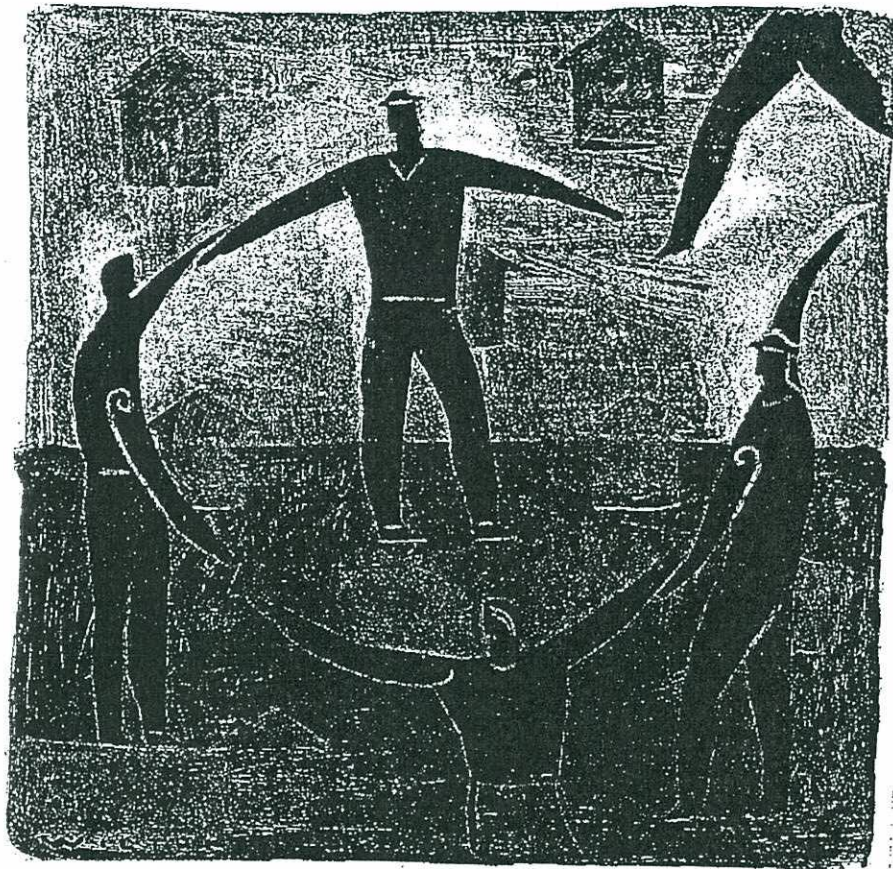


A Framework for Shared Leadership

Instead of looking to the principal alone for instructional leadership, we need to develop leadership capacity among all members of the school community.

Linda Lambert



The days of the principal as the lone instructional leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for an entire school without the substantial participation of other educators (Elmore, 2000; Lambert, 1998; Lambert et al., 1995; Lambert, Collay, Dietz, Kent, & Richert, 1997; Olson, 2000; Poplin, 1994; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

The old model of formal, one-person leadership leaves the substantial talents of teachers largely untapped. Improvements achieved under this model are not easily sustainable; when the prin-

incipal leaves, promising programs often lose momentum and fade away. As a result of these and other weaknesses, the old model has not met the fundamental challenge of providing quality learning for all students.

Our lesson is clear: Instructional leadership must be a shared, community undertaking. Leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school.

Linking Leadership and Learning

For decades, educators have understood that we are all responsible for student learning. More recently, educators have come to realize that we are responsible

for our own learning as well. But we usually do not move our eyes around the room—across the table—and say to ourselves, “I am also responsible for the learning of my colleagues.”

Some students seem to understand that the classroom and school communities are in the business of learning together. For instance, when our 9-year-old grandson, Dylan, completes his own work, he observes how other students are progressing. He voluntarily goes to the desks of other students and assists them. Shannon, our 10-year-old granddaughter, serves as a peer mediator at her school in Colorado, helping other students work out solutions to their conflicts.

Being responsible for the learning of colleagues is at the center of the definition of leadership that I propose. By understanding that learning and leading are firmly linked in community, we take the first essential step in building shared instructional leadership capacity. This understanding rests on some assumptions that promise to shift our thinking about who can learn and who can lead:

- Everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader.
- How we define leadership influences how people will participate.
- Educators yearn to be more fully who they are—purposeful, professional human beings. Leadership is an essential aspect of an educator’s professional life.

A New Framework for School Improvement

Educators and policymakers alike seek a framework for instructional leadership that will produce sustainable school improvement. The development of leadership capacity can provide such a framework. I define “leadership capacity” as broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership. In schools with high leadership capacity, learning and instructional leadership become fused into professional practice. Such schools have some important features in common.

- *Principal and teachers, as well as many parents and students, partici-*



Students like Dylan, right, know that learning is a shared responsibility.

pate together as mutual learners and leaders in study groups, action research teams, vertical learning communities, and learning-focused staff meetings.

- *Shared vision results in program coherence.* Participants reflect on their core values and weave those values into a shared vision to which all can commit themselves. All members of the community continually ask, “How does this instructional practice connect to our vision?”

- *Inquiry-based use of information guides decisions and practice.* Generating shared knowledge becomes the energy force of the school. Teachers, principal, students, and parents examine data to find answers and to pose new questions. Together they reflect, discuss, analyze, plan, and act.

- *Roles and actions reflect broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility.* Participants engage in collaborative work across grade levels through reflection, dialogue, and inquiry. This work creates the sense that “I share responsibly for the learning of all students and adults in the school.”

- *Reflective practice consistently leads to innovation.* Reflection enables participants to consider and reconsider how they do things, which leads to new and better ways. Participants reflect through journaling, coaching, dialogue, networking, and their own thought processes.

- *Student achievement is high or*

steadily improving. “Student achievement” in the context of leadership capacity is much broader than test scores; it includes self-knowledge, social maturity, personal resiliency, and civic development. It also requires attention to closing the gap in achievement among diverse groups of students by gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

These features—skillful participation, vision, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and student achievement—interact to create the new tasks of shared instructional leadership. An abundance of research into school improvement suggests that these features are vital to the school improvement process (for example, see Barth, 1999; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lambert, 1998; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Schmoker, 1996; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

Leadership Capacity in Action

A growing number of schools have undertaken the work of building leadership capacity to bring about sustainable school improvement. Schools are inventing and experimenting with many forms of participation. The following examples come from former principal students of mine or from educators whom I have come to know in my development work, in the United States, Canada, England, and Australia.

Study Groups

Study groups read articles or books together and discuss the implications of the texts’ ideas. Educators in Edmonton, Wild Rose, and Calgary in Alberta, Canada; Columbus, Ohio; Kansas City, Kansas; and San Leandro, California, regularly use study groups as a means to challenge and integrate their thinking and move to new and collective levels of understanding. These conversations give rise to new and better instructional practices.

Chief Justice Milvain School in Calgary, Canada, an ethnically diverse elementary school serving 460 students, developed an inquiry-based improvement plan with the broad participation of teachers, parents, and administrators.