EMERALD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS SERIES

Lessons in School Improvement from Sub-Saharan Africa

Developing Professional Learning Networks and School Communities

Miriam Mason
David Galloway

LESSONS IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

EMERALD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK SERIES

Series Editors: Chris Brown, Durham University, UK and Cindy Poortman, University of Twente, The Netherlands

In the current international policy environment, teachers are viewed as learning-oriented adaptive experts. Required to be able to teach increasingly diverse sets of learners, teachers must be competent in complex academic content, skilful in the craft of teaching and able to respond to fast changing economic and policy imperatives. The knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for this complex profession requires teachers to engage in collaborative and networked career-long learning. The types of learning networks emerging to meet this need comprise a variety of collaborative arrangements including inter-school engagement, as well as collaborations with learning partners, such as universities or policy-makers. More understanding is required, however, on how learning networks can deliver maximum benefit for both teachers and students.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Dedicated to the teachers and children of EducAid, and to their ongoing commitment to the transformation of education in Sierra Leone and beyond: one teacher at a time, one child at a time.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
CPDL	Continuing Professional Development and Learning
DfID	Department of International Development
DSTI	Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation
EFA	Education for All
GPI	Gender Parity Index
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PLN	Professional Learning Network(s)
PTSD.	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.
RATL	Raising Achievement/Transforming Learning
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SMC	School Management Committee
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (subjects)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WAEC	West Africa Examinations Council
WASSCE	West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Miriam Mason was educated in the UK and trained as a teacher before moving to Sierra Leone in 2000 to run EducAid. Her brother and a friend had started EducAid Sierra Leone as a sponsorship programme but finding the available quality of schooling insufficient to change children's lives they decided to start their own school. The first EducAid school started with 20 children on the veranda of a rented house but was the forerunner to a network of schools which now runs at the heart of a school improvement programme working to support change across the education ecosystem in Sierra Leone.

David Galloway developed his lifelong interest in the effect of schools on their pupils' behaviour and psychosocial development while working as an educational psychologist in Sheffield, UK. After appointments in Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand and Cardiff and Lancaster Universities, UK, he joined Durham University where he was Professor of Primary Education, and Head of the School of Education. Since retirement from his full time post, he has run workshops on school improvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, China and Hong Kong.

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FOREWORD

The delivery of free, quality education for all children and young people has been my priority as the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education in Sierra Leone. Most recently, my team and I institutionalised an agenda for radical inclusion as part of the country's vision for human capital development. In doing so, I outlined a promise to provide equitable learning opportunities to the most marginalised and excluded in society. This book provides an important and timely message on the need to build learning communities to fulfil this promise.

In this book, Mason and Galloway provide grounded and critical insights on the challenges that the education sector currently faces. In particular, the book disentangles the historic roots of systemic barriers to school improvement, elaborates the impact of successive national crises on teachers and unpacks the limited success of previous education interventions. This analysis sets up a platform for a research-based approach to address these issues.

Drawing on EducAid's decades of experience of providing quality education to the most vulnerable in Sierra Leone, Mason and Galloway highlight the importance of using evidence to promote school improvement centred around pedagogy and teaching. The book draws attention to the critical role of professional learning networks in fostering a dialogic and respectful climate in which principals and teachers share

and reflect on their experiences to 'lever up' learning. This close-up analysis shows the significant, positive impact of professional learning networks on the attendance and learning of students.

The accompanying practitioner's manual provides a step-by-step guide for those looking to build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to lead school-level change. The guide can help education leaders to implement and adapt lessons from this research to deliver continuing professional development and learning to support children to succeed academically and socially.

These comprehensive resources present a pathway for promoting sustainable school improvement to enable the next generation of Sierra Leoneans — as well as subsequent generations — to live up to their potential. The core themes of community, equity and impact will continue to echo as we strive towards radical inclusion and free, quality education.

Dr David Moinina Sengeh
Honourable Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and Chief Innovation Officer for the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation for the Government of Sierra Leone.
July 2021.

NOTE ON PRACTITIONERS' MANUAL

This book describes a structured approach to school improvement through continuing professional development and learning (CPDL) for teachers. The focus is on the context, (a low income country in Africa,) the reasons for selecting a structured and potentially replicable approach to CPDL, the methodology and the results. The book does not describe the programme itself in detail. To do so it would have been necessary to describe each of the literacy and numeracy activities that the CPDL team used with primary teachers in the course of ten days intensive work and follow-up over the subsequent year. That would have seriously interrupted the flow of the book. Yet knowing that a project is successful – or encountered problems – is of little or no practical use without knowing details of the project itself. For this reason, Emerald agreed to make the Practitioners Manual available online with purchase of the book, without further cost. This can be accessed on Emerald's Bookstore (books.emeraldinsight.com).

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