when school resumes at any time, it is expected of teachers to perform efficiently even though their wellbeing was not addressed during the time of crisis. Additionally, in view of how abrupt this year came to a standstill, it is prudent to note that teachers' workload will be more hectic this coming year. Therefore, in order to reinvigorate them to give their best, it will make a significant difference if administrators were to thoughtfully hand their staff a financial bonus. That will lift their spirits and make them feel appreciated. Thus, the long-term effect of this action will enhance the likelihood of a productive and cordial school year. I should note that teachers are heroes who have massive impacts on students and the community, and they should be treated as such. To conclude, teachers should be appreciated and gratified more when school resumes.

My goal of writing this paper is not to show that I know and have all the answers to navigate the difficulties faced by Liberian schools during this pandemic. I am very certain that policy makers and educators who have experienced similar difficulties have some ideas to offer. Therefore, I offer my views to assist leaders traverse the many challenges that lie ahead of them.

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Understanding Educational Responses to School Closure During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case for Equity in Nigeria

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Abstract: *As the COVID-19 pandemic ravages the world, the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Education on February 27, 2020, announced the temporary closure of all schools in Nigeria. The closure of schools was a strategy to mitigate the spread of the virus. This paper addresses how the Nigerian government met the educational needs of students during the pandemic and the impact of school closure on the most vulnerable. The author acknowledges that for some students, the disruption caused by the epidemic will be a time of greater autonomy for their learning. However, for many Nigerian children, this will not be their stories. Hence, this paper aims at identifying the severity of the educational inequity represented by school closures. It challenges the government to take responsibility to lead a process that is as effective and equitable as possible in ensuring that all school children have access to education.*

Keywords: Pandemic, educational responses, equity

Introduction

Nations are battling to slow down and eventually stop the spread of COVID-19, a pandemic that has taken thousands of lives. In Africa, the virus has spread to dozens of countries (World Health Organization [WHO] Africa 2020). Specifically, in Nigeria, statistics derived from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) reveal that the country currently has 15,181 confirmed coronavirus cases and 399 deaths as of this writing (June 12, 2020). Government and health authorities are striving to curb widespread infections. Measures such as social distancing, travel bans, school closures, home isolation, handwashing, and coughing into bent elbows have been essential components of global responses to the pandemic.

The need to protect people from harm is at the core of the pandemic mitigation strategies. Thus, when schools were mandated to close, many teachers, parents, and students, although unprepared for the lockdown, clearly understood the need and commitment to safeguard lives and to demonstrate responsible stewardship. Research supports that school closure

during a pandemic is necessary to slow viral transmission by limiting contact between school children (Cauchemez, Valleron, Boelle, Flahault & Ferguson 2008). School closures transmit powerful messages to the broader community about the severity of the pandemic and the likely risk it poses (Smith 2006). Modeling studies indicate that school closures are only valid if invoked early before community transmission occurs (Halder, Kelso & Milne 2010; Hens et al. 2009). Therefore, the government's decision to close schools in Nigeria when they did, for the most part, was praised.

While the emphasis of the COVID-19 response is primarily on health systems, the closure of schools, which we all hope will be short-term, may have impacts on students. For example, in the USA, Marcotte and Hemelt (2008) discovered that even a few days of spontaneous school closures due to bad weather can affect student performance negatively on statewide mathematics and reading assessments. Also, it has been shown that USA middle-grade learners may have lower rates of educational achievement if their learning is disrupted during critical periods of development (Hernandez 2011).

Even though schools are closed, the Nigerian government is making efforts to ensure continuing education opportunities during this pandemic. The government is encouraging remote learning and online resources to resume education in light of school closures. Lagos and Ogun State Governments have taken the lead in engaging students with educational content broadcasted through the state television and radio stations. I think this is a laudable development because it brings education to people right where they are. Moreover, since most families already have radios or televisions, infiltrating the mass media with educational content is the right step in the right direction. This initiative is far better than doing nothing. Although I acknowledge the conscious efforts of the Nigerian government, in this paper, I provide insights into the impact of the responses taken by the government on the country's most impoverished students. While I cannot ascertain the magnitude of the effect of school closure, I theorise that the current measures employed during this challenging time are magnifying the already-existing disparities within the Nigerian education system. Since I do not have data on school closure, I must emphasize that the views conveyed here are those of the author.

School systems and governments have come up with online or virtual learning to help engage students during this pandemic. Virtual learning is education that can functionally and effectively occur in the absence of traditional classroom environments (Schlosser & Simonson 2006). It is a form of schooling that takes place over the internet to deliver instruction to students and requires a quiet place for students to study. It further requires access to a computer or other digital devices which students can use for their work, as well as high-speed broadband or internet connectivity. Whilst school closures may be necessary to slow the spread of the virus, and virtual or remote instruction can replace in-person instruction, they can adversely affect students, particularly low-income students, who do not have equal access to the same opportunities as privileged students. Online learning will most likely work well for children whose parents are literates and who have access to resources. For many

children lacking these conditions, the period of school closure is likely to result in minimal opportunities to learn.

It is imperative to tackle the digital divide that will make the goal of online education challenging to achieve in a country like Nigeria, where only 42 percent of residents have access to the internet (International Telecommunication Union [ITU] 2017). Sahara Reporters (2019), on June 5, stated that 91.8 million Nigerians are extremely poor. This number makes up 46.5 percent of Nigeria's population. According to The World Bank (n.d.), an individual can be said to be living in abject poverty if he/she lives below the poverty line of 1.90 USD. While a little over one in three of Nigeria's whole population live below the poverty line, among children, this proportion surges to 75 percent (UNICEF n.d.: paper 1). Research has it that poor households have less access to learning materials and experiences, including books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building lessons, or tutors to create a positive learning environment (Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo & García Coll 2001).

Given that most children live in poverty in Nigeria, many students lack access to the technology needed to learn remotely. By implication, online learning will be available to only those who can afford it. This negates a large number of students, thus mitigating their access to learning. As a result, many students with little to no access to digital gadgets will find themselves trapped at the periphery of the educational system, while their more privileged classmates continue to learn.

I admire online learning for its ability to mirror individual needs; however, it requires parental involvement. Parents serve as a coach for their children's virtual learning. While parents with formal education can actively oversee their children's online learning, this is not an option for those without formal education. UNICEF's literacy rate report recorded that 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 24 years in Nigeria cannot read a simple sentence (UNICEF n.d.: paper 2). With such a high level of illiteracy in Nigeria, how can a mother, or even a father, who cannot read support the online learning structure or reinforce the goals that should be accomplished at home? Therefore, the opportunity available for parental involvement will more likely be evident in those who are of higher educational status (Dixon 1992).

While the Nigerian government is actively promoting virtual learning for children during school closures, and schools are moving towards this direction, it leaves me asking so many questions. Nigeria, unlike Western countries, struggles with providing its citizens with stable electricity. Prolonged power cuts are a daily experience in Nigeria. The country's epileptic power supply is a significant hindrance to online learning. In Africa's most populous country, almost everyone depends on generators, including the President. In the country's 2019 budget, there were 1,358 generator-related expenses (A. Osae-Brown & R. Olurounbi, Nigeria runs on generators and nine hours of power, *Business Bloomberg*, September 22, 2019). On April 30, 2020, the official twitter account of the Government of Nigeria informed Nigerian students and the general public of the availability of free data access to some e-learning portals. I applaud the benevolence of the government, however, I question how this would

benefit families that cannot afford to buy solar lanterns or generators. How would this lovely intervention profit the low-income Nigerian family that needs to access the e-learning portal, but cannot afford the cost of gas to run a generator in a country with a shortage of power?

Additionally, a vital requirement for online learning is the availability of a quiet space to study. As a growing child, I remember my mum always telling me that where you study is just as important as what you study. She said this each time she caught me watching my favorite cartoon while doing my homework. For my mum, I needed to avoid distractions when studying. Statistics show that 60 percent of Nigerians are homeless (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) 2004). Research has further confirmed the profound inadequacy in the housing circumstances of Nigerians, in particular the low-income population (Olotuah & Aiyetan 2006), who, by the way, constitute the vast majority of the populace. Research has shown that an estimated 2.3 million urban dwelling units are substandard; only 33 percent of houses are considered to be suited for living (Olotuah 2002). Sanitary facilities in most urban dwellings (especially water and electricity supply) are grossly inadequate. As asserted by Kamete (2006), urban facilities, especially housing, have failed the growing demand of the rural poor. If this is the reality of low-income families, how can children in these homes find a study space at all, before even considering whether it is a comfortable one that is quiet and free of distraction? These groups of students will have to deal with distractions from other members of the family who may have other plans for the space (if space is available).

Students are being encouraged to take advantage of educational programs on television and the radio. However, the TV option is still not feasible for some low-income earners and the poorest of the poor. Even where TVs are available, the issue of an unsteady power supply shows its ugly face. The radio option could be quite limited in range as the radio broadcast can only attend to one subject and class at a time. Nevertheless, radio school is highly commendable. It is a different but needed voice during this crisis. The beauty of the radio school lies in the number of people that will benefit aside from school children whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic. Prior to COVID-19, Nigeria was home to over 10 million out-of-school children. According to UNICEF, one out of every five of the world's out-of-school children resides in Nigeria (UNICEF n.d.: paper 3). Therefore, learning broadcasted through the radio will have unintended beneficiaries such as out-of-school children and illiterate parents. The success of the radio program depends on the provision of radios and writing materials to people who cannot afford to buy them. This is the time for the Nigerian government, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations to rise to the task of providing and facilitating the distribution of radios to low-income communities.

Additionally, newspaper routes could be considered to circulate weekly learning packages to children in different areas. This might not be a popular option since it does not involve technologies that can compete with the Western world. However, we must be reminded that in our pursuit of better schools and virtual learning, the discourse around what works should not overlook significant contextual and cultural differences (Harris & Jones 2015). While

trying to conform to global educational initiatives, we must identify our unique problems and educational needs before we can move forward. The newspaper route, if adequately deployed, could help bridge the gap of educational inequity by ensuring all students are engaged in learning during this period. In a country where working remotely is mostly unpopular and where we lack basic infrastructures, this is not the time to think of expensive or sophisticated technology and approaches. Since school closure was unplanned, this is a time to act fast. Our plans must be considerate of all students irrespective of their socio-economic background. We must be creative and devise a way to support the learning of each student during this trying time. We need to think of offline strategies.

Without a doubt, the coronavirus pandemic has adversely affected our lives. In Nigeria, the educational system has been devastated, and children from low-income families are the hardest hit. Absence of an intentional strategy to protect the opportunity to learn during this period will cause severe learning losses for students. In the words of a great Nigerian statesman, late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, 'the children of the poor you fail to train today will never let your children have peace tomorrow' (T.I. Tahir, Kidnapping: The new wave Boko Haram, *Daily Trust*, May 7, 2019). This indicates that if nothing is done to narrow the educational gaps between the rich and the poor today, in the future, it could be less likely for the impoverished to get well paid and gratifying jobs. When this happens, these young ones will become nuisances in society.

Given the significance of education as the foundation for all development, and as a currency that we cannot afford to devalue, we must strive to provide an equitable education for all students. Education needs to be incorporated in the current response of the COVID-19 outbreak, as the future of millions of children is at stake. The current crisis presents an opportunity for us to reconsider our perceptions of education. If we can rise to the task, we could harness lessons on how to adapt learning to continue in challenging times and support learners physically evacuated from schools.

I hope we will leave with a lesson when this is over. As we go into the phased easing of lockdown protocols, I sincerely hope that we do not return to the status quo. The Federal Government needs to be intentional in making education a priority, and long-term dedication to the education sector will be essential. We need to invest heavily in education and consider funding research that is directed to learning about the effects of sudden school closure on students – their needs, learning loss, and trauma. This will enable those at the helm of affairs to recognize how to plan for and support students learning remotely if the need arises without disadvantaging any child.

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Home Education as Alternative to Institutional Schooling in Nigeria: Lessons From COVID-19

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Abstract: *COVID-19 (coronavirus) threw the world into pandemonium and making Nigeria close her institutions of learning. Hitherto, Nigerian school activities have largely been dependent on face-to-face interactions. Homeschooling with technology based teachings has helped some parents and learners to cope during the lockdown and it is argued in this paper that homeschooling in Nigeria should become a more widely available and recognised alternative to regular schooling.*

Keywords: Homeschooling, pandemic, pedagogy, institutional school, learning, mainstream

Introduction

Some 150 countries globally locked their schools purposively to ameliorate the spread of the coronavirus. It was thought safer and better for learners to stay at home. Academic activities dependent on face-to-face interactions were paralysed. National and international examinations including the Common Entrance; Junior Secondary Certificate Examination; Senior Secondary Certificate Examination; Cambridge Assessment International Education; Test of English for Foreign Learners and other professional examinations were suspended.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) assured citizens of strengthened surveillance at five international entry airports. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) also announced the set-up of a coronavirus group to activate its incident system should any case emerge in Nigeria (Coronavirus: Nigeria 'strengthens' surveillance at five international airports, *Premium Times*, January 9, 2020; Coronavirus: Nigeria announces 'preventive measures', releases numbers, *Daily Post*, January 28, 2020). These calmed Nigerians against the World Health Organization (WHO) listing of Nigeria among 12 African states categorised as 'high-risk' (Coronavirus Spread: WHO Lists Nigeria Among High Risk Countries, *This Day Newspaper*, February 1, 2020). The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was an Italian that tested positive for the virus on 27 February 2020 (NCDC 2020; Nigeria Responds to First

Coronavirus Case in Sub-Saharan Africa, *The New York Times*, February 28, 2020). A second case had contact with the first and, thus, COVID-19 entered Nigeria and began its spread.

Nigeria thereby joined the list of 150 countries across the globe that shut down, not only the economy, but also educational institutions. The lockdown generated a crisis in the education sector. The crisis is being considered in cyclical form as individuals, institutions and governments began preparing responses in anticipation of the unknown. Three questions are asked: How are we coping?; What might be the impact?; and, How will we recover?

The Education Milieus

The education sector in Nigeria has operated for decades with the traditional didactic methods as the popular mode of teaching across all educational levels (Achuonye 2015; Mahmood 2010). A teacher delivers well prepared lessons in the classroom, using chalk to write, draw and highlight important points, and talks to explain and analyse the complex concepts to the students sitting directly in front. This has been a universally accepted way and adopted in institutions including specialised universities.

However, there has been an age long debate on how best to teach and the most effective methods of lesson delivery. Having a repertoire of methods would ease class control, activate learning and engage learners to learn at different rates and ways. Since the dawn of the 21st century, it is becoming clear that the teaching-learning process can no longer remain in this traditional way. Teaching needs to be more engaging and include real experiences (Ofodu 2012). Instructional strategies that could help include play-way, role-play, storytelling, demonstration, recitation, field trip, discussion and simulations at appropriate levels, the skilful usage of pictures, audio-tape, radio, television, audio-visual (Adeyanju 1994, 2005, 2012), multi-site teaching system (Sofowora & Adeyanju 2009), and the use of information and communication technologies (Adeleke 2017; Adeleke & Akpomuje 2020; Adeleke & Jegede 2020; Adeleke, Jegede & Iroegbu 2017). Even though these studies were locally conducted, regulating agencies and financiers of the education industry have ignored them. The government (FGN) has exhibited low interest in the educational development of Nigeria and has regularly reduced fiscal commitment over the past decades.

The outbreak of COVID-19 prompted Nigerian families to take up their children's educational prospects with choices, freedom and novelty. The disconnection and time lost to the closure of institutionalised schooling could be inimical cognitively, psychologically and emotionally to children. Parents (locked-in themselves) suddenly became not only child minders, but available to support their children's learning through the use of various platforms gained mostly through snowball recommendation. The pandemic helped to nurture family relationships, allowing families to explore new interests and skills and, glimpse education without schooling. While the concern weighed more on parents, learners were not spared and hence everyone seeks alternatives to conventional schooling. For many this has been an introduction into home education or homeschooling.

Homeschooling is growing and legalised in many nations. There is growth of between two and eight percent per annum in nations like Australia, Canada, China, France, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Russia, Malaysia, Mexico, New-Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and United Kingdom (Ray 2020). The growth is across religious preferences, economic strata, parental educational background and race. According to the Victorian Department of Education and Training (State Government of Victoria, Australia 2019), homeschooling during a child's compulsory school years (6–17) is a recognised alternative to attending government or registered non-government schools. The parents have the choice and the state acknowledges parents who choose home education. The state requires parents to register and provide a report each year of what has been achieved. Similarly in Canada, parents choosing homeschooling have the primary responsibility for managing, delivering and supervising their children's courses and programme of learning (StatCan 2018).

In Nigeria, public familiarity with homeschooling is increasing due to the lockdown. Media interest in homeschooling has recently increased and families are seeing jingles, advertisements and educational programmes on cable stations, television and radio highlighting homeschooling possibilities. Notable homeschoolers have been popularised, like respected Nigerian lawyer and university proprietor, Aare Afe Babalola.

Merits of Homeschooling

There is evidence of the advantages and possibilities of homeschooling. The following advantages accrue to parents, learners and states mainstreaming home education.

a) Academic Performance – homeschoolers perform better academically than learners attending public or private school. Statistical analysis of performances showed home education is superior (Coalition for Responsible Home Education 2020). This has no relation with parent's level of education, gender, income, degree of state control and regulation. It also stands evident in achievement tests, placement tests and admission recruitment tests into higher learning.

b) Safety Issues – parents in Nigeria are concerned about increased bullying, violence and rape issues in schools (The Guardian, 15 March, 2018, Rising cases of child rape in Nigerian schools; The Guardian, 2 June, 2020, Rape and Murder of student in church sparks outrage across Nigeria). Homeschooling takes many of those concerns away.

c) Access to Learning Accessories – Learning is facilitated when needed instructional materials are adequately utilised but a perennial problem in Nigerian schools is availability and accessibility of those resources. New technologies ease accessibility to learning aids. Homeschooling parents can be members of organisations and associations that readily provide useful materials like cheaper computers, free applications and access to internet based educational materials that are not readily accessible for learners in institutional schools.

d) Affordability of Homeschooling – homeschooling has been vindicated to be more affordable and economical to the parents and the state. For example in the USA, a 1993/1994 survey showed that parents spent about $US.546 per child per year for home education, while the government spent $US.5,325 per student per year in school excluding construction, equipment and debt financing (Ray 1997). Although these are USA figures and the figures for homeschooling did not include wages, it would be interesting to explore whether homeschooling in Nigeria would be more economical.
e) Socialisation – that homeschoolers might be lonely, isolated, bored and depressed has been proved wrong. Rather, they were found to be above average on measures of social, emotional and psychological development. The reality is, parents, siblings and other homeschooling children involve them in wholesome community activities that prepare them for real life. Homeschoolers also have online association or groups that orientate them socially. Regular involvement in field-trips, community volunteer work, religious ministrations, visitations to grandparents etc. build skills in peer interaction, self-concept, leadership skills, family cohesion and balanced self-esteem. They could be more tolerant than contemporaries in the schools.
f) Gainful Adulthood – with good social cohesion, it seems that homeschooled may be more available and participative in community services. It is also logical that they have deeper internalisation of the beliefs and values of the community and prove to be good citizens and leaders such as Aare Afe Babalola from Nigeria and homeschooled USA luminaries including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Edison.

Resolving Impediments to Widespread Implementation

Whilst homeschooling has many advantages it could be a worthwhile alternative for school education in Nigeria. However, in Nigeria there are some issues to overcome.

a. Poverty – Some 40.1 percent of the Nigerian population live below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics 2020) and so the ability to homeschool is limited. Certainly many families cannot afford basic supplies or to replicate the other services schools supply, such as gymnasiums, sport fields, science laboratories, language laboratory and libraries. Some of these services might be accessible in communities in large cities, but in rural and remote areas it will be more difficult. Perhaps more importantly, unless families can afford to hire a tutor, it will mean one of the adults in the family will have to be the teacher and many families will not be able to survive if the adults are not earning an income.
b. Time – Whilst there is time saved because children do not have to attend school, homeschooling is a family commitment and, as mentioned, will require an adult in the family to have time to supervise the children being homeschooled.
c. Expertise – With 65–75 million adults illiterate in Nigeria (Nkamnebe & Nkamnebe 2018), it is clear that not all parents have the expertise to homeschool their children without the support of tutors or on-line service providers.

d. Government/Agency Support – There is a lack of recognition and support for homeschooling from the government and education agencies. Indeed, there are requirements, like compulsory attendance policies, that work directly against homeschooling. Policy and practice support for homeschooling is needed.
e. Infrastructure – Electricity is unreliable, and internet connection problematic and expensive in Nigeria. This is true for large cities and more acute in rural and remote areas.

Conclusion

Hitherto, the Nigerian public are bereft of homeschooling as an alternative to classroom situations. However, with the recent closure of schools, public appreciation for homeschooling has increased and this should become part of the national education policy for mainstream practise. The shutdown of schools means that the largest populated African nation, Nigeria, cannot shy away from homeschooling as a legitimate alternative to regular schools.

Educationalists and parents disposed to homeschooling should launch an awareness campaign, rallies and conferences that explain the significance of the homeschooling concept and make it more resident than alien in Nigeria. Teachers should be reoriented with the pragmatics of homeschooling in teachers' education courses. Parents must wield influence on the government and governmental agencies by reiterating the benefits of homeschooling and demanding its legal recognition. There should be policy and practice support for homeschooling from government and agencies. Examples of successful homeschool practice should be publicised to show that it is quality alternative to regular schools.

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The Role of Local Authorities in the English School System: Why Did the Coronavirus Pandemic Subvert 30 Years of Neoliberal Policy?

Ian Dewes

Abstract: *In England local authorities (LAs) have had an important part to play in coordinating schools' responses to coronavirus, yet this has come after three decades where neoliberal policies have led to a reduction in LAs' status. I identify two periods of the pandemic: First, schools became childminders and the government gave LAs a key role in facilitating this. I speculate that the sudden onset of the pandemic has forced the government to ignore the established policy direction of the decline in the role of LAs. The second period is characterised by the government's desire to return schools to their normal role, and LAs having a significant part to play in enacting or denying this policy. I compare the role of LAs with Regional School Commissioners (RSCs), a more neoliberal organisation overseeing academy schools. I draw on observations from my own professional experience as a school leader during the pandemic.*

Keywords: Coronavirus, neoliberalism, local authorities, schools, academies, democracy

Phase 1: Schools as Childcare

In response to the developing pandemic, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in mid-March that all schools in England would close to pupils, except for those whose parents met the criteria for 'keyworkers' (jobs seen as crucial to the smooth running of the country) and those pupils who were considered vulnerable. By the start of April only around 1 percent of pupils were in school (F. Whittaker, School attendance around 1%, finds DfE analysis, *Schools Week* 21st April 2020). While most schools organised online learning for the pupils who were no longer allowed in school, the main role of schools was transformed into one of childcare to enable keyworkers to continue to attend work. The Prime Minister explained that 'by looking after the children of key workers, [schools] will be a critical part of our fightback against coronavirus' (Department for Education 2020a: para 24).

At a time when there was growing concern over the risks of coronavirus, keeping schools open for childcare was a challenge. With many schools struggling to stay open for vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers, there was concern that parents who were nurses and doctors, among other roles, would no longer be able to work as their children were not able to attend school. This problem was exacerbated by the fact many grandparents were unable to mix with their wider families and therefore there were fewer childcare options. In response to this problem, the DfE published the following in late March:

> We expect schools and local authorities should work together to ensure that different settings are supported to stay open wherever possible…and we want local authorities to help coordinate what this means, working with education settings to deliver the services required. That includes academies, the independent sector, and boarding schools. (Department for Education 2020b: 1)

LAs were given a crucial role in organising provision, but this expectation was challenging. The policy direction for many years has left LAs with a hollowed-out staff structure. A series of policies since the 1980s has gradually eroded the role of LAs in the English educational landscape. New types of school were created, such as Grant Maintained schools and City Technology Colleges. Both were designed to be independent of local authorities and provide a broader choice of educational establishment for parents. Academies carried on this policy and had become a significant part of the English school system. By 2018, 50.1 percent of pupils studying in state-funded schools in England were in an academy (DfE 2018). In addition, from 2010 an age of austerity hit the finances of the public sector. This culminated in 2017, the Department withdrew funding that was previously paid to local authorities for school support services (NAO 2018: 9) thus reducing significantly the school support function of LAs.

The politics of neoliberalism has been central to the LAs' decline. Described as the 'unsurpassable horizon of our age' (Dean 1999: 199), neoliberalism has influenced much of modern-day education. Brighouse (2016) has pointed out that the English government's Department for Education publications have regularly employed neoliberal words, such as 'choice', 'autonomy' and 'diversity', alongside references to the neoliberal tenet of accountability. Young (2015) has detailed that, for an academy, the political accountability of an LA has been replaced by market accountability. The government has made much of the freedoms on offer to schools which leave LA control and become academies. Minister for Schools Nick Gibb stated that, 'by empowering teachers and headteachers and promoting an atmosphere of innovation and evidence, power is wrestled from the old authorities' (DfE 2017: n.p.). Andrew Wilkins (2016) has described recent years as a 'repoliticisation' of the education system, where LA and local democratic controls are removed and central government's influence more keenly felt. I will return to this theme later in Phase 2.

In the LA where I work, Warwickshire, some tensions emerged as the LA attempted to engage with schools that had been set up to be independent from their control. In my LA, schools

(including academies) are organised into local groups. As the pandemic developed, some schools struggled to stay open – either because staff and pupils were contracting the virus, or because they had too few children remaining to make staying open viable. The local authority tasked the chair of each regional group of schools to coordinate provision in their area. As one of the chairs, I helped to organise schools into clusters with shared contingency plans. When one setting closed due to a lack of staff, its keyworker pupils were accommodated at a nearby school. There was a high level of coordination among schools including most academies, although some academies were surprised to see the local authority have a coordinating role. Simple acts such as requests for information were met with some scepticism, as if to question what right the LA had to know about goings-on in an academy. One academy, part of a large trust, relied on its relationship with other schools in the trust for its contingency plan. Rather than working with the schools nearest, they preferred to have a contingency plan with the nearest school in a trust. This left the families of displaced children with a journey across town should their school not remain open. Other trusts were happier to work with maintained schools and join the LA plan. The varying degrees of reluctance for academies to forgo their independence from LAs undermined my efforts to coordinate provision of childcare within my local group of schools and, in turn, the role LAs had been tasked with.

Phase 2: The Road to Normality

On the 10th May Boris Johnson announced that, pending certain measures being met, there would be a phased reopening of schools, therefore largely bringing to an end schools' recently acquired role as child minders. The plan was to prioritise specific year groups in the primary phase of education (3-11-year-olds).

While this was welcomed by some, there was much questioning over whether it would be safe for more pupils in the primary sector to return. The government created five tests and stated that they would take advice from scientists when determining whether they had been met. The largest teacher union in England, the National Education Union (NEU), created their own version of the five tests, effectively raising the bar for the conditions which would allow schools to reopen (NEU 2020). The education secretary of the Labour Party, (the government's main opposition) concurred with the NEU, stating that they thought there were serious problems with the proposed plan (Labour Party 2020). The government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), who provide scientific and technical advice to support government decision making during emergencies, were due to judge whether the government's tests had been met, but had their announcement upstaged by an Independent SAGE publication released a few hours before which argued that the government's plans were not safe (The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies 2020).

With no clear consensus on whether schools should be having more children from June 1st, school leaders were left with a confusing landscape to navigate. Regular reform over many

years has left a number of different types of school and consequently different people holding the power of deciding whether schools should move beyond simply offering childcare for a small group of pupils – see Table 1.

Table 1: School Type and Decisional Authority for More Pupils

Type of school	Who decides if the school has more pupils from June 1st?
Community Voluntary controlled (usually a school with a religious denomination)	Local authority
Academies (including free schools) Voluntary aided (usually a school with a religious denomination) Foundation schools (usually a school with a religious denomination)	Governing board (for groups of academies, this is the board of directors who oversee all academies in the group, rather than any local group)

Up-to-date data on how many of each type school exist is not available, but it is known that around 35 percent of schools in England are academies (NAO 2018). It is clear that for many schools, LAs had a considerable role in deciding whether the government's wish for their plans for June 1st be enacted. After years of their role being gradually reduced by successive governments, the pandemic suddenly left LAs at the centre of a crucial decision: Should schools be returning to their normal role?

In the days following Boris Johnson's 10th May announcement, a range of responses emerged from LAs. From some there was outright hostility to the government's plans. LAs such as Lancashire (Lancashire County Council 2020) and Liverpool (S. McCoid, Where every Liverpool Council Stands on Schools, *Liverpool Echo*, May 20th 2020) stated that the timescale was unreasonable and they considered it unsafe. However, with LAs having few staff left in their education department, making a decision for so many schools was impractical. In my own LA, Warwickshire, there are 114 schools which are either community or voluntary controlled. Bearing in mind the cuts in LA budgets over many years, there were simply not enough staff for the LA to make all decisions for each school themselves. Instead advice was given and decisions made locally by headteachers were rubber stamped.

Throughout the crisis, and beyond the debates focused on educational provision, the extent to which local decision making should take precedence over centrally dictated policy was widely debated. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, said that:

> What we have learned throughout this crisis is that too much has been centralised. They [the government] have been running too much from a national level and they haven't allowed the local or regional input into decision making. (The Today Programme 2020: n.p.)

In the context of education, local decision making was undermining the government's stated policy wish. In the run up to the hoped-for expansion of school on June 1st, more than 20 LAs strongly advised their schools to not open (N. Shaw, Council schools won't reopen, *Derby Telegraph* June 1st 2020).

Harmes (2006: 726) suggests that local decision making, rather than being a deliberate political development, is perhaps more of an inevitable, but unintended consequence of neoliberalism. In England, the decline in the role of the LA should not be taken as an indication of there being a movement away from local decision making. Geddes (2014) describes two stages to the process of 'neoliberalisation'. First the state is 'rolled back' (as we have seen with the gradual decline in LAs) before there is a 'roll out' of various actions which legitimise neoliberalism.

An example of the roll out, or (to use Wilkins' (2016) aforementioned concept) repoliticisation, would be the creation of Regional School Commissioners (RSCs). These are relatively new local bodies, introduced to oversee the academy sector, who are mostly independent of LA influence and have looser democratic controls than LAs. Introduced in 2014, there are eight RSCs who are appointed as civil servants and carry out various functions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. They are overseen by a National Schools Commissioner. They approve the conversion of maintained schools into academies and intervene where academies are said to be underperforming. Concerns have been raised over a blurring of the lines between the role of LAs and RSCs (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts 2015). The confusion was exacerbated by the way the physical boundaries of RSCs did not match the boundaries of LAs (House of Commons Library 2015).

When the pandemic struck, the government needed local bodies to co-ordinate schools' efforts to provide childcare provision. Faced with a choice between using LAs or RSCs, each serving a different section of a fragmented school system, the government chose the former. This was an elevation of the role of LAs; one CEO of an academy trust remarked in a conversation with me there had been more involvement from LAs in their trust during the pandemic than there had been for some time, while the RSC had a comparatively minor role to play.

Conclusions

Given that LAs have been out of favour with the government for some time, it begs the question why were LAs given a central role in coordinating provision during the pandemic, rather than RSCs? The rapid nature of recent developments may well have been a key factor. The education system changed significantly in a period of just a few weeks with little chance

for preparation. I would argue that it has revealed a disjointed education system where LAs' resources have been greatly reduced and new structures, such as RSCs are not yet fully formed. This could be the start of a revival in the role LA although one wonders if the opposition by some LAs towards the government's plans will have only hardened the government's traditional opinion of them.

A key difference between RSCs and LAs is the element of democratic control. While there is a veneer of democratic representation in the work of RSCs – each RSC is supported by a Headteacher Board mostly made up of headteachers who are voted for by other headteachers – this is a limited form of democracy where only the elite have a voice. It fits with an idea about democracy first described by Walter Lippmann in the 1920s. Lippmann (1993) wrote that people are too busy with their lives to be closely involved in decision making. Consequently, they need experts to do the decision making for them. In more recent times Wilkins (2016: 147) has written that if a form of democracy does still exist in the English education system, 'it is one reserved for the skilled and committed'. It has been argued that the individualism that characterises modern society has led to less democracy (Klikauer 2013) and there has been a decline from democratic accountability that was a feature in governance structures from the 1960s and 1970s (Baxter 2016). For Arthur (2015: 311), the decline in the role of local authorities has created confusion in the education system. Historically, local authorities have helped to provide 'agreed collective public and civil values' but now there is a vacuum.

It may be that normally the structure of RSCs is more convenient for the government as a result of their more limited democratic accountability, but the coronavirus pandemic has been an exceptional time. Even Lippmann, who has been described as an elitist (Petrou 2018), advocated a greater role for the public in times of social turbulence, writing that in a crisis 'it is the function of public opinion to check the use of force' (Lippmann 1993: 64). Perhaps therefore, the dissension towards government policy from the local authorities should be welcomed as a healthy indicator of challenge and there being a wide range of opinions held on the difficult question of schools resuming their normal role. It remains to be seen whether the disagreement of LAs with government policy discourages the government from restoring their role they enjoyed before the influence of neoliberalism was felt.

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Academic Integrity During COVID-19: Reflections From the University of Calgary

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Abstract: *In this paper I document and reflect on our institutional response to the coronavirus crisis from an academic integrity perspective. I contemplate how the rapid transition to remote learning impacted academic misconduct, including how assessment of student learning played a role. I explore the proliferation of commercial file-sharing and contract cheating companies during the pandemic, situating Canada within broader global contexts. Finally, I consider how to address concerns around academic integrity as remote and online delivery continue into the fall 2020 semester and beyond.*

Keywords: Academic integrity, COVID-19, emergency conditions, higher education, contract cheating, file-sharing

Introduction

In July 2019 the University of Calgary launched the Educational Leader in Residence (ELR) programme. Faculty members were seconded on a part-time basis to undertake special assignments in priority areas such as graduate supervision and mentorship, online learning and the portfolio I was seconded to, academic integrity. The ELR programme is situated within the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning and is intended to provide support across campus. Little did any of us know when we began our secondment roles how essential our work would become during the COVID-19 crisis that hit during the first year of our assignments. In this paper I document and reflect on our institutional response to the coronavirus crisis from an academic integrity perspective, through the lens of a newly-appointed educational leader in residence whose research programme centres around academic integrity in higher education contexts.

The school of education where I am based has had a robust professional graduate programme which is offered in a variety of formats, with the main focus being blended and online delivery. Over the course of my career I have taught more than 100 online credit and continuing education courses, so I already had extensive experience teaching in an online

environment. When the university announced its transition to remote and online learning in March 2020, I worked alongside colleagues at the institute for teaching and learning to help faculty members transition more than 6000 courses from face-to-face to remote delivery formats in a matter of days. The intensity of the work was unlike anything any of us had ever experienced.

In terms of academic integrity, there is a robust body of literature to show that contrary to popular myths, there is actually *less* academic misconduct in online courses compared with face-to-face delivery (Bretag et al. 2019; Davis, Drinan & Bertram Gallant 2009; Hart & Morgan 2010; Stuber-McEwen, Wiseley & Hoggatt 2009). Studies comparing academic misconduct in face-to-face versus online courses have consistently shown there are higher rates of self-reported misconduct in traditional face-to-face classes (Hart & Morgan 2010; Kidwell & Kent 2008; Stuber-McEwen et al. 2009). However, these same studies also show that students enrolled in online courses were typically older than their face-to-face counterparts and were taking the e-learning versions of the courses voluntarily. Maturity levels of students has been identified as a factor putting students at risk of committing academic misconduct, with the probability decreasing as students mature (Bertram Gallant, Binkin & Donohue 2015). When classes rapidly transitioned from face-to-face to alternate delivery during the coronavirus pandemic, the nature of teaching and learning online was unlike what those with experience with e-learning knew it to be. The technological tools used for delivery may have been the same, but suddenly we had thousands of students and educators working in online environments who had little to no training, experience, or in some cases, willingness. Let's be clear: emergency remote learning is not the same thing as online learning. In the former, panic underpins a rapid response to ensure learning continuity in an uncertain environment. In the latter, students receive orientations to the learning environment and professors receive training and mentoring to think through how to assess students in appropriate and effective ways, and everyone who takes part consents to doing so, at least to some extent.

In the transition to emergency remote delivery during the coronavirus pandemic, the result was that many faculty members kept their assessment practices exactly the same as they had done in face-to-face classes. When this involved administering timed exams in an online environment, the situation quickly became complicated. Suddenly, students were getting higher grades on tests, particularly multiple choice tests, than they ever would have in face-to-face classes. At the time, our university did not have an e-proctoring service for remote online exam invigilation. This led to experimental approaches in invigilation, such as professors using Zoom to try and proctor online exams occurring in real time for up to 800 students at a time; a solution that a couple of us quickly recommended be dropped for a variety of reasons (Eaton 2020; Norman 2020). Although Zoom and other video-conferencing systems have many appropriate uses for online learning, exam invigilation is not one of them (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 2020).

When class averages on these types of tests shot up, it triggered an escalation in finger pointing and adversarial stances between some professors and their students, a position that can exacerbate academic misconduct (Eisner & Vicinus 2008). During a university-wide update delivered via webinar in mid-March, the Provost and Vice-President Academic, commented specifically on academic integrity, saying, 'I want us to start from a place of trust. It is not the majority of students who cheat… We have to start from a position of trust' (Marshall, D., March 19, 2020, webinar address). Our executive leaders signalled to faculty members, students and other campus stakeholders that starting with an assumption of guilt regarding academic misconduct was not going to be the official stance and nor would it be endorsed.

Part of the problem was that faculty members who had never taught online before had little time to consider how assessment in e-learning contexts can, and should, differ from how we assess students in face-to-face environments. This challenged some faculty members' sensibilities around assessment, particularly for those who had been assessing the same way for many years. The general principles of academic freedom point to faculty members' autonomy and authority in how they assess their students, based on their subject matter expertise. However, the impact of these choices, in terms of enabling student academic misconduct was an angle that some of my colleagues had never considered. Some professors had simply never considered that offering an unproctored online multiple-choice exam might make it easy for students to look up the answers online during the exam. There was also a general lack of awareness about the extent to which students engage in online academic file-sharing, which can include sharing exam questions and answers (see Blum 2016; Rogerson & Bassanta 2016). This resulted in an almost immediate escalation of agitation and dismay among some colleagues.

Although universities have yet to collect data, student behaviours related to academic file-sharing and academic outsourcing (also known as contract cheating; Clarke & Lancaster 2006) during the coronavirus pandemic may have increased during the shift to emergency remote learning (White 2020). One reason for this might be that, in addition to maturity levels, another factor influencing student cheating behaviours is stress (McCabe 2016). When students are under extreme stress, such as during exam conditions, they can make poor choices that lead to academic misconduct. The typical levels of stress students were under during the coronavirus pandemic were further escalated as they were moved to emergency remote learning delivered, especially as, in some cases, these were led by professors who had little experience delivering classes in anything other than a face-to-face. The whole world was turned upside down and sometimes the effect on students, in terms of stress and the impact that can have on their behaviour in terms of academic integrity, was a variable that was not fully considered. Another reason might be that the aggressive marketing practices of commercial contract cheating and academic file-sharing companies has exploded during the pandemic (White 2020). Students who previously might not have been tempted to engage

with these companies have found themselves bombarded with offers of 'help' on social media from predatory commercial enterprises wanting to make the most of a stressful situation.

In countries such as Australia and the UK, large-scale efforts have been underway to combat contract cheating (QAA 2016, 2017; Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) 2017). In Europe, there have been multi-country initiatives underway to examine and address academic integrity, including contract cheating, at a macro-level (Glendinning, Foltýnek, Dlabolová, Linkeschová & Lancaster 2017). Meanwhile, in other countries, such as Canada, efforts to address commercial contract cheating have been limited to local or regional efforts and quality assurance bodies have been all but silent on the topic. At my own institution, I regularly interact with academic colleagues and administrators who have little awareness about the industry or how it operates. When I talk about it, some have dismissed contract cheating as hyperbole or sensationalism, or claim that it simply does not happen in Canada, even though there is increasing evidence to show that the industry is quite active in Canada (Eaton & Dressler 2019; Lancaster 2019; Stoesz & Los 2019).

During the COVID-19 crisis, we have certainly seen increases in violations of academic integrity. In keeping with modern approaches that call for a multi-stakeholder response to academic integrity (Morris & Carroll 2016; TEQSA 2017), students are not the only ones who should be held responsible. Of course we want students to conduct themselves in ethical ways and learn with integrity. At the same time, we must recognise that faculty members play a role in ensuring the integrity of assessments can be upheld, and this includes adapting assessments in ways that are appropriate for the learning environment.

As we look towards a fall 2020 semester that will be delivered mostly online, I worry that adversarial stances of some faculty members towards students will not dissipate. Although there are many of us working at full capacity to support academic colleagues to adapt to online contexts into the next academic year, I fear that students will be the ones who lose out. Meanwhile, the predatory commercial contract cheating industry remains poised to make massive profit as they greedily feed off students who continue to find themselves caught in the middle between a higher education system that has not yet fully adapted to online learning, and the cheating cartels ready to seduce them with false promises of 'help'.

My second and final year in the secondment role of educational leader in residence for academic integrity for the university is about to get underway. To say that I anticipate that it will be a busy and challenging year is an understatement. The biggest challenge might come from colleagues who continue to resist adapting their assessment practices to ones that are more appropriate for online learning and persist in their belief that students are the only ones responsible for maintaining academic integrity. I intend to forge ahead with conversations about how and why instructional integrity is an essential component of academic integrity, as well as continue to provide evidence about how commercial contract cheating cartels operate and present a threat to our students, but also to the integrity of our institutions.

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Can Ghanaian Universities Still Attract International Students in Spite of COVID-19?

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Abstract: *The higher education landscape across the globe has changed dramatically over the past few months due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities are confronted with unprecedented challenges, which include the prediction that student numbers are likely to reduce. With this pandemic it can be anticipated that the numbers would reduce further especially for international students. This paper outlines some of the factors that have enabled Ghanaian universities to attract foreign students before the COVID-19 pandemic and it assesses the impact the pandemic is likely to have on Ghanaian higher education institutions in terms of international student numbers. Drawing from available literature and experience of the writers in educational administration, some recommendations are made to guide higher education managers as they face this new normal.*

Keywords: Internationalisation, higher education, international admissions

Introduction

There are important reasons why universities worldwide give much attention to international students' admission. This is because internationalisation facilitates the integration of an international, intercultural and global dimension into the goals, teaching, learning, research and service functions of any university. According to Knight (2014), internationalisation emphasises the relationship between and among nations, people, cultures, institutions and systems. Also, international students among others bring cultural diversity to enrich university life, provide different perspectives for teaching and learning, enrich research and serve as potential sources of manpower and collaborations. Another factor that motivates universities to admit foreign students is the fact that they pay higher tuition fees, which are very important to the budget of the universities.

Internationalisation has economic, social and academic impacts. For economic reasons, Khorsandi Taskoh (2014) indicated that there is competition among institutions for

recruitment of foreign students from privileged countries in order to generate revenue, secure national profile and build international reputation.

On the social front, internationalisation, according to Altbach and Knight (2007), grants access to students from countries with limited access to domestic higher education opportunities to access and obtain their education in a foreign country. Academically, the admission of international students also enables faculty members to adapt their teaching style and content delivery to suit students with diverse backgrounds and needs. It is for some of these reasons that all Ghanaian universities strive to attract and recruit international students. However, according to Chasi (2020), the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic provides us with an opportunity to re-think the world of higher education internationalisation afresh, casting a critical eye on the concepts, models and practices we have become accustomed to.

Why Ghanaian Universities Are Able to Attract International Students

Ghana has been a good destination for students from various parts of the world, especially from the West African sub-region, who wish to study outside their country of residence. This preference could be attributed to many reasons, a few of which have been outlined below:

Ghanaian Universities are most preferred by foreign students because over the years, Ghana has been comparatively stable within the West African sub-region. In recent times, political instability has caused significant disruption to many universities within the sub-region and indeed sub-Saharan Africa. Labour unrests prevalent in most West African countries lead to the frequent closure of higher education institutions. Parents and students, therefore, find Ghana a safe place where students could safely undertake their academic journey and be sure to complete within a reasonable time.

Secondly, the cost of schooling in Ghana is comparatively cheaper than schooling in America, Europe or Asia. This is partly because transportation within the sub-region is far cheaper than travelling outside the region. Again, accommodation in Ghana is considered manageable financially as compared to what is offered elsewhere. Additionally, Ghana is known as a good destination for foreigners due to the hospitable nature of Ghanaian citizens, and the fact that the country has a variety of rich and nutritious foods to which foreigners are able to easily adapt.

Tuition fees are a major consideration for international students. The fees universities charge is a major factor that can determine the number of international students they can attract. Maringe and Woodfield (2013) noted that international students pay inflated tuition fees when compared to domestic students, which can act as a barrier for international study opportunities. This notwithstanding, universities in Ghana are able to attract a good number of international students because they charge moderate fees. Even though America and Europe are the most preferred destinations for many students in West Africa, tuition fees serve as one of the deciding factors. This is where Ghanaian universities have the advantage;

they offer high quality academic programmes, a serene and stable academic environment with moderate fees to these students.

Another reason why universities in Ghana are able to attract a good number of students from West African countries is the medium of communication. Ghana attracts more students from Nigeria, Liberia and The Gambia because of the common medium of communication. Most students prefer having their international education in a language they are more comfortable with. Ghana is surrounded by Cote d'Ivoire, Togo and Burkina Faso which are all French-speaking, but students from these countries prefer to school in Ghana in order to have the opportunity of learning English as a second international language in addition to the degrees they ultimately obtain. For some of such students, although they can speak English adequately, interacting with students in Ghana offers them the opportunity to polish their spoken English.

Many international students call Ghana their 'home away from home'. This is largely because of proximity. It takes international students only a few hours to travel from their countries to Ghana. Some are able to come by road, while others come by air. Probably, the most important factor to these students and their parents, as far as proximity is concerned, is the ability for these students to visit home easily or, parents to visit their wards while on campus. During graduation ceremonies, many parents and relations are able to join their wards and share the special time with them. This is possible because it does not cost too much in terms of transportation to join their special ones during such important and memorable occasions.

Importantly, one does not need to acquire a visa to travel from a West African country to Ghana. As part of the protocols between these countries, one can travel across the sub-region without a visa. Besides, there is easy access by road to Ghana due to the West African highway. This makes movement across the region easy for students and their relations to travel in and out of the country. The fact that there are a lot of tourist sites in Ghana and the notion that most Ghanaians are noted worldwide for their hospitality, all serve as incentives to many.

The above reasons and many more have helped universities in Ghana attract international students to their campuses. However, this opportunity, which Ghanaian universities have enjoyed over the years, will undoubtedly not be the same after this COVID-19 pandemic. This is because, as Mohammedbhai (2020: n.p.) put it, 'COVID-19 will leave no sector in any country in the world unaffected, and its consequences will be felt for years to come'. Therefore, to say the pandemic has been a game changer across the globe is an understatement. It is predicted that universities could experience a significant drop in their international student intake. Even on domestic applications, DePietro (2020: n.p.) has projected that 'new domestic applications are likely to go down as many students and their parents may no longer be in the position to afford tuition fees because of being laid off, furloughed, unable to pay off loans, needing to dip into their savings'. This could have

significant impact on many of the universities in view of the importance of these students to the universities.

Even though the COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to have negative effects on international student intake, universities in Ghana could adopt strategies which could position them not only to maintain their international student numbers, but also increase these numbers. In the words of Hinson (2020), for universities to remain viable and essential to the public trust, they must pay attention to marketing and employ sound marketing strategies to ensure value to their stakeholders. To fulfil their core mandates, Ghanaian universities must in the wake of this pandemic start serious reflections on the impact and assess possible consequences before it becomes too late. This calls for holistic approaches that involve all relevant stakeholders.

Recommendations on How Universities in Ghana Can Attract More International Students

In order for universities in Ghana to hold on to their international student numbers and even add to them, the following strategies are recommended:

First, universities in Ghana should reduce fees to attract more international students. Reducing fees may not necessarily mean reducing revenue. This is because fee reduction can lead to more student admissions, which will lead to an increase in revenue. Fee reduction is critical at this time for international students because the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the incomes of many families. In view of this, a reduction in fees between say 20 to 30 percent for international students will be a strong statement from these universities. It is expected that if this reduction is compensated by a similar percentage increase in student intake (or even comparatively lower increase in intake), these universities would still be better off.

Another way Ghanaian universities can attract more international students is to offer these students their first choice programmes as much as possible. Over the years, international students have preferred programmes like Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Petroleum and Petro-chemical Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Law, Business Administration and the like. In most cases, due to stiff competition, these preferred programmes cannot be offered to the applicants. They are therefore offered their second and third preferred programmes. Many of the students who do not get their first choices usually decline the admission. The universities can take a second look at this by trying as much as possible, to offer these international students their most preferred programmes. This can, significantly, improve the intake of international students.

Universities in Ghana should create special offices for international students. International student admission must be seen as a special project. Over the years, most of the universities in Ghana have not given special attention to international student admission. They, usually, lump this with domestic admissions and allow the same team and office to handle it. Most of the universities in Ghana do not have special offices or special desks for international students and international admissions. In some cases, international applicants and their parents who

intend to make enquiries struggle to get attention. In many cases, they have had to use the same contact lines which domestic applicants also use and which are often very busy. This should change if Ghanaian universities want to make any gains in international student admission. The universities which do not have such offices should start setting up special offices and special desks to handle international student matters.

Ghanaian universities can continue to attract international students through the provision of decent accommodation. In most of our universities, student accommodation is a scarce resource. Therefore, the majority of the universities in Ghana have policies that regulate the allocation of rooms. On most of our campuses preference is given to fresh students when it comes to accommodation. No special arrangements are made for international students. Even with this arrangement, not all first year students get campus accommodation. Those who are unable to secure campus accommodation due to late admission and other genuine reasons have no option but to look for private hostels within the communities where these universities are located. To attract international students, it is proposed that special arrangements should be made to house international students throughout their stay on the various campuses.

The outbreak of this pandemic has revealed that the health systems of most developing countries have serious challenges and Ghana is no exception. Most of our hospitals lack state of the art technological equipment and sometimes even basic protective clothing and equipment. With these challenges, even on the national front, it presupposes that the various health facilities on our various campuses cannot be left out. To adequately take care of the health needs of our international students, the universities should build hospitals and equip existing ones with modern proper equipment. Besides, special arrangements should be made to take care of the health needs of international students as a matter of policy.

Another strategy the universities can use is online engagement with candidates. Potential students and their parents often have concerns. They need information on the universities, campuses, security, transportation, arrival protocols, immigration requirements, where to report upon arrival, what to do on arrival, how to locate their hostels and much more. Universities which take these matters as trifles are yet to wake from their slumber. These issues are critical to international students, especially, fresh students. The universities need to provide online tours of their campuses on their websites to help fresh students have a comprehensive view of the campuses. Again, webinars and online counselling sessions should be organised to address pertinent questions bothering people. These would be ideal both as part of the admission process and also as part of reopening arrangements.

The universities in Ghana should build stronger relationships with their international students. Usually, once these students report to campus, very little could be picked between them and the local students. No special attention is given to them. In most of the universities, they go through the same orientation with the local students. They do not receive any special welcome from their Heads of Department or Deans, let alone the Registrar or Vice-Chancellor. The only time some of these students may see their Registrar or Vice-Chancellor may be

during matriculation and graduation ceremonies. Universities in Ghana should do better than this if they want to remain in the competition for students from the international arena.

International students must be seen and treated with a special focus. The universities must court the loyalty of these students right from admission to graduation. Heads, Deans, Registrars and, where possible, the Vice-Chancellors should have special engagements with these students from time to time. Imagine the Vice-Chancellor's dinner with international students and the impact it could make. Again, the universities could organise special local tours, visits to important places and sight-seeing for these international students. These could have lasting impact on the students outside their academics. The students may inform their parents, younger siblings and even their own children about these experiences and this could have positive results in future enrolment for the universities.

Universities in Ghana must use their international alumni for admissions. Referrals are effective tools used in the business sector. This strategy is also relevant to universities. Many parents want their wards to enrol with the parents' alma mater. This is referral. In the same way, international alumni could serve as good references for international admissions. In this case, the universities would need to build strong alumni associations among their past international students. This vision should be nursed while the students are on campus so the universities could easily connect with them when they leave campus.

Universities in Ghana should offer incentives for international students. For example, where parents have three wards with a university, the university could waive the tuition fee of the third child. Again, students who pay their fees in advance could be given an attractive discount. These could go a long way to motivate these students. Beside these, the universities could allow international students to apply online without the payment of admission and processing fee. If the student will end up paying tuition fee, it should not be difficult for the universities to waive the admission and processing fee which often serve as a hindrance to many international applicants.

Conclusion

According to DePietro (2020), Gaidi Faraj, Dean of the African Leadership University has commented that 'COVID-19 has forced all of us to re-imagine how we deliver an engaging and holistic experience for students'. He added that, while the disease presents its challenges, it is also a massive opportunity to break out of old habits and create new, impactful, relevant modes of learning that take advantage of technology. Since international students are one of the major customers and stakeholders of universities, there is the need for universities in Ghana to be strategic towards issues relating to international student admission and their life on campus. Our universities cannot continue to handle international student affairs the way they did pre COVID-19. They must start initiatives aimed at adopting a completely new approach if they intend to maintain their international student numbers and even improve upon them.

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Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Work of University Administrators in Ghana

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Abstract: *This paper examined how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the work of university administrative and professional staff in Ghana. The pandemic has affected higher education institutions (HEIs) throughout the world in the areas of teaching, learning, research and the provision of administrative support services. In this paper, we used survey data and in-depth interview transcripts to describe how a selection of administrative and professional staff from eight public universities in Ghana are affected. The survey targeted members of the Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA) which is made up of non-teaching Senior Members of the public universities. We found that the work of university administrators in Ghana was mainly office based with little or no virtual working schedules or platforms. We, therefore, predict a drastic shift from office-based working to blended-working schedules among university administrative and professional staff in the post-COVID-19 era.*

Keywords: University administration, COVID-19, blended working, HR policy, professional competencies, technological challenge

Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19 pandemic) has become a serious global health emergency with dire consequences. As the pandemic continues to eclipse the world with lock-down and social distancing protocols implemented by countries to slow down the spread of the virus, there are discussions around the world about its impact on the different segments of the higher education sector in the areas of teaching, learning, research and funding. Beyond these important areas, it is noteworthy to discuss the impact of the crisis on university administrators. University administrators include non-teaching Senior Members in the public universities who provide administrative and/or professional services such as admissions, student affairs services, counselling and administrative support in general. There is little doubt about the fact that the pandemic has presented university administrators with much

uncertainty about the future of their work. Although we do not know any statistics about the working schedules of university administrators throughout the world before the pandemic, we speculate that the majority did not work virtually, mostly due to the nature of administrative support services. In a developing country like Ghana, internet connectivity challenges make it a daunting task for university administrators to work virtually. The question that arises during the pandemic is: What is the impact of lock-down and social distancing protocols on the work of the university administrator? We investigated this question by analysing data from a cross section of administrators in Ghana's public universities about their working schedules before, during and after the crisis. The objectives were to help unpack the nature of services rendered by university administrators, the medium of work and what may change in the post-COVID-19 era.

Review of Relevant Literature

The varied work of HEIs, in this case universities, is carried out by different categories of staff. University administration is one of the most important career areas in higher education management/administration. It is carried out by people with different professional and educational backgrounds and varied competencies that are required to work in a rapidly changing academic work environment. For the purpose of this paper, we briefly explored some literature on the theory and practice of educational administration in the Ghanaian context and the impact of COVID-19 on higher educational administration.

Theory and Practice of Educational Administration

Educational administration is a distinct discipline that plays a key role in achieving the goals of an educational enterprise. It is very important to appreciate the underlying concepts in the global context and apply them to appreciate the dynamics within the Ghanaian context.

Empirical evidences have shown that educational administration has evolved. Adebayo (2001) postulates that there has to be administration in any organisation in so far as human beings are gathered together in a hierarchical order, thereby making use of human and material resources towards the achievement of objectives. According to Pont, Nusche and Moorman (2018), educational administration is a process of utilising appropriate materials in such a way as to effectively promote the development of human qualities. It, therefore, includes the totality of those techniques and procedures employed in operating the educational organisation in accordance with established policies (Akinwumi and Jayeoba 2004). Consequently, Okendu (2012) stresses the need for both human and material resources to be brought together within the school system to engender any effective teaching and learning process. This view is premised on earlier views expressed by Knezevich (1984) who thought of the concept as a social process that creates, maintains, stimulates, controls and combines human and material energy within an integrated system that has been designed to achieve predetermined (educational) objectives. For instance, Campbell, Corbally and Ramseyer (1966) observe that educational administration consists of facilitating the

development of goals and policies basic to teaching and learning, stimulating the development of appropriate programmes, recruiting and managing personnel and the procurement of materials to implement teaching and learning goals. This view is supported by Amadi (2008) who defines educational administration as a process through which the school administrators arrange and coordinate the resources available to education for the purpose of achieving the goals of the educational system. Kaur and Kaur (2016), on their part, opine that educational administration is about formulating the general plans and policies for an educational enterprise. What these connote is that there must be a goal at which human and material resources are aimed to achieve and lay credence to the earlier views that educational administration concerns itself with the achievement of educational goals of facilitating teaching and learning.

Roles and Nature of Work by University Administrators

In the opinion of Mohanty (2005), university administrators concern themselves with all the activities incidental to the achievement of the pre-determined goals. They do this through the proper utilisation of resources (human and material) which borders on some aspects of management, regarded as functions of administration. These functions include planning (goal setting, vision, mission of the school, etc.), organising (marshalling and deployment of both material and human resources), directing, coordinating, supervising, controlling and evaluating. Effah (2017) broadly categorises the functions into *advisory, procedural, supervisory* and *managerial* roles. This means that all the day-to-day functions of the university administrator could be seen from the viewpoint of offering expert advice on the progress of an issue, adhering to established protocols and following laid-down bureaucratic procedures (administrative procedures and processes), and providing leadership or the management of resources (human and material). The performance of these functions has undoubtedly been influenced by the pandemic.

Similarly, Amadi (2008) outlines the task areas of the educational administrator into five main areas of curriculum/instructional functions, staffing function, student personnel function, financial and physical resources management function and the function of school/community relations. Consequently, any task of the educational administrator could be said to fall under one of the above broad categorisations which include planning, organising or evaluating an educational activity. Duze (2012) explains that the primary concern of university administrators is how to manage resources allocated to them and do so by managing budgets, human resources, policy, shape institutional priorities and practices. They plan and make decisions on course materials, recruitment and training of instructors and the use of communication tools.

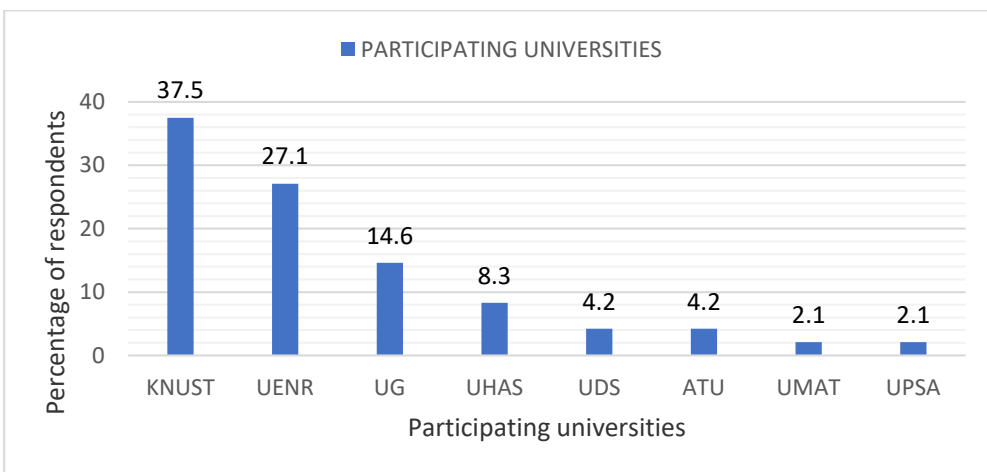
In the Ghanaian context, university administration can be explained in two breadths; in one breadth, it encompasses all top-level management staff of the university, which is made up of the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Provosts, Directors and Deans who are charged to implement the university's strategy. They are supported by administrative and professional staff who include General Administrators, Chartered Accountants, Lawyers,

Public Affairs Specialists, Engineers, Architects, Planners, Surveyors, Land Economists, Estate Officers, Procurement Officers, Medical Officers, Pharmacists, ICT Specialists, Human Resource Managers, Security Experts, Dentists, etc. (Asamoah-Boateng, 2020). This paper focuses on the latter group of university administrators who play middle-to-senior-level management roles.

Methods

This study adopted a mixed method research approach to unearth the opinions of university administrators about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their work. The online survey strategy was used to collect data from a selection of administrative and professional staff from eight public universities in Ghana. The survey instrument was sent to 11 public universities out of which 48 administrators from seven universities and one technical university responded. We conducted in-depth interviews with five purposively selected respondents who provided ideas about the topic. These interviews were conducted by telephone from May 26 to May 30, 2020 after we had received the survey responses. We used the interview transcripts to contextualise some of the responses received from the survey. The survey report was analysed through the use of graphs. The respondents were drawn from the following public universities: the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the University of Energy and Natural Resources (UENR), the University of Ghana (UG), the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS), the University for Development Studies (UDS), the Accra Technical University (ATU), the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Tarkwa and the University for Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage Sample Distribution of Universities for the Survey



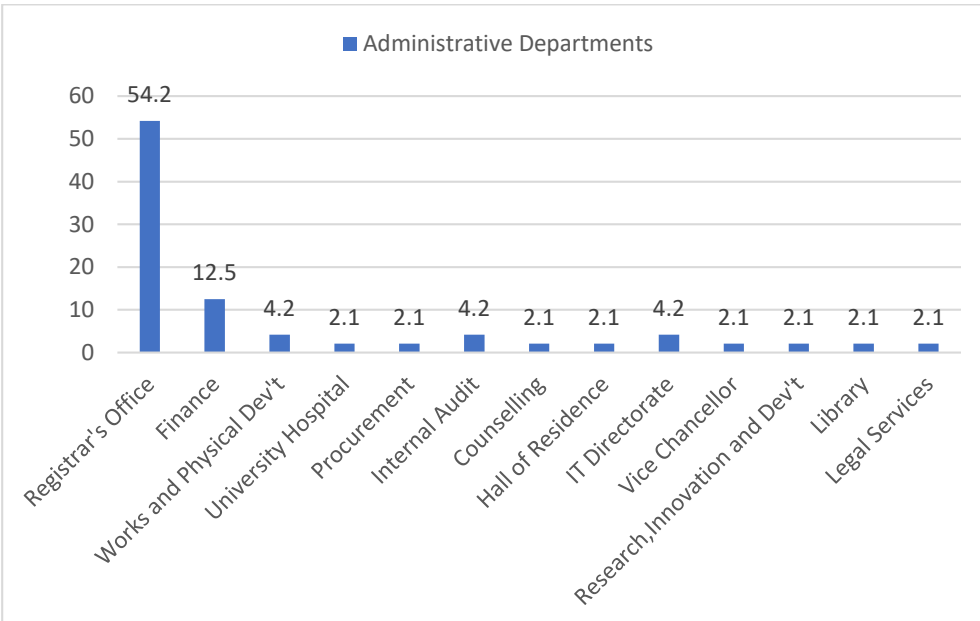
Source: Online Survey (May 2020)

Results and Discussions

Administrative Department of the Respondents

The survey solicited information on the particular office in which respondents worked in their institution. From the survey, the Registrar's Offices recorded the highest respondents with 54.2 percent. This is partly so because, most of the administrative departments in the universities in Ghana are under the Registrar's Offices. This was followed by respondents from the Finance Directorate, Works and Physical Development Department, Internal Audit and the IT Directorate (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of University Administrative Departments



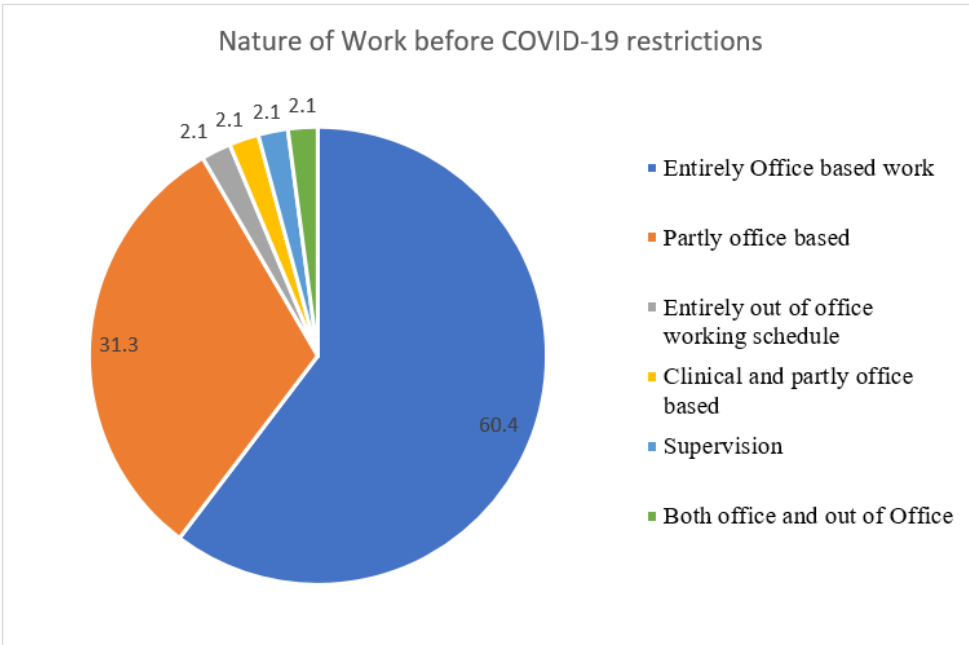
Source: Online Survey (May 2020)

The rest of the offices included Procurement, Counselling, Vice Chancellor's Office and the Library. The nature of the work of the respondents confirms the general trend in the literature (Asamoah-Boateng 2020; Duze 2017; Tolman & Calhoun 2019) that university administrators perform administrative, teaching and learning support services in various departments such as general administration, finance and academic quality assurance.

Pre- Covid-19 University Administrative Work

The results of the survey revealed that the work of the majority of respondents (60.4%) were mostly or entirely office-based (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of the Nature of Respondents' Work Before COVID-19 Restrictions

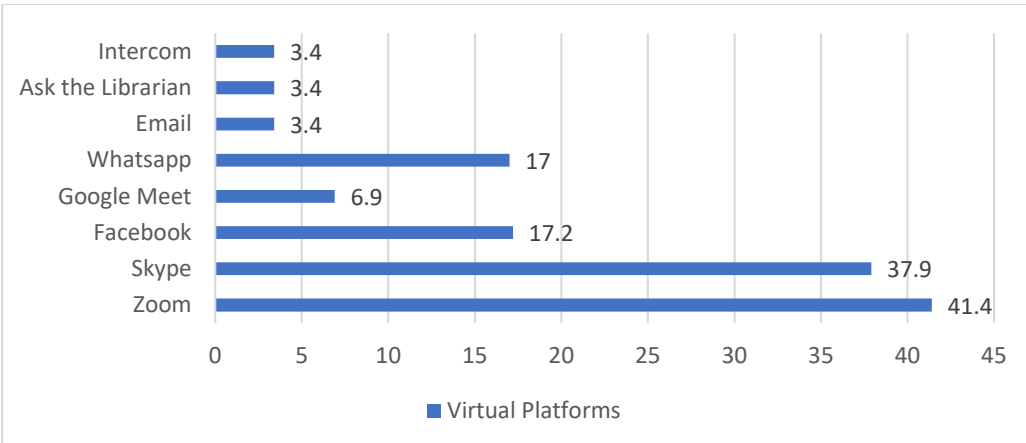


Source: Online Survey (May 2020)

Although there are no official statistics on how university administrators in Ghana performed their day-to-day administrative functions before the crisis, the survey report shows that work was mostly done intensively in office. Even where technology could allow for blended-working schedules among university administrators, work culture and other constraints made it less attractive to work virtually. This involved physically performing administrative work in the office premises. This was the case for the majority, as 58.3 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not employ any virtual platforms in performing their roles. The nature of university administrative work is mostly office-based because most of the roles involve face-to-face contacts with the various clientele (i.e. faculty, students, prospective students, parents). There is, however, a growing attempt to provide online services. This is often hampered by technological challenges such as poor internet connection and cost of data. The next category of respondents (31.3%) indicated that the nature of their work was blended; partly office work and field work. This suggests that looking at the nature of university administrator's work, restrictions of the pandemic would have severe negative effects on productivity. The survey further revealed that 39.6 percent of the respondents used virtual platforms of various kinds to help in performing their roles.

The survey revealed that out of the 39.6 percent of the respondents who used virtual platforms in performing administrative roles before Covid-19 restrictions, Zoom had the highest usage of 41.4 percent, followed by Skype (37.9%), Facebook (17.2%) and WhatsApp (17%). The least used platforms were 'intercom', 'emails' and 'Ask the Librarian' which recorded 3.5 percent each (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of the Various Virtual Platforms Used by the Respondents



Source: Online Survey (May 2020)

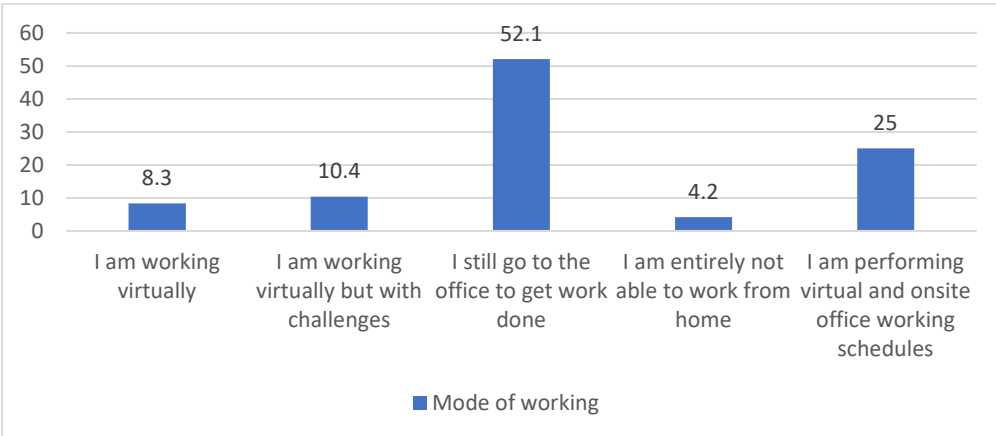
Work Schedules in the Covid-19 Era Among University Administrators

Ghana temporarily closed universities in March 2020. This change made university administrators adjust their work schedules due to social and physical distancing protocols. The survey revealed that the majority of respondents (52.1%) continued to go to their offices to work, while 25 percent indicated they combined both virtual and in-office working schedules. It follows that the majority of the respondents did not adopt the use of any virtual work schedules but continued to perform their duties only when they were in the office. The survey further revealed that 10.4 percent of the respondents said, 'I am working virtually but with challenges' while 8.3 percent said 'I am working virtually' (see Figure 5).

Only a small percentage of the respondents said they were working virtually in the COVID-19 era without challenges. A Deputy Registrar explained that:

> … The crisis has rendered me 'redundant' because I am unable to work although there is work to be done. I go to the office twice a week to make sure that administration functions are rendered. I try to work from home, but it is virtually impossible because the university is not programmed that way…everything is office-based… (Phone interview, Deputy Registrar, KNUST, 30.05.2020)

Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Working Schedule During the COVID-19 Restrictions

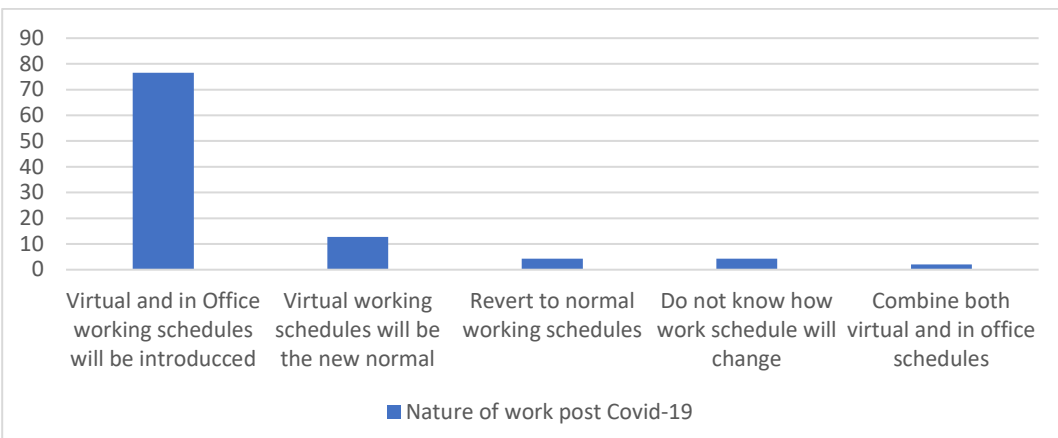


Source: Online Survey (May 2020)

The Post-COVID-19 University Administrator in Ghana

As at the time of writing this paper, universities in Ghana continue to be closed and there is growing uncertainty regarding how universities will resume academic work. Much the same way, university administrators are uncertain as to how their work will change during and in the post-COVID-19 era. The survey revealed that the majority of the respondents (76.6%) envisaged a blend of 'virtual and in-office working schedules will be introduced', while 12.8 percent said 'virtual working schedules will be the new normal' (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percentage Distribution of the Nature of Work Among University Administrators Post COVID-19



Source: Online Survey (May 2020)

One Accountant stated as follows:

> … Even those of us in accounts section who did not think about taking our accounting work virtual, this crisis shows we must start to do things differently. We cannot continue to be glued to our offices… (In-depth interview, Senior Accountant, UENR-Sunyani, 27.05.2020)

A Senior Assistant Registrar shared the views of the Accountant by saying:

> … The pandemic has showed that we have to shift to virtual working schedules. Look, there are so many tasks we can perform without coming to the office everyday… (In-depth interview, Senior Assistant Registrar, KNUST 29.05.2020)

The views of the respondents pointed to a need to appraise current work schedules of university administrators and design work in a way that staff can perform their duties and achieve the same results as though they were in the office.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

University administrators play critical roles in universities all over the world. In Ghana, most of the administrators worked in the office, with limited use of virtual platforms. Even during pandemic shutdowns, the majority of people chose to go to the office to work. There is some increase in blended-work schedules, and as the shutdown continues, workers are anticipating that there will be increased virtual work in the post-COVID world (Cohen 2020). The technology limitations that exist in Ghana at the moment may slow this, but the expectation is that long-term blended work will be the new normal. There is the likelihood that there may be major changes for the universities. Computers, devices and networks would need to be improved and training provided. Human resource policies would have to be updated to reflect the needs of modern times. Universities would have to create enabling environments to support staff as virtual work platforms become more important and more common. We believe that such changes will improve the work of the university administrator in the ever-changing world.

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Transitioning to Online Distance Learning in the COVID-19 Era: A Call for Skilled Leadership in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Darcia Roache, Dina Rowe-Holder and Richard Muschette

Abstract: *In the context of the global challenges of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the unprecedented change to the educational landscape, the paper explores the need for skilled leadership to assist learners' transitioning to online distance learning in higher education institutions (HEIs). Throughout the conceptual paper, discussions will emanate on how learners and educational leaders at HEIs are managing the transition to operate in full online modalities in response to the global coronavirus pandemic. The conclusion focuses on skilled leadership in education as a necessary tool to transform the learning experiences of HEIs learners and to facilitate their transition to online distance learning.*

Keywords: Skilled leadership, online distance learning, COVID-19, students' engagement, HEIs, financial management, policy and planning, student support services

Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had brought unprecedented change to our lives and the educational landscape. Based on a UNESCO Report (2020) on COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Responses, governments in 161 countries around the world, in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, have closed educational facilities at all levels of their education systems. The report further stated that these closures are 'impacting over 60% of the world's student population' (para. 1) of which higher education institutions are included. As a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, HEIs, like other educational institutions, have been forced to continue their educational offerings through online distance learning (ODL).

Online distance learning in HEIs is ubiquitous and has been driven by massification and an ever-growing demand of adult learners for flexibility in their education programmes (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley 2009; Bichsel 2013). This paper discusses how HEIs are transitioning their programmes to operate in full online modalities in response to the global coronavirus pandemic. Skilled leadership in HEIs is imperative in leading this transition. Some considerations for moving courses fully online include policy and planning, financial management, designing and delivering lessons, student support services, and student engagement (Bates & Sangra 2011; Levy 2003). Skilled leadership, and each of these considerations, will now be explored briefly.

Skilled Leadership

Leading organisational change requires skilled leadership. Northouse (2013) describes the skills approach to leadership as an approach which focuses on what the leader has the potential to achieve based on the acquired skills, knowledge and attitudes that are required for the leader to work effectively. Katz (1974) argues that leadership is primarily based on technical, human and conceptual skills. Technical skills relate to proficiency and technical knowledge of the company's products, services, rules, regulations (Katz 1974; Yukl 2006). Whilst human skills relate to interpersonal skills of the leader required to influence other team members to achieve organisational goals (Katz 1974; Yukl 2006). Conceptual skills are synonymous with problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Northouse 2013).

Meanwhile, Goleman (1995) in his description of effective leaders describes similar competencies for skilled leadership; however, he includes emotional intelligence (EI) which he describes as being able to work collaboratively and effectively to lead change. Goleman (1998) believes that emotional intelligence is the most important factor needed for highly skilled leaders. EI constitutes self-awareness, empathy, motivation, self-regulation, and motivation (Goleman 1995, 1998). Further, Marques (2013) terms the aforementioned components as soft skills and argues that successful leaders should seek to strengthen these skills to become more effective. Additionally, Warrick (2011) argues that there is a need for skilled leadership to manage change amidst scarce resources. Fullan (2011) postulated that skilled leaders focus on building strong relationships with staff, faculty, students and other stakeholders especially in times of crisis.

Policy and Planning

One area which is crucial in the transformation to online distance learning is educational policy and planning (Bates & Sangra 2011). Skilled leaders should implement policies to govern the educational systems and to support pedagogical awareness surrounding learning. Educational policy and planning include policies such as staff training and support, student services, and student training and support (Levy & Beaulieu 2003). These policies will aid the smooth transition of the achievement of goals and objectives in unforeseen circumstances.

Policies should be aligned with the organisation's mission and vision. When online learning is integrated into the institution's policies, it fosters greater adoption and relevance for stakeholders (Casanova & Price 2018). Skilled leadership is imperative to have the vision to create policies which are aligned to the mission and vision of the institution. Leadership must be strategic in making these decisions which will have incremental benefits for the institution. In this regard, strategic change leadership should work collaboratively with all key stakeholders involved (Hache 2000; Levy 2003).

Financial Management

Financial management impacts every business entity, educational organisations, marketing and sales, and every major force of the organisation such as economic and technological. Financial management accountability processes in every department of education involves the functions of management: planning, organising, leading, and controlling. These functions work together to create, execute, and realise the strategic directions or goals for educational organisations. In educational organisations every department needs sufficient financial resources to meet their daily financial obligations (Ahmad & Shah 2015). Colleges and universities are no exception and are incumbent on adherence to institutional financial needs. COVID-19 has resulted in unprecedented financial challenges in operating the institutional balance sheet. Kim and Woodland (2020) stated that an evaluation of HEIs strategic and financial plans should involve contingency decisions that weigh the development of programs against new financial realities. Kim and Woodland (2020: 1) further stated that:

> Potential job losses and income reductions in the wake of an economic downturn may make financial aid awarded for the upcoming year insufficient, creating additional financial pressure on the institution to make up the shortfall. Inability to make up the financial aid shortfall may result in enrollment target shortfalls.

Financial management accounts for proper accountability of HEIs' operations, to include the designing and delivering of lessons. This necessitates skilled leadership to ensure that the appropriation of financial resources is in keeping with financial guidelines/regulations of institutions.

Designing and Delivering Lessons

Online distance learning technologies in HEIs allows the delivery of learning resources or communications between instructors and students which may be applied either to the learning technology itself or to online pedagogical methods (Cheawjindakarn, Suwannatthacote & Theeraroungchaisri 2012). Ease of access to education has improved drastically with the growth of information technology. Teaching and learning in universities have adapted to keep up with the changes in communications and information technology (Cheawjindakarn et al. 2012: 1). Since adult learners are motivated and self-directed with a wide range of experiences (Merriam 2001), facilitators are encouraged to design learning

experiences which are related to these learner experiences and to apply practical solutions to problems which the learners may encounter in their daily interactions. The challenge for the facilitator is to provide an environment which involves interaction and collaboration to facilitate adult learning (Cercone 2008).

According to Martin, Polly, Jokiaho and May (2017), crucial to delivering a quality online learning experience is having standards, ensuring there is instructional design, development and analysis, and having faculty and student support. Additionally, the importance of timely and constructive feedback between students and instructors serves to enhance the instructors' skills and students' learning (Al-Bashir, Kabir & Rahman 2016) and critical feedback enhances students' engagement with their facilitators.

Keengwe and Kidd (2010) noted that, when teaching online, the facilitators' role may be viewed as encompassing pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles. The pedagogical role equates to facilitating the course/s being offered, whilst the social role entails the creation of a friendly social online learning environment (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz & Santiague 2017). The managerial role involves 'agenda setting, pacing, objective setting, rule-making, and decision making while the technical role depends on the instructors first becoming comfortable with the technology being used and then being able to transfer that level of comfort to their learners' (Keengwe & Kidd 2010: 4). Further, Coppola, Hiltz and Rotter (2002) supported the argument by distinguishing three roles that can aid faculty in the development of teaching an online course: cognitive, affective, and managerial. The cognitive role connects the learners' mental processes of learning, information storage, and thinking. The affective role influences the relationships among the students, faculty, and the classroom environment. The managerial role guides the faculty with strategies how to manage the class and course (Keengwe & Kidd 2010; Liu, Kim, Bonk & Magjuka 2007). Teaching an online course requires instructors to acquire unique knowledge, skills, and abilities (Howell, Saba, Lindsay & Williams 2004) to successfully operate in the new paradigm and to support students' learning.

Student Support Services

The change leadership needed to navigate this new paradigm should also consider student support services as part of the delivery (Schroeder 2001). How students are being supported in this period of transitioning to online learning should also be crucial to instructional design that is student-centred. This area of support should be constantly reviewed to continue to contribute to the services which would have been offered on the physical campus. Since students may no longer have access to the physical sites, as part of the strategic planning, student services which offer technical help, and other services which were offered face-to-face, should also be available to students (Jaggars 2014). Further, as long as HEIs remain student centred, students' health and well-being are key areas of support that should be

addressed. No doubt, some students are facing emotional distress as a direct result of the pandemic (Roy et al. 2020).

To mitigate the stress of staying at home for extended periods, some universities in China have provided counselling services to students (Wang, Cheng, Yue & McAleer, 2020). During this transition, faculty, staff and students may become isolated and struggle with establishing boundaries between work and home (Rose 2020); thus, critical to this transition is a forward-thinking approach which employs practical solutions.

Students' Engagement

Students' engagement in online learning can enhance a culture of learning in higher education. Krause and Coates (2008) defined student engagement as the 'effort and commitment that students give to their learning' (p. 1). The commitment of learners adds value to class discussions, increases students' knowledge, and according to Kahn, Everington, Kelm, Reid and Watkins (2017), provides an active and collaborative learning environment to solve challenging academic issues and enhance interaction between students and faculty. Educational technology contributes to students' engagement in online learning.

The use of social media tools aid students' engagement in online learning through social and interpersonal connections (Heiberger & Harper 2008; Junco, Heiberger & Loken 2011). Students can develop their online social relations by working collaboratively, using social media tools such as twitter (Kahn et al. 2017). 'Twitter can promote student engagement through enhanced communication and interpersonal connections between students' (Kahn et al. 2017: 2). Students' engagement in the online learning environment in the COVID-19 era calls for skilled leadership to provide the best learning experience for students' learning and the school community. Drysdale and Gurr (2017: 1) postulated that:

> In times of great change, complexity, and uncertainty [like the global response to the 2020 pandemic], school leaders are challenged to adapt and navigate their way through the tide of internal and external forces to create the best positive outcome for students and the school community.

Gurr and Drysdale (2017) posited that in challenging or times of uncertainty educational leaders should develop capabilities to help them lead their organisations successfully. They described seven domains of practice that could be used to embrace leadership challenges in times of uncertainty. These are 'understanding the context, setting direction, developing the organisation, developing people, improving teaching and learning, influencing, and leading self' (Gurr & Drysdale 2017: 1). The importance of these practices for skilled leadership in HEIs cannot be overemphasised as they contribute to the recognition of pedagogical practices of educational leaders and learners.

Conclusion

The transitioning to online distance learning in the COVID-19 era indeed calls for skilled leadership in HEIs. The biggest advantage of the crisis seems to be that it has fostered the development and utilisation of online learning in delivering courses. Some considerations for moving courses fully online including: policy and planning, financial management, designing and delivering lessons, student support services, and students' engagement were explored briefly in this paper. It is recommended that skilled leaders implement effective policies aligned with their university's mission and vision, provide appropriate professional development and training for faculty and learners in online learning, and the appropriate technical support for online teaching and learning. These endeavours will facilitate an effective transition to online distance learning in HEIs.

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