
Derailing the Fast-Moving Train of Communities of Leadership in Education (1021835)

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To cite this article:

Joseph Murphy. Derailing the Fast-Moving Train of Communities of Leadership in Education (1021835). *Journal of Public Policy and Administration*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 2021, pp. 168-178. doi: 10.11648/j.jppa.20210504.18

Received: June 11, 2021; **Accepted:** December 6, 2021; **Published:** December 24, 2021

Abstract: There is some evidence and analysis from notable scholars that educational leadership is in the early stages of historical change. First, there is a significant change from the bureaucratic pillars of schooling. Second, there is strong analysis that a shift in understanding of leadership is essential to the reorientation. At the same time, however, emerging scholarship holds that these changes will fail to take hold. This article lays out the theory and empirical knowledge revealing that change is indeed afoot. Our objective is to clearly lay out these two perspectives, with major attention given to the analysis of likely failure. Absent the failure narrative, it is believed that a robust shifting of our understanding on the topics of school organizations and educational leadership will not occur. Our early conclusion is that the train moving the profession to a post-bureaucratic era will likely derail. Even when there is some progress, regression to the known will hold the high ground.

Keywords: Post Bureaucratic Leadership, Positive— Not Demeaning Actions, Small Communities of Work, Inclusion of All, Good Grounding for Social and Academic Outcomes

1. Introduction

We start with the knowledge that throughout most of the last century, with its focus on hierarchical forms and institutional dynamics, “leadership... tended to be constructed as associated with ascribed authority and position” [22]: “leadership traditionally has been perceived to reside with school administrators where power flowed downward to teachers” [116]. On the schooling scene, this has meant that (1) educational leadership has been defined in hierarchical and positional conceptions [27], in terms “positional authority” [20] of principals and superintendents; (2) “the system has not been organized to treat teachers as leaders” [59]; and (3) the leadership literature, in turn, has focused almost entirely on those in formal school leadership positions [98]. These understandings gave rise to views of leadership that were tightly connected to domains of responsibility, with the assignment of school-wide leadership to principals and classroom leadership roles to teachers [14].

The significant point here is not that teachers were unconnected to leadership but that such leadership was rarely acknowledged outside the realm of the classroom, teachers’ role-based field of authority and influence as traditionally

defined. Because the work of teachers in terms of role and authority “has been seen as being composed of interactions with students in classes” [36], the expectation has been hardwired into the structure and culture of schools “that the only job of teachers is to teach students and to consider the classroom, at best, as the legitimate extent of their influence” [108]. “The formal authority of teachers in schools remains carefully circumscribed. Traditionally, they have exerted extensive control over teaching in their classrooms and departments, but their formal influence rarely extends beyond that” [60].

This preoccupation with the hierarchical organizational systems with its tenets of separation of management (leadership from labor, chain of command, and positional authority) has led to the crystallization of (1) forms of schooling in which teachers are routed into traditional roles [65] and “teacher leadership is clearly not a common contemporary condition” [4]—models in which “few people have viewed these educators as a group in the same way as other leaders, i.e., principals” [54]; and (2) a profession in which “teachers, even those who are already leaders, do not see themselves as leaders” [50]. As a consequence, historically “there were almost no mechanisms by which

teachers [could] emerge as leaders for the purposes of leading work on teaching, even when they [had] been acknowledged as exemplary classroom teachers” [73]. Thus, teachers have been forced into dependent roles [19].

Not surprisingly, teachers have generally not been featured in school reform initiatives, except in the “cog-in-the-wheel role” [36] of implementing policy from above. They have been afforded very limited “opportunit[ies] to effect policy or restructure schools” [78] or to participate in decision making about school improvement—“to effect meaningful change outside their classrooms or departments” [60]. While the need for leadership has been a central ingredient in the school change and school improvement literature, consistent with the analysis above, historically that leadership has been associated with those in roles with positional authority over teachers. Indeed, it is proposed that much of the reform activity has actually solidified the traditional roles of administrators as leaders and teachers as followers.

We proceed from Suleiman and Moore’s [100] position that the false assumption that teaching is for teachers and leading is for administrators has operated to the inutility of the public schools for a long time, that the sole emphasis on formal school leaders at the center of educational leadership has been ill directed [21] and has real costs in terms of schooling outcomes.

We commence also from the proposition that teacher leadership is essential to change and improvement in a school and that without teachers’ “full participation and leadership, any move to reform education—no matter how well-intentioned or ambitious—is doomed to failure” [70]. In short, we argue for the necessity of challenging the underlying assumptions about historical and existing roles for teachers and school administrators.

The scaffolding on which we construct our understanding of leadership is forged from a variety of educators and sources. It arises in part from the stockpile of material on leadership roles but is inclusive of more than traditional administrative roles. That is, we advance beyond the view of educational leadership as the domain of either a particular stratum of the educational system or the individuals within that stratum. Our scaffolding is also erected, however, from our best understandings of leadership as (1) an organizational property, (2) a function or process, (3) an outgrowth of expertise, (4) an activity of a group, and (5) a dynamic of community, understandings that move us away from conventional leadership and that permit the concept of teacher leadership to be positioned on center stage in the leadership play—insights that promote a new understanding of leadership or a new paradigm of leadership.

We begin with the knowledge that the pillars that support traditional and community leadership are quite different. The base of traditional leadership is organizational. It is about positions. The base of collective leadership on the other hand is about interactions among workers as they engage in decision making processes. When we look more deeply, we find that CL is not exclusively positional. “It implies a fundamental difference in the way ‘formal leaders’ understand

their leadership role” [46]. It departs from the bureaucratic or traditional model to an interconnected and dynamic approach to innovation and change. Communities of leadership holds that formal leaders are only part of the leadership practice in any school as there are inevitably many other sources of influence and direction. “It encompasses both formal and informal as well as vertical and horizontal dimensions of leadership” [10]. It can be individually or collectively based. CL helps teachers absorb increased tasks. It is a way for teachers to carry more freight in school improvement efforts and divorce leadership from a 100% focus on role-based and hierarchical leadership.

As Ho and Ng [57] report, “it is a shift from focusing on the leadership actions of an individual as the sole agent to analyzing the ‘concertive’ or ‘co-joint’ actions of multiple individuals interacting and leading.” It defines leadership as “collective leadership practice” [75]. For the school, it means multiple sources of guidance and direction following the contours of expertise. It is dynamic and collectively performed work [57] that highlights group activities [75]. Scholars define shared leadership as an emergent property that pursues a bottom-up strategy that honors the abilities of varied workers to lead. It has less to do with “telling” but a good deal to do with “helping.” It is constructivist and socially constituted [119]. It is a concept laced with empowerment. CL adds practice to our understanding of leadership. Or as Tian and colleagues [104] explain, collective leadership is a practice-centered model that adds staff and situation (including context) and non-formally positioned organizational activity as key components of leadership. It underscores dispersed activity. Or to borrow from the work of the major analyst in this area, Spillane has provided a leadership design that has “fundamentally changed the unit of analysis from a [sole focus] on people to practice” [104]. Or in the words of Harris and Spillane [48, 92], “it focuses attention on the complex interactions and nuances of leadership in action.” It places considerable emphasis on “employee autonomy” as a central element in organizational decision making. It also depends much more on interdependent and interconnected workers than is normally found in schools [40]. In recognizing the considerable variation in social context, it is impossible to develop a “blueprint” for actions [10].

The concept of communities of leadership is defined by a number of elements. It equates leadership with agency, focusing on the relationship among people. It is about leading beyond the classroom—“the belief that teachers should be leading their colleagues toward building more powerful schools” [111]. It is about the division of labor in organizations, the actions of each individual in the collective activity of inter-dependent participants [53]. It encompasses both formal and informal approaches to leadership as well as vertical and lateral dimensions of leadership [10]. CL has both structural and agential dimensions that often interact [104]. It encompasses the idea that leadership is emergent.

Communities of leadership is a construed concept where leadership is primarily about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and

collaboratively [47]. It is not about the relationship between leaders and followers, but the relationship between co leaders and their work. The work of leading... in schools involves multiple individuals and differs by the type of activity or function.

Communities of leadership entails a powerful commitment to democracy. The authority traditionally associated with the head teacher or principal is shared among a number of people in both formal and informal ways [53]. It is about high involvement organizations in which the competitive functions of power between principals and teachers are considerably reduced [82].

Communities of leadership is an organization-wide phenomenon. It is a group-level phenomenon among members of the organization. Leadership resides in the human potential available to be released within an organization. Communities of leadership “is much more a living process rather than a static body of information” [113]. It is not a choice between the principal and the power of the teacher. Rather it involves a shift in roles in which the managerial task is to create the conditions and context for self leadership [82].

We should also report that CL is laid out differently in various venues. It is often described in articles in terms of formality and informality. More rarely, but at times, CL is bifurcated into planful and ad hoc activities. Finally, even rarer, analysts examine the concept of depth in CL.

2. Evidential Angst

The negative part of the CL narrative (e.g., constructs that hamper school improvement [110] grows from clusters of ideas and findings. One is that “only a handful of studies... inquired about effects on students and these data are generally not supportive” [68]. Because of this, researchers in the area of CL worry that “the groundswell of support for distributed leadership may be a kind of meta rhetoric with little reality on the ground” (p. 550).

The most powerful aspect of the negativity about the impact of CL focuses on “evidence.” In particular, there is evidence that CL projects “initiated by teacher leaders are not very successful over time” [99], that they fail to bring extolled benefits to life—that a pathway from shared adult leadership to student learning may not exist. “Only a handful of studies... inquired about effects on students and data were generally not supportive” [68].

On the topic of learning gains, for example, Anderson and colleagues [1] “did not detect any clear connection between the patterns of leadership distribution revealed in the qualitative data and student test results evidence.” And Harris and Muijs [47] review a Peterson et al. study that found no relationship between shared decision making in schools and enhanced teacher effectiveness. Leithwood and Mascall [68] found that “few changes have occurred in schools that are detectable by teachers.” Timperley [106].

Tells us that “with the exception of leadership established through formally established committees and teams, we have almost no systematic evidence about the relative contribution

to the achievement of organizational goals of different patterns and distributed leadership.”

One suspicion on the negative side of the CL → outcome narrative is that CL is actually undermining the authority of teachers and as a result it acts as a brake on employing widespread decision making in the service of school improvement. Worse, teachers at times see CL as neutering the influence they currently enjoy in schools.

Negative results also materialize because needed support such as new skills and task- relevant information and strategies are often not provided. CL also surfaces new understandings of “time” for teachers themselves as well as for teacher leaders and formal leaders. These understandings are rarely acknowledged and even more rarely infused into schools. The same “absence of support” theme is often visible in the area of learning and knowledge for teachers (e.g., knowledge of group facilitation and interaction skills, the meaning and use of interdisciplinary work) in professionally anchored schools.

In institutionalizing CL all the actors need an understanding of what principals do, and why. They need to have their voices heard, which we learn is not the norm in schools. Relatedly, the reality is that even when teachers are listened to, they are often not heard by school leaders. The existing knowledge base, understanding, and wisdom to structure CL in schools is generally too limited to assist in planning, doing, and assessing.

Given the robust focus in the last 20 years on influence and power from school administrators, it is again surprising that their appearance in the collective leadership narrative requires a massive amount of detective work. While this is understandable given the school embedded linkages between parents and schools for over a century, such exclusion has been harmful to school reform efforts. If CL continues to be nested and grow, we would all benefit from an analysis of the theoretical and conceptual energy that powers these schools. And, if we could achieve understanding here, we would be even more advantaged as we explored how CL works in schools and why.

The question we confront here is why has the concept of community leadership appeared and continues to try to go to seed and bloom in the world of K-12 public education? Why is strategy “now moving towards distributed sources of influence and agency” [104]. Why is it viewed as “an idea whose time has come” [6]? Why do “the old perspectives not fit the landscape as they used to?” [112]. Societal, business, product, and work force changes... argue strongly for a change in management style that fits current realities, rather than simply doing the old better, i.e., some form of collective leadership makes the most sense because it fits with the major changes in the work force, technologies, and societal conditions better than any other alternative [67, 112]. Analysis reveals a broadening of leadership theory away from unitary command and the traditional view that leadership equates with individual role or responsibility [39] toward the idea of leadership as a social influence process [101] and away from a direct process from leadership to outcome [42]. School

improvement will depend on expanded thinking about teacher leadership. In this sense, leadership is located between and among individuals within an organization [103]. “Joint performance and interdependence are highlighted” [118]—a movement from roles to practice and tasks [119].

Communities of leadership have been powered by negative and positive forces. These forces have materialized in the external environment which surrounds education and in the internal actions in the schools themselves. Organizational influence and decision making is governed by interaction of individuals rather than individual direction [45].

No sooner had the ink dried on these early reform measures than they came under attack. A wide variety of scholars and practitioners found the entire fabric of the reform agenda to be wanting [9, 13, 23, 88, 91]. Finding the earlier suggestions inadequate at best and wrongheaded at worst, reformers clamored for fundamental revisions in the ways analysts approached school improvement. The muted voice of teachers—“too long silent and isolated in classrooms” [110]—and the overreliance on those in formal leadership roles to carry the reform freight [12] were seen as especially problematic. There was an expanding recognition that these elements of the early reforms undermined teacher professionalism [34] and blocked sustained school reform [21]. Concerns were increasingly voiced that these centralized reforms not only lacked the energy to power improvement but may have actually been an obstacle in the path toward enhanced student performance.

3. A New Approach Appears

New ways to formulate school improvement began to surface, new forms that grew from a different philosophical seedbed than the negative one that nourished the early round of change efforts. Teachers were now perceived as part of the solution to school improvement [62]. Reformers began to assert that educational improvement was (and is) contingent on empowering teachers to work more effectively with students. More and more people began to discern the tremendous potential of teacher leaders and to hold communities of leadership qualities as necessary elements for redesigning schools for success.

The major policy mechanism employed in these new reforms is “power distribution”—a perspective that assume[s] that schools can be improved by distributing political power among the various groups who have legitimate interests in the nature and quality of educational services. Reforms that seek to reallocate power and authority among various stakeholders are based on the belief that when power is in the right hands, schools will improve. [2]

Unlike the negative strategy employed in the past era of reform, this change model is designed to capitalize on the energy and creativity of teachers at the school site level. Underlying the ideology of these more recent reform initiatives is the assumption that many of the problems in education can be ascribed to the structure of school—“that the

highest impediment to progress is the nature of the system itself” [11].

It is not surprising, therefore, that the focus of improvement shifted to the professionals who populated schools and the conditions they needed to work effectively, including basic changes to the organizational arrangements of schooling—a shift from mechanistic, structure-enhancing strategies to a professional approach to reform and from “regulation and compliance monitoring to mobilization of institutional capacity” [105]. Nor is it surprising that reformers who considered the basic structure of schools as the root of education’s problem should propose more far-reaching and radical solutions than their predecessors, who believed that the existing system could be repaired [9].

More directly to the topic at hand, we note that the reform dynamics outlined above created a window of opportunity for teacher leaders [114]. That is, “new leadership roles for teachers occurred, in large part, in reaction to the regulatory bureaucratically oriented educational reforms of the late 1970s and 1980s” [93] and that the concept itself was born out of a ‘second wave’ of reform [5] developed in response to earlier initiatives [95]. Creating change through enhancing teachers’ roles as leaders [18] was thus both a reaction to the failed framework of centralized control as well as a central plank in alternative reform strategies [8].

While community leadership sometimes held center stage by itself, more often than not, it was “connected with several interrelated educational reform themes” [33]. It has been both a spur to the acceptance of these reform strategies (e.g., school-based management) as well as a key element and a central component of the latest educational reform efforts [96]. Or, as Teitel [102] affirms, the current reform movements ask classroom teachers to take on significant new leadership roles and require a new type of leadership from professional educators [17].

The broadest and most powerful reform stream that has carried community leadership to prominence is the “professionalization of teaching” [33] and “an emphasis on moving on to more professional models of school organization and management” [18]. The first of two tributaries of rationale here spotlights the macro, occupational level [5] and underscores the importance of community leadership as a means of reforming the teaching profession [69]. Community leadership is viewed as a conduit for the emergence of (1) “a new paradigm of the teaching profession” [21]—a “true profession” [85] and (2) a professional model of teaching [61]—conditions, it is held, that are essential for “the preservation of the public school tradition” [115] writ large. The logic here is that “teachers must assume leadership if teaching is ever to become accepted as a profession” [56]. Or, as Katzenmeyer and Moller [61] assert, “a professional model of teaching points to the need for teacher leadership” (p. 43) and “teacher leadership has become synonymous with the drive toward greater professionalism for teachers” [80]. The essence of the change here is a shift in the attempt to address issues of quality control “by substituting quality control over personnel for quality control over service delivery” [115]—a

“shift from hierarchical to peer control of teaching” [31] and the “transformation of teaching from an occupation to a profession” [5]. The change features a variety of roles for teachers, which provide teachers with greater opportunities to influence both practice and change in schools [99].

A parallel but somewhat distinct tributary of rationale was introduced earlier—the micro level and more instrumental argument “that unless teachers are... supported as professionals, schools will not be able to sustain change through school reform efforts” (Wynne, 2001, p. 1). That is, unless we create a teaching profession, our ability to restructure schools and improve student learning will be crippled [110], that teacher leadership is a critical component [99] or crucial element of school improvement. Thus, professionalism is “held out with the promise that [it] will produce more successful solutions to problems of students learning and student socialization” [74].

Collective leadership is also buttressed by a set of values or reform imperatives [30] that are at the heart of post-bureaucratic reforms in general and professional community specifically. The most visible of these is empowerment [61] or the focus on “empower[ing] school staff by providing authority” [28]—on overcoming the high degree of powerlessness among professional staff [41] through the “shift of a major portion of responsibility for leadership from principals to teachers” [85]. The assumption is that formal alterations in decision-making structures will lead to real changes in the involvement, voice, and autonomy of local stakeholders.

Another premise here is that this augmented autonomy and authority provide the requisite context for change. “With adequate authority at the school level, many important decisions affecting personnel, curriculum and the use of resources can be made by the people who are in the best position to make them (those who are most aware of problems and needs)” [15]. More specifically, “there is a significant relationship between providing authority to employees at the work site and achieving the organization’s ultimate goal” [29]. That is, by relying on a “matrix of authority bested in many people rather than a strict hierarchy of authority and power vested in the principal” [49, 61] and by “extending teachers’ decision-making power into schoolwide leadership activities” [7] and schoolwide decision making and policy development [36].

Other values also nourish reforms and restructuring and feature communities of leadership. While professionalism empowers teachers, the development and use of a specialized knowledge base [110] that is widely shared by teachers (an emphasis on knowledge-based work) brings professionalism to life. Emerging understandings of reform as processes that privilege community, a collaborative culture and social context in which knowledge can be created, transferred and transposed [34] are also significant. So too are commitments to democratization in the workplace [35] and to the principle of building schooling on the consent of the governed—an affirmation of schools as communities in which all members have voice and are allowed the space to fulfill their human

potential and exercise leadership [34].

Our growing understanding of teaching and teachers has helped foster a commitment to communal as opposed to solitary notions of leadership. Long-exerted efforts by the political and administrative sectors of education to control rather than involve teachers in the life of the school have proven not to be especially efficacious in enhancing school culture, professionalism, school improvement, and student learning [90]. Particularly troublesome are the findings that efforts to create better schools by changing structures and consolidating leadership have rarely been helpful [53]. Related work to “teacher proof” the teaching and learning processes has also produced disappointing results. This, in turn, has produced strategies and plans to meaningfully involve teachers in school reform efforts [77, 83].

As has uniformly been the case in education, the policy and development sections of the profession of school administration looked to the corporate world to uncover reasons to move from individualistic to collective understandings of organizational improvement [43, 51] and a framework for thinking about leadership [72].

It allows schools to become more intentional and systematic about managing knowledge [113].

Communities of leadership is perhaps most fully acknowledged because a good number of influential educators have come to believe that it is a roadway to school improvement and enhanced academic learning. It is presented as a strategy to solve specific education problems and to increase school capacity to promote democracy in education. It is also argued that communities of leadership are needed to provide those closest to the students, i.e., teachers, with much needed professional development and to enhance teacher motivation and involvement.

Thus, we see that the idea of communities of leadership has been heavily supported by beliefs that hierarchical and structure-based models are less effective in securing outcomes than consensus-based models [10] and in a rising tide of failure in education. Schooling is frequently described and assessed as an industry that that has been unable to adapt to the larger world in which it is ensconced [43]. While recovery remains at least a possibility in other industries, that often does not seem to be the case in education. Failure leads to a flurry of work which has routinely failed to revitalize schooling and consequently produces very few real shifts in the industry and in the concomitant measures of success. The position is deepening that we require leadership distributed across the community, i.e., the leadership we now need is outside our current way of operating [46].

At the same time, other forces are pushing schooling away from a (1) factory (machine) metaphor [76]; (2) a hierarchical, bureaucratic, top down [99] understanding of schools [47]; (3) adversarial relations of administration and teachers [99]; (4) government dominance of actions in education; (5) a mechanistic system and an emphasis on vertical interactions; (6) the deprofessionalization of teaching [85]; (7) rule-based systems of work [18]; (8) a context of declining resources; (9) a system of schooling that relies on externally developed

policies to assure public accountability [26]; (10) an environment that is more competitive [45]; (11) “a model where responsibility for ensuring quality education rests at the top of the organization” [109]; (12) an environment in which rules trump relationships [47]; (13) the “seductive idea of the all-powerful principal or superintendent who will rescue the organization and turn things around” [46]; (14) negative pressures that push teachers out of classrooms and schools [47]; and (15) the many impediments facing teachers and principals that block teachers leading [4].

Today we are witnessing a powerful reassessment of thinking across the social sciences [38]. These shifts toward multiple sources of guidance and direction [89], interactions [75], and communities of practice [113], or collective professionalization [79], e.g., a movement involving numerous individuals rather than the isolated minds of individuals [107], support more than they reinforce existing understandings of schooling [86]. It is seen as a living process [113]. Thus, there is a widespread belief that communities of leadership is the major way to create conditions (e.g., commitment, responsibility, efficacy) that in turn are linked to student learning [68] and school improvement and to help solve the leadership crisis of insufficient numbers [72]. Indeed, it is sometimes asserted that communities of leadership has been growing because it supports the core ideas that all teachers can teach and all youngsters can learn [58].

On a larger sense, communities of leadership has grown from new conceptions of the type of organizations that scholars contend are needed for a post-industrial, information-anchored world, i.e., in the new knowledge economy [52]. Also included here is the growing understanding that structural change is a much less powerful method for school improvement than has been held for over a century). While often necessary, structural change does not predict performance. Nor does it usually address critical improvement concepts such as the social organization and culture of schools and the teacher as researcher. Here, it is argued, communities of leadership both breaks down the dysfunctions of organizational bureaucracies, addresses the “crises in leadership in our schools and school systems” [45], and is a better fit for the increasingly interdependent and information rich [37] world of schools. It surfaced to some extent because scholars were trying to create leadership and management strategies that are more congruent with contemporary management strategies and probably owing to the appetite for accounts of new leadership by senior executives that dominated scholarly and practitioner literature during this period [6]. Bolden [6] also recorded different names for teacher leadership, such as emergent, collective, collaborative, and co-leadership, that enjoyed some attention in the 1990s. Heads and principals can no longer be responsible for all the areas requiring leadership in schools [45]—to improve schooling by ‘professionalizing’ the occupation of teaching [26]. As Ross and colleagues [87] tell us, “command and control notions of a single agent leadership [are] obsolete.”

Rational, bureaucratic control is being delegitimated [51]. Concomitantly, we are witnessing a powerful reappraisal of a way of thinking across the social sciences. These changes

support change more than theory refuels existing understandings of schooling [90]. New theory in the social sciences is pushing thinking away from fixed invariant forms [38] that defined school organizations for nearly a century and toward foundational pillars that support key elements of communities of leadership [10]. Thus, there is a widespread belief that community of leadership is the most powerful way to create conditions that nourish professional trust and positive relationships that in turn are necessary for student learning and school improvement.

The surfacing and additional attention paid to communities of leadership is linked to: (1) the growth of interest and theory in communities of leadership at the university level; (2) the growing interdependency of classroom teachers in schools; (3) an increasing sense that the silencing of teachers is inappropriate and that teachers need to step up in the quest for overall school improvement; (4) the growing perception that workers need to see the entire organization, not just their own silo, and how their efforts affect the functioning of the entire school; (5) a growing belief “that it would be virtually impossible for schools to promote democratic society if they were not democratic communities themselves” [94], and (6) knowledge that “extraordinary personnel resources lay unacknowledged, untapped, and undeveloped” [4].

We also see a growth in communities of leadership because “it is thought to (a) more accurately reflect the division of labor that is experienced in organizations from day to day and (b) reduce the chance for error rising from decisions based on limited information available to a single leader” [68]. Deeply embedded in support for communities of leadership is the belief that complex problem solving requires multiple perspectives [113].

Communities of leaderships also rests on the planks of a social process of learning and leading [76], not simply attention to role-based figures, and to the actions they take and methods and ways of doing work that they require [42]. Interdependence is visible and reciprocal in such communities [81]. An understanding of leadership as work to ensure that teachers cannot make “inappropriate” decisions and perform in “inappropriate” ways—e.g., work to “teacher-proof” the school and its classrooms, is much less prevalent when meaningful communities of leadership play out in the school [76]. An acknowledgment of the complex mix of structural, cultural, social, and individualistic dimensions of teaching is visible. There is less effort to improvement only within the existing culture of first-order change. More specifically, there is “an attempt to change the organizational culture of schools from one that fosters privatism and adversarial relationships between and among teachers and principals to one that encourages collegiality and commitment” [71]. To a significant degree, communities of leadership is a product of change from a mechanistic organizational system to an organic system, one that holds that shared power strengthens an organization [97]. There is an emergence from the twentieth century firm to the emerging enterprise, away from free market neo liberalism [52]. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that communities of leadership can flourish in a

mechanistic anchored organization. It is also patently evolved from the idea and implementation of teachers as researchers, or the broader idea of teachers as practitioner-scientists—from the individual improvement, role-based models of teacher leadership to a group quality [112]—to a more collective task-oriented and organizational enterprise [94].

Perhaps more important is a realization of the potential for community leadership to truly professionalize teaching and revolutionize—changes that have been pursued for the last 100 years. There is also support here for the belief that practice-based evidence should have a more significant place in school improvement—that it can challenge the hegemony of university-generated knowledge [16].

Other dynamics also help explain the implantation and growth of communities of leadership in the current era of schooling. One is the fact that the idea of communities of leadership is embedded in “asset-based thinking” and the concept of positivism, rather than in the soil of negativity, problems, and deficiencies. It fits how school organizations need to evolve and develop to be effective for all teachers and youngsters. We also know that communities of leadership is growing because it privileges not only distal outcomes.

School improvement work itself has also pushed communities of leadership forward [45]. There is increasing recognition everywhere that there is a need for more leadership from more people [109]. If schools are to become better, teachers must assume a variety of important instructional leadership responsibilities [85]. The movement here is heavily focused on the belief that those closest to the classroom need to be in the decision process [47]. Leading a school should not be restricted to those at the top of the organization. So too, as noted above, has the emergence of the limitations of the traditional single role-based perspective in schools that are outmoded and increasingly irrelevant [42] and a growing appreciation of the importance of informal leadership [6]. Although it is almost never mentioned directly, the idea of moving toward communities of leadership as a moral imperative [94] for teachers rests in the backgrounds of other explanations. That is, “everyone can exercise democratic agency by right rather than as a licensed delegation of power within an unchanged positional hierarchy” [53].

Communities of leadership is “largely a critical response to the Trojan horse of heroism” and the “new leadership of the 1980s” [38]. The changing relationship between traditional school leaders and teachers is also in play here [4]. It holds that leadership is not simply a role-specific phenomenon but system-wide phenomenon [76] in which leadership can come from group/organizational members other than the designated leader [32] as well as evidence and a growing sense that improvement is often not possible through traditional management approaches and or the traditional organization of schools or the work therein; i.e., “the limitation of a singular leadership approach” [44]. That is, post heroic leadership [63] is not possible without a major shift in responsibilities [97] and a model of effective leadership that is suited to the post-modern context [47]. As is the case with teaching in the post-modern world, there is a shift from telling to construction [84] “where

leadership is primarily about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively” [47].

As school systems become more complex, diffuse, and networked, the talents of the many rather than the few will be required to respond to quickly shifting and changing contexts. [46]

It has become increasingly apparent that for schools to develop and improve in rapidly changing times, issues of leadership and management can no longer simply be seen as the exclusive preserve of senior staff. [47]

Communities of leadership have been lifted by beliefs in the rising tide of failure in education, by the belief that students coming out of public schools possess inadequate knowledge, limited skills, and poor attitudes toward work [24]. The claim is routinely presented that the nation’s economic problems are tightly linked to the failure of schools.

Schooling is viewed and assessed as an industry that has simply been unable to adapt to the larger world in which it is ensconced [42]. While recovery remains at least a possibility in other industries, that often has not been the case for over a century in education. Failure has led to a flurry of activity that almost never revitalized schooling and consequently produces very few real shifts in the industry and in concomitant measures of success.

Communities of leadership are nested in the professionalization of teaching, a term that brings professional experience and expertise to the forefront of education. It means providing professionals not simply with policies, regulations, and rules from those higher in the work chain but autonomy and flexibility in making decisions for the benefit of children and their families. Communities of leadership suggest a deep, informed engagement of professionals in the leadership of the institution at all levels, from forging direction and shaping purpose, to establishing goals, to selecting appropriate tools to make work more productive. As such it requires the development and cooperation of systems that allow professional influence to be valued and employed. The influence means that communities of leadership attend to the allocation of time for shared decision-making activities to occur.

As noted earlier, we know that communities of leadership has arisen because increased external demands on schools [48] have “begun to reformulate the educational problem in ways that suggest different policy strategies” [26]. Particularly relevant here are formal policies. We also see here the emergence of a new work order that pushes schools toward greater networking and “joined up” work, collaboration, that “involve teachers in school decision making processes” [117], that allow them to shape schooling. Teacher leadership practices are no longer confined within classroom walls—and “collective power [is] more fully capitalized to bring about educational improvement” [66]. On the organizational front, changes rest, at least to some extent, on the “burgeoning literature of distributed leadership being operationalized within schools” [55].

It draws support from a growing understanding that “knowledge is much more of a living process than a static body of information” [113]. Likewise, it is anchored in emerging understandings from the cognitive sciences that “the

‘mind’ rarely works alone... intelligences are distributed across minds, persons, and the symbolic and physical environments, both natural and artificial” [84]. Communities of leadership also is developing as “the official power over models associated with organizational roles and legitimate authority [gives way] in favor of understanding a more humane, real, and everyday exercise of leadership in problem solving” [39]. And scholars have “found that purely economic cultures are continuously outperformed by organizations with more humanistic cultures” [86] and that “hierarchical and status-based models are less effective in securing outcomes than consensus-based models” [10].

4. Conclusion

Community of leadership is a systematic analysis of all concepts crafted to describe shared leadership. Our strategy was to cut all related perspectives (e.g., distributed leadership, teacher leadership) in half. We then pull out the DNA from each of these shared leadership terms and place them on the same plate of analysis. From here we can deduce common and distinct ideas. We close with a narrative that reveals the centrality of community-based organizations and leadership.

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