

Composing Literacy Leadership in Professional Development: New Meanings of Practice and Process

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, new perspectives on leadership in education have emerged. Research literature documents the growing number of leadership roles played both formally and informally by teachers and demonstrates how they contribute to instructional improvement and school reform (cf., Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Simultaneously, researchers and policy makers have been rethinking the roles of formally designated leaders, including principals and district personnel. A focus on literacy has been integral to this recent reimagining of leadership. And, in response to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), districts have created new literacy leadership roles and increased expectations for leaders in terms of assessment and accountability.

In this paper, we explore key questions about literacy leadership using three cases of teachers and other professionals affiliated with the National Writing Project (NWP). NWP's 34-year history of developing literacy leadership offers an ideal context for examining what this looks like and how it is composed by leaders and followers. The three cases are part of the Legacy Study, which was conducted to investigate the influences on and effects of different leaders affiliated with the NWP (Friedrich, Swain, LeMahieu, Fessehaie, & Miele, 2007). Two questions focus this paper: What does literacy leadership look like in practice? How do teachers and other professionals come to accept others as leaders?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to better understand literacy leadership, we draw from two related bodies of literature for our conceptual framework—communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006).

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) are spaces in which individuals come together to create practice and meaning. In these situations, individuals interpret, enact, and, at times, change practices mandated by organizations. They become members not simply by joining or being appointed, but through a process of “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). That is, individuals gradually learn the nuances, history, and complexity of practice through becoming full participants. Communities of practice do not exist in isolation. They use various means to connect with the world around them—both to share their practices with others and incorporate information from the outside into the community. Such “boundary encounters” allow participants to negotiate new meanings of practice (Wenger, 1998, pp. 113-118).

Distributed Leadership

The community of practice literature, as initially framed, provides limited understanding of leadership within professional communities. Because a distributed leadership perspective shares a common theoretical basis and focus (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001), it provides a useful lens for understanding individuals’ different leadership practices. Over the past decade, James Spillane and his colleagues (2001, 2006) have been building a new framework for analyzing and understanding school leadership—one that moves away from conceptions of the heroic individual leader. Instead, their distributed leadership framework emphasizes that schools typically have multiple leaders and focuses on leadership *practices* rather than on the qualities, knowledge and skills of individuals. Specifically, Spillane (2006) asserts: “*Leadership* refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, or practices of other organizational members. ...”(pp. 11-12, emphasis in the original)

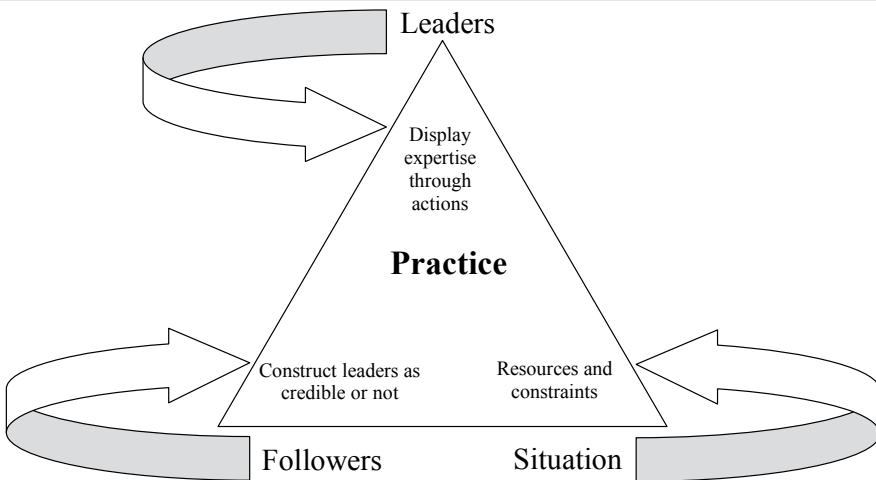
Two components are particularly relevant. First, Spillane (2006) argues that “leaders and followers supplement ... and extend ... each other’s actions through heedful interacting” (p.71). He notes that designations of leader and follower are not fixed identities but vary from situation to situation. Second, he demonstrates that leadership practice both shapes and gets shaped by the particular situation in which leaders work. The situation, which includes tools, routines, culture, language, structures, and the like, makes leadership practice more or less difficult.

Spillane’s (2006) distributed leadership theory is primarily descriptive in its approach—it does not assume that leadership necessarily has an influence (either positive or negative) on others. Related scholarship is relatively early in its development. Empirical studies focus on building the overall theory and exploring questions about optimal forms of leadership distribution within schools (Gronn, 2008; Macbeath, 2008). For example, Firestone and Martinez (2008) applied a distributed perspective to the relationships between district personnel and policies and teacher leaders. While some studies mention leadership beyond school walls, additional exploration is warranted in order to more thoroughly understand the complex processes involved in composing and practicing leadership.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates our emerging understanding of how interactions among leaders, followers, and situations develop into an influence relationship. Through practice leaders have an opportunity not only to reveal their knowledge and expertise, developed over time and situated in their involvement with multiple communities of practice, but also to build relationships with those whom they hope to influence. They also demonstrate how they use available resources and navigate constraints in a situation. Moreover, based on experience and their relationship with the leader, followers determine whether they find a leader to be credible and the extent to which they are willing to take additional action.

Figure 1. How practice develops an influence relationship between leaders and followers



Adapted from Spillane, 2006, p. 3.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The Legacy Study, commissioned by NWP, was conducted by researchers affiliated with NWP for the purpose of exploring its influence on the field of education through the contributions of those teachers whom it has developed and supported since its inception in 1974. The multiphase study employed a mixed methods design and a nested sample. Phase I (2004) involved a census survey of all writing project teachers who participated in an invitational summer institute between 1974 and 1994 to capture complete professional histories and their perceptions of NWP's influence on their performance in each professional appointment ($n=1,848$). Phase II (2006) involved 110 semi-structured telephone interviews with a stratified, random sample of survey respondents to explore nuances of their work, NWP's and additional professional influences, and perceived influences on other individuals and the field. Strata, or bins, were defined as: classroom, school level, school district, higher education, other education, related field, and other field (Friedrich, Swain,

LeMahieu, Fessehaie, & Miele, 2007). Phase III (2007) involved case studies of 10 individuals who pursued different careers within education. We draw from 3 of the 10 cases for this paper. All research participants, organizations other than NWP, and locations are referred to by pseudonyms.

Summary of Phase I and II Results

Findings from Phase I indicate that NWP influenced participants' work to a great extent: 88.3% of respondents felt that their writing project experience influenced their work. Similarly, 87.8% felt they applied writing project knowledge and skills. Respondents felt most strongly (90.2%) that the attitudes and values of the writing project influenced their work. Phase II interviews corroborated and elaborated the survey findings. Interviewees across all professional categories indicated that participation in the summer invitational institute and ongoing involvement in their local writing project community had a positive and significant impact on their daily work, their writing, their engagement in the teaching profession, and their preparation for leadership. Specifically, interviewees reported drawing on their writing project experiences as they designed and facilitated professional development, contributed to curriculum development, and supported the creation and implementation of assessment. (See Friedrich, Swain, LeMahieu, Fessehaie, & Miele, 2007 for Phase I and II findings).

Research Setting

NWP's mission is to improve the teaching of writing and the use of writing in America's schools. Founded in 1974 as a single site, known as the Bay Area Writing Project, NWP from the outset has been committed to the idea of teachers teaching teachers as an effective form of educational leadership (Gray, 2000). NWP is now a network of nearly 200 independent, university-based sites in all 50 states, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which are bound by a shared set of values (see National Writing Project website, NWP Core Principles).

A common set of activities, known as "the writing project model," are offered across all sites—summer invitational institute, continuity activities, in-service and partnerships. The summer invitational institutes, which last four to five weeks and involve selective participation, prepare talented and accomplished teachers to serve as leaders among colleagues by inviting them to demonstrate a piece of teaching practice, write daily, and read a range of research related to the teaching of writing. There, teachers also participate in peer response and review of their teaching demonstrations (Stock, 2008) and writing (Whitney, 2008). Following successful completion, participating teachers become identified as teacher-consultants and have opportunities to engage in ongoing learning with other teachers from their local writing project site and lead professional in-service activities for interested peers. Through these ongoing activities, teacher-consultants continue to build their capacities as leaders (Gray, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2001).

Sample

Using theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the 10 cases were purposively selected from the interview sample, including two from within each of five Phase II bins. [For Phase III, we combined other education and related field bins. We excluded those who worked outside education because they represented less than one percent of the Phase I survey sample ($n=5$).] The Phase III research team selected the final sample from a pool of 21 interviewees (with four or five from each

bin), nominated by Phase II researchers as having articulated specific ways in which the writing project had influenced their work.

The Phase III team members created selection criteria based on their preliminary analyses of selected Phase II data. Two researchers then read the full interview transcripts for nominees within each bin and, based on the selection criteria, came to consensus on two individuals to recommend for the final sample. The full sample was reviewed, and then confirmed, by the Phase III research team to: ensure the selection criteria were applied appropriately; examine the sample’s demographic and geographic distribution; and make certain that there was variation in participants’ level of writing project involvement over time. Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of the full case study sample in comparison with samples for the first two phases.

Table 1. Demographics of Legacy Study Respondents

	Phase I (n=1,848)	Phase II (n=110)	Phase III Focal individuals (n=10)	Phase III Informants (n=152)
Ethnicity				
African-American	3.8	4.5	10.0	4
Asian	2.2	0.9		3
Pacific Islander/Philippina(o)	0.2			1
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.4			1
Latina(o)/Hispanic	1.2			3
White	89.7	92.7	90.0	85
Other	1.8	1.8		22
Double code	0.8			
Sex				
Female	83.3	81.8	80.0	78
Male	16.7	18.2	20.0	22

Note. The values represent percentages of the sample.

Three primary considerations guided the selection process. First, each focal individual needed to have worked within the bin for a minimum of 3 years and have had work experiences typical of others employed in comparable positions (e.g., a district curriculum administrator developed new curriculum materials aligned with state standards and accountability). Second, because the Legacy Study seeks to understand the long-term impact of the writing project, each focal individual needed to be able to articulate the writing project's influence (or lack thereof) on him/her within the assigned bin. Third, each individual could identify a sufficient number of informants and sources of evidence to permit a viable case study.

Additional informants were nominated by the focal individuals to describe their work, influences, and contexts over time. A total of 186 individuals (152 adults and 34 minor students)

were interviewed for the 10 cases. The demographics for all adult informants are described in Table 1; demographic information was not collected for minors. At the researchers' request, adult informants included individuals both with and without writing project affiliation (49% reported some affiliation and 32% had participated in a writing project summer institute). Typically, informants included the focal individual's supervisors, colleagues, supervisees or students, and writing project site directors or other writing project colleagues as well as current and past associates, who varied in length of their associations with the focal individual.

For this paper, we chose three cases that represent bins both inside and outside school systems. Like the full Phase III sample, they vary in the length and depth of their writing project involvement. Each also illustrates a different form of literacy leadership.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis were framed by four lines of inquiry: (a) description of each focal individual's work and leadership; (b) influences on the focal individual, including the writing project; (c) contributions and accomplishments of the case study individual; and (d) contexts in which the case study individual worked (Yin, 2003). For each focal individual, the two researchers assigned to the bin conducted, at minimum, a two-day site visit in spring 2007. During the site visit, researchers interviewed as many informants in person as feasible, conducted observations of the focal individual engaged in illustrative pieces of work, and collected artifacts. In addition, researchers interviewed informants by telephone who were unavailable during the site visit. Table 2 summarizes the data collected for the full sample and the three cases reported here.

Table 2. Data Sources for Phase III Cases

Data Source	All Cases (n=10)	Selected Cases		
		Karen Hull	Melinda Kresge	Francesca Abbott
Interviews, Focal individuals	33	3	2	4
Interviews, Informants	137 ^a	11	9	16
Focus groups	13 ^b	0	0	1
Observations	46	6	3	2

^aIncludes all interviews conducted with one or two individual informants: 142 individuals were interviewed, including 3 who were interviewed twice. ^bA total of 44 individuals participated in the focus groups.

Informant interviews typically lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and followed semi-structured interview protocols, which included common and case-specific questions. When necessary, researchers followed up with informants by e-mail to clarify and expand responses. All interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. Observations of key work situations (e.g., meetings, workshops, presentations) were re-written as field notes, using a standard template. Documents and artifacts were annotated and archived. General references to interview data include interviews with both the focal individuals and informants.

Interview data and field notes were coded using both common and case-specific codes. Common codes, initially created during Phase II, were derived from research questions and patterns that emerged from researchers' summaries of these interviews. Definitions were developed iteratively with researchers applying them to interview transcripts, refining these, and formalizing in a coding dictionary and with sample passages. Most of the common Phase III codes are derived from Phase II codes, which have been revised for clarity and applicability to a different set of informants. A small number of new common codes were developed, using a process that paralleled Phase II code development. In addition, researchers defined case-specific descriptive and analytic codes based on their initial reviews of the data following the processes outlined above. Phase III researchers received 1.5 days of training related to common codes. The lead researcher for each case coded all interview and observation data related to that case. The principal investigators reviewed the coding for consistency. Coded data were entered into NVivo7 and made available to researchers for use in subsequent analysis.

We employed a case-based approach to analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition to reading all data and drafting memoranda, the lead researcher for each case conducted, at minimum, four analyses of interview and observation data. First, each prepared a professional history timeline based on an open reading of the data. Second, each prepared three matrices of the major influences on (e.g., how participating in the writing project influenced an individual's leadership of professional development, how involvement in another professional network shaped an individual's dispositions and attitudes toward leadership) and effects of the focal individual. These matrices relied primarily on interview data coded to: Influence/Writing Project; Influence/Other; and Effect. Researchers identified themes within the coded data, listed specific pieces of evidence from the focal individual and informants that either supported or disconfirmed each theme, wrote interpretive notes, and then rated the evidence related to each theme for strength (Weak = 1 to Strong = 4) and consistency (Inconsistent = 1 to Consistent = 4).

Third, they prepared narrative case reports, which follow a common outline and range from 40-140 pages (see Appendix B). These present systematic analyses of all interview and observational data, including both confirming and disconfirming evidence. Descriptive sections relied on open reading of interview data and use of case-specific codes. The matrices formed the basis for findings related to the influences on and the effects of the focal individual. Finally, these reports include a case-specific causal network and narrative that synthesize the other analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In particular, they built on the matrices and report sections describing influences and effects.

Case reports and causal networks were reviewed by the principal investigators for completeness, responsiveness to the study's central research questions, and the adequacy of support for claims made. Reports also underwent two kinds of member checking for accuracy of facts and interpretation. First, relevant sections (i.e., direct quotations or summaries of informants' words) were reviewed by informants with feedback captured on a survey. Second, the entire report, including the causal network, was reviewed by the focal case individual. Feedback from the focal individual was captured in an audio-recorded and transcribed interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After each check, the lead researcher revised the case report accordingly. Case-specific designs and methods for the three cases are detailed in the case reports (McKinney, in preparation; Meyer, in preparation; Shanton, in preparation).

In this paper, our analytic focus centers on the importance of interactions among leaders and followers in particular settings, and the situational constraints that shape what happens. We identified two or three “feature situations” for each case relevant to this focus. As we identified emerging cross-case patterns, we chose those examples that appeared most relevant to current issues in U.S. education and that also were based on evidence from multiple informants or from multiple sources (i.e., interviews, observations, and artifacts). Data from specific informants are included because they clearly communicate a point central to the example.

FINDINGS

Leadership in Practice

We present three illustrations drawn from leaders working in a range of educational settings—a high school English language development teacher and instructional coach, a regional district administrator, and a director of a community literacy center. Each example typifies the respective focal individual’s approaches to sharing her expertise, establishing trust, and navigating contextual demands thereby influencing followers. We highlight the common and unique ways these individuals draw on their experiences in communities of practice, including the writing project, as they engage in the complexities of leadership.

Karen Hull: Leadership by example. Since 1977, Karen Hull has taught and advocated for English language learners (ELL) in two large urban school districts. She currently works at Clover High School teaching beginning English to second language learners, coaching teachers in their classroom, and offering professional development courses. One colleague described that “her fundamental goal is to ... provide [students with] the most effective education possible ... and her work with teachers [permits them] to bring what she’s taught them to their classrooms” (Karbone, interview). Karen believes that by continuing her classroom teaching, she becomes more effective teaching adults about how to teach language to minority youth.

Over time, Karen has participated in multiple communities of practice, including the Metro Area Writing Project, the regional TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) affiliate, and a writing group that has met for more than nine years. For five consecutive summers, Karen visited Mexico to teach teachers about writing in a university summer program. The yearly visits to Mexico enabled her to better understand her students’ language and culture while also supporting her preparation for teaching cross-cultural communication courses.

Given her expertise, Karen was often consulted in the design and implementation of in-service within the Clover district. “Even if she didn’t like the way the district was mandating a certain practice in top down fashion with little regard for what teachers were already doing, she could deliver a lesson and become the ideal model for how to use such a strategy” (Fish, E-mail). In 2006, Karen’s district superintendent set a district-wide goal for “second language scaffolding and academic language development” and wanted “all subject area standards seen through the lens of English language learners” (Document, 2006).

Karen was invited to a district-wide meeting to demonstrate an instructional read aloud, a strategy required by the superintendent. Normally a practice associated with elementary education, instructional read aloud can be used by secondary teachers to scaffold students’ comprehension

through careful questioning. It builds students' background knowledge about disciplinary content as well as their listening and discussion skills.

Karen's turn to present came after two other presenters had run over time. Working closely with the group of approximately 30 instructional supervisors, Karen read aloud an "allegorical story—a picture book—about the Holocaust. [It] was so amazing to watch" (Fish, interview). Karen brought along a stuffed toy rabbit to scaffold participants' understanding of the book, since rabbits represent passive observers of Terrible Things, or Nazis. She asked them to make predictions, "... focusing on key words, [while] looking at the illustrations in the book to support" comprehension (Ramirez, E-mail). During her discussion, Karen used transparencies as scaffolds, and prompted participants to write about what they understood. A high school principal described how effectively Karen coupled reading with guided discussion and writing about content appropriate to the state world history standards. The principal and two other observers that day believed that a number of participants enjoyed and valued Karen's presentation.

Karen's work that day surpassed expectations of some attendees and started to break down resistance to the district's mandated use of a potentially effective instructional strategy. One attendee confided, "Many of us secondary coaches and teachers [came in] griping about how instructional read alouds [wouldn't] work so well for ESL secondary classes. We couldn't imagine how a math teacher or a science teacher was supposed to incorporate an instructional read aloud strategy" (Chi, interview). We see various followers—district teachers, administrators, and instructional leaders—accepting Karen's leadership and poised to share or ratify a new instructional practice. However, it is unclear how the practice she shared was adopted, even though it was admired. One attendee suspected that some teachers would simply ignore the instructional read aloud strategy because the district had a history of adopting and then abandoning curricular reforms.

It is possible to trace multiple influences on Karen's workshop. She credited a writing project mentor, an elementary teacher that she had first met 30 years earlier, for introducing her to the power of children's literature for teaching "age-appropriate themes ... with language [and pictures] that ELL can understand" (Hull, interview). She first learned how to plan discussions and use the overhead as a tool to mediate learning from TESOL experts that provided extensive professional development in her first school district from the late 1970s until 1984. Finally, she drew on her own extensive classroom experience engaging learners in carefully planned, text-based discussions.

Melinda Kresge: Leadership through connection and collaboration. Melinda Kresge has worked for 24 years as an educator, in a variety of roles—middle school learning specialist, high school English teacher, high school principal, and county level curriculum coordinator. For the past 15 years, her leadership practice has focused on writing grade specific and district level curriculum and improving literacy achievement, by working with teachers and administrators on meaningful professional development for assessment and accountability mandates. In 2001, Melinda accepted a position as English Language Arts Curriculum Coordinator for the Middle Regional Educational Service District, serving historically white (not Latino), rural, working class communities in one of the most economically depressed states in the nation.

In response to the federally legislated high school exit requirements (No Child Left Behind), Melinda created a professional development workshop for teachers and principals on the new State Exit Exam during summer 2006. She aimed to persuade teachers in preparing high school youth to

understand the exam's writing criteria and to write successfully on it. An observation of the daylong "Prepping for the State Exit Exam" workshop, which 150 high school teachers and administrators representing all grades and content areas attended, illustrated how Melinda focused her interactions on helping teachers develop shared meanings about the exam's content and format. At one point, participants, working in small groups of three to five, re-framed their understanding of the State Exit Exam by reading and discussing descriptive statistical summaries from the exam. Melinda intermittently sat down and listened to different group discussions while they reviewed the results. When interaction came to a standstill, or talk became charged with emotions, she assured them they would develop a clearer picture of the exam and identify for themselves what they needed to do back in their classrooms. The manner and timing of Melinda's proposition implied her finely tuned awareness of teachers' frustration with the high stakes on them and their students, as well as their professional obligation to this process. In these interactions, participants tested her credibility as a leader. As Melinda sat down next to a dyad, one teacher asked her:

"What do you think about this?"

Melinda looked at the social studies comment codes statistical summary and responded, "I think sometimes kids like to take short cuts." She then leaned forward unexpectedly, but not abruptly, and, pointing to the bar graphs related to "uses prior knowledge," commented further, "That did surprise me because kids have tons of prior knowledge. So, why are they not applying it?"

One of the pair, in turn, questioned the low statistic for "uses core democratic values," which she asserted she taught repeatedly.

Melinda responded by comparing, "It's the same here [pointing to bar graph for "uses data"], and probably here [pointing to bar graph for "refutes opposing position"]. We don't really emphasize that do we?" (Kresge, workshop observation)

In this encounter, the leader (Melinda) listened to her followers' (teachers') concerns and encouraged them to articulate what they had done as well as what they had yet to do to accomplish the goal at hand. The remainder of this exchange illustrates how Melinda made a connection to a participant's experience in order to re-negotiate the underpinning purpose:

The teacher replied quickly, "For one of the [daily] general ice breakers, we do that, we problem solve."

Melinda smiled and commented, enthusiastically, "Wow! How do they do with that?"

The teacher answered, "Some days they get it, and others they don't. And, sometimes I ask them to take a specific perspective."

Melinda nodded affirmatively. (Kresge, workshop observation)

From Melinda's perspective, collegial examination of the exit exam is a tool to make positive contributions to leverage curriculum change and professional development. Her tactics of pointing to additional information and asking questions provided support for shifting teachers' attention away from defending what they do to identifying what students actually did or did not do. While this appeared to be effective in this workshop, at others participants resisted her practice. She contrasted the responses she received in two different workshops:

[W]e just did this workshop [focused on preparing for the state exit exam] last week ... [and the teachers were] just saying, "This is wrong and a waste of time!"

They were very negative. And, I had to say to them, “Give it up. It’s here; it’s not going away. And, we have to figure this out for our kids. So, we better do it.” And, this group is great, aren’t they? They’re really struggling to figure it out. (Kresge, workshop observation, aside to researcher)

Despite the real constraints on curricular choice and instructional time in the classroom, Melinda advocated that educators attempt to influence the preparation process by contributing, together, what they knew about content and creating their own instructional tools and protocols. This approach reflects her enactment of writing project values and practices that she encountered in her 1987 summer invitational institute: “You start thinking more globally. You just think bigger and broader, and you have a whole different way of thinking about learning. You see yourself as a learner, first and foremost” (Kresge, interview). Although Melinda viewed her approach as influenced by the NWP, she realized that not all writing project members in her state agreed with her about the content of her work. Instead they advocated resisting standardized curriculum and test preparation. Like Karen, Melinda worked successfully with followers at two levels. Melinda’s collegial approach appeared to overcome the distance between an administrator charged with enforcing an unpopular policy and teachers mandated to meet new requirements. Melinda’s success prompted other regional administrators in the state to call on her, and this outcome has gradually provided an infrastructure of support for school districts across every county-level service region in the state.

Francesca Abbott: Leading by helping others discover their potential. Characterized as an individual who lives literacy in every aspect of her life, Francesca Abbott’s professional career spans 26 years and encompasses participation and leadership within and across multiple communities of practice. These include work as an adjunct instructor in the English Department at Overton University and involvement in founding, shaping, and sustaining two organizations focused on literacy and learning—the Jasmine Hills Writing Project and the Blackstone Community Center, a non-profit community literacy and learning center. Since becoming the Blackstone Center’s Executive Director in 1998, Francesca has steered the center through a major financial crisis and overseen the expansion of offerings to meet the needs and changing demographics of the community. The center’s programs include after school and summer tutoring programs for youth, adult education GED classes, AmeriCorps/VISTA volunteer sponsorship, and writing classes for aspiring writers.

Francesca’s ability to help individuals discover their own potential sits at the core of her leadership practice and is evident in her mentoring of the Blackstone Center’s less experienced administrators. She explained that she has “a tremendous amount of faith in young, fresh, energetic leadership.” Noting that “a lot of people grow as they are leaders rather than having all the characteristics they need” (Abbott, interview), Francesca works collaboratively to create opportunities for all voices to be heard and share ownership of the day-to-day work. At the same time, she is cognizant of her need to scaffold these emerging leaders through challenging situations: “I’m not sure they’re yet at the point where they could be in a meeting and not come out in tears or ... taking it personally, in a way that they would [not] need to” (Abbott, interview). In turn, these young leaders describe how she has helped them become more aware and savvy about dealing with political situations through modeling, working alongside them before and during meetings, and debriefing after meetings.

For example, Emily Boyd reflected on how Francesca supported her work as Program Director for the city's Americorps/VISTA project, which has involved collaboration among 15 different non-profit organizations. Blackstone, the sponsoring agency, provides oversight, "a lot of coalition building," and bringing together local literacy organizations as well as service organizations, "to talk about programming and to do collaborations" (Boyd, interview). The work of coalition building involves challenges including "turf wars," personnel concerns, figuring out how to talk about issues, and complexities of coordinating a range of different types of agencies. Emily explained that when such challenging situations arise, she and Francesca often sit down together ahead of time to problem solve or discuss strategies. In the program's early years "[t]here were a couple of agencies that didn't even want to be in the same room with each other" (Boyd, interview). However, after just three years, Emily pointed to Francesca's influence on some agencies' ability to hold conversations about programming and collaborate with each other without the fear that "someone's going to steal a program" (Boyd, interview). Noting the power of "what can be done when they all come together," Emily credited her working relationship with Francesca and the way she modeled and practiced reflection on her own understanding of how to handle "a lot of those difficult decisions" (Boyd, interview).

Emily also learned about the effectiveness of using writing in leadership practice from Francesca. At a statewide service learning conference, Emily began the meeting by asking the 75 participants to write about a positive experience they had had with service learning on one side of a piece of paper and a difficult experience on the other. Francesca reflected on the outcome:

She used it as a basis for a wonderful conversation. ... I wanted to give her credit for what a big deal that was. For [this 24 year old woman] to suggest that to this group of older, more experienced people and have them all just do it like it was no big deal. (Abbott, interview)

Emily drew from Francesca's frequent examples of using writing as a basis for generating productive conversation across a variety of situations but found a way to make it her own. While Emily used writing effectively, one of Francesca's colleagues expressed that the Blackstone Center's approach of focusing on and integrating writing into all aspects of its work might limit its reach: "To say that we're a place for writers is fine and that sort of vibrates within the writing community. But I don't think it vibrates anywhere else. So I see that as a big problem for Blackstone Center, and I always have" (Ackerman, interview).

The long-term nature of their working relationship enabled Francesca to nurture Emily into leadership using legitimate peripheral participation. Emily's reflections highlight how she observed Francesca negotiate delicate political situations and strategized with her behind the scenes to think through how to handle them. Further, Emily experienced using writing as a tool for stimulating productive conversation, a practice that Francesca had learned from her own mentor at the Blackstone Center and through her writing project affiliation. Emily appears to have patterned her leadership practice after Francesca because she observed Francesca's influence in a variety of situations, including the respect and trust Francesca granted her. In turn, Francesca's collaborative leadership style developed through work in several settings, including her involvement with the Overton Women's Writers conference in the 1960s and 1970s. Francesca explained this early influence:

A lot of my thinking about leadership came out of that [the Overton Women's Writers conference], too. ... My belief that ... small groups of people are really smarter than individuals, and my understanding of the limits of my own good ideas... (Abbott, interview)

How and Why Do Educators Come to Accept Others as Leaders?

In each case described above, the leader sought to influence others and the evidence shows that some followers accepted them as leaders, even when the situations of practice involved dealing with some level of conflict. Karen convinced district administrators and specialists that the instructional read aloud was a valuable tool for teaching high school subject matter and literacy; Melinda persuaded teachers in the workshop to learn from the data presented and consider how it could become useful for their curricular and instructional purposes; and Francesca mentored Emily as she developed different strategies for bringing different parties together and hold difficult conversations. Across the examples, three patterns emerged that help us make sense of leadership practice and the process for developing capacities of literacy leaders.

Negotiating situational challenges in constructive ways. Spillane's distributed leadership lens suggests that leaders always need to negotiate and interact with the context in which their work takes place. In each case, contextual challenges arose that had the potential to undermine the leader's efforts to improve literacy education. In particular, Karen's and Melinda's leadership practices occurred in a contact-zone wherein they realized they had to connect with followers' experiences and desires in order to negotiate between policy requirements and the strain on professionals' practice and psyches. As executive director, Francesca faced ongoing financial challenges with the potential to impact the center's future; she successfully addressed these by engaging stakeholders in respectful and productive ways.

Karen was admired for her resilience and determination to face the challenges of instructional directives. One of her mentees, a fourth year teacher, reflected, "She always is thinking... 'OK, let's make the best of it. We now have this mandate to move these kids into these kinds of classes. How do we make it work? How do we support teachers doing that?'" (Chi, interview). In her read aloud demonstration, Karen brokered her pedagogical expertise to influence the implementation of a district directive. Despite her concern that the district had mandated this practice, and being placed in a situation that was less than conducive to effective demonstration, she modeled how to use this strategy while upholding her professional respect for teacher judgment and ethical commitment to improving education for ELL youth. Similarly, Melinda used negotiation as a primary medium to re-frame teachers' perspectives on preparing high school students for stringent tests required for graduation. She fostered collegial relationships and acknowledged teachers' perspectives on the testing mandate in order to open up pedagogical pathways beyond the constraints imposed by the policy situation. Her leadership practice contrasted with how teachers and school administrators typically experience policy implementation. Although teachers acted responsively during the workshop, this does not necessarily mean they changed classroom practices after leaving the workshop. These two individuals operated in high stakes accountability environments in which educators felt pressed to meet performance standards. As they acknowledged the pressures felt by their colleagues, both continued to design and lead relevant professional development guided by a commitment to negotiation and aimed at improving underserved students' education.

Not subject to education policy mandates, Francesca faced distinctive but equally difficult political issues. Her ability to negotiate contextual challenges was especially evident in addressing the Blackstone Center's sudden loss of funding. In 2003, the mayor zeroed the center out of the city budget. Although Francesca had been working to decrease the proportion of the city's budget contribution from 90% to 70%, this action threatened the center's existence. Francesca mobilized hundreds of individuals who had benefited from, or been involved with, the center over the years to join a "Save the Blackstone Center Day." They wrote letters to the editor, performed public readings of writing growing out of their Blackstone experiences, and were joined by public celebrities—authors, TV and radio personalities, politicians—to make the case. These collaborative efforts, along with Francesca's ability to engage others in public as well as behind-the-scenes negotiations, resulted in the mayor reinstating the funding; the formation of a three-way partnership between a private donor, the city, and the library; and saving the center's community literacy services.

Leading alongside followers. Observations of the three leaders reveal an orientation to colleagues that is lateral in nature rather than hierarchical. Each woman held some positional authority: Karen was designated by supervisors as an expert instructor of district-wide workshops; and, Melinda and Francesca each held administrative positions as a county curriculum director and executive director, respectively. Each, potentially, could have used her official authority to tell others what to do; instead, each chose to use collegiality and persuasion, which in turn garnered some followers' respect.

Karen's leadership practice involved establishing connections with other teachers and coaches around their common work by teaching publicly, sharing quality products, and making her commitments to English language learners visible. One informant described that Karen is not "a leader eager to stand up and take the microphone. ... She's always a leader by example and consciously so, consciously so" (Chi, interview). Karen's leadership through example was not always effective; sometimes teachers ignored her efforts to improve instruction possibly because of her diminished status as a teacher and coach. She described several difficult situations when she needed to call on formal administrators for help in addressing her colleagues' problems.

Because of Melinda's position within the organizational hierarchy, she could not establish credibility rooted in shared teaching experiences. Thus she quickly built collegial relationships by carefully orchestrating clusters of teachers to express their genuine concerns, make sense of student achievement patterns, and identify viable possibilities for improving those results. She reflected her regard for teachers' experience and a well articulated process for them to think about what was at stake for students. She prompted them to work with testing data and materials as she moved from pod to pod, listening to and working from followers' hunches and ideas to reframe teachers' perspectives about the State Exit Exam. Although we observed her making an effort to work collegially, not all teachers saw her in this way because of her positional authority.

Like Melinda, Francesca listened to her younger associates' concerns, working with them to think through challenges. She was confident that by engaging smart, dedicated people the work would get done, and she let them lead to that end alongside her. Francesca's trust engendered a sense of confidence in followers. However, one staff member noted that he hadn't always trusted her collegial and non-confrontational management style, "I think there are people who come in to institutions and kick ass and we may need that and we may get that. But while she's here, I now

recognize that she is doing what she needs to do and doing it in a way that's right for this institution" (Slade, interview).

In summary, each modeled expertise and created environments in which "followers" felt respected to make sense of and adapt what they were learning. But, the normal culture of schools and organizations—often characterized by isolation and hierarchy—may have mitigated against the more collegial style of these leaders.

Sharing and amplifying knowledge and expertise. The three leaders each exhibited her expertise and portrayed a picture of successful practice through interactions with followers. In each case, however, this process involved the leader sharing "rough" knowledge (Stokes, 2005). In other words, their practices reflected their awareness of the challenges and imperfections of their knowledge. They offered repeated opportunities for followers to experiment, extend their thinking, and develop their own approaches. Their actions as leaders made it clear that they trusted followers to contribute to the knowledge, and practice of that knowledge, amplifying it and making it work for them.

In the district-wide meeting Karen made visible practices that informants later described experimenting with in order to help their English language learners connect language, objects, and concepts and thus make the strategies their own. Melinda conducted collegial conversations among teachers about the nature of the state exit exam that gradually engendered their trust in orchestrating parallel conversations in their own classrooms. Francesca engaged younger administrators in problem-solving and reflective conversations; Emily Boyd, among others, adapted these strategies in their own work to facilitate difficult interactions among stakeholders. In sum, the leaders shared knowledge in ways that allowed followers to amplify it by bringing it forward into new situations and adapting it in the midst of other relevant interactions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Analyzing interactions among leaders, followers, and the situation can shed light on new meanings and processes of leadership practice. Across these three cases, we see leaders pragmatically working alongside followers in demanding situations and exchanging and supplementing knowledge in respectful ways. This heedful interacting (Spillane, 2006) encourages appropriation of literacy and leadership practices, and seems especially well suited to the egalitarian professional culture of teaching (Little, 1995). In these cases, followers indeed gained access to effective literacy practices through carefully scaffolded experiences and interactions that involved authentic and deliberate reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Leaders' deep knowledge and strategic actions, which they indicated were nurtured by their participation in NWP as well as other communities of practice, created effective literacy practices and also inspired new learning. Although the "followers" in this set of cases portrayed the leaders in generally positive ways, it also is clear that the processes involved in accepting leaders as credible are dynamic, multilayered, and time intensive. These leaders faced a variety of challenges that sometimes limited their ability to affect change (e.g., policy mandates that conflicted with their beliefs, fiscal constraints that challenged relationships). Although informants were generally positive, they also noted that some of their colleagues actually dismissed or resisted the focal individuals' practices.

We believe that the distributed leadership perspective offers a promising theoretical construct for examining educational leadership—especially literacy leadership—in a range of formal and informal educational settings. Despite the fact that our research design gave us limited access to followers who may have dismissed or resisted the practices described, we shed light on how *practice* creates opportunities for leaders to demonstrate the expertise they bring to bear on their work. We argue that when these practices connect to the experiences of followers and accurately reflect of the complexity of a situation, followers both construct individuals as leaders and may be influenced by them.

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APPENDIX A

National Writing Project Legacy Study Case Study Write-Up Outline August 14, 2007

I. Introduction

What this is a case of?

II. Case Specific Methods

Data collected

- Numbers and demographics of informants
- Other types of data—observations, documents, background materials
- Fieldwork/data collected by phone

Case-specific analysis

- Case specific codes
- Special types of analysis brought to bear

III. Analytic Description

Note. The questions to be answered in this section are based on the **case study design template**. This section of the report should be as descriptive and factual as possible, recognizing that even description requires interpretation.

- This section should be drafted as a narrative with explicit references to the data. While the narrative will only quote or summarize from a few informants, we ask that additional data be cited.
 - The writing should assess the quality of the evidence for supporting claims. In particular, the writing should reveal both confirming and disconfirming evidence.
 - Our current thinking is that we would want to have sub-headers IIIa, IIIb, IIIc, and IIId, but that the order below that level could be customized by case.
- a. Description of the case study participant's work, disposition, and attitudes and values
- i. What is the work?
 - ii. What are the leadership aspects of the work?

- iii. What are his/her dispositions, attitudes and values? How, if at all, are Writing Project attitudes and values enacted? Which ones?
- b. Accomplishments and contributions
 - i. What are his/her key accomplishments and contributions?
 - ii. Who or what did he/she influence? In what, ways?
- c. Influences on the case study individual
 - i. Who or what influenced the case study individual?
 - ii. How was the case study individual nurtured into leadership roles?
 - iii. What was the nature of the Writing Project's influence on the individual?
- d. Description of the context
 - i. What are the contexts in which this work takes place?
 - ii. What affordances and constraints are present?

IV. Discussion and interpretation

- a. How, if at all, does this case help us answer the question: *What role has NWP played in guiding the pursuits of a generation of educational professionals so as to influence that and subsequent generations of educators?*
- b. Please describe the chain of evidence between the case study individual's participation in the writing project, her/his work, and his/her accomplishments and contributions.
- c. What alternate explanations or interpretations might explain this individual's work, accomplishments, and contributions?
- d. Revisit the question: What is this a case of? What makes this case important for the Legacy Study, for the National Writing Project, and for the field as a whole?

V. Appendices

Note. Some of these may not be made public or even shared with the case study person because they could compromise confidentiality

1. Timeline of significant events in each case study individual's work and career
2. Thumbnail descriptions of each adult informant: what information do we want to be sure to capture here, how do we capture researcher's assessment of how to regard the veracity of and weight to accord each informant?
3. Methods
 - a. Data collection schedule
 - b. Specialized questions and protocols
 - c. Case specific codes
 - d. Elaborated discussion of specific approaches to analysis
4. Others—case specifics