

EDUCATION REIMAGINED: LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA



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ALL-IN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
INTRODUCTION	6
PART A: THEMES	9
THEME ONE: THE NEW LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE	10
THEME TWO: THE ART OF WITH: TEACHERS AS LIFELONG LEADERS	20
THEME THREE: THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP NETWORKS	25
AFTERWORD: TRANSFORMATIONAL NETWORKS	30
PART B: ARTICLES	31
SUPPORTING SCHOOL LEADERS IN POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY	32
WELLBEING FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP	34
ESCUELA NUEVA AND LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING	36
EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A PATH TOWARDS INSTITUTIONALISATION	38
LEADERSHIP OF NETWORKS AND CLUSTERS: A COLOMBIAN PERSPECTIVE	40
LEADERSHIP OF NETWORKS AND CLUSTERS: A KENYAN PERSPECTIVE	42
THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR SUPPORTING TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN MOROCCO	44
MINDSETS MATTER: EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POST-COVID-19	46
LEADERSHIP ECOSYSTEMS: A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP	49
NEW LEADERSHIP FOR NEW TIMES	52
AUTHORS	54

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EDUCATION REIMAGINED: LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW ERA

A WISE ALL-IN SPECIAL PUBLICATION

This is an impressive collection of articles from a highly experienced group of education professionals, from across multiple geographies.

The context is the anticipation of post-COVID-19 life.

The COVID-19 disruption to the world's social, economic and political conditions has given rise to the reimagination of education and the building of leadership for a new era.

This WISE ALL-IN special publication bears witness to the critical role of leadership in promoting and enabling student and system-deep learning. The collection reveals the centrality of education leadership in the life of communities, for individual and collective wellbeing, and for a sustainable future, locally and globally.

The authors' contributions advance our understanding of how educational leadership can address an enlarged concept of equity – serving social cohesion and economic prosperity.

The publication is in two parts.

Part A consists of three Key Thought Pieces that address the agreed themes adopted by the WISE ALL-IN Network as the focus of network collaboration over 2021. The themes include: 1 – developing a global capabilities framework that informs the growth of future leaders; 2 – teacher and team leadership, and the development of a leadership-oriented education workforce; and 3 – the leadership of networks, clusters and communities.

The Foreword and Introduction to Part A provides a framing for the Collection. The Afterword suggests a direction of travel for the ongoing work of WISE ALL-IN.

Part B consists of a selection of articles, some directly related to the three Themes explored in Part A, others taking up everything from transversal considerations to single issues. These papers are designed to stimulate further thought and discussion on 'leadership for a new era' – informed by insights from research, policy and practice, and with a deliberate bias towards innovation and experimentation.

THANK YOU

Appreciation is extended to members of WISE ALL-IN Working Groups and to contributing authors for their commitment to this endeavour, and sincere thanks to the WISE ALL-IN Team for their guidance and support.

EDITORS

Anthony Mackay
Neil Barker
March 2022

FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION

The WISE Agile Leaders of Learning Innovation Network (ALL-IN) was established in 2017, as an **action-oriented global community of practice** of educational leadership experts – including academics, program providers, practitioners and policy makers – who research, design and advocate for high-quality school leadership policies that prepare and support school systems in educating the learners of today and the future.

Research has shown that school leadership is one of the most important influences on student learning, and thus, a critical factor for improving the life and educational outcomes of children and the broader economic conditions of nations. However, despite strong empirical evidence showing the importance of investing in school leadership, actual investment by governments and systems has declined in the last two decades. This, coupled with a seismic shift in how we think about learning and schooling in the face of an ever-changing future, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, has left many schools and systems deficient in the necessary leadership to nurture future-fit educators and learners as they navigate a path of increasing uncertainty.

ALL-IN seeks to increase the quantity of **future-fit school leaders** to support schools and systems in their transitions toward resilient and future-thriving learning environments that maximise learner outcomes and wellbeing, for a brighter, more equitable, and inclusive future for our children and our world.

ALL-IN'S THEORY OF ACTION

Over the next five years, ALL-IN commits to achieving its mission through **three strategic pathways**:

- 1) research
- 2) program support, and
- 3) advocacy

with a deep and intentional focus on supporting the development of school leaders in under-served contexts, as well as incubating emerging school leadership programs and research aimed at closing systemic equity gaps to improve outcomes for all children.

THE CHALLENGES TO BE ADDRESSED

- Rigorous evidence on school leadership practices and impact in more marginalised, under-served contexts – including in the developing world and in non-OECD countries – is limited, and investment and access are not sufficient to meet the research and programming needs to equip schools, systems and governments with the necessary frameworks to design and implement high-quality, contextually relevant leadership development programs at scale.
- In addition, there is narrow understanding of the definition of leadership and the types of leadership roles that can exist throughout an education ecosystem and benefit learner outcomes. This includes what leaders need to know – particularly considering the uncertainty brought about by multiple, concurrent global pandemics, including public health crises, systemic social injustice, economic inequality and climate change – to be 'future-literate' or lead the future of learning.

Since our first meeting of ALL-IN in 2017, with the support of Simon Breakspear as a co-founder of this community, there has been immense momentum within our growing community to come together and find new ways to collaborate, exchange ideas, and innovate. We met in Accra, New York and Paris, and our last physical meeting was in Doha in 2019. Our focus over this first phase of network growth has been building a community of practice, sharing research, and developing case studies and new frameworks, with a particular interest in the global south and non-OECD countries.

Two years ago, COVID-19 hit us, not only in education but in all sectors, so like most of the world we shifted our work to the digital sphere and, through our close partnership with Salzburg Global Seminar and Anthony Mackay – and also through the great work and participation of our ALL-IN community – we hosted a number of the *Education Disrupted, Education Reimagined* convening series.

Through these convenings we shared narratives, stories and case studies of leadership in practice, leadership under pressure, and leadership in transformation. We began at the frontline of disruption, in April 2020, and ended at the precipice of reimagining, at our September convening.

Then we had our March 2021 convening, with a focus that we should expect more shocks, and that the future will always surprise us with multiple crises and changes. Key themes that emerged from this discussion were the need to lead for equity and for change, to advocate for the most under-served among us, and to amplify new voices and paradigms in the leadership space. This also aligns closely with the new ALL-IN strategy that we launched in December 2020.

This special publication focuses on the work of our three ALL-IN thematic working groups, who came together throughout 2021 to consider research, policy and practice into

- 1) developing a global capabilities framework that informs the growth of future leaders
- 2) teacher and team leadership, and the development of a leadership-oriented education workforce
- 3) the leadership of networks, clusters and communities.

The authors in this publication argue that there is significant opportunity for reimagining education and creating leadership for a new era. The publication introduces readers to a blend of practical experience, programs and initiatives, together with a series of theoretical propositions for improving leadership in schools and networks, and across systems. The breadth of experience and thinking evident in this publication is testament to the commitment and hard work of our network members. I thank them for their passion for creating leadership that can impact global education outcomes, and for sharing their thoughts with us.

Dr Asmaa Al-Fadala

Director of Research, World Innovation Summit for Education

INTRODUCTION

Most days after school, my 11-year-old and I settled in for our quick post-school ritual: tea and a chat about our day. Our debrief usually starts with the gossip – of course – followed by his take on more important events of the day. Last week, sparked by a playground incident, he shared his concern that racism and sexism often influence the distribution of praise and punishment. Next, he bemoaned the fact that he was not learning anything new because too much preparation for the SATS (the upcoming national Year 6 tests) was making school 'really boring'.

As he sipped his tea, he paused and quietly reflected: 'Why is everyone pretending life is back to normal? School expects us to walk through the door and be all happy and fine. What we are learning feels like it doesn't matter in real life and life is NOT normal.' Then, he peppered me with questions about the – at the time, threatened – conflict in Eastern Europe and England's decision to abandon all COVID-19 protection when cases remain high. While there is much we disagree about – bed and screen time, for example – our chat made me realise I share my 11 year-old's frustration and worry about inequality, our collective wellbeing and the pressures we are all facing to 'return to normal'.

When I was invited to get an early glimpse at and to introduce *Education Reimagined: Leadership for a New Era*, I expected two things. One, a brilliant collection of contributions from educators and leaders around the world. Two, I imagined the authors' reimaginings would arrive as countries simultaneously stepped out of the COVID-19 shadows. As expected, the editors have curated a powerful collection of provocations and insights

Three main themes shape the publication: the importance of developing and embracing renewed leadership capabilities; the centrality of teacher leadership to inform practice and policy; and, finally, the power of networks to shape patterns of learning, communication and innovation across schools, communities and education systems.

for leaders, policy makers and academics alike.

Unfortunately, as early 2022 dawns, many countries are contending with COVID-19 outbreaks and civil unrest, and war and persistent social inequality remain omnipresent. Early 2022 does, however, provide the strongest of possible arguments for systems that nurture and support credible and innovative leaders who can unite communities and countries, while simultaneously creating safe and equal access to learning, opportunities and prosperity for all.

So, from this vantage point, I am deeply thankful to the authors who share their insight to reimagine leadership from where we are now: 2022. *Education*

Reimagined proffers strategies for and examples of leaders for our new era, driven by a fierce commitment to recalibrating our imbalanced systems. The authors skilfully acknowledge that adults, as well as students, need care and trust to re-establish their sense of efficacy and motivation. Each contribution, in its own way, touches on the need for leaders, formal or informal, to acknowledge the interconnectedness of their communities and the power of their policy contexts. Strikingly, throughout, the importance of responsive, agile, collaborative governance from all levels of the education system is demanded.

As this publication is succinct and purposeful, my role is simply to reflect upon and tender a few threads to perhaps guide your own reading and reimagining of the structural, policy and role-based step-change educational leaders deserve. Three main themes shape the publication: the importance of developing and embracing renewed leadership capabilities; the centrality of teacher leadership to inform practice and policy; and, finally, the power of networks to shape patterns of learning, communication and innovation across schools, communities and education systems.

Developing a global capabilities framework that informs the growth of future leaders reaffirms the importance of leaders' will and ability to thrive in complex conditions. The authors acknowledge, thankfully, that this takes practice! Drawing on global evidence, a quartet of proposed leadership capabilities underpins the importance of career-long learning, conceptually anchored by notions of flourishing, complexity, agency and equity. Pandemic-magnified social inequities demand that educational leaders contend with increasingly polarised and wounded communities. The new era, therefore, requires leaders who recognise the opportunities for securing teaching and learning outcomes, while supporting the wellness of students and adults in their schools, organisations and communities.

Teacher and team leadership, and the development of a leadership-oriented education workforce, crystallises the importance of systems and structures that respectfully acknowledge and amplify teachers' unique skills and insights. System-level and school-level improvement strategies failing to harness teachers' wisdom and commitment will never reach their intended potential. Contributors carefully argue for time and space to understand and support educators' pandemic-influenced grief, health and wellness. Whether formal or informal, teacher leadership is recognised as a unifying priority: schools and systems must urgently create conditions that ensure teachers feel valued, efficacious and heard, to secure their longer-term commitment to remaining in the profession.

Leaders require time, energy and patience to engage in a process requiring leaders to: identify potential and willing partners; find commonalities that seed relationships; and risk initial collaborations that – if successful – foster trust and confidence.

Finally, **the leadership of networks, clusters and communities** acknowledges the growing impossibility of successfully leading in isolation. The authors champion the value and necessity of networks in post-pandemic educational recovery, while reinforcing that working within and leveraging can create flows of essential, yet previously inaccessible, knowledge, expertise and resources. However, leading and learning across networks requires crossing intellectual, organisational, geographical and often temporal boundaries. Leaders require time, energy and patience to engage in a process requiring leaders to: identify potential and willing partners; find commonalities that seed relationships; and risk initial collaborations that – if successful – foster trust and confidence.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As the teams curated *Education Reimagined: Leadership for a New Era* over the last six months, global political, health and social realities have shifted in ways that seemed impossible even weeks ago. However, the authors' proposed solutions provide sustainable ambitions for leaders, teachers and networks that will stand the test of time. Their collective call: systems and networks that support educational leaders who can navigate complexity with confidence and wisdom, while ensuring equitable access, learning and prosperity for students and communities. Recognising the essential nature of leadership as a practice, beyond roles, that exists within and outside schools, contributors provide stepwise progressions and examples, which remind us that leaders need practice and support to sustain their belief that there are better ways and brighter futures ahead. Much food for thought, for all of us.

More personally, as I prepare for the imminent return of my 11-year-old, I am bracing for his reflections on realities of school today. Before I put on the kettle in anticipation of our daily debrief from the 'front lines', I have a few reflections based on life in London and the themes emerging from this publication. I am profoundly optimistic about our shared leadership futures and hope we can continue, across our many countries, to support and provide the space for leadership to flourish. My reflections are offered with a hand (sanitised and distanced, of course) to say thank you for everything our educators have done to keep our children and communities afloat, and to ensure our steps toward our new era are safe, inclusive and sustainable.

Reflections

The prevalence of exhaustion

Throughout the pandemic, schools have demonstrated that great change, at scale and speed, is possible under specific short-term conditions. However, as the scale and pace of 'build back better' rhetoric accelerates, we are observing that our educators, students and communities are exhausted. Sustaining and improving our education systems rests on the shoulders of our school-based educators. As such, their health and wellbeing must be paramount to any leadership development and expectations. As many leaders and teachers are dangerously close to burnout, new initiatives prioritising educator health and wellbeing are, I believe, more likely to pay longer-term dividends.

The power of tweaks vs overhauls

Innovation and grand ambitions are powerful but, to many, big changes will seem so far out of reach that educators' disinterest, disengagement and avoidance may result. As this publication has embraced the need for adults in our schools to be respected, supported, and presented with career-long opportunities for learning and engagement, I hope we can also prioritise the power of small steps. The power of small, sequential tweaks to our current ways of working will, in my opinion, greatly outlast the overhauls.

The importance of healing

The members of each generation carry forward the experiences and wounds from their childhood and young adulthood. As hard as it will be, simply acknowledging that the pandemic is not over and talking about how things may be different at home – for students and teachers alike – may be a small step toward our collective healing.

The equity imperative

Even our students are highly attuned to spotting bias. They may not have the words to describe it as such, but the pain of being treated unfairly lingers. As educators, challenging our own ability and will to develop our skills for identifying and addressing bias in our teaching, hiring, promotion and community work is essential for building resilient teams, schools and communities. Leaders have varying levels of awareness and comfort with issues of race, gender, nationality and ability, as a start. Any leadership and networking initiative harnessing the power of student and educator experience, creating safe space to identify where and when bias interrupts learning and leadership will be essential. As leaders and educators, we owe it to ourselves and to future generations to spot the opportunities for learning, especially with some whose views are different from our own, to create the new era championed in this publication.

Dr Karen Edge

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THEMES

**THEME ONE:
THE NEW LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE**

**THEME TWO:
THE ART OF WITH: TEACHERS AS LIFELONG LEADERS**

**THEME THREE:
THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP NETWORKS**