

PLANNING EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR EFFECTIVE STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

Leadership education is a crucial component of student development. There are many skills and competencies included in leadership development. Student leadership development (SLD) and education provides students with opportunities to demonstrate and develop their leadership skills at a young age. There is currently an argument for combining student leadership development opportunities into the formal education model. However, this is dependent on effectively planning the educational curriculum and activities. The educational system of developing nations like Nigeria continues to struggle with the implementation and assurance of high educational and teaching quality because of lack of effective planning. This paper looked at which activities, curriculum contents and educational plan that could influence students' leadership development. This study has shown that at institutional level, it is important to establish a strong learning culture to support leadership education that is experiential and flexible. Leadership through learning are likely to be promoted by programs that have a well-defined and well integrated theory of leadership.

Keywords: Educational planning, Curriculum, Leadership, Schools, Students, Rivers State

Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners increasingly recognize the role of education planning in developing high-performing schools and students. With a national focus on raising achievement for all students, there has been growing attention to the pivotal role of educational planning in improving the quality of education. Largely overlooked in the various reform movements of the past two decades, head of schools are now regarding planning as central to the task of building schools that promote powerful teaching and learning for all students (Peterson, 2002). This recognition of the importance of planning, coupled with a growing shortage of high-quality leaders among Nigerian graduates, has heightened interest in leadership development as a major reform strategy in the educational sector. According to Ololube (2009), educational planning in its broadest generic sense is the application of rational, systematic analysis to the process of educational development with the aim of making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of its students and society. The principal focus of educational planning is to make education more result-oriented for the development of the individual and the larger society. It is essential for educational production to be both efficient and effective if it is to properly guide the internal changes in the school as it utilizes the educational resources available.

Effective education planning makes a difference in improving learning especially as it concerns the inculcation of leadership skills onto the students. There is nothing new or especially controversial about that idea. What's far less clear, even after several decades of school renewal efforts, is just how much planning matters, how important planning and other

related activities are in promoting the learning of students, and what the essential ingredients of planning for successfully impacting leadership skills onto the students are.

Lacking solid evidence to answer these questions, those who have sought to make the case for greater attention and investment in leadership education as a pathway for large-scale education improvement have had to rely more on faith than fact.

Education planning not only matters; it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning, according to the evidence compiled and analyzed by some authors.

A recent report from Learning First analyzed principal training in Ontario, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai and found that each system had a well-designed, intentional approach to leadership development, including training and development aligned with the vision of the system, identifying and grooming teachers and students for leadership roles, creating training programs that emphasize problem-solving skills, and ensuring ongoing professional development continues throughout a principal's career whose goal is impacting on the students and potential graduates with leadership skills (Sparks, 2017). Leaders in these systems recognize that quality educational planning almost above all other activities of the school (Elmore, 2000; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004), especially in schools serving high needs students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, 2005).

Another commonality in high-performing educational systems is the creation of a cohesive, structured system to identify leadership talent at every level of the system and scale it up to higher levels of responsibility (Sparks, 2017). Unfortunately, investment in school leadership quality and stability is an oft-neglected policy lever in addressing the educational challenge of school improvement. Therefore, a targeted investment in building leadership capacity for high-need, high-poverty, hard-to-staff rural schools is a strategy that promises to yield significant returns in improved student outcomes.

To create a transformational environment within an educational setting, effective leaders establish and maintain several vital components. First and foremost, leadership is evident in a school that shares a moral purpose and vision. This vision and purpose must drive the mission. Therefore, it is not enough for a leader to have a moral purpose; s/he must express it, clarify it, and ask others to commit to it. Secondly, effective teachers and administrators continually work to develop and maintain positive relationships with students by establishing mutual respect, trust, and a safe environment for learning. The importance of relationships extends beyond the classroom. Therefore, establishing productive working-relationships with colleagues is critical to the success of instructional teams, buildings, district committees, and a plethora of school-parent-community organizations. Thirdly, effective educational leaders lead by example. They model and exhibit the very characteristics they wish to instill in their students and observe in their colleagues. Successful leaders motivate others by communicating and modeling enthusiasm, commitment, integrity, flexibility, and innovation (Mathews, 2015).

Since the "effective schools" research of the 1980s, which identified the importance of principals who function as strong instructional leaders in improving academic achievement and instilling the spirit of leadership unto students (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986), several lines of research have identified the critical role of principals and other school heads in recruiting, developing, and retaining teachers; creating a learning culture within the school; and supporting improvements in student learning (Leithwood *et al.*, 2004). In one of several

recent studies identifying school leadership as a key factor in schools that outperform others (with respect to leadership skills of the students) with similar students, researchers found that achievement levels were higher in schools where principals undertake and lead a school reform process; act as managers of school improvement; cultivate the school's vision; and make use of student data to support instructional practices and to provide assistance to struggling students (Mathews, 2015).

School leadership is now an education policy priority around the world. Increased school autonomy and a greater focus on schooling and school results have made it essential to reconsider the role of school leaders in effective planning that yields future leaders. There is much room for improvement to professionalize school leadership, to support current school leaders and to make school leadership an attractive career for future candidates. The ageing of current school heads and the widespread shortage of qualified candidates to replace them after retirement make it imperative to take action. Effective succession planning is imperative in ensuring that the school leadership quality is sustained, once this is achieved, effective planning of education that ensures graduates with leadership skills is also sustained (Mathews, 2015).

The modern, rapidly changing world demands quality leadership and, secondary and postsecondary education is a crucial time for young people to develop leadership skills. The traditional belief that leadership is an inborn characteristic trait that only some people possess has changed and been replaced with a belief that anyone can learn and improve their capacity to lead. Secondary and higher education institutions around the world, recognizing the importance of leadership competencies, have made it part of their educational mission to provide students with leadership experiences (Mathews, 2015). For this mission to be accomplished, much attention need to be put in during the curriculum and other activities planning. Therefore, this paper aims to discover which activities, curriculum contents and educational plan that can influence students' leadership development.

Education Planning

An obvious problem that has seemed to limit educational production in developing nations like Nigeria over the years is lack of human and material resources. Generally, the major problems impacting on the educational system in Nigeria include poor management and control of teacher education programs, teacher training and retraining, the selection and organization of curriculum content, curriculum implementation and evaluation, the development, distribution and utilization of teaching materials, and the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of society. Obviously, there is also a problem with poor motivation and discipline (Adeniyi, 2001).

Educational planning, human resources (HR) training and development have evolved as disciplines to guide the allocation and utilization of educational resources in the school system. This is required to arrest areas of waste of resources to make educational production more effective. In this regard, educational planning, HR training and development have become indispensable tools in the management of the school system in order to achieve the desired goals of education systems around the world. The output of the planning process is the plan itself, which is a blueprint for action. It prescribes the activities needed for the education industry to realize its goals. Therefore, the purpose of planning for leadership simply entails to ensure that the educational system is effective in those activities that will

improve the impartation of leadership skills onto the students and according to Adiele *et al.* (2017), achieving this can be made possible by the ability of educational planners to adopt and apply modern planning and management techniques.

Succession Planning In Education for Effective Leadership

The practice of succession planning is not as common in education as it is in other sectors. Most times when a leader leaves, many programs and initiatives disappear as well. This is because the structure and motivation that supported the programs and initiatives resided within the administrator / leader, instead of being embedded within the staff. Proactive managers have started to effect succession planning as a result of the combination of the general increase in turnover rates in the principalship, the potential for an even higher turnover rate with Baby Boomers aging into retirement, the modern-day deterrents to the principalship, and the need to avoid the potential performance that often accompanies change in leadership. Big schools, particularly the ones located in urban areas and those encountering surges in growth, experience this problem exponentially as a result of the high demand for school leaders and the uncertain, uneven supply of candidates. In this era of accountability in public schools and the increasingly tough demands placed on school administrators, developing leaders to meet today's challenges in a school district is a critical issue, especially if the graduates of the school are expected to be sound in leadership skills.

All long-term successful athletic coaches understand the value of succession planning, though it is not often termed "succession planning" in athletics. In the athletic world, succession planning is thought of as bench strength. How strong are the players sitting on the bench during the game? Whether the sport is football, basketball, baseball, soccer, or any other team sport, the bench must contain players prepared to play in case of injury, illness, poor performance, or other unforeseen issue. This same concept of bench strength can be applied to education. Whether the need is a result of retirements or growth, schools need to have a strong bench of candidates to fill administrator positions as the need arises so they are not caught in a reactive crisis mode wherein they are forced to hire less-than-ideal personnel to fill openings (Riddick, 2009).

Succession planning is a practice that should be utilized in some form or another in schools given the leadership demands expected from these schools. Jarrelland Pewitt (2007) researched a leadership development program for a city government and developed a framework for planning a sustainable workforce for a continued impartation of leadership skills on the students. The key components of this framework are as follows:

- Planning
- Selection and training of staff,
- Sustainability, and
- Evaluation of the process in practice.

Leadership Training

Leadership training is recognized as learning activities such as ropes courses, team-building games, group discussions, and other specific leadership interventions. Leadership training is very explicit or overt about leadership education and the goals for students. Educator interventions can also be covert, in which the educator teaches leadership skills disguised in group work, classroom discussions, or journal reflections. Typically the

education system has relied on extracurricular activities - student government, sports, and clubs - to create leadership development or education opportunities and experiences for students (Van Velsor & Wright, 2012; Whitehead, 2009). More recent literature argues for combining student leadership development opportunities into the formal education model (Bowman, 2014; Dymont *et al.*, 2014; Ponder *et al.*, 2011; Seemiller & Murray, 2013; Van Velsor & Wright, 2012; Whitehead, 2009). Van Velsor & Wright (2012) identified essential competencies for future leaders: adaptability, effective communication, learning ability, and multicultural awareness. Students in our education system now will have to deal with complex problems and they will need those competencies and skills to do so (Bowman, 2014). As one researcher writes, “leadership reveals a social conscience anchored in a commitment to humanity” (Bowman, 2014). Effective education programs are often characterized by their ability to leverage leadership development within their curriculum. Therefore, for effective education planning for leadership, the planners must incorporate activities that promote the communication skills, adaptability, learning ability and multicultural awareness of the students and potential graduates.

Elements of Effective School Leadership

The significance of leadership to school and instructional improvement has been well documented (Leithwood *et al.*, 2004; Waters *et al.*, 2003). The impacts of leadership on learning outcomes operate through at least two mediating pathways: First, through the selection, support, and development of teachers and teaching processes, and second, through processes that affect the organizational conditions of the school. Processes that affect organizational conditions operate at the school level, including building school community and developing school procedures and plans, as well as at the classroom level, through developing curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Each of these categories of intermediate outcomes has in turn been linked to important student outcomes (e.g., Leithwood *et al.*, 2004; Silins and Mulford, 2002). The leadership practices that build these aspects of the school are in turn influenced by state practices and supports (Mathews, 2015), as well as the leaders’ own personal biography and training.

Leithwood and Jantzi’s (2005) review suggests that the most critical areas of focus in effective leadership include:

1) Setting direction, by developing a consensus around vision, goals, and direction; 2) helping individual teachers, through support, modeling, and supervision; 3) redesigning the organization to foster collaboration and engage families and community; and 4) managing the organization by strategically allocating resources and support. A review by Waters *et al.* (2003) adds to this list the development of collective teacher capacity and engagement.

Finally, in considering the kind of “transformational leadership” that fundamentally changes school organizations and impacts on the students with leadership skills, Silins *et al.* (2000) added factors such as setting a vision, providing support to staff, establishing a supportive culture and establishing a participatory decision-making structure that encourages intellectual stimulation and holds high performance expectations for staff and students. They found that these factors are strong predictors of organizational learning and that they also directly affect teacher outcomes, such as teacher motivation, students’ leadership skills and sense of empowerment.

The Importance of Leadership Development

Bowman (2014) states that leadership is a huge responsibility for our education system faced with global challenges such as “self-interest, incivility, greed, coercive power, zealotry, and violent extremism” and he sees leadership as a way to help students make a difference in this world.

Young people are important parts of our communities and are crucial to the nation’s future (Rosch & Caza, 2012; Van Velsor & Wright, 2012). Youth see the world in different ways, and if educators allow them to, youth can lead their communities’ and stimulate growth (Welsh, 2007). In 2012, a survey was conducted with identified business leaders who were asked to list competencies that future leaders would need ten years from now. These leaders felt the most important competencies would be: adaptability, effective communication, learning agility, multicultural awareness, self-motivation or discipline, and collaboration (Van Velsor & Wright, 2012). This demonstrates the importance of including competencies like these into student leadership education and curriculum before the students ever reach the college level. This is for the benefit of the community and the individual student.

Leadership Education Implementation

Engaging in student leadership development (SLD) as an educator is not an easy task. In the SLD there are roadblocks, such as the pressures of academic progress (Whitehead, 2009). In order to consider how educators can carry out successful leadership programs, this section will consider best practices or proven methods in a given field. This will start first at the institutional level and then the individual educator’s role.

Institutions

At the institutional level, it is important to emphasize what attributes of the system lead to high quality leadership development programs. In a grounded theory research project by Eich (2008), sixteen programmatic attributes were organized into three clusters that identified programmatic practices that were leading to high quality outcomes.

Cluster I: Participants Engaged in Building and Sustaining a Learning Community

1. Diverse students
2. Experienced Practitioners
3. Modeling Educators
4. Small Groups
5. Supportive Culture
6. One-on-One Relationships

Cluster II: Student-Centered Experiential Learning Experiences

7. Leadership Practice
8. Reflection Activities
9. Application in Meetings
10. Meaningful Discussions
11. Episodes of Difference
12. Civic Service
13. Discovery Retreats

Cluster III: Research-Grounded Continuous Program Development

14. Flexible Design

15. Values Content

16. Systems Thinking (Eich, 2008)

These three clusters explained that participants were engaged in building learning community, it was a student centered experiential learning experience, and programs were flexible and accommodating, always using research for program development (Eich, 2008). More broadly, Eich (2008) found that leadership programs that were highly resourceful, productive, and intentional about goals and outcomes scored higher on a survey measuring leadership programs for effects on students.

Education Coordinator

Adriansen & Madsen (2013) studied the effects of facilitation within environmental study groups and found that, by creating student facilitators to lead discussion, there was an increase in participation, increased student happiness, and it made the material more relatable to students. Facilitation is based on the experience of learning through relationships that provide feedback, and in this way is very much related to leadership skills, whether the educator is facilitating a group or if students are practicing the art of facilitation (Adriansen & Madsen, 2013).

Facilitation is one strategy of teaching leadership skills. If we want to teach leadership specifically, Cogner's Four Approaches to Leadership Development are key to consider what goals we are working towards and what activities align with those goals (Allen & Hartman, 2009). The four approaches or goals are personal growth, conceptual understanding of what leadership is, feedback or assessment, and skill building. Sources of learning, activities, or specific examples of leadership intervention are identified within each approach (Allen & Hartman, 2009). Once educators have a leadership goal, competency, or outcome they are aiming for they can choose an intervention that would best align with that aim.

Educator

An important way to contribute to SLD as an educator is to understand your students. For younger students, SLD looks like practicing skills for the future. Childhood and adolescent experiences that emphasized strong work ethic, high standard of success, and responsibility have been known to foster personal traits such as understanding others, striving for success, and assertiveness later in careers (Brungardt, 1997). In a service learning model with kindergarten, third grade, and sixth grade students based on teamwork and student decision making, teachers found that there were greater opportunities than they originally thought for collaboration between students, critical thinking, and problem solving (Ponder *et al.*, 2011).

In adolescent and teenage students, leadership becomes more transformative and it begins to dive into personal values, emotions, and goals of students (Ingleton, 2013).

For high school students, leadership starts out very personal and then moves outward towards making differences in the community (Bowman, 2014). Welsh talks specifically about the characteristics and behavior of youth in her piece on "Leading Youth in Your Community." Youth understand conflict and truly want to make a difference, they have short attention spans, are very emotionally charged, and are self-conscious (Welsh, 2007). Based on these, the strategies to work with youth are to build trust, develop credibility by maintaining appropriate lines, create a culture of inclusion, and develop their independence

(Welsh, 2007; Boyd *et al.*, 2014). One of the most important things we can do for youth is to show our respect for them and to ensure our faith in them (Welsh, 2007). Cognizant to this, in education / curriculum planning, attention needs to be paid on the age bracket of the students.

Conclusion

While leadership started as a hierarchy model of top-down leadership, it has shifted to an understanding of relationships and ethics (Eich, 2008; Ingleton, 2013; Rosch & Caza, 2012). In the past, student leadership has been focused on extracurricular activities, but recently there has been a push to involve all students in the education system in leadership education (Ingleton, 2013; Rosch & Caza, 2012; Van Velsor & Wright, 2012; Whitehead, 2009). SLD is important because 80% of the public sees a need for more effective leadership (Rosch & Caza, 2012). Leadership education also offers students an opportunity to be integral parts of communities by making a difference and taking ownership (Bowman, 2014; Welsh, 2007). Leadership education also focuses on competencies that all students need to learn such as adaptability, communication, learning agility, multicultural awareness, self-motivation, and collaboration (Van Velsor & Wright, 2012).

At the institutional level it is important to establish a strong learning culture to support leadership education that is experiential and flexible to research (Eich, 2008). Educational programs need to be highly resourceful, productive, and intentional about goals and outcomes (Owen, 2008). At the coordinator level it is important to begin matching appropriate instruction and pedagogies with the larger institutional goals (Allen & Hartman, 2009; Rosch & Meixner, 2011). At the specific educator level it is important for educators to consider age appropriateness and to engage students using those age characteristics (Welsh, 2007). It is also important for educators to build appropriate relationships with their students to work together in a seamless way, and to provide a strong role model of leadership (Rosch & Meixner, 2011).

Recommendations

Research by Kaagan (1998) suggests that leadership through learning are likely to be promoted by programs that:

- 1) Have a well-defined and well integrated theory of leadership for school improvement that frames and integrates the program. The theory should provide coherence and be consistent with other program elements.
- 2) Use preparation strategies that maximize learning, learning transfer, and leadership identity formation. These include the use of cohorts, student-centered instructional pedagogies, faculty and mentor support, and opportunities to apply theory to practice.
- 3) Provide strong content and field experiences during leadership preparation that provide intellectual challenge; offer comprehensive, coherent, and relevant experiences; and include high quality internships (Mathews, 2015).

The effective leadership development programs must be centered on:

- Clear focus and values about leadership and learning around which the program is coherently organized;
- Standards-based curriculum emphasizing instructional leadership, organizational development, and change management;
- Field-based internships with skilled supervision;

- Cohort groups that create opportunities for collaboration and teamwork in practice-oriented situations;
- Active instructional strategies that link theory and practice, such as problem-based learning;
- Rigorous recruitment and selection of both candidates and faculty; and
- Strong partnerships with government to support quality, field-based learning (Mathews, 2015).

When these innovative preparation program features are in place, programs yield better graduate perceptions of their training and stronger school leadership outcomes.

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