

HOW SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS BUILD TRUST IN KENYAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The most successful school leaders are those who have been able to transform their schools into centers of deep and ongoing learning by managing relationships (Kaser & Halbert, 2009). Consequently, strong levels of trust are preconditions for successful school improvement initiative. Research confirms that no cooperation strategy works in high schools without sufficient attention being paid to the quality of relationships and the level of trust in those high schools (Kotter, 2002). When adult relationships as those between parents and principals in schools are characterized by trust, stories about change and failure shift from indifference or negativity to possibility and hope (Kaser & Halbert, 2009). Unfortunately, and according to Solomon and Flores (2001), trust is never something 'already at hand'; it is always a matter of human effort. It can and often must be conscientiously created, not simply taken for granted '(p.87).

This qualitative multi-case study sought understanding and describing how secondary school principals in south western Kenya build trust with the communities in which their schools are located. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to elicit opinions and reflections of participants about challenges, individual efforts to develop trust as well as their efforts to adapt to unstable parental demands and expectations. Multiple interviews with six high school principals were conducted. The interview data was triangulated with extensive observation data collected in

naturalistic settings in the schools. Observations were augmented with several days of “shadowing” each principal and the utilization of document analysis at the site.

Due to the instability present in the study area coupled with the need to secure resources from the community while meeting parental expectations and demands, data gathered indicated an urgent need on the part of principals to build trust with parents. To achieve this, principals had to close the gap between the community and the school and the community and the self in addition to sustaining high levels of competence, professionalism and morals. Through modeling, mediation, genuine interest and participation in community activities and issues, good instructional leadership, balanced management practices, free and open communication with the parents were found out to be some of the methods used by the principal to close these gaps and consequently build trust with the parents.