

Developing Instructional Leaders in Schools in Kazakhstan: The Centre of Excellence Directors' Leadership Programme.

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'Какovy, по словам директора, главные изменения в роли школьного лидера?

Я была авторитарным директором. Никто ничего не мог у меня спросить. Была очень строгая. Теперь строю более доверительные отношения. Замечаю, что обученные директора по-другому строят диалог, оказывают помощь, с большим пониманием взаимодействуют с коллективом.

I was an authoritarian director. No one could ask me anything. It was very strict. Now I build a more trusting relationship. I notice that trained directors build a dialogue in a different way, provide assistance, interact with the team with great understanding.'



First Leadership Programme School Directors

The most important factor influencing childrens' learning of school subjects is having really good teachers in every classroom. The second most important factor is school leadership and instructional leadership is the critical component of being a school Director. The work of instructional leaders is to ensure that every day in every classroom, every student has a highly challenging, positive and successful learning experience. To achieve this requires instructional leaders who believe it is their responsibility to lead the improvement of teaching and the improvement of all childrens' learning (Coldren & Spillane, 2007).

The Aims of the Centre of Excellence Leadership Programme

The aims of the leadership programme were twofold. The first aim was to create the most conducive conditions within a school for teaching and learning to flourish. The second, but equally important aim, was to equip Directors with the knowledge and skill to be able to introduce a whole school teacher accountability and professional learning system.

In essence the nine-month long leadership focussed on what it means to be an instructional school leader. The Face to Face training allowed Directors the opportunity to work with other school leaders and expert trainers to consider models of distributed and transformational leadership in action in other countries. Furthermore, Directors had time to be able to collect their own school data collected prior to the first face to face seminars and during the seminars were supported with the analysis and had time to reflect on what the results meant for future developments. At the end of the first face to face periods each Director had detailed research informed knowledge of the prevailing conditions of their own school. This enabled each Director to be able to plan for a school specific intervention. The follow up school - based tasks were implemented with the support of peers and expert trainers. Process and outcome impact evaluation of the intervention was undertaken by the Directors. The purpose of the school-based tasks was to support the Director in becoming an instructional leader who was cognisant of the strengths and limitations of teaching and learning within their own schools. Directors were introduced to the transformational aspects of school instructional leadership (Day and Sammons, 2013). The transformational power of instructional leadership is underpinned by the increasing the commitment of those in a school to organizational goals, vision, and direction (Bush and Glover, 2003) and has been shown to have positive impact in relation to the introduction of new initiatives or the remodelling or restructuring of school activity (Leithwood, 1994). Instructional leadership relates to the effort made by a Director in improving teaching in their school whilst also focussing on the relationships among teachers, as well as between teachers and students in classrooms. (Timperley and Robertson, 2011).

A second important driver of change was the introduction of a supportive model of teacher accountability. This was achieved through identifying each teachers' areas of strength and the areas which needed to be developed. This was closely followed up by establishing a support programme to develop all teachers through collegial collaborative teams within the school. It is through establishing trusting relationships in classrooms as well as in the departments of the school that the Director could actually transform practices in the school. An important trait of being a professional teacher is the desire to always do a good job in the classroom and to constantly strive to improve. The Directors role was to create positive trusting environments and the time to reflect on practice that created the conditions which were conducive to teachers taking responsibly for their own professional development too.

Evaluation of the Leadership programme; what is actually happening in schools?

In 2015, a team of expert trainers were introduced to advanced research methods and undertook a detailed impact evaluation of the Directors programme. By November 2015, 24% (1,736) of the Directors in the country had taken part in the nine-month extended leadership programme. The research team collected survey responses from all of these Directors and visited 231 schools where some school of the Directors were leaders.

Why did Directors join the programme?

Various reasons were given by Directors for attending the extended nine-month leadership programme.

One director in Astana was curious to know more and said:

'I heard about the leadership course, and wanted to attend, so agreed with pleasure. The "old education system has given its fruits and there is a need to renew and this programme helps us achieve this'. Astana '

Another Director in Akmola region wanted to be the leader of change in his school.

'to introduce in school innovation, diversify and improve education in school is important As headteacher I wanted to lead the process'. Akmola.

When teachers completed the three levelled programmes this increased interest among Directors too when the teachers came back to their schools.

"There are teachers in schools who have done level 2 and 3 and need help from senior leaders, but it was hard without knowledge of the programme. 'We need to understand to understand they have done in the levelled programmes to help support it" .Almaty

Several Directors stated that they also wanted to learn more about new ways of working.

"One principal had a friend, nearly 50, and he changed completely as a result they are like an 18-year old and this increased my curiosity. So, I joined." Shymkent

'I want to keep up with the times. I plan to learn. Teachers are working well'. East Kazakhstan

'6 teachers went immediately to level 3. I talked to them and I thought that I, too, must learn'. West Kazakhstan.

What changes were taking place in schools?

The research study found strong evidence that school leaders had introduced professional accountability systems and that many teachers had taken part in follow - up training. There were two main indicators that this was happening.

First, the Directors had implemented the school development plan introduced in F2F sessions as a routine activity and this was an embedded part of the school culture. The main drivers of change were the systems and structures that the Directors had introduced to support change in classrooms. There was good evidence that in schools where Directors had attended training, or in one or two cases where very active Level One senior teachers were in post, that systems were in place to support pedagogical developments. The transformational effects of the instructional leadership can be attributed to a two-stage process leading to changes in classroom practices. The instructional leaders, be it a Director or Level One teacher, could write research informed, targeted development plans but more importantly they could also successfully implement active dynamic coaching and mentoring teams in the school and in most cases large numbers of teachers took part in this process (Figure One)

Second, there was a culture of high expectation and high aspirations for all the pupils in the school cultivated by the Director through the supportive on - going professional development of all the members of the school team. Responsibility for sharing new knowledge was distributed among the newly trained level one, two and three teachers. Ultimately school accountability was centred on ensuring that teachers were well equipped to fully support pupils learning of subjects in their classrooms. So, the most important mechanism for change was the constant improving and refining of classroom teaching practices so that all pupils could engage in deep learning. This is after all the single most important responsibility of the teaching profession (Figure Two)

Networking In Schools

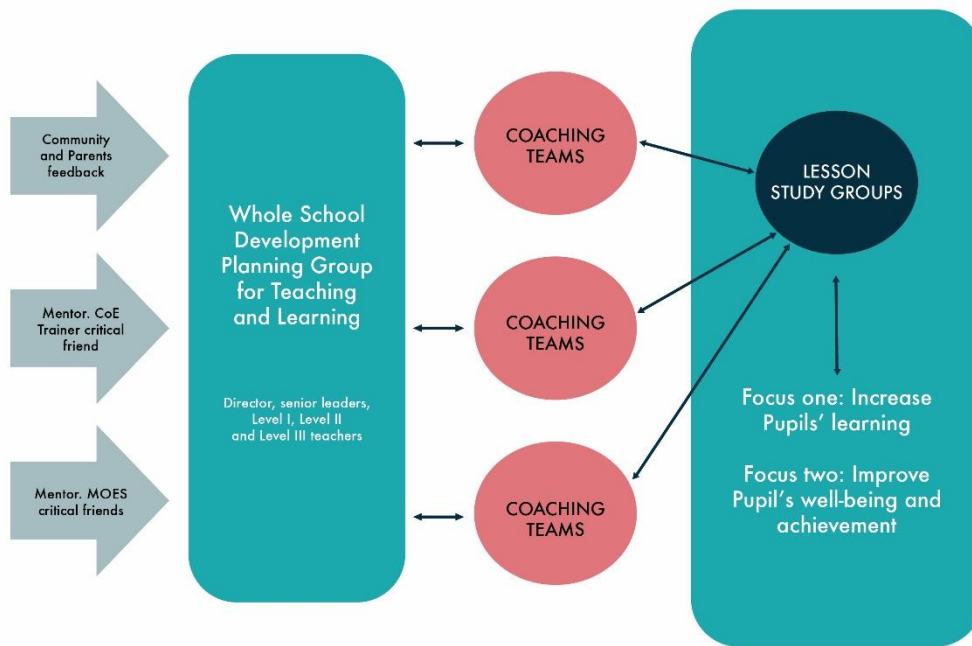


Figure One: The two-stage process of transformation of classroom practice.

How The Layers Of The CoE Programmes Are Connected

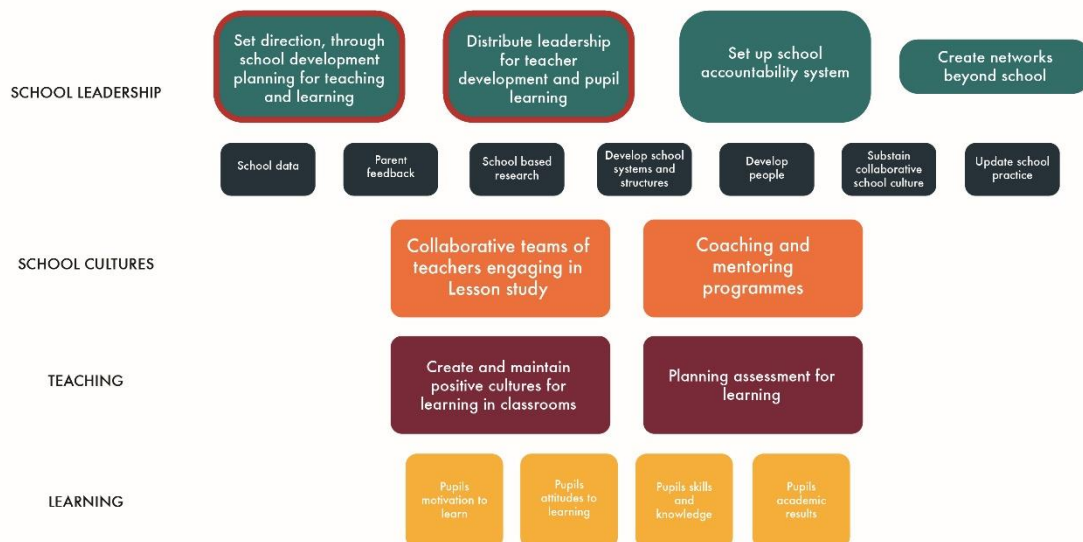


Figure Two: Whole school mechanisms for transforming practice

Directors Perception of their changing roles

Directors were asked about the main changes that had taken place in their leadership approach as a result of the CoE training programme.

'the first week was spent competing and showing off saying I did this and I did that, all of us were ambitious. But later thanks to the trainer, we managed to make collaboration possible in our group'. Pavlodar

'Previously we had an understanding that we could delegate some of our responsibility but now we understand. But the main idea now is not to delegate responsibility but to distribute leadership according to the talents of the staff' Karaganda

'According to our job descriptions we are responsible for many things and it is not just about the educational process; in many cases it is about the premises, about the economical; and financial processes, but this time we will be more prepared for educational issues. Our trainers explained that we will have some difficulties initially but we will be supported by the CoE centre and the regional education department' Zhambyl

What changes have taken place?

Directors were also asked about changes taking place in their schools

'In my opinion, the main advantage of level programs has been the creation of favourable conditions for the identification and development of the abilities of each child, the creation of an environment in the classroom, every child can show their talents, and most importantly - gain confidence in themselves'. Akmola

'It is too early to judge the results. But first - yes, there is a change. I believe that these courses - aimed at humanizing and democratizing education. And this is a big win. without fear of change, we are on the path of development, coaching, implement Lesson Study, we created the collaborative environment - teachers started trusting each other, helping each other, working together on development plans' Pavlodar

'Watching teachers completing the course I came to the conclusion that they have changed, become more open, communicative, began to smile more, discussing the lessons. That is good' South Kazakhstan

Directors responses to the TALIS survey were also analysed

Head teachers were asked about changes they had made to their leadership role. Almost 90% of the Directors who responded to the TALIS survey said they were involved in observing classroom teaching and 80% support the development of teaching and help teachers to improve their teaching skills (Figure Three).

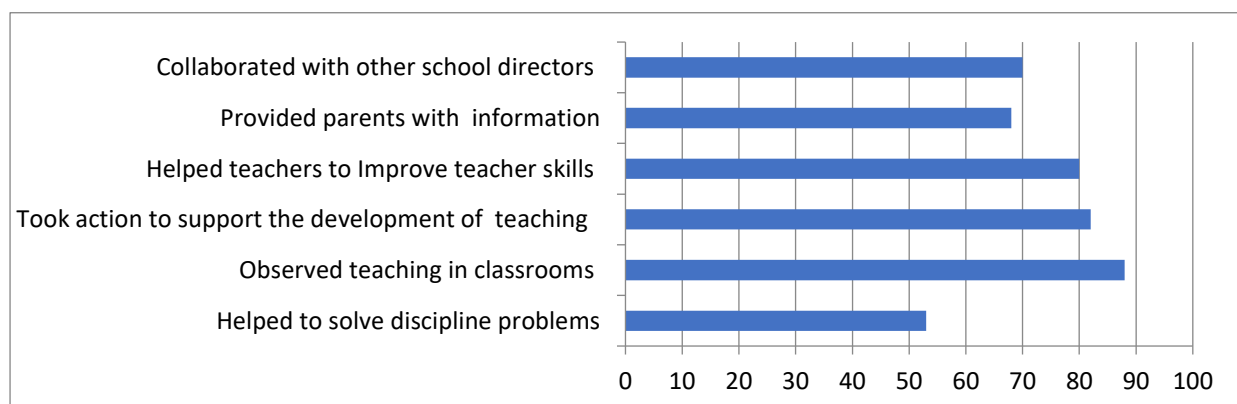


Figure Three: Changes that Directors had made to their leadership role



Some of the Directors who attended the 2014 Leadership programme in Astana

Directors' responses about collaborative characteristics of the school were collected by the TALIS principal's questionnaire and this was compared with TALIS average scores.

Table One shows that the Kazakhstani Directors have slightly lower % scores for active staff and student participation although opportunities for parents to participate in schools are higher than TALIS average scores.

Table One: Opportunities to collaborate in school		KZ	OECD
%		Head teachers	TALIS average
a	This school provides staff with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions.	92	98
b	This school provides parents or guardians with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions	88	82
c	This school provides students with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions.	79	76
d	There is a collaborative school culture which is characterised by mutual support.	85	95

Data collected for Kazakhstani teachers was added to the table of TALIS 2013 data which shows the average allocation of time spent by Directors over a year. Kazakhstani teachers spend less time on administrative task and meetings than other OECD countries but more on student interactions and spend the highest amount of time interacting with local and regional communities.

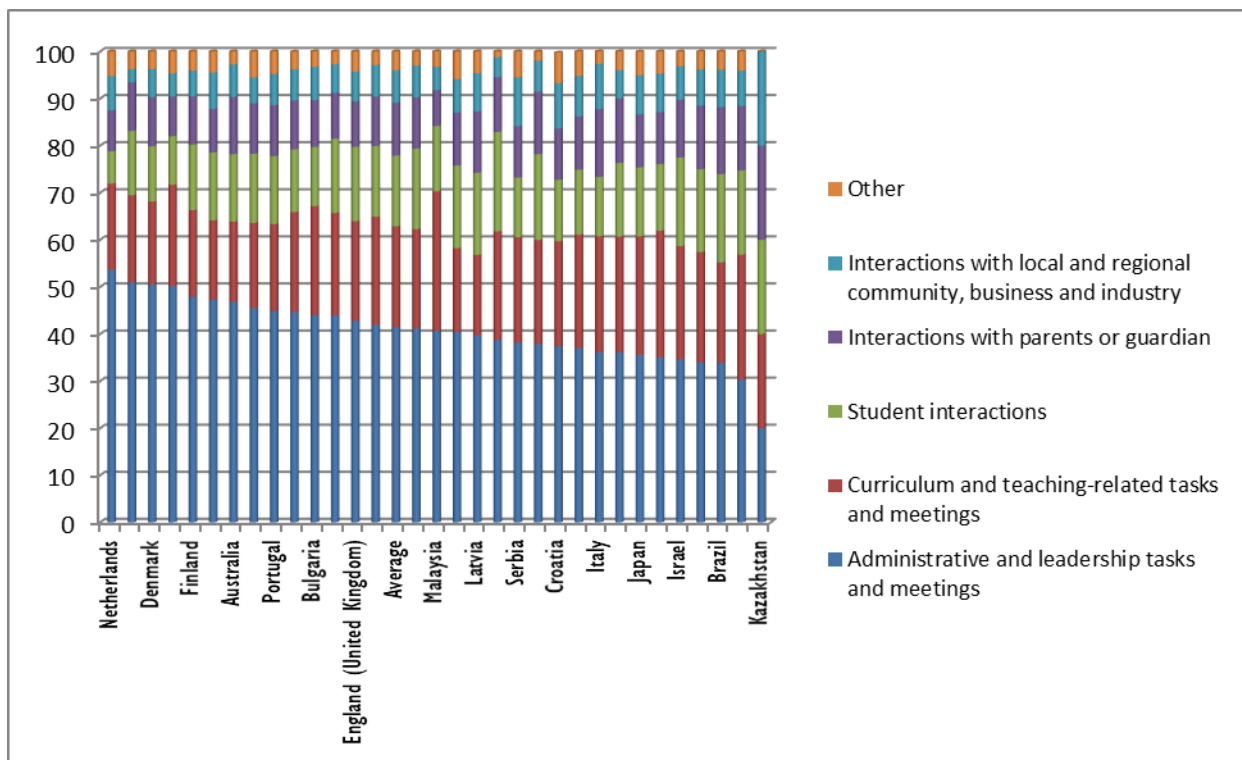


Figure Four: Average allocation of time spent on leadership activities of OECD countries and Kazakhstan

In summary

There is now a growing understanding and world-wide consensus that the two most important factors needed to ensure maximum learning for all children in all schools is first, to have great teaching in every classroom and second, to have active instructional leaders in every school. School leaders are particularly important when it comes to the conditions for change by allowing time to create collaborative and collegial environments that are conducive to professional learning of teachers (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012).

The school system of Kazakhstan is now well placed to be able to share their experience of bringing about transformational change. This process has been realised through equipping classroom teachers with the knowledge and skills of teaching all children well in each individual school, through the establishment of strong coaching and mentoring programmes cemented together by Directors who not only understand the methods of instructional leadership but are also able to implement these methods to bring about change.

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