Distributed Leadership: Re-conceptualizing the Work of Leading and Managing Teaching

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Northwestern University

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The Distributed Leadership Studies
http://www.distributedleadership.org

Funded by National Science Foundation, Spencer Foundation, Institute for Education Sciences, & Carnegie Corporation
“We have one hunter and one gatherer... Everyone else is a consultant”
• Getting beyond an ‘implementation mindset’, engaging the twin processes of diagnosis and design.

• Anchoring diagnosis and design work in teaching practice.

• A Distributed Framework: Elements and Entailments for Practice.

• Putting a Distributed Framework to work: Designing School System and School Organization Infrastructure.
Diagnosis and Design

- **Diagnosis** = identifying the nature or cause of something

- **Design** = shaping educational infrastructure to achieve particular purposes

Leadership

• [Leadership refers] to the interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the whole group to solve problems or attain goals.

• [Leadership refers] to people who bend the motivations and actions of others to achieve certain goals; it implies taking initiatives and risks.
Management

• Management is about maintenance; maintaining current organizational arrangements and ways of doing work (Burns, 1978; Cuban, 1988)
Teaching Practice
Teaching

- Contested ends
- Uncertain means
- Mutual dependency
- Unpredictability of practitioner-client interactions
Anchoring Leadership in Teaching

Students’ Opportunities To Learn

Teaching

What gets taught?  How is it taught?

Leading and Managing
Teaching as a Social Practice
Teaching and Leadership
Instructional Interactions about Language Arts

Instructional Interactions about Mathematics
Instructional Interactions about Science
A System & School View: Instructional Interactions by School Subject

School and School Systems: Science
A Distributed Perspective on Leading and Managing Teaching: Elements & Entailments
Task One

• What does ‘distributed leadership’ mean to you?

• Write a short definition that captures your understanding

• Share your definition with the person next to you
The Principal-Plus Aspect

• The principal works with others when leading and managing teaching

• Other formally designated leaders take responsibility for leading and managing

• Individuals with no formal leadership designations have a hand in leading and managing teaching
An Alternative to the ‘Heroics of Leadership’ Genre

"Initially I tried to do it all. I was trying to do it all and that was impossible. You cannot be all things to all people… I don’t know everything about everything."

Dr. Johnson


The Principal’s Workday: The Significance of Others

Who Are The Co-Leaders? Primary School Principals

“Heroics of Leadership” Genre
The Problem: “Heroics of Leadership” Genre

- The lure of leaders and their gallant acts.
- The leader is center stage, while others play follower.
- Setting school principals up for failure.
The Realities of the Leader’s Work

“…is like dancing that wonderful tango, blindfolded, yet serving lunch, breakfast, and dinner on skates to 500 people,” [each of whom has] ordered something different” [and each of whom] “brings…their own set of dynamics, personalities, that you have to be acutely aware of in order to serve them.”

The Practice Aspect

Leaders
Administrators, Specialists, Teachers, Parents, Students

Leadership Practice is in the interaction

Situations
Tools, Routines, Structures, Rules

Followers
Teachers, Administrators, Specialists, Students, Parents

Task Two: Examining Leadership in Practice
Task Two

- Watch the scene, keeping in mind the distributed perspective. Take notes about who is leading and in what capacity. Where is the leadership practice?

- While noting what happens in the scene, keep in mind the characters below:

  Jim Lovell
  Gene Kranz
  EECom (Cy)
Practice
A Distributed Perspective

- A diagnostic framework that draws attention to particular dimensions of leadership & management work
- A design framework for guiding leadership and management improvement efforts
Dispelling Some Myths about a Distributed Perspective

• Principal somehow less relevant or even irrelevant … WRONG

• Everyone is a leader … WRONG

• The more leaders, the better … WRONG

Task Three

• Watch the brief video clip

• How many times does the white team touch the ball?
The Situation: The Critical Role of Educational Infrastructure
Diagnosis and Design from a Distributed Perspective: Individuals and Infrastructure

Leaders
Administrators, Specialists, Teachers, Parents, Students

Leadership Practice

Situation
Tools, Routines, Structures, Rules

Followers
Teachers, Administrators, Specialists, Students, Parents
Diagnosis and Design from a Distributed Perspective: Individuals and Infrastructure

Leaders
Administrators, Specialists, Teachers, Parents, Students

Leadership Practice

Situation
Tools, Routines, Structures, Rules

Followers
Teachers, Administrators, Specialists, Students, Parents
Educational Infrastructure

- **Educational Infrastructure** refers to structures and resources that school systems (and organizations) mobilize to enable (and constrain) teaching, maintain teaching quality, and lead improvement in teaching.

- Educational Infrastructure includes:
  
  - the instruments and tools that are the materials of instruction ... curriculum frameworks and materials, student assessments, etc.
  
  - the formal positions, routines, procedures, and rules for guiding professional learning, maintaining teaching quality, and enabling teaching improvement.
  
  - professional norms, values, and cognitive scripts that infuse the work.


Formal positions, organizational routines as represented in formal documents and accounts

VS

Organization as experienced in day-to-day life of organizational members
The Designed Educational Infrastructure
ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES POSITIONS

concepts positions

frames

scripts

tools

work

rules

organizations regulations frames

programs

scripts

procedures
Organizational Routines

• **Organizational Routines**: “repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions carried out by multiple actors” *(Feldman & Pentland, 2003)*
Embracing Design: Leading & Managing Instructional Innovation by Designing Organizational Routines

• **Adams School:** Breakfast Club, Grade Level Meetings, Teacher Talk, Teacher Leaders, Five-Week Assessment, Literacy Committee, and Mathematics Committee

• **Baxter School:** Cycle Meetings, Leadership Team Meetings, Literacy Committee, Math/Science Committee

• **Kosten School:** Report Card Review, Grade Book Review, Lesson Plan Review, Faculty Meetings, Grade Level Meetings

• **Kelly School:** Skill Chart Review, Professional Development

Designing Organizational Routines to Address Core Organizational Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Five Week Assessment</strong></td>
<td>-Standardized Tests</td>
<td>-Language Arts Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Standards</td>
<td>-Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Student Assessments</td>
<td>-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakfast Club</strong></td>
<td>-Research Articles</td>
<td>-Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Language Arts Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Improvement Planning (SIP)</strong></td>
<td>-Previous Year SIP</td>
<td>-Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-District Guidelines</td>
<td>-Teachers (approved LSC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Test Score Data</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Observations</strong></td>
<td>-School Protocol,</td>
<td>-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-District Protocol</td>
<td>-Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Real Men Read</strong></td>
<td>-Books</td>
<td>-Language Arts Co-ord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Community Members</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Diagnosis and Design Work: Asking the Difficult Questions about Organizational Routines

- What is the theory of action behind the routine?
- What arguments explain and evaluate the routine?
  - Why should it work?
  - Why might it not work?
  - What are the advantages of this routine?
  - What are the disadvantages of this routine?
- How is the routine connecting with/anchored in teaching and learning?
The Lived Educational Infrastructure
A (Simple) Model of Teachers’ Instructional Productivity

Motivation \times Knowledge \times Situation = Teacher Productivity
Focusing on Social Interactions?

- Knowledge development key to improving teaching
- Advice and information important for developing new knowledge
- Social relations are a source of resources such as advice and information
- On-the-job interactions can enable transfer of advice and information

Blau, 1957; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coburn, 2001; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Elmore, 1996; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004; Hill, 2004; Little, 2002; Smylie, 1995; Spillane, 2004
Knowledge Development Processes

- On-the-job interactions associated with the transfer of advice and information — essential to knowledge development
  - Socialization: Tacit Knowledge — Tacit Knowledge
  - Externalization: Tacit Knowledge — Explicit Knowledge
  - Combination: Explicit Knowledge — Explicit Knowledge
  - Internalization: Explicit Knowledge — Tacit Knowledge

During THIS SCHOOL YEAR, to whom have you turned for advice and/or information about CURRICULUM, TEACHING, and STUDENT LEARNING? Please write full first and last names. You do not need to fill all the spaces.

Please consider all forms of communication including face-to-face, via e-mail or telephone, etc., and include individuals across content and school/district/outside roles. You may list people you named as your close colleagues as well.

☐ I have not sought advice from anyone. Do not check this box if you provide a name(s) below.

1) James Spillane
2) Megan Hopkins
3) Katie Mertz
4) 
5)
6)
7)
8)
9)
10)
11)
12)

Please Note: No names or identifying information will ever be revealed in reports produced from these data.
Task Four: What is going on in this diagram?
Examining Interactions about Mathematics Instruction

Woodpecker Math Network 2011-2012
Study One: Organizational Infrastructure and Instructional Interactions

- Teachers more likely to seek advice from others of same gender and race
- Prior tie strongly associated with having a current tie
- Formal leaders more likely to provide advice or information
- Teachers in the same grade more likely to receive or provide advice or information
- Teachers more likely to seek advice about a subject from teachers who reported more PD in that subject

Study Two: Infrastructure ALSO Matters for INTER/BETWEEN School Instructional Interactions about Instruction

- Individual characteristics are associated with advice and information ties in schools

- Aspects of the formal organization are more strongly associated with between school ties:
  - Formal leadership position: More likely to have a tie
  - Subject-specific leadership position: More likely to have a tie

- Formal leadership position predicted instructional advice and information ties between schools more than anything else

System & Organizational Educational Infrastructure Redesign: The Case of One Local School District

- New mathematics curriculum
- Investing in professional development of teacher leaders for mathematics
- Strategic selection of teacher leaders
- Creation of math coach position in some schools
- Designed system and school organizational routines, e.g.,
  - Toolbox for mathematics
  - Professional Learning Communities
  - Grade level team meeting
Math Teacher Leaders and Interactions about Mathematics Teaching & Learning

2009-10

INSTRFACIL **

SPED

PRIN

2010-11

2011-12

SPED

RDGSPEC

PRIN

K
Teacher Leadership and Training as a Marker of Expertise

Karen (1st grade)

“Because he’s a second grade teacher….He’s kind of become the math person to see because he’s taken this extra training that nobody else in the building has done, and I know that he’s interested in math so, he’s just one that I’ve gone to that I know focuses very heavily on, I like his beliefs and the way that he has his room set up and the way that he carries himself.”
Math Coach Transforms Interactions about Mathematics Teaching (Bryant Elementary)
Teacher Leadership and Training as a Marker of Expertise

“[Emily] really wasn’t our facilitator [last year], though she was my co-worker, just a third grade teacher. I knew she had a wealth of knowledge, I just wasn’t in [her classroom] when she was teaching math. But, now that she’s moved into this math facilitator position, that’s different…She’s been trained in it. And, she’s gone to school for it and she’s a great coach. She knows a lot about math and I trust her that she has a lot of, a wealth of knowledge… She’s the go-to person.”

Angie
(Special Education)
Organizational Routines and Expertise

Clarissa (1st grade)

“We have had that benefit of having [Gabrielle] on the [district] toolbox [routine] and so she was looked upon as you know more of an expert. And she would come back and share everything with us...we kinda felt more in the math loop than maybe some of the other teams who don’t have that connection piece of somebody on the toolbox in their building.”

Rachel (Kindergarten)

“Our [grade] team plans and we get to collaborate together... our math coach [Mary]... when we’re planning together if we have a question she’s always there to help... she knows a lot...”
## Infrastructure Redesign Promoted Advice and Information Seeking in Mathematics

### Average In-Degree for Teacher Leaders and Other Teachers, Auburn Park School District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toolbox Members (6)</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundamental Math Participants (9)</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>6.00*</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Coaches (3)</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>16.33**</td>
<td>18.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Teachers (256)</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.36</td>
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Infrastructure Redesign Promoted Brokering in Mathematics

Average Betweenness for Teacher Leaders and Other Teachers, Auburn Park School District

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
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<tr>
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<td>5.00</td>
<td>75.80*</td>
<td>48.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fundamental Math Participants (9)</td>
<td>32.44</td>
<td>144.33*</td>
<td>115.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math Coaches (3)</td>
<td>38.67</td>
<td>248.67**</td>
<td>222.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Teachers (256)</td>
<td>10.85</td>
<td>24.81*</td>
<td>11.90</td>
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System and Organizational Infrastructure & Teachers’ Instructional Beliefs and Practice

Change in Teachers’ Beliefs about and Reported Practices in Mathematics

<table>
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<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Mathematics</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.46***</td>
<td>3.51***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction Mean (SD)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reasoning and Problem-Solving</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>2.52***</td>
<td>2.64***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning and Problem-Solving</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices Mean (SD)</td>
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Notes: Means are based on teachers from 12 schools with over 70% response rates who responded in every year of the survey. Significant differences are for comparisons to 2009-10. ***p<.001; **p<.01, *p<.05; +p<.10
Lessons on Social Interactions & Knowledge Development

• Strong ties - enable the transfer of tacit, complex knowledge and facilitate joint problem solving

• Weak ties - enable the transfer of explicit knowledge

• Ties that span organizational boundaries allow for new information and minimize ‘group think’

• Boundary spanners — individuals that connect different subgroups — facilitate the implementation of new approaches

• Trust enables learning from social interactions
Lessons on Educational Infrastructure & Social Interactions

- Think about **Work Practice** in Schools & School Systems – **who** talks to **whom** about **what**, **how**, and **why**

- Think Educational **Infrastructure**

- Think about the Components of Educational Infrastructure Working **together, in interaction** to shape work practice.

- Think about the Vision for Teaching & Learning that **Anchors** the educational infrastructure

Concluding: On a Cautionary Note
Putting Distributed Perspective into *Practice*

- Focusing on *practice*, the practice of leading and managing

- Practice is fundamentally about *interactions*, not just actions

- Components of the educational infrastructure working in interaction to shape interactions among school staff

- Looking at the *designed and lived* educational infrastructure in *tandem.*

The Ultimate Responsibility Challenge

“I’m responsible for the whole building of students and I’m ultimately—for most purposes—the end all, be all accountability person. Everything falls on me … no matter what …. One thing that really was smacking me in the gut Sunday night was the responsibility part. It’s like the ultimate responsibility …”

“the buck stops at your desk. … everything stops at my desk so I’m ultimately accountable for everything in this building. … Everything is your responsibility.”

“Captain of a ship … things sometimes are smooth sailing and then in a moment, the winds can turn, and you’re not sure you’re gonna stay afloat … I’m the last one out.”


The Challenge of Distributing Leadership

“that tendency to ... micromanage, I just felt like I had to keep that in check. ... that was never my style before, but I think just because I would kinda get overwhelmed with the idea of the responsibility that I felt like I had to have my hand in, you know, all the different things going on. So I just had to challenge myself to let go gender differences ...

Kathy

“it was hard to release that, because I like to be in [involved], and some of it is trusting that it will get done, but with this [person] I know it will get done effectively and right. It's also just wanting to be a part of the process whole heartedly, but I can't whole heartedly be a part of everything”

Kara
The Challenge of Distributing Leadership

“If it’s a bilingual, I’ll send them to Evelyn. If it’s a testing question … I’ll send them to Helen. … And not to pass the buck, but they already know cause I gave them a sheet on who’s responsible, but sometimes they just want me to hear.”

Carol
More At:

- http://www.distributedleadership.org
- http://distributedleadership.org/DLS/Presentations.html

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