

World Teachers' Day 2020

Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future

Concept Note

Introduction

Every year on 5 October since 1994, UNESCO celebrates World Teachers' Day (WTD) to commemorate the anniversary of the signing of the [1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers](#). It sets forth the rights and responsibilities of teachers, and standards for their initial preparation, ongoing professional development, recruitment, employment, teaching and learning conditions. It also contains numerous recommendations for teachers' participation in educational decisions through social dialogue and negotiation with educational authorities. Complementing this landmark achievement, WTD also commemorates the adoption in 1997 of the [UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel](#) which sets forth the rights and responsibilities of higher-education teaching and research personnel.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including [Goal 4 on Education](#), recognises teachers (Target 4.c) as key to the achievement of the 2030 Education Agenda. WTD provides an annual occasion to take stock of achievements and raise awareness around challenges facing teachers and their role in the achievement of the global education targets. This year WTD will be celebrated with the theme, **"Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future."**

Rationale for the choice of the theme

An unprecedented event, the COVID-19 pandemic challenges already constrained education systems in various new ways resulting in a revision of how teachers teach and more generally work. While the topic of leadership has been somewhat neglected amongst the multitude of issues facing the teaching profession in the push towards achieving the SDG 4 and Education 2030 goals, the issue of teacher leadership in relation to crisis responses is not just timely, but critical in terms of the contributions teachers have recently made to provide remote learning, support vulnerable populations, re-open schools, and ensure that learning gaps in the curriculum are being mitigated. The chosen theme also considers the role of teachers in building resilience and shaping the future of education and the teaching profession.

The COVID-19 crisis created a unique situation for teacher leadership, creativity and innovation to be demonstrated. Around the world, teachers are working individually and collectively to find solutions and create new learning environments for their students to ensure that learning could be continued. In most cases without much warning and with little time to prepare, teachers have had to modify or condense the curriculum and adapt lesson plans to carry on with instruction, whether via the internet, mobile phone, television, or radio broadcast. In many low-income countries, where there is poor or no connectivity to the internet or mobile networks, teachers have prepared take-home packages for their students. The move to online learning has required capacity for innovation and creativity never before attempted in order to keep children engaged and learning. Some teachers have even posted their lessons online for the benefit of all; others check-in with their students through WhatsApp, while others visit homes to pick up

work and bring back revisions and feedback. Teachers have formed communities of practice and support groups through social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Without much guidance or pedagogical support from education authorities, the frontline workers of the education sector are showing great capacity and flexibility to adapt to an ever-evolving situation in order to keep children and youth learning.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 released a “[Call for Action on Teachers](#),” which among others, advocates for teacher-related responses including a role in short, medium-, and long-term planning and policymaking for the continuation of learning and eventual return to school.

Beyond epidemic and pandemic situations such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS and Ebola, teacher leadership in other crises including civil conflict, displacement, migration, climate change and other emergency situations is critical given they overwhelmingly impact teachers, their daily practice and presence in the classroom, effectiveness and motivation.

At its peak, the recent COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures directly affected 1.5 billion students at all levels and 63 million primary and secondary teachers. In many cases, teachers were required to conduct online learning but lacked basic ICT tools in their own homes. In many places teachers also found themselves unable to continue education because many households lacked the technology and connectivity to allow students to learn online. Globally, for instance, approximately 50% and 43% of learners, respectively, lack computers or the internet in the home. Teachers themselves are under significant strain and lack a network and system of psychosocial support from education leaders and the greater community. In many cases, teachers often have the double duty of looking after their own children at home while trying to teach online and facilitate the continuance of education and learning. This highlights the need for system-level leadership so teachers are not only equipped with ICT tools and connectivity to continue teaching, but also benefit from adequate training and accompanying support.

Teachers face other challenges beyond the current and other crises; overall the early twenty-first century has not been an easy time to be a teacher. There has been, without doubt, a decline in the status of the teaching profession globally, and respect for teachers more generally. Worldwide there is growing concern about the competence and qualification levels of teachers to the extent that families no longer systematically support teachers’ authority or the concept *in loco parentis*. In many countries, this can be attributed to teachers’ low level of qualifications and training. For instance, data show that in primary and secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, only 64% and 50% of teachers, respectively, are trained. In some countries, including those in Western Africa and South Asia, it is also related to the practice of filling teacher gaps with a growing cadre of para-professionals and community volunteers. If this were not enough, the combined concern about competence and the drive to deskill teachers has led some prominent academics to urge a rethink of the very notion of “expertise,” suggesting that technology and artificial intelligence could soon make redundant many human tasks that were once the historic preserve of ‘professions,’ replacing them with automation.

Under ordinary circumstances, policymakers face critical challenges to identify which balance of policy options to recruitment, teacher education and continuing professional development, incentives, support and motivation offer an effective professional and personal development strategy for teachers and other education personnel to develop as leaders. During the COVID-19 crisis and the return to school—if these issues are not properly addressed—policymakers might miss the opportunity to develop a new cadre of talented teachers with a leadership mindset to effectively establish the new global, regional and country level aspirations countries need in these challenging times.

One of the fundamental aspects of SDG 4 is the shift from the overriding issue of education access to quality and learning outcomes. Teacher leadership will be essential for inclusive and quality education and allows for a broader interpretation and greater role for teachers beyond their traditional role. It expands on teachers' central role as leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning.¹

Under the current international framework for education, the [Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action](#) recognises the key role of leadership. Under Target 4.c, it acknowledges that “teachers make a major contribution to the improvement of student learning outcomes...[.]” More precisely, it notes teachers' leadership role not only in terms of instruction and curriculum, but also in terms of governance, efficiency, effective coordination, and monitoring and evaluation of learning and achievement.

Consequently, education stakeholders and global partners are increasing their focus on the issue of education leadership and how teachers, head teachers, principals and others play important roles. By choosing to focus World Teachers' Day 2020 on leadership, UNESCO and its co-convening partners wish to draw global attention to this neglected issue and to invite education stakeholders to reflect on what teacher leadership means in the context of Education 2030. These discussions will also contribute to UNESCO's [Futures of Education](#) initiative which is exploring how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet.

As the global community commemorates World Teachers' Day 2020, stakeholders and development partners should reflect on the recent COVID-19 crisis to examine the future of the profession – taking on board not just emergency preparedness, but also the role for teacher leadership in relationship to the changing climate of education including inclusive societies, education for sustainable development, global citizenship education, climate change, and more generally to achieving SDG 4 to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all.”

Framing teacher leadership

Teacher leadership is framed as a central component of educational innovation, governance, effectiveness and efficiency within a system-wide framework with its various hierarchical structures of governance constituting a triangular continuum of micro-, meso-, and macro- levels. The actions of teachers, headteachers, principals, and other education personnel at the different levels demonstrate the multiple facets of leadership, which sometimes overlap between actors. Furthermore, while some leadership roles are formal with designated responsibilities, others are more informal, for example, when teachers coach and interact with peers, parents, and the local community. During emergencies, leadership often takes the form of grassroots (bottom-up) approaches, while the system self-adjusts at a higher level.

The COVID-19 pandemic and other past and potential emergency situations require a fundamental re-evaluation on the role of teachers and how they can mitigate the worst elements of emergencies and their impact on teaching and learning. While a systems-level analysis of leadership is a useful framework for thinking about leadership in general, the COVID-19 crisis and other emergency situations also necessitate different teacher leadership responses during the short, medium-, and longer-term including additional phases of the pandemic. In the current context this long-term planning can be aligned to different phases of the COVID-19 situation including: i) during the crisis; ii) post-pandemic; and iii) longer-term planning and strengthening system resiliency.

¹ Cosenza, M.N. (2015). Defining teacher leadership: Affirming the teacher leader model standards, *Issues in Teacher Education*, 24, 79-99.

Classroom-level leadership (Micro): This refers to both face-to-face and virtual classrooms. This leadership level considers interaction of teachers with their learners where teachers' authority and competence are central. The teacher makes decisions regarding teaching methods and pedagogical approaches, interpreting the curriculum, sequencing learning, facilitating learning, monitoring and assessing outcomes in specific subjects and other cross-curriculum learning outcomes, based on knowledge of students' ability levels, talents and challenges. The teacher goes beyond adhering to narrow role definitions, but leads the teaching-learning process by being innovative and making impactful decisions. Teachers' leadership at this level also applies to their decisions about the selection of ICT tools, learning management systems and online learning platforms, OERs, social media, radio, or TV, to support the teaching-learning process and meet expected learning objectives, whether in distance learning situations or as part of a blended approach.

School-level leadership (Meso): Teacher leadership at school level represents additional responsibilities, such as performing administration and management tasks, serving on committees (e.g., improvement committee, patronage of clubs), and pedagogical experts. Teachers and others with responsibilities at this level lead on the identification and selection of virtual learning platforms, e-learning software, textbooks, and other teaching-learning materials to be used on a school- or district-wide basis. As pedagogical experts, headteachers and other classroom teachers are uniquely positioned to lead on articulation and implementation of distance learning preparation plans to enable continuity of education during times of crisis. Through these roles, teachers align professional goals with those of the school, share responsibilities for its success and contribute to shaping its culture. Senior and experienced teachers mentor or coach juniors and peers, participate in the local community of practice, and encourage students and colleagues to learn and do things differently, thus serving as catalysts of change, and confronting obstacles to achieve the school mission.

Community-level leadership (Macro): In addition to teachers' leadership role to ensure internal coherence between curricular components (i.e., learning objectives, subject curriculum/syllabus, teaching methods, textbooks, assessment rubrics), they can also ensure external coherence between curriculum and societal needs. The notion of curriculum as a contract between society and education actors helps to ensure i) coherence between interdependent education sub-sectors; ii) consistency between different stages (early childhood to tertiary and lifelong learning); and iii) forms of education (general, TVET, non-formal, informal). This framework is important to define teachers' leadership roles and the contribution they can make to achieve the community's and society's desired social, economic, and cultural aspirations. Teacher leadership at community level is often demonstrated within district-level coordination structures that have been put in place for the purpose of school accountability efforts such as teacher appraisals, performance evaluations, and school inspections, as well as individual and whole school professional development opportunities and management of teacher career structures. During the COVID-19 crisis and school closures, community-level grassroots demonstrations of leadership can also emerge where teachers develop organic solutions to mitigate educational challenges confronting communities when classrooms and school-level arenas are compromised.

Background research

In preparation for World Teachers' Day, UNESCO has commissioned a series of research papers to inform future policy and planning related to teacher leadership at different levels of the system, inclusive of teachers' leadership at the grassroots level shown in the wake of COVID-19 and other emergency education situations. The research will explore teacher leadership not only in terms of instruction and curriculum, but also in terms of education governance, efficiency, effectiveness, and resilience at system level during times of crisis. The research is expected to generate new insights into teacher leadership in

the broader context of educational leadership and explore promising policies and strategies to affirm teacher leadership in emergency education. Preliminary findings will be shared during WTD 2020, followed by a UNESCO publication on the topic in 2021.

Official event and virtual programme

World Teachers' Day is usually celebrated on 5 October at UNESCO and worldwide through UNESCO field offices and institutes. Events are organized in collaboration with co-convening partners, ILO, UNICEF, and Education International. Given the uncertainty around when physical distancing measures will be lifted, UNESCO is organizing a virtual World Teachers' Day celebration in 2020. Virtual WTD will be celebrated through a week-long series of online interactive events beginning on 5 October with the official Opening Ceremony in the presence of UNESCO's Director-General Ms Audrey Azoulay, followed by official statements by the heads of the co-convening partners. This year, WTD coincides with the Award Ceremony of the 6th Edition of the [UNESCO-Hamdan Prize for the Effectiveness of Teachers](#). The Prize, awarded every two years, amounts to US\$300,000 equally divided among three winners whose projects aim to improve the performance and effectiveness of teachers. The Prize will be awarded virtually following the Opening Ceremony in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum of the United Arab Emirates.

The Opening Ceremony will also feature the official launch of the new TTF Knowledge Platform, financed by the Hamdan Foundation. This is a flagship product of the [International Taskforce on Teachers for Education 2030](#) (TTF), commonly known as the Teacher Task Force. The Teacher Task Force is a global alliance of national governments, intergovernmental organizations, international development agencies, civil society organizations, and private sector organizations working to raise awareness and expand knowledge on teachers with a view to attaining the SDG 4 goals. UNESCO is a permanent member of the Teacher Task Force. The official Closing Ceremony will take place on 12 October.

All events from 5 to 12 October will be virtual (online) and interactive via an online platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WebEx) allowing simultaneous interpretation to facilitate open discussion among speakers, panellists, and participants at large. Events will feature teacher testimonies, keynotes, and thematic debates around policy and practice issues of relevance to the teaching profession. Virtual events will be scheduled on a daily basis across the world throughout the week. Events will be organized jointly in collaboration with co-convening partners, UNESCO institutes, field offices, UN agencies, and other development partners. A virtual 'exhibition space' is also in the planning, and will feature publications, advocacy materials, and live demonstrations of innovative products and technologies by partner agencies, educational technology developers, and other interested groups.

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