# Using the Six Pillars Approach to Futures Studies to Ask: What is/are the Futures of School Leadership in Africa?

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UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education "Learning to Become" report due in the fall of 2021, is likely to create a problem window that governments must respond to in addressing the urgencies of our time. It will focus on identifying, "promising paths to build policies and strategies that will shape desirable futures and repair past injustices" (UNESCO, March 2021, p. 3) and call for extending full citizenship rights to marginalised groups by 2050 (Mengisteab,2020), as well as for empowering citizens and promoting agency through education. UNESCO thus promotes an "emancipatory vision of education at the individual and collective level and...affirms education as a public good and a fundamental human right" (UNESCO, March 2021, p. 3). "A powerful paradigm can restructure the political landscape" (Mehta,2013, p. 287), but there are many possible and competing futures for education policy. How might the opening of a problem window be leveraged to illuminate Afrocentric perspectives that will not only contribute to the "Learning to Become" project, but also affirm histories and experiences that have been erased/forgotten?

As UNESCO's Futures of Education is contemplated, the African experience must be actively considered to engage and repair past injustices and develop a truer picture of humanity. As of 2019, the population of sub-Saharan was 1.07 billion (UN, December, 2019, p.3) and this is projected to double by 2050(UN, 2019). Rapid population growth brings challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – especially that of creating quality education systems (UN, 2019) in the many African countries that "do not have the

necessary number of educators to conduct the new educational system" (Mengisteab,2020).

In this paper, I will consider a position often invisible or illegible within education discourse:

school leadership in Africa.  Full participation/engagement in civic life is not possible under

the current education systems that dominate African educational landscapes, and I argue that

school leadership is a potential cite for change that should be illuminated.

To begin, I situate my humanity as a Canadian citizen/settler and white woman living

in Nigeria and acknowledge my positionality, privilege, and complicity as part of my

decolonizing practice.  I acknowledge the systems of oppression I benefit from through

colonization and globalization and that Black bodies and African peoples survive the world in

ways I can never understand, in part because of the actions of my ancestors, and in part

because of the systems and structures that I also participate in/replicate.  Yet I believe we are

all connected, that power in the present is temporary, and that we can still work together to

create a better world.

When Africa is conceptualized holistically, it is not to diminish diversity, minimize

nation states, or promote Africa as a monolith.  In the same way that it empowers White

people to conceptualise and recognize Eurocentrism and a Eurocentric worldview, it is

appropriate to talk about Afrocentrism and recognise common themes of an Afrocentric

worldview (Mazama,2001) – in which the African experience is centred and affirmed.

Afrocentricity is "the placing of African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves

African culture and behavior" (Asante,1987, p. 6).  This way of knowing is hidden to most non-

African people, but in working to develop our understanding of Afrocentrism, we all stand to

gain a more complete picture of humanity.
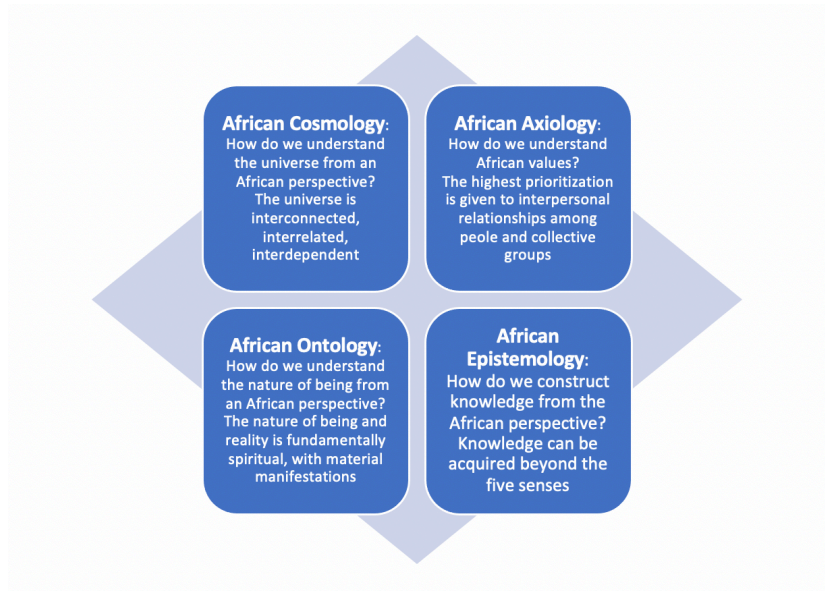
*Fig.1: Core Elements of Afrocentrism, adapted from Carroll (2014)*

Futures Studies (FS) provides a fertile ground on which to consider Afrocentric approaches to school leadership, as FS is helpful in exploring the complexity of education. Inayatullah(2012) offers the **Six Pillars Approach** as a conceptual framework for FS,

> ...concerned not only with forecasting the future, interpreting the future and critiquing the future, but also with creating not just the possibility but the reality of alternative worlds, alternative futures. Through structured methods, the emergence of new visions and strategies result. The Six Pillars approach provides a conceptual and methodological framework for this journey(p. 61).

I will use this framework to explore the futures of school leadership in Africa through Mapping, Anticipation, Timing, Deepening, Creating Alternatives, and Transforming. In following this exploratory theory of the future, it is possible to consider Afrocentric futures.

**Mapping**

What are the pasts, presents and futures that impact school leadership in Africa? Just as the future is full of many possibilities, history is also replete with rejected, forgotten, prevented, unusable, unthinkable, cancelled, repressed, feral and unusable alternatives(Epaminodas,2021). In considering the power dynamics of the present day, it is essential to highlight the colonial history that continues to impact African presents. Years of

banking education(Freire,2018) and mimicry of colonial systems of education, that have long since changed in their countries of origin, have left a violent legacy of disempowerment and oppression that continues to be perpetuated through education in Africa.  As one Nigerian education critic puts it, "We spend years telling our students to keep quiet.  And then throw them into the world and tell them to speak out against injustice.  But are shocked when they can't!"(Ofili,2013).  Educational leadership continues to be dominated by New Public Management approaches with top-down bureaucratic management at the fore, and no attention given to developing school leadership.  For example, "Nigeria, like any other African country, has no formalized procedures for preparing and developing school leaders…all are expected to gain knowledge through experience"(Otunga et al.,2008, p. 370). Colonial histories dominate narratives about Africa, erasing pre-colonial life and "Africa and Africans have a long history of being written into darkness…We live in tomorrow's history"(Adebisi,2020).   This leads to the observation that when it comes to development, Africa is "running while others walk" (Mkandawire, 2011).

In **mapping**, we scan the environment and see examples of Afrocentric futures emerging.  One thread is a growing movement supporting Indigenous Knowledge Systems(Dhewa,2020; Adebisi,2021; Adichie,2009; Akinwale,2020).  Another thread is teacher-focused NGO initiatives which seem to be emerging through movements like [Teach for All](), [Teach for Nigeria](), [Teacher Task Force](), and the [Learning As I Teach Foundation]().  An additional thread is the "invention" of Africa through Afrofuturism as a literary genre(Cobb,2018), which encompasses a long history of magical realism in African literature, and which has also surged in the wake of the Black Lives Matter(BLM) and Black Futures movements(Ogbunu,2020).   New stories are being told; new frames are emerging.

**Anticipation**

Inayatullah suggests we look for potential disruptors as we consider an emerging issue analysis. I suggest six interrelated issues as potential disruptors to consider when thinking about the future of school leadership in Africa:

1. **Global Convergence of Educational Policy(GCEP)**
   Globalization accelerates the convergence of policy, including human rights and social policies in a controlled way "promoted by powerful global economic interests" (Carnoy,2016, p. 27-8). GCEP occurs at the school level through mimicry and policy isomorphism as "best practice" is shared in teacher-to-teacher/school-to-school networks. At the macro level, legitimacy-seeking also drives GCEP, seen in the COVID-19 pandemic, when many African governments adopted remote learning (UNESCO, June 2021; UNESCO,n.d.), despite the reality that extended school closures were already normalized in many African nations. Nigeria, for example, was normed to school closures, typically initiated by unions, with closures being a central challenge in higher education (Asiyai,2013). Global institutional pressure from other countries operationalizing remote learning was the catalyst for action in 2020. Through GCEP, "state legitimacy in the eyes of global elites has real political meaning and...overrides the power of local economic, social, and ideological forces as an explanation for educational policies" (Carnoy, 2016, p. 31). This view is supported by critics of global development policy like Moyo(2009), who argues that structured overreliance on aid de-incentivises African governments from building quality public institutions; global policy brokers and global legitimacy-seeking are powerful drivers of GCEP.

2. **Market-Based Approaches and Aid**
   A narrative of "neutrality" and benevolence of aid/development/philanthropy in education in Africa facilitates market-based approaches to education and competition, or what Sahlberg(2012) refers to as the GERM (Global Education Reform Movement), also enabled by GCEP. This narrative drives investment in education in Africa, notably by groups like Caerus Capital. In this context, school leadership might be framed as a cost-effective route to improving education quality in Africa, a view that aligns with the UN's "grand challenges"(Kroesen,2018) framing promoted by the MDGs and SDGs. According to Srivastava and Baur(2016),
   > The primacy of market-based solutions (e.g. competition, choice, narrowly defined assessment metrics, etc.) is espoused by the new global philanthropy in education. Simultaneously, the increased use of complex multi-stakeholder and public-private partnerships (PPPs) as mechanisms for education provision in many countries of the Global South opens up and creates formal and non-formal spaces for constellations, of philanthropic and other non-state private actors to act. These fundamentally alter education governance structures by surreptitiously embedding forms of privatization in education systems, though this may not be the intention of all actors involved(p. 434).

3. **Educational Leadership as a Field**

Outside of Africa, educational leadership has developed as a field with expanding scholarship and many universitates offering educational leadership programmes. Thinktanks and policy influencers like the Wallace Foundation fund research on school leadership, including Leithwood et al.'s(2008) seminal work in the field that popularized the statement, "School leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on school learning"(Wallace, n.d.).

4. **Rapid Digitalization in Education as a Result of COVID-19**
   COVID-19's influence on digitalization in education in Arica would not have been possible without widespread access to affordable smart phones and internet. Rapid digitization over the past decade in Africa(UNESCO, June 2021) has also led to a great deal of innovation, particularly evident in Lagos, Nigeria, where tech start-ups abound. Access to affordable technology also has unexpected consequences on culture as smart phones and cameras change the way people communicate and share culture.

5. **Indigenous Responsiveness**
   Institutional engagement can be influenced by global events. There are growing movements for the abolition of compulsory education, a movement that Wong(2021) claims gained momentum at the beginning of the 2020s with the disruption caused by COVID-19. This is linked to a new attention towards Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Akinwale,2020) and calls for anticolonial responses to education in Africa (Adebisi,2021). Social movements impact policy and problem framing; Cape Town's, now global, "Must Fall" movement(LenkaBula, 2021 pg. 4) challenges the valorization of colonial mastery and highlights its impact on structural racism. In October 2020, crowdfunded mass youth protests occurred across Nigeria with organizational support from collectives like the Feminist Coalition. These "EndSARS" protests were a reaction to police brutality faced by young people in Nigeria at the hands of the "SARS" unit of the police force, and were undoubtedly influenced by the BLM movement and the civic protests sparked by the 2020 killing of George Floyd. However, these protests ended tragically on October 20th, 2020 at the Lekki Toll Gate massacre when protestors were shot at, leading to active covering up by Nigerian authorities.

6. **Educational Insecurity**
   Insecurity is a major threat to education in Africa, especially in West Africa where Boko Haram is actively targeting schools. While the mass kidnapping of the Chibok School Girls may be the most well-known incident, there have been continued occurrences, most of which go un/underreported. National reporting is also unreliable, leading in part to alternative forms of education insecurity mapping in the region that use social media posts, verified by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project to identify activity.

**Timing**

In a recent breakthrough analysis, "The Cones of Everything" (Epaminondas, 2021) offers

diagrammatic depiction of the highly contingent inter-relationship between the past, the

present and the future. The nettlesome project of human understanding of causality involves the search for change patterns that are linear, cyclical, spiral, driven by a creative minority, or driven by "hinge periods" of dramatic difference at the meso, micro and macro levels of institutions (Inayatullah,2013).  There are also elements of microtiming that impact futures: the stage of one's life, which in education includes the professional lifecycle stage; and the "unconscious structure to how we imagine our lifecycle"(Inyatullah,2013, p. 49).  There are multiple competing professional, field, and administrative timings that intersect in educational ecosystems.  Hinge periods may occur when theses cycles intersect. Epaminondas(2021) considers timing in "*The Cones of Everything*" and reminds us that there is a multiplicity of pasts and futures, but what is essential is who is considering them: the "P" standing in the present moment (*Fig. 2*); worldview is essential to timing.

The Afrocentric worldview comprises collectivist rhythms to life, with spirituality and more western positivist conceptions about science, time, and human priorities weaved together.  By investigating ways of knowing presented in research on education, Wong (2021)'s work contributes to anti-colonial scholarship that questions the dominance of white supremacy in educational studies (Macharia,2016; Gardner-McTaggart,2021).  Wong presents the hegemonic approaches to educational research as belonging to a dominant "cosmogony"(macro-origin story) that has marginalized indigenous and black voices but has, in the 2020s, given rise to what Wong calls an intergenerational movement of "*les damnés*". Wong claims,

> Radical imagining by *les damnés* has recognized that liberatory futures are always/already coming into existence…and have always/already existed…these persisting and developing traditions defy sequential and teleological ways of knowing time, and often see that 'our history is our future'.  They recognize that radical imagining requires that we constantly look back, to know where we could go (Wong,2021, pg. 47).

This conception presents a new approach to considering how timing impacts the way we might consider futures of education and educational leadership from Afrocentric perspectives.

**Deepening**

In ***deepening***, we "go beyond conventional framings of issues"(Inayatullah,2013, p. 53) to interrogate competing present narratives that connect educational change and school leadership in Africa.  The Causal Layered Analysis(CLA) is an FS tool to promote deep-thinking and uncover the layers that impact change through four dimensions: **litany** (unquestioned view of reality), **systemic** (systematic causes/explanations), **culture/worldview** (deeper social processes/language used to depict the perspective), **narrative/myth/metaphor** (unconscious emotive dimensions, and stories/symbols used to express the problem)(Couture & Murgatryod, 2021).  While exploring school leadership in Africa through the Six Pillars leads to a deep exploration of the problem, the CLA provides a tool to synthesize and summarize key problems and begin to explore solutions.

| CLA Level | Problems and Solutions |
|---|---|
| Litany | • School leadership is executive; focus on managing resources<br>• Solution: more training on financial management, school management systems; principals selected on ability to implement systems |
| Systemic | • Absence of professional qualifications/training leads to mimicry and repeated cycles extending past education systems and structures into the future.<br>• Colonial systems are replicated – this is a hegemony where people are actively participating in their own oppression.<br>• The African experience is edited out of history through skewed or underreporting of the African experience, and decentering of Black lives as a systemic reality across the globe |
| Culture/ Worldview | • New Public Management focus on efficiency through lines of command.<br>• Post-colonial perceptions about a path to success and quality through top-down decision-making approaches.<br>• Obedience as a form of respect and deference to elders and authority leads to erosion of self-efficacy and agency and increased fear and self-doubt limiting local solutions. Novelty and innovation perceived as the folly of the youth and infantilized. |
| Narrative/ Myth/ Metaphor | • "West is Best"<br>• "Education is the path to success (read: financial independence)"<br>• "Study well, ace your exams, get a scholarship out of Africa, complete your higher education abroad, get a higher paying job, send dollars home to help your family, come back later as financially wealthy to retire"<br>• Solution: continue to mimic western solutions<br>• Poverty, disease, disconnection-Africa needs to be saved<br>• Alternative narratives:  Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Dambisa Moyo, *Dead AID Why Aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*<br>• Some argue that the rise of science has led to a decline in magical thinking in the West (Ferguson, 2021), but magical thinking is still a central part of African literature and collective imaginations.  New voices are rising through literature, Nollywood, and the Arts.<br>• Norming OECD narratives about future of work and what Africa must do to prepare, always from the perspective of the West.  Again, these racist views erase the African existence and experience.  A focus on Math and Science erodes culture.<br>• Fanon writes, "the customs of the colonized people, their traditions, their myths – above all their myths – are the very sign of that poverty of spirit and their constitutional depravity" (Fanon, 1967, p. 32); Sesanti (2019) points out that in destroying African myths, "European colonialists were set on destroying the very foundations of African societies" (p. 439).  African narratives, myths and metaphors must be understood within this pervasive deficit framing and actively presented as valid and essential to education in Africa to benefit under UNESCO's "Learning to Be" initiatives. |

## Creating Alternatives

"Scenario planning does not focus on accurately predicting the future but is a process that produces a number of possible futures that are credible yet uncertain"(Keough &

Shanahan, 2008, p. 167).  In taking a critical/post-structural stance to scenario planning, power imbalances that lead to current realities can be uncovered.  This creates a space to highlight what might be altered to create new constellations of power and alternative past, present and future realities.  Using the Schwartz model (Inayatullah,2013, p. 57), I developed four future scenarios for educational leadership in Africa.

| Best Case | Worst Case |
|---|---|
| Reorganization of schools and education that emphasizes Afrocentric concepts that benefit humanity.<br>Education becomes restructured based on African interests and indigenous knowledge systems; this becomes globally valued.<br>Africa contributes to the growing global paradigm of educational leadership as an equal partner; school leadership develops as a recognized field in Africa.<br>Schools leverage GCEP through practices like remote learning to buffer themselves against national disruptions and borrow policy/practice by filtering through lenses that affirm Afrocentric perspectives.<br>Educational insecurity becomes unacceptable; African governments strengthen public institutions. | Privatization of educational leadership and decoupling of educational leadership and the schools experience leading to a rapid disconnection between school leaders and teachers.<br>Further disconnection of African education from the world.  Government restriction on digital access preventing resource sharing at the school level.<br>Insurmountable insecurity unaddressed by national governments.  Growing inequality between the leading class and the masses.  Education becomes completely centered on commercial and business interests, benefiting the wealthy. |
| **Outlier** | **Business as Usual** |
| Private schools build on their capacity to, "offer options that the public system may not be providing, and…stimulate the public system to change by spearheading innovations and alternatives" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012, p.4) and leverage GCEP to make changes that are mimicked by public schools.<br>School leadership becomes about promoting teacher sense of self efficacy and student agency with a focus on African worldviews.<br>In the absence of effective unions, school leaders take up the responsibility of teacher wellbeing and actively work to develop their self-efficacy.  School leaders view teachers as ends-in-themselves, and not as a means to an end (Griffiths, 2011). | Education continues to be neglected and deprioritized in Africa.<br>The potential of educational leadership for educational reform and improvement of educational quality continues to be underutilized.<br>Unions and governments continue to use education as a tool of oppression, through pedagogy, curriculum content, and continued political school closures.<br>Inequality continues to rise.<br>Africa falls further behind. |

## Transforming

In ***transforming***, Inayatullah identifies methods for pursing selected scenarios, but is it the place of individual outsiders (even inside-outsiders) within FS to identify their most

desired scenarios?  It is suggested that scenario planning is a necessarily collaborative, "highly participative"(Keough & Shanahan,2008, p. 168) enterprise.  Again, we need to consider the "P" in "*The Cones of Everything*".  The positionality of the observer standing in the apex of the futures cones is deterministic.  I am left asking who is responsible for the future of school leadership in Africa? Are alternatives beyond the "Projected" (business as usual) future being considered?  Rather than a colonizing approach of selecting a preferred future for others, as a student of FS, I need to ask what can I do to help co-create and illuminate those futures that, as Wong states, "are always/already coming into existence, and have always/already existed"(Wong, 2021)?

Taking an FS approach to analysing school leadership in Africa is a project beyond the scope of an individual researcher who views the world from an ultimately limited vantage point.  But, as pointed out by Amara(1981)(in Inayatullah, 2013), the future is not predetermined or predictable, and future outcomes can be influenced by our choices in the present; this position offers hope for the future of school leadership in Africa.  In our joint humanity, "It would be a bad service to Africa to remain silent on these issues for reasons of political correctness and shame for the crimes of colonialism...we need a deeper understanding of Africa's past to comprehend where it might (or should) be heading"(Kroesen,2018, p.107).  Inspired by Wong's solidarity in researchership of *les damnés*, and the ever present hope that the future is not certain because power in the present is fragile(Inyatullah,2013), on the eve of UNESCO's release of "Learning to Become", I am hopeful that there is a transformative future for educational leadership in Africa that will create a new problem window through which we will see more room for school leadership as a site to develop teachers' and students' agency and civic participation.

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