Teacher Leaders: Transforming Schools from the Inside

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INTRODUCTION

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Let's say it right off: teacher leadership is *hard*. Many of the reasons are obvious: Teaching is a highly labor-intensive profession to begin with, leaving little downtime for work with other adults. School schedules are notoriously stingy with space for adult collaboration. Teachers are rarely paid to exercise leadership; when they are, they are never paid enough. There is a fundamentally egalitarian ethos in the teaching profession. Those who would step forward to offer advice to their peers, or promote innovative ideas, or speak up on behalf of their colleagues are, as often as not, regarded with suspicion or resentment. Unions, ironically, with their historic concern for clear delineation between supervisors and supervised, do not on balance do as much as one would hope to promote teacher leadership.

Teacher leaders commonly report feeling trapped in the "middle space" (Lieberman & Miller, 2004, p. 84) between the teachers whom they attempt to influence and represent and the administrators who count on them to do work that the administrators are, for various reasons, unable to do themselves—while being trusted fully by neither.

Teacher leadership may be especially challenging today, when so many of the urgent "reforms" being visited upon schools come with mandates that do not emphasize or reward—or, sometimes, even tolerate—teachers' exercise of initiative and autonomy, let alone leadership. The editors of the most recent *Occasional Paper* remark:

> Teachers are increasingly told that the measure of professionalism is not the development of their own expertise and responsiveness to the individual children in front of them. Rather, it is bought through their fidelity to uniform, commercial and heavily scripted curricula that promise (but often fail to deliver) greater student success (Boldt, Salvio, & Taubman, 2009, p. 4).

The extraordinary dominance of externally imposed accountability and standardization in this decade, defined in huge measure by test results and buttressed by tight bureaucratic and administrative regulation, is designed to leave little, if any, room for leadership from within the ranks.

For all these reasons, teacher leadership has never been more crucial.

A glance at the emergent literature on "teacher leadership"—or at least the

number of titles with that phrase included in the lists of Amazon and Barnes and Noble, for example—may give a false sense of linear progress. The strong movement for the professionalism of teaching in the 1990s and early years of this decade produced a long overdue awareness of the integral role that teacher leadership must play in any true reform of the schools. Wasley (1991), Barth (1990), Bolman and Deal (1994), Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Lieberman and Miller (2004), and Danielson (2006), among many others, have weighed in with books on the topic and identified the instructional leadership of teachers as being at least as important as that of strong principals. But the rapid emergence of the testing culture has overwhelmed such considerations, at least for the moment, and the best thinkers have turned to other, more immediate and urgent battles. The even more recent economic downturn has taken an evident toll as well. The number of teacher leadership positions in schools and districts, which had increased impressively in the past two decades, has now begun a noticeable decline as funding has dried up.

This volume is a modest attempt to restore the issue of teacher leadership to the prominence it deserves and requires.

What *is* teacher leadership, anyway? The definition problem has complicated some of the organizational thinking on the topic, and even confounded some prospective contributors to this volume. Is "teacher leadership" actually a truism? (After all, *all* teachers are leaders within their own classrooms.) Is it an oxymoron? (Teachers teach, leaders lead.) Is it a specific, designated role? Or is it a hard-to-get-your-hands-around abstraction, visible only in its subtle impact on school culture? Is it, in fact, even a useful construct, something that can help us make sense of the way schools either change to accommodate the needs of their students or remain stuck in old, corrosive patterns of failure?

Teacher leadership, as we use the term in this volume, has been, and in some places still is, all of these. The writers in these pages do not spend a great deal of time torturing the nuances of the definition, preferring to explore instead the vast variety of things teacher leaders do to make a difference in their schools; the daunting challenges of fulfilling roles in which you're neither, entirely, a teacher nor a leader; and the ways that schools can take advantage of this powerful—and yet frequently untapped—source of vitality and renewal.

Teacher leadership has, to most proponents of progressive, democratic education, an appealing historical ring to it. It defies, in some measure, the notion of schools as hierarchies. It implies that everyone who works within a school organization has some responsibility for the welfare of the community as a whole. It

broadens the meaning of what it is to teach. It suggests a commitment to change for the better; progress in the interest of more roundly educated students; and, ultimately, a better society. "Teachers [need] to assert themselves more directly about educational affairs... in both the internal conduct of the schools by introducing a greater amount of teacher responsibility in administration, and outside in relation to the public and the community" (Dewey, 1933, p.390). To more recent researchers and theorists, it presents a dynamic antidote to the isolation of teachers in their classrooms, unable to take advantage of the rich opportunities for better practice that collaboration offers, and to the "flatness" of the teaching profession, which so often leaves teachers with a vista only of recurring waves of their own students, year after year.

To be clear, teacher leadership comes in many distinct variations, and teacher leaders come in many shapes and sizes. There remain the traditional teacher leaders of yore: the department chairs, the staff developers, the head teachers, and the union officers. There is a newer wave of instructional and learning and support specialists and coaches and coordinators—and even specifically titled "teacher leaders." But of even greater significance for our purposes here are the unofficial—and often unacknowledged—acts of teachers who support and extend each other's practice in a million quiet ways; who press for the greater care of English language learners or dyslexic or bullied or simply invisible students; or who advocate on committees or in principals' offices or in the hallways for fair treatment of their colleagues or overdue instructional reforms. These are the people, struggling to create cultures where these acts are the norm, about whom the authors write so poignantly in the following pages.

Although there is considerable overlap among the essays, we have organized them loosely into three categories: *mentoring*, to address the essential question of teacher helping teacher; *transforming school culture*, to reflect some of the many ways teachers make a difference in the environment immediately beyond their classrooms; and *advocating* for change, to spotlight the voices teacher leaders find ways to project in the interest of creating broader and more enduring change.

Mentoring

Any teacher knows that, no matter what the formal arrangements for supervision and evaluation, it is the guidance and modeling of colleagues that most often make the difference in what you do in your classroom. Teachers may have coaches or mentors officially assigned to them, but as often as not, they will

gravitate to a fellow teacher of their own choice for the most immediate and important instructional help. Jill Stacy and Nayantara Mhatre, in the compelling piece that opens this volume, describe a spontaneous relationship that has equal measures of mentoring, peer coaching, and teaming. Their getting together is not an event that screams "leadership" in any conventional form. But in its emphasis on careful self-study and co-planning—and on the ultimately democratic mutuality of their partnership—it offers a model of the kind of internally generated support and motivation that even the most effective leaders are often unable to inspire or create.

Kami Patrizio reminds us simultaneously of two very different things: 1) Most mentoring arrangements in schools are not so casually and comfortably effectuated as that of Stacy and Mhatre. To make them more than isolated events, they require careful structuring, thorough preparation, and continual monitoring. 2) On the other hand, there is a distinct strain of human sensitivity (call it, maybe, *poetry*) that is at the heart of any truly effective mentoring relationship. And this requires of prospective mentors not only pedagogy, but also a deep, hard look into themselves to confront the elusive issues of identity, empathy, morality, and emotion.

Transforming School Culture

That changing schools is long, hard, and usually painful work has become starkly evident at this moment in history. It is probably understandable that our society has turned with a vengeance to some of the simpler remedies: set high, specific standards; test inveterately for compliance; and punish inadequate results. Or tear the existing structures down, replace them with new, smaller schools, and insist that these tender sprouts quickly achieve the results the old schools couldn't. But the approach with potentially the greatest long-term impact is ultimately the most difficult: it is the work of transforming schools into collaborative, collegial cultures, where the engagement and leadership of teachers is natural and persistent (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, pp. 44-52).

Jessica Endlich brings us into intimate contact with the faculty of a small urban high school which depends heavily on voluntary teacher leadership, and finds itself straining against the limits of capacity. Her candid interviews show vividly the tensions that exist when there is never enough time, support, appreciation, and equity to turn a wonderful idea into reality. She suggests some baseline, common-sense strategies to enable teachers to lead without sacrificing their students or their own personal lives.

While the theme of almost all the authors in this volume is that collaboration will necessarily be at the heart of any lasting changes, it is also evident that one person can motivate specific innovations or reforms and thus make a real difference. Jennifer Groves writes movingly of the need for schools to be true learning communities and to create collective ways for teachers to share and generate knowledge. She found Sarason's (1996) call for risk taking and initiative compelling, and stepped forward to bring teachers together. It was her idea and organization of a professional development book club that brought the teachers in her school away from their regular routine, created a "rich network of learning," and offered hope and a sense of renewal to a number of her colleagues.

Kathy Rockwood's graduate students are pragmatic and idealistic all at once, and present a dramatically varied picture of how schools go about involving their teachers in leadership. As they tell their stories through a threaded internet conversation, it becomes evident that the trust, communication, transparency, and support that make distributed leadership workable and satisfying in some places is so visibly and painfully lacking in others. Not surprisingly, it is the former schools that, for the most part, produce the most fulfilled teachers and successful students.

Advocating for Change

Clara Lin tells the inspiring tale of a new teacher who refused to accept the dreary status quo to which beginning professionals are so often consigned. Almost in anger at the assumption that she was supposed to be miserable for her whole first year, she struggled mightily to find innovative ways to solve her most intractable classroom problems, and then turned her energies to whole-school reform. The morass of school and community politics in which she quickly found herself turned out to be a vehicle of powerful learning for Lin, as well as the basis for a major school change. Her discovery that "'novice teaching' and 'teacher leadership' are not mutually exclusive terms" is a happy one.

Children are at the heart of most teacher leaders' struggles. But none, it would seem from Lillian Hernandez and Cristian Solorza's essay, can surpass the passion and intensity inspired by English Language Learners and other bilingual and immigrant students in their teachers, who so often and so completely identify with the daily struggles and obstacles these students face in school. For these teachers, leadership feels less like an option than an imperative. They sense the societal forces so starkly arrayed against non-English speaking children and feel they have no choice but to step forward and speak up. Bank Street's BETLA program has

prepared teacher leaders with the voice and resources to advocate for the voiceless.

Finally, Robin Hummel makes an emphatic, persuasive plea for teachers to seize the reins of instructional leadership and to take responsibility—even in the face of recalcitrant administrators and increasingly prescriptive curricula—for their own professional learning and growth. She makes the case for action research as a particularly potent professional development tool, and shows how it serves in addition to liberate teachers from inertia and dependency. Her own research indicates that teacher leadership not only benefits the field in important ways but, in fact, satisfies an urgent personal/professional need in many teachers.

These voices, many of them publishing for the first time, make an eloquent case for more attention—scholarly, public, human—to be paid to these critically important, too-often neglected people in the middle.

BECOMING A TEACHER LEADER WITHIN YOUR CLASSROOM: A DIALOGUE

nayantara mhatre and jill stacy

I don't know what to do about Heather and Diane. Based on their written answers to literature assignments and their lack of participation in class discussions, it seems that they're not really understanding the plot of the novel we're reading as a class. I know my students are all on different reading levels, but they need help. I want them to be and feel successful, but where do I start?
(E-mail from Nayantara to Jill, December 2007)

Nayantara

I first approached Jill halfway through my second year of teaching sixth grade at a progressive independent school in New York City because I was at a loss about what to do with two of my students who had been in her class the year before. It was assumed by most, including me, that because I had made it through my first year, I "knew what I was doing." However, I was facing new challenges that neither my first year's experience nor my graduate school work had prepared me for.

The literature program I had inherited from previous sixth-grade teachers was based on at-home reading assignments, usually two or three chapters per week, and written responses to questions. It's almost embarrassing to share now, but beyond the initial introduction to the novels that all the students were assigned, we rarely read together in class, and my students were not reaping the benefits of sharing ideas with their peers. The assumption was that everyone in the class could independently read literature critically.

I had taken a literacy class designed for teachers of kindergarten through third grade during my first semester of graduate school. It was the first time I had been introduced to any formal pedagogical methods; because I had never taught in a classroom, it all felt rather out of context and irrelevant. Additionally, because I was enrolled in a museum education program, I was certain I'd be developing curriculum in a museum one day, not teaching young children how to read.

However, my path had taken me out of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, where I had been designing and implementing curriculum in an after-school program for teenagers, and into the classroom. And while I am not teaching young children how to turn letters and sounds into words and sentences, in my second

year I realized that I was still teaching slightly older children how to read. The problem was that I didn't know how.

Jill

"I never learned how to really teach reading." Nayantara's words sat with me for a number of days. I recalled how lonely many periods of my years as a beginning teacher had been. I had started out down the same path five years ago as a fourth- and fifth-grade teacher, asking many of the same questions Nayantara had had for me the day she approached me. I was even pursuing another degree in literacy in order to refine my classroom practice. My survival during these beginning years depended on the support of two mentors along the way, two individuals who took the time to reach out to me so I might swim rather than sink. I decided to ask Nayantara if she would consider working together with me and engage in a mentoring relationship. She readily accepted my invitation and our journey began.

My interactions with Nayantara prior to mentoring her consisted primarily of conversations during division and department meetings. I had not known who she was as an educator within the classroom before we began this relationship.

Our first meeting gave me insight into Nayantara's current literacy practices and instructional strategies. As we talked, she was able to articulate the areas of literacy she wanted to focus on and she asked me to help her change the way she taught books to the whole class.

In our division at our school, students read novels that are meant to add to their knowledge and enhance their understanding of the concepts rooted in our social studies curriculum. Nayantara was about to begin a new book, but was frustrated with the "read–answer questions–whole class discussions" format she had been using. She recognized that her struggling readers had difficulty reading the books independently at home. The students' answers were "dry," and not everyone participated in the discussions. She knew there was something else she could have been doing, but was unsure of how to break away from her current practice.

Thus began the first cycle of our relationship. We set aside one forty-five minute period a week (ordinarily a preparation period) to meet, debrief, and plan our next steps. Reflecting on our experiences was an integral part of the process; we often used concerns or questions that surfaced in our individual journals to guide our discussions. There were times, of course, that something unexpected arose and we were unable to meet, but when this happened, we kept in contact via e-mail.

Throughout this first cycle, Nayantara and I focused our work on the rea-

son she had approached me: thinking about and learning how to change reading instruction so she could meet the needs of her students. We looked at the overall concept of differentiated instruction. Using the ideas we discussed, Nayantara put a literature circles structure in place in her room.

I played several roles during this process. During our meetings, I shared with Nayantara the practices I had enacted in my room using literature circles and I asked questions about her goals for her students in using this format. When I was in her classroom, I worked primarily with the small groups she had created and occasionally one-on-one with a student. Our work was content-specific; the beginning of our relationship was, as Nayantara described it, noninvasive.

Nayantara

At first, I was cautious about working so closely with Jill. My classroom was my space, and I wasn't sure I was ready to make myself vulnerable to someone else's ideas. However, I eventually felt safe working with Jill for a couple of reasons. To be frank, the most important reason was that she was my colleague and not my supervisor. That Jill was going back to her own classroom of students made me feel that she wouldn't be judging me. It wasn't threatening to have her in my classroom. She was neither evaluating me nor giving directives; rather, she was trying to help me have more success with my students.

When we began, we focused on specific lessons and assignments. This was a productive way for us to start. We examined the types of questions I was asking, both in class and for homework. I never felt that Jill was critiquing me as a person—which can be difficult to separate from me as a teacher—but rather that she was evaluating the techniques that I was using.

When we moved on to Jill observing me, I could feel myself getting nervous. There she was, sitting in the back of the classroom furiously taking notes. However, despite my tendency to focus on what went wrong during our observation, or to focus on something entirely different that had materialized in the interim, Jill always started our debriefing meetings with positive feedback. We had built a sense of trust, and I could be honest about my concerns and bring up new issues. Because of this trust, I was confident and eager to take Jill's suggestions and tailor them to my teaching style and the learning styles of my students.

While working with Jill has been a generally positive, productive experience, there were some roadblocks with regard to our personal goals and philosophies, as well as to our relationships to other people at school.

Jill was really enthusiastic about working with me. I was excited about the possibilities, but nervous about what I had gotten myself into. She had so many ideas, both in terms of theory and practice, and it sometimes felt overwhelming. I was still a second year-teacher and I wasn't sure how much I could, or wanted to, change at one time. As our work picked up, I became more aware of all the things I could be doing better. (Thankfully, Jill was good about reminding me about the things I was already doing well.) I brought up so many things with Jill in our pre- and postlesson meetings, that as I look back, it seems that while we made progress, much of it was superficial. Perhaps, however, the surface changes were a good way to test the waters in working with Jill. Perhaps they were indicative of my anxiety about looking so closely at my own practice. In retrospect, I wish we could have picked one specific goal to examine in greater depth; I should have slowed down along with my students.

Jill

Trying to keep our work focused was definitely a recurring theme throughout my later journal entries.

I also noticed that I tried to focus our conversation, but felt that it was all over the place at some points while we are talking. I suppose this is part of discourse, but I don't want her to feel overwhelmed with too much information. (Journal entry, March 2008)

It was at this point that I knew we were no longer in the honeymoon phase. Nayantara and I had established a trusting, caring partnership, and were facing new obstacles. I realized that each time we met to debrief, the goals of our work changed. While I tried to keep our work centered on a specific literacy strategy, Nayantara posed important questions as she analyzed her practice, leading us in new directions. For example, after observing a lesson I had taught to my class on the strategy of asking questions when you are reading, Nayantara identified organization as an area she wanted to concentrate on. "Organization—of time, materials, logistics—I never think to use chart paper. How can I use chart paper?" she exclaimed. Honestly, at first I was concerned that not only did her comments point us in a new direction, but also that they were taking us away from our literacy-content focus. I wondered if I had done something wrong or had not observed something I should have noticed earlier. How was I going to ensure I included subject matter in our work together as we explored this new issue? As Feiman-

Nemser and Parker (1990), writing about coaching relationships, had pointed out, "Beginning teachers need help learning to organize students for purposes of teaching and learning," but can still focus on structure, logistics, management, and organization, as it is "rooted in the specifics of content" (p. 41). I had forgotten that Nayantara was a beginning teacher. She's smart, confident, and a reflective educator. That doesn't mean, though, that she had mastered everything, just as I certainly didn't have all the answers.

Nayantara

The major focus of our work together was exploring how differentiated literacy instruction would impact the range of learners in my classroom. While I understood that this could potentially be a positive experience for all my students, and particularly the two I had initially struggled to reach, I was not sure I bought into the concept of differentiation. At first it seemed rather unprogressive, and reminded me of the negativity I felt when I was in tracked groups in middle school. I was therefore nervous about changing things.

> *How is this different than tracking? Is this approach actually going to work? How would my students feel about it? Will I be making more work for myself? Will parents get upset that their child is not getting the same homework assignment as another child?* (E-mail from Nayantara to Jill, December 2007)

Jill

I also wondered if our jumping from idea to idea—from organization, to asking questions, to materials—was because I pushed the topic of differentiation too quickly. I knew that Nayantara was still questioning this approach and wasn't necessarily ready to move forward with differentiation in her literacy practice. I had encountered the same instructional difficulties and questions as Nayantara. I thought I had conveyed to her my empathy, my understanding of how I knew what she was going through. I realize now that, while I was on this journey, she would take the path she wished to take at the speed she needed, at her level of readiness.

Another challenge I encountered in my role was balancing how much information I shared directly with Nayantara, and how much I left her to discover through my guidance. I felt it was essential that she be given the opportunity to construct meaning from her own experiences, to make meaning of her own learn-

ing to teach. But I also didn't want her to feel frustrated and walk away without any ideas that she could pick and choose from to help shape her practice. Often, as we debriefed, I felt as if I dominated the beginning of our meeting by asking many guiding questions to prompt Nayantara's thinking, and that at the end I shared examples of how we could address some of the issues we had been discussing. I left feeling unsure and wondering if I had talked too much and asked either too many guiding questions or not enough questions that led in the correct direction. As I was new at this, I didn't have a definitive idea about what this conversation was supposed to feel and look like, but I knew that the dialogue would vary from person to person, and from conversation to conversation. With time and practice, a smooth rhythm fell into place.

Nayantara

While I was slightly concerned about what my students and their parents would think about my work with Jill, I was more concerned about the reaction of our supervisors. Our school generally encourages and supports collaboration, but I wondered if the work I was doing with Jill was supposed to be done instead with our learning specialist or our curriculum coordinator. I was meeting with them as well, but given the nature of that particular year, much of my time with them was spent confronting other, equally important, issues. Was working with Jill challenging the well-established hierarchy of roles at our school? Did it matter?

Jill

I struggled over how to define the nature of our relationship as it developed. In the beginning, my relationship with Nayantara exhibited many of the qualities of mentoring. I am a more experienced teacher and Nayantara was the novice or beginning teacher. However, as our relationship evolved, we moved beyond the narrow definition of mentoring. Traditionally, mentoring at our school was designed to support new teachers, but ended once the teachers were settled into their new surroundings and position. Our relationship, unlike this model, did not stop simply because we had explored our initial goals. Instead, as Nayantara began to identify her problems and address various literacy practices, we developed a professional partnership, one in which we learn from each other by asking questions, offering opinions, and providing suggestions.

While it was perhaps clear to others that Nayantara has learned from me, what was not as apparent was that I have learned from her. She asks me questions

about my practice that push me to think about the instructional strategies I choose to put in place in my classroom. I am then able to explain more clearly what I am doing and why. Ours is a professional partnership, two colleagues working together to gain knowledge that will further our literacy practices within our respective classrooms.

There's no end to this type of relationship, as you continuously question and refine your practice. Recently, Nayantara was telling me about how she would like to structure her work with student teachers and her new grade-level partner next year. As I left this informal meeting and stepped onto the subway, I wondered whether she would be taking on these leadership roles with such confidence if we hadn't worked together.

Nayantara

During my first two years of teaching I noticed a disconnect between what I had learned in graduate school and what I learned in the classroom. I found that even the most specific, practical suggestions from a professor ("If you can hear my voice, clap once…") might not be effective in every situation.

While working with Jill wasn't always perfect, it was ultimately successful. It wasn't successful because it made me think, "Great, I fixed that problem. Now we're done," but rather the opposite. It was and will continue to be successful because I feel supported and confident in rethinking and improving my practice. I'm more interested now in exploring new theories and techniques in my classroom, and I understand that not everything is going to work for my students or for me.

Although we've completed graduate school, it doesn't mean we can or should stop learning. While we can learn from our professors and our administrators, often the people in neighboring classrooms can help us the most. Jill shared her experience and knowledge through our partnership. I saw her evolve as a teacher leader, and was able to tap into my emerging leadership qualities and apply them to my own professional relationships.

WALKING A HALL OF MIRRORS

kami patrizio

I remember Lois's eyes the most clearly, though not the color so much as the kind affect that danced around them. I was 21, a new teacher in a massive urban school district. I entered the job through an alternate route program, more aware of social injustice than the realities of teaching and learning. With no experience or coursework to qualify me, I had been placed as a teacher in a junior high special day class for adolescents labeled as "severely handicapped." These 10 students were between the ages of 11 and 13, and ranged on cognitive assessments from 3 months to 8 years of age. There were three aides in the classroom, women who alterately rescued and humiliated me in front of colleagues and students—when they were not on the playground smoking cigarettes.

I honestly cannot recall a single discussion about content or pedagogy during that first year of teaching. Like many new teachers, I was in survival mode. The fluid political and cultural contexts of that urban school presented me with a myriad of challenges. Questions of race, socioeconomics, and my own preparation as a teacher impeded my ability to focus on the individual needs of the exceptional students in my classroom. Figuring out how to engage in any best teaching practices required that I figure out who I was as a person and as a professional.

The memories that I do have of that first year are all connected to conversations with Lois. A representative of the Special Education Department who was responsible for supervising 14 first-year special educators, she was one of three mentors that I had been assigned by the school district. Though our contact was only monthly at best, I immediately felt sustained when she arrived at my classroom door. She was calm, centered, intelligent, and still passionate about her work after over 20 years of working in schools. She allowed me to connect with her at a time when I was drowning. In many ways, Lois's mentoring kept me in this field and shaped my five subsequent years in the classroom, my leadership in educational nonprofits, my graduate and doctoral studies, and my focus on the role of identity in education. The hours that we spent talking were the foundation of my identity as a teacher.

It has been almost 15 years since I have had any contact with Lois, but her influence continues to fuel my work. My dissertation research about mentor teacher development in a Professional Development School (PDS) was an homage to her and a testament to my continued exploration of the relationship between identity formation and leadership in schools. Investigating the ways that teachers became

leaders when they took on mentoring positions in the PDS often reminded me of Lois. I watched mentors develop during the three years of the research project, often suspending their own judgments and opinions in an attempt to help interns understand the complex social and political dynamics that played out in the school and the classroom. Moreover, when they worked together in the PDS Steering Committee, they began to demonstrate the same tendency to try to understand other mentors during the process of PDS program development. Individuals who were stridently opinionated in faculty meetings and personal interactions became more collaborative and process-oriented when they were put in the leadership position of PDS mentor. It was a change that I remembered Lois beginning to facilitate in me, long ago. The PDS's collaborative underpinnings and theoretical foundation in inquiry-based renewal (Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, and Goodlad, 2004), harmonized mentors' voices in dyads with interns and in the Steering Committee.

These collaborative processes also provided people with opportunities to learn about their practice, their colleagues, and themselves. The mentors in this PDS were secondary-level in-service teachers, presented with the additional charge of working with a graduate-level intern from a nearby university for nine months of the school year. These mentors also participated in PDS-specific professional development workshops and a steering committee, which required that they consider the dynamics of group process, adult learning, organizations, collaboration, and programmatic decision making. They were in positions of teacher leadership. I found a dearth of research on mentor teachers to inform my understanding of these mentors' experiences (AERA, 2005) and wondered how they went about making the "psychological shift from being authored by…to authoring their own stories" (Rodgers and Scott, 2008, p. 733) as they worked in the PDS. Mentors often seemed to require support when changing their focus from the classroom to the PDS partnership. I had observed this happening in different groups and dyads in the PDS. *How* they came to understand themselves in relation to this type of big picture thinking was the "black box" (Rodgers and Scott, 2008) that I hoped to illuminate through my research. It was with this in mind that I set out to use a constructivist-developmental framework of identity and voice to explore mentors' leadership development in the PDS.

Variable Terrain

The context of the mentor's identity spans vast *emotional geographies* (Hargreaves, 2001), shaped by moral, professional, cultural, ethnic, personal, profes-

sional, and political influences. The narratives that emerged during mentors' meetings with interns, PDS Steering Committee meetings, and research interviews revealed the complex nature of identity formation in the PDS. The process was dynamic and unstable (Rodgers and Scott, 2008), grounded in relationships, and often found mentors questioning their most deeply seated beliefs in the face of new situations. Self-authoring their identity in the PDS terrain "within the professionally pertinent array of possibilities" (Coldron and Smith, 1999, p. 714) required considering who they were and how they acted. There was frequent dissonance between the two.

I chose to feature some of "Debbie's" narrative here because of the ways she went about addressing this dissonance. She was an experienced mentor who tried hard to understand others' perspectives and had a sense of agency about her role in creating the PDS program. She was committed both to acting as a "guide on the side" to interns as well as to learning from them. She was confident in her abilities and open to learning new things.

As I analyzed the transcripts of my conversations with Debbie, I was struck by the variety of experiences that she recounted. She discussed complicated, sensitive, and painful incidents where she both sought support from colleagues and interns and provided support to them. Her role as a mentor put her in a new leadership position and made the politics of these incidents more pertinent—and confusing. Many of Debbie's words suggested that she was forced to confront conflicting and painful questions about her sense of self. Her descriptions and questions left me with a recurring image: as Debbie sought to make meaning and self-author her identity, she walked a hall of mirrors. The hall was lined with the reflections of those with whom she had the closest relational ties: her mentee, her colleagues, and occasionally university representatives. The interactions of these reflections defined the emotional geographies she would use to orient herself during the course of her mentoring experience. Her choice of where to place herself in relation to these geographies was based in the common ground of the students in her school, to be sure, but also in a search for what it meant to be human on a path informed by others' variable ways of knowing.

Listening for Voice, Listening for Resonance

I decided to use the listening guide (Balan, 2005; Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch, 2005) to analyze Debbie's process of mentor development. I wanted to "draw on voice, resonance, and relationship" (Gilligan et al., p. 253) in Debbie's experiences, as well as my own. Part of the listening guide's four-step analytical process involved the cre-

ation of *I-poems*. Sections of one of these poems are featured here because they so poignantly limn the rich layers of Debbie's identity formation. The poem also illustrates that one woman's narrative can hold universal lessons of humanness that transcend school boundaries. The emotional geography of Debbie's identity grew far beyond the context of the PDS in which she worked.

To work through and respond well to the conflicted conditions of our own becoming and of our students', we need to consider narratives, such as little Phillipe's or Hans's or Jonathan's, that contain the painful conflicts that make history, and to resist, as much as we can, the wish to prevent them with the right pedagogy or interpretation. Quite divergently, pedagogy resides in the tensions between the past and the present, between the history we can recall and its "invisible ink," and, if all goes well, in narrating the meeting point between "the adult in the child" and "the child in the adult." What allows for these conflicts to be meaningful is the teacher's capacity to symbolize them, rather than school them away, both in herself and in students.

Intersections and Allegiances

When I asked Debbie to describe a critical incident from her mentoring experience, her reflections led seamlessly from one to another until she had described two such incidents that had occurred during the course of one year. Each story detailed a challenging situation that put Debbie at the center of multiple tensions. She often seemed conflicted between perceptions of herself, her allegiances to her colleagues, and her responsibilities to and for interns and students. The moral and political undertones of each incident found her turning to different collegial support groups in search of resolution. These groups acted as *holding environments* (Kegan, 1994), each a "transitional culture, an evolutionary bridge, a context for crossing over, supporting developmental transformation, or the process by which the whole…becomes gradually the part…of a new whole" (p. 43). Her in-service colleagues and pre-service interns both provided support for her learning processes. Interns occasionally required protection and supervision, but even in these instances, Debbie preferred the company of their perspective to standing alone.

Secondary school students sometimes emerged as antagonists in Debbie's narrative. The actions of students in her school evoked intense emotional responses. So much so, in fact, that Debbie found it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain objectivity. The first of Debbie's narratives depicted here describes an incident that prompted widespread media coverage and intense community dialogue. A student at the school posted digitally altered, slanderous, and obscene images of a teacher on an

internet blog. Debbie realized that students had the power to destroy reputations and even careers; students' mirrors reflected back to her a vulnerable image of herself that was frightening and painful to see. This image conflicted with her sense of being in control in her classroom. What she saw instead was evidence that students could jeopardize her very livelihood.

Debbie strove to be understanding of the developmental characteristics of her adolescent students and to act professionally. She actively sought shelter behind the closed doors of the teachers' lounge. Here, Debbie worked to reconcile her duties as a teacher with her needs as a human being. This collegial support group provided another reflective surface, one that was sympathetic and familiar. It was at this crossroads that her identity as a teacher ended and her needs as a human emerged, with adolescents prompting the shift.

Debbie's participation in this holding environment was an attempt to understand the "politics of survival" (Coles, 2000, p. 21) in a public forum of community, school, and university voices in which people "can be given a chance to express their yearnings, their worries" (Coles, p. 21). It helped Debbie address the challenge of how to learn from this experience. The public outcry in reaction to this morally provocative incident brought Debbie, as a leader (though not in a traditional role), into a position to see how "a range of individuals can bring us all up morally…a child, an adult, a person in politics, or one quietly trying to get through a seemingly quite ordinary life" (Coles, p. 21). She was connected morally and emotionally to the impact that one student could have on an entire school. Navigating this aspect of her identity as a leader was still difficult, even gut-wrenching, for her; her "acts, ideals and ordeals, ideas and thoughts" (Coles, p. 21) were suddenly under the scrutiny of her intern and colleagues at the school, as well as of the general public, simply because she was there. She received a high level of support in a highly challenging situation. The holding environment allowed her to engage in self-authoring her personal, and suddenly political, identity. Her I-poem reflects this elegantly:

I learned that I'm a human being
I can't let it go
I find it difficult
We've had that discussion
I can try to
I don't know
I'm going to have that student
I don't know if I'll ever fully trust

I learned
I am human
I question
What kind of teacher I am
What kind of person I am
I still think
I don't trust
I have reason
I've always prided myself
I'm trying to focus
I'm trying to focus
I think my intern learned
Where can we—how can we let our personal feelings go
Can we do that?
Can we ever…?
Maybe we can…
I think
I think

Debbie's reflection on her relationally supported self-authoring process indicates that she learned that her personal and professional selves are inevitably intertwined, though the relationship between the two still seemed unclear to her; she specifically articulates her sense of self-as-teacher and self-as-person separately. She is struggling to act as a mentor, to put herself aside and facilitate learning for her intern. She questions her ability to lead while suppressing personal and professional aspects of her identity. Her belief that one can act as a mentor while separating emotion from professionalism suddenly becomes impossible to maintain.

Lots of Shady Areas

Debbie's understanding of her self-as-mentor was an even more pertinent factor in her response as a professional to a second incident. Due to its extraordinary sensitivity, involving an intern's observation of another educator, I quote Debbie directly:

The intern felt very uncomfortable with the way the teacher was dealing with students. Physical touching. Comments that she thought were inappropriate. And sort of not conducive to a good learning environment. And she was concerned enough that she was near tears.

Debbie's I-poem is once again revealing:

I felt that I needed to do something
So I did
I spoke to the principal, so
We had that happen
I'm not sure that anything happened
I felt that it was a learning experience
I wanted her to know
I didn't ignore
You know, what could I have done
I went through the process
I'm not sure that the process totally worked
It was a learning experience for us
We determined as a group
We didn't feel that we had to step it up anymore
I couldn't ignore it…You know
Lots of shady areas and we're, as a school, looking at them.

Debbie is prompted to address her moral identity again in this critical incident. Her self-perception as a leader and her moral code find her reporting a colleague to the school administration. The nature of the intern's concerns prevented Debbie from discussing them with her preferred peer group; the sensitive topography of her emotional geography made them inaccessible as a source of support. This was a potentially tricky situation for Debbie; since she was bereft of a holding environment and faced with a highly political situation, her ability to grow from the experience was at risk. The relationship between challenge and support was more likely to find her in a state of complete stasis or retreat (Daloz, 1999), rather than of growth.

The intern becomes Debbie's "we" in this critical incident, the school administrator she references rendered bureaucratically symbolic by virtue of affiliation with the institutional "process" that she is "not sure" "totally worked." Debbie's leadership and cultural values prompt her plan of action in this context. Her moral identity compels her to act, though to what end she is unclear. She remained unsure even at the time of the interview, seeking validation from the interviewer—"You know, what could I have done"—the narrative storytelling process of the interview itself a continued attempt at identity construction. In calling on what Coles (2000) refers to as

"the moral passion within oneself" and in trying to "set it in motion among others…resourcefully, pointedly" (p. 192), Debbie finds that she is far outside the relational landscape which has been so professionally pertinent to her. She faces school policy alone. As a result of this incident, Debbie reflects:

> The learning that comes from mentoring and being an intern is the whole package. The where do we stand as colleagues. You know this was a colleague of mine that was being observed and where does my loyalty to my colleague end and my loyalty to my students and the students of my school and my mentee begin?

Debbie articulates the separation that she experiences by virtue of her leadership work as a mentor. It causes her to revisit her moral identity yet again, unsure whose interests are most important when deciding on a course of action. The lines of her identity blur again. Her perceptions of her teacher, colleague, and mentor selves create dissonance for her. To whom should she demonstrate loyalty? Here she chooses to look into the mirrors of her in-service colleagues to shape her identity. These interns will, after all, be "gone" like the students that she referred to in her first critical incident; however, the safety of her students is her first professional responsibility as a teacher. Debbie stands at a crossroads; her moral passions are ultimately the framework that she relies on most heavily in her decision making.

Voicing a Reminder

This brings me back to Lois, who recognized that the work of developing educators as teachers and leaders involves attending to the relational and emotional aspects of self and identity. Scholarship about teacher leadership, mentoring, and PDS has documented this over the past two decades. This paper presents nothing particularly new, but during a decade when schools, leaders, teachers, and students struggle with unprecedented pressures to scientifically document student achievement, it is my hope that Debbie's voice will serve as a reminder of the struggles inherent in teacher leadership. The identity formation of those who work in schools transcends organizational boundaries, stands to influence action, and frequently transpires at complex moral crossroads. In the words of one mentor I worked with, it would serve us well to remember that those we teach are ultimately looking to us for what it means to be human.

ASK NOT WHAT FHS CAN DO FOR YOU,
BUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR FHS

jessica endlich winkler

Giordano: *You're always working. Always.*

James: *There's just no way to do it all in the building.*

Giordano: *Even mentally, you're always working; all the time, you're thinking about it. But I think it's amplified in a small school, the amount of roles that we have to take. Administrative, clubs…*

Bramwell: *Yeah, because everybody wears a thousand hats. Everybody.*

With the small schools movement in full force and new schools opening nationwide, principals are relying on teacher leaders to supplement the limited number of administrators available on a small school budget. Teacher leaders may be veterans who have achieved aspects of classroom mastery, administrators-in-training who relish the opportunity to lead, or enthusiastic young teachers who work tirelessly for an improved school community. While it is clear that new small schools desperately need strong teacher leadership to function effectively, is there enough being done to support these teachers—many of whom have not yet fully honed their teaching skills? Could it be that the opportunity for teacher leadership is burdening young teaching careers more than advancing them? What other supervisory arrangements and instructional support need to be provided to help teacher leaders succeed?

In late June, with the past year of teaching fresh in our minds, I interview 19 of my co-workers, representing over three quarters of the teaching staff at Fenwick High School (FHS) in New York City, to try to find some answers. *

Seventy-nine percent of my interviewees have been teaching for less than five years, which is indicative of the school's overwhelmingly young staff. Four of the teachers are currently studying to become school administrators, while others are considering doing the same.

FHS is finishing its fourth year of existence and celebrating its first graduating class. The school educates 430 students and is modeled after another highly

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* School and teacher names have been changed to protect privacy

successful public school in New York City. One principal and one assistant principal fill the formal leadership roles and do an excellent job of ensuring a safe building, maintaining academic standards, and creating a relatively disciplined and respectful school tone. Unfortunately, this work leaves less time for offering instructional feedback, fully supporting initiatives, or advising teacher leaders. There is a pervasive sense that as long as teachers are following and upholding school policies, the administration will be fairly lax in its oversight of individuals.

Throughout the interviews, teachers mention 30 distinct activities that they consider "leadership" roles. Formal positions such as dean, senior advisor, and coordinator of student activities are listed, as well as nontitled duties like choosing novels for the English department, editing all of the college admission letters, and keeping inventory of art supplies. The departmental study group leaders are appointed by the school's administration, while other roles—advising a student club or presenting a small professional development unit at faculty meetings, for example—are filled by volunteers. In addition, teachers believe that unacknowledged tasks such as clearing the hallway during lunch and offering advice to struggling coworkers are evidence of leadership. These sentiments—that vital school leadership encompasses much more than formalized roles—align with nationwide initiatives to improve schools by engaging teachers in a variety of leadership activities (Paulu & Winters, 1998; Searby & Shaddix, 2008; Teacher Leaders, 2005).

With their wide variety of experiences within the school building, 19 teachers (plus one interviewer) build a cohesive picture of teacher leadership at Fenwick High School. We wonder whether whether leaders should arise organically or be appointed. We analyze the role of the "repeat leader" who assumes a multitude of positions, and we question whether favoritism is shown to those teachers. We look at the special challenges of mentoring. A critical question arises from these conversations: Are school administrators relying too heavily on teacher leaders without providing training, support, and recognition for their invaluable service?

Organic or Assigned Leadership?

In our discussions, we debate whether leadership should develop naturally or be assigned. Though there is merit to each approach, it becomes clear that neither route is without problems. In early autumn the tenth-grade teachers decided that they should meet as a grade-level team to discuss the students they have in

common. Second-year humanities teacher Patterson describes the meetings as "egalitarian," as they were not mandated by the administration and had no recognized coordinator; however, she also notes that after the holiday vacation in December, the group failed to reconvene for the remainder of the year. Teachers offer an explanation for why their grassroots movement failed:

> **Harrison** (fourth-year special educator): I had way too many meetings; that's why. So something had to go. I had yearbook, prom, graduation, AP art history. I had all this deadline-driven stuff, so tenth graders had to go.

> **Bramwell**: I think with teacher leadership, I think often times it's easier to take that stuff and say, "You know what, I think I'll drop that." You want to let a deadline drop for another teacher as opposed to a Washington or a Ronald [principal and assistant principal] who are saying, "Hey, you guys need to meet." You'll be less likely to put that to the side.

> **Patterson**: I feel like I would have kept meeting if I had been hounded down to meet, but my own initiative to get everyone to meet was just lost in other stuff.

> **Harrison**: And when it's a group, I thought, "Well, maybe they'll continue without me. But if I don't do the yearbook, then nobody's going to do it." When you're just responsible for one thing, then you're accountable for it. But in that group, I felt like there's…

> **Hausler** (fourth-year math teacher): …other people.

The school's two administrators were pleased that the tenth-grade teachers decided to meet, and they even encouraged other grade levels to do the same. Regrettably, their words were not backed by actions, as they offered no additional time, resources, feedback, or compensation to the tenth-grade teachers for their efforts. Administrators may have inadvertently sent the message that the meetings were expendable by not encouraging or expecting ongoing commitment.

While the leaderless tenth-grade collaboration was short-lived, there is also no guarantee that assigned leaders would have done any better in supporting a cohesive group, as shown in the following discussion about the departmental study

group leaders assigned by the principal. Fifth-year teacher Hanson led meetings of the English department, using a rotating facilitation model of which fourth-year teacher James says, "People were very responsible…when it was their turn to lead, and it's something that functioned really well. We also had it really be about our interests and what was useful for us." Though overwhelmingly positive, they admit that even a highly functional team begins to lag:

> **Bramwell**: In the beginning we were very, very consistent, but then in April, May, no.

> **Patterson**: I think we met when we needed to meet. I think in the beginning it felt more necessary to have a weekly meeting. And then biweekly sort of suited us more at the end.

> **Bramwell**: Then, by the end, it was just kind of, you know, a little more happenstance toward the end of the year as opposed to very structured in the beginning.

Departmental meetings were also difficult for the social studies department. Waldorf, a teacher with less than one year of experience, says that the five teachers had no common planning period, so they were forced to meet before the school day, creating departmental friction. School administrators demanded weekly meetings, but did not prioritize the meetings enough to schedule common planning time. Waldorf says that the principal mediated the department's verbal conflict but did not solve the scheduling problem. Describing one burden of being study group leader, Waldorf comments:

They're under way more pressure than the rest of us. Because anything that goes wrong in the department, they get blamed for it. Again, with the meeting thing, our [study group leader] got blamed for it, and she had the least to do with it. She had to take the brunt of the blame for what went down with that whole fiasco.

Teachers from various departments complain that the administration's expectations for the role of study group leader are unclear. Moretti, a second-year teacher and science study group leader, describes his understanding of the position:

I don't think I do any more than anybody else. I really don't. I am always willing to stay, assist, do whatever I can, but I don't know that I necessarily

go out of my way…I keep reminding them to do things we need to do. But as far as having meetings, I was very bad at holding department meetings.

Essentially, teachers describe a scenario in which study group leaders are fully in charge of leading their departments while receiving almost no guidance from school administrators. Meetings between the two parties are sporadic, leaders receive no professional development to facilitate their endeavors, and there is no compensation for assuming the role. These policies are counter to those recommended by most research on promoting teacher leadership (Searby & Shaddix, 2008; Wynne, 2001; and Teacher Leaders, 2005); in addition, some teachers struggle without greater supervision.

Calapatia and Moretti discuss why the science department sometimes needs someone with more authority than a study group leader:

Calapatia: When we have meetings or need to come to a decision about things, I feel like sometimes we need a mediator.

Moretti: Yeah, we either don't take a stand, or we do take a stand, and when we do, nobody budges.

Calapatia: Brunson is opinionated but with a lot of reason, and you can understand why, but sometimes people…push for a direction, and we're open to hearing about it, but it's like, "What are your reasons?" And he keeps pushing, and it gets frustrating. I guess in that sense, I'm open to ideas, but I feel like we need someone to step in.

Administrators and teachers alike are expecting study group leaders to function as departmental assistant principals; however, these leaders still have full-time teaching schedules to manage. They have no real authority to mediate conflict between peers. Brunson describes the conflict:

It's difficult. We're our own bosses for most of the day. We're the masters of our domain most of the time. Sometimes it's hard to put that aside and follow someone else's leadership. I think, in this job, more than any other job I've worked in, when you're among peers, establishing leadership roles

can be a little bit tricky. Because we are sort of all equal, but then again, all day we don't have a boss telling us what to do. We're the ones in charge.

Repeat Leaders

Because the administration relies so heavily on teacher leaders to keep the school functioning, certain teachers do play critical roles in large capacities or with small niche talents that are seemingly irreplaceable. Keita, a first-year English teacher, is a published writer and feels that the administration tapped into his passion by asking him to edit the seniors' college application essays. He enjoys the job, but recognizes the reality of being the school's "go-to" person for editing:

> But I felt like, it was starting to get kind of overwhelming. Because then people would come and be like, "Look at this, look at this, look at that." I feel like with a lot of the leadership roles, since it's a small school, it's like this is the one person. Ms. Hausler is the programmer: I'm sure you wish you had like a team of programmers. Ms. Benson is the one student [activities] person. It's like that one person. Sometimes they get overwhelmed.

"I feel like that too," says Rizzo, the only visual arts teacher. Zambrano, who is the only physical education teacher and speaks with twenty years of experience, adds that sometimes "it's like the floodgates open up."

When asked whether those in formal leadership roles are shown favoritism, second-year English teacher Giordano suggests that it might be difficult to break into this group: "I tend to see that—that people who are pursuing administrative [degrees] tend to get more leadership roles. Not that it's unfair, but they tend to be the leaders of the school." Markowitz does not believe repeat leadership is limited to administrative interns but does pinpoint personality and competition as key factors:

> I think that some teachers are more motivated to take on a lot of things, and be in charge of a lot of things, and for that reason, maybe other people aren't as driven to do that thing. They end up taking on a lot of things that other people would like to be involved in, and maybe the other people didn't have the opportunity.

Zambrano views the role of experience pragmatically: "If somebody's been

doing it well for the last three years, who am I to come and say, 'I want to do it now. Can you just step aside?" At the same time, others are noticeably less content with the status quo. Expressing dissatisfaction with a few of the teacher leaders in formal positions, first-year science teacher Chatham says that they were selected and rehired the next year in a "less than transparent process." After debate and attempts at clarification, it appears no one in the interview group is certain about how leaders are appointed; this confusion leads Chatham to change his description of the application and selection process to "opaque." Administrators rely on those who have proven competent in the past, which allows the principal and assistant principal to focus on other things; however, the perception of equity among teachers is an issue worth examining before greater tension arises. It may also behoove the administration to review the teaching staff in search of untapped leadership potential from those currently on the sidelines.

Many teachers say that repeat leaders are viewed as "capable," "committed," and "good at what they do" by the principal and assistant principal. While perhaps more teachers would like to feel the pride of being a recognized leader, everyone mentions that his or her own demanding workload can stand in the way of increased leadership. Finishing his first full year of teaching while juggling a few teacher leader roles, Marshall says, "I feel like I have enough on my plate anyway, that I didn't need the extra responsibility of anything else. So, I was happy with what I have." Michel lightheartedly adds, "I like to think of it, like, is it worth the perk of being one of these leaders? You know, if a perk is getting more work, you can just keep your perk."

The Special Problem of Mentoring

The New York State Department of Education requires that each first-year teacher have an assigned mentor. Literacy coach Bramwell, who also serves as the mentoring coordinator, explains that he first tries to assign administrators-in-training to act as mentors. After those considerations, he then looks at content area and personality to match mentors and new teachers.

As a first-year science teacher, Calapatia is satisfied with the arrangement, saying, "I think I lucked out, because I think my mentor helped me out a lot, based on what he taught…It was kind of convenient because he can watch me because we share a classroom, and that component helped out a lot."

Thomas, a special education teacher, had a less favorable opinion of the formal assigning of mentors:

I mean, I had no problem with my mentor, but I think of it like in life:

Someone who you choose to be your mentor, someone who you look up to, someone who you've sat back, and you've observed them. You're like, "I like something in her. I want to be like her." I think maybe it should start a little bit later in the year. See who you mesh well with, and then you go from there.

Numerous teachers agree with Thomas, including fourth-year math teacher Michel, who resigned as mentor to fellow math teacher Kannangara in January:

Michel: The funny thing is, I was chosen [by Bramwell]. I didn't volunteer to be a mentor. Which is why I kind of agree with what Thomas is saying. I felt, because I was just kind of forced into it, well, not *forced, called* into it, when it was time for me to make a decision between other priorities that I had and mentoring, that's something that I can just cast away. So in January, that's why I just had to, uh…

Bramwell: Yeah, it's just less of a priority.

Michel: Yeah, exactly. I have to give up something. But I think it would be a little more personal if you knew that person chose you. You'd feel a little more committed. Like, OK, this person holds me up here, and then, you know…

Bramwell: You might commit more.

First-year mentoring has been a requirement for many years, but previously mentors from outside the school were assigned by the city. Most teachers disliked the process, including Brunson, who has taught science for six years:

Being an outsider, they weren't really helpful. The people I look up to and look to for leadership the most, and that I'm most willing to receive it from, are the people that I do work with. I see them in shared experiences that we have, and I'm way more likely to trust their actions, their guidance, than someone from outside the school.

Brunson's description includes many of Sullivan and Glanz's (2005) goals for peer coaching: "improve school culture, increase collegiality and professional dialogue, share in the implementation of new or common instructional skills" (p. 144).

Kannangara adds, "At least from my perspective, I feel like I can go up to any teacher and ask them for advice, and they'll give it to me." Teachers agree that this informal mentorship, which develops organically between teachers who work well together, is invaluable to the staff. It also supplements the limited amount of time that the two administrators have available for one-on-one conversations with teachers.

Remembering Appreciation

Teachers at Fenwick High School monitor bulletin boards, start new student organizations, and serve on the school leadership team. They volunteer to teach the really tough group of students, the scorching hot Saturday academies in June, and the credit recovery programs after school. Educators write grants, prepare report cards, and develop new courses. They do these things in addition to their contractual duties, often with little or no extra pay. They lead the school without the power that comes with a formal title such as "assistant principal," but are then left to deal with the consequences of angered coworkers, unclear expectations, and little feedback on their efforts. Keita describes an incentive:

> Even if it's just having students and teachers come to them with more work, I feel like it's kind of a form of appreciation. Like, "You're good at what you do. So, here, do more of this." So, I feel like, you know, as much as it is a lot of work for students to come to me with essays, I always feel like that's a compliment.

Hanson, a fifth-year teacher, dean, and extremely busy administrative intern, is a bit more critical, observing that some leaders can get more credit than others:

> I feel personally my efforts have really been appreciated, but I feel like a lot of other people's efforts really go unsung. And that's something I would like to see more of. People who maybe don't have a leadership title but who maybe do a lot of leadership things in our school. I think that they need to get more appreciation.

Teaming for Richer Teacher Leadership

Teachers work extremely hard to meet their classroom obligations while fulfilling additional leadership roles. While most teachers feel overwhelmed by the

tasks they are asked to complete, their roles are often isolated, with one teacher leader being solely in charge of each responsibility. This leaves little opportunity for collaboration, shared decision making, and the exchange of expertise, which the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement considers vital to developing teacher leadership (Teacher Leaders, 2005). This compartmentalization also means that the principal and assistant principal are supervising isolated individuals, as opposed to a professional learning community or study group, effectively leaving them less opportunity for constructive, personalized feedback.

Perhaps a more group-oriented approach to teacher leadership would be appropriate, in which a small team shares the burden as well as the sense of accomplishment that comes with each role or task. A team-based model would also guarantee that at least one or two other people recognize the full extent of an individual's efforts and could show appreciation for this outstanding service; similarly, this approach also allows for critical feedback so that leadership skills can improve over time. At FHS, the principal and assistant principal are hardworking individuals with strong leadership skills, but their administrative workload makes it difficult for them to fully develop teacher leaders. Despite the time constraints, school administrators need to invest in providing professional development, more manageable schedules, and ongoing support mechanisms for teacher leaders. Principals must also communicate more frequently to receive feedback and genuinely hear the voices of the educators, particularly if they are going to rely so heavily on teacher leaders to advance the mission of their schools.

EMPOWERING TEACHERS:
DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP

jennifer groves

Definition of a Teacher Leader

In the call for this *Occasional Paper*, teacher leaders are described as those who advocate for change, serve as models for colleagues, and provide informal mentoring within the school. I will add to the definition here.

I think a teacher leader is someone who seeks opportunities to grow and develop as a professional, someone who tries new methods, takes risks, and is willing to share his/her learning with others. S/he is not necessarily someone who has been officially designated a coach, mentor, or teacher leader. Teacher leaders communicate their knowledge and experience to others. To me, that is what makes them leaders. Teacher leaders serve more than their own needs. They have a willingness and motivation to nurture collegial relationships and to share both the ups and the downs of their own stories.

Seeds of Empowerment

As a second-grade teacher, I tried to create a learning environment, curriculum, and style of teaching that would empower my students. I didn't believe that I was the sole (or best) source of knowledge in the room, and I wanted my students to understand that we were all learners, inspiring each other with our questions and discoveries. Barth describes a community where all members, teachers and students alike, are committed learners (2001). I wanted to help my students develop the confidence to wonder and the skills to pursue their curiosity.

In the following pages, I describe how I was instrumental in creating a similar framework to empower my colleagues, promote adult development, and help build a school culture that mirrored the priorities I set in my classroom, so that adults were encouraged to inspire each other, to keep the cycle of learning going, and to build teacher leadership into a powerful model within the school.

A Professional Learning Initiative

In my district, teachers had been working in collaborative teams for several years. Teacher teams met weekly to review student performance on assessments, set goals for achievement, implement interventions, and monitor progress. Fewer

students were slipping through the cracks, and team monitoring efforts were raising student achievement. But to me, something was missing despite all of the work we were doing. Our culture still seemed, for the most part, focused on the individual rather than on the community.

I wanted our school culture—"how we do things around here"—to reflect certain qualities (Eaker, DuFour and DuFour, 2002, p. 9). I wanted to see greater collegiality, more risk taking, and truly honest sharing among teachers. As Sarason (1996) wrote, "teachers cannot create and sustain contexts for productive learning unless those conditions [risk-taking, sharing, questioning] exist for them" (p. 367). In schools, he further observed, "there were absolutely no forums, no traditions that brought teachers together on a scheduled basis… What I found was a culture of individuals, not a group concerned with pedagogical theory, research, and practice" (p. 367). I asked myself what our school could do to provide teachers with a well thought-out plan that spoke to their development as professionals, and then decided to submit a proposal for a K-12 book club.

In book club, teachers would not only meet and talk about the book, but also take part in meaningful learning activities; we would take action. I wanted to bring teachers together who didn't work with each other regularly, which is why I chose the K-12 focus. I knew the book club topics would need to apply to teachers of all grades. I wanted the emphasis to be on what unites teachers, rather than what separates them. In my small district of 730 students and approximately 65 full-time teachers, it seemed that improving K-12 relationships was both feasible and necessary. In a bigger way, I saw improving the interactions between teachers as a way to build a more cohesive and truly supportive school culture, in which the seeds of teacher leadership could really grow.

Respecting Teachers' Needs

I wanted to give teachers what they needed. I surveyed the staff and asked teachers what type of professional development would help them do their jobs better. I asked them how past programs had impacted their teaching and the learning of their students and received substantial feedback. I brought this feedback along with an outline for my proposal to the professional development committee, of which I was a member. I received almost instant approval and my superintendent even agreed to purchase the book for staff members. I chose *Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning* (Johnston, 2004) for the book club. The book suited our needs perfectly. The subject, improving the self-

efficacy of students, was an appropriate theme. Self-efficacy, or "agency," as Johnston calls it, was what I was trying to promote in teachers as well. And, with ten chapters of about ten pages each, *Choice Words* was quite manageable. I worked with a local college to offer graduate credit for participation, so the club also became a course. Eventually two-thirds of the faculty purchased the book and one-third enrolled in the club. I was offering my colleagues what they wanted and their enthusiastic response verified that. I was thrilled at the prospect of so many within the school having a common experience and using new knowledge together to affect student learning in a powerful way.

In the classroom, I gave my students choice in order to foster engagement and buy-in. I wanted to do the same with my colleagues. The two main activities in the course were journaling on a wiki (a collaborative website whose content can be edited by anyone who has access to it) and doing peer observations. Within these activities, teachers could pick their own timelines and focus. I hoped this flexibility would make teachers more invested and increase the learning curve.

Journaling on a Wiki

I had been part of many classes that required a personal journal. Too often I wrote all my journal entries the night before they were due, and I wondered how I could make journaling a more meaningful tool this time. We created an online wiki. Every two weeks I posted a prompt (from a list we prioritized) that was either an idea or question from *Choice Words*. Teachers would have to respond once in that time period. The wiki allowed us to journal collaboratively, to get away from writing individual entries that would only further the insular experience I wanted to avoid. Teachers posted their questions, the risks they had taken, and their revelations. Many teachers' entries displayed an openness and vulnerability about their teaching that I had not previously seen. Others, appreciating this candidness, empathized and responded thoughtfully. By the end of the course the wiki had become a document that represented our joint and cumulative learning. It showed actual and substantial progress. (With my colleagues' consent, please view our wiki at http://choicewords.pbwiki.com/?doneLogin=1.)

Reciprocal/Peer Observations

Another activity in the course was peer observation. Barth speaks of this when he writes about improving relationships in the schoolhouse (2006). He describes the power of peer observation and the importance of a non-evaluative

setting. In our school, teachers had always been encouraged to observe each other but seldom had the time, support, or energy to make this happen. Here, it was a requirement. I made sure that it was easy for teachers to get coverage. Busy administrators even offered their time to help with that.

Teachers observed or videotaped each other and then shared their thoughts. For instance, I told my book club partner that I was working on increasing "wait time" with my students during discussions. My partner videotaped my class and we viewed the footage together, discussing my efforts and results. Allowing me to decide what I wanted my partner to help me with removed the onus of being observed and instead created a constructive and nonthreatening atmosphere.

One night a colleague called me and said she had met with her team that afternoon to review their videos. She said the hours had flown by and that everyone had been engaged in the process in an eager and open manner, and that it had been a boost to feel this trust and mutual respect. When I heard this story, I was encouraged. Staff members were nurturing each other. A structure of support was evolving.

As book club participants, we revealed our strengths and challenges. Together we modeled and tried new techniques and offered each other feedback for collective, continued growth. In this sense it felt as if we were all teacher leaders, trying to improve ourselves, taking risks, reflecting on our practice—truly leading by example. Book club helped us create powerful adult learning that fostered teacher leaders. After all, adult learning sets a powerful example for student learning; how can we expect to cultivate growth in our students if we don't promote it in ourselves?

Overcoming the Challenges to Teacher Leadership: Resistance

Some teachers prefer to remain isolated in their classrooms and have no desire to have a leadership role in their school. These teachers may be successful writing teachers, innovative classroom managers, or experts in children's literature. Rather than putting them on the spot at a faculty meeting, they could be asked to share an effective strategy with their grade level team. The team can then present that strategy to the whole staff. This is one way to tap into teacher expertise that is both sensitive to different personalities and has the potential for building leadership.

Other resistance comes from attitudes. R. DuFour says that asking someone to act is often more effective than asking someone to change his/her personal beliefs (personal communication, July 16, 2004). Isn't it easier to ask a teacher to share and discuss with six math colleagues the strategies he/she just learned at a

math conference, rather than telling her him/her to abandon old ways, adopt a more collaborative mindset, and learn to work better with others? In book club, we took this approach. We didn't ask for wholehearted allegiance; we simply asked each other to take one small risk that was different from our normal pedagogy.

School Culture/Adult Learning

If teachers are to become leaders in their schools and districts, mentor colleagues, advocate for change, and informally lead learning initiatives, then these actions must be part of the school structure. They must actually be happening, and in good faith. A culture that promotes continuous learning among its staff is an environment in which teacher leaders can thrive naturally. In my school, teachers were asked to work in collaborative teams. Teachers were also given a sizeable budget for professional development, and were thus encouraged to seek out learning opportunities.

E. Drago-Severson, of Teachers College, Columbia University, states that in order to develop, adults need both challenge and support (personal communication, December 4, 2007). In book club we encouraged each other to examine our teaching and we talked honestly about how we could better empower our students. Our challenge was to improve as teachers. Our support was both internal (confidence in our own abilities) and external (the dedicated support of our colleagues). Mutual support is a condition for fostering and maintaining teacher leaders.

Differentiating for Teacher Growth

It was important to recognize the different timelines that teachers had established for developing this self-efficacy. Not everyone had begun with confidence in his/her own ability to make a difference in the classroom. Some people were ready to take risks and try new methods with little prompting. Others had implemented only small changes by the end of the semester, and only after much deliberation. In their entries on the wiki, several teachers openly declared their struggle with change. They were trying to apply change in their classroom, but it was difficult to do on their own, and they weren't sure they could succeed. Our challenge was to make it possible for each of us to be supported, despite the differences in our personal timelines. The choices offered within journaling and peer observation were one way we accommodated teachers' different needs. Another was recognizing that we wouldn't all be at the same point by the end of the course, but that we would all be moving in a positive direction of growth. The

important idea for us to remember was that teachers on the journey to leadership needed to be provided with consistent support no matter how their journey is unfolding. There is no single road to leadership, nor a single timeline for traveling it. The challenge for each of us was to become leaders in our own way.

The Solution: Looking Inside

I believed we had much talent, untapped knowledge, and expertise within the ranks at our school. Teachers enthusiastically connected with students and created original and engaging curriculum; they were exciting to be around. Rather than seeking wisdom or leadership from the outside, I felt we should look for leaders within our walls. Schools need to trust that often the necessary talent is within and needs only be revealed and allowed to flourish. A structure must exist for this to occur. As Sarason (1996) stated:

> School teachers accept the obligation as a group to develop a forum specifically devoted to their growth and development, a forum that acknowledges that there is a world of ideas, theory, research, and practice about which they should be knowledgeable (which is not to say expert) if they are not to wither on the vine, if they, like their students, are to avoid passive resignation to routine (p. 369).

I would argue that teacher leaders are the real experts in the schoolhouse. The value of teachers' accessibility to their colleagues and appreciation and sensitivity to their colleagues' needs cannot be underestimated. An outside facilitator would not have the necessary history and/or tact to support the local teacher leader community. Participating in book club took us out of our regular routine. It improved our morale and provided us with a rich network of support within which to learn. As one colleague reminded me, "book club gave us hope." Teaching is not an assembly line job that produces identical widgets. Dealing with the challenges of the profession requires both thought and reflection, opportunities that are far too scarce in many schools. Teacher leaders are the solution.

MAKING SENSE OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP: A CONVERSATION AMONG TEACHER LEADERS

kathleen dickinson rockwood

The online discussion presented here followed up on prior reading and class discussion about distributed leadership in an Educational Leadership program course in the greater New York City area. The course focuses on the building leader's role in working with and cultivating the people within the organization. Major course topics include effective supervisory practices, team building, conflict resolution, and building leadership capacity.

Eleven students, working in both formally-appointed and informal teacher leadership roles in suburban and urban districts, participated. What follows are threaded student responses to two questions I posted. The students' responses were edited only for length and flow, with the substance maintained. (Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper for all the students and for the names of their districts/schools.) The purpose of this assignment was to hear how the students integrated their understanding of distributed leadership and to get them, as current teacher leaders and future school leaders, to take a stand about it. For this assignment, I purposely removed myself from the conversation. In this paper my thoughts within the online discussion appear in brackets, and I then provide my final reflections at the end.

Online Discussion

Question 1: Share your vision of distributed leadership and how that resonates with the current reality in your school district.

Debbie: I believe that leadership is only truly effective if it is distributed in a fair and logical way. The myth of the beloved autocratic ruler is just that; and even if it worked out at times in the past, it really would be a bad idea in the educational arena. Within the last six years, our school district has created many more leadership roles than had existed before. However, because many of these positions were new, a few years had to pass in order for the leaders themselves to feel confident and productive.

Roberta: I agree with you, Debbie. Distributed leadership (at its best) is fair, and I think it is also the most effective type of leadership. The most effective leaders are the ones who build something that lasts beyond their period of leadership, something that inspires people to want to keep it going. To that extent, distributing leadership gives everyone ownership and embeds the leader's vision within the culture of the school.

Doug: I view distributed leadership as a wonderful way to encourage those who possess a particular talent for inspiring and leading others. In Bolton, many of the leadership positions are filled internally, by design. Most of the time, I feel that this is a positive thing, in that the current administration clearly recognizes the potential in some of its best teachers.

The danger is that distributed leadership can, if not exercised properly, appear to be an exclusive, hierarchical system. Many teachers at Bolton treat those who are given leadership responsibilities as though they were the chosen ones. Because of this, I notice resentment on the part of the faculty who have not been given a similar opportunity. For many, the issue lies in procedure. Many of my colleagues wish to see a formal interview process that looks at internal and external candidates for all leadership positions.

An effective school needs to cultivate a vision of a succession of leaders who could possibly come from within. It is dangerous to do otherwise, and ultimately will hurt the students as they fall prey to rocky [leadership] transition periods.

Debbie: Yes, Doug, I agree that students do suffer from rocky transition periods with new administrators and with new teachers, too, for that matter! The difference between our districts appears to be that many times our district seeks leadership from outside, and yours from within. I think each carries its own benefits and drawbacks, such as an inevitable learning curve in my district. [*Doug and Debbie appear to be focusing only on individuals who become administrators, not the informal leaders. This needs to be addressed during the class debrief.*]

Joan: Distributed leadership means allowing other trusted members of your faculty/staff to assume positions of leadership in a building/district. In other words, you (as principal) don't try to do everything on your own.

Mary: The key word that Joan used in explaining what distributed leadership is all about was "trusted." Garnering the trust of a faculty can be a huge task. That is why power sharing through effective models of delegation and communication is crucial. Collaborative approaches in school administration increase full buy-in to its programs or goals. An effective leader must discern who can be trusted to help build and share in a learning organization's vision. Trust among teachers can sometimes be difficult to find. It often takes years for colleagues to appreciate and get to know each other.

Ann: My vision of distributed leadership is essentially encouraging staff members to assume leadership positions in the building. It is important to recognize the talents of your faculty and staff and provide support and encouragement. When you

offer this support as an administrator, I believe that staff/faculty will view you as not only resourceful but also as a partner for change. In my building there is abundant evidence that leadership is supported and encouraged.

Beth: Mary, it is true that trust is not easily earned, especially with new leadership. This is a reality that anyone contemplating an administrative role must face. While I think it might be easier to develop this trust where there is a collaborative culture established, it is incumbent on the new leader to nurture, respect, and convey trust within the existing learning community.

In my school there is a culture of collaboration which permeates our learning community; leadership is distributed through a variety of committees and roles. One example is the Strategic Planning Committee, which met the week after school ended. Representatives from each grade level and specialty area met with the principal to reflect on this past school year as well as to set goals for the coming year. The work we did focused on the impact of recent initiatives, as well as grade level, individual student progress, and related support [needs].

Nancy: While I cannot speak for the building or district, the special education department within my district provides an example of distributed leadership. Past and present administrators have encouraged me to become more involved in special education administration, more specifically preschool special education. Approximately three years ago…I became actively involved in the process and sat in on several meetings. My previous CSE [Committee on Special Education] chairperson spent a lot of time training me and explaining different laws and regulations. The administration included me on several district-level discussions so that I could learn more. The following year I was appointed CPSE [Committee on Preschool Special Education] chairperson. I was somewhat reluctant to take on this leadership role, as I did not feel fully prepared. However, in hindsight, I am so glad that I was provided with both the support and the opportunity to take this on.

Edward: As Mary pointed out, members' buy-in [to shared leadership] requires a collaborative approach. On the instructional level, we have seen that it isn't enough for us to tell students that they need to know the material we are teaching; when we do that, it goes in one ear and out the other. Students need to be invested in the material to truly learn. Effective leaders who are able to share their power create or sustain environments where their subordinates become personally invested in the goals of the organization. At this level, it is no longer about personal power, but more that each individual in a position of influence uses his/her leadership within a smaller, perhaps more focused group to motivate those people

toward the organization's ultimate objectives. Each leader then enhances his/her own effectiveness by accomplishing his/her own immediate goals more efficiently. By increasing the power of the entire group organization through distributed leadership, the building leader enhances his/her own power.

Dora: I don't believe that the trust issue starts with administration having trust in their staff in order to distribute leadership. I think the process begins with the individual administrators first having trust in themselves, their abilities and expertise. That confidence is reflected in their personalities and allows them to appreciate and nurture leadership skills in others. Without that inner trust in oneself, how could one effectively and successfully distribute leadership to others?

In my current school, it really does not seem to work this way. There is a lot of favoritism. The teachers that seem to make strides are those who have some sort of personal connection to the current administration. From what I see, it seems that nine out of ten times they are not the best choice for the task at hand. The other few teachers that have special duties are usually those that the administration sees as overachievers, and the rest of the staff silently label as the *outcasts*. They are by no means *overachievers*, but rather those who do their job efficiently and complete the task by the administration's desired method.

I'm fairly certain that this happens in part because the New York City system is so large. They don't invest too much in the individual because they don't want to waste time, energy, and resources on someone who in a short time will most likely move on to be a teacher in another district. On the flip side, I am sure that if more teachers were involved, trusted, and properly trained, the revolving door would not revolve as quickly. [*She raises an important systems issue.*]

Jill: It is so important to all involved that everyone is honest and open with each other. When that doesn't (or simply cannot) happen, distributive leadership is difficult to achieve. For years, my district has used the old boy network for the distribution of leadership. There are long-standing chairs, team leaders, etc., whose positions are basically untouchable. The irony is that in our superintendent's four-year tenure in my district (though teachers are "encouraged to apply"), she has caused good leaders at all levels to search elsewhere. It is so important to nurture and support teachers who are seeking leadership roles, and to give them an honest chance. But first, building a climate of trust and respect all around is crucial.

Question 2: Formulate recommendations that you would make to area school districts about how to build leadership capacity. What should occur at the building level

and at the district level to support movement toward distributed leadership?

Doug: First, I believe that the goals need to be established clearly and then shared with the school community. Districts and schools should be capable of assessing current leadership and stating what types of leaders they would like to see in the future. Next, there should be a clear process for identifying future leaders. If every leadership position requires both an internal and external search, districts should follow this procedure.

Dora: I agree, but I was also thinking about the teachers who are always asked to assume leadership roles. I really don't know if I have a suggestion to reverse this, but I have experiences with administrators who always rely on a certain few to complete leadership tasks. Many [teachers] are afraid to volunteer, but I think that if the administration gave others a chance to shine, they might find that there are a lot more people capable of the task. This requires gaining some understanding of your staff by committing time to investigate the interests and personalities of the people in your building.

Roberta: I agree with you, Doug, about the need to establish clear goals, and also with you, Dora, about needing to *spread around* the leadership opportunities instead of turning to the same people repeatedly. In a place where there is no culture of distributed leadership, however, I think it has to be generated from the bottom. It is ironic because the directive for it might come *from the top*, but it can only work if everyone is invested in it from the start. I think that taking the time to make sure that everyone understands what distributed leadership is, and how it benefits us professionally and enhances student learning, is the most important first step. In other words, the clear goals that Doug mentioned would be generated by the potential leaders themselves. The drawback is that this process takes time.

At my middle school we have an Instructional Council which is made up of representatives from every team in the school. The IC meets monthly to discuss and implement various instructional or policy initiatives, some of which come from the central office or the state, and some of which have been generated in response to concerns voiced by the staff. The IC representatives facilitate weekly meetings with their teammates, and then take the concerns/feedback from the teams to the larger council, which ultimately advises and frequently decides what the school as a whole will do regarding particular initiatives. Reps from each team serve two years, and representation on IC rotates through the various members of the team. Everyone is encouraged to participate as an IC rep at some point; the norms of our school go against anyone serving multiple consecutive terms. It

works well for us, and even worked in the year that our principal was on leave and we had a disastrous interim (who, by the way, never attended an IC meeting).

Dora: Roberta's school district really has been progressive in this area, and I think that all of the answers given thus far point to a redefinition of the word *leadership* and what it really should encompass.

It is human nature to need to be recognized and valued. Having a system in place that gives everyone a voice and a role to play, no matter what the degree, would work wonders toward unifying administrators and staff. To me, distributed leadership also means genuinely listening to and considering each individual's opinion and giving that person credit when due!

[*It is so important for Dora and some other students to hear about Roberta's experience. They need to know that the theory they read about can be a reality, even if they do not experience it in their organizations. Dora understands that and is looking for other role models as she cultivates her own vision.*]

Jill: I agree that Roberta's school is incredibly progressive when it comes to leadership and I wish all places were the same. However, a major practical obstacle is time. As more districts create goals along with measurable ways to track success, the need for committee work grows. At Islingham, we have seen increasing numbers of teachers involved in meaningful district goal work, and there are enough committees to appeal to just about any interest (data analysis, curriculum, community relations, character education, etc.). Although some teachers are afraid to volunteer, lest they be rejected by our superintendent, the other, bigger issue that threatens our involvement is the time it takes. Teachers are frequently pulled from their classrooms to work on committees, and that tends to create problems for all involved. Many of the administrators and teacher leaders who run these committees try to work around teacher preps, but so many of us meet with students at these times that the meetings become intrusive. I can remember a time in the not-so-distant past when students were let out an hour early on Wednesdays and we were given structured time to meet as faculties, departments, and grade levels. Districts need to find a way to manage time wisely, so that this important committee work gets the time it deserves, but not at the expense of our primary job: to educate our students. [*As department chair, Jill offers up her reality and insight to the group about an important systems issue related to how time is managed to reflect the organization's priority of shared leadership.*]

Beth: On the district level, this means being transparent in developing leadership roles that encourage respect and accountability. Additionally, by making meaning-

ful professional development opportunities available, the administration can tap into the leadership resources that currently exist in every school district. At the building level, instructional teams and academic and social committees, along with a mentoring program, support building leadership capacity.

Edward: Before embarking on any of these concrete steps, however, I think it is vital that districts establish an atmosphere where risk taking is not only acceptable, but encouraged. It is easy enough to tell people that they have the authority to take the lead on a project or initiative, but when they are constantly looking over their shoulder for approval, then the focus is not on moving forward. We need to recognize that in today's educational environment maintaining the status quo is no longer enough. We need to empower every level of the school organization to try new methods and strategies in an effort to advance learning. I would never suggest that this be done without oversight, but there can certainly be safeguards in place that still allow autonomy and experimentation within established guidelines.

Joan: I think it's essential to build into the structure a framework for incubating ongoing positive professional change. It is one thing to build capacity, but if there is no place for the leaders to use their leadership, then the system is pointless. There must be continued outlets for leaders to use their newly acquired skills so that they may continue to grow as learners.

Instructor's Closing Reflections

As I listened to the conversation that unfolded, I was pleased to hear that all the students had insights about distributed leadership, despite the range of personal experiences in their respective school districts. What started out as an open, conceptual discussion with recurring themes evolved into specific recommendations that would make distributed leadership a reality in schools. Several noteworthy themes emerged. There appeared to be strong consensus that an administrator's ability to trust faculty was a vital condition for distributed leadership. Power sharing and school leaders' views of what constitutes power also surfaced as another element. Finally, the students talked about the importance of redefining leadership and establishing a climate that supports professional growth and varied leadership opportunities. Their concrete examples and recommendations for future action highlighted their understanding of the substantive changes in school culture that school leaders need to initiate in order to truly support distributed leadership.

Throughout this open exchange, the teacher leaders' voices and understandings

resonated with the leadership literature. Lambert (2003a) emphasized that changes will not be possible until educators redefine leadership and create a context and a new framework that will support a continuum of leadership capacity. The guiding beliefs of this framework would include: (a) the right and responsibility of all teachers to be leaders; (b) the importance of engaging in purposeful work; and (c) the importance of contributing in a reciprocal manner to the good of the community (Lambert). This framework is aligned to the theory of distributed leadership where teachers gain control over school operations that enable them to improve their classroom practice (Elmore, 2003; Harris, 2003). Inherent in this theory is the belief that substantive instructional improvement can be accomplished only when powerful leadership, involving teachers in instructional decision making, is distributed broadly among the faculty (Elmore). While grounded in theory, this conversation helped consolidate students' understandings and allowed them to learn from each others' experiences about positive new directions and challenges, as well as to debate the benefits and drawbacks of various practices.

Often I worry about those of my students who are in buildings where traditional top-down management practices predominate and distributed leadership is not welcomed. Our challenge as leadership instructors is to create many opportunities to broaden our students' exposure. I have found that online structured dialogue with program colleagues, representing different community types and district practices, provides one way to broaden everyone's perspectives and appreciation for the diverse organizational cultures and leadership practices that exist.

LEADERSHIP AND AGENCY AS A NOVICE TEACHER

clara e. lin

"Don't worry," many colleagues say to the first-year teacher, "next year will be better." Other sentiments commonly shared with me during my first year were, "I know, isn't it terrible?" or "the first year is so hard—I cried every day of mine." Some colleagues felt the need to celebrate every time a calendar milestone had been crossed: "You made it to Thanksgiving!" they exclaimed, as if I had been ready to jump ship the week before. By spring I was frequently reminded, "It's almost over."

These veteran teachers mean well, as do the authors of dozens of "survival guides" published for the first-year teacher. As I started teaching, I was struck by these heavy doses of sympathy doled out at work and in my graduate classes. I appreciated that my colleagues were looking out for me; however, I could not help finding these well-meaning sentiments to be, in fact, discouraging. I wondered why, when I worked and studied with such strong, active teachers, novice teachers were expected to suffer passively. Even very progressive educators, it seemed to me, were drawing a picture of the novice teacher as an acquiescent individual rather than an active learner.

In my first years of teaching, I have certainly struggled and discovered many weaknesses. It is in the process of reacting to those difficult experiences, however, that I have found strength and learned that even a novice teacher can be a leader in her classroom and school. This is not to say that the discovery came quickly, or that my first teaching experiences were often joyous or successful. I did not regularly thrive on my mistakes, cheerfully thinking, "It's just another learning opportunity!" At the beginning of my teaching career, I was very often over-whelmed, exhausted, frustrated, and certainly challenged by difficult problems on a daily basis. But I reminded myself that I believed in the power of the individual to shape her experiences and impact her environment. In that first year I decided that if problems were happening in my classroom, then I had the power to solve them and bring about positive change. I found that the novice teacher does have agency, and must use it if she is to do more than "survive" her first years and teach children to be responsible, active agents in their own lives.

This theme of agency has very much shaped how I feel about my first years of teaching, and guides how I teach in the classroom and engage with the school beyond the classroom walls. Here I will share my personal accounts as a new

teacher exploring leadership in the classroom in the form of problem solving, and in my school through advocating for a policy change. My experiences were uniquely shaped by the environment in which I work, a small, progressive public school in New York City with fewer than 200 students in our nine pre-K to fifth-grade classes. Sharing my experiences of finding strength and using agency in my first years, I hope to communicate my personal feeling and experience that "novice teaching" and "teacher leadership" are not mutually exclusive terms.

Leadership in the Classroom

It may not sound like a stretch for a head teacher to think of herself as a leader in her own classroom. After all, the profession calls for an individual who can accept the charge of building a stimulating, community-oriented learning environment with the cooperation of young learners. On the first day of school, eager to meet my kindergarten/first-grade mixed-age class, I felt ready to launch into this role with confidence and capability. Yet after a few months, my ability to lead my students with strength and understanding was already being challenged. What little part of me had indeed felt in September like a strong leader and facilitator of learning quickly slipped away. That fall I was regularly overwhelmed by classroom management, unable to prioritize problems that needed to be addressed, and worst of all, did not seek help from colleagues. I was disappointed to think that others' nightmare accounts of their first years of teaching were indeed a universal experience for the new teacher. Not wanting to accept that such a cliché could be true for that year—an entire year of my life and the lives of my students—I nevertheless had little evidence initially to help me believe otherwise.

Fortunately, although I did not reach out to others, someone reached out to me. That first November, a visit from my Bank Street advisor set in motion a chain of events and a change in attitude that transformed my classroom, my students, and my self-image as a strong teacher. Following her observation of a chaotic afternoon in my classroom, my advisor sat me down after dismissal in my empty classroom and asked, "Why didn't you tell me?" The same concerns I had about my class and my teaching were also obvious to her. All I could think to reply was, "I didn't know where to begin."

Together, we started by generating a list of what needed to be addressed and changed in my classroom. I was brimming with examples of classroom management problems, including students who behaved unsafely and defiantly, and class work times and meetings that were noisy and disorganized. Looking at my

notebook page quickly filling up, I primarily saw challenging students. Why, I wanted to know, did one child climb on bookshelves, another hide in a corner during class meetings, and yet another constantly knock over his classmates' block building projects? My advisor asked me to stop looking at my page of notes, and look around the classroom. "They do those things," she explained, "because they feel they are invited to. They can and so they *will*." She challenged me to consider what would happen with the boy who had an inclination to scale any furniture over 12 inches high if the tops of bookshelves were not empty. Where would the girl with a knack for hiding go if furniture was rearranged so the room had no nooks, and more open spaces? Similarly, what could be done so that children were not encouraged to pass through the block area? And so I began the reorganization of my physical classroom: baskets of books were secured with Velcro to the top of each low bookshelf; furniture was moved so that from my chair in the meeting area I could see every inch of the classroom and so that children moving about the classroom did not have to go through the block area. With the transformation of my physical classroom came the first positive transformations of the year, in my students and myself. The children responded well to the added structure, using the extra limits the physical space imposed to guide their behavior and movement through our busy school day.

Identifying each problem area in that first year was easy; finding creative solutions to common problems was the challenge, but one I became ever more equipped to handle. The support offered by my advisor that day inspired me to use more of the resources in my school and from my teacher training. I consulted veteran teachers on how to create behavior modification programs for a couple of children, designing programs and goals that helped these students identify their own challenges and set goals for themselves. Communicating those goals to families and other teachers who worked with these students was crucial to helping the students understand that all of the adults in their life had similar expectations of them and all wanted to offer support. I gave students the daily opportunity to reflect on their goals, judging success or struggles for themselves, and they eagerly accepted the responsibility.

It was not only my struggling students who required great attention and received such support that first year. Taking my newfound focus on agency, I started a routine with my class which helped support the class community as a whole, offering a structure within which we shared struggles and celebrated successes. Every day after recess my class came together to hold a "community talk," a meet-

ing which offered a time for children—and me—to share an observation or obstacle from the day. From anxiety over the death of a pet goldfish to a situation of bullying in the schoolyard, students listened to the troubles of their peers and supported each other. With some guidance, role playing, and modeling, students learned and used the problem-solving process we developed together: share observations, identify a problem, brainstorm possible solutions that are appropriate to the problem at hand, and form an action plan. Going beyond the motto "you break it, you fix it," my class and I together discovered how powerful it can be for all of us to work collaboratively to address and act upon the challenges in our school day. I have continued to hold daily community talks in my second and third year, and plan on keeping the routine alive for many years to come.

Collaboration with students, parents, and other teachers was very often at the root of the small and large successes of that first year. Initially, perhaps, I feared that if I put my struggles into words and asked for help, I would be admitting my weaknesses. I am thankful that with the support from others and finally with my own increased confidence, I learned to take responsibility for those weaknesses and act on the challenges that faced me in that first year. Like my students who set their own goals for their behavior plans and met them, like the child who learned how to express his emotions and select a strategy to calm down, I learned that I had agency as a new teacher and could use it to take action. In so doing, we shaped our experiences and made a positive impact on our classroom environment.

Leadership in the School

As I began my second year, this time teaching a first/second-grade class, I felt that I better understood how to be a confident leader in my own classroom and how to teach my students to be responsible leaders as well. I was no longer so baffled about how to set priorities or address challenges. With so much yet to learn, I was now more comfortable asking for needed support and collaboration. My concentration on agency and action did not wane, but my breadth of view did change. While in my first year I focused on my own students and classroom, my attention was drawn in my second year to the school at large. I found it impossible to make an observation about my individual students without making connections to questions I had about our school philosophy and practice: Is the anxiety over reading I see in some of my students caused by the pressure of sharing a table with their older classmates? Why are there few close friendships that bridge the grades in my class? Are the two boys who most often misbehave bored by our first/second-grade bridged curricula?

Had I been working in a school with a strict top-down administration, I likely would have kept these questions to myself, or shared them to little effect. I am fortunate, however, that my school encourages teachers to voice their interest in school affairs, not just their own classrooms. During weekly meetings, teachers and other staff are asked to convey their concerns honestly and encouraged to share in school decision making. In my second year, my colleagues became quite familiar with my voice during meetings and staff retreats, as I persisted in questioning a school policy I was becoming increasingly less comfortable with: our mixed-grade classrooms.

It was not the philosophy behind this policy, but rather the practical implications it had for our very small school that so concerned me. In theory—and in practice in many larger schools—multiage classes provide an environment that is exceptionally inclusive and supportive of students' social and academic growth. A commonly cited rationale for multiage classrooms is the value in implementing developmentally appropriate curricula that nurture children's continuous improvement rather than judging children rigidly on grade-specific criteria that may not match their developmental profiles (Chase & Doan, 1994; Rathbone, 1993). Teachers of multiage classrooms often report great social strengths of their classrooms, as children quickly become adept at mentoring peers of different ages or abilities and seeking support from their peer role models. While I saw great possibility in the philosophy behind multiage classrooms, I did not always see the practical benefits or solid teacher support and school structure needed for this educational model in our school.

I became concerned that our school was in fact providing students and teachers with challenges that caused frustration and feelings of defeat rather than nourishing a strong, diverse community. In my first/second-grade class, a five-year-old first grader who struggled with learning and language differences was asked to be the peer of an academically advanced second grader who was nearly eight years old. Because of the small size of our school, there was not an option for students who lay on extreme ends of the age or development spectrum to be in a differently configured class; such students either struggled or became bored, often acting out and jeopardizing their position as role model for others. Also due to our small school size, parents did not have the option of being involved in decision making about which class their child would attend each year and what grade configuration that class would use. I questioned whether I was appropriately trained and prepared to teach a class with such diverse needs, and parents that year began to voice their concerns to me about the true benefits of mixed-age grouping. Furthermore, par-

ents—and I—saw instability for their children, with grade configurations changing year to year due to uneven enrollment in each grade. For years running, some children were forced to remain in the younger range of their classrooms while others would always stay in the older range, never receiving the promised benefits of alternating between the important roles of apprentice and experienced role model. On the subject of class grouping in multiage settings, Rathbone (1993) writes that "the key is reaching an intentional balance in the student groupings on several dimensions, achievement being only one of them" (p. 170). In researching multiage education and reflecting on my own school's practices, I began questioning how intentional our class groupings were, given enrollment constraints, and what effect this poor planning was having on our students.

Questions about this practice came to me in the fall of my second year, with hardly 12 months of teaching experience behind me. To some colleagues who had been teaching mixed-grade classes for a dozen years or more, I feared that my concerns would seem judgmental and immature. I worried that these veteran teachers, whom I so respect for their exceptional attention to student needs, might believe that my concerns came from a place of complaint over the added challenge of teaching a mixed-grade class rather than my sincere concern that our school was not meeting students' needs.

I knew that, however unpopular my questions about our school might have been, I could not put them on hold. To more thoroughly develop my professional evaluation of the mixed-grade class policy in a small school, I needed to hear from teachers with more experience and differing perspectives. I thought then of the problem-solving process my students went through every day at our afternoon "community talk." We shared an observation and why it impacted our life at school, asked others to offer ideas, collaboratively developed an action plan, and always checked in with each other later to assess how the plan had worked. This, I thought, is how I expect my students to show their responsibility to their community of peers; it is also a format I can use to start sharing my concerns with my professional community.

After approaching a couple of classroom teachers and specialists with my observations and questions, I was surprised to hear that teachers in our school had regularly been raising similar questions for years. Often, they related to me, issues around our mixed-grade classes were raised at the annual June staff retreat, too late to change plans for the next school year. I learned I was not off base; the struggles I observed in my students had also long been true for many others. Certainly, colleagues began sharing with me, many students benefited from our mixed-grade

approach, and our school's teachers have always been strong enough to take on the task of teaching to a wide range of student needs. Yet, they added, many others suffered frustration for years under a structure which did not provide the support or consistency they needed. Teachers reflected that we receive professional development in specific curriculum areas, but never spend time better learning how to effectively implement multiage curricula and classroom management approaches. Some veterans added that they used to be more comfortable with their mixed-age classes when they had more freedom to develop their own curriculum; now that they were being asked to teach math separately and students are given standardized tests based on their grade, they wondered if some of the community-building goals of the multiage classroom were being lost. The experiences and observations of my colleagues gave me the confidence to approach my principal with the request that the whole staff review and analyze the success of this policy at our unique school before further plans were made for the following school year.

What began as conversations with individual teachers turned into the first agenda item at our winter staff retreat, when my principal granted me an hour to launch what would be the first of many conversations about our policy of having mixed-grade classes. Over the course of this first session and other discussions at staff meetings, staff members shared observations, listed pros and cons of the practice, and posed questions for the group which honored the history of our school but challenged us to revisit the rationale and assess the policy's success for our current student body. Even with my principal's encouragement of this dialogue, I was often the one who later reminded her to add a follow-up conversation to our weekly meeting agendas, and challenged the staff to consider our questions not only with next year in mind, but with the goal of developing a long-term plan for the growth of our school.

True to the mission of our democratically run school, our principal honored the observations and vision of our school's teachers by planning a vote. Classroom teachers were asked to consider their own observations and those shared by other teachers and parents in voting either to continue and improve mixed-grade classes, or to begin rolling out single-grade classes the following school year. The results were very nearly unanimous, in favor of dismantling mixed-grade classes with the goal of providing only single-grade classes within 3 to 5 years. In a snap it was announced that our school was to begin the change next year. My students, I thought, might recognize this process. It was a "community talk" on a larger level, as we came together to share observations, identify why these caused concern, ask our peers for input and advice, and form an action plan.

An Oversight

What may sound like a quick and easy process—and one that may be impossible in many traditional schools—had its snags and disappointments. It quickly became evident that the staff had missed an opportunity to include parents in an important decision-making process, and now stumbled over how to discuss this decision with families. Although many staff members shared parent feedback during our discussions about the mixed-age policy, we had indeed decided that the policy would be changed based on the vote of teachers and administrators exclusively. Without further discussion as a staff, a quick announcement was made at a parent association meeting, an imprudently worded letter was sent to parents without the review of our principal, and tension quickly grew. Parents had been misinformed about why this change was happening, and had been told that testing and city standards were to blame. They were rightly upset about being removed from the process, and they had plenty of questions.

After such initially thoughtful dialogue about our mixed-grade policy with staff members, I was beyond disappointed that we had neglected such an important group of our school community. Upset by the letter that had been sent to parents, I addressed my principal with my newest concerns and wrote the staff an email expressing my worries about the consequences of the poor communication with parents and lack of a unified message about our policy change. The following day, our principal sent a thoughtfully worded letter to families and planned with our parent coordinator to hold the largest-to-date parent-teacher association meeting, with this policy change at the center of the agenda. The meeting was well attended and a variety of voices were heard. Questions were cleared up, mistakes were admitted, and parents had the opportunity to share how they hoped our school could hold on to many of the benefits of multiage education in alternative ways in the coming years. Plans were made to strengthen other multiage activities already in place in our school, such as clubs, student government, and reading buddies between older and younger grades. By June, staff and parents together decided to organize quarterly all-staff parent-teacher association meetings for the following year, offering a venue to discuss school-wide successes and concerns.

I am learning all the time how leadership is—and should be—shared in a community. Throughout this process I was struck by what a strong and collaborative environment can be created when individuals are encouraged to share their observations, concerns, and vision. In my school and many others, it is the mutual respect community members have for each other's experience and opinions, and the open-minded

approach they have about change, that encourages educators, students, and parents alike to take on leadership roles in schools.

Leadership, Continued

Now, completing my third year, I remain thankful to work in an environment that encourages teachers to be so active. Looking back, I can see how the lessons from my first year helped give me the confidence to embrace agency and problem solving, the comfort to take on my role as a leader in my own classroom, the eagerness to become involved in school-wide concerns, and the great appreciation for collaboration with colleagues and families. I still often find myself thinking about that simple question asked by my advisor after my first months of struggling as a new teacher: "Why didn't you tell me?" It is a question I will always hold on to as a reminder to be honest with myself and my colleagues, to reach out when I need help, and to offer help to others, even when they may be too proud—or simply too exhausted—to ask.

Leadership, I have learned, is not only for veterans. Novice teachers, too, can change what must be changed in the interests of supporting their students, improving their practice, and strengthening their schools. In schools where the administration is less receptive to teachers' concerns and suggestions than in mine and where colleagues stay isolated and closed to collaboration, change will be harder. But it can happen, beginning first with one's own classroom and in a proactive approach toward teaching, learning, and leading. The traditional story of the passive, tortured new teacher can be taken back and rewritten. As teachers we are role models for our students. If we want them to grow into active, responsive, and responsible citizens who will work for change in their lives and the world, we must do the same in our schools.

BETLA TEACHER LEADERS:
AN UNSELFISH SENSE OF PURPOSE

lillian hernandez and cristian solorza

Teacher leaders are those whose dreams of making a difference have either been kept alive or have been reawakened by engaging with colleagues and working within a professional culture. — *Linda Lambert (2003b, p. 33)*

Given an anti-bilingual, anti-immigrant national political climate, a strong case can be made that teachers who work with English language learners (ELLs) need to possess exceptional leadership skills inside and outside the classroom. Bank Street's Bilingual/ESL [English as a Second Language] Teacher Leadership Academy (BETLA) was created to develop just such teacher leaders.

The numbers and diversity of ELLs/bilingual students help to explain the enormous instructional and institutional challenges that teachers and leaders alike need to embrace. As with any "group," ELLs/bilingual students "vary significantly in their socioeconomic status, cultural traditions, family literacy rates, prior schooling, English proficiency and other factors" (Crawford & Krashen, 2007, p. 12). ELLs in the US speak over 460 languages, and approximately 76% of all ELLs speak Spanish at home (Kindler, 2002, as cited in García, Kleifgan, & Falchi, 2008).

The New York City Department of Education (2008) reports that ELLs constitute about 14% of the total student population—144,000 students—dispersed widely among K-12 settings. This figure does not include those students whose parents refused bilingual services or those who have placed out of ESL services but nevertheless continue to use a language other than English at home. Educators are faced with the dilemma of how to provide adequate assessments and the instructional differentiation needed to effectively serve bilingual learners.

Recognizing that much of the leadership in resolving the issues of quality and equity for this population will fall to teachers themselves, BETLA has taken on the mission of preparing teachers of ELLs for the intense and unique leadership challenges they will face. Our study of the narrative accounts of nine BETLA teacher leaders was designed to give voice to teachers who have often been silenced and to speak to the positive relevance of teacher leaders in today's schools. The semistructured interviews took place over a two-week period and were recorded and transcribed.

Unleashing the Voice of Self-Confidence: Working from Strengths

> *I know that I am that much closer to being the advocate and leader I aspire to be. I aspire to make a difference in a system that fails to see (consciously and unconsciously) the needs of minorities.* — *BETLA teacher leader journal entry (2004)*

In the above quote, the teacher leader recalls that throughout the years that he was a student in the New York City public school system, his weaknesses always seemed apparent to him. In the BETLA program, he learned to recognize his strengths as an adult and to value his possibilities within the same educational system.

> I will always hold on to how I felt at the conclusion of the BETLA program as a reminder of the work I need to continue as an educator. Every attempt to share my gratitude with words was overcome with tears and silence. I am an educator, advocate, researcher, leader, and so many other roles and possibilities I have yet to discover. I now know that I must help my students feel self-confident and must work with their strengths.

All of the teacher leaders interviewed described similar experiences. They all needed to acknowledge their potential in order to feel like authentic leaders in their schools.

In collaboration with the school principal and a BETLA advisor, each teacher leader drew up a work plan that assisted them in structuring their teacher leader work. Each played an active role in identifying her/his own strengths. "It was about taking risks. The ideas could have been crazy but it was part of a vision," recalled one teacher leader. "We realized we had a voice and had something to say."

Many teacher leaders engaged in shared school leadership for the first time. "BETLA made me feel that someone valued what I did. It made me behave differently, made me want to share more. I started to see myself as somebody who can have a real influence on a school building." Another teacher leader realized, "I have a lot to offer. Not only can teachers be leaders, but I can help them believe they can be leaders." The experience of sharing their work plans and gaining the approval of school administrators empowered the teacher leaders. Moreover, their new schoolwide leadership roles provided opportunities to actually share their cultural perspective and pedagogical expertise to help change school practices.

The monthly advisement group provided support that many felt was critical

for their personal development. One teacher leader said, "I was pushed to the next level. My advisor came with an attitude of 'You can do it!" She remembers having felt earlier that she couldn't or shouldn't follow through with her ideas. "Although things haven't changed in terms of what scares me, I have a different attitude toward that. You have to believe in yourself." The one-to-one advisement helped provide focus for one teacher leader, who said, "It gave me a clear vision of what I wanted to do and how to do it. It brought me peace."

The conference groups, collegial discussions, and informal support systems were highly regarded and important, as many bilingual/ESL teachers found themselves isolated in schools. One teacher stated, "Many bilingual teachers are experts in their field but they don't have the confidence to advocate for their children because they are the minority." Each bilingual/ESL teacher brought valuable experiences to their conversations. "You would get input from teacher leaders who were *abriendo caminos* (opening doors) in their own schools. You heard different points of view that helped you develop flexibility in understanding peoples' needs." One teacher recalled, "It gave me a chance to see things in a broad perspective when I really needed to." She valued the discourse so highly, she often found herself exclaiming, "*No hablen a la misma vez* (Don't speak at the same time) because I have to write this down!"

The cohorts themselves were critically important in clarifying and challenging stereotypes regarding gender, class, and identity. "I think the fact that it was predominantly women really encouraged those voices that are often shut down. The advisors, the professors, the directors, all of these women were professional role models for the rest of us…" One teacher leader explained, "My parents have always cleaned offices and houses…the exposure and opportunity to identify with exceptional Latino educational leaders and role models opened up new possibilities for who I can become."

While all the Latino teacher leaders felt proud of their ethnicity, some admitted to also holding on to self-deprecating ideas. Many teacher leaders grew up feeling that being bilingual was a disadvantage. Some felt discriminated against for speaking with an accent and using a Spanish-language variation not valued by other Spanish speakers. Two teacher leaders admitted that, until they met their BETLA cohort, they believed that bilingual teachers were not very well-educated and did not speak English very well. Through ongoing conversation and participation, BETLA teacher leaders seem to have developed a critical awareness of what it means to be bilingual and/or Latino in the field of education. They challenged

old stereotypes, personal ideologies, and their history. They defined and redefined their identities as people and as leaders. The experience empowered them and amplified their voice.

Identification with ELLs and Their Communities

These are the kids I see myself in, and I can't let them not get to college because they don't have the background…It's a very political thing. If we leave [the profession], who's left for our kids?…If I worked in a completely monolingual environment, I would lose a part of myself. —*BETLA teacher leader*

A close identification with ELLs and their communities was the basis of teacher leader advocacy. It fueled the type of leadership needed to support the needs of bilingual students. As teacher leaders, the BETLA participants developed and defended practices that support the social, emotional, academic, and linguistic development of their students. Throughout the interviews, we heard BETLA teacher leaders connect quite emotionally to their students' lives and educational experiences.

One teacher, whose father is Italian-American and whose mother is originally from Colombia, stated:

Although I was born in the US, I thought of myself as an immigrant. My education stemmed from my family… making my parents proud, being polite, being proud of your heritage, economical, not wasting things…all of those things were part of my upbringing.

She explained that she relied on an "American" high school friend, who lived in Greenwich Village and whose father was a political science teacher, to introduce her to a "world beyond my little world" and "to gain entry into academics and to their cultural things like camp, summer programs…the best colleges." Her friend provided access to the types of cultural capital she felt she needed to succeed in the academic world.

Later, in explaining her reasons for becoming a teacher, she said:

I realized that when they [teachers] said we were smart, it was because we were doing things that they wanted us to do. It wasn't through our own creativity. I realized that I didn't understand what intelligence was, that I didn't

understand what education was. For a long time I thought education was following the rules… If we are going to help kids from Queens like me get to places like Swarthmore, we have to use their real potential, not have them jump through hoops. That's when I realized that teaching small children is really powerful.

She attempts to redefine the term intelligence and questions the instructional practices she encountered in her New York City public school experience. In her interview, she speaks of the importance of creating "bridges" between home and school, and trying to understand the practices that families have in common.

Similarly, one teacher leader revealed that he had considered himself "lazy" much of his life because of an education that did not value his culture. He realizes now that "I was just *curious* that entire time and perhaps didn't fit the mold of what I was expected to do in school."

One teacher leader tells of making a conscious decision to return to the South Bronx to work in public schools, even though he received offers to work in the private sector. He too makes reference to school practices.

I realized that when I went to prep school and college [Ivy League], I was learning how to think. I was learning how to write. I was learning how to speak. But when I was going to public schools, it was more about drilling, not really helping you become that intellectual. When I realized that there was that big gap, I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to give people from my community the opportunity to get a good education and to ensure that everyone gets an equitable education. I wanted to be at the forefront of all that.

These teacher leaders all considered their cultural and educational experiences to be the reasons that they became educators. They all expressed the need to play an active role in shaping the school curriculum. They hope to empower their students to be able to enter unfamiliar worlds and to feel entitled to articulate their beliefs, while still maintaining their strong family connections.

Nieto (1999) describes the importance of a teacher's identification with students and its relationship to pedagogy:

The purpose of identifying with one's students is not to dabble in other people's cultures, but to use the relationships that ensue to change classroom practices to be more effective with a wider range of students. It is a process that is as empowering and enriching for teachers as it is for the students with whom they work (p. 153).

These teachers see their relationships with parents and communities as opportunities for developing practice that is both responsive and respectful of their students' needs.

Another teacher leader admits that it took time for her to learn to respect and appreciate the reality of student and family life outside the classroom. In her early years as an educator, she did not consider the needs and interests of parents, and characterized her attitude toward them as "pretentious and self-centered." Being responsive to families within current public schools demands sacrifice, perseverance, and a strong sense of self. Valuing and incorporating family culture in an already highly standardized one-size-fits-all curriculum is difficult work.

A Call for Action: Redefining Teacher Leadership

For BETLA students, the term "teacher leadership" encompassed a broad definition that included self-development, instructional leadership, and a shared responsibility to students and their community. The commitment to meeting the needs of the complex diversity of bilingual students required the participants to expand their roles as teachers and leaders in public schools.

Self-development

Leadership was recognized as a deep, evolving, and reflective process. An understanding of their strengths and identity, as well as feeling empowered in schools, served as catalysts for the development of leadership abilities. One teacher leader stated, "I am going to be a leader as long as I perceive myself as one and do what I have to do."

Courage and strong communication skills are needed to fulfill the role of the teacher leader. One stated, "It takes a lot of confidence to get up in front of adults and embody knowledge and behavior people can respect." Regardless of race, language differences, perceptions of self, doubt, and stress, the teacher leaders identified the absolute need to feel comfortable in their own skin. One believes, "You need to own who you are, so you can allow yourself to sincerely share aspects

of yourself. It allows me to feel calm in stressful situations. I now trust myself."
This is an essential quality if the teacher leader is to support family practices that
do not seem to belong in the public school.

These teacher leaders worked hard to develop cultures of trust and respect-
ful, collaborative learning in their schools. They found the need to invest in gen-
uine conversation. "My goal was to make a connection with each person and I
knew the connection was going to be different [with each]." Teacher leaders are
facilitators, coaches, and critical friends. One explains, "It is not 'I want to see what
you're doing in your room because I don't know if you are doing that right'—but
more like, 'Let me see what you are doing so I can better my practice.'

Learning to listen and collaborate with others proved challenging for the
teacher leaders. One said, "I've worked on becoming more socially-emotionally
intelligent and learning how to communicate nonviolently and just become more
well-balanced as a person." Interactions with colleagues entail patience, deep
reflection, and awareness of one's needs and those of others. Teacher leaders are
liaisons between teachers and curriculum, and teachers and administrators.
"Learning how to become more diplomatic and more emotionally intelligent is
very important. Learning how to listen, and learning how to get two different fac-
tions within the school to learn and collaborate in order to resolve school issues is
extremely challenging."

Instructional Leadership

Differentiating instruction and educating bilingual students present many
challenges. As one teacher leader put it, "I didn't realize how much work [it was]
and how hard it was to be able to meet the needs of every student." Another
teacher leader shared her concerns, "Many times our ELLs come off as incompe-
tent due to language barriers. People judge them as low-performing children." A
third believes teachers need help with accurately measuring a student's language
growth. She worries teachers are "lumping ELLs together."

Understanding bilingualism and learning to support the spectrum of lan-
guage learners require careful analysis of student work, curriculum, content, lan-
guage, and social goals. Students who are labeled as SIFE (students with inter-
rupted formal education) or long-term ELLs present other challenges that require
a deep understanding of their needs and innovative ideas. One high school teacher
leader calls for a serious commitment if "they [ELLs] are going to graduate, no
matter when they come to the country." BETLA teacher leaders have helped cre-

ate newcomer classes and collaborative relationships with social workers to foster their students' social and emotional growth.

Teacher leaders understand that "you are more than yourself when you collaborate." It was important for them to rely on their BETLA network and also to find people in their school to form groups they could depend upon. "Working in a team, you can come up with an idea/approach toward very complex problems. These are not decisions one person can make."

These teacher leaders are continually refining their practice as educators of bilingual learners and are committed to "learning how to teach even better than yesterday." Their teacher leadership requires them to step outside their classrooms to work with a network of educators to promote what is best for ELLs.

Shared Responsibility to Students and Their Community

These teacher leaders take risks, embrace a sense of duty, and engage proactively with others to generate change in schools. When asked to give advice to teachers, one said, "You need to take chances." She continued, "If you explain your philosophy, your mission, your vision…if you articulate that to the principal and you say, 'I am suggesting an alternative because I think it's best for the kids'…you could probably get your administrator on board." Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) emphasize, "teacher leadership represents a major shift from old norms of teaching in isolation and focusing on just 'my students.' Many teachers have rethought their roles and now engage in collaborative work on a shared school vision, and many practice shared decision making with colleagues, parents, and administrators" (pp. 3-4).

Many principals recognize "a myriad of opportunities in teachers" and foster shared leadership in their buildings. However, in a time of NCLB [No Child Left Behind] and an increasing emphasis on testing, one teacher leader believes her administration is too focused "on data and assessment." She continues, "Teacher leaders need to fill that gap in order to improve the teaching quality of the entire staff." Another understands "that their primary role is to make sure [that] what they do works [for] the students. You have to have courage to advocate for your students…to help them grow."

As bilingual educators working in a highly political field, teacher leaders find their leadership extending beyond their schools. Taking on this role can be challenging. As one teacher leader put it,

I'm not a political person, but it's a pill I have to swallow. You have to be political! You have to seek out other people in the know who are popular and in the media. You have to put yourself out there to get what you need for your students.

Another said teacher leadership is "acting on beliefs, on what you think is the right thing to do." She explained that the United States has a "history of racism, discrimination, class divisions, and other factors. Equity and principles of equal treatment are very strong with me." She shared her experience of being politically active by writing letters to various newspapers nationwide. She believes that many people do not understand the bilingual/ESL field and that it is important to share "our truths." She also stresses that teachers need to be a part of organizations that support the educational excellence of ELLs.

The BETLA teacher leaders have been involved in writing grants for parents and students, providing resources, facilitating study groups, providing staff development, and coaching teachers. They have addressed policy issues at the local, state, and national levels. Several have made presentations at conferences, provided professional development to local and state audiences, responded to anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant editorials in national and local newspapers, and lobbied state and national policymakers. All have taken on advocacy roles on behalf of bilingual learners.

Fulfilling an Unselfish Sense of Purpose

I have been entrusted with a legacy. I have a serious responsibility to keep up with the literature, develop a set of competencies, finding that relationship, and develop that trust to share what you know. —BETLA teacher leader

All the BETLA teacher leaders know that their ability to improve instruction for bilingual learners is contingent upon a supportive environment. All of those interviewed acknowledged that they work in school cultures that promote their role as teacher leaders. Research literature corroborates the significance of a supportive environment in encouraging successful teacher leader roles (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002; Danielson, 2006; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). For successful teacher leadership to occur, school leaders need to value teacher input, support risk taking, commit to shared leadership roles, provide opportunities for teacher discourse and inquiry, and allow for a sincere and sus-

tained exchange with students and their communities.

Several teacher leaders felt disillusionment at having been in settings where administrators did not support a vision of shared leadership and had little knowledge of their students' cultures and language needs. They expressed concern for schools that have little contact with the community and where the pedagogy was not reflective of their students' needs. Two teacher leaders, now assistant principals, understand the importance of these issues and acknowledge the control school leaders have over their budgets and school curriculum.

The BETLA teacher leaders interviewed represent a group of people as diverse as their ELL/bilingual students. They hold tremendous cultural capital that is often overlooked by society. The range of socioeconomic classes, educational experiences, cultural practices, languages, and transnational experiences position them uniquely to help schools meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Complex solutions and strong teacher leadership are needed if we are to truly build on the strengths of our bilingual learners. Often viewed as outsiders in the highly standardized, mostly English-speaking institution of the public school, these leaders cannot wait until they are invited in before accepting that they have a critical role to play in fashioning a new public culture containing many new and previously silenced voices.

LEADING WITHOUT PERMISSION

robin e. hummel

Taking responsibility for what really matters to us is the definition of leadership, according to Weissglass (2009). If we accept this definition, then leadership is something that can be nurtured in teachers from the very beginning of their careers. Leadership isn't something separate and distinct from all the other aspects of the craft that we're expected to develop; it is an attribute of our work, just as collaboration, inquiry, reflection, pedagogy, and content knowledge are.

There is an egalitarian streak in the teaching profession. We often chafe at attempts to rank us and are skeptical of positions that grant us special privileges or power over our colleagues. I believe that by developing our own leadership, we can transcend the hierarchical nature of school systems. We don't need permission to be leaders.

One important way to achieve this is through action research. Action research is a way for teachers to look closely at a specific aspect of their practice of their choosing, in order to gain a deeper understanding of it. The methods inherent in action research support inquiry and reflection, using the teacher's classroom work as data. Action research is personal, intensive, and long-term, essential qualities for purposeful professional development.

Through action research, we invite others to join us in building relationships that promote collaboration. When we quietly and thoughtfully pursue our ideas together, we don't have to wait for permission to be leaders. "Teacher leadership is less a matter of according trusted leaders responsibility for important issues than of ensuring that all teachers are given ownership of a responsibility about which they care deeply" (Barth, 1988, p.139).

A perceived obstacle to creating action research projects is the time they require. Teachers always worry about not having enough time to accomplish many of the things they think are important. So the question becomes, Is our own growth as teachers not worthy of our time? That's why the action research must be personal (that is, defined by the teacher) and purposeful, so the time spent is seen as worthwhile. If carefully crafted, action research creates energy, an essential element for teaching and leadership.

I often wonder if my work with teachers and faculties inspires them to see themselves as agents of their own change and of leadership. I frequently hear protests

about leadership. One middle school teacher recently said to me, "I don't want to be a leader. I just want to be a teacher." When I tried to encourage another teacher to accept a leadership role in her school, she responded, "Robin, do you know that leadership is code for doing all the [stuff] that principals don't want to do?"

In my work with coaches, I often hear about their frustrations with their colleagues who are not responsive to them. In an attempt to move teachers into leadership roles like coaching, well-intentioned principals try to select the best and brightest and offer them these positions, which often causes resentment from other staff members who wonder why they were not chosen to share their expertise with colleagues. "Most teachers are unresponsive to top-down efforts to improve their instruction through administratively created teacher leadership positions" (Wasley, 1991, p. 160).

This leads me to wonder why teachers' voices are rarely a part of the decision-making process when it comes to leadership roles. Teachers who are put into leadership roles by the principal are often presumed to be experts. In my experience, the truly inspired masters of teaching don't see themselves as experts—they see themselves as learners. These leaders are less interested in sharing their expertise than in nurturing efficacy in others. And by taking a learner's stance, these same leaders exemplify the humility necessary for successful leadership because they're always open to the ideas of others. A coach who is capable of inspiring teachers to reflect deeply on their lessons contributes to those teachers' effectiveness, which promotes a capacity for leadership.

In order to get a sense of their thinking about leading and teaching, I asked 32 colleagues in a variety of roles for their definitions of leadership and the attributes needed by a teacher to take on a leadership role. (My research was conducted via email; see acknowledgements.) I also asked them to explain what leadership has to do with teaching, and I asked what they themselves would need to take on leadership roles in their schools. If the respondents were already in leadership positions, I asked them to describe experiences that defined their roles as leaders.

Echoing a common view, many of the respondents said that leadership is influencing and inspiring others to accomplish goals by providing guidance and direction. All said that leaders need a vision of what could be accomplished. Implicit in most of the responses was the distinction between teaching and leadership. If, on the other hand, we believe that taking responsibility for what is most important to us is a precept for both teaching and leadership, then perhaps more teachers would see leadership as a natural part of their work. Saying, "I don't want

to be a leader, I just want to be a teacher" simply wouldn't make sense.

Through purposeful collaboration, we can develop the qualities necessary to be thoughtful leaders in our schools. We need to open our classroom doors and welcome our colleagues in with open arms, as difficult as that may be.

> When teachers are afraid to share their ideas and successes for fear of being perceived as blowing their own horns; when teachers are reluctant to tell others of a new idea on the grounds that others might steal it or take credit for it (or on the assumption that others should go through the same painful discovery process that they did); when teachers, young or old, are afraid to ask for help because they might be perceived as less than competent; when a teacher uses the same approach year after year even though it is not working… it is not possible to embrace collaboration (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996, p.39-40).

If we accepted and practiced collaboration as a natural expectation of our teaching from the very beginning of our careers, wouldn't these obstacles diminish or disappear altogether?

How do we promote ideas that are important to us without the explicit support of the principal? Do we need that support to look more closely at our practice? Is it possible for teacher leadership to exist without permission from the administration? What does it mean to take responsibility for things that are important to us? I have been fortunate in my career to have worked with principals and superintendents who expected me to reflect more deeply and to demand more from my practice and myself, and who created opportunities for me to step up and take responsibility for things that have been important to me. But how can we encourage teachers who don't work with such inspiring instructional leaders?

Taking responsibility for what really matters to us does not require structural changes in a school; it does not require broadening our job descriptions; it does not require contract negotiations or revisions. Leadership begins with a commitment to our craft, with or without supportive principals and superintendents.

Many teachers resist leadership roles because they worry that these roles will either interfere with their teaching or will somehow separate them from their colleagues. Do we need to leave the classroom in order to meet the demands that leadership requires? How can we nurture best practices beyond our classrooms?

We nurture our own leadership when we take responsibility for our own

professional development, and action research is one important way to own this responsibility. When we learn to gather data and look at our own practice as valid research, we make the specific work in the classroom valuable, respected, academic, and public. An important component of action research is the creation and promotion of collaborative learning communities where teachers work together, reflect on their practice, exchange ideas, and share strategies. A collaborative learning community is the most promising strategy for sustained and authentic school improvement, according to Schmoker (2004, p. 424). When we engage in action research, we're saying that our own practice is worthy of time and attention. We're telling the system that our work is of utmost importance, and that the system needs to pay attention. When we engage in action research, we grow our own content knowledge and pedagogy and promote our leadership capacity. And when we make our action research public, we are all given opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways.

Promoting action research builds leadership capacity because action research supports teachers as reflective practitioners committed to their own growth, an essential element in leadership.

Teachers learn more about changing their practice when they learn from other teachers. After her first experience with action research, one teacher wrote that having colleagues to work with provided a sounding board for her, and the questions and ideas from the group "forced [her] to think deeply about what [she] was doing."

Another participant wrote that his action research question seemed focused on one specific idea that initially led him to think there would be a specific result or answer. However, he found that in the process he saw distinct influences on several aspects of his teaching. He wrote,

> It was fascinating. The question was like a pebble dropped into a pond. Its rippling effect had a profound influence on my entire practice. This one question facilitated changes in the activities and projects I assigned, my classroom climate, and my role as a teacher of mathematics. I completely underestimated how much action research would influence my teaching and my students' perceptions of and experiences in mathematics.

This teacher continued his action research, both individually and with a group.

An integral part of action research is sharing the findings of the research, which builds a collaborative culture, diminishing or even eliminating the isolating nature of teaching. This sharing enhances our capacity for leadership because we no longer need to look only to the authorities in the hierarchy for support, direction, or vision.

When I asked colleagues, "What does leadership have to do with teaching?" the responses were fascinating. Several teachers understood that we are leaders in our classrooms. Most said that leadership has everything to do with teaching because our objectives are to support a willingness to take risks, to nurture passion for ideas, to inspire curiosity, and to foster independence so our students take charge of their own learning. Whether teachers wrote, "To teach is to lead," or administrators wrote, "To lead is to teach," clearly the teachers I surveyed are quite skilled in creating student-centered classrooms and the administrators are inspired teachers.

So this leads me to wonder why leadership roles and teaching are seen as mutually exclusive responsibilities. As classroom teachers, we have a clear vision of what we want for our students. What we want for them we should want for ourselves: a wide array of opportunities that engage us in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems using our own experiences and working with others in ways that contribute to the good of everyone. When we do this, we are leading our schools. Teacher-centered leadership, like student-centered classrooms, is a worthwhile goal. "To assert one's leadership as a teacher…takes commitment to an educational ideal. It also requires the energy to combat one's own inertia caused by habit and overwork. It requires a certain kind of courage to step outside of the small prescribed circle of traditional 'teacher tasks,' to declare through our actions that we care about and take responsibility for more than … what goes on in the four walls of our classrooms" (Barth, 1988, p. 135).

I asked colleagues who were official leaders to describe one experience that reflected their role as leaders and I asked classroom teachers to explain what they would need to take on leadership roles in their schools. Again, the results were telling. All the school and district leaders spoke of experiences in which they nurtured leadership in others. They told stories of questions they asked teachers, of believing in their integrity, of engaging their intelligence and work ethic, of decisions they ultimately left up to the teachers. One colleague wrote that she considered each person's positive contribution a form of leadership within a group.

Many teachers wrote that they would need the support and encouragement of the principal. Some wrote that they would need to be given the opportunity to

take on leadership roles; some responded with qualities that they would need to possess, such as the ability to establish trust in relationships with peers and strong communication skills. One teacher wrote, "At this time, I am not interested in taking on a leadership role in my school. I love the classroom too much!" I know that this particular teacher has taken on many leadership roles, including contributions to content knowledge through curriculum development, collaborating in professional development sessions, team-teaching, and lending an ear to frustrated colleagues. However, she clearly sees leadership as something disconnected from her teaching.

Learning to be a thoughtful leader, like learning to be a thoughtful teacher, transcends techniques and strategies to be mastered and provides us with opportunities to immerse ourselves in our own learning and leadership. When we stop seeing ourselves as technicians, when we stop allowing the hierarchy to define our craft and manage our time, and when we naturally accept our roles as researchers, we will expand our vision of who we are and what we do. We will come to view ourselves and be viewed by others as "intellectuals engaged in inquiry about teaching and learning" (Lieberman and Miller, 2004, p. 11). Inherent in this expanded vision is the idea that we are also leaders who make a difference in schools every day.

"Teaching and leadership are both about infusing life and work with passion, meaning, and purpose" (Bolman and Deal, 1993, p. 3). Leadership does not necessarily have to be about managing politics or overcoming obstacles. If we are taught from the beginning of our careers that leadership is the willingness to take responsibility for what is important to us, and we can embrace this responsibility through collaboration and action research, then we'll begin to think differently about the nature of teaching and leadership and understand that they are not separate endeavors. In doing so, we will influence more of our colleagues to see themselves as the leaders many already are.

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