

Framing Reform for the New Millennium: Leadership Capacity in Schools and Districts

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I want to share with you my thoughts on the transformation of leadership that is taking place--what these new conceptions look like--and why they are coming about. An important context in which to understand these struggles is to notice and reveal that we do not as yet have the schools that we want....

I would contend that....

We want schools where children:

- Are confident, reflective, self-directed, caring and competent
- Contribute to community
- Ask questions, create, feel passion

We want schools where ~~educators~~ *Parents*:

- Are full partners in the work of teaching and learning
- Understand the purpose and goals of schooling
- Derive confidence and joy as a parent each time they come to school
- Advocate for our schools and lead other parents to participate

We want schools where educators:

- Engage in meaningful dialogue while grappling with questions of practice, seek evidence, and deepen understandings
- Skillful and knowledgeable about teaching and learning
- Act out of a core set of values
- Challenge each other and the school community to grow and develop

We want schools that...

Provide learning communities for students, parents and educators as a center of inquiry.

Why do our countries not abound with such schools? Yes there are some pockets of excellence--and many can be found in this room--but it is not the norm. Why not? I would suggest that our tremendous talents, energies and powers in schools go largely untapped. Leadership is left to the few at the top of the hierarchy in spite of our realizations that leadership, like love and energy, is not a zero-sum game. Today, our assumptions are changing and our conceptions of leadership must do the same.

For most of 30 years, I've struggled with this question: *What is Leadership?*

A brief history of leading and learning will set the stage for a reconception of leadership. Let me begin by observing that Einstein made few mistakes ...at least one that he admitted: Throughout most of his life's work, he thought that the universe was fixed. In his later years, recognizing that the universe was indeed expanding...a growing moving entity...he was surprised by his earlier miscalculation. But it is no wonder that he, too, was occasionally a victim of culture and history.

Early in this century--as during the previous thousands of years--we held traditional conservative thoughts about the nature of things: the universe, intelligence, roles, race, age...our world view was studded with fixed

concepts of the major facets of life. Learning and leading fell easy prey to these assumptions. I link learning and leading throughout history since both are based on assumptions about humans; for instance, when leading was more autocratic, so was learning--when learning theory shifted to the engagement of humans in their own learning, so did leading.

Early traditional thought in learning and leading understood human capacity **for learning to be innately fixed** and in need of an outside authority such as a teacher or employer to insert information and direct behavior. Knowledge originated outside the person.

When Thorndike and Binet made it possible to **measure this fixed intelligence**, our behaviorist technologies allowed us to describe and prescribe learning and leading activities. Individuals were thought to learn in small increments, which were quantifiable and responded best to extrinsic rewards and sanctions. Learning and leading continued to be directed from outside the person. Because learning capacities were fixed and measurable, objectives could be set and achieved with predictable outcomes.

Such measurement and predictability led to the **sorting and grouping** into ability groupings...all the better to teach people to the best of their abilities. In leadership, we sorted people into situational settings--describing the kinds of monitoring, directing, and evaluating needed by each group. These practices were rampant in the military during World War II, and also practiced with equal fervor in our schools.

In the wake of the civil rights movements and shift in perspectives about human nature leading up to the 1970's, Ron Edmonds startled us with the declaration that "**All Children Can Learn!**" It is critical to understand that until the beginning of what came to be known as the **Effective Schools Movement**, intelligence was a human possession that enables them to be measured, labeled and sorted. Teaching and leading were designed to accommodate these views by supervising and directing.

As momentous as the **Effective Schools Movement** was, it had its pitfalls. It assumed that if we could find out what made good schools succeed, we too could develop those features and characteristics. Few of these reforms were sustainable, as they did not recognize the context of schooling or the capacity of a school and a group of professionals to improve themselves.

The next major turn in our world views occurred with the **Community of Learners and Leaders Movement**. Based upon the assumption that communities of people can design their own learning, share leadership and behave democratically, this thinking led to successes leading to improved student learning and sustainability (as long as key personnel stay in place).

This 'Community' concept--during this decade--has become joined with what we have recently come to know about human learning. Our educational and brain research, as well as research into natural systems, have led us to know what Piaget and Bruner knew all along: that human minds hold assumptions, beliefs, perceptions and experiences that mediate with new ideas and experiences, thereby constructing meaning and knowledge. This learning is collective and enhanced by inquiry, dialogue, reflection and action. We know this as **constructivist**.

We have journeyed 100 years (actually more like 7,000), altered our world views about the static nature of things and understand now that learning occurs from the inside out. A stunning achievement.

What we yearn for now is a new conception of leadership, one that adheres to what we know about learning and the nature of human dynamics. I would propose such a definition, one that I refer to as **constructivist leadership**.

This notion of leadership recognizes that leadership is about reciprocal, purposeful learning that allows

participants in community to construct meaning and knowledge together. In other words, leadership is the reciprocal processes that enable participants in a community to construct meanings that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling.

The nature of reciprocity is central to this new conception. I am taken by a comment Bishop Desmond Tutu's of South Africa made in a recent interview on National Public Radio. He said "I am human because you are human...we reside in each other's humanity." We need to be able to engage in the processes of meaning making as we live and work together in communities if capacities for reciprocity are to be developed...for knowledge is built up in the relationships among people.

What does constructivist leadership look like when applied to staff interactions? An example of Reciprocal Processes Design:

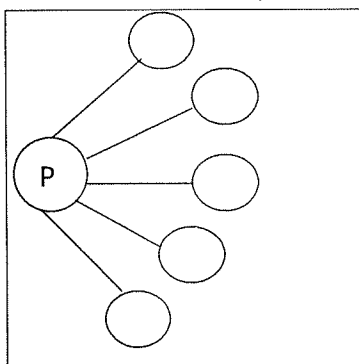
- Surface current practices, assumptions, beliefs
- Inquire into the effectiveness of current practice by examining student work, disaggregating student data, observations, action research. Seek new understandings.
- Engage in dialogue to make sense of what they are learning...how do their inquiry findings differ from current assumptions. What does this mean?
- Frame new actions/practices based on new understandings.

Such a view of leadership enables us to think about a dense fabric of leadership within a school community...this concept that I've called leadership capacity.

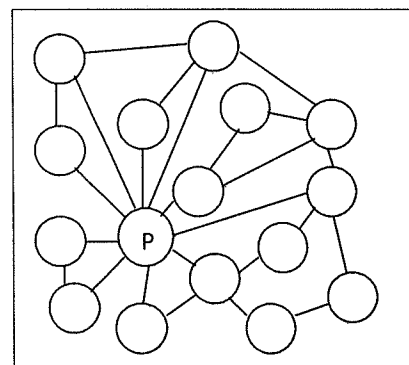
Leadership capacity is defined as the broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership. Why this concern for leadership capacity? Almost none of our schools have been able to sustain improvements after a change agent principal leaves. And, why is that? With our current models of leadership schools become person dependent. And districts that adopt the practice of the "buck stops here" model of leadership are reinforced. Let me illustrate:

With the "input" model, the improvement effort dissolves when the principal leaves. In the 'reciprocal' model, the fabric is strong and closes ranks when a principal leaves.

INPUT MODEL
of Leadership



RECIPROCAL MODEL
of Leadership



Assuming that we seek this web of leadership and are persuaded that such a fabric builds high leadership capacity, let's look at how this plays out in practice. Breadth of participation and depth of skillfulness create relationships among several features of school reform: formal and informal issues of authority, information and inquiry, alternate roles and responsibilities, reflective and innovative behaviors, and student achievement. For instance, in a school with low participation and skillfulness, authority is usually situated in one person, often the role of the principal. This situation encourages what I call "co-dependent" behaviors, ones through which principals give signals that teachers are to stay in their classrooms and teachers give signals that principals are to perform traditional management tasks. On the other hand, in a school with high participation and high skillfulness, authority is distributed widely among many participants.

Let us think about the evolution of information and inquiry in such a paradigm. Information moves from outside-in to inside-out, at which stage it becomes inquiry because participants are formulating questions and generating evidence. This is a developmental continuum.

The transformation of roles and responsibilities are likewise a function of this evolutionary process. Teacher leadership emerges strongly, while principals and other administrators rethink their roles in order to co-invent and facilitate learning communities. Such communities, we know now, are inextricably connected to high or improving student achievement. Full achievement and maintenance of such communities requires enlightened district leadership as well. The leadership capacity of which I speak is institutional in nature, a result of securing the following features:

- Broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership
- Inquiry-based use of information to inform decisions and practice
- Roles and Responsibilities that reflect broad involvement and collaboration
- Reflective practice and innovation as the norm
- High or improving student achievement

The capacity of a school for leadership is, like energy and love, boundless--since each human has the ability, right and responsibility to act as a leader. Those who perform acts of leadership need to understand and be able to act on the following understandings:

- a sense of purpose and ethics
- facilitation skills, because framing, deepening, and moving the conversations about teaching and learning are fundamental to constructed meaning.
- an understanding of constructivist learning for all humans
- a deep understanding of change and transitions
- an understanding of context so that communities of memories can be continually drawn and enriched
- a personal sense of identity that allows for courage and risk

We at our university are in the process of preparing such leaders in our educational leadership programs and in the schools and districts in which we work. Our selection processes and curriculum are based upon four major values: democratic collaboration, equity/diversity, bold, socially responsible leadership and continuous improvement.

Several interesting studies are underway to assess the efficacy of such approaches. One of particular interest is by Foster (now at the University of Manitoba) and colleagues. In a study of the leadership patterns in two high schools, they found:

In both schools, respondents perceived the qualities of community to be crucial in supporting the reciprocal processes leading to the "sense making" and the development of shared purpose...participants stressed the important role played by teachers in contributing to the sense of community and support of the continuous

construction of meaning...they were defined as chief facilitators and constructivist leaders.

We can truly celebrate where our understandings have brought us, especially in the last 30 years. Yet education continues to find itself on the wind swept plains between cynicism and hope. In the US, education has become the number one public policy issue desperately seeking to solve problems of urban centers by improving schools. Governors and mayors are speaking the rhetoric of educational leaders. Candidates for President are vying with each other to promise the boldest initiatives in school reform---charter schools, vouchers, standards, carrot and stick approaches to accountability. But too many of these proposed solutions are palliative at best, punitive and divisive at worst.

Examples of these promises and paradoxes, trends and tensions in American reform:

Focus on standardized test results	Use of multiple measures to assess student performance
Emphasis on Standards, a set canon of knowledge	Developmental, constructivist learning designs
Punitive responses to lack of success: retention, Saturday schools, failure to graduate	Engaging students in projects, technology, community service academics, choices
CEO takes charge of change Centralization or recentralization	Collaborative, democratic leadership Decentralization, site based management
Privatization	Public school choices, charter schools
Large, economical efficient, yet depersonalized schools	Small schools and schools within schools
Building more prisons - focusing on the "fall out" of failed public policy	Investing more in schools and other forms of education

We need to get beyond the simple solutions to the in depth work of building communities of learners and leaders who can create and sustain the leadership capacity of schools and districts. This is lasting leadership...and, this is our best hope for schools. We must expand the boundaries of hope and imagination for the next generations by choosing ***lasting leadership***.

Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*, asks us to consider that,
The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof. (1997, p.299)

If we are to teach, learn and lead in the next millennium, we must find ourselves situated within the embrace of hope and act on it thereby securing lasting leadership for all of us.