

Educational Leadership

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Introduction

Leadership is a central theme in recent conversations about improving K-12 education. This is not surprising; over the past few decades researchers have consistently reported that school leadership, principal leadership in particular, is critical in developing and sustaining those school-level conditions believed essential for instructional improvement (Rosenholtz, 1989; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). While volumes have been filled with discussions on education leadership, many scholars and practitioners have raised questions about research on leadership. Indeed, scholars have called for a re-focusing of scholarship in the field of educational administration in general.

This special issue of *EEPA* is designed to contribute to this on-going conversation about re-focusing scholarship in educational administration in general and education leadership in particular. The first three articles address the issue of leadership for instructional improvement from a distributed perspective. Eric Camburn, Brian Rowan, and James Taylor show that participation in a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model influences the distribution of leadership functions across positions in schools and impacts the extent to which particular leadership functions get activated. Camburn and colleagues also show that professional development can influence leadership practice.

Continuing to look at how the performance of school leadership functions is distributed, the next two articles take a more in-depth look at distributed leadership on the ground. Through a multisite case study of Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), Michael Copland underscores

that the distribution of leadership in schools shifts over time as school leaders' roles change. Further, Copland shows that while new structures can be a means of building leadership capacity, turnover of key leaders coupled with limited preparation for this turnover threaten sustainability of improvement initiatives. Jennifer Goldstein examines efforts to give teachers responsibility for teacher evaluation through a case study of one school district's implementation of Peer Assistance and Review (PAR). Goldstein's article identifies some core challenges involved in distributing leadership, especially for leadership functions that have been strongly tied to the school principal.

Mary Kay Stein and Barbara Nelson develop the notion of Leadership Content Knowledge (LCK) pressing us to consider what leaders need to know about the teaching and learning of particular school subjects in order to practice as instructional leaders. Contending that educational administration scholars have neglected administrators' understanding of subject matter and how it must be transformed for the purposes of leadership, Nelson and Stein explore the subject-matter-knowledge requirements of leadership at different levels of the local school system. David McGough's article also focuses on school leaders' professional learning but situates that learning in school principals' learning stories. McGough's article illuminates how school principals' professional learning is influenced by the learning stories that guides how they apprehend novelty.

Through a case of a school district moving from court-ordered desegregation to unitary status, Ellen Goldring, Robert Crowson, David Laird,

and Robert Berk examine how school principals define leadership in transition. Arguing that policy implementation implies a transition from one *modus operandi* to another, Goldring and her colleagues explore school leadership during this process of transition.

Moving Forward: Some Directions for Educational Leadership Research

Taken together, these articles identify a number of themes and in doing so suggest potentially fruitful directions for research on educational leadership. Three of these themes—leadership for teaching and learning, distributed leadership, and systemic leadership—suggest interesting lines of inquiry.

Leadership for Teaching and Learning

These articles are grounded in a concern with leadership for improving teaching and learning. This is no accident; as editor I intentionally focused the special issue on relations between education leadership and instructional improvement. For the most part instruction and its improvement has not been a hot topic in research on educational administration. As scholars of educational administration increasingly argue that the main responsibility of school leaders should be the improvement of teaching and student learning (Murphy, 2002), this will undoubtedly change. Moreover, shifts in the policy environment over the past couple of decades that have attempted to forge wide-ranging changes in classroom instruction are likely to afford classroom teaching and student learning a central role in educational leadership research.

A number of the articles in this special issue provide rich illustrations of ways in which scholarship on education leadership can put teaching and learning front and center in studies of educational leadership. A critical issue here, suggested by Stein and Nelson, is that it is not simply instruction but instruction in particular school subjects that needs to feature more prominently in research on educational leadership. Teachers don't just teach—they teach mathematics, reading, and science and how they enact their roles depends in part on the school subject. As one might expect, then, leadership for instruction is subject matter sensitive and research on educational leadership must take this into account (Burch & Spillane, 2003; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003).

Stein and Nelson show how investigations of leadership expertise need to be subject matter specific because it is inadequate for administrators to generalize from what they know about instruction in one subject area to another subject area. Research on leadership content knowledge suggests one line of inquiry. Other aspects of educational leadership might also be studied in ways that are sensitive to the subject matter such as the distribution of leadership functions across positions in schools and school districts by subject area.

Distributed Leadership

Another theme addressed in many of these articles is distributed leadership including everything from the distribution of leadership functions across positions to attempts to unpack the complexities involved when the work of leadership is “stretched over” (Rogoff, 1990) two or more leaders. These articles make a contribution to addressing what Bennett, Wise, Woods, and Harvey (2003) correctly identify as a limited empirical knowledge base on distributed leadership and, equally important, suggest numerous avenues for future research. For example, Goldstein suggests two models of distributed leadership, divided responsibility and shared responsibility for leadership tasks, pointing us to one area where the knowledge base is thin on distributed leadership; that is, understanding how leaders practices relate to one another when leadership is distributed.

Recent work puts forth ways of thinking about this aspect of distributed leadership suggesting potentially fruitful lines of inquiry. Work undertaken by the Distributed Leadership Study, suggests three ways in which leadership might be stretched over the practice of leaders—collaborated distribution, collective distribution, and coordinated distribution (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2000; Spillane, Diamond, Sherer, & Coldren, in press). Collaborated distribution refers to leadership practice where leaders work together to execute a particular leadership function where one leader's practice becomes the basis for another leader's practice and *visa-versa*; there is a reciprocal interdependency. Collective distribution refers to the practice of two or more leaders who work separately but interdependently in pursuit of a shared goal involving interdependent activities that produce a common practice. Coordinated distribution denotes leadership practice

in which different leadership tasks that must be performed in a particular sequence for the execution of some leadership function—the interdependency among tasks and the leaders responsible for executing these tasks, is sequential. Each of these three types of distributions suggests different interdependencies among the practices of school leaders that have implications for thinking about and investigating how leadership expertise might be distributed.

Peter Gronn, develops a two dimensional taxonomy of distributed leadership structures, differentiating arrangements by the mode of conjoint agency (coperformance or collective performance) and the size of the concertively acting group (Gronn, 2003). Among other things, Gronn unpacks examples of co-performance with intuitive working relations, coperformance with institutionalized practices, collective performance with intuitive working relations, and collective performance with institutionalized practices. This work provides a rich conceptual model for framing investigations of distributed leadership.

Educational Leadership in and Across the Education System

Another theme that these articles bring to the fore is the importance of situating educational leadership at any one level of the education “system” in the larger system. As Elmore (2000) argues, a systems perspective is critical in thinking about educational leadership in the service of large scale instructional improvement. Studies of educational leadership more often than not focus on what happens within the schoolhouse or district office. These articles suggest that studies of educational leadership at any one level of the system—department, school, and district office—must take account of how educational leadership is both vertical and horizontal distributed. Education leadership can be orchestrated from and across different levels of the school system (e.g., district office) and from, through, and with agencies beyond the formal government system (e.g., Comprehensive School Reform models). The challenge in understanding educational leadership is developing rich and robust understandings of the phenomena at one or more levels of the system while simultaneously attending to the policies, programs, and structures at various levels of the system that enable and constrain that practice. Goldring and her colleagues underscore

this point in their attention to leadership in transition. Stein and Nelson, illuminate the importance of this system perspective by illustrating how the form that leadership content knowledge takes might differ depending on the leadership function and proximity to the classroom.

Of course the “education system” is complex construct. The education system extends beyond the formal government system of schools, school districts, and state departments. As Camburn and colleagues illustrate the nonprofit sector and its engagement with the government sector is critical in efforts to understand educational leadership. Though not the focus of these articles, the for-profit sector is an increasingly important player in education and its improvement. A critical issue then, not addressed in these articles, concerns the role of government, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies in education leadership and its development.

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between state policy, local government agencies, and teachers’ and school administrators’ practice. James P. Spillane is the editor of *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

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