Leadership for Instructional Improvement:

An Examination of How Principals Share Leadership

by

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Abstract

Beginning in the latter part of the 20th century, and especially since the advent of No Child Left Behind, the roles and responsibilities of the elementary school principal have undergone significant expansion. While the primary function of the principal at one time may have been to serve as the manager of the physical plant of the school and as the supervisor of the instructional staff in a manner reminiscent of the factory boss, today’s principals are now more often expected to serve as the leader of leaders and to focus their efforts on instruction and its improvement. These expanded expectations may well be beyond the capabilities of any one individual or office. This multi-site case study examines how instructional leadership happens in three urban ring elementary schools, how teacher leaders contribute to this work, and how the principals of these schools support the facilitation of distributing instructional leadership. The primary question that guides this study is: How does instructional leadership happen in these three schools? This is examined and reported on from both the principal’s and the teacher’s perspectives.

Key words: Leadership, principal, instructional leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership
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My sincere appreciation goes to the principals and teachers leaders who participated in this study. I admire your dedication to our profession, your commitment to your students, and your desire to continually improve your schools.

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Leadership for Instructional Improvement:

An Examination of How Principals Share Leadership

Problem of Practice

In recent years, and particularly since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2001 reauthorization of the United States Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the job of the school principal has expanded and been subject to ever-greater levels of accountability. Under NCLB, continually increasing student achievement and closing achievement gaps for numerous sub-groups of students (e.g. minorities, those with learning disabilities, language deficits), has become the measure by which students, teachers and principals are judged. The current educational context pressures both school leaders and teachers to continually improve their practice and raise student achievement levels (Mulford, 2003). The challenge is not only to improve, but to sustain ongoing improvement. The accountability system of NCLB requires that all states establish high standards, and that by 2014 all students demonstrate proficiency in tasks specified by those state standards. Schools that fail to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards this goal face sanctions, and in districts throughout the country principals in schools that fail to increase achievement scores are being replaced.

In this current wave of accountability, instructional leadership from the principal has become increasingly important (Leithwood, 2001; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). Findley and Findley (1992) argue, “If a school is to be an effective one, it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal.” (p. 102). Flath (1989) concurs: “Research on effective schools indicates that the principal is pivotal in bringing about the conditions that characterize effective schools.” (p. 20).
Referring to the recently expanded roles that principals now must play, Ubben and Hughes claim that, “Although the principal must address certain managerial tasks to ensure an efficient school, the task of the principal must be to keep focused on activities which pave the way for high student achievement” (as cited in Findley & Findley, 1992, p. 102).

The expectations of and responsibilities for principals have now expanded to the point that some believe the job can no longer be done by one person, or perhaps only by a fictional “super-principal” type (Copland, 2001), and that we must look to others who can share in the instructional leadership of schools. Lambert (2002) writes, “It has been a mistake to look to the principal alone for instructional leadership, when instructional leadership is everyone’s work.” (p. 40). Neuman and Simmons (2001, p. 9) propose that for learning to become the focus and primary value for every member, leadership is the job of the entire educational community, and it must be distributed. Consequently, current leadership and reform literature highlights the importance of building leadership capacity in teachers throughout the school (Copland, 2003). The concept of teachers as leaders acknowledges that teachers hold a central position in the ways schools operate and that they play critical roles in the core functions of teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The development of teacher leadership in order to support school improvement continues to gain acceptance as researchers and administrators recognize that teachers possess the primary knowledge and expertise for improving instruction and student outcomes (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Harris, 2005).

This study seeks to provide an enhanced understanding of how the educational leadership required of schools in this era of increased accountability happens in practice.
It builds on understanding of what principals do (and how) to create, build upon, or redesign the infrastructure for managing not only facilities and faculties as would be expected of a manager, but also the structures and opportunities that principals initiate and identify for sharing in the work of instructional improvement and innovation that is now required of the principal-as-instructional-leader.

**Significance and Intellectual Goals**

In an era of unprecedented accountability for improved student learning outcomes, and at a time when additional mandates place new demands on principals, it may be true that successfully accomplishing all that is expected of the elementary school principal has grown beyond what any one person can do alone (Copland, 2001). Developing a greater understanding of how principals navigate these new expectations by engaging multiple teacher leaders in the shared leadership required for instructional improvement has the potential to increase principal understanding of how instructional leadership really happens in schools, not necessarily as described by an organizational chart or a collective of job titles but in actual practice (Spillane, 2001). Better understanding how instructional leadership happens can potentially help principals who are trying to lead improvement efforts. In fact, Spillane (2006, p. 89) argues that one of the greatest challenges that education will face over the next several decades is understanding leadership practice as a basis for thinking about educational improvement. Hopefully, this more thorough understanding will enhance the principal’s ability to create the structures and opportunities for sharing instructional leadership that will not only make the principal’s job more manageable but will also potentially build teachers’ senses of confidence, efficacy and professionalism, encourage greater commitment by teachers
to the school mission, and ultimately have a positive impact on student achievement. In discussing the need for understanding leadership as happening throughout a school organization, Spillane (2001, p. 23) indicates that:

An in-depth analysis of the practice of leadership is necessary to render an account of how school leadership works. Knowing what leaders do is one thing, but without a rich understanding of how and why they do it, our understanding of leadership is incomplete.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study is to examine how elementary school principals navigate the expanded and evolving roles and expectations of their positions in light of the relatively recent and increasingly demanding accountability movement. The research questions for this project are as follows:

1. How does Instructional Leadership happen in the school?

2. What does the principal do to support the infrastructure for engaging others in managing instruction and its improvement:
   
   a. From the principal’s perspective?

   b. From the teacher leader’s perspective?

The traditional model of principal leadership may be best symbolized by, and likely grew out of, the old one-room schoolhouse led by the sole master teacher. In fact, Shellard (2003) stated that the traditional administrative role of the principal was built on the fundamental concept of one-person leadership. Often, organizational charts and agreed-upon lines of authority are used to describe the intended leadership structure in schools. However, the realities of where power, as opposed to “authority,” actually
resides and the influences that situation and circumstance exert on instructional leadership make understanding how it happens in practice far more challenging.

In light of the more recent emphasis placed on building-level accountability for student achievement, the principal’s role has increasingly become more about leading change for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Thus, the definition of what it is to be an administrator has expanded to include this new emphasis on instructional leadership. This is in addition to, not in place of, the traditional tasks of building and human resource management. To be successful, principals must now somehow balance the roles of school leadership (i.e. being both building administrator and instructional leader). They can no longer simply focus on the organizational functions of operating the school. The increasing demands being placed on principals and the complexity of the issues with which they must contend demands a new look at all of what it means to be a school leader (MacBeath, 2005).

Successfully leading today’s schools requires more than the leadership of any one individual (Fullan, 2001, Gronn, 2002, Spillane, 2006). In response, a new model of educational leadership is emerging that, while not diminishing the role the principal, supports the greater cultivation and utilization of teacher leadership (Mangin, 2005). It states that an “organization cannot flourish on the actions of the top leader alone. It is a model that acknowledges that schools and districts need many leaders at many levels” (Fullan, 2002, p. 20). This new model of leadership is not based on position, authority or formal hierarchy. It is based instead on various levels and types of expertise and influence. This emerging model of leadership is described as distributed, interactive, “web-like” and concertive (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006) and describes leadership as
being vested in the many as opposed to the few (Murphy, 2005).

Answering questions about instructional leadership in schools and what principals do to support it requires a theoretical framework that organizes ideas and provides insight into the *how* of the leadership process. I believe that the distributed leadership framework provides such a perspective.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

I believe that the roles and responsibilities of the principal have expanded from those reflecting an emphasis on building and employee management to one better described as educational leadership and that educational leadership requires both management of buildings and resources and leadership for instruction and its improvement.

**The Factory Model.** As stated above, in the traditional school leadership model, principals were the recognized leaders of local schools. Assistant principals, instructional coaches, and classroom teachers would often then follow in a hierarchy of decision-making authority. School leadership (which might have more appropriately been described as management or school administration) was associated with the principal filling a formal position vested with the authority and responsibility for operationalizing school policies and procedures. The principal oversaw the budget, scheduled the building, made sure the buses ran on time, and managed relations between parents, staff, students and the outside community. School principals in this paradigm typically acted unilaterally, making organizational decisions themselves and then delivering those decisions to followers who were expected to carry them out. Leadership roles such as these were reserved for those who had earned qualifications (i.e. certification) that
allowed them to step outside of the classroom and into a supervisory role. Characterized
by authoritative leadership styles with an emphasis on management, this model guided
both theoretical and empirical leadership research throughout much of the 20th century
(Northouse, 2004). Murphy (2005) describes the literature on school administration as
filled with “hierarchical and bureaucratic pillars of management-authority, control,
impersonality, and division of labor.” (p. 52). Consequently, leadership in public school
settings has customarily been of an individualistic and controlling nature, with principals
being the sole site decision-makers.

**The Evolution of the Educational Leader.** Beginning with the Effective Schools
Research of the 1970s, however, and especially in light of the more recent emphasis
placed on building-level accountability for student achievement, the principal’s role has
increasingly become more about leading change for the continuous improvement of
teaching and learning. He or she is now expected to lead his or her faculty in the
alignment of curriculum, assessment and instruction in this relatively new, high-stakes,
and standards-based environment (Dufour, 2002). Effective educational leadership is
understood to now include creating a safe and orderly environment, developing a clear
mission and vision, promoting stakeholder involvement, providing an instructional focus,
practicing progress monitoring, and setting high expectations for student achievement
(Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Instructional leadership from the principal means
identifying and supporting the conditions that help teachers more effectively engage
students in their learning, and it requires that the principal take a more active role in
examining existing teaching practices, stay current with the most recent educational
research and support the adoption research-based instructional strategies (Marks &
Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership requires the principal’s involvement in setting clear goals, allocating resources for instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, evaluating teachers, providing professional development, making decisions based on data, and using technology effectively (King, 1996).

**The Principal as Instructional Leader.** The addition of instructional leadership to the principal’s responsibilities has led to a movement dedicated to building greater capacity for shared leadership among many leaders in the school (Dufour, 2002; Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2003; Lashway, 2003; Spillane, 2006). The demands being placed on principals and the complexity of the issues with which they must contend demands a new look at all of what it means to be a school leader.

**Distributed Leadership.** In response, a new model of educational leadership is emerging that, while not diminishing the role the principal, supports the greater cultivation and utilization of teacher leadership (Dufour, 2002; Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2003; Lashway, 2003; Spillane, 2006). It is one that acknowledges “organization(s) cannot flourish on the actions of the top leader alone. It is a model that acknowledges that schools and districts need many leaders at many levels” (Fullan, 2002, p. 20). This new model of leadership is not based on position, authority or formal hierarchy. It is based instead on various levels and types of expertise and influence. This emerging model of leadership is described as distributed, interactive, “web-like” and concertive (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). It recognizes leadership as being vested in the many as opposed to the few (Murphy, 2005). This new model of leadership capitalizes on what under the traditional paradigm meant ignoring “the major untapped potential” that teachers represent as instructional leaders (Barth, 1990, p.131), and it works counter to
the former models’ stifling of the skills and leadership potential of others in the organization (Elmore, 2000). Gronn argues that this perspective “invites consideration of an organization’s overall capacity for leadership rather than helping to perpetuate the idea of the power of one.” (p.17). A distributed leadership perspective was used to guide the collection and analysis of data and the development of the findings of this project.

**Distributed Leadership Defined.** At its simplest, distributive leadership is the sharing of leadership between two or more individuals (Spillane, 2006). Unfortunately, terms such as collaborative leadership, shared leadership, democratic leadership, co-leadership and others are used with such frequency (and as if they are all appropriately interchangeable) with the phrase distributive leadership that its meaning can easily be diluted or obscured (Ibid.). Spillane warns that distributed leadership should not be confused with these other forms of leadership. He argues that that distributed leadership, as he and others use it, is about more than task sharing or assignment delegation. Distributed leadership is based on the idea that leadership functions are performed by people at all levels in the organization rather than as a function of any personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p.22). From a distributed perspective, leadership is inclusive of all educators, regardless of formal leadership roles. A distributed leadership perspective locates leadership beyond any one individual and suggests instead that it is really an “emergent” property that exists somewhere within the relationships and interactions of multiple actors (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). Within the distributed leadership model, teacher leaders and others who hold expert knowledge are recognized as vital to strengthening the school’s organization, operation and ultimately the learning process for students (Gronn, 2002; Spillane &
Distributed leadership is a leadership model that recognizes that the work of improving instructional practice requires people to operate interdependently within networks of shared and complimentary expertise rather than in hierarchies of clearly defined divisions of labor (Elmore, 2000). From a distributed leadership perspective, it is recognized that each member of the organization has the potential to bring something different (i.e. complimentary skills) to solving problems, that leadership is actually “stretched over” (Spillane, 2006) a number of people in the school, and that distributive leadership supports the transfer and sharing of knowledge throughout the school (Yost, 2002, p. 5). Distributing leadership shares the responsibility of decision-making and places it within the entire instructional environment.


Distributed leadership is a leadership practice that relies heavily on the assistance of numerous stakeholders that permits the organization to benefit from the united experience and dual interaction of school leaders and their supporters as they employ material and cultural artifacts to work in performance toward a universal goal so the outcome is larger than the sum of their individual actions.

For Gronn, distributed leadership is not about simply creating more leaders (as in a numerical/additive function) but is more about facilitating “concertive action” and pluralistic engagement. Woods, Bennet, Harvey & Wise (2004) provide the definition of concertive as “the additional dynamic, which is the product of conjoint activity where people work together in such a way that they pool their initiative and expertise” (p. 441).
This idea of concertive action is the crux of the matter for Gronn. In his view, distributed leadership is not about the actions of individuals but instead is found in “structurally constrained conjoint agency, or the concertive labor performed by pluralities of interdependent organizational members.” (p. 28). Using this concertive lens, Gronn discusses the product of distributed leadership as something greater than the sum of its parts and argues that concertive action can be identified as happening in three main patterns:

1. Spontaneous (ad hoc) collaboration in which organization members, often with different skills and from different levels in the organization come together in a way that pools their collective expertise in order to meet the needs of the task. This “pool” of expertise may then disband once the task at hand has been completed (p.5).

2. Shared roles emerging between organization members who work closely together in an “implicit framework of understanding” and “intuitive understandings” (p.6).

3. The institutionalization of structures, which are the most formal and easily documented of the three. This includes concertive mechanisms such as established teams and/or committees and norms.

**James Spillane.** In addition to Gronn, one of the leading researchers and authors on distributive leadership whose work is cited in the literature considerably more than any other is James Spillane. Spillane (2006) suggests that as opposed to focusing on traits or styles, a distributed perspective puts “leadership practice center stage” (pg. 144). Spillane’s work shifts the focus from the traits, characteristics and attributes of leaders or
organizations to an examination of the shared practices, activities and functions of leadership. Central to the work of Spillane is the idea that leadership practice should be analyzed in relation to the interdependencies of the players, the tasks at hand and the “artifacts” (e.g. test scores, curricula, observation tools and protocols, etc.) with which they interact. Spillane argues that leadership is best understood as being “stretched over” the social contexts in which it is situated (Spillane, 2006). He contends that situations and artifacts or tools do not simply provide a contextual backdrop for examining leadership action. He argues instead that they are intrinsic components of such action and that they in fact define components of it stating, “The material situation does not ‘affect’ what school leaders do, it is constitutive of their practice” (p.26). Spillane and Diamond (2007) further state that the “situation is both the medium for practice and outcome of practice. As the medium for practice, aspects . . . offer both affordances and constraints . . . in turn, leadership practice also can transform aspects of the situation over time.” (p. 10). Thus, situation and practice are closely intertwined in a distributed leadership approach. This suggests that leadership practice should be analyzed on a task-by-task basis and that thoughtful examination of leadership practice should include recognition of how actors, circumstances and artifacts converge and continually influence, change and impact each other in a reciprocal fashion. Spillane describes leadership practice as really existing “in between” all of these interdependent actors.

Spillane (2006) also emphasizes that leadership can be found in both formal positions and in the informal relationships formed as the result of varying expertise. This is often discussed in terms of positional and informal leadership. Spillane asserts that whether it is formally vested or not, or even if it is for the “right” reasons or is conversely
counterproductive to school improvement efforts, distributed leadership is exercised all the time. For example, a principal and others may be working collectively toward building structures and supports intended to increase student achievement. Others (detractors, or even “saboteurs”), however, can be at the same time and just as effectively “leading” a resistance-to-change movement or otherwise seeking to serve their own agendas in ways that are just as distributed. From this perspective, a distributed leadership lens is about understanding real-life leadership. This is as opposed to expending energy trying to determine if there is distributed leadership being exercised or if leadership is being shared. Spillane’s point is that it, for good or for bad, having multiple players and circumstances continually operating in a reciprocal-type convergence just “is,” and there is no getting around that reality (Spillane, 2006).

For both Gronn and Spillane, leadership is seen as an integral part of the daily activities and interactions of everyone across all levels of the organization irrespective of position or title. For both, leadership is revealed within the small, incremental, more informal and emergent acts (micro) as well as within the large-scale, long term and transformative (macro) changes more often directed from the top. An example of macro change would be building a commitment to school goals or mission. This kind of long term, big picture leadership naturally would require numerous smaller day-to-day (micro) leadership moves to support it. The task of school leaders is therefore to offer direction and management in employing these indirect macro and micro variables. As MacBeath (2005, p.74) describes it:

> Distributed leadership provides the means to develop school capacity and lessen the burden on the person in charge, freeing
them to do key things only persons in charge can do. Thus, the potential extends beyond just making the job of the person in charge more manageable. It offers the potential to rejuvenate all staff, increasing their professional respect, as well as to improve conditions for students and raise achievement.

Distributed leadership describes a perspective that offers a post-heroic, representation of leadership that may well be better suited to understanding the complex realities of school leadership today.

**Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

**Introduction**

The focus of this study is an examination, using a distributed leadership perspective, of what principals do (and how) to build the supports and capacity for instructional leadership by and amongst the teaching staff. The literature that has informed this study includes writings on leadership theories through time and also research on educational leadership. The overview of popular leadership theories is presented in order to serve two purposes. It is my intention both to demonstrate an understanding of the various theories and to describe how the strengths and weaknesses of some theories have contributed to the development of others throughout the years. I also intend to demonstrate how, as part of this evolution, the distributed leadership perspective has emerged as the framework most appropriate for understanding how instructional leadership happens.

**Leadership Theory through Time**

The review of the literature begins with a review of leadership theories and a
discussion of their evolution over roughly the last one hundred years as a progression from the “Great Man” notion of heroic leadership, to traits theories, situational and contingency theories and then transactional and transformational leadership theories.

Theories of leadership evolve over time. Theories, which may at one time be popular but over time be deemed inadequate for the purposes of describing a particular circumstance or phenomenon, often will be modified or adapted by researchers to account for perceived shortcomings. At some point, enough modification, adaptation or “tweaking” of the original eventually results in the creation of something else; something that may be considered more appropriate, more robust. Introduction of this “something else” often will not mark a clear or divergent break from previous theory, and seldom will it describe entirely “new” thinking; rather, it will build on the old and add to it a greater degree of flexibility. While early theories tend to focus on the characteristics and behaviors of successful leaders, later theories increasingly consider the role of followers and the contextual nature of leadership. Each of these theories has provided insights over the years and added to our understanding of what qualities make for a successful leader; however, in isolation each theory is inadequate for capturing and explaining the importance of responding to different situations and contexts and for describing the leader’s role(s) in relation to followers. Also, none of the theories discussed here were developed for the explicit purpose of studying how leadership happens in schools.

The table that follows provides a brief introduction to each of the major theories. The table is followed by a more thorough narrative explanation of each theory and discussion of how they may have added to our understanding of leadership yet prove inadequate for understanding school leadership as it actually happens.
Table 1. Dominate Leadership Theories

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<td>Great Man Theory</td>
<td>Pre-1950</td>
<td>Leaders are born, not made.</td>
<td>Fatalistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some men are “gifted” with characteristics that predispose them to assume leadership positions (Carlyle, 1888 cited in Northouse, 2004)</td>
<td>No consideration of followers context or task (Northouse, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Obvious gender bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait Theories</td>
<td>Early 1900s - WWII</td>
<td>Characteristics of leaders are different than those of non-leaders (Kirkpatrick &amp; Locke, 1991; Northouse, 2004)</td>
<td>No consideration of followers, context or task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on physical and personality traits and characteristics (Bryman, 1992)</td>
<td>No universal traits that distinguish leaders from non-leaders found (Northouse, p. 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Subjective determination of who is regarded as a “successful” leader and the relative importance of identified traits (Ibid.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adds nothing to understanding of leadership training (p. 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviorist Theories</td>
<td>WWII- 1960s</td>
<td>Concentrate on what leaders actually do rather than on characteristics or qualities.</td>
<td>Weak predictive value (Northouse, p. 55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Patterns of behavior can be observed and categorized as “leadership styles” (Jago, 1982).</td>
<td>No universal behaviors or leadership styles identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Behaviors can be classified as task-oriented or relationship orientated.</td>
<td>Does not account for how variations in situation can affect performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adapted from study of military leaders so may not be generalizable to education (p. 56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational and Contingency Theories</td>
<td>1960s – 1980s</td>
<td>There is no best, fixed leadership style (Northouse, 2004)</td>
<td>Fails to distinguish between leadership and management (Kotter, 1990; Rost, 1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factors unique to the situation determine effective characteristics and behaviors (Ibid.)</td>
<td>Continues focus exclusively on what the person in charge does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate approaches may be autocratic or participative (Northouse, pp. 125-126)</td>
<td>Fails to address leadership of individuals vs. that of organizations (Northouse, p. 99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Situational forces include relation of leader to followers, nature of task, position of</td>
<td>Fails to consider match between leaders and follower readiness (Ibid.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Views context as “background,” not as integral to dynamic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Transactional Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Presumption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s - present</td>
<td>Emphasizes importance of the relationship between leader and followers</td>
<td>Presumes that followers are motivated by rewards and punishments (Burns, 1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focuses on mutual benefits of delivering rewards or recognition in exchange for production, commitment or loyalty of followers (Northouse, 2004)</td>
<td>Can encourage destructive competition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Transformational Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>The role of leadership is facilitating individual growth and implementing the transformation of organizational performance (Bass &amp; Riggio, 2006)</th>
<th>Potential for abuse of power (Hall, Johnson, Wysocki &amp; Kepner, 2002)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited research base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Adapted from “A Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks” by R. Bolden, J. Gosling, A. Marturano, and P. Dennison, June 2003, Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter.

**“Great Man” Theory.** One of the first theories that figures in various studies of leadership is commonly referred to as the Great Man theory. This approach assumes that a “great man” naturally holds the essential skills that allow him to perform as a leader, and it asserts that leaders are born and not made (Northouse, 2004). In this respect and for this reason, “Great Man” can be thought of as an early version of trait theory. Great Man theory is based on two basic assumptions: that leaders are born and not made, and that whenever there is a need of leadership, a Great Man (i.e. a Superman) will arise and solve all problems. When the Great Man theory was most popular, most of the leaders were indeed male. The subjects studied and on which the theory was based were typically successful military and/or political figures. Obvious problems with the Great Man theory include the issue of gender bias as well the focus it places solely on the leader. The theory says nothing of the role(s) of followers or the context of the leadership activity (Ibid).

** Traits Theories** An outgrowth of Great Man, Traits is another popular and important leadership theory that emerged around 1910 and that still figures in the educational leadership research literature is traits theory. Traits theory was similar to Great Man theory in that both
attributed the success of the leader to something about the leader (Northouse, 2004). Trait theorists reason that if leaders possess superior qualities that differentiate them from followers, discovering these qualities should be possible (Hodgetts, 1993; Northouse, 2004). Trait theorists acknowledge common personality characteristics among leaders, the capabilities for which are still inherent, but those traits do not guarantee the exercise of leadership. Traits theorists also thought that (in a way that foreshadows contingency theory development) in examples of successful leadership certain traits appeared to be best aligned to certain environments. In traits theory, a potential leader is viewed as someone who has the right combination of attributes that will make him a good leader (Northouse, 2004). In 1948, Ralph Stogdill published a review of 124 studies and surveys published between 1904 and 1947. These studies identified characteristics such as initiative, social dominance, and persistence as being typical qualities of effective leaders. Despite the fact that many leaders shared a number of the identified traits, no common list of specific leadership traits surfaced. In fact, not only did Stogdill fail to discover a common list of leadership qualities, he also uncovered a number of inconsistent findings (Northouse, 2004). Additional research on traits also failed to reveal clear answers regarding which traits might be consistently associated with great leadership (Hershey & Blanchard, 1988). Stogdill concluded, “A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities, and goals of the followers” (Stogdill, 1948). John Gardner (1989) also researched many leaders from a traits perspective and listed the attributes and characteristics of leaders. He identified the leader’s traits as:

- Intelligence and judgments based on actions
- Physical stamina and a vital driving force
- Task competency
- Better understanding of the followers and their demands
- Avidness to accept responsibilities
- Ability to deal with people
- Capability to motivate people
- Trustworthy
- Conclusiveness
- Flexibility

In his research, Boyatzis (1982) identified interpersonal skills as the single most important attribute that distinguishes effective leaders. Boyatzis further delineated aspects of interpersonal skills such as empathy, persuasiveness, communication skills, social acuity, charm and diplomacy.

Problems with trait theories include the inability to explain how someone can possess the traits as described above yet fail to emerge as a leader or conversely how some leaders who lack particular identified traits are successful (Wright, 1996, p. 34). Trying to determine a set of effective leader traits and a set of effective leaders’ behaviors in all situations has not been successful (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Traits theory also seems to suggest that traits leaders possess the same qualities whether they are leading on the battlefield, the football field or in a school, again suggesting that context is unimportant (Sadler, 1997). Traits theory also fails to account for the situational and environmental factors that play various roles in a leader’s effectiveness (Horner, 1997). As with Great Man, Traits theory considers only the one-way effect of leader influence on followers and fails to address environmental or situational factors. Finally, any lists of
traits thought to be those inherent to successful leaders are thought to be subjective and arbitrary (Northouse, 2004).

**Behavioral Theories.** After trait theories, researchers started exploring the behaviors of leaders and made assumptions that the traits and the leadership qualities are not inherited but instead can be identified, learned and mastered by any person. Behavioral theories became popular modes for studying leadership during the 1950s and 1960s (Northouse, 2004). Unlike Great Man theory, behaviorism argues that leaders are not born but can be made. Theorists such as B.F. Skinner argued that leadership is a learned behavior and contend that reinforcement of leadership behaviors and punishment or non-reinforcement of non-leadership behaviors determines who will become a leader (Skinner, 1974, p. 167). It follows then, that if these leadership behaviors can be identified, they can be taught (Horner, 1997). Behaviorist theory does at least begin a shift from an emphasis on understanding what leaders are to understanding what successful leaders do (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004).

**Contingency (Situational) Leadership Theories.** Contingency or situational theories began to gain attention in the 1960s, and their emergence marks the beginning of consideration of the interaction between leadership traits, behaviors and the situation (Northouse, 2004). This allows for the possibility that leadership differs according to the situation (Horner, 1997). The basis of these theories is that an individual’s characteristics make him/her a suitable leader only in certain situations. Since each situation requires a type of leadership that fits the circumstances, groups do best when they match the leader to the current situation. In other words, there is no one right or wrong way to lead all of the time, and the successful leader is the one who can adapt to the unique demands of an
ever-changing organization (Yukl, 2006). Contingency or situational theories propose that the organizational or group context affects the extent to which leader traits and behaviors will be most effective or appropriate (Yukl, 2006). Situational approaches require that leaders be flexible, diagnose the leadership style most appropriate for the given situation, and effectively apply that leadership style (Hershey & Blanchard, 1988). Two popular contingency theories are Fiedler’s Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967) and the Hersey/Blanchard Theory (Hersey, Blanchard, 1976).

**Fiedler’s Contingency Theory.** In 1967, Fred Fiedler proposed his contingency theory to determine when a task-oriented approach would be more effective and when a relationship-oriented style would be more productive. Fiedler found that task-oriented leaders are effective when conditions are either “very favorable for the leader or which are very unfavorable for the leader” (Fiedler, 1967, p.13). When conditions are favorable, member relations are typically strong; there is a positive relationship between the group and the leader; and the task is clear and structured. The group members are ready and willing to work, and their energies can be focused on the goal. Task-oriented leaders are effective because they support efficient job performance. When conditions are unfavorable, when there are poor relations within the organization, or when the task is ambiguous or undesirable, the group will need to stay goal oriented in order to achieve any success; so the task-oriented leader is once again most appropriate.

According to Fiedler (1967), “the relationship-oriented style is more effective in situations which are intermediate in favorableness” (p.13). When an intermediate situation is present, the leader can help to build confidence and ensure cohesion by focusing on the personal needs of individuals. Whether the situation is favorable,
unfavorable or “intermediate,” Fiedler’s model suggests that “group performance can . . .
be improved either by modifying the leader’s style or by modifying the group-task
situation” (p. 151).

**Hersey/Blanchard Theory.** Another popular theory that deals with task and
relationship behaviors is the Hersey/Blanchard Theory (Hersey, Blanchard, 1976). This
theory differs from Fielder’s in some important ways. Hersey and Blanchard introduced
the notion that effective leaders are somewhat flexible and that they can and should
change their approaches as their followers’ maturity increases. They posit that the
effective leader continually diagnoses the needs and wants of followers and then adjusts
accordingly. The leader recognizes that while the group becomes more experienced
(mature), it also becomes less dependent on his or her direction and more capable of self-
direction. Hersey and Blanchard define maturity as “the capacity to set high but
attainable goals (achievement-motivation), willingness and ability to take responsibility,
and education and/or experience of an individual or a group” (1976). Hersey and
Blanchard argue that maturity is not, in this context, to be thought of in the chronological,
age-defined sense, but instead as describing the possession of the knowledge or
experience required of a specific goal. The savvy leader gauges the maturity (i.e. the
capacity) of his group and then employs the most appropriate leadership style, providing
the just-right amounts of pressure and support. Hersey and Blanchard describe a
continuum of leadership approaches that range from “telling” to “selling,”
“participating,” and finally “delegating.” Each style represents a progressive stage in the
gradual release from a decidedly autocratic, directive approach toward a more
empowering, entrusting one.
**Transactional Leadership Theory.** In transactional leadership theory, rewards (e.g. compensation, prestige, career advancement, praise) and sometimes punishments are contingent upon the performance of the followers. Transactional leadership is based on bureaucratic authority and focuses primarily on task completion. In transactional leadership theory, the leader views the relationship between leaders and subordinates as an exchange. This type of leadership was first identified by sociologist Max Weber (1947), and was further described by Bernard Bass in the 1980s (Bass, 1985). The transactional leader uses the exchange or “trade off” of rewards and promises of future payoffs to motivate followers from whom he expects performance (Bass, 1985). In addition to the more obvious *quid pro quo* reciprocal nature of transactional leadership, the process is also based on reciprocity in the sense that leaders not only influence followers but are under their influence as well. The transactional leader earns influence by adjusting to the expectations of followers (Schermrhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2000).

**Transformational Leadership Theories.** Transformational leadership differs substantially from transactional leadership. Transformational leadership is more about ongoing progress and both individual and group growth and development. While transactional leaders focus on exchange-based relations with followers, transformational leaders inspire followers to higher levels of performance for the sake of the organization (Burns, 1978; Yukl, 2002). The transformational leader articulates a vision in a clear and compelling manner, explains how to attain the vision, acts confidently and optimistically, demonstrates confidence in his followers, emphasizes values with symbolic actions, leads by example, and empowers followers to achieve the vision (Yukl, 2002). The transformational leader asks followers to transcend their own self- interests for the good
of the group and to consider their long-term needs to develop themselves, as opposed to
any immediate or extrinsic needs (Burns, 1978; Yukl, 2002). Through the strength of
their vision and personality, transformational leaders are able to inspire followers to
change expectations, perceptions and motivations in order to work toward common goals.
According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is based on the four dimensions
of charisma, communication, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration.

Bernard Bass expanded upon Burns’ original ideas and developed what is referred
to as Bass’ Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985). According to Bass,
transformational leadership can be understood best by considering the impact that it has
on followers. Transformational leaders, Bass suggested, garner trust, respect and
admiration from their followers. Bass (1985) suggested that there were four different
components of transformational leadership: intellectual stimulation, individualized
consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Transformational
leaders foster inspiration and support the creation of a level of excitement that motivates
followers to put forth extra efforts to achieve common goals. Through this interaction,
followers are often converted into leaders (Bass, 1985; Yukl, 2002).

The leadership theories described above have all at various times through the last
century been used in attempts to describe and make sense of the school leadership
dynamic. They have most often served as frameworks for those attempting to describe
the school leader and the attributes and style(s) that he or she employs. While aspects of
all the above may have some utility in this pursuit, no one theory in and of itself may be
adequate for describing how leadership happens in schools (Spillane, Diamond, Walker,
Halverson & Jita, 2001). They have, however, contributed to the development of our
understanding of leadership and have informed more recently introduced conceptual models such as distributed leadership.

The Principalship

Terry (2000) says, “Principals have always told their subordinates how to act. Teachers have had little voice in workplace issues such as the choice of curriculum material, the types of tests used to evaluate instruction, the scheduling of classes, and the allocation of instructional resources” (p. 7). Consequently, leadership in public school settings customarily has been of an individualistic and controlling nature, with principals being the sole site decision-makers.

Beginning with the Effective Schools Research of the 1970s, however, and especially in light of the more recent emphasis placed on building-level accountability for student achievement, the principal’s role has increasingly become more about leading change for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Elmore, 2001). The principal is now expected to lead his or her faculty in the work of aligning curriculum, assessment and instruction in a relatively new, high-stakes, and standards-based environment. Thus, the definition of what it is to be an educational leader has expanded to include this new emphasis on instructional leadership in addition to the traditional tasks of building management. Critical indicators of effective educational leadership are understood to now include creating a safe and orderly environment, developing a clear mission and vision, promoting stakeholder involvement, having an instructional focus, facilitating progress monitoring, and setting high expectations for student achievement (Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

For the principal, instructional leadership means identifying and supporting the
conditions that help teachers more effectively engage students in their learning, and it requires that the principal take a more active role in examining existing teaching practices, staying current with the most recent educational research, and supporting the adoption of research-based instructional strategies (Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership requires the principal’s involvement in setting clear goals, allocating resources for instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, evaluating teachers, providing professional development, making decisions based on data, and using technology effectively (King, 1996). The increasing demands being placed on principals and the complexity of the issues with which they must contend demands a new look at all of what it means to be a school leader (Elmore, 2001).

**Distributed Leadership**

A growing number of authors now argue that successfully leading today’s schools requires more than the leadership of any one individual (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2005; Hallinger and Heck, 2009; Spillane et. al, 2001). These authors instead promote the consideration of how leaders in addition to the principal can and must contribute to student success and argue that failing to tap the leadership potential of all teachers represents a waste of potential human capital resources (Barth, 1988). They contend that successful educational leadership will require “the development of collaborative decision-making strategies, distributed leadership practices, a culture of collegiality and community … and processes for organizational change and renewal” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe & Meyerson, 2005). They push for the consideration of the leadership potential that exists in far many more players than the principal or his administrative team. They also call for way of accounting for the role(s) that situation
and resources play in shaping leadership practice. They argue that what is needed is a conceptual model that analyzes and provides insight into the *how* of the leadership process. They argue that a distributed leadership perspective may provide a framework that helps to make sense of what really happens in schools in terms of leadership in practice (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2005; Hallinger and Heck, 2009; Spillane et. al, 2001).

In making the case for a distributed leadership perspective Hallinger and Heck (2009, p.113) offer that:

> It may be the case, that some of the “nagging problems” that have accompanied studies of school leadership effects arise from the fact that we have been measuring an incomplete portion of the school’s leadership resources. Thus, future research would do well to assess the contribution of leadership by the principal as well as by other key stakeholders.

Alma Harris (2005) adds that, “The ascendancy of distributed leadership as a powerful concept and a theory represents a significant shift in thinking about leaders, leadership practice, and leadership development. It not only challenges the mythology of individualistic leadership but also reclaims leadership for teachers and others working in schools” (p. 24). This new model of educational leadership, while not diminishing the role the principal, supports the greater cultivation and utilization of teacher leadership. It is one that acknowledges, “organization(s) cannot flourish on the actions of the top leader alone. Schools and districts need many leaders at many levels” (Fullan, 2002, p. 20).

This new model of leadership is not based on position, authority or formal hierarchy. It is based instead on various levels and types of expertise and influence. It is described as
distributed, interactive, “web-like” and concertive (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). It
describes leadership as being vested in the many as opposed to the few (Murphy, 2005).
It capitalizes on what once meant ignoring “the major untapped potential” that teachers
represent as instructional leaders (Barth, 1988, p.131), and it works counter to the stifling
of the skills and leadership potential of others in the organization (Elmore, 2000;
Murphy, 2005).

In response to the added pressures that principals now face, a number of researchers
have pointed to distributive leadership as the most promising leadership model for this
new era of accountability (Elmore, 2000; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006; MacBeath, 2005).
In discussing how distributed leadership changes the leadership dynamic of schools and
how this change can benefit multiple stakeholders, MacBeath (p.74) states:

> Distributed leadership provides the means to develop school
capacity and lessen the burden on the person in charge, freeing
them to do key things only persons in charge can do. Thus, the
potential extends beyond just making the job of the person in
charge more manageable. It offers the potential to rejuvenate all
staff, increasing their professional respect, as well as to improve
conditions for students and raise achievement.

At its simplest, distributive leadership is the sharing of leadership between two or
more individuals. Unfortunately, terms such as collaborative leadership, shared
leadership, democratic leadership, co-leadership and others are used with such frequency
and interchangeably with the phrase distributive leadership that its meaning can easily be
diluted or obscured (Spillane, 2006). Spillane warns that distributed leadership should
not be confused with these other forms of leadership, that distributed leadership as he and others use it is about something far more than task sharing or assignment delegation (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2005; MacBeath, 2006; Spillane, 2006). Distributed leadership is “the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles across the school organization” (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Seashore, 2007, p. 470). Distributed leadership is based on the idea that leadership functions are performed by people at all levels in the organization rather than as a function of any personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top.” (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p.22). From a distributed leadership perspective, leadership is inclusive of all educators, regardless of formal leadership roles. A distributed leadership perspective locates leadership beyond the individual and suggests instead that it is really an “emergent” property that exists somewhere within the relationships and interactions of multiple actors (Gronn 2002, Spillane et. al, 2001). Within the distributed leadership model, teacher leaders and others who hold expert knowledge are recognized as vital to strengthening the school organization, operation and ultimately the learning process for students (Gronn, 2002; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Distributed leadership is a leadership model that recognizes that the work of improving instructional practice requires people to operate interdependently within networks of shared and complimentary expertise rather than in hierarchies of clearly defined divisions of labor (Elmore, 2000). From a distributed leadership perspective, it is recognized that each member of the organization has the potential to bring something different (i.e. complimentary skills) to solving problems, that leadership is actually “stretched over” (Spillane, 2006) a number of people in the school and that distributive leadership supports the transfer and sharing
of knowledge throughout the school (Yost, 2002, p. 5). Woods et al. (2004) suggest that distributed leadership is based on three premises:

1. Leadership is an “emergent” property of a group of interacting individuals.
2. An openness or permeability to the boundaries of leadership (i.e. it can come from all positions and levels in an organization).
3. Varieties of knowledge, experience and task-specific expertise are distributed across the many as opposed to the one or the few.

Distributed leadership not only highlights the importance of leadership for all, but creates a conducive environment for those individuals with expert knowledge to actively participate to maximize student learning, professional efficacy, and organizational effectiveness (Gronn, 2002; MacBeath, 2005; Spillane et. al, 2001). Distributed leadership shares the responsibility of decision-making and encompasses effective educational strategies beyond the principal’s office, and places it instead within the entire instructional environment. According to Gronn (2002, p. 4):

Distributed leadership is a leadership practice that relies heavily on the assistance of numerous stakeholders that permits the organization to benefit from the united experience and dual interaction of school leaders and their supporters as they employ material and cultural artifacts to work in performance toward a universal goal so the outcome is larger than the sum of their individual actions.
For Gronn, distributed leadership is not about simply creating more leaders (as in a numerical/additive function) but is more about facilitating “concertive action” and pluralistic engagement. Woods et al. (2004) provide the definition of concertive in this sense as “the additional dynamic, which is the product of conjoint activity where people work together in such a way that they pool their initiative and expertise” (p. 441). This idea of concertive action is really the crux of the matter for Gronn. In his view, distributed leadership is not about the agency of individuals but instead is found in “structurally constrained conjoint agency, or the concertive labor performed by pluralities of interdependent organizational members” (pg. 28). Using this concertive lens, Gronn discusses the product of distributed leadership as something greater than the sum of its parts. Gronn (2002) argues that concertive action can be identified as happening in three main patterns:

1. Spontaneous (ad hoc) collaboration in which organization members, often with different skills and from different levels in the organization, will come together in ways that pools their collective expertise in order to meet the needs of the task. This “pool” of expertise may then disband once the task at hand has been completed. (p. 5).

2. Shared roles will emerge between organization members who will work closely together in an “implicit framework of understanding” and “intuitive understandings” (p. 6).
3. Institutionalization of structures, which are the most formal and
easily documented of the three. This includes concertive
mechanisms such as established teams and/or committees.

In addition to Gronn, James Spillane is one of the most often cited researchers and
authors on distributive leadership. Spillane (2006) suggests that as opposed to focusing
on traits or styles, a distributed perspective puts “leadership practice center stage”
(Spillane, 2006, p. 25). Spillane’s work suggests a shifting of focus from one on the
traits, characteristics and attributes of a leaders or organizations to an examination of the
shared practices, activities and functions of leadership. Central to the work of Spillane
and his colleagues is the idea that leadership practice should be analyzed in relation to the
interdependencies of the players, the task at hand and the “artifacts,” e.g. test scores,
curricula, observation tools and protocols, etc. (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004;
Spillane, 2006). Spillane (2006) argues that leadership is best understood as being
“stretched over” the contexts in which it is situated. He contends that situations and
artifacts or tools do not simply provide a contextual backdrop for examining leadership
action, arguing instead that they are intrinsic components of such action and that they in
fact define components of it, stating “the material situation does not ‘affect’ what school
leaders do, it is constitutive of their practice” (p.26). Spillane and Diamond further state
that the “situation is both the medium for practice and outcome of practice. As the
medium for practice, aspects . . . offer both affordances and constraints . . . In turn,
leadership practice also can transform aspects of the situation over time . . .” (Spillane &
Diamond, 2007, p. 10). Situation and practice are thus closely intertwined in a
distributed leadership approach. This suggests that distributed leadership practice should
be analyzed on a task-by-task basis and that thoughtful examination of leadership practice should include recognition of how actors (both leaders and followers), circumstances and artifacts converge and continually influence, and ultimately change each other in a reciprocal, iterative fashion. Spillane talks about leadership really existing “in between” all of these interdependent actors. Another emphasis in Spillane’s work is recognizing that leadership can be found in both formal positions and in the informal relationships formed as the result of varying expertise. This is often discussed in terms of positional and informal leadership. Interestingly, Spillane also puts forth the idea that no matter whether it is formally vested or not or even if it is for the “right” reasons or is conversely counterproductive to school improvement efforts, distributed leadership is exercised all the time. For example, a principal and others may be working collectively toward building structures and supports meant to increase student achievement. Others (detractors), however, can at the same time “leading” a resistance-to-change movement or otherwise seeking to serve their own agendas in ways that is just as distributed. From this perspective, all organizational leadership is distributed leadership and it isn’t a matter of determining if there is distributed leadership being exercised or if leadership is being shared. Spillane’s point is that it, for good or for bad, it just “is” and there is no getting around that reality (Spillane, 2006).

Spillane and his colleagues also take distributed leadership beyond the concept of shared leadership by including in the discussion of leadership the concept of “distributed cognition” which they use to describe thinking (such as leading) as a social rather than an individual activity (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). Distributed cognition is a process of sense making that incorporates situation, action and artifacts into a single
whole. Again, it is from this standpoint that Spillane argues that cognitive distribution is “stretched over” actors in context-setting situations interacting with artifacts and that attention must be paid to the many-sided nature of any leadership situation.

For both Gronn and Spillane, leadership is seen as an integral part of the daily activities and interactions of everyone across all levels of the organization irrespective of position or title (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). For both, leadership is revealed within the small, incremental, more informal and emergent acts (micro) as well as within the large-scale, long term and transformative (macro) changes more often directed from the top. An example of macro change would be building a commitment to school goals or mission. This kind of long-term, big picture leadership naturally would require numerous smaller day-to-day (micro) leadership moves to support it. The task of school leaders is to offer direction and management in employing these indirect macro and micro variables.

**The Principal’s Role in Distributed Leadership.** As discussed earlier, adopting a distributed leadership perspective does not in any way diminish the role of the principal or indicate that there is no longer a need for strong leadership from someone who helps to create the conditions for bringing it all together. In a distributed leadership model, the role of the principal becomes one of leading from the middle, empowering and building capacity in others (Marsh, 2000). Harris (2005) discusses the role of the principals in distributed leadership as often being one of coordinating the distribution of tasks. Copland (2003) found that no matter the structure employed to distribute leadership, formal leaders play a critical role in creating a learning community, developing a cycle of collective inquiry, hiring and supporting talented teachers, and asking questions rather
than drawing conclusions.

In contrast to managing through a command and control approach as described earlier, the work of the principal in a distributed leadership model is “primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of the people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective results” (Elmore, 2000, p.15). To accomplish this, the principal must articulate a clear vision, establish efficient organizational structures, and cultivate a school culture that works to nurture, recognize and capitalize on the varied expertise of a broad range of individuals throughout all levels in the organization (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). For the principal, distributed leadership means cultivating a system “concerned with enhancing and elevating the skills and knowledge of all faculty and staff within the instructional organization to create a common culture that functions effectively” (Harris, 2008, p.1). The principal in a distributed leadership model assists educators by making them more aware of the connection between their own instructional practices and student learning and accountability measures (Elmore, 2000). To create and support this type of environment the principal must be the facilitator of the school’s distributed leadership practice, again, working from the middle. When practicing distributed leadership, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to organize the diverse competencies of his or her staff into a functioning system where the skill of one person can be made to complement that of another and to know how the expertise of some can be shared with others in order to move the entire school forward (Elmore, 2000, p.14).
The Teacher’s Role in Distributed Leadership. As schools continue to experience significant changes due to reform and restructuring efforts, success is dependent on answering the need for greater teacher leadership (Wasley, 1991). The concept of teachers as leaders acknowledges that teachers hold a central position in the ways schools operate and that they play critical roles in the core functions of teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The development of teacher leadership to support reform efforts continues to gain acceptance as researchers and administrators recognize that teachers possess the primary knowledge and expertise for improving instruction and student outcomes (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Harris, 2005). York-Barr and Duke (2004) define teacher leadership as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.” The 2001 Task Force on Teacher Leadership found that “Teacher leadership is not about ‘teacher power.’ Rather, it is about mobilizing the still largely untapped attributes of teachers to strengthen student performance at ground level and working toward real collaboration, a locally tailored kind of shared leadership, in the daily life of the school” (Task Force on Teacher Leadership, IEL 2001).

As stated previously, teacher leadership may be exercised formally as typified by positions such as lead teachers, instructional coaches or literacy consultants. It also, however, may be exercised informally by the school’s “foot soldiers” (Whitaker, 1995) or those innovative teachers who develop and influence roles based less on title and more on expertise and interests (Wasley, 1991). Teacher leaders must be perceived by colleagues as having subject area and instructional expertise (Yarger & Lee, 1994) and must deal
with the professions norms of “egalitarianism,” as they operate in a different professional space from their teaching colleagues (Lord & Miller, 2000).

For the purposes of this study, teacher leaders are understood to be those who have, either by organizational design or because expertise or interest, influence beyond that of their peers and who contribute to the distributed leadership of the school (Bascia, 1994; Wasley, 1991). They may not be formal leaders nor do they necessarily aspire to be leaders, but they do indeed have influence.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Principals, as school-level leaders, have traditionally been thought of as manager-administrators in charge of overseeing and operationalizing the educational process. Murphy (2005) described the school administration literature as filled with “hierarchical and bureaucratic pillars of management-authority, control, impersonality, and division of labor” (p. 52). Principal roles and functions as school leaders have traditionally been characterized by a top-down, authoritarian approach to leadership. However, as research on student achievement, school reform, and the complexities of the job of principals have shed light on the impact of leadership on school improvement and student achievement, the traditional school leadership model has begun to change.

What has become apparent is a need to redefine the traditional concept of leadership, from an individualistic-type focused on matters of management to one that incorporates teams in the functions, responsibilities and tasks of instructional leadership. Elmore (2000) describes this redefinition as a paradigm shift that involves moving away from “role-based conceptions and toward distributed views” (p. 35). The complexity and size of school systems today are such that one leader cannot meet the demands of daily
tasks and problems. Thus, a singular leader-centric school cannot operate as efficiently as one in which leadership is distributed. Distributed leadership is “the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles within the school organization” (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Seashore, 2007, p. 470).

Discussions of community building, the complexity of leadership as a construct, the need to share leadership in times of unprecedented levels of accountability, and the connection of distributed leadership to school improvement have all increased interest in this concept. While there has been much discussion, there has been little empirical evidence in the literature of distributed leadership in practice. In fact, research on distributed forms of leadership is still at its early stages (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). And while research suggests that distributed leadership is more likely to have a greater impact on student achievement/outcomes than traditional top down forms of leadership, the available empirical evidence is sparse (Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al., 2004). The purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of leadership in schools and the role(s) the school principal plays in the facilitation of distributed leadership that supports instruction.

**Methodology**

To examine how elementary principals facilitate the distribution of instructional leadership, a phenomenon as it happens within a particular context, a multi-site case study approach was used (Creswell, 2007). According to Yin (1994) a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) one wants to examine contextual conditions because they are believed to be
relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context in which it is being studied. Yin defines the case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1994). Bromley (1986) agrees and describes a case study as a “systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest” (p. 302). A strength of the case study method is the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. Bringing together (triangulating) multiple perspectives, methods, and sources of information (e.g., from interviews, observations, field notes, meeting agendas and minutes, and other documents) adds texture, depth, and multiple insights to analysis and can enhance the validity or credibility of the results (Yin, 1994).

**Multi-site Case Study.** A multiple case study enables the researcher to explore commonalities and differences within and between cases. In a multiple case study design, each site (in this instance, school) is treated as a single case. The “case” is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as, “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case, they say is, “in effect, your unit of analysis” (p. 25). The conclusions developed from each case can be used as information that contributes to the whole study.

**Site Selection.** Carefully selected sites, coupled with well-designed and executed data collection, and the triangulation of data, contribute to credibility of a qualitative study (Yin, 1994). This study of how principals distribute leadership in support of building capacity for instructional improvement was conducted in three separate elementary schools in one Rhode Island school district. The strategy for selecting these
schools was a non-probabilistic, purposeful sampling approach as described by Merriam (1998). This sampling strategy is most appropriate when the researcher believes that what he or she is hoping to understand can best be studied within particular settings (Merriam, 1998). Because this study was about how principals and others share leadership in the school context, I believed that it was within that setting that meaningful data collection could best be accomplished. The decision to conduct this study in the selected school district was also one of convenience, due to the researcher’s status as a central administrator in a nearby district. This allowed for ample access to the schools, their principals and staffs and the documents and artifacts that informed this study.

In addition to being situated within the same district, the elementary schools selected for the study share a number of additional similarities. These include stability of leadership as a result of all having been led by the same principal for at least the last five years, comparable levels of support for instructional leadership provided by the district (e.g. instructional coaches, literacy consultants and access to district level Instructional Leaders), similar student and teacher demographics and comparable student achievement data as reported using the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) accountability system. By taking an observer-as-participant stance (Merriam, 1998), the researcher was able to gain access to the many actors and artifacts that constitute the school leadership paradigm. By my taking an observer-as-participant stance, the members of the staff were fully aware of my research activities, and they were able control (particularly by means of what they chose to share in interviews) my access to information (Merriam, pg. 124). While because of my familiarity with a number of staff
I may have been viewed as “one of us,” the gathering of information was always my primary focus (Ibid.).

**Data Collection.** Data collection occurred during the winter of 2012. All data gathered from participant resources was collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. In keeping with the qualitative case study research tradition (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), data from multiple sources was collected. It was comprised of three main types: principal and teacher leader shadowing and observation, interviews and reviews of documentary evidence of instructional leadership practice. The primary data source was interview recordings and transcripts, which documented multiple semi-structured interviews of principals and principal-identified teacher leaders. The interview data were triangulated by the use of observation data gathered through principal and teacher leader shadowing and attendance at School Improvement Team (SIT) meetings, general faculty meetings and Common Planning Time (CPT) meetings. Also included in the collection of data was the review of numerous documents and artifacts germane to the topic of shared and distributed leadership for instructional improvement. These documents included school improvement action plans, memos and electronic correspondences between the principals and their staffs, as well as School Improvement Team meeting agendas and minutes. Triangulation of the multiple data sources was built into data collection and analysis for this study for the purpose of assuring greater confidence in the findings. As stated by Stake, “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or
interpretation . . . triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (Stake, 1994, p. 241).

**Observations/Shadowings.** Close observation of the actors and their interactions provides the opportunity for a “firsthand encounter with the phenomena of interest” (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). As stated earlier, the role of the researcher in this study was one of “observer-as-participant,” wherein the researcher has a peripheral membership in the group/context being observed (Adler & Adler, 1994). No formal, intentional interaction between the researcher, the participant and students took place during observations, but the researcher presented as a friendly, knowledgeable outsider. Adler and Adler (1994, p. 378) note that:

> One of the hallmarks of observation has traditionally been its non-interventionism. Observers neither manipulate nor stimulate their subjects. Qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic in essence: it occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life.

The researcher spent two full days at each of the three sites shadowing the principal observing his/her interactions with staff around issues of instructional leadership taking field notes describing the principal’s tasks and interactions throughout the day. While not always practical, I attempted to code the task the principal was engaged in at roughly fifteen-minute intervals noting the location of the principal, with whom the principal was interacting, and the nature of the activity. In cases where multiple codes appeared relevant, the more specific code were entered as the primary task, with other relevant
codes listed as secondary activities. In addition to the information described above, extensive field notes were generated to more thoroughly document the content and nature of the interactions between the principal and the school’s teacher leaders. These encounters ran the gamut from formal scheduled meetings to numerous “on the fly” conversations with individuals or small groups of teachers.

The observations made during the site visits generated its own data set, which figure prominently in the analysis and reporting processes. They also informed the interview process during which participants were asked to share their perspectives on the leadership in their schools. See Appendices D & E for Principal and Teacher Leader Interview Protocols.

**Interviews.** During the week immediately following the observation activities described above, semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals and teacher leaders. These interviews served the purpose of providing participants the opportunity to share their thoughts on school leadership and also allowed me to gather additional data that helped to clarify, support and strengthen that gathered through the previous weeks’ observations.

Merriam (1998) notes that highly structured interviews do not afford a true participant perspective, they simply, “get reactions to the investigator’s preconceived notions of the world” (p. 74). For this reason, interviews of both principals and teacher leaders were of an open-ended semi-structured nature. Each took between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. All interviews were digitally recorded and were then transcribed. Transcriptions were then provided to the participants for their review and as part of a member checking process. Member checking is considered an important method for
verifying and validating information observed and/or transcribed by the researcher and is meant as a check of the integrity of the data (Merriam, 1998). It helps ensure “accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). In addition to recording them, I also took handwritten notes during the interviews for the purposes of extending questions or guiding further any observations. All interviews were conducted with participants at their schools either before or after school hours.

Artifact Collection/Document Review. Artifact collection is the least intrusive method of collecting data and will provide detail and evidence of corroboration or contradiction as compared to other collected data (Merriam, 1998). However, Yin (2003) cautions that while reviewing artifacts researchers must keep in mind that artifacts were designed for purposes other than research and therefore should be used with care. For the purposes of this study, the researcher requested and was granted access to School Improvement Plans, School Improvement Team (SIT) meeting agendas and minutes as available, principal and teacher leader memos and any other documents pertaining to matters of instructional leadership and or school improvement. It was anticipated that such documents would serve as evidence of school improvement work completed or in process and would also provide insights as to how communication of school improvement priorities and directives happens.

Memos. Throughout the processes of observing principals and teacher leaders through shadowing activities, conducting interviews and reviewing documents, I added to the data to be later analyzed (and which ultimately figured into the findings developed) by maintaining a record of memos generated as I worked through the collection, sorting and interpretation of this data. Glasser (1998) describes memos as the “theorizing write-
up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge during coding, collecting and analyzing data, and during memoing” (Glaser 1998). Memos were written to describe, keep track of and document notes, references, cross references, emerging ideas, tentative hypotheses, contradictions and any developing themes during the processes of data collection, data analysis and the development of final conclusions. Miles and Huberman (1994), in discussing the importance of memos to research, warn that collecting and analyzing data from field observations and interviews can be so intellectually stimulating, that later data coding can be become so laborious that it is possible for the researcher to find himself lost in the midst of so many interesting details. They describe how, “. . . the poignant remark, the appealing personality of a key informant, the telling picture on the hallway bulletin board, the gossip after a key meeting. You find it nearly impossible to step back, to make deeper and more conceptually coherent sense of what is happening” (1994, p. 72). I used memos to attempt to note all of the aforementioned in addition to ideas and “gut” reactions that came to mind throughout all observations, interviews and document reviews. Memos were found to also be very helpful when struggling to develop initial coding categories for final results, reflecting about any emergent coding categories and developing my thinking about possible links between those categories.

**Data Analysis.** Case study data analysis generally involves an iterative, spiraling or cyclical process that proceeds from more general to more specific observations (Creswell, 1998). Merriam says that preliminary data analysis must be conducted immediately post-collection or better yet, “the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection” (Merriam, 1998, p. 162). Data analysis for this
study began somewhat informally during the observations and interviews and continued
during the writing of field notes, interviews transcription, whenever recurring themes,
patterns, and categories became evident. Analysis of the data gathered from principal
and teacher leader interviews, observation notes and document/artifact review involved
coding of data, and identifying salient points or structures. After reviewing all data
sources, (interview transcripts and follow-up notes, observation notes and research
memos, and notes on the review of physical artifacts) all materials were manually coded
and preliminary meanings were generated from the observation notes, interviews, and
artifacts (Seidel, 1998).

The procedure for coding data gathered through principal and teacher leader
shadowing was adapted from the School Leadership Research Report No. 09-3, Principal
Time-Use Effectiveness (Horng, Klasik & Loeb, 2009). This report is one of many
produced for the Center for Education Policy Analysis at Stanford University which
examine matters of principal and teacher career paths, education policy and how
principal and teachers influence student outcomes. For their study, Horng, Klasik and
Loeb (2009) used, as a starting point, four broad categories of principal tasks previously
developed by Spillane, Cambrum, and Pareja (2007) to describe the work of principals.
These categories were Administrative, Instruction and Curriculum, Professional Growth
and Fostering Relationships. For the Time-Use Effectiveness study this list was
expanded from four to six categories, which were then Administration, Organization
Management, Day-to-Day Instruction, Instructional Program, Internal Relations and
External Relations (Horng et al., 2009). These researchers, through consultation with
school leaders and by conducting pilot principal shadowing, then developed a list of 46
tasks that they believe is inclusive of virtually all principal duties. As the graphic below illustrates, these tasks can be classified as being representative of those that are functions or indicators of the six categories described above. Those six categories are then paired with others and further aggregated to describe the duties representative of three leadership roles required of the contemporary principal, Administrative Leader, Instructional Leader, and Relationship Builder.

(Horng et al., 2009).

For the purposes of the present study, those categories and related tasks specific to that of the Instructional Leader were used to analyze observation data and assisted me as I sought to identify emergent trends or patterns and generate findings with respect to how leadership happens in the site schools.
Credibility

**Researcher Identity and Bias.** Central to conducting qualitative research is the concept of the “researcher as research instrument” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Because all research design decisions were mine, and all data was collected, interpreted and reported upon by me, it is important that I, as researcher, acknowledge and account for the possibility of bias in my work (Horsburgh, 2003). As Creswell explains, “Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain world view that guides their inquires” (1998, p.74). Malterud (2001) adds that, “A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (p. 483-484).

My experiences during nearly 25 years in education, first as a teacher, then as a principal, and now as an assistant superintendent, charged with supervising and providing support to principals, have informed and shaped my thinking about instructional leadership. I have worked in schools where it appeared that leadership was considered the responsibility of a single person or very small few and in others where leadership seemed to be a more concerted effort that engaged numerous participants throughout all levels. As a result of my experiences as a teacher and principal, I have come to believe that sharing leadership with teachers has the potential to positively impact the work being done in schools and ultimately, student achievement. I share the belief that, particularly in an age of increased accountability, the job of school leadership has become too large for any one person to do well. I also believe that empowering teachers to share in leadership positively impacts their sense of professionalism and commitment to the work
of continual school improvement and that it has great potential to address the issues of leadership continuity and sustainability. In addition, my ongoing graduate studies have contributed to my understanding of, and the decisions I make about, conducting research. In short, my theories of leadership and my perspectives as a researcher, my beliefs about leadership and the multiple roles that principals play, the methodologies I choose, and the questions I ask, have been built on my prior knowledge and experience. I have attempted to account for these considerations by first acknowledging any predispositions and biases that I bring to this study and then taking steps to protect against the possibility of them skewing my findings. I have given my best effort to continually remind myself to attend only to the evidence and to resist any urges or tendencies to impose my own biases on what participants said in interviews, what documents and artifacts provided evidence of and what was observed in my visits to the schools. Biases exist and are likely inescapable. I believe that identifying mine and attempting to compartmentalize or bracket them from the study’s results only serves to strengthen the credibility of my research (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

**Member Checking.** Stake (1995) describes member checking as an important part of triangulating observations and interpretations. As analysis proceeded and findings were developed, each research participant was given multiple opportunities to review data materials and provide further response to the research questions. Interview transcripts, memos and tentative findings were shared with participants via email, in the context of telephone conversations, and in face-to-face visits to the sites after data collections had been completed. When research participants reviewed interview transcripts, observation notes or narrative text, they often provided corroboration and
feedback (Stake, 1995).

Limitations

Sample. Despite the inclusion of multiple components in the research design to enhance the credibility of the findings reported, this study does have limitations. While the three sites selected for the study do have a number of characteristics (e.g. socio-economic, demographic) that distinguish them from each other, they are all of the same “type.” They are all public elementary level schools serving students in grades kindergarten through six. The three schools are also all within the same district and as such function within in a common context. A larger, broader, more diverse sample of schools likely would enhance the confidence that one would have in trying to draw any larger generalizations from the findings reported here. How instructional leadership happens is very much context specific (Spillane, 2006) and it may be that the inclusion of middle, high, charters, career and technical and other types of schools would yield different, even if not dramatically so, results. As it stands, this study describes how instructional leadership happens in just the three schools profiled.

Time. Another limitation is that of time. Spillane defines distributed leadership as the joint interactions of leaders and followers over time in the performance of tasks toward a shared a purpose of instructional improvement (Spillane, 2006). Data collection for this study took place primarily during the months of January and February 2012. While full-day shadowings were conducted and multiple common planning, school improvement, and other meetings were observed, the ability to remain on site for extended periods of time (i.e. weeks and months) would allow for a more nuanced and robust understanding of how leadership plays out at a more macro level.
Protection of Human Subjects

This study did not present any obvious risks to the participants. All participants were informed, consenting adults. All participants had the purpose and design of the study explained to them and all signed a consent form agreeing to willingly participate in the study (see Appendix A). While students were present during the collection of data gathered through observations and interviews of principals and teachers, they were at no time the focus of the study, and they were not at any time considered study subjects or data sources. No student identifying information was collected or included in this research. Participation in the study did not put any of the principals, teachers or support staff in the site schools at personal or professional risk. Conversely, participation in the study may well have provided principals and teachers with the opportunity to enhance their own understanding of school leadership thereby resulting in professional growth.

No data collected for this research will be used as part of any job-performance evaluation process, nor will it be used in any way that may advance or limit the advancement or promotion of any personnel. As described in the informed consent form, all recordings of interviews were destroyed once the interviews had been transcribed and member-checked for accuracy. Also, throughout the data analysis and report writing processes, pseudonyms were used for all participants in order to assure protection of anonymity. Finally, all participants were provided frequent opportunities to review interview notes and other data sources in order to verify that they were accurately representative of statements made and/or events observed.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents results and findings from this qualitative descriptive case
study focused on how, from a distributed leadership perspective, the work of instructional leadership happens across three elementary schools. The presentation of this chapter uses a descriptive approach to provide background information about the three sites and the participants, as well as themes and subthemes that emerged from the study.

**Introduction of Sites and Participants**

The three schools selected for this study were all in the same Rhode Island school district. The district itself, which consists of seventeen schools total, is considered by the Rhode Island Department of Education to be an “Urban Ring” district, meaning it borders an urban center and shares many characteristics of both its urban and more suburban neighbors. The sites themselves were selected after meeting with the district’s assistant superintendent. She was supportive of this project and made recommendations about which sites to consider and the people with whom I might talk. She also assisted in the process by making written introductions to the participating principals via email prior to my contacting them directly. While all in the same district, and while all would be considered academically successful in terms of continually meeting AYP as required under NCLB, the schools themselves have a number of unique characteristics. Two (Budlong and Rockland) are older, single-level neighborhood schools, while Castleton, built in the early 1990’s, is a much newer facility. Castleton also serves a newly developed, affluent section of the city, while Budlong, due to its high enrollment of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, is a school-wide Title 1 school. In terms of Rockland’s demographic profile, it falls somewhere between the other two. What follows are brief profiles of each site, the principals and the teachers from each school
who participated in this study. Again, pseudonyms are used for all schools, principals and teacher leaders.

**Budlong School.** At the time of the study, Budlong School, which opened as a neighborhood school in 1950, had a student population of 308 in grades Kindergarten through six. The one principal oversaw a staff of thirty. The teacher-student ratio was 1:11. Forty-seven percent of the students at Budlong qualify for free or reduced lunch, qualifying Budlong for supplementary funding under Title 1. The school has a small ESL population (4%), and 14% of the students at Budlong receive special education services. Both the percentage of free or reduced lunch students and student mobility rate (13%) are the highest of the three schools in the study.

**Principal Cooper.** The principal of Budlong School is Cheryl Cooper. Mrs. Cooper has been at the school since the fall of 2008. Prior to her current assignment, she served as one of two assistant principals at a large middle school in the district. She came to the district after having taught secondary mathematics for a number of years and had served as a secondary-level assistant principal in another community. Principal Cooper came to school leadership by a somewhat alternate path. As opposed to the more typical route of taking administrative coursework that ultimately results in administrative licensure, Ms. Cooper received her training through the Aspiring Principals initiative, Rhode Island’s alternative pathway to school leadership. In her interview, Principal Cooper talked about her experience of becoming a principal and what she quickly learned:

> The experience that I had to get my Masters for instructional leadership was through the Aspiring Principals program where the
instructor considered herself an instructional leader so we spent very little time and talk on management at all. I did not really understand the breadth and depth of that realm of the job. And when I was an assistant principal in two different middle schools, both of the principals that I served under were really strong in building management-type leadership. I didn’t even know what they did. I didn’t really. So, when I became a principal myself, I was hit with a barrage of activities and responsibilities that I was not aware of. I was so immersed in instructional leadership through my coursework that when I came into the position I didn’t know how that stuff got done, the building management. I thought the kitchen people supervised themselves. Like, I didn’t realize that when kids didn’t pay for their lunch that I had to get involved in that.

Ms. Cooper shared other examples of the management side of the principalship that surprised her, like the city councilman who called about the leaves needing to be picked up around the school, parents who called to complain about their neighbor who had not shoveled the snow out of their driveway and blocking the bus stop, and teachers who come to her for help with technical problems in their classrooms. “I just didn’t realize the amount of time that is eaten up by that management type stuff that you’ve got to do because the building’s not going to run if you don’t.”

Ms. White. The teacher leader at Budlong that participated in the study is the school’s literacy consultant, Ms. White. She was recommended to me by Mrs. Cooper
who described her as “a very hard worker” and as “very important to the leadership structure.” Every elementary school in the district is staffed with a literacy consultant, whose role it is to provide small-group support to students and instructional coaching to classroom teachers. District literacy consultants are also responsible for the oversight of all literacy testing and student data management. As do the other teacher leaders included in his study, Ms. White also serves in a number of other capacities. She chairs the School Improvement Team, is a member of the Data Team where she co-leads data meetings with the principal, she serves on the Response to Intervention Problem Solving Team, and participates as needed on the Special Education Eligibility and IEP Teams. As Budlong is a Title 1 school, the literacy consultant also assists the principal by coordinating required family engagement activities. She plans other professional development and school-wide family engagement activities as well.

She explained that her involvement in responsibilities that exceed the basic expectations of her position sometimes results from being enlisted by the principal, and in other instances she simply identifies a need and takes action. She described herself as someone who likes to help out who “just naturally fell in to it,” making her a “go to” person in the building and complicating her ability to get her own work completed. Ms. White offered the following about how she sees her working relationship with Principal Cooper:

I have to say it’s a good mesh because she’s very strong in the math and data. That’s her strength and that’s her focus her preferred arena, whereas I’m very strong in the reading and writing. We usually bounce things off of each other, and I feel
very comfortable bringing up something, and she’s very open to that.

As will be described throughout this chapter, Principal Cooper, Ms. White and others at Budlong engage in instructional leadership in a variety of ways and in multiple contexts.

**Rockland Elementary.** Rockland Elementary School opened its doors six years after Budlong did (1956) and also services students in grades kindergarten through six. Three hundred forty-six students attend the school, and the teacher-student ratio was 1:12. The percentages of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and ESL services are both lower than those at Budlong: 15% and 4% respectively.

**Principal Hackman.** Mr. Hackman became the principal at Rockland in 2008, transferring from a district middle school principal assignment. Mr. Hackman has, throughout his 28 years in the district, taught at both the elementary and secondary levels. Hackman is also well known in the community for his involvement in youth sports. He has for many years been a fixture on the baseball fields and basketball courts in the city serving as coach, referee or spectator. Principal Hackman provided many examples of what he sees as matters of instructional leadership as will be discussed through this chapter, but when asked about what he sees as his role in the management of the school he said that he felt his primary responsibility was “making sure that the building runs smoothly, that there’s order and discipline in the building; that everyone’s in their place and doing what their supposed to be doing.”

Like his colleague at Budlong, Principal Hackman described being surprised by what he learned were his responsibilities when he became an elementary school principal. From monitoring what foods come into the building because of possible student allergies
to refereeing arguments between parents jockeying for parking spaces at dismissal time to having to police people who bring their dogs onto school property, Hackman has learned that it all falls on him:

So all of a sudden you get smacked in the mouth with these things and say: Wow, I never really considered that. Everything, whether it’s from the district, from the state, from the parents, the students themselves and the teachers all ends up coming through the building administrator and that can frequently take up quite a bit of your time.

Ms. Violet. The principal identified two teacher leaders (a fifth grade classroom teacher and the school’s Art teacher) at Rockland, and both participated in interviews. Ms. Violet is a fifth grade teacher who identified that she saw her primary roles at Rockland as, “to follow the district’s curriculum and meet GLEs (Grade level Expectations) for grade five students.” In addition to this, this teacher leader also serves as chair to the RTI Problem Solving Team. She described her responsibilities on the RTI Team as scheduling all the meetings and coordinating the team’s work to identify struggling students, problem-solve action steps and monitor interventions. She is also a member of the Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports Team (PBIS) at the school. Ms. Violet serves on the school’s School Improvement Team and is a regular participant in Rockland’s professional book clubs, which are discussed later in this chapter. At the time of the site visit, this teacher was in the process of completing an administrative internship as a component of a graduate-level program that will qualify her for administrative certification. About herself and how she believes she became involved in
those things beyond her primary assignment, she shared that she enjoys the opportunities to continually learn and grow as an educator. She believes that her involvement in these teams help her learn new strategies that benefit her students and that it also provides her insights into how the school is progressing towards its vision and opportunities to contribute.

Mr. Greene. The other teacher leader at Rockland is, while now in his mid-forties, a Rockland alumnus. Mr. Greene describes his primary role as, “an elementary arts specialist.” He also serves as chair of the PBIS team at the school and said that, “I’ve always been somehow finding myself to be a faculty advisor to student-based organizations. I tend to find myself being the facilitator of those programs wherein the kids can actually become leaders.”

Castleton Elementary School. Located in one of most affluent and recently developed sections of the city, Castleton is the newest (built in 1991) and largest of the three schools in this study. The student population of 406 is served by a staff of 35. The number of students receiving free or reduced lunch at Castleton is 6%. The school has a less than 1% ESL population, and 14% of the students qualify for special education services. Both the student mobility and suspension numbers for Castleton are low at 5% each. While both Budlong and Rockland are older, single-level schools tucked into tight neighborhood lots, Castleton stands back from the road on a large piece of converted farmland. It is a large, modern school with updated playgrounds and big faculty and guest parking lots. The secretary who monitors the entrance by closed circuit television buzzes visitors into the large open foyer.
Principal Jennings. Mr. Jennings is the principal of Castleton. Jennings had been principal at another elementary school in the district until the district’s superintendent transferred him to Castleton. Jennings is also a veteran teacher with a strong math background, but he has always worked at the elementary level. Mr. Jennings is in his early forties and wears his salt and pepper-colored hair short, but it may be his energy level and the rate of speed with which he does seemingly everything (walking, talking, multi-tasking, etc.) that might be his most distinguishing characteristic. He rarely stays in any one place and seems to be constantly juggling multiple tasks. Throughout his interview and other conversations, Mr. Jennings frequently talked about the importance of structures and routines and how he views his role in supporting that:

Every principal wants to be an instructional leader, but sometimes the job doesn’t allow you to be an instructional leader because you have to be a manager. To be a good instructional leader you have to somehow, get the management piece under control first. So, I set up the management. I set up the routines, I set up the procedures and once everything’s in place I don’t micro-manage at all. I let teachers do their jobs. But, with all that said, most important to my job is to make sure that the kids get a good education that will prepare them for the next level, make sure they’re functioning citizens of our society, make sure they’re literate, make sure they’re safe, make sure they’re comfortable, happy and make sure the teachers are providing an environment that is going to include all kids.
When asked about a typical day, Mr. Jennings laughed saying, “Beside that fact that it’s going to be unpredictable?”

I’ve covered for teachers who went home sick. I’ve been a mentor to teachers who were not teaching math well. I’ve been the secretary so she could go to lunch or a meeting, answering the phones. I’ve been the tech guy when the tech guy’s not here.

When the nurse is not here, I’m the nurse. I’ve cleaned vomit, I’ve cleaned blood, I’ve given Band-Aids. I’ve done all that stuff. So all those things, none of them have to do instructional leadership, maybe not even management, it’s just filling in the gaps because at the elementary school, there’s no one but you. You’re it. You have to be everything to everybody; cause if you’re not, the whole thing starts falling apart.

When asked what at the school is not his responsibility, Jennings replied, “Um ...I don’t think anything. If the nurse screws up, they call me. If they run out of lunches, they call me.” He added:

I also did not realize how much of the facility role I would have being responsible to make sure the building is clean. Even though I’m not the custodian or the foreman, it basically comes on me.

The Superintendent came here, he looked at the hallway and he didn’t like the way the floors were done and he came to me. He said, “The floors don’t look good. This building’s not even 20 years old.” So, now I’ve gotta haul those guys in and say “OK, the
Superintendent just came in and reamed me. The floors look like shit and now we gotta fix them and so what needs to be done?”

So, now I have four more people to manage and make sure they’re doing their job.

Mr. Jennings identified two teachers in his building as teacher leaders. Both were veteran classroom teachers who also had additional responsibilities in the building.

**Ms. Sienna.** Ms. Sienna is a fourth grade teacher leader is also the co-chair of the RTI Problem Solving Team, where she serves functions similar to those described by Ms. Violet at Rockland. She also is a member of the School Improvement Team at her school. When asked about how and why she became involved in work beyond her classroom Ms. Sienna shared that her own continued professional growth was important to her as she believed it made her a more effective teacher. She also commented that she believed that changes in education necessitated greater teacher contributions to leadership and that because her own children were now of college age, she had the time to, “volunteer to be on different committees.” This teacher leader has also for a number of years served as a mentor to student teachers sent her by the local college and university teacher preparation programs. “I like that role, helping kids succeed in the profession.”

**Ms. Rose.** The second teacher leader interviewed at Castleton is Ms. Rose. She identifies herself as primarily a grade-one classroom teacher. In addition, she also serves on the RTI Problem Solving Team and is the Teacher/Parent Teacher Liaison, “So, I attend all the PTO meetings to keep that connection with the community, because I really feel strongly about maintaining a community connection. Especially with first-graders, parents need to be engaged.” She is also the Educational Issues Chair for the local
When asked for her thoughts about how she became involved in leadership, Ms. Rose described with excitement how her early experiences with professional development offered through the teacher’s union so impressed her with their quality that she wanted not only to continually seek out more for herself, but also that she wanted to help see that others had access to it. “It started out as that very first workshop that I took that was a union workshop and it just spiraled from there.”

The three sites included in this study share a number of commonalities. By virtue of the fact that they are all within the same district, they are staffed in similar ways (e.g. provided with Literacy Consultants) and work to address common initiative such as RTI. While this study is concerned primarily with leadership at the building level, the three schools included here also operate within a district context. They are parts of a larger system and as such operate under the direction of the same central administration and within a common local context. The principals and the teacher leaders introduced here are colleagues (some well known to each other) who, while in their own way(s), share a common experience of working in this particular district. They enjoy access to many of the same resources. They are also bound by many of the same constraints and work to meet the same expectations of the district and the state.

**Organization of Results**

Leithwood (2001) provides a general theoretical framework for exploring the distribution of leadership in organizations, specifically schools. According to Leithwood, the core leadership functions in school systems that often get distributed include setting the school’s direction, professional development and redesigning the organization. Spillane (2006) defines distributed leadership as the joint interactions of leaders and followers over time in the performance of tasks toward a shared a purpose of instructional improvement.
Spillane adds that these interactions are mediated by the situation – the structures, tools and routines that leaders and followers use and the situation(s) in which they do so. Both Leithwood’s and Spillane’s frameworks are used to organize the results presented in this chapter. The data that follow are presented in terms of how they represent leadership related to direction setting, professional development and growth and redesigning the organization. The last section of the chapter presents results that speak to the structures, tools and routines that advance, and in some instances may inhibit, instructional leadership in these three schools.

**Theme One: Setting the Direction**

Across all three sites studied, there was evidence of principals and teacher leaders contributing to setting their school’s direction. Participant interviews, observations and document reviews generated sub-themes related to the work of direction setting, which included establishing the school’s mission, promoting high expectations for student and adult learning, decision making, monitoring the instructional program and communication.

**Sub Theme: Establishing the Mission.** Any school’s mission is based on what it sees itself as being about. The mission reflects the belief systems of those who inhabit the school and it represents their best thinking about teaching and learning. It is the mission that describes who and what the school aspires to be and encourages the stretch that its members need to make to achieve ambitious goals. Principals and teacher leaders support the setting and articulating of the school’s mission when they encourage each other to reach, when they, by their words and their deeds instill confidence in each other that ambitious goals are in fact attainable and when they demonstrate a commitment to the vision that others can see as worthy of their own investment. Principals and others in
their buildings develop and articulate missions based on their beliefs. They do this based on what they believe it is that students and adults are capable of doing and learning. They do this based on what they believe about how students, adults and organizations learn best. They do this as they bring together all that they “feel” in their guts, “know” in their hearts and what they can glean from the latest and best research. The school’s mission is the compass that guides its work and colors all of the choices that get made along the way. It exerts influence over what the adults will expect from the children and from each other, how it is expected that teachers and principals will work together, how decisions will be made and by whom and more. The principals and their teacher leaders in this study discussed vision in a number of different ways. In some instances vision was stated clearly as in “I believe” statements such as when Mr. Jennings, principal of Castleton Elementary, says without hesitation, and with a confidence and conviction that makes the listener believe every word, “I believe every kid can learn. I believe that if you set high expectations, every kid can reach those expectations as long as you support them with the structures they need to be successful.” Other belief statements like this would include the way in which Mr. Hackman, the principal of Rockland Elementary, describes his teachers, saying, “I believe in the professionalism of every teacher in this building.” Or when, Mrs. Cooper, principal of Budlong School, shares her belief that the self-contained special education students in her school, “should be having access to the same type of rigorous instruction” as their non-disabled peers.

What these principals believe about themselves, their teachers and their students form the basis for the missions that they establish and that they will often rely on teacher leaders to help them solidify, articulate and realize. Across all three sites in this study,
there were numerous examples of the principals and teacher leaders working together to share their thinking, gather information about best instructional practices and support each other and school priorities based on their vision.

**Sub Theme: Promoting High Expectations.** Across all three sites, there is a common core element that undergirds the mission and vision work that principals perform at their schools. The promotion and protection of high expectations for both student and adult learning and achievement were referenced frequently during all three principal interviews and, as will be described at later points in this chapter, many of the decisions that principals make and duties that they perform are illustrative of those expectations. While all three principals may articulate their beliefs in the abilities of their students and their faculties somewhat differently, they all discussed a commitment to the belief that all students can learn, share a common optimism for the possibilities of student success and recognize their roles and responsibilities as promoters and protectors of high expectations. Both they and their teacher leaders provided examples of how their words, deeds and the decisions that they make along the way reflect those expectations. Statements made over the course of interviews and as represented by the way the three principals go about their work demonstrated that high expectations help to shape the visions that they have for their schools and inform the steps that they take to move forward. Each shared various perspectives and examples of how high expectations reflect what they believe and how they see as their roles in establishing them. As Principal Cooper said, “I think that that’s my job. I have to make people have high expectations of themselves and high expectations of the children.”
Like her colleagues at Rockland and Castleton, this principal has high expectations for herself, for her staff and for her students. A veteran educator who has always worked in Title 1 schools, Mrs. Cooper presents as fiercely protective of high expectations. One has the sense that she has almost a visceral reaction to anyone questioning the abilities of the students in her school or that of her teachers. “Whenever I hear any kind of situation where I might think it’s (indicative of) a low expectation, I certainly question that.”

As a Title 1 school principal, Mrs. Cooper is sensitive to the possibility that others outside of her building (or even within it) may have lower expectations for the achievement of her students and it seems likely that when she hears any comment like the one referenced above, she would speak right up and say as she does here:

Hey, wait a minute. Our kids are as good as any. And even more so because they’re learning two languages simultaneously and learning academic content at the same time and they have all these other factors influencing their lives and they’re still performing.

While she speaks highly of her teachers generally, Principal Cooper indicates that even with them, she has to push the agenda of maintaining high expectations for the students in her building. She sees it as part of her job to probe, to seek clarification, to push her staff to articulate and be accountable for the thinking behind the decisions they make; the things that they do:

I have those conversations. They’re not comfortable, but this (having these conversations) gives me an opportunity to look inside teacher’s heads based on actual kids and actual things going
on rather than just saying, at a faculty meeting, “Do we all have high expectations for kids?” In that generic, “Raise your hand if you have high expectations for kids,” kind of way.

Principal Cooper also uses these conversations to press her teachers to continually consider what needs to happen for students to be successful. While some teachers may tend to think that a student has reached the extent of his or her capabilities, she is likely to challenge that thinking and push for possible solutions. “If the child is not making progress, it’s not the best he can do. We need to do something else. We need to look at every possible avenue.”

Similarly, at Rockland Elementary, Mr. Hackman also sees himself as responsible for keeping expectations for achievement and improvement high. He believes that without coaching them to think otherwise, many teachers will have a tendency to dismiss expectations as unrealistic and out of reach or to become complacent, to fail to see the potential for growth. This principal discussed how he pushes his staff to believe that, while 100% proficiency or some other arbitrary target may seem unrealistic, there is always room for growth and improvement, that “there is always something to chase”:

One of the things that teachers tend to do whenever they start hearing about “all children can learn and we’re looking for 100% proficiency by 2014,” is right away, you’ll hear “Well, this kid is from a divorced family, this one’s got no money, this kid just came from Boston, they’ve got gaps, how am I supposed deal with this, that and the other?” So, automatically many start with, “That’s crazy. Don’t expect that.” What happens is, if you allow that to be
even part of the consciousness, then we don’t push the way we could.

Hackman sees it as his responsibility to push back against this almost “excuse-making” mentality. He argues against it by reminding his staff that despite any challenges the school’s students may face and regardless of what their current levels of proficiency might be, there is always potential for growth and that the “difference between where we are and where we could be is instructional practices, so let’s keep pushing forward. There is always room for growth and its dependent on the quality of instruction.”

As described earlier, Principal Jennings at Castleton speaks often and passionately about his expectation that, given the proper time and support, all students can be successful. He credits his belief in the ability of all students for his willingness “to do the work” necessary to support a successful inclusive special education model. This “work” included creatively rescheduling the building in order to provide the teachers in the inclusion classrooms additional time to plan collaboratively. A first-grade teacher leader explains:

He figured out time in the schedule that frees up the two inclusion teachers, the special education teacher and the regular ed. teacher, at least once a week so that those two teachers can meet so that we can just talk about those particular kids and how to meet those kids needs that otherwise we might not have had.

The support created here serves as a tangible example of this principal’s expectations aligned with a vision for a school where all students (and their teachers) can, given the proper supports and structures, be successful.
In addition to having high expectations for their students and their teachers, all
three principals recognize, and at least partially credit any success that they’ve had as
leaders, to their own high expectations of themselves. At nearly 50 years old, Mrs.
Cooper shares that she “has to be the line leader.” Mr. Hackman is driven to have a
lasting and positive impact on his school. And when discussing his leadership style, Mr.
Jennings says:

I’m not a control freak in the sense that I want to control
everything around me, but I am a control freak internally. Like, I
have to be successful. Like, that’s how...I’m very competitive that
way. I don’t have to win everything I play, but I just to be ...I need
to be successful. (He laughs.)

While all the principals talked about their commitment to establishing, promoting
and protecting high expectations for achievement and improvement, the teacher leaders
interviewed more often discussed roles that they play that were intended to ensure that
high expectations for student achievement translated into high-quality teaching and
learning. Teacher leaders discussed their roles in contributing to deepening teachers’
content knowledge; expanding teachers’ content-specific instructional strategies; using
various forms of assessment data to diagnose, analyze, and assess students; and
advocating for high standards for all students. The teacher leaders interviewed were all,
to varying degrees, involved in developing and/or presenting professional development
activities for their colleagues around content or pedagogy, serving as chairs or members
of Response to Intervention (RTI), School Improvement or Data teams in their buildings
and were regular contributors to Common Planning Time, Faculty and Professional Book
Club meetings. Their contributions to all of the above and the leadership that they exercise by actively participating help to advance and embed the principal’s agenda of high expectations.

**Sub Theme: Decision-Making.** Setting and maintaining a school’s direction means making numerous decisions, some big and with longer-range implications and others small and of a more immediate nature. Decisions made reflect both vision and expectations. They also often will require additional research and consideration. The principals and others interviewed discussed decision-making processes and provided examples of how those decisions typically played out. The principals interviewed see, as part of their responsibilities, continually seeking out new ideas, curricula and initiatives that align with their vision for their schools and which they believe will help their teachers and students move that much closer to it. The principal at Castleton, Mr. Jennings, described how he gathers the information he needs to make instructional decisions this way:

> I read. I listen to my colleagues. I listen to Central Office. I go on the Internet, and I read the blogs. I try to get as much information as I possibly can and then filter it down to what’s going to work in this building. There’s a lot of information out there so you have to filter it out. You can’t do all of it, you have to see what fits your building, fits the population you’re working with, filter out what you think is going to be successful.

The principal at Rockland, Mr. Hackman, sees himself as serving a similar function for his school and his teachers: “I’ve said, “I’m the lead researcher in this building. I will do
this. I will pre-read. I will go to the seminars at my own expense to bring this information back. I am the lead researcher because you (teachers) don’t have the time to do it.”

All three principals provided examples of their ongoing personal professional development through reading and attending workshops in order to stay abreast of latest research and trends. They and their teacher leaders also provided examples of their regularly seeking input from the staff as when Principal Cooper was described as frequently being out in her building’s classrooms meeting with teachers in effort to identify needs and hear ideas. Principals and teacher leaders described how teachers are frequently encouraged to offer ideas and suggestions.

Many times instructional decisions are made as the result of data analysis, assessing needs and brainstorming with the principal and teachers working in collaboration. At Budlong School, Principal Cooper and her literacy consultant provided an example in which, as a result of state testing data analysis, they determined a need for an additional writing instruction support throughout the building. In this instance, Mrs. Cooper described how this came about as a result of her having “the vision” and her literacy consultant helping to make the adoption of the new program a reality. Through analyzing student state assessment data together, they saw that students at their school struggled with, or worse, left blank, items that required longer constructed responses, basically anything longer than a one-word answer. While the literacy consultant didn’t know a great deal about the program, she had heard of one that she thought might have potential and suggested it to the principal:
It first stemmed from us looking at the NECAP (New England Common Assessment Program) scores. The principal had us looking through item analysis classroom by classroom. We would look at each question and notice the ones that the students got most wrong. We would notice that when you had either the two-pointers, short answers or the longer four-pointers, they weren’t getting any points at all, and that’s just silly. The student’s just answered in one sentence and there’s so much more they could be doing. So, I had done some research and found a site online and looked up the ACES model. I said, “This seems like something that we could use across the board K-6. I said, “I think this would be a good thing to get going whole-school” and she (the principal) agreed.

Both the principal and her literacy consultant described this as a somewhat typical example of a need being identified by the principal and the consultant and their then working together to find and implement the solution. Once the literacy teacher had done the research and made her pitch to the principal, Mrs. Cooper’s reaction was, “OK, next faculty meeting we’re going to do ACES. I wanted to figure out how to do constructed responses with everybody in the building, and I knew I could count on her to go make it happen. I had the vision; she helped make it happen.”

A similar story, involving the decision made to introduce a different writing program, was told at Rockland. After a procedurally similar co-analysis of student data, it was the literacy consultant who went out and “read up” on Empowering Writers. She
brought the program back to Mr. Hackman and provided him with what he needed to know to feel comfortable making his decision and a commitment to the program. The consultant then helped to arrange for the program’s trainers to come to the school and work with all of the building’s teachers. She then (and continues to) followed up with direct support in the classroom by modeling lessons and providing constructive feedback to teachers as they implemented the program. Interestingly, Mr. Hackman saw introducing Empowering Writers as a partial solution to improving student-writing scores, but also as a tool to support his vision (shared by Mrs. Cooper as described above) for greater consistency of instruction among and across all grades at Rockland. The writing program and the implementation of Fastt Math (a web-based math practice and remediation tool) have helped to advance his stated vision for greater consistency and continuity of instruction and supports across all grades at Rockland.

While principals may invite contributions and count on teachers to help “make it happen,” across all three sites teacher leaders indicated that final decision-making was done by the principal alone.

**Sub Theme: Monitoring the Instructional Program.** Once decisions have been made and implementation of any initiative is underway, principals will often employ a number of actions in order to ensure fidelity of implementation. Across the three sites, the principals discussed the importance of this. As Principal Hackman stated:

I mean, there are a lot of programs, a lot of theories, and a lot of practices that could be effective and would be effective if they were fully implemented and fully resourced. So much of that is a matter of fidelity.
Hackman also shared his belief that failure to fully support implementation by ensuring that teachers have the materials, the training and the time that they need to be successful, results in many initiatives being allowed to die an early death and contributes to teachers developing a “this too shall pass” mentality, making it that much more difficult to get support for subsequent improvement efforts. About monitoring for fidelity of implementation he said:

I think that just presence in the classroom helps facilitate the instructional leadership. We have programs (e.g. Empowering Writers) that go throughout the grades. So, by being in the classroom, I can further facilitate their (the teacher’s) use of those programs that we’ve put into place and I can follow up with conversations with the teachers as well. I think visibility is a huge part of the instructional management piece, because often things will either happen or not happen just because you’re there. When we did Empowering Writers we brought Empower Writers into the building to do training and so forth and I have resourced them in terms of materials. Ok, so now that that’s done, now I need to see evidence of it in the classroom, I want to see it working for you. This same principal shared that in addition to program implementation, he visits classrooms to monitor and encourage the grouping of students for differentiated math instruction similar to how teachers tend to group for reading. Again, his vision for success and what it will take to achieve it informs his decision-making and how he monitors instruction.
**Sub Theme: Communication.** Having a vision for student and adult learning is one thing. Communicating that vision, getting others to believe in it, and convincing them that not only is achieving it possible, but that their own investment in helping make it a reality is necessary and will be worth their time and energy is another. By way of various examples, the principals all discussed the importance of communication generally and highlighted particular aspects of communication specifically.

The principals at all three sites use a number of direct communication tools including weekly email updates to staff, memos, and faculty meetings. They all also have multiple conversations with individuals and small groups of teachers throughout the course of the day. Some of these are scheduled and take place in their offices or during Common Planning Time meetings; many others are of a much more on the fly, in passing nature. Regardless of where, when or how leaders and teachers communicate back and forth, it is by doing so that they are able to continually support the work of setting the school’s direction and gathering ideas and feedback that inform next steps. All three principals and their teacher leaders discussed the importance of clear, consistent communication. It was Principal Cooper, who stated, “Communication is, of course, number one. Clear communication is key to making sure that things are getting done that you think should be done as the instructional leader.” Principal Jennings sees as very important, and as a contributor to his success, his ability to communicate his vision and to engage others in the work. He speaks about communication as being essential to one’s success as a leader and believes that without the ability to communicate what it is that has to get done as well as a sense of confidence that what he is envisioning is possible, nothing will be accomplished:
You have to communicate everything. You really do. How do you communicate your vision? How do you communicate where you want your kids to be in a year, two years, ten years? How do you get people to buy into what you’re saying? You almost have to be like a salesman.

This principal feels that once he has considered all of what the state, the district, the learning standards, and student achievement data have to say, and decided upon a course of action, it is his responsibility to set that course and then communicate not only his vision, but also confidence in himself and his staff that they will be able to make that vision a reality. He describes this as like saying, “Here’s where I want this building to go, it may seem impossible, but here’s where we’re going to go…Sort of like, ‘Follow me and I’ll get you there.’” Again, he feels that much of whatever success he enjoys as a leader is due in large part to his ability to get others to believe as he does. He does his “selling” seemingly all day long in the context of large faculty meetings, small group encounters and one-on-one conversations and while his approaches to communicating his vision and his needs may vary depending on the audience, his message does not. This need for constancy and consistency of message was echoed by Principal Hackman when discussing his messaging of high expectations, “I don’t ever deviate from that. No matter how funky it looks or if it sounds corny, the things I say to them or whatever, I’ll say it over and over again.” Staying on message he says:

Takes an unwavering commitment on the part of the leader. You can’t vacillate. You can’t say, “Oh, they didn’t like that so I’ll back off.” No. If it’s good, if it’s going to work for kids then you’ve got
to sell it. And you’ve got to keep going. Let them say, “That guy looks like a fool talking like that.” Fine, but I haven’t changed a thing and I’m going to keep talking about it.

This principal believes in the importance of modeling his beliefs and staying on message. As he says, promoting high expectations for students and adults or getting behind an instructional initiative, “is never a one shot deal.”

As was referenced earlier, principals also communicate their beliefs and expectations through their actions. Mrs. Anderson’s tendency to immediately question a hint of low expectations helps to clearly communicate her position on the matter. Likewise, Mr. Hackman’s arguing against excuse-making or complacency communicates his and Mr. Jennings’s willingness to “do the work” required to support inclusive classrooms, his.

Another function of communication that principals and teachers discussed was as a tool that supports monitoring the instructional program and informing decision-making. The literacy consultant at Budlong School described how the principal would often be out in the building, visiting classrooms, checking in with staff to hear their ideas and get their input on what they think about next steps or new initiatives that the school may want to consider. Teachers at Castleton described how Mr. Jennings was willing to listen to the ideas of any teacher in the building and if he could be convinced that they were in the best interest of his students and had potential for success, encouraging them to pursue them.
In addition, Mrs. Cooper shared that it is the union delegate who will sometimes come to her to let her know when the teachers are beginning to feel the pressures of her high expectations:

My union delegate has come to me on different occasions and said, “The word’s out that you’re taking on too much. You’re involving us in too many things right now. Can you step back a bit?” and I appreciate that she says that and she knows that about me because I shared that with her that I feel as I always have to push myself and she knows that about me so she’ll say, “People feel that you’ve pushed them to the breaking point” and so I say, “Ok” and I do a little ... I try to do a little bit of ... take a deep breath.

Mrs. Cooper is reflective enough to know that she is very driven and as stated, holds her staff and herself to high standards. She also recognizes that not all of her staff members are always as passionate about the work as she is. In this instance, it is through the welcomed communication of her union delegate, that she is reminded of the need to check herself from time to time and keep tabs on the temperature of her staff.

The importance of clear communication for leadership also was discussed when at Castleton, the first grade teacher interviewed was asked about the possibility of there being any risk to the principal who attempts to share leadership with a staff member:

I think that the principal definitely, if he’s asking somebody in the building to take on a role, has to be in tight communication with that person to make sure that the two of them are on the same page and that the message that is going out is clear. If the message
going out gets muddied, then he’s the one who’s going to take the flack for that and he’s going to be the one who’s going to the one who’s going to have to fix it. So, I think it’s very clear that the message has to be tight.

Examples of teachers using communication in ways that advance the principal’s agenda and the school’s direction setting were also provided. Teachers can often contribute to the principal’s message reaching into places where it might not otherwise be heard. Mr. Jennings provides an example of this when discussing a teacher leader with whom he was working to develop as a leader and to whom he had tasked a role on an important Science curriculum project. As a result of the teacher’s involvement in this intense training and the expectation that he will also share out what he is doing and learning to his fellow teachers:

He now has a lot of those individual conversations I talk about, except I’m not having them. He’s having them. He’s having them in the teachers’ lounge; he’s having them at grade level meetings. He’s having them all the time.

Likewise, the first grade teacher at Castleton describes how teacher leaders can help support messaging:

He (the principal) could sit there at a faculty meeting and say, “Here’s the information,” but you have to have that next level that will sit in the teacher’s room and support his initiatives or go next door and say, “Hey, what do you think about that?”
Summary of Theme One: Setting the Direction. In all three schools, principals and teachers discussed the work of instructional leadership that supports the establishment of the school’s vision, the importance of promoting and protecting high expectations and how vision, expectations and other considerations align and inform instructional decision-making. They also provided insights and evidence that speaks to how, once decisions that reflect the school’s mission and collective best thinking are made, principals and teacher leaders collaborate to implement initiatives that they believe will advance the school’s vision and how they see their roles in monitoring the instructional program. Finally, principals and teachers discussed the importance of communication to the work of setting the school’s direction. They highlighted the importance of clarity, consistency, and constancy of message, the ways in which two-way communication can support direction setting and improvement efforts and how teachers can support the communication agenda.

Theme 2: Developing People

As most of the work that is done in schools is accomplished through the efforts and contributions of individuals and teams of people, an important function of leaders is influencing the development of the human resources in their schools. Leadership that develops people, that helps them build the capacity to effectively meet the expectations of their jobs and manage the complexities of necessary changes comes from many sources and happens in a variety of ways. Leaders who contribute to the development of the human resources in their schools do so by offering intellectual stimulation, providing professional development support, and by providing appropriate models for others to follow (Leithwood, 2001). Across the three sites principals and teacher leaders discussed
and provided examples of how instructional leadership for developing people and enhanced capacity happens.

**Sub Theme: Offering Intellectual Stimulation.** In addition to the types of conversations referenced in both the discussions of how leaders establish, promote and protect high expectations and in the context of the subtheme of communication, are those that, while they may ultimately support direction setting, are more about enhancing teacher capacity. These are instances in which leaders encourage honest reflection, challenge educators to re-examine held assumptions, help them see the discrepancies between where they are and where the school’s vision says they want to be, and assist them in their thinking through what needs to change. At the three schools in this study, principals and teacher leaders shared multiple examples of things they do or have witnessed, conversations that they have had with teachers and professional development activities in which they have participated in order to support the kinds of intellectual stimulation that builds capacity in their staffs.

By way of the conversations that she has with her staff, Principal Cooper pushes her teachers to be accountable for the decisions they make. She also will challenge teachers to re-examine their assumptions and help them to make the connections that they might not see otherwise. Here, she describes the example of a young teacher questioning the emphasis being placed on the use of base-ten blocks and other supports in the district’s inquiry-based math curriculum:

I just had this conversation with a teacher who says, “I don’t expect my kids to being using manipulatives in high school,” I said “Really? You’re in college now. Do you use sticky notes and
highlighters when you’re reading complex text?’” and she said,

“Well, Yeah, I do” I said, “Aren’t those manipulatives for
reading?” and she’s like, “I never thought of it that way.”

This connection making is something that the principal also will do in larger staff
meetings at which she would otherwise play more of an observer role. “Sometimes when
I have a teacher presenting, I will be the one in the audience that’ll say, “So, that’s the
connection to . . . and people will sometimes come to me and say, “I never thought of
math that way, that you’re learning along a continuum and every time kids should be
introduced to a new concept with a manipulative.” The principal shares that she is often
looking for opportunities to push her teachers in their thinking. “I’m always thinking of,
‘How I am going to take what they’re saying and use where they are and help them to
think about it maybe not differently, but just . . .’” She sees this pushing of thinking as
another part of her job and adds that she fears, “If I didn’t talk about it, it wouldn’t get
talked about.”

Principal Jennings also adds a bit more information about the teacher that he
eventually asked to lead the science curriculum work described earlier, the one who now
is “having those conversations all the time.” The teacher, slowly at first, but with
increasing frequency would seek out the principal at the end of the day, “We would have
a lot of conversations in my office, like really detailed conversations about books or
about things going on that he either agreed with or disagreed with. We argued about
things.” It should be noted that Mr. Jennings described their “arguments” as friendly and
professional. It seems likely that they both found these discussions stimulating and that
while they had a positive impact on the teacher, they also pushed the principal’s thinking and played a part in his decision to select the teacher for a leadership task.

Sub Theme: Professional Development Support. Providing professional development training to educators has, for many years, been a major (if not a multi-million dollar) industry niche. Teachers and school leaders are often inundated with invitations each year to attend half, full, sometimes multi-day conferences promising to build expertise in instruction strategies, assessment literacy, Response to Intervention, school law and more. These conferences and workshops are often expensive propositions for sending districts, necessitate time out of the classroom, and frequently, once completed, are found lacking in terms of the content they deliver and the impact they have. While attendees may hear some excellent ideas and perhaps enjoy an inspiring speaker, when they return to their classrooms, most often little if anything changes. As Mr. Hackman said, when discussing a changing approach to professional development that he describes as, “. . . a big shift for people. I mean, when people would go to a conference, they go, they learn some nice things and where do all those ideas go? Up on the shelf.”

Professional development activities like those described above ultimately have little lasting impact on the teaching and learning happening in classrooms. This reality coupled with shrinking school budgets have led principals to rethink the types and formats of professional development activities they want to see their teachers engaged in. Says Mr. Jennings, “I think everything at this point needs to be embedded. We have to learn from ourselves. So, I try to create structures and an environment where we’re constantly learning from each other.” Mr. Jennings and his colleagues work to create
these structures and environments in which, after highlighting the discrepancies between where their teachers and schools are compared to what their vision says they aspire to be, help them to then, as Principal Hackman says, “build our professional development around that.” The principals often will do this work in collaboration with the teacher leaders in their buildings. Examples would include the implementation of the writing programs at both Budlong and Rockland. While the principals will, on occasion (as when trainers from Empowering Writers came to Rockland) contract with facilitators, more typically they will, as Mr. Jennings says, “try to take care of as much as we can in-house before we spread out and ask other people.”

The development and delivery of school-based job-embedded professional development by teacher leaders, at all three sites, is where perhaps the most evidence of their contributions to school leadership were found. In some instances the contributions they made were in support of the principal’s vision for training that he or she has for the entire staff. In others, teachers help build their colleagues’ capacity by providing direct support to small teams or individuals.

Principals, as was discussed earlier, after conducting needs assessments, or because of what they are seeing and hearing in their buildings, often will recognize a need for a new initiative or training for their staff. Such trainings might, as described earlier, be delivered in support of new writing programs. They could be included as part of an effort to address student behavior such as the district-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) rollout underway in all three schools. Many times once these needs are identified, the principals at all three schools benefit from the expertise and the contributions of their teachers. In both examples discussed earlier in which
teacher leaders (both being literacy consultants) helped the principal identify an approach for improving student writing scores, both leaders did the research needed, helped the principal decide on the course of action, and ultimately themselves provided direct training to teachers in the building. Mr. Jennings described how teachers at his building, with relative independence, facilitated trainings for the staff during the summer of 2011 to prepare for the implementation of PBIS:

We had a PBIS planning session. I attended, but I didn’t take the leadership role on what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. They planned the training for the teachers. The teachers led it 100%. They set the agenda, they got the materials, they divided the roles and responsibilities for who’s going to present what . . . they did all of it.

In a way similar to how Principal Cooper described the introduction of the ACES writing program at Budlong, Mr. Jennings allowed that he had the vision for summer training, but that it was his teacher leaders who made it happen.

In the previous section on direction setting, reference was made to the role that teacher leaders play in advancing the principal’s vision for the school. They do this when they show support for his or her ideas by “talking them up” in the lunchroom, the corridors or during visits to teachers in other classrooms. These teachers may also, by way of these conversations, be supporting the work of providing intellectual stimulation to their colleagues and thereby contributing to their professional growth. There are other instances, however, when teacher leaders will take on an even more direct support role. Principal Cooper provided the example of a situation in which a teacher of hers was
routinely getting negative feedback from the principal about the quality of her lesson plans and her plan book:

Another teacher came to me who always has a fabulous lesson plan book and said to me, “Can you tell me what I can do to help that teacher with her lesson plan book? Do you think it would be helpful if I share?” I said, “That would be fabulous to give that teacher some help.”

Mr. Hackman shared another example when he recalled an instance in which he helped establish a connection between two colleagues when he was a principal at the middle school level:

I went in to observe him one time and he’s doing Socratic Seminar. It was outstanding. The kids were just so engaged. It was great. So, we stepped outside afterwards and I said, “Can you do me a favor? Could you talk to somebody for me?” I went across the hall, and I got Beth out of her room. I said, “Beth, you ever done Socratic Seminar?” “No, not really.” I said, “Barry, could you talk to her?” Next thing you know they were meeting after school, there’s the two of them digging into Seminar. Now, I showed instructional leadership by facilitating that. Granted. But he showed instructional leadership by sharing. Now, who knows where it went from there? Who knows, maybe she told somebody else. It can spread that way as well so there a lot of ways of showing it (instructional leadership) and a lot of ways to do it.
In this example the principal played to the role of connector introducing one teacher to another in hopes that one would help to develop capacity in the other. He and his colleagues also gave examples of ways in which they provide direct support to teachers by assisting them with student data analysis, modeling instruction (particularly in math) and providing support to teachers as they attempt to effectively group their students or implement new programs.

During her interview and as mentioned during the introduction of this chapter, the first grade teacher at Castleton spoke enthusiastically about professional development trainings that she has attended throughout her years in the district. It is obvious by speaking with her that this teacher is very much committed to her own continued professional growth. She adds, however, a perspective that speaks to her leadership contributions at the school and beyond that support the development of her colleagues:

I can bring that information back to my classroom and use it personally. I can bring that stuff back to my building and share it with my colleagues, I can share it out with my district and further if necessary. So, I see that multi-layering of stuff as being part of my job. I can hand over and share this information, and I think that that’s the role of us (teacher leaders) that we bring it all together and make sure everybody gets access to it.

During a site visit to Castleton one afternoon, I was able to observe an example of a professional development support, in the form of a faculty professional book club that involved the entire staff, but which had been jointly designed by the principal and this teacher leader. Using a text-based discussion protocol selected by the principal and a
book on looking at student work which had been suggested to him by the teacher leader quoted above, I watched as grade level teams engaged in discussions based on their reading. Throughout the session, the principal rotated around visiting the groups and joining in the discussions. He listened, he pushed, he probed, and he joked a bit. Watching him and his teachers, I noted the ease with which the teachers fell into the routines of what their meeting time would consist of and what was expected of them.

**Sub Theme: Providing a Model.** Additional support for developing people is provided when instructional leaders set examples for others to follow that are consistent with the school’s goals and vision. The principal who schedules his building so as to provide additional planning time to his special educators, because he knows it will support a shared vision for inclusive practices sets an example. Teachers who recognize his efforts and then use that time effectively, collaboratively and professionally in order to help achieve that vision do the same. The principals and teacher leaders, who continually monitor the instructional program, use data to identify gaps and then collaboratively action plan solutions model processes of collective inquiry and problem solving that individuals and teams of teachers can learn from and emulate. Even the teacher who, seeing an opportunity to assist a colleague by sharing what she knows how to do, sets an example for others of leadership that helps to grow people. Across all three sites, principals and teacher leaders provided multiple examples of their efforts to create opportunities for engagement, communicate expectations, and establish norms of behavior for collaboration between teachers. They do this in the context of data meetings, in common planning time sessions, through faculty book clubs and by providing individualized support to each other when needed.
Leaders in these schools also model their own commitments to life-long learning. They continue to seek out professional development for themselves, they take advanced coursework, they try to stay current with the latest research and they seek to continually build their own expertise through a variety of approaches. They do this for their own benefit, but also in order to identify and understand those things that they believe will benefit their buildings.

In addition to doing so to push her teacher’s thinking as described earlier, Principal Cooper adds that many times even her “uncomfortable questions” have selfish motivations. She says that many times when she is asking her probing questions, “I’m not trying to put the teacher on the spot, it’s because I’m trying to learn, too.”

All of the teacher leaders also participate in ongoing trainings, attend (and often present) weekend and summer trainings, and all were able to offer examples of recent learning about using data to inform instruction, differentiated instruction, leadership concepts and much more. Through these activities, the principals and their teacher leaders model their own ongoing personal professional growth and serve as examples to their colleagues.

Summary of Theme 2: Developing People. An important part of instructional leadership that was described and observed in the three schools had to do with supporting the development of teacher and organizational capacity. Principals and teachers across all three sites provided evidence of ways in which leaders offer intellectual stimulation that pushes thinking and helps teachers make important connections. They also described how they contribute to capacity building by providing professional development support to individual teachers and the faculty at large. Finally, they provided examples of how
they provide appropriate models of collaborative problem solving and commitments to ongoing learning and professional growth.

**Theme Three: Redesigning the Organization**

Components of redesigning the organization include ensuring that teachers have opportunities to learn from another, adequate time and resources for professional development and the time and know-how to work collaboratively. Many times for this kind of work to happen, the dynamics of the organization and how people work and function within the organization must change. The work of redesigning the organization is about changing school culture and structures so as to enhance the ability of organizational members to engage in and the build collaborative processes that support the school’s improvement agenda (Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K., 2006). Data related to the work of redesigning the organization spoke to efforts at modifying leadership structures in terms of who does what work and how, strengthening school culture and building collaborative processes.

**Sub Theme: Who Does the Work?** When discussing the various parts played in the instructional leadership of their schools, principals and teacher leaders were asked about whom they saw as responsible for which components. In the course of all interviews, participants were provided with a list of tasks associated with instructional leadership. The tasks included: making student and adult learning the priority; setting high expectations for performance; gearing content and instruction to standards; creating a culture of continuous learning for adults; using multiple sources of data to assess learning; and activating community support for school success. Both principals and teachers agreed that all were important to instructional leadership and all described the
list as comprehensive. There was also consensus, however, that bearing the responsibility for ensuring that all six are in place was beyond the abilities of any one person. Responses from principals included, “I think, to me, it's my job to push the vision in that, but I can’t do all of those things all of the time. You can’t do that all yourself, but you have to have the vision.” Another said, “No. In fact, it’s impossible for it to be just my job. So, to answer the question, whose responsibility is that? It’s all of ours, but that is a paradigm shift that is in process now.” The teachers interviewed echoed this, but the first grade teacher at Castleton also added her perspective on the teacher’s role in instructional leadership noting, “I would say that these should be part of a principal’s job qualifications, but I would also absolutely say that if a teacher disconnects from any one of those six, they’re not doing their job.”

If successfully exercising instructional leadership is in fact beyond the capabilities of any one individual, I was interested to learn what the principals and teachers thought about who else contributes to instructional leadership. I also wanted to hear what they had to say about how and why they thought others did.

The principals and their teacher leaders all shared thoughts on teacher leadership. They discussed the attributes that they believed teacher leaders should possess and the decision-making processes that principal’s go through when selecting or “tapping” teacher leaders. One teacher interviewed shared her definition of teacher leaders as, “people that may take a little bit more of an initiative to help train other faculty members, maybe do the research on a new program or a part of the curriculum and then teach other faculty members so they can better teach the kids.” Her description aligned closely with the leadership function of developing people discussed earlier.
When asked to describe someone likely to serve as a teacher leader, one principal offered a profile that reflected well the comments of the other participants:

I think they have to have confidence in themselves. They also have to be strong enough to agree and disagree with things; sometimes popular, sometimes unpopular. They have to be able to communicate with people, and not necessarily easy, Kum-ba-yah kind of stuff either; they have to be able to sometimes say things that are not popular or comfortable. They have to have a good sense of the curriculum, of what it is that we’re trying to accomplish. They have to understand instructional strategies. I think they have to be respected. They have to be able to think fast on their feet. I mean, there’s a lot of things that . . . ya know, the qualities of a teacher leader are not a whole lot different than the qualities of a principal. So you’re looking for people who have the same qualities, basically, as the building principal.

A teacher leader provided a similar description:

I think the biggest piece is that the instructional leader in a building is a high quality teacher first. Those folks are, first of all, good instructional leaders in that the instruction going on in their classroom is good. It’s an extremely organized person that knows how to manage not just materials and students and stuff, but also time, because if you ask somebody to do extra there has to be time management built in. Also, it’s a person that is respected by
colleagues in the building, because you can't pull on somebody that people are complaining about because that could muddy the waters of that message.

Principals also recognize that despite exhibiting many of the qualities described above, some teachers may not be well suited for leadership or at least not for specific leadership tasks. As one said:

Now, there are other people who step up who are bright, strong, understand curriculum, but there’s something about their personality, there’s something about their communication styles, there’s something about the way they go about things that turns other people off. So, that becomes a tricky a thing because, here you have people that are willing to step up, you know they have some abilities, but there’s something about the way they do things that turns other people off and now you have to decide, do I tell them, do I not tell them, do I just choose certain kinds of activities?

Principals and teacher leaders pointed to the importance of being strategic when tapping teachers for leadership in terms of “spreading the wealth.” They referenced the danger in overburdening any one individual and discussed a need on the principal’s part to sometimes protect hard-working, ambitious staff members almost from themselves. “I have to be careful with who I select for what and how many times I go to a particular well and try to spread the wealth a little bit.”

A teacher leader added that:
Sometimes, the teacher leaders get stressed out and overwhelmed, because they’re repeatedly asked to do a lot. There are some things that I have had to logistically say no to. I like to be very busy and don’t have young children at home so I don’t mind doing extra, but I think that that’s a caution.

The issue of having “young children at home” was referenced in a number of interviews and particularly in the context of explaining why some teachers were more or less likely to engage in teacher leadership. Children at home or being at a stage in one’s life where, due to the availability of time, greater involvement was possible were mentioned repeatedly across all three sites.

In addition to the risk of overburdening teacher leaders, at least one principal and a teacher leader voiced that they sometimes felt conflicted about engaging teachers in leadership fearing that it may detract from their primary role. As Principal Cooper said:

That’s always the dilemma I have. I want the teacher to be best at what they went to the position for: to teach, to instruct. So, I always hear about teachers doing this and teachers doing that, but in my head, I want the teachers to teach.

A teacher leader voiced a similar sentiment:

My first and foremost priority is to teach first graders from 9 to 3. So, anything that interrupts that teaching time gets at my gut because that’s my first and primary. That’s what I’m most worried about. So, anything that impacts on that? That’s a hard juggling act.
With respect to how principals sought to engage teachers in leadership, both they and teachers discussed the importance of matching people to tasks and providing the guided support that emerging leaders need in order to be successful. Principal Hackman talked about having teachers take on smaller projects at least initially in order to build their confidence. Jennings expanded on this, saying:

I think you have to give people safety nets and support so that they don’t fail. I think the thing that’s going to kill leadership is if you give somebody some leadership responsibility and you give them some freedom to fly away, and then they crash and burn . . . because then once they’re done, they’re done. They’re not going to do it again. They’re gonna be like, “You know what? That didn’t work out for me.”

While Jennings pointed out the risk that a potential emerging teacher leader might “crash and burn,” I was also interested in learning if principals and teachers saw any other risks inherent in either taking on or in the case of the principal, relinquishing leadership responsibilities. Principal Jennings added:

I think the risk to a teacher is how other teachers view them. I think there’s a popularity thing. I think there’s this view of who’s kissing who’s ass and who’s in tight with the principal and who’s not, so I think there is a risk that you take by being too involved as a teacher. There are negative people out there, they think negative things, and that’s too bad.
Principal Cooper also discussed how other teachers might view a teacher leader. Here, she talks about her literacy consultant who at one point was leading Common Planning Time meetings:

I think it was a risk to her. I think she did in a lot in that venue and people sort of resented her for that. That she was pushing my agenda. People were like “She needs to back off a little bit. She’s not the assistant principal” and stuff like that. She’ll do anything I ask, but I also can’t ask too much because then it becomes . . . other people might see that as a negative thing.

The first-grade teacher leader from Castleton adds another interesting perspective on this:

I see more of a risk for me with the union stuff I do because sometimes they’ll (other teachers) look the union leadership, and say, “You’re too close to the central administration because you’re backing everything that they do. Well, we don’t back everything that they do. You don’t know all the behind the scenes discussion that we’ve had to get to a common place. So, I think there is some risk-taking and that we have to then say, “This is a benefit to you as a teacher and to your students.” If you can show that benefit, then you can get people on board.

Principals also talked about the risks they themselves run in assigning tasks to teacher leaders. These included the possibility that things may not be done exactly the way they would have liked or done them themselves or that they may in fact go wrong and create more problems than they solve. Mr. Jennings:
Even though I don’t micro-manage teachers and I don’t sit on top of them all the time, I am ultimately responsible for everything that happens here. So I have to make sure for my own self-preservation and the success of this organization that, things go well. When you give up responsibility obviously you’re giving up control somewhat so the risk is, if you give something to somebody else and they drop the ball, that they do it the wrong way or they somehow upset somebody, then that’s going to come back to you.

The focus of this study is, in light of the increased expectations for instructional leadership by school leaders, how does this work get done. If the job of school leadership has in fact grown beyond what can be accomplished by any one person, the question then becomes, “Well, then who else and how?” The results presented in this section have provided some answers and highlighted some of the considerations that leaders who seek to engage others in the work of instructional leadership take into account.

**Sub Theme: Strengthening School Culture.** Across the three sites, principals and teacher leaders discussed aspects of their building’s cultures. They provided examples of individual personal interactions and how they see those happening. They also discussed issues of culture at a more organizational level.

Principal Cooper recounted what her mentor drove home years ago:

Building relationships. It’s the main thing that we have to do, build relationships. She would always say, “What’s this all
about?” and we’d all have to go, in a little chant “Relationships, Relationships, Relationships.”

Through the course of interviews and during site-visit observations, evidence of how the principals and others attend to some of the more affective aspects of leadership was noted.

During his morning rounds and in numerous meetings observed at Castleton, many examples of how Principal Jennings engages with his staff were evident. During his rounds and throughout the rest of his day he is seemingly always on the go, but as he conducts his first check-ins with teachers, making sure they are “good to go” he is always, if even briefly, present for them. As busy as he is, he stops and demonstrates a genuine interest as he asks about how their son made out on his driving test the day before, how another teacher’s daughter is feeling or how another’s physical therapy is going after her recent surgery. As he works his way around the building, he is doing the school’s business, but he is also showing that he cares about his teachers as people. He asks questions, he jokes, he smiles, he laughs out loud (most often at his own jokes, at his own expense), and he wishes them well for the day ahead.

A teacher leader at Rockland describes how, from his perspective, Mr. Hackman, connects with his staff there and, by his work ethic, also sets a positive example and provides a model. “He’s a people person. One-on-one. Looking you in the eye. Talking with you, being present. Anytime, anyplace, he’s here for us. That makes one hell of a difference.”

Sometimes, principals might act in ways that build positive relationships and result in a more pleasant and possibly more productive working environment. At other
times, they may address issues of an emotional nature in order to ensure that the school continues to function as it should. Mrs. Cooper shares an example:

We had a longtime teacher pass away last year, and not that I wasn’t caring about her, but it was my role that day to make sure that every teacher was in a good place and every kid was in a good place. I had to manage the support staff coming in and talking to the kids and I went to every single room in this building and told the kids what had happened. So, I’m good in a crisis situation in that respect.

At Rockland Principal Hackman explains that he sees himself being supportive and demonstrating caring sometimes by “just following up with a teacher who had maybe an unknown or vague situation at home and just asking, “Hey, everything ok, anything I can do?” In fact, during our interview, a young teacher who apparently was experiencing a “vague” situation at home appeared at the principal’s office door in tears. I excused myself so she could speak with the principal. When I returned, he shared only that “she’s having a tough time, going home for the day. Nice kid. It’s too bad.” Principals in these schools lead real people with real issues and they often are faced with leadership responsibilities that are about things other than raising test scores. Mr. Hackman shares one last example:

I have a teacher lives (at the other edge of the state). During the hurricane, when we had the power outage, I followed her down to her house on the Connecticut border and I gave her my generator
for three days. Why, is it a technique? Is it a plan? No, it’s just
the way I am.

He offered and delivered a generator, because, he says, it’s just the way he is. He does
believe, however, that the investment he makes in showing caring support for his staff
does come back to him.

. . . it’s just the way I am, but the offshoot of that is, how could
they ever question my intentions, my commitment to this place and
to them? So when those opportunities to contribute around here do
come up, it’s not a stretch for them to jump on board.

Teacher leaders contribute to a culture of support and caring when they support each
other as in the example of the teacher who offered to help a colleague frustrated by the
feedback she was receiving on her plan book. They also help here when, as the union
representative at Budlong does, they let the principal know that the stress level in the
building is becoming an issue. They support each other and help to build a positive
environment when they, as was mentioned at all three sites, take it upon themselves to
cover the class of a teacher who becomes ill or has to leave the classroom for whatever
reason.

**Sub Theme: Building Collaborative Processes.** Principals and teacher leaders
also discussed school culture and how it supports risk-taking, the sharing of ideas and
collaboration. Leaders can support or hinder the creation of environments where teachers
feel safe to offer ideas and suggestions and where teacher collaboration is supported and
expected. The principals in two schools in particular discussed the roles they believe
they need to play in encouraging teachers to think “beyond the four walls” of their own
classrooms and to engage more with their colleagues. It was Principal Cooper who stated that if it were not for her talking about collaborative work, using data and maintaining high expectations, “it wouldn’t get talked about.” Similarly, at Castleton Mr. Jennings, frequently made reference to the tendency of teachers to, left to their own devices, work in “silos.” In speaking about a school-wide book club that I observed he said, “This collaboration that you saw today did not exist before I got here. Did not exist. Nobody spoke to anybody. Grade levels didn’t meet. Everybody did their own thing.” The principals talked about how they leverage the work they and others are doing in terms of professional development and a number of structures and tools as will be discussed in the final section of the chapter, to build collaborative practices. They also discussed how the work they do here is resulting in, as Mr. Hackman says here, a growing awareness “that in order for the school to survive and grow, we all have to do our part beyond the four walls (of our classrooms).”

In interviews, teacher leaders shared their perspectives on how their principals shaped the environment and what they did to encourage a culture of collaboration. One teacher leader, in a way that again refers to the critical role of communication in leadership, described the principal as “a good listener,” as someone who “takes our suggestions” and who is “very respectful of people who want to try new things.” Another teacher leader in a different building said, “I feel very comfortable bringing up something and sharing the fact that this is what’s going on, this is what I don’t feel comfortable with, etc., and the principal is very open to that.” This sense of a willingness on the principal’s part to entertain suggestions, ideas and concerns was cited as contributing to a culture of collaboration.
Of the five interviewed for this study, one teacher leader shared a different perspective when discussing the culture in their school:

I think sometimes people around here feel like they’re just kind of looked at like they don’t know what they’re doing. And they do. They’re good teachers in my opinion that have good ideas that aren’t always heard, and I don’t know why. I mean I don’t know all the exchanges that go on obviously and I just see it from my perspective, but like, I’ve had teachers say to me, “I feel like (the principal) thinks I just have no idea what I’m doing and (the principal) looks at me like I’m an idiot or talks to me like I’m an idiot.”

One teacher leader shared the following when discussing how her principal encourages teacher’s feeling that speaking up is welcomed, safe and that will most often be productive:

He’s known to listen. He respects his staff. So you can go to him and tell him X, Y and Z and you know it’s going to stay with him number one, and also that he’s actually going to think about what you’ve said and take it from there.

Says the principal:

When my teachers come with a concern, if they come frustrated, if they come angry, I listen and I try to find ways to solve the problem. I want it so they feel good about coming to me because
they know I’m going listen and try to respond in some way shape or form.

Conversely, the teacher who earlier provided the contrasting view said:

- I think (the principal) will send out emails and say come to me, voice your concerns things like that, but some of feedback from other teachers had been like, “Well, we voiced them and nothing happens” or, “(the principal) makes us kind of feel like that’s not really important” or “No. That’s not the way it’s happening”.

- I think (the principal) is trying. It’s just making that connection; figuring out how to do it; to hear teachers out.

Another way that principals identified supporting the strengthening of the school culture, which also could be viewed as a communication tool and as one of the things that supports a culture of collaboration, is recognizing and celebrating those things that they would like to see more of. The principals provided examples of ways in which they attempt to encourage teachers to offer their own ideas, work collaboratively and develop habits of sharing with their colleagues by pointing out that which they hope to encourage.

Principal Hackman, when asked about teacher initiated leadership contributions:

- I think it’s very rewarding when I’m approached that way (with an idea) and I generally take the time to celebrate that. I’ll say, “That’s the way it should be! You guys should be thinking about ways in which you can facilitate growth in the building. It’s doesn’t have to be just me.”

Mrs. Cooper provides another example:
I will, at faculty meetings, mention little examples of things that I saw and that I want that I want to promote. Since my first year as an administrator, I’ve found that if I saw good teaching when I went into a classroom, at the next faculty meeting I will try to share those out so that people are valued for what they do.

In speaking about the importance of a strong school culture, Principal Hackman shared his belief that while educators may be under tremendous stress due to the expectations being placed upon them, it is the positive culture that he is trying create that will help them all persevere:

I can see the sun coming out one day and us moving forward at a more accelerated pace, but right now I am way too cognizant of the demands and the stress, the pressure and time. I’m extremely cognizant right now of not getting to that tipping point where people just can’t take it anymore, myself included. So for now I think everything that we’ve built so far is sustaining us through what I must acknowledge are very difficult times. I shudder to think of what it’s like in other schools that don’t have a common vision, that don’t have that togetherness. With what they’re going through right now? It must be like every man for himself.

**Summary of Theme 3: Redesigning of the Organization.** Principals and teacher leaders provided numerous examples of leadership that result in changes to the organization. Some of these changes have to do with the redistribution of leadership capacity and responsibility and are dependent on the recognition of and cultivation of
leadership potential of others in the school. Discussion also included the roles that principals and others play in strengthening the school’s culture. Principals and others do this, in part, by attending to the more affective side of management: being supportive of one another, demonstrating genuine caring for individuals and recognizing the needs of the larger group. Redesigning the organization was also discussed in terms of building a culture of collaboration. Whereas teachers are seen as having traditionally worked in relative isolation, redesign here means changing the way people work. It means creating cultures where risk-taking, the sharing of ideas and teacher collaboration are welcomed and encouraged. Again, as it did in the earlier section on direction setting, the critical role of communication (both expressive and receptive) was discussed.

**Theme 4: Structures, Tools and Routines**

To this point, results of this inquiry into how instructional leadership happens in three elementary schools have been presented in terms of how they represent leadership that is about direction setting, providing for the development of capacity in people in the organization to do the work, and finally reorganizing the organization so as to increase the numbers of educators contributing to school leadership, support positive working relationships, and encourage broader collaboration. Many examples have been provided, such as vision informing professional development decision-making, of the frequently interdependent nature of leadership work that happens across the three themes discussed so far. Others would include a vision for consistency of instructional practices that result in adoption of a writing program, necessitating professional development and requiring, or at least encouraging, teacher collaboration.
While Leithwood’s (2001) frameworks are helpful for organizing these results, the work that they help describe does not happen in, to borrow Principal Jennings’s word, “silos.” The work that happens in one is most frequently informed by and/or exerts influence in others. As was referenced at the outset of this chapter, Spillane (2006) adds to the discussion of distributive leadership for the management and improvement of instruction by describing it as the joint interactions of leaders and followers over time in the performance of tasks toward a shared a purpose of instructional improvement. Spillane says that these interactions are mediated by the situation—the structures, tools and routines that leaders and followers use and the situation(s) in which they do so.

The final section of this chapter will be used to highlight a number of the structures, tools and routines that provide context for the work discussed thus far and which also exert influence on and are shaped by leadership practice. Some are created by principals and/or teacher leaders and reflect, support and advance the school’s direction, developing people and changes to the organizational structure. Others are, or are the results of, external factors, which also have implications for the same three themes. They support the development of people and help with the redesign of the organization. A number support the work of instructional leadership, others may inhibit it. Ironically, some perhaps do both.

**Sub Theme: Creating Opportunities for Collaboration.** An important component of the work around redesigning the organization so as to support instructional leadership that principals and teacher leaders discussed was about creating opportunities to do that work and the structures within in which to do it. As one principal said:

> I think what I need to do is create an environment and a structure so that other people can be successful and do the work that has to
be done. I have to create mechanisms and place things, structures in place so that people can be successful and give the kids what they need.

Structures that principals and teacher leaders discussed frequently and which served as settings for professional development and collaborative work included Common Planning Time, Data Meetings, the School Improvement Team and faculty book clubs. Protocols and source materials such as professional texts and assessment/achievement data were also discussed as important to the work that happens there.

Time for teachers to work collaboratively recently has been added to the teacher’s day, district-wide, as a result of collective bargaining. As was described earlier, principals sometimes will modify their building’s schedule so as to provide additional time as in the case of the special education inclusion model at Castleton. An example of the lengths to which principals will go in order to create opportunities for teachers to work together was provided when Mr. Hackman was asked about how he might create those opportunities: “Is there anything I can do to facilitate that? Yeah, be creative. I’ve paid for subs (substitute teachers) out of my pocket. I’ll scrounge for grant money. I’ll do whatever I can.” As welcome as this additional time is, as Mr. Hackman explains:

It’s not enough to just give people time in common. You’ve got to figure out how to structure that time so that it’s common planning time. You’ve got to learn how to effectively use that time. I think we principals have to help people know how to use that effectively.

In addition to providing expectations and the tools (i.e. protocols) for tasks such as data analysis and looking at student work, Mr. Hackman identified a number of professional
books that he had identified and that are used during that time as source material for text-based discussions. Common Planning Time at Rockland is at least partially structured in ways similar to the book club at Castleton described earlier. During my interview with him, Hackman described using protocols and rich source materials, “to help teachers use that common planning time more effectively.”

Another piece of evidence, an artifact, that is used to help structure Common Planning Time and ensure that time is used effectively and efficiently was provided by another principal. The Teacher Collaboration Handbook is a 12-page manual, created by the principal. It clearly spells out when, where and how teachers at his school are to structure their collaborative work. It discusses norms, contains protocols for text-based discussions and looking at student work and provides forms that are to be used by the teachers to assure productivity and ensure accountability. He saw the need for such a tool because as he says, “This year we’ve got these, two new common planning blocks a month, which were fantastic, but nobody was really prepared for them. It was like ‘Alright, now what are we going to do?’” His grade-one teacher leader describes the handbook this way:

   He created a template for us to use at every meeting. It’s a very focused discussion, you have to keep minutes you have to come up with an agenda for the next meeting, you have to meet that agenda and you have turn that in to him so there’s an accountability there.

   I think that’s phenomenal.

While the above describes the structure of Common Planning Time at one school, at another building, a teacher leader said this about CPT there:
I think it needs to be planned a little bit better. We have common planning today and we don’t know what we’re doing in it. It’s like, “What are we supposed to do?” I mean, I liked the idea of having the common planning added to the schedule. I think it could be used to build consistency but right now it’s not.

At Budlong School, an additional structure has been put into place recently. Both the principal and her literacy consultant contribute regularly to scheduled grade-level data meetings. These meetings are made possible by the principal’s manipulation of the building schedule in order to carve out the additional time. In an observed data meeting, Principal Cooper and the literacy consultant co-led the grade level team scheduled for that day through a discussion of student achievement and growth data for both mathematics and reading. They used a large white board which they transformed into the “data wall” to frame the work of the meeting. As they discussed the progress that they and the teachers were (or were not) seeing students make, based on assessment results, they also discussed possible contributing factors and problem-solved action steps.

**Sub Theme: Building Assessment Literacy/Data Facility.** In the context of meetings such as these, in the school improvement process and in order to inform decision making, data plays an obvious and important role and serves as an important tool. Assessment literacy and facility with data analysis are also at least partial desired outcomes of the book clubs and professional development activities described previously. As a teacher leader shared, “Our folks have got to get much more critical about data and really look at that data and connect it to instruction.” Participants discussed the use of
data, how this happens in numerous settings, for a variety of purposes and how they see it influencing changes to their organizations.

The principals described how they use student data themselves and attempt to encourage its use by their teachers. They use data to inform decisions about programming, student placement and other instructional matters. They also will use data as a tool to guide teachers to re-examine their practice in ways that they hope are seen, because they are based in evidence and not personalities, as less threatening to the teacher. As Principal Cooper describes, “The conversations are more data-driven this year so it takes more of the relationship stuff out of it. It’s like, ‘I still like you as a person, but let’s look at what the data has to say.’ To me, it’s non-threatening because it’s based on student data.” Principal Cooper believes focusing teacher attention on data is an important part of her job because while she believes her teachers will always try to do their best, “They might not have the focus on data as their guiding light if they didn’t have an instructional leader. I mean, if I didn’t talked about it would never get talked about. It’s an area that I have to push.” She also references data in a way that relates back to her vision for the school:

I hope to see it become part of their human nature, to use the data.

Right now I see them using it to satisfy my directives to use it. I’m hoping that soon enough that the teachers will just…that it’s automatic, that they need to do that, and not that they need to do it, that it’s the right thing to do.

At Rockland, the principal is using his book study with staff to support the development of a collaborative environment, but also to help build some of the data
literacy that he believes his teachers need to acquire. “What I’m trying to groom is, through having this book study and then having data teams by grade level, they need to learn how to examine the data and how to react to it.”

As was described earlier when discussing how the principal and teacher leaders co-lead data meetings at Budlong, while working with student data, principals will often consult teacher leaders in the building when conducting their own analysis:

My principal does come to me to bounce things off of. He’s a data person, and he knows I’m a data person so when he’s got questions about data or wants to look at something he’ll bring stuff to me.

Last year he brought me the NECAP (state standardized test) scores and he was real happy with them and I looked at it, and you know numbers, you can sometimes look at numbers and get two different feeds on it, I looked at it I said, I’m not happy with this. I’m glad you are but I’m not because I’m looking at it this way.

And he had not looked at it the same way. So then we have to look at it and say and ok, so which way of looking at this data best helps us move kids forward. It’s kind of combination of our thoughts about it.

Teacher leaders also discussed the role of data in the RTI process:

We’re always looking at the data. How are they doing? Are they making progress throughout the year or from beginning of the year to mid-year to end of year? I have my little data book where I literally keep track of every single kid in the school with what’s
going on with all the tests. At any moment if anybody has a question about how a child’s progressing, I can offer that.

The same teacher leader, however, voiced the following concern:

There’s so much data collection going on with all the different tests that it leaves very little time for you to instruct in the classroom. So, I feel the pressure and I think the teachers feel the pressure also. So the data is the guiding point to be looking at, but you’re not . . . the balance hasn’t been found yet to be able to get back to the instruction to be able to do it as the result of the data.

Data collection and analysis plays a number of critical roles related to the work of instructional leadership. Principals see it as part of their responsibilities to build the capacity of their staffs to use data effectively. They place great importance on the thoughtful use of data to inform instructional decision-making and school improvement action planning. Data usage is the focus of much of the professional development that takes place in the schools and the data itself serves as the source material for acquiring the skills that principals hope to develop in their teachers.

Sub Theme: School Improvement. The School Improvement Team (SIT) as a structure which supports instruction was discussed at all three sites. It is the place where many decisions that relate to issues of direction setting and of developing people through professional development are made. It too, is a structure that requires a degree of collaboration and makes extensive use of data. Principal Jennings described how he played the role of facilitator for the SIT and how he also sought to use the process to
build the capacity for later independence. Describing the most recent school improvement planning cycle he said:

We identified areas that we wanted to look at as far as school improvement plan objectives. Then I put together teams of teachers and parents, said “Tell me what you want to work on, tell me what’s most important for you as a teacher, as a parent, what we need to accomplish and then let’s start seeing if we can find some overlap and ways to whittle it down.” I knew that my school improvement plan was going to influence my professional development which was going to influence everything else I did. I thought if the school improvement plan was essentially written by the teachers, with the parents help, and all I did was facilitate the process, the teachers could then introduce the school improvement plan to the staff at the faculty meeting and respond to any questions or concerns, which they did. I didn’t work on a single committee. All I did was provide the structure. I didn’t write a single goal, I didn’t do anything. All I did was put everything together and keep it all organized. I think if we went through that cycle, maybe one or two more times with the same group of people, I could eventually not even be that person who has to organize things. I could say to somebody, “You’re running school improvement,” and they could do it.
Common Planning Time, data meetings, the School Improvement Team and book clubs were all provided as examples of structures with their own inherent routines that appear to serve multiple purposes. They provide opportunities for the strengthening of a culture of collaboration, they build educator capacity by enhancing content and process knowledge and they have the potential to advance the school’s vision.

**Sub Theme: Obstacles to Instructional Leadership.** Principals and teachers also discussed what they see as challenges to the work of reculturing their schools into what they envision when they think of professional learning communities: places characterized by shared commitments, clarity of purpose, collaboration and data-driven, inclusive decision making processes. They described these as possible impediments to the work of managing and improving instruction, which they believe directly, or indirectly, inhibit instructional leadership. These included, as referenced earlier, what they see as the traditional tendencies of teachers to work in isolation, the issue of teacher and/or principal turnover, the frequency of changes in direction or implementation of new programs and initiatives and externally imposed mandates in general and the newly introduced educator evaluation model specifically.

**Staffing/Turnover.** In this district, the teacher contract provides that, in the event of there being a vacancy in a building, any teacher may, based on seniority and provided they hold the appropriate teaching certificate, bid into the vacant position. By contract, principals have no say in who comes to work in their building. As a result, principals inherit a staff and a culture and then have no ability to control who is hired or who “bids into” their building. As Principal Hackman describes, principals begin their work in established contexts:
I didn’t start this school. If I did, I would have picked all the groceries (chosen the staff). I would have collected people who were like-minded and all that stuff, but it doesn’t happen that way.

You get plopped down into the middle of an existing institution that’s got it its traditions and its histories and it attitudes. So, molding that culture takes a lot of effort and some time as well.

This same contract provision means that teacher mobility is an important concern. He continues:

I would say the biggest impediment on my continuing to build this culture is the specter of turnover. Because, if you’re doing certain things in the building, if you’ve established a certain attitude in the building and then you get turnover, even if that incoming person is still of the same attitude, they still now have to be trained. They still now have to be brought up to speed with what you’re doing in your building. Turnover can really slow you down. Until and unless we get to the point where we interview for every vacancy you have to hope for the luck of the draw.

Principal Jennings adds, “It’s hard to grow people when people are constantly coming and going. A teacher leader at Rockland, when discussing a possible contributor to teacher resistance to change, also referenced the issue of turnover and its effects on leadership. When faced with new initiatives or proposed changes, Ms. Violet says, “A lot of people are like, ‘It’s just another principal. How long is he going to be here?’”

Principal Hackman acknowledges that the “specter of turnover” as he refers to it holds
influence over his teachers and often contributes to a “this too shall pass” approach to resisting change on the part of some faculty.

**Constancy of Change.** In addition to turnover, the principals and teacher leaders discussed their concerns about the frequency of changes in policies and direction (often led at the district and State levels). As Principal Jennings said:

> If there wasn’t always something new coming down the pike, we could say, “Ok, this year’s just like last year. Let’s take what we’ve learned and take it to the next level.” But what happens is it’s just one thing after another. If it wasn’t always something new it would make it easier for us to distribute the leadership to other people but the thing is, every year there’s something new, every year there’s something different.

He continues while reiterating some of the points made by his colleague regarding turnover:

> Besides the policy coming down every year with something new, the other thing is the way things exist now with seniority and the way we hire and fire and handle our faculty. Many buildings have a constant turnover of teachers. And sometimes, you lose your best ones because they have the least amount of seniority. So, I think we’ve got to get rid of that. It’s hard to grow people when people are constantly coming and going.

Finally, Principal Jennings uses a sports analogy to make his point about both the constancy of policy change and turnover:
I mean imagine Bill Belichick. He’s the coach of the Patriots, and every year there’s 25 different rule changes, and every year his teams completely different. Every single year! How do you do that? I’m not saying it’s that drastic, but sometimes it seems like that. It’s five new things you need to get done and, oh by the way, here are five new faces that you know nothing about.

**Educator Evaluation Model.** Beginning in fall 2011, a new statewide model for educator evaluation was introduced in all Rhode Island public schools. This rigorous, time-intensive evaluation system requires that evaluations be completed for all educators annually. The model is grounded in multiple observations of educator practice, ongoing feedback and conferring and extensive artifact collection and review. The model rollout for SY2011-2012 is being described as “gradual implementation.” Full implementation in SY2012-2013 will require twice the number of observations annually as being conducted currently. While both principals and teachers spoke positively about the increased quality and quantity of professional conversations that goal setting, observation and conferencing have contributed to, they also discussed the impact that they believe this new system is having on instructional leadership. Ms. Sienna, the first-grade teacher leader at Castleton had this to say:

Before this huge evaluation system rolled out, Mr. Jennings was much more accessible. You could go to him and you didn’t mind peeking your head in his office. Right now, if he’s in his office and you peek in he’s probably doing somebody’s evaluation and you kind say, “Oh, do I want to interrupt him?” So I think that has
just eaten up a huge block of time and next year to double that time? I’m very concerned about that both as a teacher, as a teacher leader and as a union person. I’m really concerned about that, because I see what’s going on in buildings and the stress level with teacher evaluation. I think the new evaluation system, doing every teacher every year is just inundating every principal and is impacting the instructional leadership time that he has and when you lose that teacher leader because he’s doing evaluations non-stop, you lose that thread of pushing that education agenda.

The fourth-grade teacher leader in the same building, Ms. Rose, adds her perspective, saying:

I think that the evaluations will help student achievement, but there are other things that help student achievement as well, and when we double the amount of time that administrators are going to have that (observations) for next year, I think that’s going to have a negative impact on other initiatives that really are critical.

The irony here may be that the evaluation system which is intended to support improved instructional practice and school leadership, and which by the accounts of all participants in this study has led to some very rich professional discussions about teaching and learning, is according to some, making it that much more difficult for principals to lead. It is contributing to the curtailment of the time and accessibility that allowed principals to invest in direction setting, developing people (at least as they were) and redesigning the organization. Earlier, participants discussed as important the openness to suggestions and
ideas demonstrated by their principals. Here, one describes the difficulty in now even getting an audience:

Over the last few years, I’m finding that principals on a whole, tend to talk to their staff more and find out how we’re feeling and how we would like to move forward in our vision, but I’m finding it difficult now with all the regulations coming down as far as teacher evaluations and all of that, and I’m concerned about how much the principal is going to be able to continue this dialogue. With everything going on with their increased responsibilities, they’re no longer as accessible as they were in the past. I could always go and knock on the door. Now you pretty much have to make an appointment because principals are not there. They’re not ready to hear us at anytime, because they’re so busy with everything that’s going on.

**Summary of Theme 4: Structures, Tools, and Routines.** The work of direction setting, developing people and redesigning the organization all happens within contexts. It happens within settings (some previously established/inherited, others created to meet a need) and it happens through the use source materials and tools that help to define the work and how it happens. This section highlighted some of the structures that advance and in some instances appear to constrain the instructional leadership functions of direction setting, developing people and redesigning the organization.
Conclusion

This chapter presented the results generated through interviews, site visits and document and artifact analysis conducted in order to examine how instructional leadership happens in the three elementary schools settings in this study. It described the site schools to establish context and introduced the participants. These included the three principals and a total of five teacher leaders who the principals identified as important to the schools’ leadership. The results were organized using frameworks developed by Leithwood (2001) and Spillane (2006). These frames provided the following themes: Setting the Direction, Developing People, Redesigning the Organization and Structures, Tools and Routines. The principal and teacher leaders interviews, school site visits and document analysis generated evidence about how school leadership happens, who leads and/or contributes to this work and how. In addition, the results describe what principals do to support the infrastructure for engaging others in the work of instructional leadership.

The following chapter presents the findings based on the results described here that help to answer the research questions of this study. These findings and the discussion that follows will highlight how the results from this study confirm and, at times, challenge the instructional leadership and distributed leadership literatures. I will also present practical implications that emerged from this investigation and recommendations for future research and practice.
Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this investigation was to examine, in light of the increasing demands being placed on elementary principals, how instructional leadership in schools actually happens and how principals support leadership for instruction and its improvement. In this final chapter, I will expand on the results that I presented in the previous chapter and discuss my findings as they confirm and, at times, challenge existing research and theory. I will review the problem of practice, the theoretical frameworks, and the study design in order to frame my discussion of the findings. This discussion will facilitate the connections between the research on instructional and other forms of leadership presented earlier, the results from this study, and the implications for future research and practice in the area of instructional leadership.

Review of Problem of Practice

In this current climate of accountability and standards-based instruction, while buildings and staffs must still be managed and supervised, instructional leadership from the principal has become increasingly important (Leithwood, 2001; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001). This increased focus on instructional leadership has been “in addition to” not “instead of” the expectations for principals as building managers. As a result, authors have stated that successfully leading today’s schools now requires more than the leadership of any one individual, that successfully accomplishing all that is expected of the elementary school principal has grown beyond what any one person can do alone (Copland, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). This
study sought to answer the questions of who else in the school contributes to instructional leadership, how, and what principals do to make these contributions possible.

**Review of Theoretical Frameworks**

The frames used to collect, organize and present the data described in the previous chapter were adapted primarily from the works of both Keith Leithwood (2001) and James Spillane (2006). According to Leithwood, the core leadership functions in school systems that often get distributed include: setting the school’s direction, professional development and redesigning the organization. Spillane defines distributed leadership as the joint interactions of leaders and followers over time in the performance of tasks toward a shared a purpose of instructional improvement. He adds that these interactions are mediated by the situation—the structures, tools and routines that leaders and followers use and the situation(s) in which they do so. As such, the decision was made to use both the distributed leadership functions described by Leithwood and also Spillane’s contributions regarding the structures, tools and routines in use and their implications for instructional leadership to organize results and surface findings.

I believe that while both Leithwood’s and Spillane’s frameworks have great utility for my work, but that neither in isolation supports as thorough an exploration of instructional leadership as they do together. Each of the leadership theories introduced in Chapter 2 explain some elements of effective instructional leadership, but no model that I found is adequate on its own. I believe that the “married” model that I propose is most suited to the task.
Review of Study Design

The challenge of meeting the expanding expectations of principals as both building and faculty managers and as instructional leaders presented as the problem of practice for this study. It was the more recent contributions to the literature on school leadership referenced above that provided an appropriate lens for the study of how instructional leadership actually happens in the schools studied. A distributed leadership framework was adopted so as to help me see beyond the simple actions and/or traits of the leader or his or her followers, and instead get at the ways in which multiple players, through their interactions with each other and their situations contribute to instructional leadership. The intent was to focus less on the actors, and more on leadership practice. As Spillane (2001, p. 23) states:

An in-depth analysis of the practice of leadership is necessary to render an account of how school leadership works. Knowing what leaders do is one thing, but without a rich understanding of how and why they do it, our understanding of leadership is incomplete.

To develop this understanding of the “how and why” of leadership practice, a multi-site case study approach was used (Yin, 2002). Through the use of semi-structured interviews, observations and artifact review, data was collected that describe how the work of instructional leadership plays out in these three schools.

Findings and Discussion

How Instructional Leadership Happens. Instructional leadership happens by means of the interactions between principals and others as they do work that directly and indirectly supports the management and improvement of instruction. It happens as
principals and teacher leaders, some designated and titled leaders (e.g. coaches, literacy consultants), others, rank and file “foot soldiers” (Whitaker, 1995) all support, collaborate with, and play off of one another to establish and maintain the school’s direction, develop leadership and teaching capacity in each other and the school, and collectively contribute to the redesign of the school’s structures and cultures (Leithwood, 2001). As was witnessed and described, principals and teachers in the schools studied work in ways that pool and capitalize on their individual areas of interest, experience and expertise (Woods, et al., 2004). Examples of these “concertive” (Gronn, 2002) efforts include the collaborative work of principals and teacher leaders to identify, acquire and then implement new curricula or instructional practices. In instances in which the principal or others identify a need, but perhaps lack the content knowledge or necessary skills to successfully implement a desired initiative on their own, other members of the organization often “fill the gap,” fleshing out the collective knowledge of the organization, and help make things happen. This scenario plays out as literacy experts help their principals bring new writing programs into the school or develop protocols and routines for analyzing student assessment data. It also does as principals provide, time, coaching and resources that provide structures and opportunities for sharing in instructional leadership. Teacher engagement in this work builds the capacity of the teaching staff at large and the self-efficacy of individual teachers (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010).

_The Principal and . . ._ Both the principals and the teacher leaders in this study acknowledge that successfully meeting the demands of building management and instructional leadership is beyond what can be expected of the principal alone. As one
principal said, “In fact, it’s impossible for it to be all my job. So, to answer the question, ‘Whose responsibility is that?’ It’s all of ours.” This assertion certainly aligns with the findings of previous studies, which point to the shared responsibility for student learning and the importance of broad participation in leadership for instructional improvement (Copeland, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). As Lambert has written, “it has been a mistake to look to the principal alone for instructional leadership, when instructional leadership is everyone’s work” (p. 40). Teacher leaders in this study recognized their responsibility for sharing in the work. They also provided examples of how they and others do so.

**Structures and Contexts.** Instructional leadership happens as principals and others work co-jointly within structures and local contexts (Spillane, 2006). Some of these structures and contexts they help to create, others they inherit or have imposed upon them. Examples here would include schedules that allow for common planning time and repurposed faculty meetings that principals then use to support professional development rather than as simple information dissemination forums. These structures provide venues and supports for the development of norms of teacher collaboration, support professional development and allow for the building of broader leadership capacity.

**Structures that impede.** Conversely, school leaders must also contend with other structures such as collective bargaining agreements that can curtail their ability to maximize their human capital resources. As an example, faculty turnover, or even, as Principal Hackman describes it, “the specter of turnover,” is a structural reality over which school leaders have no control and which presents significant challenges to the successful and coherent implementation of instructional programs and reform efforts.
Likewise, frequent principal turnover can encourage the development of a passive-aggressive-resistance-to-change stance in teachers. This too, undermines reform efforts.

Another such impediment is what the principals and teacher leaders describe as the seeming near-constancy of change. They describe the frequent imposition of mandates and the changes in state and district priorities and direction as a structural phenomenon that undermines their ability to get and maintain solid, sustainable leadership traction. Frederick Hess (1999) has described this continuous and fragmentary approach to school reform the “policy churn.” He points to it as a phenomenon driven by policymakers and leaders, intent on making a difference during their typically short time in office, misallocating their limit resources, always looking for the “right” structure or “best” new pedagogy rather than paying sufficient attention to how to successfully implement and sustain any particular approach (Hess, 1999). Both turnover and frequent policy and direction changes are structural realities within which schools operate and leaders struggle. Both can make the work of instructional leadership even more difficult.

About the situation in which principals and others do the work of instructional leadership, Spillane and Diamond state that the “situation is both the medium for practice and outcome of practice. As the medium for practice, aspects . . . offer both affordances and constraints . . .” (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p. 10). Both structures that advance and others that impede instructional leadership have been described here. What have not been included thus far – and which are not discussed in the distributed leadership literature – are any examples of structures that seemingly do both at the same time. Instructional leaders should recognize that structures often exert both positive as well as
negative influences on leadership. Being aware of the importance of situation to leadership practice and then thoughtfully considering the potential impact of any unintended consequences could have important implications for school leaders and policy makers.

**Double-edged Swords.** About the situation or context of instructional leadership, Spillane and Diamond state that the “situation is both the medium for practice and outcome of practice. As the medium for practice, aspects . . . offer both affordances and constraints . . .” (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, p. 10). Throughout my analysis, I have described both structures that advance and others that impede instructional leadership. What I have not included thus far and did not find in the distributed leadership literature are any examples of structures that seemingly do both at the same time. For example, some structures such as the statewide educator evaluation system discussed in Chapter 4 can, on one hand, support positive outcomes (e.g. high quality reflection on instructional practice) and yet on the other create and perpetuate unintended negative consequences. The principals and teacher leaders describe the level of professional discourse and teacher support that implementing the new statewide evaluation system necessitates as extremely powerful and important work. They see great value in the system’s intent. They also, however, voiced serious concerns about what they perceive to be inordinate amounts of principal time, energy and attention that it requires. They fear that the benefits of this particular structural component may be outweighed by the negative impact it has on the principal’s ability to lead as they should.

Contexts and structures, regardless of whether they advance the agenda of school improvement and shared instructional leadership or impede it, do not simply frame the
work of school leadership; they are themselves an important actor in the leadership
dynamic. They exist almost as the third leg of the leadership practice stool. They are as
much a part of the instructional leadership equation as the leader and the follower. They
simultaneously and continuously exert influence on principals and teachers and the work
they do. They are continually reshaped and reciprocally acted upon by those whose work
they help to define (Spillane, 2006). Instructional leaders should recognize that structures
can exert both positive and negative influences on leadership. Being aware of the
importance of situation to leadership practice could have important implications for
school leaders and policy makers as they consider reform initiatives. It may be that a
more accurate understanding of how instructional leadership actually happens in practice
will help school leaders and policymakers be more effective at accounting for and
mitigating the potential unintended consequences of school improvement efforts.

**Tools and Routines.** Finally, instructional leadership happens as principals and
others, working together and within their local contexts and structures, and on the core
functions of teaching and learning, adopt, adapt or develop the tools and routines for
doing this work. These tools and routines, like the structures described above, are
inextricably part of leadership dynamic. They, too, reflect an ongoing and reciprocally
generative relationship that exists between the principals, teacher leaders, the work they
do and the settings in which they do it (Spillane, 2006). Examples of tools and routines
evident at the three schools in this study include the Teacher Collaboration Handbook,
created by a principal, which articulates clear expectations for teacher collaboration and
provides teachers with the protocols for doing that work. Another is the data meetings
and student data walls in use at Budlong School. The data wall is also an example, as
referenced previously, of an instance in which the principal had an identified need, but it was the literacy consultant who helped create the solution. Tools such as these help to both mediate and define the work of instructional leadership (Spillane, 2006).

**Summary.** Instructional leadership practice happens through the interactions of principals, teachers and the work they do to support teaching and learning. These interactions also continually act upon and reshape the structures and tools that mediate that leadership practice. As Spillane (2006) describes, some of these structures advance the work of instructional leadership, while others potentially impede that work. Interestingly, some structures such as the educator evaluation system described in this study appear to both. They provide a frame for important professional growth, yet the successful implementation of them comes at a high, unintended cost.

**What Principals Do to Support Instructional Leadership.** Principals play a critical role in supporting instructional leadership that facilitates the management and improvement of instruction and that builds the capacity for shared instructional leadership. In fact, in discussing the importance of the principal to school success, Findley and Findley (1992) state, “If a school is to be an effective one, it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal” (p. 102). Flath (1989) concurs, saying, “The principal is pivotal in bringing about the conditions that characterize effective schools” (p. 20). The results of this study indicate that principals provide the leadership that sets the stage for shared school leadership in ways that tend to present as a small number of distinct yet mutually supportive and interdependent themes.
High Expectations. To create the conditions for shared instructional leadership, principals establish, promote and protect cultures of high expectations for student and adult learning and performance.

For Students. Research has long supported the idea that students excel in schools characterized by high expectations that are shared by administrators and teachers (Hill, Foster & Gendler, 1990). Principals help to facilitate the creation of these cultures when they themselves establish promote and protect high expectations, communicate those goals and foster group acceptance of them (Fullan, 2003). The principals in this study spoke often and fervently about their expectation that given the appropriate time and supports, the students in their care could and would be successful. They see it as part of their job to not only instill that belief in their teachers but also create the structures and environment that make success possible. An example is the rescheduling of the building so as to provide additional common planning time for those teachers working in the special education classrooms. The principal believes that the special education inclusion program in his school will be successful. As a result he is, “willing to do the work” that he thinks will assure that success. The expectations that principals have for student learning inform their decision-making around instructional matters and are reflected in the initiatives they introduce and/or support.

For Adults. Principals also support the infrastructure for instructional improvement when they establish and promote high expectations for the performance and learning of the adults in their school (NASSP, 2001). The principals in this study, through their efforts to create opportunities for collaboration, support the building of positive professional cultures, provide instructional leadership themselves, and engender
Creating a Culture of Collaboration. In addition to those for student and adult learning, principals likewise establish and promote expectations for teacher collaboration and do the necessary work to provide the time, tools and resources needed to make that collaboration happen (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, Spillane, 2006). The results presented in Chapter 4 include numerous examples of principals rescheduling their buildings in order to create opportunities for collaboration and/repurposing meetings to provide additional common professional development time. The results also describe how principals use the tools and routines, of which professional books and text-based discussions would be examples, to support professional collaboration. That principals pursue these opportunities to provide the time, materials and supports necessary to engage in this collaborative work is indicative their expectations for their staff. The principal’s investments in supporting this professional development communicates both high expectations for their teacher’s ongoing professional growth and their confidence that they will meet the challenges of the tasks put before them.

Communication. Principals communicate their vision for their schools. They also communicate their expectations for student and adult learning as well as for teacher collaboration. They do this through both their words and their actions.

Expectations. They define and promote their expectations through memos, meetings and conversations and they believe that they need to use every opportunity and mode of communication available to them to continually and consistently promote those expectations. As Principal Hackman said, “No matter how funky it looks or if it sounds
corny, the things I say to them I’ll say over and over again. . .Let them say, ‘That guy looks like a fool talking like that.’ Fine, but I haven’t changed a thing and I’m going to keep talking about it.”

**Pushers of Thinking.** Principal use the tools of communication and their own facility with them to advance their school improvement agendas and they use them to push their teacher’s thinking, to challenge them to re-examine previously held assumptions and to reflect on their decision-making processes. This pushing of thinking represents an important element of one of the key leadership functions frequently distributed by principals, that of providing the intellectual stimulation that helps to develop people’s instructional and leadership capacities (Leithwood, 2001).

**Actions as Loud as Words.** The principals also communicate their expectations by providing models for behavior that reflect their belief in high expectations, the importance of collaboration, and the potential of their school and the teachers within it to contribute to school leadership (Leithwood, 2001). These efforts are strengthened when the principals demonstrate an appreciation for the two-way nature of communication by themselves “communicating” a message that says to teachers that their ideas and input are welcomed and valued. They establish credibility and authenticity by then acting in ways that show that they have heard and considered that input. Through this process of inviting, listening and following through they send the message that everyone has a part to play in instructional leadership, that leadership is the job of the entire educational community (Neuman and Simmons 2001, p. 9).

As was described in Chapter 4, it is possible that principals and teacher leaders have differing perspectives on the communication skills that they see in each other.
When discussing teacher leader attributes, a principal mentioned (and another made the same point) that while a certain teacher may have excellent content knowledge and other abilities that would make them a candidate for leadership, “there’s something about their communication styles, there’s something about the way they go about things that turns other people off.” This would make the principal unlikely to tap this otherwise excellent candidate for a leadership task. Likewise, a disconnect in perception was highlighted by the instance of the principal who outwardly encourages input and the offering of ideas from teachers, but then acts in a way that teachers find dismissive and perhaps demoralizing. It may be that principals who self-reflect on their communication skills and consider them a strength fail to see this disconnect, this leadership blind spot.

**Inviting Engagement.** Finally, by establishing expectations, providing the time, the support and the tools for collaboration and by communicating that teacher contributions to instructional leadership are welcomed, principals help to invite broader engagement in that leadership. They scaffold teacher engagement in instructional leadership as they seek to create opportunities for teachers to engage in the work of direction setting, developing themselves and others and redesigning the structures and cultures of the school (Leithwood, 2001). To do this, principals identify and cultivate potential leaders, matching them to tasks with which they believe they will be successful. They again rely on their communication skills to convey their confidence in the teachers’ abilities to meet the expectations of the leadership task, to help teachers see how the task aligns with the school’s mission and direction and to convince teachers that their contributions will be worthwhile to themselves and the organization. They then monitor
and provide guided support to the emerging teacher leader in order help ensure his or her success.

**Summary.** Principals play a number of critically important roles in supporting the infrastructure for instructional management and its improvement. The leadership moves that they demonstrate and the leadership tasks that they tend to distribute involve the work of direction setting, developing people and redesigning the organization (Leithwood, 2001). In support of those tasks principals establish, promote and protect high expectations for student and adult learning and teacher collaboration. They use multiple media and strategies for communicating those expectations as they also seek to build teacher confidence and commitment. Through these actions and by modeling the collaboration and sharing of leadership that they hope to see their teachers engage in, they help to invite broader teacher engagement in instructional leadership.

**Implications for Future Research**

**Sampling and Time.** Recognized limitations of this study include the size and typology of the sample schools as well as the amount of time available for data collection. This study involved three elementary schools all located within a single urban-ring district. Also, all data was collected over a roughly two-month period. To gain a broader understanding of how instructional leadership happens, and in a way that allows for greater generalization of findings, it is a recommendation that additional studies of instructional leadership practice be conducted in a wider variety of school settings and for extended periods of time. Conducting a similar study at the high school level, for example, where organizational structures often include department chairs and greater degrees of content specialization than the elementary level, likely would yield a
number of similar findings and themes, but also some perhaps more germane to the secondary level. Extended time at any one site would allow for a more robust examination of how leaders develop and how structures and routines evolve over the course of months and years.

**Organizational Resiliency.** In the course of an interview and while discussing the theme of creating a culture of collaboration, a principal made a statement about the school culture that I found particularly interesting. He described the collaborative spirit of his teachers, the “togetherness” that he believes exists, as playing an important part in helping them all, he included himself in this, weather the storms of constant change, the pressures of accountability systems and even the implementation of the new educator evaluation system. He worried that without a positive, collaborative culture in place, “It must be like every many for himself.” He believed that the culture is what helps his staff and him see their way through difficult times. What this statement led me to consider was what a growing body of business management literature refers to as organizational resiliency.

Organizational Resilience refers to “a characteristic or capacity of individuals or organizations, or more specifically (a) the ability to absorb strain and preserve (or improve) functioning despite the presence of adversity (both internal adversity—such as rapid change, lousy leadership, performance and production pressures—and external adversity—such as increasing competition and demands from stakeholders), or (b) an ability to recover or bounce back from untoward events” (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003).

Understanding how schools might develop and maintain cultures of collaboration that provide their members with professional and personal networks of support that help
protect the organization against the negative consequences of challenges such as turnover and policy churn (Hess, 1999) could provide principals with an important tool to thoughtfully manage or mitigate those potential impediments. Like the adoption of a distributed leadership frame helped to answer the questions of this study, a resiliency framework may have application when examining school culture and the role(s) it plays in school leadership and reform efforts.

**Leadership Density.** This study adds to a still relatively small body of literature focused less on the traits, skills and dispositions of leaders and followers and more on the leadership practice that happens between them framed by the situation in which it happens. It may be possible that researchers and practitioners can, through further study of how principals invite teacher leadership, leverage existing knowledge of how principals support teacher-leader engagement to help them grow the numbers of leaders in their buildings. If what it means to lead a school has grown beyond any one person’s abilities and we are now looking to see principals in the role of leader of leaders, a more thorough understanding of what they do and how to engage others in instructional leadership may help them to establish the “leadership density” (Sergiovanni, 2001) to successfully navigate the expectations of both building management and instructional leadership.

**Recommendations for Practice**

By means of introducing the participants contributing to this study of instructional leadership, examples were provided to highlight the multiple responsibilities that principals have and the roles that they play as managers of their buildings and staffs each day. The main focus of the study was instructional leadership and how it happens. The
point attempted through the intentional inclusion of those decidedly non-instructional
tasks is that while the ability to focus their time on instructional leadership may be the
“brass ring” of school leadership for many principals; the area where they aspire to be
able to devote most of their energies, the building still has to run, children and adults still
have to be managed with safety, order and logistics maintained. While new expectations
for instructional leadership have been added to the principal’s plate, none of the
supervising custodians, serving as temp-secretary, cleaning up blood spills and handing
out Band-Aids has come off of that same plate. The cafeteria workers do not “take care
of themselves,” and no else is there to referee disputes over parking spaces between
parents. For principals to be able to fulfill the roles of instructional leader and to enhance
the capacity for shared leadership of the their schools, they will have to free themselves
from the bureaucratic tasks and focus more of their efforts on those things that actually
improve teaching and learning. Instructional improvement and enhanced leadership
capacity are important goals that result in better outcomes for both students and
educators. To achieve these will take more than a strong principal with good ideas and
technical expertise; it will require a redefining of the role of principal. For principals,
this means taking a more active role in examining teaching practices, staying current with
the most recent educational research, and supporting the adoption of research-based
strategies (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Re-examining Time Usage. In order for principals to gain the time needed to
serve as instructional leaders they will need to identify those things that currently
cannibalize their time, reexamine their priorities and seek ways of, through delegation of
tasks and distribution of leadership, relieve themselves of those things that do not
necessarily need to be his or hers to accomplish. There are likely teachers in every building who are willing and able to assist with the more management-type tasks. They may not yet (or ever) feel that instructional leadership is an area to which they can contribute, but they may be more than willing to assume some student supervision or other functions from the principal thereby freeing him or her up to focus on more instructional matters.

**Building Broad Leadership Capacity.** Principals also can make the job of instructional leadership that much more manageable by continually finding ways to build the instructional leadership capacity of their staffs. Through their efforts to continually identify emerging leaders and creating opportunities for leadership practice and collaboration, principals are growing both the numbers of leaders in their buildings and the capacity of those leaders and others to do the important work that supports the improvement of student and learning.

**Concluding Remarks**

This study investigates how instructional leadership happens in three elementary schools. I was drawn to this investigation as a former principal who was committed to collaborative leadership, but lacked a formal framework for understanding why and how it worked; we just got it done. Furthermore, I believed that meeting the dual expectations of building management and instructional leadership is beyond the capabilities of most principals, requiring that multiple stakeholders share responsibility for managing instruction and its improvement. Without a useful framework for understanding the instructional leadership dynamic, I struggled to understand the roles “I” played in the work that “We” accomplished. What I wanted to understand was how we, in ways large
and small, through our interactions and while working with the tools of instruction shared in the leadership of the school. A distributed leadership lens provided that frame.

I learned through my conversations and observations in these three schools that instructional leadership happens as principals and teachers work through school improvement and reform efforts together. Instructional leadership that engages others in the school, and which continually builds leadership capacity in both individuals and the organization is something that principals can help facilitate and support. They can do this by recognizing the distributive nature of school leadership and by paying close attention to how they support the conditions that advance broader participation in leadership.

Principals engage teachers in meaningful instructional leadership by including them in setting and actualizing the school’s mission and vision. They also facilitate shared instruction leadership by helping each teacher develop professionally. Finally, they communicate that teacher contributions to leadership are essential to the school’s success.

This study supports a fundamental shift of how we view the role(s) of the principal. It also enhances our understanding of the contributions that teachers make to instructional leadership. Armed with a clearer understanding of how instructional leadership happens, using the lens of distributed leadership, principals and teachers have the tools and resources to address the complex nature of contemporary school leadership. They can direct their energies to helping redesign schools into places where there is shared responsibility for instructional leadership, which results in leadership capacity that is greater than that of an individual.
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Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.


Appendix A: Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Department of Education Name of Investigators: Mark Garceau, Doctoral Student, Dr. Jane Lohmann, Principal Investigator

Title of Project: Leadership: An Examination of How Principals Share Instructional Leadership

Request for Consent to Participate in a Research Study

September 1, 2011

Dear potential participant,

I am preparing to begin my doctoral research project. The goal of this study is to examine, in light of increasing demands placed on schools for continual school reform and improvement, how principals engage others in the work of instructional leadership. The proposed study will seek answers to the questions 1) How does instructional leadership happen in the elementary schools studied and 2) What do principals do in order to support the infrastructure for engaging others in the work of managing and improving instruction? These questions will be explored from both the perspective of the principal and his/her teacher leaders.

I hope that this study will further develop my understandings of how leadership for instructional improvement is distributed or shared amongst multiple actors in the elementary school. I also anticipate that the project will contribute to the district’s collective knowledge of this issue and am optimistic that such knowledge will be of benefit to a wide audience. You are being asked to participate in this study because I believe that your work positions you to have knowledge and experiences important to this research.

I seek your consent to observe you in your current role as a principal, instructional leader, classroom teacher or support staff member in the Woonsocket Education Department and interview you regarding your experiences with school leadership. I am also requesting access to non-confidential documents such as School Improvement Plans, School Improvement Team and Faculty meeting minutes, or other correspondence regarding issues of school leadership that you would willingly share.

As part of the informed consent process, you should know:

- There is no compensation being offered for participation in this study. You may, however, benefit from your participation by being provided the opportunity to share insights on school leadership, thereby adding to your own the district’s collective understanding of how leadership happens in practice.
- While I cannot guarantee with certainty complete confidentiality of your participation at the local level, I will not identify anyone by name in any published project results. The purpose of this research is not to evaluate your job performance or to generate personal profiles of any kind and it will not be used for these purposes.
- Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to answer any questions asked, request “time-outs” from observations and reserve the right to share only those documents you are comfortable with sharing. You may withdraw your consent to participate in the study at any time.
- You will be offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of any of your interviews and
will reserve the right to request that any contributions be withheld from the analysis.

- All interviews will be digitally recorded and then transcribed for analysis. All digital recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed, verified and analyzed.
- As findings are developed, you will be provided the opportunity to review those particular to your participation and offer any clarifying information in order to help ensure the accuracy of my results. Your input here will be critical to strengthening the validity of my research. Any comments gathered during this review process will be incorporated into the research report.
- I do not foresee participation in this project posing any risk or harm to you or anyone else.

Specifically, I am seeking your consent for the following:

- Participant Shadowing: I intend spend considerable time in your building shadowing both principals and teacher leaders. I anticipate that approximately two full days will be spent in very close proximity to the principal and that extensive field notes regarding the nature and substance of his/her interactions with instructional staff will be generated. Additionally, teacher leaders (identified by the principal or others) will also be shadowed (up to a full day each) and, again, copious field notes generated.

- Interviews: During the week following the shadowing activities, I plan to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with principals and teacher leaders. All interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The purpose of these interviews will be to add to, clarify and generally “flesh out” the data collected during the previous week. No interviews should take longer than one hour to complete and will be conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant.

- Document Review: Much of the evidence regarding instructional leadership of a school is memorialized in school improvement action plans, meeting agendas, meeting minutes and hard and/or electronic correspondences between participants. I am requesting that I provided access to all such documents. Access will be granted solely at discretion of the participants, but as with the interviews described above, these artifacts will be very important to fully understanding the leadership dynamics in your school and the sharing of any pertinent information will be greatly appreciated.

I anticipate that the activities outlined here will take place during the fall of 2011 and that my final report will be completed by Spring, 2012.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about participating in this research. You may contact me at: mgarceau@cox.net or by calling me at 401-767-4686 (W) or 401-301-6310 (C). You can also contact Dr. Jane Lohmann, the Principal Investigator at j.lohmann@neu.edu or 617-756-3237.

Additionally, if you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. You may also contact her at jrb@neu.edu or 617-373-4588. You may also call anonymously if you wish.
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Appendix B: Observation/Shadowing Protocol

Observation Date: ____________   Time: Start: _____ ___ End: ___________

School: _____________    Setting (Shadowing, Meeting, etc.): ______________

Participants Present:  ____________________ _______ _____________  
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Appendix C: Document Analysis Data Collection Protocol

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Appendix D: Interview Protocol–Principal

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today, and thank you for allowing me to conduct this study about how leadership happens in your school. Obviously, you and your staff are under considerable pressure to continually meet mandates, raise test scores and generally improve outcomes for your students, and I appreciate your time and assistance both last week and today as I try to understand how all of this gets done. I hope to also learn from you and others that I’ll be talking to about things that you think might help you to be even more successful in leading your school.

Last week while I was here I spent quite a bit of time observing in order to gather information about what you do as principal day-to-day and what teachers and other staff also do throughout the day and as you know, my primary interest is in those things that happen around matters of teaching and learning. Today I’m going to ask you some open-ended questions about how instructional leadership gets done here. Your comments will be kept confidential and I will be giving you an opportunity very soon to review my transcripts of today’s interview so you can help me be sure that they accurately reflect our conversation. I’d like to ask your permission to record our interview. The recording will help me more accurately represent your ideas and views. Please know that if any questions make you uncomfortable, you can always just let me know that you would rather not answer. Also, should you wish to end our conversation, you may do so at any time. Again, just let me know. Once we’ve reviewed the transcript together, all recordings will be destroyed. Do I have your permission? May I begin?

Research Question 1: How does Instructional Leadership happen in the school?

There’s obviously a lot that happens here every day. Some are of a more “nuts and bolts”-type management nature and others are more issues of teaching and learning and the supports for them. Recognizing that there are at least these two kinds of work going on, I’d like to ask you about how you see this happening.

1. What do you see as your primary role as principal?

Please describe the things that you do on a regular basis that help to fulfill that role.

2. So, in addition to what we’ve just discussed, what other role(s) do you play?

What are some examples of the things you do to fulfill that role(s)?

Let’s talk a little about “managing” the school.
3. Can you name a few activities that you do specifically in your role as manager of the school?

   How do you know that you need to do these things?

   Are there any activities you do that you think fall under management responsibilities that we haven’t considered?

4. What other people here assume or assist you with some of those duties?

   Can you tell me about a specific instance or practice?

   Can you talk a little about how this came to be?

   Do you actively seek help? How?

Is there anything else about the management side of your job that you would like to say?

**Research Question 2: What does the principal do in order to support the infrastructure for engaging others in managing instruction and its improvement?**

   So, we’ve talked through a lot of what you do as manager of this school. That is obviously an important function of your position, but it isn’t really my primary interest today. If we could, I’d like to set that aside for now and change direction a bit. I’d like to shift our attention to your role in leading the work of instruction. Some of the questions in this section will sound familiar, but I’d like to talk in greater depth about the instructional leadership side of your work. I’m going to first share a definition of Instructional Leadership, just to frame things a little, and then ask some questions of you.

   The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) frames instructional leadership in terms fulfilling six roles: making student and adult learning the priority; setting high expectations for performance; gearing content and instruction to standards; creating a culture of continuous learning for adults; using multiple sources of data to assess learning; and activating the community’s support for school success.

   Any reaction to the definition I just read?

   Does it align with how you think of instructional leadership?
Is there anything that you think ought to be added, deleted or changed?

Who’s job is it?

With our definition in mind…

5. How do you see your role as Instructional Leader here?

   Can you name a few activities that you do in your role as an instructional leader around issues of curriculum, instruction and assessment?

   How do you see these activities (either directly or indirectly) influencing what ultimately happens in your classrooms?

6. Are there others here who help you with this?

   How?

7. What do you think about how or why these others become involved in this work?

   Are there things you do as principal to encourage this?

   Are there things about these people that make them likely to assume tasks or assist?

      Commonalities? Idiosyncrasies?

8. Can you describe an entirely teacher-initiated improvement or innovation?

   How was it presented to you?

   Was it followed through upon?

   What was that like for you?

   What do you think that experience was like for the teacher(s)?

9. Is there ever any risk to these teachers (or yourself) when they assume leadership roles?

   Can you describe an instance?

   How was it handled?
10. I would like to talk to you specifically about a few of your staff and about how you see your roles and theirs coexisting.

Please describe the role of the district Instructional Leader here.

How would you describe what they do or contribute here?

Can you provide a specific example or two?

How do you interact with this person?

Describe a particular interaction with him/her. What went well? Not so well?

How do you see him/her and his/her work as being part of the leadership structure in your school?

Please describe the role of the Instructional Coach here.

How would you describe what they do or contribute here?

Can you provide a specific example or two?

How do you interact with this person?

Describe a particular interaction with him/her. What went well? Not so well?

How do you see him/her and his/her work as being part of the leadership structure in your school?

Please describe the role of the School Improvement Team Chair here.

How would you describe what they do or contribute here?

Can you provide a specific example or two?

How do you interact with this person?

Describe a particular interaction with him/her. What went well? Not so well?
How do you see him/her and his/her work as being part of the leadership structure?

11. In addition to these positions, are there others here that we should consider?
   Can you provide examples of how they contribute, what they do?
   Are there any here who, while they might not have distinguished themselves as leaders, you see potential in?
   What makes you think so?
   Do you have any plans for any of these teachers?
   Are there things that you think principals can do to encourage emerging leadership?

*We’re almost finished.*

12. In light of all we’ve discussed, does the way this all seems to happen align with your vision of how instructional leadership should happen?
   Is there anything that you would like to see change?
   Is there anything you think you could do to make that change happen?
   Is there anything that you think teachers might need to do to make that change happen?
   Do you think there are any factors impeding your (or their) ability to make that change happen?

13. Finally, is there anything about the leadership structure here that we have not discussed that you think would be important for me to understand?

*We have talked quite a bit about your school this afternoon. Your taking the time, as busy
as you are, to meet with me is greatly appreciated. The insights you have provided me today have been very helpful and will undoubtedly contribute a great deal to my understanding of how instructional leadership happens here. Hopefully, you’ve enjoyed the conversation as much as I have. As I stated at the outset, your comments today will be kept confidential and I will be giving you an opportunity very soon to review my transcripts of today’s interview so you can help me be sure that they accurately reflect our conversation. You should also know that when I’m writing the final report on my research, I will be using pseudonyms for everyone we’ve discussed here and neither you nor your school will be identified by actual names. So, again, I thank you for participating in this study, your hospitality last week at your school and your time today. Unless you have anything else you would like say today, I will be turning off the recorder now.
Appendix E: Interview Protocol–Teacher Leader

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of how leadership happens in your school. I appreciate your time and contributions as I try to understand how the work that happens around here gets done. Last week I spent quite a bit of time observing in order to gather information about what the principal, teachers and other staff do throughout the day. Today I’m going to ask you some open-ended questions about how instructional leadership gets done here. Your comments will be kept confidential and I will be giving you an opportunity very soon to review transcripts of today’s interview so you can help me be sure that they accurately reflect our conversation. I’d like to ask your permission to record our interview. The recording will help me more accurately represent your ideas and views. Please know that if any questions make you uncomfortable, you can always just let me know that you would rather not answer. Also, should you wish to end our conversation, you may do so at any time. Again, just let me know. Once we’ve reviewed the transcript together, all recordings will be destroyed. Do I have your permission? May I begin?

Research Question 1: How does Instructional Leadership happen in the school?

There’s obviously a lot that happens here every day. Some things are parts of our work that are clearly spelled out in our job descriptions, and titles or professional expectations. Others are more of an “above and beyond” nature. They are things that maybe aren’t spelled out in any collective bargaining agreement or formally assigned, but they get done just the same. Of those, some are operational or managerial matters like supervision of students, meeting with parents, etc. Others are more clearly issues of teaching and learning and the supports for them.

Does the way I’m describing things sound right and make sense to you? Are there any parts that you think you would disagree with or anything that you would want to add to?

Then, recognizing that there are at least these two kinds of work going on, I’d like to ask you about how you see this happening.
1. What do you see as your primary role at this school?

Please describe some of the things that you do on a regular basis that help to fulfill that role.

2. In addition to what we’ve just discussed, what other role(s) do you play and what are some examples of the things you do to fulfill that role(s)?

*These might include supervision duties, committee work, outreach, etc. (i.e., things beyond your teaching responsibilities).*

So, we’ve talked through some things you do here that would probably be considered as in addition to your classroom responsibilities. I’d like to ask some questions about how you and others take on instructional leadership roles. I’d like to first share a definition of instructional leadership for the purposes of framing the next part of our conversation. The organization that I’m taking this definition from says that “…instructional leaders have six roles: making student and adult learning the priority; setting high expectations for performance; gearing content and instruction to standards; creating a culture of continuous learning for adults; using multiple sources of data to assess learning; and activating the community’s support for school success”.

*Any reaction to the definition I just read?*

*Does it align with how you think of instructional leadership?*

*Is there anything that you think ought to be added, deleted or changed?*

*Whose job is it?*

3. How would you describe the roles you’ve talked about and the activities you do as fitting with this definition?

4. How would you describe the activities you do as supporting what the principal and others like yourself are trying to do here? How do you think it all fits together?

5. How do you see these activities ultimately influencing what happen in classrooms here?

*If primary role is classroom teacher*
Can you tell me about how you became involved with these activities? (i.e. how you went from classroom teacher to classroom teacher who also does….)

Were you assigned them or somehow asked/encouraged to become involved?

By whom and how?

Why do you think you were asked/encouraged to take on more?

Can you name others who were similarly sought out?

Do you think for the same reasons you were?

Do you see yourself becoming involved in more or different activities in the future?

Or, if participant indicates that he/she sought opportunities or volunteered

What lead you to do that, to offer your help?

How did it happen, how did you make the offer or make it known that you were interested?

How was your offer received by your principal the first time you made it?

Was there anything he or she does that encouraged you to make the offer or get involved? Can you describe how that happens?

How do you think was your gesture is received by your colleagues?

6. How does decision making around instruction matters happen?

How are they communicated?

7. Are teachers involved in making instructional decisions at your school with regards to matters of curriculum, instruction or assessment?

Who?
Can you describe an instance in which you were involved?

8. Do you think there are things that the principal does or structures that are in place that encourages staff members to engage in instructional leadership?

9. Do you think that the principal could do something more or differently to encourage even greater participation from others?

   Why do you think that hasn’t happened?

10. Can you name any teachers you work with here who you think could take on some leadership roles and really contribute, but who just haven’t?

   Do you have thoughts on why they haven’t?

   Do you have thoughts on what the principal could do that would encourage them?

   Is something you or a peer could do?

11. What do you think you’ll be doing in three years? Five?

We’re almost finished.

12. In light of all we’ve discussed and thinking back to our definition, does the way things work here align with your vision of how instructional leadership should happen?

   Is there anything that you would like to see change?

   Is there anything you think principals could do to make that change happen?

   Is there anything you think you or your colleagues could do to help make that change happen?

   Are there things that impede your (or their) ability to make that change happen?

   Is there anything about the leadership structure here that we have not discussed that you think would be important for me to understand?
We have talked quite a bit about your school this afternoon. Your taking the time, as busy as you are, to meet with me is greatly appreciated. The insights you have provided me today have been very helpful and will undoubtedly contribute a great deal to my understanding of how instructional leadership happens here. Hopefully, you’ve enjoyed the conversation as much as I have. As I stated at the outset, your comments today will be kept confidential and I will be giving you an opportunity very soon to review my transcripts of today’s interview so you can help me be sure that they accurately reflect our conversation. You should also know that when I’m writing the final report on my research, I will be using pseudonyms for everyone we’ve discussed here and neither you nor your school will be identified by your real names. So, again, I thank you for participating in this study, your hospitality last week at your school and your time today. Unless you have anything else you would like say today, I will be turning off the recorder now.