Changing Teaching from Within: Teachers as Leaders

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Introduction: The Question of Teacher Leadership

In the last decade some researchers have begun to talk about "distributed leadership" (Spillane, Hallett and Diamond 2003), while others have called for a redefinition of leadership for principals and teachers (Fullan 1995; Lambert 2003; Leithwood 1992; Sergiovanni 2006). These researchers have added immeasurably to our understanding of leadership development and its possibilities in this reform era. We are learning that good principals share leadership responsibilities as they build a team; that teachers increasingly take on responsibilities for instructional improvement; and that professional learning communities need to be developed and supported for continuous growth and development of the school culture.

These and other researchers call for the development and nurturing of teacher leadership (Lieberman and Miller 2004; Smylie 1997; Wasley 1991) as a critical component of distributed leadership. But we still know very little about how teachers become leaders and what sustains them, and even less about how teachers learn to lead, the experiences that seem seminal to their development, and how they shape and transform the many leadership positions they take on.

This was precisely the set of issues we attempted to understand when we initiated the Vignette Study as part of a larger group of studies of teacher-consultants in the National Writing Project. We reasoned that NWP quite purposefully creates leadership opportunities for the teachers who participate in the summer institute and wondered whether their socialization into the writing project might help them better articulate how they learned to lead in a variety of contexts: in their school, district, state, or writing project site. We also wanted to know how their experience in the writing project might have been foundational in their learning about leadership. Because of NWP's history of nurturing teacher-leaders and offering opportunities for leadership,

as well as its engagement of teachers as writers, we saw the organization as an ideal setting for exploring a broader set of questions related to teacher leadership.

The National Writing Project

Previous work has documented the "social practices" of the writing project's intensive, month-long summer invitational institute (Lieberman and Wood 2003). During this institute, teachers, often for the first time, go public with their practice by teaching some aspect of their instruction to their peers; work in writing groups; share and critique each others' work; and learn from research and theory in the field of writing as well as from the knowledge and practice of other educators. At the institute teachers participate in a learning community that is collaborative and inquiry oriented, at the same time as they are expanding their knowledge of writing and the teaching of writing.[1] Teachers become learners engaging in the various stages of writing, which deepens their understanding of their own and their students' strengths, challenges, and development as writers; they participate as colleagues in a way that is starkly different from much of their experience as teachers in their own school. Many speak of their experience in the summer institute as being "transformative" and "magical."

Wenger (1998) has written about "learning as social participation," making the claim that participation in communities of practice "shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (4). For him such communities become important arenas for professional learning because the people imbue activities with shared meanings, develop a sense of belonging, and create new identities based, in part, on their relationships with one another. In the summer institute the social practices convey norms and purposes, they create a sense of belonging in a community, and they help shape professional identities. The teachers come to realize that they are members of a community of others who share their struggles, their desire to

improve the teaching of writing, and their need to continue learning (Lieberman and Wood 2003, 21). Our hunch was that the summer institute, combined with the experiences gained by being a teacher-consultant (TC), would be a part of the TCs' learning as they assumed different roles.[2]

At the end of the summer institute these TCs begin to share their practice and provide professional development for their colleagues, sometimes through informal sharing with teaching colleagues in their schools, often through opportunities sponsored by their writing project sites, and other times by assuming formal professional development positions within their schools and districts. As TCs leave the summer institute, where all are invested in sharing and refining their practice, they typically confront the strong egalitarian norms of teacher culture, facing such attitudes as, What makes you think your practice is better than mine? Why do you want me to expose my practice? (Lortie 1975). They learn that leading in their own schools has a particular set of problems for them as leaders. One teacher-leader names this challenge:

> *It's one thing to stand up in front of strangers . . . and ask teachers to try something they may not have tried, to show them ways to teach writing, maybe even to ask them to write and share something: if they don't buy it you may never know. It's quite another thing to get up in front of your co-workers and tell them they should teach differently.*
>
> – Paul Epstein (Ruffner Elementary School)

The Vignette Study

As we began our study, we wondered about several things. What does teacher leadership look like in practice? How does it differ from common conceptions of leadership? What problems do these leaders face and how do they negotiate their roles and responsibilities? How do teachers learn to lead? Answering these questions required us to understand how the work of teacher-leaders unfolds both day to day and over time. We also needed to get a picture of teacher-leaders' principles, interactions, and challenges. To do so, we decided to identify a

sample of NWP teacher-leaders who were locally recognized as strong and effective models of teacher leadership and engage them in a vignette study.

In many studies of leadership, one of the problems is that leadership is daily and takes place among a myriad of activities and actions that accrue over time. Typical data collection strategies—interviews, surveys, or even observations and focus groups—often fail to show the interconnections and variety of activities, strategies, and tactics that people come to learn over time when they take on leadership responsibilities. For these reasons, the vignette was developed. Our study, which uses vignettes as its primary data source, is built upon the assumption that when a number of people write to a common set of prompts it is more likely that people's dynamic practices of work and interaction with others can be revealed, because we can see both the common elements that emerge across several stories as well as the complexities and specificity of each individual story.

The vignette was first used by Miles, Lieberman and Saxl (1988) in a study of assistance personnel who were change agents in a variety of school reform efforts in New York city. After interviewing the successful leaders in this project, the research team was told by those we were studying that "you don't get it." The participants in the study taught the research team that it was hard to describe the many things that these successful leaders did every day despite our well-thought-out interviews and observations of them at work. The vignette helped fill the gap. The researchers wrote several prompts that would help the participants write about a set of events (spanning less than one year) where they learned about and helped facilitate improvement with one or more teachers. In that study, the vignettes did indeed help show how those in leadership worked on a daily basis and what they were doing that appeared to teach them how to facilitate for others (Lieberman 1987). In this current study, we changed the prompts to get at the essence

of the NWP culture and what the teachers were learning in their new leadership positions (see appendix A).

The Sample

Writing project site directors, as well as leaders from NWP's nationally sponsored programs, observe writing project teacher-leaders at work in a variety of settings.[3] Therefore, we called on a selected group of them to identify teachers who had successfully taken on leadership positions in their schools, districts, or states, or in NWP,[4] and to each nominate one individual whom they knew to be professionally active; reflective about work s/he has done to influence students, peers, and the contexts in which s/he works; and comfortable writing about his/her work.

As an additional criterion, we asked half of the nominating NWP leaders to recommend someone who played leadership roles at the writing project and the other half to recommend an individual who took on leadership in other educational arenas (e.g., school, district, state). Thirty-three individuals were nominated; all were accepted to participate in the Vignette Study, but two dropped out after the first writing retreat for personal reasons.

Of the vignette authors, 88 percent are women and 12 percent are men; 79 percent are Caucasian, 15 percent are African American, 3 percent are Asian American, and 3 percent are "Other." They come from 21 states and 31 writing project sites. Their leadership work spans all school levels: elementary, middle, senior high, and university. They participated in the writing project's invitational summer institute between 1983 and 2004. On average, they have worked in education for 18.5 years. At the time of the study, 91 percent worked in education, while 9 percent were retired but continuing to work in education. In their last reported position, the vignette authors were

- teaching (15 / 38.5%)
- working in school systems in positions such as assistant principal, curriculum specialist, or superintendent (11 / 28.2%)
- working in education in positions such as curriculum specialist in state departments of education or consultant for their writing project sites (13 / 33.3%).[5]

Writing the Vignettes

The vignette writers and researchers met for two writing retreats, each lasting two and a half days. In the first retreat, we explained to the assembled teacher-leaders that we wanted them to write about their leadership by selecting a series of activities—less than a case, but more than one event—that "showed" rather than "told" how they were learning to lead. The retreat marked the beginning of a process of co-constructing the vignettes.

At this retreat, we worked with the teacher-leaders both one-on-one and in writing response groups to choose one slice of their work to write about, offering guidance about which aspects of their work seemed particularly well suited for this study. In the four months between the two retreats, each person produced at least two drafts of his or her vignette and received written responses from one lead researcher.[6] In our responses, we asked them to elaborate what they did, to focus their stories, and to make explicit their leadership and the ways in which they learned to lead in the situation described.

At the second writing retreat, the teacher-leaders shared their works-in-progress with us and with their colleagues. Often, hearing others' stories and listening to the questions of their peers prompted them to add nuances to their stories and to clarify information about the context in which they worked. Following the second retreat, the writers received one final round of response and polished their vignettes.

Additional Data

In addition to the vignettes, we collected an array of other data related to these teachers' leadership work and conceptions of leadership. First, we collected a professional history survey from all 31 participants in order to situate these vignettes within the trajectory of their full work lives. The survey asks about participants' full work history, their experiences within the writing project, their personal and professional publications, their participation in other professional organizations, their ratings of the writing project's influence on their career, and their perceptions of the extent to which leadership was part of each job they held.

At the second writing retreat, we held five focus groups, which included 28 of the 31 participating teacher-leaders. We wanted to make explicit what was implicit in the vignettes—how do these accomplished professionals define teacher leadership? To what extent, if at all, do they view themselves as leaders? What role, if any, has participation in the writing project and the writing of this vignette played in shaping their conceptions of teacher leadership?

Our Approach to Analysis

After all the vignettes were finally finished, we read and made notes about the roles each author played, the key content dimensions, and common themes related to leadership, the role of the writing project in shaping the work, and the process of learning to lead. We then met to discuss our understanding of each vignette and out of our initial readings we identified three broad categories of vignettes: teachers leading change inside their own schools; teachers facilitating an array of professional development opportunities outside of their own schools; and teachers moving into formal, named leadership roles in their schools, districts, states, or writing project sites. We then read each subset of vignettes to identify and categorize the strategies these

teacher-leaders used to make change, as well as to understand patterns in how they learned to lead.

In each group, the leadership learning initially comes from the participants' engagement with the writing project. The first group is characterized by those teachers who find a way to make change inside their own school buildings without seeming to step out of the ranks. In this group, the teacher-leaders figure out how to match some strategic moves with the exigencies of the context.

In the second group of vignettes, teacher-leaders describe offering an array of professional development opportunities for teachers outside their own schools. In these vignettes, the authors show us how they continue to build their own knowledge base and refine their practice—through reflecting on and critiquing their work, and through finding out what teachers say they need and then revising their professional development offerings.

In the third group, teachers write about making transitions into leadership roles outside their classrooms. They explore what happens when they cross the line from teacher to administrator: they describe how they work to stay true to their writing project principles and values while fulfilling their responsibilities as administrators, and they show us how they continue to learn and grow in these formal leadership positions.

In this paper, we focus on the 10 teachers whose vignettes describe their leadership inside their own schools (see appendix B).

Identity: What Does It Mean to Be a Teacher-Leader?

> *We are doing a study of the leadership work of writing project teacher-consultants. We are looking at what TCs do, the content of their work, how TCs develop and get supported in their work . . .*
>
> – Vignette Prompt, n.d.

When we introduced the vignette prompt, several vocal members of the group claimed that they were not leaders, reflecting the egalitarian ethos of schools. When asked about their definition of leadership, they replied, “It is when you are told what to do.” While some TCs readily identified themselves as leaders from the outset, none wanted to describe their work as authoritarian or hierarchical and many wrestled with how to portray their collaborative approach to leadership. This ambivalent relationship with leadership seems to stem from institutionalized notions of leadership as well as direct experience with “leaders” who work in a top-down way and appear more concerned with administrative matters or career advancement than with what is best for students.

In the professional history survey, the TCs reported taking a leadership role in 89 percent of the positions they have held since their participation in the summer institute. The focus group interviews corroborate our survey findings; all focus group participants described times when they had performed leadership roles and all but four characterized themselves as teacher-leaders. At the same time, the focus groups reveal why these TCs expressed reluctance to name themselves as leaders, although they do lead, and how they had changed the very meaning of what it means to lead. The TCs also articulated how their participation in the writing project has shaped their perception of themselves and their notions of the meaning of leadership.

From the study there emerged some common elements of what being a teacher-leader means. First and foremost, teacher-leaders exhibit a strong moral commitment to doing what is right for students. Teacher-leaders are always learning their craft and growing in their practice in order to fulfill this commitment. As one person said, “We’re really driven to do better and to be the best we can for kids” (Focus Group, June 2006).

The TCs emphasized that leadership must be earned. Being a teacher-leader means receiving (often informal) recognition from one's colleagues for commitment to children, for high-quality teaching, and for willingness to share ideas (a rare quality among teachers working inside isolating school cultures).These teacher-leaders noted how their colleagues turned to them for advice about teaching writing. For example, Paul Epstein described what happened after he facilitated a schoolwide benchmark-setting process. Teachers from all grade levels sought him out informally for advice about how to teach writing; he was then able to share what he had learned from writing project colleagues as well as what he knew from his own classroom.

While a teacher-leader's credibility stems from the quality of his or her teaching and commitment to continuous improvement, teacher-leaders work in realms outside their own classroom walls. The TCs repeated the refrain of "stepping up to their responsibility" to share their practice with their colleagues, to contribute to the "bigger picture," to stand up for what they believe in, and to "do what needs to be done."

The TCs also emphasized that teacher-leaders work collaboratively and in an egalitarian manner. They recognize the knowledge and expertise of their peers; they reiterate that they are teachers who may have spent a little more time studying the piece of practice they are sharing; and they share knowledge with the hope that their colleagues will adapt it to meet the needs of their own classrooms. These TCs argue that true teacher-leaders "do not have all the answers." Rather they see teacher leadership as "bringing in others and getting help from others and getting contributions from others."

When the TCs redefined the term "teacher-leader" to mean these things—making a commitment to children, taking responsibility for contributing beyond one's own classroom, working collaboratively as a fellow teacher—they felt more comfortable claiming the mantle of

leadership. One statement captures this alternate vision of leadership and the dynamics of this egalitarian form of leadership inside a school:

> I've found that certain people [in my school] have turned to me for things because they know that I know a little something about it. So [teacher leadership is] about relationships and who can I ask about this. . . . Even though I probably would not have defined myself as a teacher-leader before being involved in this, I now see that that's exactly what I am in my building . . . and there are lots of us. It's not just one person [who] holds all the knowledge. (Dina DeCristofaro, Focus Group, June 2006)

The TCs also explained how participating in the writing project, both at the summer institute and in leadership opportunities within their writing project sites, contributed to their adoption of a leadership identity. For many people, becoming part of the writing project represented a shift in their identities. As one TC states,

> I had never presented anything to other adults at all, except in church kinds of settings, but not in a school setting. But the idea that I might have some sort of professional development to share with other teachers had never occurred to me before the writing project. (Shayne Goodrum, Focus Group, June 2006)

As these TCs came to view themselves as leaders, they took on the challenge of being prophets in their own lands and worked to make their schools better places for children and adults to learn together.

Learning from Vignettes: Leading in One's Own School

These teachers show us how they have learned to lead within the context of the strong egalitarian norms of the teacher culture. Other researchers have written convincingly about the clash between teachers who lead collaboratively and the bureaucratic norms of most schools (Little 1995; Smylie and Denny 1990). In light of these persistent norms, some researchers have called for thinking of schools as communities, rather than organizations. In this way, schools

would be based on believing and caring, values and commitments, and professional norms and practices (Sergiovanni 1994). In that vein, when studying Chicago school reform, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that a broad base of trust lubricates much of a school's day-to-day functioning. For them, social trust is key to reform.

Collectively, these researchers have not only taught us about the strong teacher norms of egalitarianism, but showed us that leading collaboratively is a learned characteristic that needs nurturing, practice, and support. Our Vignette Study builds on this earlier work, as we see, through our analysis, how these teacher-leaders deal with the potential conflict between working to make change in their schools and risking rejection for stepping out of the egalitarian expectations so tightly held by many teachers in their school culture.

Given these strong egalitarian norms and an ambivalent relationship with the notion of leadership, we wondered why they took on leadership roles. All 10 teachers expressed strong ***motivations*** for making change within their schools. To enact their visions (often for the teaching of writing), they described a variety of ***strategies*** for gaining teachers' and administrators' engagement that were both uniquely situated to the particulars of their teaching contexts and reflective of the writing project's social practices.

Motivation and strategic thinking alone were not enough. We observed an important dynamic that facilitated these teachers' leadership work—they were ***recognized by their peers*** as excellent teachers who were willing to share their practice, and most held ***ancillary roles*** that gave them some time to work with peers outside their classrooms while defusing the authority-like associations with formal administrative roles.

As we analyzed the vignettes alongside the focus group interviews, we also began to understand the ways in which they ***learned*** a new set of skills and abilities that shaped their

leadership and the roles they played as they carried out their work. The support these teacher-leaders had and their foundational learning appear to be an aspect of their participation in the writing project through the summer institute and as TCs.

In order to illuminate the ways in which identity, leadership, and learning interconnect, we begin by sharing brief retellings of 4 of the 10 vignettes. They illustrate two broad patterns in how teachers learn to lead inside their own schools and navigate the egalitarian culture: practicing outside to lead inside and activating passion inside the classroom. We then return to our themes of motivation, strategies, peer recognition / ancillary roles, and learning in order to situate these stories in our broader analysis.

Practicing Outside to Lead Inside

Paul Epstein and Cec Carmack help us understand how their motivations helped them think strategically about what would work in their particular context, and how they negotiated their own roles to gain legitimacy and trust. Both in their own way incorporate what they learned from playing leadership roles in the writing project and elsewhere as a necessary component to their own leadership within their school walls.

Paul Epstein practiced his leadership outside the building. In fact he was a co-director of the summer institute in the West Virginia Writing Project. He was uncomfortable being a "prophet in his own country" and "maintained a low profile" in his own school. Writing was also not a part of the school improvement plan of the school. So for seven years he maintained his dual life in his school and outside in the writing project.

But when he took responsibility for helping create a new writing project site, the Central West Virginia Writing Project, and started advising others to lead in their schools, he felt he had a moral obligation to do it too. As a fourth grade teacher he observed that scores in his school

were very low on the state writing assessment. With this in mind, he suggested to the principal that all grade levels might set benchmarks for their students in writing. (This was the beginning of an important strategic move.) Teachers agreed that students should reach the benchmarks that they had created, but expressed anxiety about helping their students reach them. This turned out to be Epstein's opening.

He began the year as the newly appointed Title I reading teacher. He was responsible for meeting the technology content standards and offering help in reading. But he also decided to use the computers for writing and publishing a quarterly schoolwide anthology. (This strategy enabled him to add writing to his portfolio.) Once he had taken on his new role, teachers started asking him for advice about teaching writing; in response he encouraged teachers to help their students write stories and to hold off on pointing out corrections they needed to make. He had learned these approaches from colleagues in the writing project summer institutes and was delighted when teachers began experiencing some success in their classrooms.

Next, he recruited three teachers to go to the writing project summer institute. One of the teachers, self-described as "pathologically afraid of writing," began to collaborate with Epstein. She used many of the strategies she learned in the summer institute and changed from being fearful of teaching writing to being a great enthusiast, helping others and sharing her ideas for success.

A year later, Epstein invited another teacher to attend the summer institute and persuaded her to lead a study group in the school the following year while he supported her on the side. Under their leadership, the study group, originally formed in response to a county Title I mandate, became a space where teachers wrote, read professional literature, and made mini-

presentations to each other about successful literacy practices. In effect, Epstein and his colleague recreated dimensions of the summer institute inside their building.

Over time, Epstein got half the school to go to the summer institute. Scores went up, the school became recognized for writing, and many teachers gained additional capacity to mentor those with less experience. Epstein finally felt that he no longer needed to fear offering advice in his own school. He had helped grow up a genuine learning community and a number of other teachers were now assuming leadership with him.

For **Cec Carmack**, a fourth grade teacher four days per week and a teacher on special assignment (TOSA) one day per week, the leadership learning and development came differently. Carmack describes how her leadership journey began inside her own classroom—nine years before the episode she writes about in her vignette—when she decided to learn about her state's on-demand writing assessment by participating in scoring. Reading and scoring thousands of papers prompted her to see on-demand writing from her students' eyes and to ask questions about her own teaching of writing.

She sought to bring her students to a new standard of writing proficiency—one that assumed that every child had something valuable to say. In the process, she "intentionally modeled every best practice and research-based theory gleaned from writing project summer institutes, statewide scoring trainings, and colleagues on the same mission to improve writing in their own classrooms."

Carmack's success with her students in her own classroom established her as the "go-to person" in her building when it came to teaching writing. As a TOSA, she started to think about how to improve the culture of writing in the school and began to act strategically. Her

superintendent's support for her work was the green light she needed to work toward changing beliefs and behaviors.

Carmack asked K–4 teachers to have their students write to a schoolwide prompt. Her idea was that each grade level team would examine all their papers to find the strengths and weaknesses in their students' writing and then engage in a plan for instruction. The second grade met first. To avoid comparisons and identification, each teacher got a code name. Using both a "teacher/parent friendly" writing rubric that the staff developed and a document from the state that described grade-level expectations for writing, the teachers set about to read and respond.

Carmack kept the meeting businesslike and on task. The teachers defined students' writing strengths, charted the strategies they already used to help students get there, and got excited about working on their teaching. Many began openly asking for help—first from Carmack and then from each other.

The teachers' collective efforts yielded success for students. Teachers who were at first fearful and reluctant to reveal their practice and their questions about teaching began posting their students' writing in the hall and slipping it under Carmack's door. Looking back over the year, Carmack could see that her approach of "self-discovery, not mandates" helped her colleagues change. In the process, her vision of leadership changed from "being a messenger" to "taking an active voice for teachers and students."

Activating a Passion Inside the Classroom

A few of the teachers who led in their own schools had a somewhat different pattern. They had an overriding passion for an idea and figured out ways to enact the passion in their classrooms—focusing not on influencing other teachers, but on turning their passion into

powerful practices in their own classrooms. In this way, they became models for others, not by reaching out, but by reaching in.

Austen Reilley began her teaching career in a new charter school that had few structures, an inexperienced principal, and little or no direction. This made the experience tough for a novice teacher. (In fact, the experience "nearly killed [her] desire to teach.") But fortunately for Reilley, on Saturdays she attended a class where women interested in writing talked and wrote. The class was called Women Writing for Change (WWC). Women from different walks of life wrote about their divorces, cancer, abuse, and more. And they learned to write and share these experiences together.

Reilley learned that as a writer, teacher, and learner she needed a community. So, finding herself in a seventh grade language arts class in rural Kentucky, she decided to create a version of WWC in her school. With her principal's okay, she invited girls from all grades in the middle school and they met every Thursday afternoon. They wrote and shared their stories and even named their club "The Winged Writers: Pick up a pen and fly." This club and her writing project participation encouraged her to think about gender and its relationship to writing.

As her school began analyzing data about students' learning, Reilley began to realize that boys were not doing well in the area of writing in Kentucky as a whole and at her school in particular. This spurred Reilley to read more research on gender and she persuaded her principal that they should pilot single-gender classrooms at her school. Her principal went to the school board to gain support for the pilot.

As luck would have it, Reilley ended up with a class full of 12-year-old boys, and now she needed to figure out how to engage boys as well as girls in writing. Although the project was challenging, she learned that there were particular themes that most interested the boys: physical

activity; friendly competition; and performance. She knew that she was on to something when the boys in her class earned the only "distinguished" scores at her school on the Kentucky state assessment of school progress.

Reilley shared the results of her pilot with her principal, who once again was the public face of change. Reilley's study led to all teachers in the building having at least one single-gender class period in their schedule. Reilley's own passion for writing and her membership in the WWC had eventually led to shared knowledge throughout the school about writing, about gender, and about the building of community.

Elizabeth C. Davis, a 32-year teaching veteran and a 12-year teacher-consultant with the DC Area Writing Project, wove together her passion for social justice, her lifelong work as an education activist, and her teaching practice during the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education decision. While reading the community newspaper, Davis discovered that her school, John Phillip Sousa Middle School, and a neighborhood student in the 1950s were central actors in the Brown decision. She seized the opportunity to support her students in discovering their own capacity for making change in their community and experiencing the powerful role of writing in that process.

Davis's students quickly learned that the lead plaintiff had grown up on the streets where they now lived. This connection between past and present motivated them to conduct historical research and to argue for improving the conditions of their own school. The project came to the attention of members of Congress: Davis and her students secured an invitation to testify during the U.S. Senate's commemoration for the 50th anniversary of the Brown decision. The national news media picked up the story and publicized the poor physical condition of the school as well as its lack of up-to-date library materials.

Davis and her students' actions yielded results—the conferring of historic landmark status on the school saved it from the wrecking ball and the publicity brought substantial donations of books and funds for its library. This phase of Davis's leadership was firmly rooted in enacting her pedagogical principles in her classroom and bringing attention to the powerful voices of her students.

This initial project, supported in part by the DC Area Writing Project's partnership with the Holocaust Museum, set in motion a series of activities that unfolded over the next year. Davis and her students worked to create a vision for rebuilding Sousa. They also advocated for students and teachers to pursue education in a separate building while construction was taking place rather than spending day after day warehoused in the dilapidated quarters of a wing of the building unused for 15 years.

This next set of events again engaged students in writing, creating a vision for the future, and advocating publicly. It also prompted Davis to seek allies outside her school building and district. Davis networked with other teachers to lobby for physical improvements in all DC schools, she built connections with parents and political action groups, she wrote eloquent op-ed pieces, and she reached out to progressive DC politicians. Once again, Davis and her students achieved victory. During the second year of Sousa's renovation, students would move to an alternate space rather than continuing to work in unsafe conditions.

Davis not only sought to "develop [her own students'] democratic capacities to enact change" and to improve conditions for children in her own school, she embraced opportunities to share her practice with other teachers in DC public schools. She regularly facilitates workshops as well as extended professional development programs, sponsored by the DC Area WP, which focus on how teaching writing can be used "as a tool for social justice and social action." She

sees this as a way to give back to her writing project site, which maintains a consistent, supportive presence in the face of constant churn within the district.

Davis is no stranger to the risks of teacher leadership. Following her advocacy at Sousa, she became, in her words, a "persona non grata" among administrators. Davis rejects formal positions and titles—too often in her experience people in formal roles are more interested in maintaining the status quo. However, she has worked hard over the years to become a leader both inside her own school and beyond.

Motivations: Given the Risks, Why Lead?

In their vignettes as well as in the focus groups, the TCs in this study articulated a long list of the professional risks that teachers take to lead inside their own schools. Putting one's ideas out there runs the risk of being perceived as bragging and working against the egalitarian culture. Teachers whose practice runs counter to the norm may be perceived as "odd ducks" until their students' accomplishments reveal that the teacher is on to something. And examining what isn't working exposes teachers to the possibility that they will be seen as frauds.

Teacher-leaders also run up against a norm that teachers simply shouldn't work too hard because they aren't getting paid adequately. Taking stands against policies that don't support children's learning also means that TCs risk administrative discipline and even the loss of their positions. And teachers newer to the profession have a special challenge, as they are typically seen as having little to offer by their more experienced peers (What do *you* know that I don't?).

In light of these risks, the teacher-leaders each name strong reasons for making changes in their schools. At the core, all of the teacher-leaders in this study are motivated by a commitment to provide the best possible education for students, especially in the teaching of writing and the use of writing to learn.

Some teachers were motivated by a long-term passion. Reilley and Davis, for example, have each developed a burning passion—about gender and race, respectively. And these passions led them to devise a number of strategies in their own classrooms and to build alliances that became the impetus for change within their schools.

Reilley first established the girls' after-school writing club and then worked behind the scenes to establish single-gender classrooms inside her school. Davis engaged her students in studying the history of their own school, which led to broader political activism using writing to improve the physical condition of her own school as well as that of other DC schools.

For most of the teacher-leaders in this group, the discovery of better ways to teach writing and of the power of incorporating writing into other subject areas pushed them to encourage their peers to change. Cec Carmack draws clear parallels between the ways in which they improved their own teaching practice and their motivation to collaborate with their peers to "change the culture of writing."

Similarly, Christine Wegmann, a social studies teacher who had been appointed as a master teacher in her middle school, describes overcoming the resistance of her social studies colleagues to incorporating a literacy focus into the social studies curriculum. She modeled and shared particular strategies for teaching reading and writing in social studies; as teachers tried out these approaches, they became excited with their own and their students' learning. In the process, Wegmann built a real learning community. Her colleagues were trying new strategies, sharing their successes and their problems, and becoming better teachers of writing.

But the district, in a sudden turnaround, decided to switch to a focus on preparing for the statewide social studies tests, rather than on incorporating literacy into other content areas. Wegmann felt so strongly that she continued her literary focus. She *stood up* for what she knew

would be a more powerful way to improve students' learning, with a side benefit of raising test scores. In the end, after visiting Wegmann's and her colleagues' classrooms, the district coordinator agreed and encouraged her to keep at it.

For other teachers it was a seminal experience that motivated them to take on more visible leadership roles inside their schools. In the focus groups, many teachers spoke of participating in the writing project summer institute as a moment when they understood both that they had something to share and that it was their professional responsibility to do so.

For Epstein, visible leadership inside his own school came seven years after his initial participation in the writing project. He had worked to rebuild his own writing project site and would now be calling on others to take leadership inside their own schools. To be an authentic leader for his writing project site, he decided to take on a different kind of role in his own school.

Strategies: How Did Teacher-Leaders Go About Making Change in Their Schools?

Linking Change to a Widespread Challenge

A central challenge faced by all leaders, including teacher-leaders, is to motivate others to change. Part of this motivation involves identifying problems that can best be addressed through taking collective action and by involving other teachers in finding solutions. The authors of the vignettes in this set worked to make visible the learning challenges that students faced.

In Epstein's school, the fourth-graders' scores on the state writing assessment were very low; in Carmack's school the superintendent had charged her with creating a culture of writing and she needed to help the teachers identify students' strengths as well as see where their writing could be encouraged and developed; in Reilley's school, boys' writing performance lagged far

behind the girls'; and in Davis's school, engaging students in writing enabled them to make public the school's poor physical conditions and inadequate learning resources.

In other vignettes, authors also wrote about the need to persuade others that they faced problems or challenges that could be addressed only by working together. Wegmann, who wanted her department to integrate reading and writing into the social studies curriculum, persuaded her skeptical colleagues to consider this approach by citing statistics that demonstrated the sheer volume of reading and writing that would be required of middle school students in social studies.

Lynne Dorfman, a writing resource teacher in an elementary school, demonstrated to her faculty the power of using writers' notebooks as a means for addressing the district's focus on literacy. (She had to overcome the idea that using writers' notebooks was something that *only* she could do because she was the writing teacher.) Making schoolwide problems visible opened the door to involving other teachers in collaboratively addressing these issues.

Creating Collaborative Forums in Which Teachers Learn Together and Make Their Practice Public

In 7 of the 10 vignettes in this group, the TCs worked to figure out a strategy for bringing teachers together to do some collaborative work, thus giving their teaching colleagues some experience in learning from and with each other. In this way, they provided opportunities for teachers to collectively go public with problems of teaching writing to their students and opened up ways for teachers to ask for help. In the process, teachers began to trust each other and learn that it was okay to ask for help.

Carmack's attempts to initiate classroom change inside her building illustrate how this process can unfold. Her strategy was to use a schoolwide prompt so that the teachers could

analyze their own students' writing, identify their students' strengths and challenges, and plan instruction.

Even before students' work was on the table, Carmack worked hard to create ownership and reduce fear among teachers. Collaboratively, teachers created a friendlier version of the state's scoring rubric. She spent hours talking one-on-one with teachers, including "the rock of the second grade," to assure them that making their teaching public would ultimately benefit the students.

With scored student papers as the basis, Carmack helped the teachers design the next five months of instruction. She learned how to bring people together to work collaboratively, to structure support for teachers, to understand the change process (from "awkward practice, to reluctance, trials, and eventual mastery"), and to lead through guidance.

Cultivating Leadership

The teacher-leaders seized the opportunity not only to establish learning opportunities for their peers, but to share leadership with others. Once Epstein, for example, took a public leadership role in his school, he began to actively cultivate the leadership of others and he eventually persuaded a number of teachers to go to the summer institute, thereby broadening his school's leadership base.

He encouraged one of these teachers to help him establish a professional study group in which teachers read professional literature and shared ideas for building their practice. This step developed her leadership capabilities and, over time, changed the school's culture to one that fostered collaboration and learning for the adults as well as the students.

Slipping into Top-down Ledership

In the vignettes, teacher-leaders also shared cautionary tales about what happened when they slipped into more traditional authoritarian patterns of leadership. Mimi Dyer writes of being brought into a traditional high school as the department chair to "fix" the teaching of writing. Emboldened by her passion for effective teaching and her own classroom successes, she began to make unilateral changes to the high school's curriculum. Going in, she "knew" that teachers would be thrilled with her innovative ideas. But after two years, the members of her department fought to have her removed as department chair.

Despite support from administrators, she left the position and started reflecting on why she had, in her words, "failed." Ultimately she realized that she had *not* built community or drawn on the strengths of her new colleagues. In a sense, she was blinded by her own pedagogical vision. After reflecting on why her efforts fell short, she had another opportunity and adopted a more collegial (and successful) approach to making change.

Publicly Celebrating Others' Good Work

Recognizing the expertise of other teachers is a central tenet of these teacher-leaders' definitions of leadership. One way to move work forward and to demonstrate respect for other teachers' knowledge is to find ways to showcase the work of other teachers. Epstein, for example, worked to make students' writing visible, at the same time integrating technology and reading, by publishing a quarterly schoolwide anthology.[7] This gave him a chance to collaborate with these students' teachers and to highlight for them their students' successes.

Similarly, Wegmann championed her colleagues' good work in integrating literacy into social studies. When her district returned to an emphasis on rote test preparation, she invited a district administrator to visit the classrooms of her colleagues in addition to her own. In this way,

she demonstrated her belief in the progress that her colleagues were making. Dorfman invited the other writing project teachers from her school to share their practice and their students' work. By featuring their work, in addition to her own, she showed that change was possible.

Building Alliances with Others to Create Change

In 3 of the 10 vignettes, the strategy for making change was different. Rather than engaging their colleagues on the faculty in collaboratively making change, these teachers found other ways to build alliances. Reilley, a relatively new teacher, shared research on single-gender classrooms with the school's counselor and principal to get permission to launch the pilot. She also collected data on the results of her students' learning during the pilot to make the case for expansion of the single-gender classrooms. While she worked behind the scenes—modeling powerful classroom practice, conducting research—she felt more comfortable with administrators playing the public leadership role.

In contrast, Davis played a more public role, seeking connections outside her building and creating opportunities for her students' learning to become visible to powerful external allies. Because of her long-time activism, Davis recognized that doing the right thing is sometimes politically unpalatable for insiders who fear losing their livelihood. By bringing students' voices and external visibility to her school's challenges, Davis was able to make much-needed change.

Navigating School Culture: Peer Recognition and Ancillary Roles

In the focus groups, TCs emphasized that continuing to grow and learn as teachers, taking a stand for what they believe in, and receiving the recognition of their peers are marks of true teacher leadership. Because of her efforts to improve her own teaching and her involvement in

the writing project and statewide scoring of student writing, Carmack was already known by her colleagues as the go-to person for writing in her building. Epstein became seen as a resource for the teaching of writing after he opened up a series of facultywide dialogues about writing benchmarks in his school. Reilley shared research behind the scenes with her principal in order to advocate for a pilot of single-gender classes and then stepped out of her comfort zone to teach boys. Davis combined powerful teaching with political activism to become known as a teacher who would stand up for what is right for children. These four examples reflect the type of informal recognition received by most who wrote about making change inside their schools.

Although the TCs emphasized that leadership titles do not guarantee leadership, 8 of the 10 teacher-leaders held some sort of ancillary role that provided extra time to work with their peers. These roles include literacy coach, teacher on special assignment, master teacher, department chair, and third grade language arts teacher. The remaining 2 TCs led by example in their classroom. One, an enrichment teacher of gifted children, literally created a program, a position, and a team.

These ancillary roles appear to be of a different order than the classic school-based positions of principal, assistant principal, and district literacy specialist.[8] For example, Lucy Ware contrasted her experiences working in several district literacy specialist roles with her work as a third grade language arts teacher. In both positions, she sought to improve the teaching of writing and reading. However, when working as a district staff member, Ware encountered teachers' perceptions that she was not a "real" teacher, and their fears that she was a "spy" for the administration. She was frustrated by not being with teachers daily because she was often unable to follow through on ideas and engage in collegial exchanges. In contrast, when she returned to full-time teaching, she once again became one of the teachers, albeit one with

additional expertise in the teaching of writing. She worked quietly as part of her grade-level team.

Virtually all of these teacher-leaders continued to teach students for at least part of the day. In addition, these ancillary roles came without the administrative duties of those holding traditional leadership roles (e.g., evaluating teachers, managing bus schedules). Thus these TCs could credibly maintain their status as peers—as teachers just like their colleagues.

Discussion: Learning Leadership

In analyzing the work of these 10 teachers leading inside their schools, we learn how they overcame the entrenched bureaucratic norms of schools and the institutionalized notions of leadership. Despite challenges, across the board these individuals show strong motivation to improve education for all students, not only their own. Recognizing that the trust of their peers is crucial to making change, and seeing the importance of a collaborative community in their own growth as teachers and leaders, they work collaboratively and tailor their approaches to the particular contexts in which they lead. Their ability to work in this way is enhanced by the recognition of their colleagues and the ancillary roles that allow them the time to work alongside others. Given these complexities then, how do these teachers learn to lead?

Looking closely at this set of vignettes, we begin to uncover some of the learning that goes on when teachers find themselves in leadership positions or assume leadership stances in their own classrooms that are noticed by others. In particular, we see how these teacher-leaders learn to use strategies that involve other teachers in improvement efforts in their school; how they develop opportunities for teachers to work together, thus minimizing competition with one another and encouraging ways of working that are more collaborative. We also see how the context helps shape the strategies used and the learning that results.

Across these vignettes a central component of teachers learning to lead is the simultaneous development of their own teaching practice. By improving their own abilities to teach authentic writing, to better understand and address their students' strengths and needs, and to teach content in ways that engage their students, the teacher-leaders grew in their abilities to support their colleagues. These teacher-leaders both better understand the challenges that their peers face in making change and also have more experiences from which to draw. For many teacher-leaders the writing project is critical in this process—both stretching their knowledge of practice and helping them to recognize what they have to offer.

These teacher-leaders seek to enact other elements of their writing project experiences inside schools. They work to develop a collegial culture where it rarely exists and to establish time for writing and professional conversation. We see here how these TCs adapt the writing project's social practices to be effective within a group of teachers who work together daily, year after year.

Many of the authors in this set played major leadership roles inside their writing project sites: co-leading the summer institute, facilitating inservice offerings, serving as members of leadership teams. These roles outside their schools afforded them opportunities not only to continue honing their own teaching practice but also to strengthen their capacity for working with their peers. They learned to recognize the fear that accompanies sharing writing or practice publicly and could understand their colleagues' reticence to share teaching practices and questions inside the four walls of the school. They developed a wide range of strategies for building community, for drawing expertise from teachers participating in professional development, for sharing knowledge in ways that can be shaped and adapted in different contexts, and for sharing leadership with others.

A more subtle form of learning also becomes visible. That is, teacher-leaders hone their leadership skills as they encounter the daily challenges of the work: helping teachers own the work, letting go so others can reshape ideas as their own, overcoming teachers' fear of exposure as "frauds," tapping into teachers' commitment to children, seeking new strategies to better support students' learning, and standing up against flawed policies.

These vignettes illustrate that teachers' leadership inside their own schools develops over time—sometimes over many years. To lead inside their schools and among their peers, teachers must first demonstrate that they can teach and that they continually work to improve their teaching. This quiet, ripple-effect leadership often takes years to establish as other teachers gradually turn to teacher-leaders for advice.

As they gain credibility, these teacher-leaders seize opportunities—a districtwide focus, low writing scores, gaps between boys' and girls' achievement, a school's unknown involvement in a historical turning point—to take more public action. Public action often involves creating opportunities for teachers to learn together and to cultivate leadership in others. Leadership involves therefore not only long-term commitment but learning how to create strategies appropriate to goals and contexts.

These vignettes bring to life how participation in the writing project supports teachers in developing the knowledge of how to work with peers and the confidence to do so. Writing project participation encourages them to work collaboratively and to go public with both their successes and their questions. These teacher-consultants adopt a stance as both leaders and learners.

As they return to their schools, their own context helps them determine their initial leadership strategy. (Where should I begin? With whom will I work? On shat should I focus?

How public should I be? How forceful or how gentle should I be with my approach?) As they identify their initial steps, they gradually seek to recreate the social organization of learning they experienced in the summer institute by establishing similar opportunities for their colleagues to learn together and take collaborative action.

They continue the leadership learning that began with the writing project as they address daily leadership challenges. They have become leaders in two communities, their school and the writing project. As they lead in both places, their involvement in the writing project renews their excitement for learning, teaches them the expectation that they are always involved in their own improvement as well as that of others, and offers a constant source of support.

Notes

[1] The social practices include: honoring teacher knowledge; creating public forums for sharing, dialogue and critique; situating learning in practice and relationships; sharing leadership; guiding reflection on teaching through reflection on learning; providing multiple entry points into the learning community; turning ownership over to learners.

[2] Teacher-consultants (TCs) are offered a variety of experiences facilitating professional development in their district or surrounding districts. A number of them become quite expert in different areas (e.g., assessment; early childhood; multicultural literature; reading strategies) and are called upon to teach others. Many are called upon to teach in their area of expertise during a summer institute.

[3] The leaders of NWP's National Programs and Site Development unit selected a group of 35 writing project leaders who are geographically diverse, are knowledgeable about a range of program content areas, and have nurtured the development of many teacher-leaders.

[4] We originally requested nominees from 35 individuals. Of these, 33 people each nominated 1 teacher. All 33 nominees accepted our invitation. Following the first writing retreat, two people dropped out of the Vignette Study for personal reasons.

[5] Data about the vignette authors' demographics and employment histories were collected on the NWP Professional History Survey. All analyses from these data were prepared by Ayumi Nagase and Sela Fessehaie.

[6] Ann Lieberman, Linda Friedrich, and Liza Percer served as the lead researchers during the data collection phase.

[7] During the summer institute participants create an anthology, so this was something that Epstein had experienced many times in the writing project.

[8] Two of the teacher-leaders in this group became vice principals. Each had to work very hard to negotiate their writing project values about collaboration and collegiality and their authority as VPs.

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Appendix A. Vignette Prompt

NWP Study of Teacher-Consultants and Leadership: Vignettes

The Vignette Prompt

We are doing a study of the leadership work of writing project teacher-consultants. We are looking at what TCs do, the content of their work, how TCs develop and get supported in their work with colleagues, their systems, and their students.

In no more than five pages, tell us about a concrete example of your work with colleagues, your school, your writing project site, your school district, or any other context that has occurred recently or in the past year. It may be a situation that includes a set of activities that took time to unfold.

Tell us a story of this situation framing it by using the guidelines below.

DESCRIBE:

- what you were hoping would happen or be accomplished
- the context within which this work occurred
- what was involved
- the impact of the work
- why you think it happened
- the role you played
- what feels most important about this work for you and why

Appendix B. Vignettes Analyzed

The teacher-leaders gave the following titles to their stories to capture the essence of what they accomplished:

Cecilia Carmack, “Building Capacity”

Elizabeth Davis, “Teacher Leadership Through Writing and Building Alliances”

Lynne R. Dorfman, “Collaboration Fosters Teacher-Leaders”

Mimi Dyer, “Lining Up the Numbers”

Paul Epstein, “The Courage to Lead: Creating a Professional Learning Community at Ruffner Elementary School”

C. Lynn Jacobs, “Leadership: Doing the Work”

Nancy King Mildrum, “Time Is on My Side”

Austen Reilley, “Ripple Effective Leadership: Transforming Passion into Plans”

Lucy Ware, “Effecting Change Teacher to Teacher”

Christine Wegmann, “Rules Worth Breaking”