

URUNANA

RW'ABAREZI

ISSUE 04 November 2016

Improving Students' Learning Outcomes



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GASANA Janvier

FOREWORD

Welcome to the fourth issue of Urunana rw'Abarezi, our magazine on Professional Learning Networks for School Leaders.

Every educator knows that the ultimate goal of education is about the well-being and the learning achievements of our students.

In other words, the purpose of any educational system should be to help students acquire the needed competences that will lead to improve both their well-being and the economic prosperity of our country.

It was very encouraging to see in the second issue of this magazine how a high level of cooperation between schools, parents and the local community can lead to positive outcomes. And from the good examples depicted in the third issue, we also see how this cooperation can substantially reduce the dropout rate. We

particularly saw how through the professional learning networks, head teachers were able to develop successful strategies to tackle this problem, with the support of their caring sector education officers. We also realised that collective work especially at central and decentralized levels through a fostered cooperation between REB, local authorities, and the wider community, would significantly help improve both our schools and our students' future.

The current issue will focus on students learning achievements and relevant strategies and practices drawn from professional learning networks. And we are proud to say that best practices shared in stories from SEOs and head teachers came from the 118 sectors where professional learning networks are active.

In reflecting on why some head teachers achieve successful results for their students, compared with head teachers who work under the same circumstances but who don't succeed, we can be sure that all have the potential to be fruitful. It just takes time to learn together, to find ways to deal with issues and to develop long term strategies to sustain the results.

The secret of success can be accessed by any

person. It is a matter of being persistent in learning from others.

When it comes to what makes professional learning networks successful, the secret is about doing it with clarity and effectiveness to ensure that members benefit from them.

As emphasized in previous issues, professional peer learning requires an appropriate platform to allow experience sharing. And this Urunana rw'Abarezi magazine serves exactly this purpose. This is why it is distributed to all head teachers, sector education officers, and any other educator from different corners of the country.

It is our hope that this magazine will provide you with a platform where you can share and discuss the challenges you face or have faced, as well as potential solutions you have implemented in your pursuit of excellence in Education. We are confident that you will enjoy reading this magazine and that you will contribute to this platform for Professional Learning Networks by sharing your valuable experiences.

Sincerely,
Janvier GASANA
Director General,
Rwanda Education Board.

FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Unlike the popular view about what education really means, we believe that schools are not about 'teaching' but learning. Teaching is about facilitating learning, creating opportunities for learning, and stimulating learning. So students' learning achievements should be the only reason schools exist. And this should be vocation of any teacher, head teacher or school leader.

So with no surprise, the main theme of this issue of 'Urunana rw'Abarezi' is about 'Learning'. As usual, you will hear in this issue various living testimonies from different sector education officers and head

teachers from different corners of the country from Rusizi to Gicumbi and from Nyarugenge to Ngororero. We are also excited to have been allowed to publish findings from a research carried by Dr Timothy Williams on the question of *"Why is the quality of children's education in Rwanda surprisingly low?"* Furthermore, an article on the value of Learner Centred Pedagogy within the framework of the implementation of the new Competence Based Curriculum has been written. We will also be privileged to hear from various shared experiences related to School Based Mentoring. Last but not least, we will enjoy an article featuring

what should head teachers do and how they should do it, based on the insights shared by the renowned expert in school leadership, Michael Fullan. We truly hope that this issue will be of a great interest to you again. We wish that readers will gain more insights from the various subjects that are discussed and investigated in this issue and through our professional learning networks, in order to establish a new learning opportunity via this platform.

We wish you all a happy reading and, as always, we warmly invite you to share your thoughts and experiences



Share your thoughts and experiences with us.
Write to plnrwanda@gmail.com



LEARNER-CENTRED PEDAGOGY AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN RWANDA

Over the past decade most African countries achieved an impressive increase in school enrolment. Rwanda as well reached an enrolment rate in primary education of 96,9%(MINEDUC, 2015). These quantitative achievements, however, raise the issue related to quality education as more children access school. Learner-centred Pedagogy (LCP) is often seen as a response to quality challenges, which is one of the reasons many countries have embraced this approach (Chisholm, 2008).

What is learner-centred pedagogy?

LCP is a multi-faceted concept with a variety of terms associated with it. They include inquiry-based education, constructivism or competency-based education(Vavrus, Thomas, & Bartlett, 2011). Once a certain education approach is used for every purpose, it makes it difficult to understand the core of something. When

focusing on classroom activities, a possible definition of LCP is the following:

Learner-centred pedagogy is an approach that gives room for individual interests, learning preferences, styles and needs. It is a pedagogy that incorporates collaborative and (inter) active teaching and learning activities that are clearly instructed and facilitated by the teacher, leading to a situation whereby learners co-influence the learning content and process.

Why promote learner-centred pedagogy in Rwanda?

The question arises why one would promote learner-centred pedagogy in Rwandan education and what is the link with learning outcomes. There are different justifications that are not mutually exclusive.

A first justification is the cognitive one, and it is firmly grounded in the concept of constructivism, which refers to the

observation that each learner has an own 'fund' of prior knowledge, one that the teacher should activate and build upon, so that s/he can lead the learner to the next phase, i.e the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Following this approach, learning is done through experiencing, whereby active engagement, discovery and empirical problem solving have to be encouraged. **The second justification is more political.** Some educationalists see Learner-centred pedagogy as a means to educate individuals with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for democratic citizenship. Learner-centred pedagogy can be considered as 'education through **democracy**', because translated to classroom practice it ideally shows teachers who enhance discussion and dialogue and who delegate some of their control to the learners. **The third justification** focuses on **preparation for the 21st**

century and the demands of a global and knowledge based society. The pace at which these demands change requires a labour force that is able to adapt to new circumstances, and employees who are creative, flexible, responsible and able to reflect on their own learning and performances. That means that knowledge only doesn't suffice; instead education should also contain the skills and attitudes that contribute to these (cognitive) characteristics.

Translated to classroom practice, these theoretical foundations lead to an approach that is participatory, collaborative, inquiry based and that takes the needs of the individual learner as the point of departure. It means that there should be room for creative, problem solving activities, whereby learners learn to reflect critically on their learning outcomes and learning process.

Recently, the approach has been adopted by the Rwandan Ministry of Education as the way forward for all primary and secondary schools, as it is depicted and incorporated in the new competency-based

curriculum. Competences in this curriculum achieved through LCP are related but not limited to communication, research, collaboration, demonstration and presentation, problem solving, critical thinking. Through Learner-centred pedagogy, students are able to **Communicate** information or ideas in a clear and correct manner using the language of instruction. Students are given opportunity to express themselves for example by asking or answering questions, making presentations, giving feedback to others' answers or presentations. This reinforces their communication skills.

Search for information from different resources. Students are given assignments that require research. In schools equipped with libraries and computers connected to internet, students are encouraged to use them to get new knowledge and share it with peers in classroom. The more they are given such activities, the more they acquire research competences. In relation to this, students become independent and lifelong learners.

Demonstrate understanding of knowledge through

different activities such as use of knowledge in real or simulated situations, case studies, internship/industrial attachment, experiments, drawings, posters among others. This practice of knowledge enhances creativity or innovation by students.

Collaborate with peers and with the teacher. In addition, group work like other active teaching and learning techniques enhance a good relationship. Where it is well applied, this technique not only facilitates learning but it develops in students the skill of collaboration and team spirit. In addition, group work like other active teaching and learning techniques enhance good relationship between teacher and students. The distance between the teacher and the learners is reduced as opposed to teacher-centred pedagogy where the teacher is authoritarian.

Promoting learner-centred pedagogy in pre-service teacher training

Past and current support to the implementation of LCP or the new competency-based curriculum went to teachers working in in-service. The University

of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE) with the support of the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB) on the other hand chose to focus on teacher-educators working in pre-service teacher training institutes. A requirement condition for an effective application of LCP is the consistent training of teachers. Teacher (educators) need

to be prepared for the specifics of LCP teaching, and the training should take into consideration their working conditions as well. With a competent teacher-educator force ultimately all (newly qualified) teachers will be reached.

In the framework of the cooperation between URCE and VVOB (2014-2016), URCE and a core group of 64

tutors from 16 Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) finalized a professional development trajectory on LCP, and these tutors disseminated their training in communities of practice in their respective TTCs. With the support of VVOB and other development partners, URCE is currently revising the curriculum of the TTCs, in alignment with the new, national competence-based curriculum. ■

OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION SHOULD BE OUR FIRST PRIORITY

IMPACT STORY FROM GROUPE SCOLAIRE SAINT JEAN BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE, KISARO SECTOR (RULINDO)



Groupe Scolaire Saint Jean Baptiste de la Salle is located in Cyisaro Sector, Rulindo district, Northern province. With a limited number of 320 students, the school has the particularity of being quality focused and committed.

The school was started decades ago by “*les frères des écoles chrétiennes*”, a Catholic Church brotherhood highly involved in developing schools and quality education. The school is

led by a dedicated team of passionate educators, with the humble brother Ramirez Zorilla Jose Aniceto serving as the school head teacher.

“Although it’s a private school, Groupe Scolaire Saint Jean Baptiste proved to be an example of how commitment, integrity, love, and courage can make things happen in a school environment. Our public schools may have limited resources but it is not an excuse for lacking passion, and commitment. To a certain level, what is

happening at Saint Jean Baptiste can be emulated in many schools” Cyisaro Sector Education officer Alfred Nyirimanzi shared.

So, what is it that is happening at Groupe Scolaire Saint Jean Baptiste? And what lessons can most public schools learn from them?

A Mexican native, Ramirez ensured that the school targets children from poor families, vulnerable streets children, those who are considered “to be the losers”. Ramirez philosophy of education is that “every child has a great potential. There is no stupid child. Some may require our particular love and care but they all have a great potential. Children are like seeds. If you plant a seed but fail to water it and to monitor its growth, chances are that you would have worked in vain. Our children’s education should be our first priority. Although the task is not easy, it should not be a burden but an enjoyable and passionate journey”.

That is why Ramirez advised that “the starting point is to change teachers’ attitude towards children. Whether you teach an overcrowded classroom in a public school or not, the first thing you need to do as

a teacher is to open your heart to your students. Working for a living is not morally wrong. But when it comes to empowering our children, we should first appeal to our hearts. Teachers should always keep in mind that they have the power to either bless their students or destroy them. That is why, love and compassion really matter when it comes to educating children”.

Teachers need to continually develop themselves. At Saint Jean Baptiste, half of the teachers work hours are spent in their continual growth and development: “Teachers performance depends on their ability to continually resource themselves. The role of a teacher is to keep challenging oneself and to set higher targets. I commit myself that we challenge ourselves as a team to ensure our progress never stops” Ramirez said.

Ramirez also believes that the task of fostering the students’ learning requires to work as a team with teachers, parents and local leaders: “We do not charge parents for the education of their children. But we ensure that they are responsibly involved in what is going on. Parents

may not be required to contribute financially yet their thoughts and opinions matter. We ensure that we genuinely listen to them and that we work as real partners. We also invite them to actively support the school with their labor in Umuganda and other projects requiring labor”.

Ramirez did a great job of building a team of caring educators. Among them are Brother Protais who serves as the school director of studies and Celestin who is in charge of the secondary section coordination. Protais is a strong advocate of teamwork as a requirement toward quality in schools: “The nature of our work is highly demanding. Improving student’s learning in schools is not easy. It requires integrity and consistent hard work but it is highly rewarding” he advises.

Protais believes that teaching requires giving oneself “beyond duty” and “going the extra mile”:

“It is important for teachers to embrace relevant teaching methodologies that emphasize the necessity of putting the child at the center of the learning,

encouraging student's active participation, and adopting a holistic teaching approach with values integration in lessons. However, teachers' task requires a great deal of sacrifice and commitment. Teachers should behave like loving educators. Not mercenaries. Otherwise the whole system will collapse.

Secondary Section Coordinator Celestin is entrusted with the heavy task of preparing students for higher education. He advises that educators always keep the bigger pictures when teaching:

"At the end of the day, it is not just about transferring knowledge. It's about building our students' life and future. That is why we need to ensure

that integrate values in our lessons, that our students' critical thinking ability is increased, and that entrepreneurship is encouraged. When they live the school, they will need to think outside the box and face life challenges. So we need to prepare them by ensuring that they don't just receive the knowledge but that they learn skills, competence and values". ■

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOCUS

Most school leaders spend most of their time and energy ensuring that quality education in schools is established and sustained. Among their compelling priorities are a new curriculum that has to be implemented, dropout rates that have to be reduced, students' learning achievements that have to be increased and parental involvement that has to be promoted. The question that thereby arises is whether the time and resources invested are channeled in the right

way. Is the school leader doing the right things and is (s)he doing things right? This article tries to apply some of the insights of school leaderships 'guru' Michael Fullan on our local situation.

As Fullan states it, school leaders often find themselves trapped and overwhelmed with the tremendous tasks of their jobs, leading to a sense of 'frenetic urgency' that is not motivating. Although it is true that urgency can effect great changes, lack of focus can lead

to ineffective actions. However, when school leaders succeed to move toward effective actions they tend to become more motivated and capable to do even more. If school leaders can avoid what Fullan describes as the "wrong policy drivers", then real progress can occur.

In the table below you'll find a list of four major "wrong" policy drivers and the accompanying better driver needed to enact real improvements.

Wrong Driver	Right Driver
1. Accountability	1. Capacity building
2. Individualistic solutions	2. Collaborative efforts
3. Technology	3. Pedagogy
4. Fragmented strategies	4. Systemness

(1) Accountability – Standards and accountability seem to become the mantra to improve schools. Accountability is based on the premise that those above can require that those below perform in a certain way. What is expected to be realized is formulated in a performance contract. The question is however if the carrot and stick approach is indeed the most effective way to motivate people. Educators only seem to perform better if we give them the competences to perform better what in turn, will make them more accountable. Increasing the pressure through accountability without a thorough program of competence building leads people to meet those measures at any cost. One could say that it is actually provoking fraud. Instead of simply demanding accountability, the better approach is to build capacity while clearly focusing on results.

(2) Individualistic solutions – Emphasis on students' learning results often goes together with a call for 'instructional leadership' from the side of the school

leader. This often is translated into a pressure to especially do a lot of classroom visits. Because of this, school leaders are now frequently busy with one-to-one feedback – which is often more of the superficial carrot-and-stick approach – that rarely leads to actual improvement. But, if you want to improve the entire school culture you need to change the group. It is a far better use of their time to build the capacity of teachers to work in teams rather than observing dozens of individual teachers. In fact, countries with strong instruction – like Singapore and Finland – did not achieve their success with an individualistic system of rewards and punishments. Instead, they helped teachers work together to use student data to improve instruction and created cultures with high-performance expectations. Overall, it is simply ineffective to try to solve systemic problems with individualistic strategies.

(3) Technology – Organizing access to very sophisticated learning materials, with as summum bonum one laptop for every child can be a

very time consuming task for school leaders. More focus on how to deepen learning by using 'simple but adequate' materials, and how to integrate them with learner centered pedagogies and more competence based approaches in service of deeper learning, could be more effective.

(4) Fragmented strategies – School leaders often are overwhelmed with a quantity of new initiatives, programs offered by educational partners, all having best intentions, but always not aligned and coherent in focus. A better driver would be "systemness" – a coordinated set of aligned strategies.

It is important to note that it is not that we should be discarding working with individual teachers or putting effort in getting access to sophisticated learning materials – it is more that these items should be playing a supporting role for the right drivers. *As Fullan puts it: the problem is often that the above wrong drivers are narrowing the school leader's role so that it becomes unproductive. If the school leader is expected to give specific feedback to as many individual teachers as*

possible, then the role of school leader becomes one of a time-consuming micromanager and leaders

simply can't micromanage people into being effective.
Describing the three keys

to maximize the impact of the school leader Fullan describes three new roles of the school leader:

The Three New Roles for School leaders

Learning Leader

A number of research studies show that groups of teachers working together to improve student learning produces the most powerful effects. Therefore, it is by directly influencing the work of these groups, that school leaders can have the greatest impact. Research shows that the groups must be purposeful in their focus on student learning. More specifically, the school leader must act as lead learner and ensure that the groups focus on a few key areas:

- (1) specific goals for students
- (2) data that enable clear diagnosis of individual learning needs

System Leader

- (3) instructional practices that address those learning needs
- (4) teachers learning from each other, monitoring overall progress, and making adjustments accordingly

As a school leader, there's only so far you can go in building a very good school if you go it alone. While you may be in a Sector that still does not promote relationships and learning among schools, your school will benefit if you can connect your staff with staff from other schools in the sector.
Professional Learning Networks of Head

Agent of Change

Teachers at sector level could be a starting point for this.

Moving an organization through change isn't easy. To become more effective change agents school leaders should become competent in challenging the status quo, building trust through clear communication and expectations, creating a commonly owned plan for success, focusing on team over self, having a sense of urgency for sustainable results, committing to continuous improvement for self and building external networks and partnerships. ■



Especially from: "The principal, three keys to maximizing impact", Michael Fullan, 2014, ISBN 978-118-57523-9

If interested in further reading the following links could be helpful: <http://josseybasseducation.com/teaching-learning/michael-fullans-new-book-principal-excerpt/> or <http://www.middleweb.com/14065/principals-can-impact-student-achievement/>

EVERYTHING RISES AND FALLS ON LEADERSHIP

A STORY FROM GROUPE SCOLAIRE NGURUGUNZU



Alexis MUHOZA serves as the Head Teacher of Groupe Scolaire NGURUGUNZU, a school located in GATUMBA sector, Ngororero District. Alexis is passionate about school leadership and he believes that effective school leadership and management is one of the key requirements toward student's learning achievement.

As one of the successful school leaders in his Sector and in his district, he was more than willing to share with our readers what is being done at Groupe Scolaire NGURUGUNZU that is making the school shine.

"Everything rises and falls on leadership. It is an unequivocal principle. Therefore, it is my duty, as school leader, to ensure that teachers understand that our ultimate purpose as educators is not just to teach, or to transfer knowledge. Our mission is to impact the lives of children by helping them tap into their full potential. That is our role as educators. Teachers facilitate students' learning rather than standing in their way" Alexis said.

So how can all this happen? Alexis shares: *"Great school leaders learn to identify assets, strengths, gifts, talents, relationships, and opportunities of his school community and use them to the benefit of the students. Among the key assets a school has are teachers. Teachers are more precious than gold. When a leader fails to understand this, he is paving his way toward failure and disaster. So if teachers are my greatest assets, my role as a leader is to care for them. I have to ensure that they are empowered holistically and that they understand our ultimate goal and purpose: impacting students' lives. If teachers are important, I have to consistently ensure that*

their teachings allow students to be involved in their learning, that students participate actively, that lessons are planned consistently, that relevant teaching aids are designed. As a school leader, I have to ensure that I support my teachers to prevent and to fight scourges like dropouts and absenteeism because they impede on the successful learning of our children".

But teachers are not the only actors involved. Alexis champions the idea of giving to parents the school ownership: "A head teacher who foolishly wants to work alone will definitely fail. It is important that school leaders involve the community and parents in particular to ensure that they embrace the same vision of the school and that they are all on the same page with regard to ensuring that students' learning is achieved successfully. This is why I always tell parents that they own the school and all that is taking place in the school. If parents are not supportive when a child returns home, if they do not care about what learning is about, if they don't know anything about how the school resources are being managed and

allocated, if they are just informed as observers instead of being involved as actors, all the efforts we make as educators in a classroom will never be fruitful and we will not see lasting success”, Alexis warns.

But to get there, Alexis believe that many efforts will be deployed from all the actors involved and especially head teachers and teachers:

“The first secret toward the successful students’ learning is to never think that you are successful enough. We always need to improve and to learn. Children potential is infinite. So we need to keep pushing to ensure that we move from good to great. It is therefore important to encourage school leaders and teachers to consider their continual professional development as a priority. One of the best ways to do this is

to share best practices through peer learning. And I am grateful that we now have Professional Learning networks that can allow such a sharing to happen. No one can master everything. We are all learners. Some of us are advanced. Some are still struggling. But we can still learn from each other to ensure that we become better educators and that our children benefit from it in their learning and in their development”.■

ELEMENTS OF SCHOOL BASED IN-SET

1. Background of School Based In-Set (SBI)

From 2008 to 2011 the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) in cooperation with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) conducted “the Project of Strengthening Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE)”. The Project aimed at introducing “ASEI-PDSI” (Activity-Student-Experiment-Improvisation, Plan-Do-See-Improve) concept which had been elaborated in similar project in Kenya to enable teachers to apply a Learner Centred Methodology (LCM) in classroom. The achievements of the

SMASSE were observed in many schools. In other words, trained teachers were able to apply LCM successfully. The Project was highly valued.

However, the expansion of the SMASSE proved to be limited. The trained teachers did not share what they learned from SMASSE training with their peers as expected. Only trained teachers could apply ASEI-PDSI properly when the project phased out. From a mutual understanding between Rwanda Education Board (REB) and Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the School Based Collaborative Teacher Training (SBCT) project was initiated with the focus of ensuring

quality School Based In-set (SBI) in lower secondary schools.

2. What is SBI?

School-Based INSET (SBI) is a type of INSET which is organized at school level by teachers in a particular school. SBI is organized to solve some special needs or deficiencies identified by the teachers themselves or by head teachers.

3. Importance of SBI

Teachers involved in intensive SBI produce best performing students and teachers in schools that practice SBI are more collaborative and active in teaching/learning than others.

3.1 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a process by which teachers continuously develop their competences. Like any other profession, teachers have responsibility to deepen their knowledge, extend their skills and keep themselves abreast with major developments affecting their profession throughout their career. CPD can be on or off school premises. Off school premises CPD is generally organized by different training providers and is a good opportunity to update their methodologies and skills. On the other hand, School-based CPD is both flexible and efficient because it is made to meet the needs of the group, uses their own experience, and addresses real-world challenges. CPD is one of the forms of school-based SBI. Therefore, teachers are expected to take part in CPD activities.

3.2 Collegiality

Collegiality is another key concept, which facilitates INSET as a way to improve upon the quality of teachers and lessons. Individually, teachers may have limitations or difficulties in their effort to improve upon their teaching competencies. In order to overcome such limitations or difficulties, they need to collaborate with each other as

colleague professionals. Thus, they can improve upon their teaching competencies through interacting with one another.

3.3 Cost Reduction

SBI reduces the cost involved in INSET. The venue could be a classroom in the school which will not be hired at any cost. The cost of transporting teachers to the venue is eliminated completely in SBI. Thus, teachers are encouraged to use locally made teaching / learning materials at no cost.

4. SBI Activities

SBI activities rely on identified teaching learning problems which are solved within the means of a school. The SBI activities conducted at school level aim at improving teaching and learning practices, production of teaching aids, peer learning in exchanging best practices and experiences on how things are done effectively. SBI groups are facilitated by a selected resource person based on their experience or any other acquired expertise. Effective school leadership is an impetus for successful implementation of SBI activities. School Head teachers report SBI activities to REB through Sector and District. Below are sample SBI activities:

4.1 Demonstration Lesson

Demonstration lesson takes place with a 'live' class. A demonstrator teaches a lesson to pupils with other colleague teachers as observers who make constructive suggestions to improve the lesson during post-delivery discussion.

4.2 Peer Teaching

Peer teaching involves colleague teachers learning from and with each other in ways which are mutually beneficial and involve sharing knowledge, ideas and experiences among participants. It allows teachers to benefit from each other's experiences, to get immediate and objective feedback on their teaching and to disseminate innovative approaches and good practices in teaching, and in classroom management.

4.3 TLM Preparation / Usage

Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) preparation / usage is another option as topic for the SBI / CBI, and it focuses on TLM rather than a whole lesson. A demonstrator can show how to construct a TLM using locally available resources. It is equally important to consider how TLM can be used in the development of a lesson in order to help pupils understand what they

should learn in the lesson. It will be really pointless to use a TLM in a lesson if it is not directly related to the lesson objectives.

5. SBI Achievements in Rwanda schools

The SBI approach was sensitized to Rwandan education stakeholders through workshops intended to empower DEOs, SEOs, Head teachers and DOSs in lower secondary to plan, implement report and monitor SBI activities in schools. From 2013 to 2015, 19 districts were trained and a total of 1905 people were trained and started implementing SBI practices in their respective schools. Given the implementation of the Competence

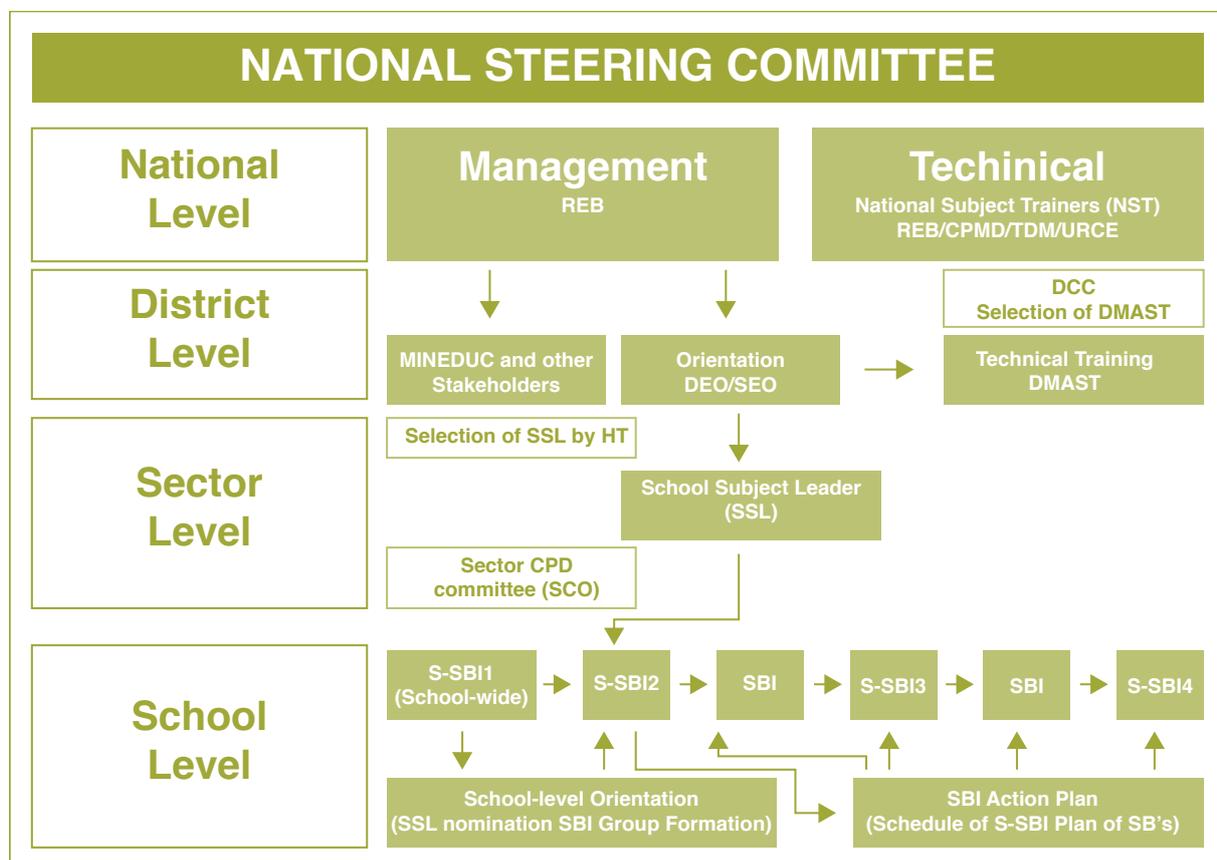
Based Curriculum (CBC) in vogue, the programme is meant to extend its activities in a wider dissemination of the CBC whereby SBI groups at school level will be lead by School Subject Leaders (SSLs) who will follow reporting hierarchy from school to REB.

6. SBI in dissemination of the CBC

In principle, as stated above, SBI practices consist of identifying a teaching / learning problem and address it in a group with the help of a resource person, who has expertise/experience in the domain. However, for the purpose of CBC implementation, as per the below chart, SBI will consist of putting into

practice CBC related managerial or technical instructions from above (REB) through a cascade modal to ensure effective implementation of the CBC at school level. In this case, SBI group will be composed of teachers who share a subject and so far the resource person will be a School Subject Leader (SSL). In the same vein, CBC trainings, monitoring and reporting will be done from top to bottom and vice versa to ensure all decentralised hierarchies are actively involved.

*SBI Article September, 2016,
By: NZITABAKUZE Claudien,
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HEROISM AGAINST ALL THE ODDS

A STORY FROM INTWARI PRIMARY SCHOOL, RWEZAMENYO SECTOR



In 1957, a handful of parents who lived in what was years ago called Nyamirambo, committed to join their efforts and energy and to gather all available resources in order to build and start a school whose main goal would be to ensure that children access undiluted quality education. With a lot of pain and against the odds, the school was born and most parents started to send their children to the new school.

But since some of the school pioneers were from the Muslim community, the school was very soon labeled a “Swahili” school, a negative expression used

to describe the Muslim community. Yet the stigma and the attitude of the community against the school displeased the Rwandan King Rudahigwa MUTARA 3, who decreed that the school should be called “Intwari” school (The heroes’ school) since to him, building a school that would strive to give access to quality education to the children of Rwanda, was a real act of heroism. Half a century later, Intwari Primary school never stopped to be committed to its ethos and core vision encapsulated in their motto “*quality education, knowledge, and heroism*”. With up to 3,000 students and 31 teachers, the school is one of the school models in what has later become RWEZAMENYO sector (former Nyamirambo sector).

Sector Education Officer Olive Mukandahiro testifies that “*Intwari Primary success has impressed many. The school faces the same challenges most schools face yet they displayed their heroism but refusing to follow the usual paths. What Intwari did, other schools can do it as well. You don’t require extra resources to enhance*

students’ behavior management or to embrace effective school leadership best practices. It is all about the right attitude and the needed commitment”.

Zamida Uzamukunda, who has been in school leadership for nearly 20 years, serves as the head teacher of this government aided school. Her care for her teachers is obvious to everybody. She believes that “*teachers who are not cared for will not care for their students*”.

Zamida is aware of the challenges many public schools face on a daily basis. They include overcrowded classrooms, low teachers’ salaries, lack of involvement of the community of parents, and the challenge of teaching and learning in English. Yet, the courageous leader firmly believes that these challenges are opportunity to display our bravery.

“*Despite the challenges schools may face, there are good best practices school leaders can do to secure quality education in their schools. The first thing a head teacher should do to ensure that students’ learning is successfully achieved*

is to care for teachers. Caring for teachers is about continually showing them that you value their personhood and that you are supportive of their efforts. It is more than ensuring that they receive their incentives regularly and consistently. Teachers should know that they matter and that we all count on them. That this is why we have established regular tea and coffee breaks that serve as short check-in and fellowship times. This really motivates teachers" Zamida shares.

But to ensure that teachers are successful, Zamida advises that the school should foster its relationship with the community of parents:

"What can we achieve if we act as if we live in an isolated island? A school that underestimates the big influence of parents on the learning of students is doomed to fail. Parents, through their school general assembly

committees and the audit committees, are of a great value to the school. Their involvement strengthen accountability but it also encourages teachers who are glad to team up with their students' parents in order to improve their learning. Parents are reliable partners when it comes to managing the behavior of students, strategizing for the school and improving teachers' welfare".

And what is the role of teachers? What should happen in a classroom on a daily basis to ensure that students' performance is increased and achieved?

Zamida explains that *"teachers are managers of their classes. That does not mean that what they say is final. They should manage their classrooms as caring servants. This means that their first mission in a classroom is to seek to know all their students individually. Not just their names or their*

birth dates. I know that with our overcrowded classrooms, this discipline can be tough. But it is one of the prices to pay. Contemporary researches prove that when students actively participate in their learning, they are more likely to be successful. And a key ingredient that can encourage students to unleash their potential actively is to create that student-friendly environment where a child feels that he or she is safe and that someone is genuinely caring for their future. All the recommended teaching techniques like learner-centric methodologies are indeed much needed. Regular students' assessments are also important to ensure that students are really making progress. But the impact of all these important activities will be very limited if there is a poor relationship between a teacher and a student". ■



WHY NOT MY SCHOOL: THE ART OF THINKING BIG | AN IMPACT STORY FROM KIBENGA PRIMARY SCHOOL, MAYANGE SECTOR



In one of our previous issues of Urunana, Mayange Sector, Education Officer, Eugene Gahamanyi shared with us how Urunana magazine was impacting his life professionally as an educational leader. Eugene shared that he *“realised that Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) is a wonderful way to facilitate sharing of experiences and knowledge among peer educators like Sector Education Officers (SEOs), head teachers, or teachers toward the development of quality education”*.

In our recent encounter with Eugene who is still overseeing the education department in Mayange Sector, Bugesera district, the educator was again

more confident in his role as SEO. With the support of some partners and from the best lessons learned through peer learning, a lot has been achieved toward the development of quality education and students' learning: frequent and regular tests to assess students level have are organized, students are given the chance to revise their lessons before class starts in the morning, head teachers are valuing the importance of observing lessons, appropriate teaching aids are being used in lessons, parental involvement has increased, early childhood development has been encouraged, dropouts, absenteeism and lateness are being fiercely eradicated.

To ensure that our readers have a concrete picture of what is going on in Mayange Sector with regard to students' performance and quality education, Eugene requested a head teacher of one of the successful schools within his sector to share with us the implemented strategies that led them to succeed.

Robert Sendegeya leads Kibenga Primary School, a school that started in

2012 and that now counts 728 pupils. Robert is a man of action. In 2015, all the students who took national exams highly succeeded. 26 students succeeded with the first division rate, while only 5 succeeded with the second division. *“My target for 2016, said Robert, is to have them all succeed with the first division. And we will make it happen”*.

When it comes to developing quality education in schools, Robert believes that creativity matters:

“School leaders should think big. Sometimes, traditional paths do not bring the required change. School leaders' role is to challenge the ordinary ways of doing things. It is important for a leader and particularly educators to dream big for their schools and for their teachers. A leader should accept to be challenged by others and ask herself or himself the question ‘why not my school?’”

Sound and effective school leadership is also a prerequisite for improved students' learning achievement:

“Leadership is not about being a VIP. Leaders are servants and this important rule is applicable to school leaders as well. Strong school leaders understand the necessity of building healthy teams and fostering trust in their schools. School leaders empower teachers by encouraging them to have ownership of their classes. School leaders don’t put the blame on teachers who fail to meet the demands. Instead, they take the blame themselves and take the time to assess deeply what are the root causes for the misfortune. They don’t encourage failure but they struggle with their teachers to eradicate mediocrity and poor performance” Robert said.

In addition to fostering school leadership in a school, Robert advises also to learn from others’ achievements: *“I always learn from renowned and top private schools that run the same programme like ours. I ask myself: ‘if we are running the same programme, why shouldn’t we be the best?’ So I go out there and chase for their previous exams to stretch our students’ capabilities. Nothing is to be taken for granted and no comfort zone should be allowed. Healthy competition should be encouraged among our children because later when they are grown up, they will have to compete in life. So it is not only about exams. It’s about their*

future. However all this should be done in a way that students enjoy it and that they understand that we do all this because we love them dearly”.

“What valuable inheritance one can give to a child than quality education?” Robert asks. That is why he insists on the necessity of sustaining the work done in schools by actively encouraging parents and local leaders to be proactive and engaged in supporting the learning of their children.

“The future of our children matters. If we fail to help them be successful, we will be failing our own destinies” Robert admonishes.■

FROM STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO PERFORMANCE THROUGH LEARNER CENTRED CLASSROOMS

Introduction

By actively engaging our students in the learning process and by putting them at the heart of all classroom activities, they will definitely perform well and achieve the expected quality education. In fact,

Nelson Mandela said that *“education is the most powerful weapon that can change the world”*. Yet unless learners are deeply and actively engaged in learning activities, the battle for quality education will not be won.

It is therefore important to emphasize the necessity of linking student engagement, learner centred pedagogy and academic performance towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

Meaning of student engagement

In the last decades, the concept of student engagement has attracted scholars' attention and "there is no doubt that engagement is currently a very hot topic in the broad field of school achievement" (Eccles & Wang, 2012: 137). In this article, I elucidate the meaning of student engagement, then that of learner centred pedagogy and establish the link between these concepts and students' performance.

The concept of student engagement is relatively new in the field of education and dates 1990s. It has been initially defined as "*students' psychological investment in and effort directed towards learning, understanding or mastering the knowledge, skills or crafts that academic work is intended to promote*" (Newmann, 1992: 12). A National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was primarily used in the USA in 2000, in Canada in 2008, and in South Africa in 2009 countrywide at

tertiary level. In Rwanda, the first study on student engagement was carried out by Nizeyimana (2013) in teacher education using a Classroom Survey of Student Engagement (CLASSE) instrument.

Being an individual act, student learning is ultimately psychological. Thus, student engagement in learning is "*a psychological process, specifically, the attention, interest, investment, and effort students expend in the work of learning*" (Marks, 2000: 154-5).

This implies both affective and behavioural participation in the learning process. Therefore, engagement is very closely related to learner centred pedagogy which is in vogue today. Chapman (2003) as cited in Zepke and Leach (2010) defines student engagement as the students' cognitive investment in, active participation in and emotional commitment to the learning process. A deeper analysis of the concept of student

engagement highlights two key components: what students do, i.e. the time and energy they devote to educationally purposive activities and what institutions do, i.e. the extent to which they employ effective educational practices to induce students to do the right things" (Strydom & Mentz, 2010: 3; Strydom, Basson, & Mentz, 2012: 3), though in this article, I focus on the first component to limit myself to the individual learner's involvement in the process of learning which goes with learner centred pedagogy. The concept of student engagement is here understood as referring to "*students' psychological investment or involvement and participation in, and effort and time devoted to learning and teaching activities within the teaching and learning environment, at the classroom level*" (Nizeyimana & Osman, 2014: S77). In this regard, the learner is at the centre of all teaching and learning activities.

Meaning of learner-centred pedagogy

In the pedagogical literature, the concept of Learner Centred Pedagogy (LCP) is viewed as opposed to the traditional, teacher-centred way of lesson delivery. In a teacher-

led classroom, learners mostly passively listen to the teacher who controls the content with a fixed curriculum, controls the teaching and learning process using chalk and talk teaching technique,

and he/she is the sole authority in the classroom. Modernising teaching and learning, an emphasis was put on LCP which draws on constructivism. In fact, knowledge is created through a process of new

information interacting with the prior knowledge and experiences of the learners" (Vavrus, Thomas, & Bartlett, 2011).

Today, LCP is conceived as a paradigm shift to always organise classroom activities focusing primarily on the learner. During lesson planning - indirect and direct - the teacher has in mind what the learner will be

doing while acquiring the learning materials. In the learner centred teaching and learning approach, active teaching and learning methods and techniques are used by both the teacher and learners. Learners are given ample opportunity to discover, communicate ideas, to participate in the creation of what is being learnt with the facilitation of the teacher;

to apply and use materials for problem solving; and to transfer learning in complex situations. This new approach of teaching and learning takes into account individual learners' needs, learning preferences in a collaborative and (inter) active teaching and learning environment clearly facilitated by the teacher.

Student engagement and performance

The literature closely associates student engagement with student performance. In fact, *"the more students are engaged in learning, the more they will understand and master, and the better they will perform"* (Nizeyimana & Osman, 2014: S77). As the level of student engagement is determined by psychological - academic background, motivation, and beliefs – as well as environmental factors -teaching and learning context and classroom interactions (Nizeyimana, 2013), these factors are ipso facto likely to influence student performance among other factors.

Everything else being equal, having strong academic background knowledge in a certain field leads to better performance in similar fields of study because, *"the better one is academically prepared,*

the more likely a student was to be engaged at higher levels" (Hu & Kuh, 2002: 569) in the subsequent learning, and consequently perform higher. It is also commonly agreed that without motivation, learning cannot take place. In addition, Nizeyimana (2013) agrees that motivation is a sine qua none condition for enhanced student engagement and leads to an effective learning and then performance. In the same vein, Sharan and Tan (2008) note that student engagement embeds the idea of motivation to learn, interest, commitment, and investment in learning. Motivation also can be influenced by the preconceptions or beliefs held by the learner. Research has found that what learners bring to school including beliefs viewed *"as personal construct influenced by experience, knowledge,*

and social background" (Markic & Eilks, 2008: 26) influence learning and impacts on subsequent learning and then performance. Indeed, learning embeds learners' beliefs about what and for which purpose they are learning. Resnick (1989) as cited in Richardson (2003: 4) notes that *"learning is an active and meaning-making process that is influenced by an individual's existing understanding, beliefs, attitudes, and preconceptions"*.

With regard to the external factors influencing student engagement and performance, we mention the teaching and learning environment or context. It imbeds all influences that are external to the student and which have a direct or indirect impact on the way the student goes about learning (Nizeyimana, 2013). This has undoubtedly a

great impact on student engagement and success, because *"the way students perceive the institutional environment influences their engagement in learning"* (Kuh & Hu, 2002: 270) which goes with students' satisfaction. In this regard, it is agreed that *"the single best predictor of student satisfaction with college is the degree to which students perceive the college environment to be supportive of their*

academic and social needs" (Kuh et al., 2007: 53).

As highlighted by Nizeyimana (2013), institutional size, or what is known as *"institutional density"* (Porter, 2006: 529) or opportunities for students to become involved (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), is an important aspect to be taken into account in the field of student engagement and success.

When institutions become overcrowded, *"student outcomes such as engagement and development suffer because the number of opportunities for involvement is dependent on the ratio of people to settings"* (Porter, 2006: 529). Moreover, *"if student time on task is increased, an increase in student achievement will follow"* (Stallings, 1980: 11).

Learner-centred pedagogy and performance

When classroom activities are centred on the learners who play an active role in the learning process, they learn effectively. They adopt a deep approach to learning. This means that they have the intention of understanding, engaging with, operating in and valuing the subject. They actively seek to understand the taught materials, interact with the content, make use of evidence/examples, inquiry and evaluation, and insist on the relationships between ideas. They are interested and motivated to learn, relate new ideas to previous lesson, relate concepts to everyday experience, and tend to read and study beyond the course requirements (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). These characteristics of deep learners are in fact those of LCP which promotes understanding and application of knowledge for life.

In this perspective, there is high quality learning as students are progressing towards achieving educational goals. Research has found that achievement goals influence study strategies and have a direct influence on academic performance (Fenollar, Roma, & Cuestas, 2007). Instead of being LCP because the approach uses active teaching and learning techniques, Newmann, Marks, and Gamoran (1996) name it *"Authentic Pedagogy"* as it posits standards of intellectual quality emphasising on student performance. These scholars argue that intellectual accomplishment is worthwhile and meaningful and that authentic intellectual achievement is a source of standards for pedagogy and student performance.

To sum up this paper, I strongly advice teachers to bear in mind that student engagement / involvement is vital in their daily practices as it leads to deep and high quality learning. During lesson delivery, the use of active teaching and learning methods and techniques or simply the implementation of Learner Centred Pedagogy (LCP) is a sine qua none condition to ensure high quality learning. The direct consequence of high quality learning is good performance. The ultimate goal of both student engagement and LCP is student performance or achievement.

Therefore, policy makers, curriculum developers, teachers and learners should be aware of the above theoretical views for an effective implementation of the school curriculum via an authentic pedagogy.

The curriculum being the content which refers to what is taught and learnt, the pedagogy referring to how it is taught, while the evaluation refers to the

methods used to ascertain whether the content has been internalised and understood (Nizeyimana, 2003). Indeed, Armbruster, Patel, Johnson, and

Weiss (2009) found a significant improvement of self-reported student engagement and satisfaction and increased academic performance. ■

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

A REQUIRED ATTITUDE FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDENT'S LEARNING IN SCHOOLS, IMPACT STORY FROM GATUMBA SECTOR (NGORORERO)



NDAMYABERA Marcel Patrick serves as the Sector Education Officer (SEO) of Gatumba Sector, one of the 14 sectors of Ngororero District in the Western Province. With an educational experience of 15 years, this passionate education leader oversees the implementation all education-related policies within all the 9 schools of Gatumba Sector.

Marcel was willing to share with Urunana rw'Abarezi

his vision of how students learning can be improved and achieved.

"We all embrace the principle that all children should freely and equitably access quality education. It is a noble principle and it is in line with our Country's strategic education policies. Yet, beyond free access to education, we have the compelling responsibility of ensuring that what our children learn is consistent. Sending children to school is one thing. But ensuring that what is taught and learned in a classroom is another thing. Which is why educators and particularly school leaders and sector education officers need to be innovative and proactive by exploring relevant and productive ways to boost quality in their schools and to ensure that student's

learning is improved and achieved" Marcel said.

So how can this happen? What are some of the best practices school leaders and educators should emulate to achieve and to improve student's learning in their schools?

Marcel shares a number of strategies and actions that can help school leaders be on top of quality education development. He begins by emphasizing the importance of investing in children from their early age:

"We all know that any house needs a strong and consistent foundation otherwise it may collapse in a very short time. I believe this principle to be true in education. Which is why I keep encouraging school leaders, teachers and parents to work together and to invest in

early childhood education and low primary since that is where children develop their basic numeracy and literacy skills as well as their cognitive capacities”.

But the education officer also advocates for a consistent analysis of reasons that lead some students to underperform at school: “The various tests that our children take at both the primary and secondary levels should be used at compasses. We cannot help a child become a better student unless we are willing to analyze and to understand what went wrong and to fix the issue. And from my experience, in most cases, educators are the cause of poor student’s performance and learning. In most cases, poor school leadership has been identified to be one of the root causes of quality impediment in schools. When school leaders are weak and unable to support teachers as they strive to deliver quality education in schools, teachers lose the motivation. Who do you think will pay the price? Our children will be the ones to suffer from the consequences.

This, says Marcel, leads us to the necessity of encouraging sector education officers to

empower head teachers and teachers in their respective roles.

“Leadership matters. And schools are not the exception. This is why my first priority is to ensure that head teachers and directors of studies are empowered and developed. I always encourage them to proactively engage with parents and local leaders to make them be supportive of the schools efforts to improve and achieve student’s learning. School’s efforts should be combined with the community involvement in the teaching and the learning of our children. I believe that the community has assets and gifts that we cannot afford to ignore. Where parents have been involved consistently into schools matters, student’s learning has also been improved. So parental involvement is a contributing factor toward quality development in schools”.

Marcel shares also another important point that is directly related to students’ learning achievement:

“I encourage school leaders to always ensure that the teachings in their schools are child-centered.

As long as teachers will be the center of the lesson, our children’s learning will continue to be mediocre. The teacher should be viewed as a catalyst in the process of learning rather than the knowledge source. Thankfully, we now have a competence-based curriculum that is structured in a way that a child potential is unleashed and that basic skills are acquired consistently. Furthermore, teachers have the possibility to easily track the progress or the struggles of students”.

On top of all these best practices, the successful education leader encourages schools head teachers and teachers to take advantage of the Professional Learning Networks since they are a great source of knowledge and skills. Marcel shares: “I learned a lot through these Professional Learning Networks, despite my many years of experience. Educators always have areas to improve. And when one sits with his or her peers, barriers are overcome and guards are dropped. Best practices are shared and people discover what was wrong with their way of doing things. I am grateful that we can utilize PLNs as tools to impact positive changes in our students’

learning. Furthermore, we can now access most of those best practices through the free magazine *Urunana rw'Abarezi*. We are really lucky. When people

open up and share both their success and their struggles, they receive the right support from their peers and they learn to solve problems by thinking

outside the box, an attitude required from any educator whose passion is to see a child's learning improved and achieved". ■

TEACHERS ARE NOT KINGS BUT SERVANTS

BEST PRACTICES FROM UPPEC LA LUMIERE, KAMEMBE SECTOR



UPEEC La Lumiere, a private school of 400 students, is one of kamembe sector schools. Led by Denson Muramira, the school is considered by many observers as a model of success in term of student's learning achievement in the district.

We asked Jean Damascene and Denson to let the readers of *Urunana Magazine* know what does it take to boost and to sustain student's learning performance in a school. Both Jean Damascene and Denson have a common passion of redeeming education at all cost. They both fervently champion the necessity of encouraging combined efforts from the community to ensure that all the stakeholders are involved.

"The first mistake school leaders make is to assume that they will just come and implement ideas of their own without taking into consideration the involvement of the community and especially parents. I know that most of the learning takes place in a classroom and that teachers play a big role in the process. Teachers are like the engine of a vehicle. But you also need good quality wheels and fuel to have the vehicle work. So striving to establish quality education in schools requires joint efforts that go beyond head teachers and teachers alone. Those children come from known places and identified families. Yes they spend hours at school but at the end of the day, they are reunited with their families. So it is important

Kamembe Sector is one of the most popular sectors of Rusizi District, one of the districts that directly connect Rwanda with the Democratic Republic of Congo. Kamembe Sector has 14 schools, overseen by Jean Damascene Uwintije, Kamember sector education officer.

for a school leader to build strong relationships with parents, to genuinely motivate them and to keep pushing so that they can deeply understand their role, and the impact their contribution has on their children's learning. It is one of the things I prioritized in our school. And it worked" Denson advised.

"Our city is directly connected to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Though this can be favorable to the local economy, it can however in some ways prevent some children from focusing on their studies. We have experienced that. So a strong collaboration between educators and parents to ensure that children are taken care of accordingly, matters. Parents need to be involved so that what a child receives at school is not stolen before he reaches home. And that it is preserved on reaching home. It is therefore very important to develop strong relationships with the community of parents to ensure that they are always and clearly involved in school matters." Jean Damascene added.

Another important requirement for student's learning achievement that

the two educators brought up is the importance of having school leaders motivate and encourage teachers to build child-friendly learning environment:

Head teacher Denson shares that *"teachers are not kings. They don't rule over their students. Instead, they should befriend and love them. When students see their teacher as their king or their boss, they are driven by fear rather than the eagerness to learn and to perform. Teachers should therefore foster an environment where children are free to be proactive and to make mistakes as they learn. I am not a fan of repetitive education policy changes, but today we are grateful that our education system has got a consistent and adequate curriculum that suits the needs of our schools. So teachers should take advantage of this and ensure that children enjoy their learning, not as passive auditors but as active participants"*.

To ensure that teachers are developed in their ability to enhance students' learning capabilities, availing the right learning resources to teachers is a vital

necessity. And the sharing of best practices is one of the best ways to that effect. Jean Damascene encourages head teachers to allow peer learning among teachers:

"Among the various relevant ways of learning how to boost students' learning achievement, is peer learning. We are grateful that both sector education officers and head teachers can share their experiences through the Professional Learning Networks (PLNs). These PLNs proved to be very helpful and relieving. So why not encouraging teachers to enjoy the same experience with their peers? We have many schools that do an outstanding job in enhancing the performance of children. They have tips and experience to share. They know what to do and what to avoid. But as a long as they don't share their riches with others, many will be left behind and as it has always been the case, children will be the ones to endure the consequences because their learning performance will be jeopardized" Jean Damascene warned. ■

QUALITY EDUCATION REQUIRES MORE THAN TEACHING

A STORY FROM MUHIMA SECTOR | GROUPE SCOLAIRE SAINTE FAMILLE

Muhima is one the sectors that make up Nyarugenge district. Known for hosting the biggest Bus Park as well as the popular Nyabugogo Market and the Central Prison, Muhima Sector has not been left behind with regard to improved students' learning and quality education in its 5 schools.



Jeannette Umurerwa is invested with the responsibility of ensuring that Muhima sector schools are

positively transformed and that teachers are successful. According to Jeannette, *"our mission as educator goes beyond the famous Education For All (EFA) goals. We send our children to school not because we want them to crowd classroom but because we want to see their energy and potential unleashed for the benefit of our Country's development. What happens in a classroom will impact the destiny of our Country, whether we believe it or not. That is why ensuring that students are really learning and performing, matters. This is why we wake up every morning and commit ourselves to invest in our children"*

Does it work? If yes, how and what should school leaders do get there? These are questions that Jean de Dieu Niyonsenga, Head teacher of Groupe Scolaire Sainte Famille answered to Urunana magazine for the sake of our readers. With up to 2,500 students, this Government aided public school is among the top performing schools of Muhima Sector. How did the school make it to that level?

Teamwork, Jean de Dieu says, extremely matters. *"The first important ingredient for quality development in a school is a genuine and dynamic collaboration between school leaders, teachers, parents, and*

the wider community. Expecting to be successful by working alone is a pitiful misconception. All key actors should be encouraged to come on board and to contribute with their gifts, assets, talents, and energy. This is one of the biggest responsibilities of a school leader: ensuring that synergy is built and that all the community resources are availed for the sake of the children”.

But teamwork cannot be achieved when there is poor leadership. Jean de Dieu shares that “effective school leadership is an undeniable key element of sustainable quality education in a school. School leaders should not play ‘hard to find’. Teachers seem surprised when I tell them that my role is to make myself unnecessary. A leader who refuses to empower his subordinates is doing a poor job. He or she is creating dependency and soon or later, this pattern destroys proactivity and innovation. I strongly believe that the role of a school leader is to empower teachers and to build a culture of trust and ownership. The role of a school leader is not to be a police officer. Instead, school leaders mentor and support their colleagues so that they can be

proactive without always relying on the leader.

Reflecting on the role of teachers in fostering students’ learning in classrooms, Jean de Dieu says that the “new Competence based Curriculum is what we have been waiting for”. And to explain that “this new competence based curriculum also known as CBC will allow teachers to teach without impending on students’ learning. While previously teachers were at the center of the teaching and the learning, students are now our persons of interest. Therefore, every professional development for teachers and school leaders should always take that important component in consideration.

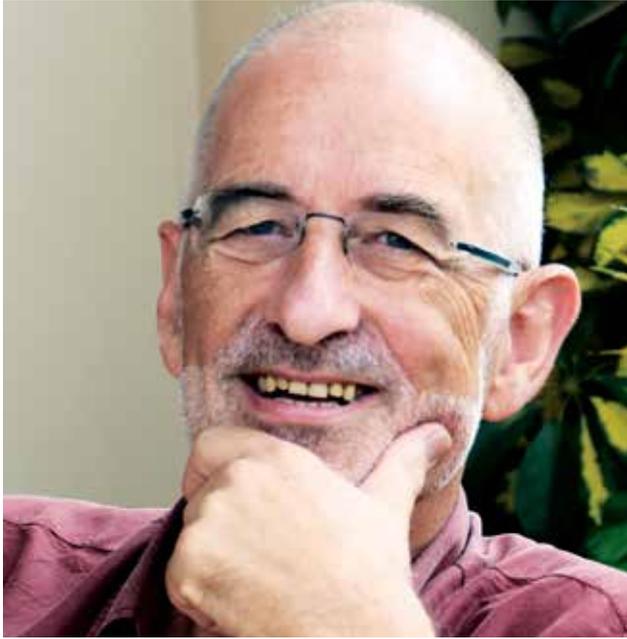
Teachers should be trained and encouraged to build child-friendly environment. Lessons should be planned and teaching aids developed in a way that students will play a prominent and participative role in their learning. Teachers should also ensure that students feel safe to express themselves regardless of their personalities. On top of this, children should learn key values whenever a lesson is taught. We don’t want them to memorize concepts. We want them to learn, to

analyze, to criticize and to understand the value of the lesson in real life. That is why, head teachers should keep their eyes wide open and observe lessons frequently. Not because they don’t trust teachers but because it is their role to identify areas where teachers need more support and encouragement”.

Head teacher Jean de Dieu expressed his grateful to REB and VVOB for encouraging and facilitating creation of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) for school leaders, education officers and teachers:

“It is a great opportunity for myself and my peers to learn from one another on how to address challenges we face on a regular basis as we carry out our responsibilities. It is also the occasion to celebrate others’ achievement and best practices and to learn from them. The good news is that we now have Urunana magazine that can serve this purpose broadly. It is easily accessible, free and on REB website. I hope that the various resources it contains will help many educators to enhance students’ learning within their schools”. ■

WE WILL MISS YOU, HANS!



in the arena of school leadership and management. But above all that, he was considered like an elder and a wise counselor to many public schools head teachers. His expertise and experience highly contributed in strengthening effective school leadership and management practices in schools within the framework of the cooperation between VVOB and the Government of Rwanda. Furthermore, Hans's contribution along with other development partners in the broad education sector, helped frame and enhance relevant policies related to school leadership and management.

The editorial board of Urunana rw'Abarezi is announcing the imminent departure of one of his education advisers, Hans Zult who joined the Rwandan Education sector since 2011. Hans will be leaving Rwanda near the end of this year to continue to share his outstanding educational experience and to champion quality education by serving the African children in South Africa.

Prior to his outstanding services in the

Rwandan education sector, Hans has passionately enjoyed serving since 1976 as a teacher, and years later, as head teacher in a variety of environments and different schools types including the vocational training schools, the children with special education needs schools, and the traditional secondary schools in the Netherlands. In his daily interactions with Rwandan educators and all other relevant stakeholders in the education sector, Hans was regarded as a scholar, an authority

It is a great privilege as the editorial board to honor him for his great work on VVOB team, and with the Rwanda Education Board. More particularly, we are very grateful for his unparalleled work in laying down the foundations of Urunana rw'Abarezi magazine as well as in inspiring and supporting the production team. Despite his great influence and success in the arena of school leadership, Mzee Hans is known for his sense of humor and his great humility. His great services and his companionship will be dearly missed by many educators in Rwanda.

"The opportunity to work with the Minisiteri y'Uburezi, REB, URCE, DEO's, SEO's and Head Teachers was really a great pleasure. It made crystal clear to me that there are many, really many people who are very motivated to contribute to the improvement of quality education in Rwanda. Thanks again for allowing me to be part of this wonderful process" Mzee Hans said. The Editorial Board. ■







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