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Ready to Lead, But How?

Teachers' Experiences in High-poverty Urban Schools

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Abstract

Despite wide-spread recognition of the teacher's importance in student learning, little is known about the role that teachers play beyond their classroom, identifying and addressing the challenges that their schools face. Can and do teachers work with administrators in leading efforts to improve their school? We interviewed 95 teachers and administrators in six high-poverty, urban schools in order to understand whether teachers seek to exercise leadership in school improvement, what opportunities they have to do so, and how the organizational context of their school influences their level of engagement. We found that teachers were willing and ready to address their school's challenges. They conditionally granted their principal discretion in setting the agenda, based on the perceived authority and expertise of the principal and teachers' opportunities for engagement as partners. When the principal took an instrumental approach to their contributions, teachers resented it, withdrew to their classrooms, and considered leaving the school. When the principal took an inclusive approach, demonstrating genuine interest in their views and contributions, teachers invested in school-wide reforms.

The failure of many urban schools to effectively and consistently serve their high-poverty students continues to be one of the most stubborn problems in U.S. public education. Such schools typically enroll large numbers of minority students, many of them identified as English language learners or having special learning needs. Their families often live in poverty, contend with racism, and encounter danger in their neighborhoods, all conditions that pose extra challenges to these students' success in school. Moreover, many schools that serve high-poverty students—although notably not all of them—have a long history of failure, marked by disorder and a lack of discipline, frequent administrative turnover, a preponderance of inexperienced teachers, and a patchwork curriculum with mismatched professional development.

In response to state and federal accountability policies introduced over the past 15 years, education officials judged many high-poverty urban schools to be chronically failing and, in response, introduced an array of strategies and sanctions meant to improve them. In extreme cases, these schools are required to replace the principal and/or at least 50 percent of the teachers as part of a "turnaround" or "transformation" process. Central to such approaches is the expectation that effective leadership is essential for improvement, yet we are only beginning to understand how that might work.

On paper, schools appear to be simple organizations, which should be easy to manage. They are headed by a principal who is sometimes supported by a second level of assistant principals or subject department heads. At the bottom of this relatively flat organizational structure are the school's many teachers. It is at this level where the core process of teaching and learning occurs as teachers exercise professional discretion in many, separate classrooms. This simple organizational structure masks the complex challenges of leading change in schools today.

The "cellular" reality of schools (Lortie, 1975, p. 15), apparent in their "'egg-crate' structure" (Tyack, 1974, p. 44) makes it difficult, if not impossible, for principals to closely monitor and direct what teachers do. Whatever decisions principals make or mandates they issue, teachers remain the "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1983) who independently decide what their students' true potential and problems are, which of the principal's initiatives deserve their support, and what they think might improve the school. If reformers are to accelerate meaningful improvement in underperforming urban schools, they must have a far better understanding than is now available about how principals lead change in schools.

Most of the available research on leadership exercised at the school level focuses on those holding formal positions as principal or teacher leader. The principal, long identified as the key leader of school change (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson &Wahlstrom, 2004; Murphy & Louis, 1999) has garnered much research attention over the past decade of school-reform efforts. Leithwood and colleagues (2004) summarized their review of current literature by stating that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its effect on student learning. Some recent studies (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki & Portin, 2010; Mendels, 2012) document the importance of the principal as an instructional leader. In contrast, Grissom and Loeb (2011) find that it is the principal's effectiveness in organizational management that "consistently predicts student achievement growth and other success measures" (p. 3091). Other researchers report that students benefit when principals allocate leadership opportunities within schools (e.g., Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009). Despite serious and extensive inquiry, we do not yet have a clear understanding of whether and how principals engage teachers in school improvement.

Researchers have also focused on the small number of teachers who hold formal leadership roles within schools. With the implementation of recent federal programs, such as Reading First and No Child Left Behind, many schools created positions for expert teachers to serve as instructional coaches. These teacher leaders were then expected to increase instructional coherence and improve student performance throughout the school. A small number of studies have analyzed the potential contributions and actual experiences of formal teacher leaders, identifying both the challenges they routinely face in assuming roles that are often vaguely defined and the struggles they encounter as they try to gain support among colleagues whose instructional practice they are expected to improve (Donaldson, Johnson, Kirkpatrick, Marinell, Steele & Szczesiul, 2008; Mangin & Stoelinger, 2008; Margolis & Huggins, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

However, effective school improvement in high-poverty urban schools ultimately depends on more than what the principal and a few formal teacher leaders do, in part because the challenges that these schools face are complex and sometimes seemingly intractable. They include both what Heifitz and Laurie (1997) call "technical challenges," for which there are clear, proven solutions, and "adaptive challenges," which require new learning, not only about how to solve the problems, but more fundamentally, about how to identify and define them. Addressing adaptive challenges, Heifitz and Laurie explain, requires "the collective intelligence of employees at all levels, who need to use one another as resources, often across boundaries, and learn their way into solutions" (p. 124).

Therefore, achieving and maintaining success in high-poverty, urban schools depends not only on teachers' implementing proven or promising approaches within their classrooms, but also on their ongoing, collaborative analysis and improvement of practice with colleagues and

administrators throughout the school. For it is at the school level where many "adaptive challenges" persist in schools that serve high-poverty students, such as how to ensure that instruction is inclusive and coherent for all students across all classrooms, how to meaningfully engage parents in their children's education over time, how to develop and implement an effective approach to order and discipline throughout all classrooms and corridors, and how to capitalize on the knowledge and skills of exemplary teachers in support of their colleagues' continuous development.

As Heifitz and Laurie's analysis suggests, the challenges that educators face in underperforming, high-poverty schools are complex and call for leadership by everyone, not just a select few. Similarly, Hallinger and Heck (1996), who studied the work of principals, speculate:

> [I]t may be the case, that some of the nagging problems that have accompanied studies of school leadership effects arise from the fact that we have...been measuring an...incomplete portion of the school's leadership resources. Thus, future research would do well to assess the contribution of leadership...by the principal as well as by other key stakeholders. (p. 113)

Yet schools seldom are organized to generate and capitalize on the potential for leadership among their teachers. Furthermore, principals play a pivotal role in determining whether and how teachers engage with school wide reform efforts. Drawing on the authority of their position, principals may create some opportunities for influence by teachers, yet foreclose others. They may enthusiastically solicit teachers' views or they may subtly or directly reproach teachers who challenge the principal's plans and expectations.

In her 1989 study of the teachers' workplace, Rosenholtz found that the interaction between teachers and principals is key in determining teachers' role in school improvement: "where teachers help principals define school goals and interact about how best to pursue them, where they help determine school policies that facilitate goal attainment, such as how students ought to behave or help to socialize new recruits, teachers engage actively in constructing their school reality" (p. 6). Rosenholtz found that teachers were much more likely to adopt curricular changes in "high-consensus schools," where they and their principal shared a sense of purpose and understanding, than in "low-consensus schools," where they were excluded from such decisions and "learned about the nature of their work randomly, not deliberately, tending only to follow their individual instincts" (p. 207).

Studies of whole-school change conducted in the 1990s further document the importance of teachers' contributions to effective, school-wide improvement efforts (Newmann and Whelage, 1995; Bryk et al, 1998, 2002; Louis and Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001; Coburn, 2001, 2006). Repeatedly, researchers have found that the principal is pivotal in making teachers' involvement possible and shaping the nature of their contribution to school improvement. Yet, we still need to understand more fully how teachers who work in high-poverty schools conceive of their role in leadership beyond their classroom, how they respond to the opportunities their principal either provides or denies, and what they experience when they, as teachers, take the initiative to exercise leadership.

Therefore, in this analysis we consider how teachers in six high-poverty, urban schools of one school district respond to and participate in leadership beyond their classrooms. We do so within today's context of accountability, which has introduced new urgency and higher stakes for these schools' improvement. We ask:

1. What role do teachers in high-poverty, urban schools play in their school's improvement?
2. How do principals conceive of teachers' potential for leadership and how do they act on it?
3. How do teachers respond to the opportunities and constraints they encounter as they seek to exercise leadership in their schools?

In this study, we found that teachers wanted to participate in developing and implementing their school's plans for change. Nonetheless, within the current, pressing context of accountability and consistent with the hierarchical structure of their school, teachers granted their principal the prerogative to propose their school's priorities and recommend promising approaches. However, the principals had very different conceptions of the role that teachers should play in the ongoing process of leadership. Although they recognized that their success as school leaders depended on what teachers did or did not choose to do, some principals primarily relied on their formal authority to elicit cooperation or compliance from teachers, while others promoted initiative and leadership among teachers in more dynamic, less hierarchical ways.

We found that when teachers believed that their principal took an inclusive approach to leadership, looking to them for ideas about how to improve the school, they were energized, committed to the joint effort and readily remained "in the game." However, when teachers thought that their principal took an instrumental approach to leadership, expecting them to comply with fixed plans or to passively endorse administrative decisions, they expressed frustration and tended to withdraw to their classroom, sometimes intending to leave the school.

In what follows, we first discuss the theory that frames our analysis and then go on to describe our study's methodology. Next, we draw upon data from all six schools of our sample to

illustrate teachers' readiness to engage in school-wide improvement and their expectation that principals would take the lead in defining an agenda for their school. We then present analyses of two pairs of schools. First, we examine teachers' responses at Giovanni Elementary School and Stowe Middle School where the principals—each with nearly a decade's tenure as principal in their school—took distinctly different approaches to teachers' leadership; one was inclusive and the other instrumental. Next, we consider Angelou Elementary School and Thoreau High School where the principals were both relatively new in their position. Each approached teachers with a mix of approaches—some instrumental, others inclusive. Accounts by administrators and teachers in these two schools allow us to better understand teachers' differential responses to these two approaches and the evolution of leadership practice within the school, as teachers assessed whether their principal intended them to be agents or objects of change. We conclude with a discussion of the findings and implications that our study has for further research, policy, and practice.

An Organizational Theory of Leadership

The familiar bureaucratic structure of schools was established over a century ago (Tyack, 1974) and has prevailed in US public education ever since. Calls to fundamentally change this structure (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986) have largely been short-lived and unsuccessful (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). The theory of leadership embedded in this simple, bureaucratic structure is essentially top-down, with the principal managing the work of his or her subordinates, the classroom teachers. In his classic analysis of organizational structure, Mintzberg (1979) calls this a "Simple Structure," which he explains has little or no technostructure, few support staffers, a loose division of labor, minimal differentiation among its

units, and a small managerial hierarchy. . . .Communication in this type of organization largely flows "between the chief executive and everyone else" (p. 306).

However, many organizational analysts have found that leadership activity is not defined solely by formal position (Bennis, 2009; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Kotter, 2008; Heifitz, 1994) and that school administrators and teachers may be leaders or followers in different situations (Chrispeels, 2004; Cuban, 1988; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2003). However, we need to know much more about how leadership emerges when the principal's formal, bureaucratic authority interacts with the less predictable, more dynamic exercise of leadership among teachers and administrators throughout the school.

Ogawa and Bossert (1995) contribute to this discussion by positing that leadership is an "organizational quality," which is not confined to roles. Rather, they say, leadership "flows through networks of roles that comprise organizations" (p. 224). In their view, opportunities for leadership exist throughout the organization and leadership emerges from the ongoing, multi-directional process by which individuals (whether principals, formal teacher leaders, or classroom teachers) seek to influence others. From their various roles, individuals may propose changes, disagree with suggestions, form alliances, withhold their endorsement, or comply with enthusiasm. Therefore, according to Ogawa and Bossert, leadership is neither restricted by position nor limited in quantity; "[it] is not a zero-sum game" (p. 236).

Further, Ogawa and Bossert (1995) understand leadership to be relational. They observe that when leadership is seen as an organizational quality, the analytic focus "shifts from people's isolated actions to their social interactions." The authors explain: "The interact, not the act, becomes the basic building block of organizational leadership" (p. 236). Therefore, whatever their role (e.g., classroom teachers, instructional coaches, principals, department heads, or

classroom aides), individuals may interact with colleagues as leaders or followers, and the stance they take may vary from one set of circumstances to another.

In seeking to understand this dynamic process of leadership, we cannot ignore the fact that formal authority is not distributed equally in schools. Principals continue to have more formal authority than the teachers they supervise, and they can use this authority to deliberately promote, redirect, or restrict the exercise of leadership by teachers in their school. Therefore, although teachers retain the potential to exercise leadership throughout the school, they may be constrained in how they can do so by the formal authority structure of the school.

Study Methods

This study is based on interviews with 95 teachers and administrators working in six high-poverty schools in one large urban school district in the Northeast. It builds on earlier quantitative work in which we examined the importance of a teacher's work environment in one state's schools (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). There, we found that the social context of work—how a teacher felt about her principal, her colleagues, and her school's culture—was a strong predictor of her professional satisfaction, her career plans, and her students' achievement (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). In the current study, we sought to examine those relationships more closely by interviewing a range of teachers and administrators in high-poverty schools. Our goal was to develop a rich understanding of how these schools addressed their challenges and how teachers described their experiences working in them. Below, we describe our sample selection, data collection, and approach to data analysis.

Sample Selection

Our sample selection was guided by two basic principles. First, we identified high-poverty schools as those that fell above the district median in the proportion of students who

qualified for federal free- and reduced-price lunch. Second, we selected a purposive sample of high-poverty schools that exhibited different levels of student achievement growth (as measured by the state) and teacher satisfaction with the school's work environment, as reflected in their responses to a statewide survey. We describe this selection process in Appendix A. Within this broader framework, we also attempted to select schools that varied on a range of other measures, including grade level and organizational structure, location, student demographics, and the principal's race, gender, and administrative experience. In other words, we wanted to include schools that represented the broad range of high-poverty schools in the district.

Our final sample included six schools: two traditional elementary schools, one K-8 school, one middle school, and two high schools. We present basic information about these schools using data from the 2010-2011 school year in Table 1. All schools served large proportions of low-income students and would be labeled "high-poverty" schools according to the Institute of Education Sciences' criteria (>75% low-income). The schools also enrolled large proportions of minority students (>90%), although the demographic sub-groups within the schools varied considerably. The sample also includes schools with varying levels of student performance. Median student growth percentiles across the schools ranged from as low as the 20th and 35th percentiles in mathematics and English language arts to as high as the 65th and 60th percentiles respectively, but were generally clustered around the 50th percentile.

Teacher and Administrator Interviews

Six researchers designed this study and participated actively throughout data collection and analysis. Two- and three-person teams took responsibility for data collection at each site and the lead researcher participated in data collection at all six. Data collection occurred concurrently across the schools. Each researcher participated in conducting interviews at two or more schools,

which informed cross-case analysis. We developed the interview protocols based on relevant literature and our own findings from prior research. (See Appendix B for sample protocols).

We first conducted a two-hour, semi-structured interview with the principal of each school in order to understand the general organization and features of the school as well as the principal's view of the school's challenges and his or her vision of school leadership. We then interviewed a wide range of teachers and, where they were present and available, other administrators. In total, we interviewed 83 teachers and 12 administrators. We sought to interview a broadly representative sample of teachers within each school in order to capture the full range of experiences and opinions of each school's staff. We solicited teachers' participation in a variety of ways, including written requests sent to school email lists, flyers in teachers' mailboxes, principals' recommendations, and professional networking. We also relied on recommendations from teachers we interviewed about others in their school who might hold views different from their own. Interviews with teachers lasted 30 to 60 minutes and included questions about their experiences with hiring, instruction, evaluation, discipline, the administration, and other factors of the school environment.

We present descriptive statistics on the experience, race, and gender of the teachers and administrators in our sample in Table 2. In each school, we were able to interview new teachers, mid-career teachers, and veteran teachers, teachers in different grades and subjects, teachers who were hired new to the school and those who had transferred in from other schools in the district, and teachers with differing perspectives about their school. The racial composition of teachers and administrators included in our sample was broadly representative of the schools and the district as whole—59% were white, 20% were African-American, 10% were Hispanic, 8% were Asian, and 3% were of mixed or other race.

Although interviews are the main source of data for this study, we learned about programs and practices by reading and analyzing various documents, such as formal plans for reform, curriculum guides, memoranda from the principal, and posted standards for student behavior. Also, during our many school visits to conduct interviews, we observed day-to-day practices as teachers taught classes and interacted with colleagues; students enjoyed recess, worked in the library, or changed classes; and parents arrived to drop off their children, meet with a counselor, or pick up information from the main office. We paid attention to what we saw on the walls of classrooms and corridors—student work, recognition of achievement, rules, graffiti—as well as how students, teachers, and administrators treated one another. Thus, we interpreted teachers' and administrators' comments during interviews within this larger context, which we observed and experienced while in the schools.

Through our many visits and interviews, we successfully captured a range of views that provided us with a nuanced picture of each school. However, our purposive sampling of teachers and schools precludes us from generalizing about all teachers in any one of the schools we studied, the district, or beyond.

Data Analysis

As a first step in analyzing data, we followed up each interview by writing a structured, thematic summary (Maxwell, 2005) highlighting the views and information provided by every respondent on a standard set of topics. During the data collection process, we wrote memos capturing emerging themes at each school and, subsequently, across schools. We discussed and refined these memos during data collection in order to identify topics that warranted further attention in upcoming interviews. The thematic summaries and school-based memos enabled us to examine broad similarities and differences across the schools.

We coded interview transcripts for central concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and used a hybrid approach to developing codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). For example, we started with a priori codes drawn from the literature about teachers' roles, working conditions, leadership, satisfaction, and retention (e.g., school climate, colleagues, induction and student characteristics). We then added codes that emerged from the data (e.g., demands on teachers, accountability, and order and discipline). (See Appendix C for a full list of codes and definitions.) Once we had developed a preliminary list of codes, team members coded a small sub-set of the transcripts, individually and together, in order to calibrate our understanding and use of the codes as well as to refine the code list and definitions. We repeated this process twice in order to finalize the list of codes and to improve inter-rater reliability. We then coded each transcribed interview using the software, ATLAS-TI.

After coding all interviews, we engaged in an iterative and collaborative analytic process. We developed data-analytic matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to explore emerging concepts and categories in the data. For example, we created single-site matrices to explore each case separately and then created cross-site matrices to identify patterns across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1984). (See Appendix D for an example of a cross-site data-analytic matrix.)

In analyzing teachers' and administrators' approaches to schoolwide leadership, we paid close attention to the principal's agenda and strategies for engaging teachers in reform and to the teachers' responses to particular initiatives. With attention to both the bureaucratic, role-based perspective on leadership (Mintzberg, 1979) and Ogawa and Bossert's (1995) theory of leadership as an organizational quality, we considered teachers' accounts of specific initiatives. We sought to understand how and why they responded as they did, noting whether and how they were influenced by formal authority and/or social interaction. Throughout, we were interested in

understanding variation as it became apparent both within and across schools. Within schools, we considered patterns of responses by sub-groups of teachers, such as novices and veterans or those teaching particular subjects, clusters, or levels. As we developed tentative findings and explanations, we often returned to the data to review our coding and to test our explanations against the full range of interviews.

Throughout the process, we periodically summarized emerging findings by site and across sites in analytic memos. At these junctures, we checked our analytic memos against the full range of interviews and assessed whether our emerging conclusions aligned with what each of us had learned about the schools we studied and whether there were rival explanations or disconfirming data that we might have overlooked (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Although the larger study included a wider array of topics and issues, we focus here on teachers' experiences with leadership for school improvement.

Findings

In presenting our findings, we start with an overview of the many pressing needs teachers in all six high-poverty schools described—improving instruction, ensuring order and discipline, expanding support services for students, increasing learning, and raising test scores. Rather than retreating to their classroom, most teachers expressed their interest in helping to identify and address these school-wide challenges. Notably, across all schools, teachers expected their principal to take the lead in setting the direction for change and defining the opportunities for leadership by teachers. This recognition of the principal's authority and influence served as evidence that teachers continue to be affected by, and dependent on, the principal's formal role.

Teachers and Principals Described the Urgent Challenges They Faced

In each of the six schools we studied, teachers and principals expressed a sense of urgency about the need to improve their schools. They were motivated both by recognition of their students' many challenges and by external pressures that demanded accountability and threatened sanctions. They expressed concern for their students' current well-being and future life chances. Whereas researchers have long reported that teachers are inclined to confine their attention to teaching their own students and working with only a few colleagues in their department or grade-level (Lortie, 1975), most of the teachers we interviewed in 2010 - 2011 expressed concern about students' pressing needs throughout the school. One said,

> We've got to do better and we've got to educate our students better. We have to help and make sure that they achieve. . . . I think teachers feel a pressure to help in the standardized scores, but I think there's a lot of caring teachers here that also understand that we need to develop a group of students that is able to succeed, that they learn those skills that they can use for the rest of their lives.

Teachers in every school also described the pressures they experienced as a result of accountability policies and the sanctions that might be imposed on their school if they failed. One expressed the views of many in the four schools with low performance, "[I]t's bad news basically. Our scores are kind of dipping and there is constant fear of closing schools or being taken over by the State and so that means big, big changes." Another teacher said simply: "It's kind of like a do-or-die thing." Therefore, teachers were alerted to the need to be involved in school improvement beyond their classrooms.

Principals Largely Determined the School's Approach to Improvement

All six principals actively exercised their formal authority in efforts to improve the school; none took a hands-off or laissez-faire approach to leadership. Each had ideas about how

the school could better serve students and meet higher standards for performance set by the district and state. In response, teachers were ready to actively invest in, or at least seriously consider, their principal's strategies. Although they did not simply acquiesce to the principal's expectations, they did recognize that the principal's positional authority as well as his or her access to district officials and additional resources meant that the principal would necessarily be central to any initiatives to improve the school. In schools facing the threat of closure, takeover, or reconstitution by education officials, teachers were especially attentive and responsive to the principal's priorities and expectations. They gave the principal wide berth in deciding how to respond, as members of organizations often do when they experience external threat (Heifitz, 1994; Mintzberg, 1980). Nevertheless, the teachers wanted the chance to initiate and contribute to change, rather than being expected to simply implement administrators' plans. Their continuing investment in the principal's agenda depended on whether they thought a proposed strategy was sound and whether the principal took an inclusive or instrumental approach to the teachers' contributions.

Engaging Teachers in Schoolwide Change: Inclusive and Instrumental Approaches

Across the schools, principals largely determined what opportunities teachers would have as participants in schoolwide change. The principals' approaches to leadership fell along a continuum that ranged from *inclusive* (engaging teachers in identifying and solving problems as well as effecting change) to *instrumental* (excluding teachers from defining and solving problems, but requiring them to enact practices the principal deemed to be effective). At two schools (Giovanni Elementary and Whitman Academy High School) teachers consistently described their principal's approach to leadership as inclusive. At another school (Stowe Middle School) teachers were similarly unanimous in how they described their principal's approach to

teachers—but in this case it was perceived to be an instrumental approach that called for teachers' compliance and or superficial "buy-in." At each of these three schools, the principal had been in his or her position between 8 and 12 years and the schools' programs and practices were established, although subject to ongoing review and improvement.

Teachers in two schools where inclusive approaches to leadership prevailed, Giovanni Elementary and Whitman High School, were widely engaged in identifying problems and opportunities, exploring options, and contributing actively and meaningfully to decisions. Teachers at these schools spoke positively about their chance to play a generative role in school-wide improvement. The principals' approaches in these schools suggested that expertise and leadership existed throughout the organization, consistent with Ogawa and Bossert's (1995) theory. However at Stowe, where teachers were expected to execute the principal's plans, all leadership initiatives appeared to be top-down and hierarchical. Nevertheless, as the teachers' accounts reveal, they continued to actively influence practice at the school by resisting and minimally complying with the principal's directives. Leadership by teachers had gone underground, and although it might have been less apparent to outside observers, it was no less consequential within the school.

The three remaining schools were in varying states of transition with respect to leadership practices. During the year we collected data at Morrison Elementary School, an acting principal was standing in for the permanent principal, who was on leave. As a result, plans for change appeared to be on hold there and teachers were uncertain about what their role in school leadership eventually might be. However, the principals at Angelou Elementary and Thoreau High School had been in their position one and three years respectively, and during that time they had introduced substantial changes, some by administrative edict and others through

collaboration with teachers. At the time we collected data, teachers in these two schools were still considering, implementing, amending, and sometimes resisting or rejecting changes. Their views of these changes and the role they were expected to play in developing and adopting them varied from initiative to initiative within the school—some were described as being inclusive in their development and others instrumental in their execution.

To examine these concepts in context, we compare the responses of Giovanni's teachers to inclusive leadership practice with those of Stowe's teachers, who experienced instrumental leadership. We then move on to look closely at the responses of teachers at Thoreau and Angelou during a transitional phase, in order to better understand the relationship between role-based hierarchical leadership and organic leadership, which runs through the schools and is apparent in interactions.

Inclusive Leadership at Giovanni Elementary School

Giovanni Elementary School served about 450 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Although more than half of the students walked to school, a significant number were bussed from across the city for specific special education and language programs. Mr. Gilmore, a literacy expert and former instructional coach, had been Giovanni's principal for close to a decade. He believed that he and his teachers saw eye-to-eye about their goals: "I think the teachers in this building have a clear understanding that I want the same things that they want, and that is for all our kids to achieve." Teachers said, with surprising unanimity, that Gilmore took a very active lead in setting the school's improvement agenda, but that he also was responsive to their concerns and ideas.

In explaining his inclusive approach to leadership, Gilmore said that over time he had discovered that the potential for positive, systematic change in schools depended on certain skilled teachers, who might or might not be formal teacher leaders:

> I've found these really excellent and strategic thinkers that are embedded in schools, who really draw no attention to themselves. When you connect with those folks—if you're lucky enough to connect with those folks—you can advance the program over time.

In order to move the agenda ahead, Gilmore worked directly with several groups of teachers, including those on the school's instructional leadership teams for literacy and mathematics. Other teachers simply chose to step up and assume responsibility. Although most teachers strongly endorsed their colleagues' contributions as both formal and informal leaders, two complained that a small number of what one called "power players" and "keepers of the data" exercised excessive influence.

When the instructional leadership teams met, the principal and teacher representatives generated proposals and then solicited their colleagues' views about them. A teacher described the process:

> When we are talking about a new idea, [Mr. Gilmore] will say, "Run it by your grade-level [team of teachers] and next time bring it back. . . .Test the waters. . . and then we will figure it out. Was that a good idea or a bad idea? What parts did people not like? What should we change?" So, before we bring it into the law, at least we kind of talk to every teacher. It's not just, "Here it is."

A third-year teacher concurred:

> We get to put in our ideas and show different things we've been trying. . . . And we definitely talked about "Can you do that in the period that you're given? Are you using

> all of the resources that come with it?" . . .Those kinds of decisions, like what's the best use of time? How can we integrate [reading for the state test] with [the curriculum]? It's not ever, "Just do this."

Another said,

> [Mr. Gilmore] is very open to hearing arguments and suggestions. So, like in many of our meetings, if we bring up an idea, we can all discuss it. If it's a good idea that we can support, it can be something we can change as a whole…. So, it wasn't just like him telling us, "This is what we are going to change." It was all of us going through this together. "Here is what is working right now. This is what we need to change."

Gilmore said that change at Giovanni "really runs on consensus. It doesn't run on a democratic vote." However, once decisions were made about Giovanni's instructional plan, Gilmore expected all teachers to adopt them. Still, it was up to teachers to determine how to implement them. As one teacher said, "I think he gives us a lot of freedom and he trusts us. He's definitely not a micro-manager."

Gilmore understood that there was great potential for leadership throughout the school and he identified and encouraged expert teachers to guide the work that they did together. He also realized that teachers throughout the school had the power to advance or stall the agenda, whether or not he had singled them out as leaders. Therefore, he regularly and broadly solicited teachers' views and concerns. Consistent with Ogawa and Bossert's (1995) theory, leadership activity at Giovanni Elementary School grew out of professional knowledge and experience and depended on teachers' readiness to commit time and effort to school-wide improvement. Individuals sought to influence colleagues and their school primarily through the work of various teams in the building. The leadership interactions focused on mobilizing groups and ultimately

all teachers to support improvement efforts. The principal's formal authority played an important role in initiating, developing, and sustaining the school's policies and practices. Teachers widely respected that authority because it was grounded in instructional expertise and was used to encourage teachers to play a generative role in school improvement. One veteran teacher characterized the interdependent leadership of Giovanni's principal and teachers: "He's the driving force behind the school, but the teachers are sort of pushing behind him. He's not like pulling us through."

Instrumental Leadership at Stowe Middle School

Stowe Middle School, where Ms. Sterling had been principal for over a decade, enrolled about 700 children from across the district. In the 1980s, the school had enjoyed a period of success and recognition, but recently had experienced a decline in student achievement and reputation. Although Stowe once had offered an array of enrichment courses, now instructional time, which exceeded the district's requirements, was devoted almost exclusively to core academic subjects. The school faced both the possible loss of state funding for their extended instructional day and further sanctions for unsatisfactory performance. Ms. Sterling, who was intensely active and hard-working, maintained a steady, relentless focus on improving students' test scores.

Compared with Gilmore at Giovanni, administrators at Stowe retained decision-making authority over most matters, prescribing practices and monitoring compliance. Teachers were not given meaningful opportunities to contribute to the plan for improvement, although they were expected to execute it. Teachers reported that this instrumental approach to leadership at Stowe limited their ability to exercise professional judgment and constrained them from doing their best work. Virtually all teachers we interviewed at Stowe were demoralized by these restrictions and

the limited opportunities to play a meaningful role in defining and solving the problems they faced.

Sterling hired consultants from a non-profit group to implement a program that was intended to engage teachers in the systematic, ongoing analysis and use of student achievement data to guide their teaching. The school allocated considerable time for teachers' common planning and preparation, but most of that time was dedicated to learning, practicing, and documenting the steps of the consultants' program. Many teachers complained that administrators and consultants controlled decisions about whom teachers would work with, when they would do so, and what aspect of instruction they would focus on. One teacher spoke disparagingly about administrators' expectations for how she and her colleagues would collaborate during common planning time:

> It just doesn't make sense. . . . A lot of people are really upset and angry about that. . . And it just doesn't work. It's like we're doing it just to show the state that we're doing something. And, it's, in my point of view, a complete waste of time. I think many people here would agree with me on that. . . . They just feel it's administration imposing the agenda upon—it's not teacher-driven anymore. It's not teacher-centered.

Many other teachers similarly were frustrated by not having any opportunity to influence how common planning time would be used. One said,

> Sometimes we feel like "Why are we doing this?". . . .[W]e should have a say in what we want to do and what we need. It's sort of like going to a group of people and telling them, "Well, I want to see this, although I'm not a teacher, although I don't know what your needs are, but I want to see this."

This teacher went on to argue that she and her colleagues should be involved in discussing their instructional needs and how they might be addressed:

> When you have that conversation, you own it. You buy into it and you want to be a part of it. [As] opposed to someone saying, "Well, I told sixth grade to do this. You do this and you do this." Do you really feel like a professional? And do you act like it?

Further, teachers resented having to keep detailed logs of their 30-minute meetings, accounting for how they used their time together. Another teacher urged, "Give teachers back some control."

Sterling explained that all teachers in the school "do something exceptionally well," and that her challenge as principal was to place teachers appropriately and provide support. She said that, "a lot of that support happens" as administrators move through the school observing classes:

> You know, we walk the building as much as we can to get information. You know, what's going on? And whenever you go into a classroom, you're always looking around. It's all of those little, administrative observation things that we really try to tally information and say, "Okay, where do people really need the support?" And that's where we provide support.

Teachers, however, interpreted the same activities not as support, but as efforts to control their work or, as more than one said, "micromanage" them. One teacher, who did credit the principal for her tireless efforts, said, "she is willing to listen to staff. . . . She is involved and wants to support us. I think that sometimes she doesn't have time to, which is just the nature of what she does." However, far more teachers' views aligned with those of another experienced teacher, who was very critical: "Our principal, she directs everything. . . . She has an idea of what she wants to do and then everyone just has to do it, period." A veteran teacher said,

> You have to know how to do it and you have to build capacity. You cannot just have one person, or two people, telling everybody else what it should be. It has to be authentic. I don't feel it's authentic.

Although this teacher saw some value in Sterling's approach to instructional improvement, she criticized the fact that the design for change had come from outside the school: "They [the consultants] have their agenda. And so, yes, they're here to support us. But it's *their* thing. . . Because we're not doing well, this is the step before the state takes over. But it's like they already took over, in my mind."

Many teachers at Stowe continued to comply with the program's requirements, but did so reluctantly and perfunctorily. Their accounts told of instrumental rather than inclusive approaches to leadership. In none of our interviews did any Stowe teacher describe being involved in a process of generating ideas, deliberating about alternative approaches, or making more than routine decisions. Many teachers suggested that the principal did not look to them for ideas. They saw her approaches as compliance-oriented and driven largely by formal authority. Although the principal discouraged teachers from making independent contributions, she could not entirely exclude them from exercising leadership because, as Ogawa and Bossert explain, they have access to leadership opportunities that run throughout the organization. In response, teachers exercised leadership covertly by going through the motions of compliance, yet withholding their support for the interventions. Teachers had undermined the principal's agenda by shifting their attention away from school-wide initiatives and back to their classroom. One said,

> So I try not to think about all the hard stuff and try to focus on the kids that are in front of me. You know, as people like to say, close the door and just teach and try not to think about all the outside distractions and influences. . . .

Other teachers described how they seized brief opportunities in an otherwise tight schedule to collaborate with another teacher or two creating the support networks that sustained them day to day in their classrooms. One said:

> I'm very happy that I work here because the teachers here are fabulous. We are a very cohesive group. We have incredible support one from the other and, you know, we all support each other. . . . And even though we may not be necessarily happy with the way things are happening in the building, we are all very happy that we have each other. And so that is what keeps us here.

Others, such as this teacher, talked about finding another school that would support them better.

> Because I'm debating on leaving. . . . I don't think that what I think about education aligns with what the school thinks about education. And I feel like everything is so micromanaged and you have no freedom to do stuff.

Although the principal's instrumental approach regulated how Stowe's teachers were expected to contribute to school-wide improvement, the teachers still retained the potential to exercise leadership. In this case, they quietly resisted the consultants' program and redirected their energy to the few colleagues and spaces (primarily their own classrooms) where they believed they could still exercise influence.

At Giovanni Elementary and Stowe Middle School, the principal was key in defining what level and type of involvement was possible or likely for teachers in school-wide initiatives. Still, teachers could decide whether to endorse or resist the ideas proposed by their

administrators or colleagues. When the principal's approach was inclusive, as it was at Giovanni, many teachers became engaged in diagnosing problems, debating about options, and refining new approaches. Teachers' leadership activity was interactive and generative. However, when they were excluded from identifying and deliberating about the school's problems, yet were expected to comply with administrators' solutions, as they were at Stowe, teachers reported feeling disempowered. Many resisted the principal's initiatives by superficially complying while withholding their commitment and effort.

Schools in Transition: Inclusive and Instrumental Leadership Mix at Angelou Elementary and Thoreau High Schools

In the second pair of schools, leadership practices were less settled and views among teachers were less consistent. At Angelou Elementary School, the principal provided encouragement and support for teachers as they implemented the initiatives called for in the school's redesign plan and gradually gained their endorsement. However, at Thoreau High School teachers remained divided in their support for the administrators' initiatives which called for substantial reorganization of teaching and learning. In both cases, the role that teachers would play in addressing their school's challenges remained unsettled and at Thoreau continued to be hotly contested.

Angelou Elementary School

Angelou Elementary School served students from one of the city's highest-poverty communities and the neighborhood surrounding the school was said to be dangerous. The principal, Mr. Andrews, had been a teacher and administrator at the school before being appointed principal the year before. Based on standardized test scores over several years, state

officials had identified Angelou as chronically underperforming and put the school on public notice that it had to improve or face further sanctions or closure. One teacher likened the state oversight to being under "martial law."

The year before we conducted our study, the state had identified the school as underperforming and a team composed of three administrators and three teachers developed a Design Plan for Angelou's improvement. The plan included two firm expectations, both of which were championed by Principal Andrews. First, all teachers would use the district's reading and mathematics curricula rather than the variety of books and plans they had used in the past. With extra funds provided by the state for professional development, the principal arranged for grade-level planning time to support teachers in using the new materials.

Second, teachers were expected to engage parents in their students' learning and to conduct home visits for each student. Andrews believed that closer relationships between parents and their children's teachers were essential for improving students' engagement and learning. The state also provided additional short-term funds to support implementation of the school's Design Plan, including 100 hours of additional, paid professional development for teachers during the year. The school also added 30 minutes of extra, unpaid instructional time each day. Teachers who did not want to comply with the new expectations were permitted to transfer to another school in the district; only one did. The state's regulations for underperforming schools also granted Andrews the right to transfer out any teacher, although he had not done so at the time of our study.

Angelou's student test scores were very low and the pressure to improve was intense, yet teachers' assessments of their working environment remained high. Teachers and administrators shared a strong allegiance to their students and to one another. Many, including the principal,

spoke about the staff as "family." One teacher described the principal as "fiercely loyal" to his faculty, a view voiced by many of her colleagues. However, a few teachers we interviewed expressed concern that not all their colleagues were being held accountable for their work. One said: "You need to be comfortable, but you need to also be on your game." Another concurred: "There needs to be a little bit more push, I would say, about people who are doing their jobs and people that aren't. . . . " Although the principal had not yet asked anyone to leave, he acknowledged that "accountability" was a problem for some teachers—repeated absence, tardiness, or not taking teaching seriously.

After several months working under the new expectations set forth in the Design Plan, the required use of district-approved curricula appeared to be gaining teachers' endorsement. A special education teacher who supported students in various classrooms said that initially there was some resistance to using the curricula. "However," she recalled, the principal made it clear that teachers who did not use the curricula would "have to go somewhere else. . . . Now it seems more teachers are doing it fully." Teachers appreciated that they were free to adapt the materials to their students and style of pedagogy. One experienced teacher said: "Well, I feel like [the administrators] respect my experience and my background, and my ability. And so they're not looking to micromanage me. And that's important to me as a teacher."

In regular grade-level team meetings, teachers worked with colleagues as they learned to use the new instructional materials. Every teacher in the school participated on one of these instructional teams, including those who taught special education and physical education. Teachers compared their strategies, lessons, and progress, exchanging advice and recommending modifications that had worked for them. Teachers in the primary grades developed learning centers, sharing ideas and materials across classrooms. One said: "...we do centers, all-day

centers so it was like you really do need to plan. There's so much going on at once and if you were doing everything yourself, it would be really overwhelming." Across grade levels, the teachers we interviewed said that Angelou's administrators often attended team meetings, but allowed teachers to direct the conversations, an approach that illustrated the interplay between the formal and informal processes of leadership at the school. Their descriptions of these sessions suggested that teachers were exercising leadership through their teams as they worked with others to implement the curriculum. The currents of commitment and interaction produced by this joint work led to broad support for the top-down change.

Home visits, however, posed a greater challenge. One teacher said, "A lot of teachers found them useful," but acknowledging his own reluctance, noted that "it was kind of daunting to some in the beginning." In the past, teachers had often contacted parents by phone, but seldom visited their homes. Some teachers worried that a formal visit might seem intrusive. A few admitted to feeling uncomfortable about crossing racial and economic divides as they entered this low-income, minority neighborhood.

Notably, Andrews not only required home visits, but also offered to accompany each teacher on the first one. Teachers respected his expertise in working with parents and supporting students. He not only had taught at the school, but also lived in the community and was active in efforts to improve it. One mid-career teacher said that Andrews' offer made it easier to carry out this obligation:

> Mr. Andrews did accompany me on the visit, which was really nice. I'll be honest. I'm not super-comfortable doing it on my own. I don't know the neighborhood. . . . I take public transportation, so it's difficult. He offered that he would go on the first one with every single teacher.

Still, teachers reported having mixed success with the visits as some parents welcomed them enthusiastically, while others refused to open their door. They suggested that some teachers remained reluctant, even resistant, to meeting the principal's expectations. However, this seemed to result more from the personal challenges they experienced in conducting the visits than from doubts about their potential value.

The changes did not always come from the principal. According to the Design Plan, all teachers were expected to join two schoolwide leadership teams, such as the Instructional Leadership Team, Math Leadership Team, Writing Leadership Team, or School Site Council. Some teams were active and others had not met, but teachers generally said that they had many opportunities to influence the direction of the school. Several teachers described how Mr. Andrews responded when they recommended that the school use additional professional development funds to adopt Open Circle, a program that provided strategies for supporting students and building a positive environment for learning. Initially Andrews disagreed with their proposal. One teacher recalled, "He was essentially talked into it. And it seems to be working well. . . . But that wasn't something that he was going to buy into, and the teachers really convinced him. He's reasonable. He's very reasonable."

Angelou's teachers faced enormous challenges amidst great uncertainty. Everyone we interviewed suggested that the stakes for them and their students were very high. Andrews used his formal authority to assemble a team of administrators and teachers to write Angelou's Design Plan, which included requirements that they use the standard curricula and make home visits. However, he coupled this exercise of formal authority with encouragement, support and responsiveness. It was not yet clear whether home visits would be widely implemented, whether Andrews would hold lax teachers accountable for their shortcomings, or whether teachers who

were dissatisfied with team meetings would withdraw or become engaged. One year into the reforms, however, teachers suggested that, although many aspects of their work remained beyond their control, they believed that the school needed their best ideas and efforts, and that the principal valued working together with them on behalf of students. Although Angelou was under intense pressure to improve, Andrews did not rely on his positional authority to intensify control of his teachers' practice, but looked to them for increased engagement in charting a path to improvement.

Thoreau High School

Thoreau, a comprehensive high school of 900 students and 70 teachers, also was a school in transition. Ms. Thomas, its principal, had no experience as an administrator when she was appointed to replace a long-time principal three years earlier. Thomas said that Thoreau "had a reputation as a very dangerous school." In addition, the academic challenges at Thoreau were great. Thomas reported that nearly half of the entering students had failed every core course in the eighth grade and another 20 percent had passed only one course. Although students performed reasonably well on state tests, teachers expressed concern that many continued to fail their courses and that those who were able to pass and graduate were not prepared for the college.

Accounts by teachers and administrators revealed the substantial challenge of changing the structures of teaching and learning as well as the organizational culture. Some teachers acknowledged, but did not immediately embrace, Thomas' new initiatives; other teachers directly contested her plans. Cross-currents, tensions, and competing expectations about the role that teachers at Thoreau would play reflected the complicated and halting course of leadership practices at the school.

Many outside Thoreau viewed it as a traditional high school. However, some years before, the prior principal had divided the school into small learning communities (SLCs). Because each SLC had considerable autonomy, the school had no common curriculum or pedagogy. Further, when the district moved programs for Chinese-speaking and Spanish-speaking students to the school, they had been assigned to separate SLCs, thus segregating the student body in ways that concerned Ms. Thomas. Also, because SLCs were expected to develop and maintain distinct identities, the culture at Thoreau was fragmented rather than shared. Many teachers who had worked under the prior principal had strong allegiance to their SLC, which provided a setting where they interacted regularly with their students and a small group of colleagues who shared responsibility for curriculum, instruction, discipline, and support of those students. However, Thomas, who described the professional culture as "more congenial than collegial," suggested that teachers were too invested in these professional friendships and, therefore, looked the other way, even if, as she said, a colleague "was just completely ballistic or off the wall with kids."

In addressing the many challenges of Thoreau, Thomas drew upon her formal authority and introduced far-reaching changes in the school's structure and practices. She explained that you have to change the school systemically. "Like warfare,… you have to be strategic. You don't get this job done by having good teachers in every classroom and then no strategic plan." Her ambitious plans addressed her concerns about teaching and learning at the school and she knew that some teachers would inevitably resist. In her efforts to unify the schools, Thomas recognized the paradox inherent in wanting to empower teachers to help implement change while also curbing their independence:

> [T]he school can't get better if teachers don't buy into what's happening.… so the teams of people have to take responsibility and run this. And I know that I have to take away

> some of the independence people enjoyed because…people can't just come in and do what they want.

Thomas talked about searching for the right balance between using her positional authority to create new structures and engaging teachers in developing new ways of working together.

Thomas did not eliminate the SLCs, as some teachers had feared. Instead, she instituted weekly meetings with subject-based teams, which required teachers to work with colleagues across the school. In these meetings, they began mapping their curriculum, creating model lessons, and in one case, doing lesson study. Some teachers valued this work in subject-based teams, while others doubted that the teams would ultimately be effective. One teacher leader who had responsibility for such a team observed, "Not everybody sees the value in collaboration. Of the eight people on our team, I would say that five of them are really into it, and some play along, and some are clueless."

Because Thomas was especially concerned about the classroom practices of some teachers, she made formal evaluation a priority for her administrative team. As a result, three teachers with tenure were "evaluated out" and one was convinced to resign during Thomas' first three years. The intense focus on evaluation continued the following year and some veteran teachers said they felt targeted by the process. One characterized the principal's vision for the school as "out with the old, in with the new." A novice teacher agreed: "If you're a young teacher, they're probably going to like you." Such divisions between veterans and early-career teachers reportedly fueled suspicion among some experienced teachers about the principal's intentions and, consequently, undermined support for her other initiatives.

For example, when Thomas and her administrative team proposed substituting a block schedule for Thoreau's six-period day, currents of distrust surfaced and subverted the effort.

Many veteran teachers exercised their leadership by opposing the plan. On a close vote, which was required by the teachers' contract, teachers rejected the schedule change. One veteran teacher described her colleagues' doubts:

> We felt like something was up their sleeve. In general the staff felt: "This is not good for us. There is something funky going on here." So people voted against it basically. The school was very divided. And maybe the schedule that would have been better for the school did not happen.

But that was not the end of the effort to change the schedule. The following year, when we collected data, administrators sought teachers' ideas—not simply their buy-in—about what schedule would work. A group of teachers and administrators calling themselves the "Revisioning Committee" began to meet regularly before or after school. Membership was open and by several accounts the work was productive. At the time of our interviews, the committee was moving to create a new schedule and the change was reportedly gathering support. Teachers had rejected the initial proposal—which some even acknowledged might have been good for the school--because they distrusted the process that gave them no say. However, they were willing to consider another plan when they had the chance to inform its development.

Teachers also responded positively to an initiative in professional development, which required teachers to assume significant responsibility for making it work. Teachers were nominated by their peers to teach mini-courses in the school's new professional development program. One teacher explained her role in this plan.

> I actually have to teach a professional development course next month. So it's a teacher thing and we, like, suggested colleagues to teach a course... I think some teachers were really excited about doing it, you know, and sharing their expertise.

Notably Thomas, herself, taught a successful mini-course in pedagogy, and teachers were impressed by her interest and expertise. They appreciated the fact that their colleagues were leading the work and that they had choice in what courses to join.

> The PD is much better here than at the other schools. It's become more teacher-directed. This year we're having a series of mini courses that teachers are behind and participants can sign up for the one that they're interested in. So I think it's not perfect but it's a lot more meaningful than at my old school or than what it used to be here,

When given the opportunity, teachers were ready to sign on to leading this work with colleagues, which extended well beyond their classroom responsibilities.

The prospects for productive change at Thoreau High School seemed promising, but it remained unclear whether the combined initiatives would engage teachers in the kind of leadership that advanced, rather than stalled, Thomas' agenda. One experienced teacher explained:

> The old principal used to talk about "I hire stallions to come in here and run." When the new principal came in, she wanted to rein in people that were doing big things and say, "Oh, no, no. Here is your list." So I think that it's still young. It is still very young, and things are moving along, but pushing and pulling.

Such "pushing and pulling" revealed the potential for leadership that ran throughout the school. Despite having considerable authority in her role as principal, Thomas could not ensure that teachers would support, or even better, promote her initiatives. In fact, as the vote on the block schedule illustrates, they could exercise leadership with their colleagues by raising doubts about the value of the change and mobilizing opposition to it.

Teachers and administrators at Angelou Elementary and Thoreau High School described patterns of leadership that remained unsettled. At both schools, the principals and most teachers saw the need for fundamental change in the practices and culture of the school and they accepted the principal's role in leading that reform. Notably, even with a new principal, formal authority played an important role. At the same time, however, both principals and teachers recognized that opportunities for leadership ran throughout the school, which anyone could seize on to support or oppose the principal's priorities.

Therefore, each principal not only set expectations, but also offered opportunities for engagement. They differed, though, in how they combined instrumental and inclusive approaches. Andrews combined each of his major expectations (using the district's curricula and making home visits) with opportunities for support and influence (creating team planning time, offering to join teachers in home visits, and accepting their recommendations for professional development) thus increasing the likelihood that teachers would succeed with each of these reforms and make them their own. Thomas, however, relied primarily on formal authority and instrumental approaches to enact several major changes (intensified teacher evaluations, subject-based team meetings, and a proposed block schedule). Although she had the support of her administrative team and a few teacher leaders, she did not tap other teachers for their ideas and expertise in reorganizing the school. Some—especially those early in their career who had been hired by Thomas—seemed inclined to support those changes, while others—especially more experienced teachers who had worked under the prior principal—viewed them as unwarranted and top-down. By contrast, Thomas's introduction of teacher-led professional development, which recognized teachers' expertise and drew on their leadership, gained widespread support. Thomas not only authorized this program, but also participated as an equal in it. However,

separating instrumental and inclusive approaches in this way did not lead to widespread acceptance of the principal's most demanding changes. Support for Thomas' evolving initiatives—which continued to be viewed as *her* initiatives—seemed to be growing within some sub-groups of teachers, but remained conditional and contested in others.

Conclusion

Schools constantly change and any study, even an intense and extended one, can only capture a slice of a school's development. The norms and practices that appear to be established one year can be upended the next if the principal is reassigned, the budget is cut substantially, or new groups of students are assigned to the school. These case studies are informative, not because they provide any final word on a particular school's success, but because they allow us to examine the role of leadership practice in the process of improvement. We can gain insight into the various approaches used by administrators, noting which ones promote teachers' active and ongoing investment and which provoke withdrawal, opposition or resistance.

We found that teachers in these six schools were ready to be involved in developing and implementing school-wide solutions to the challenges their school faced. They increasingly recognized that school-wide improvement could not be achieved one classroom at a time, but rather had to develop throughout the organization if all students were to be served. Similarly, they understood that neither the principal nor individual teachers could single-handedly meet the needs and challenges they faced. The story they told is not the standard account of teachers working in isolation. Rather, it was a surprisingly consistent story of teachers who were willing and ready to venture beyond their classroom to work with their colleagues and to play an active role in school change. Whether this was the unique response of teachers who are committed to meeting the urgent needs of their students in high-poverty schools, the direct consequence of

external threats by the district and state, or a broader change in the profession, we cannot say, but we found it striking.

These teachers were ready to grant their principal considerable discretion in setting the school's improvement agenda, but their endorsement remained conditional. It rested on the perceived expertise of the principal and an informal assessment by teachers about whether they would be engaged as partners in a generative process of change. When the principal advanced an initiative that took an instrumental rather than an inclusive approach to teachers' contributions, as Ms. Sterling did at Stowe Middle School, teachers were resentful, pulled back into their classrooms, and talked about transferring to another school. When the principal demonstrated a genuine interest in teachers' views and potential contributions, even while exercising formal authority as school leader, as Gilmore did at Giovanni Elementary School, teachers were energized and became invested in school-wide efforts. Gilmore recognized that the potential to exercise leadership already existed among teachers in the school and sought their consideration, participation, and ongoing advice.

However, improving a school by engaging teachers in defining the school's direction does not happen quickly or easily. This is especially true if the principal seeks to make substantial changes in the school's basic structures and instructional practices, which policymakers and central office administrators often demand in the current context of urban school reform. Teachers, who are expected to enact the proposed changes, will assess whether the principal's proposals make sense. Also, they are inclined to assess the demands of any new approach in the context of their ongoing responsibilities. When teachers believe the proposed changes are sound and that the principal has taken their views, suggestions, needs, and interests into account, they are more likely to lend their support and encourage colleagues to do so as well.

When they think that the principal's proposals are weak or misdirected or that teachers have had no say in their design, they may resist the initiatives, either actively or passively.

Principal Andrews' priorities were apparent in Angelou's School Design Plan, but the document was widely accepted, in part because teachers respected Andrews' judgment and because the Plan had been developed jointly by administrators and teachers. The new practices it called for—use of the district's curricula, common grade-level planning time, and home visits—were ambitious in that they required fundamental changes in how individual teachers did their work, how they related to their colleagues, and how they dealt with parents. However, the Plan also increased resources for professional development, which allowed teachers to collaborate in using the mandated curricula. Initial resistance decreased as teachers began to find team meetings useful in guiding them as they implemented the curricula. By coupling the demand for home visits with the promise of accompanying teachers on their first visit, Andrews allayed some teachers' fears and, perhaps more importantly, signaled that he would share responsibility for making the change work. When he responded positively to teachers' recommendation about a new professional development program to support students' social development, teachers were saw evidence of a working partnership with their principal and his endorsement of their expertise. Although Angelou was only in its first year of implementing the plan, change was clearly moving ahead with the support of most teachers. Leadership by individual teachers in support of the initiatives was apparent throughout the school.

At Thoreau High School, Principal Thomas encountered a mix of endorsement and resistance from teachers as she tried to bring greater consistency to the school's program and practices. Teachers there were accustomed to having autonomy within a sub-divided organization. Many were invested in the well-established Small Learning Communities, which

the prior principal had instituted, and they doubted the benefits of new approaches, which required additional time and substantially changed how they would work. Some veteran teachers at Thoreau believed that Ms. Thomas favored new teachers and, therefore, they allied with other experienced colleagues to resist change. Some were said to use their leadership potential to silently kill the block schedule proposal, without offering any explanation to the administrators. Teachers' responses to an initiative that they regarded as unwise or threatening affected their openness to other ventures, even ones they thought might have promise.

Although a principal may develop a complex, strategic plan for improvement, that plan cannot simply be "rolled out" as some reformers suggest For doing so without teachers' contributions, approval, and suggestions for refinement may well mean that the plan will be rejected outright or adopted in name only. Formal authority can only go so far in changing day-to-day practice. Certainly, as Heifitz's (1994) analysis suggests, without engaging teachers and administrators throughout the school in diagnosing and addressing the adaptive challenges that the school faces, a plan can never benefit from the insights of those who might improve it and the energy of those who must implement it. In these schools, the interaction of formal and informal leadership was apparent, as the principal's positional authority joined—or collided with—teachers' ready access to influence. Meaningful change appeared to depend on the deliberate and complementary exercise of both.

A Puzzle About Taking the Lead

One of the most interesting puzzles raised by this study is how individuals (such as teachers) who have less formal authority in the organization can lead others (such as principals) who hold more authority. Under what circumstances within schools do principals become followers and teachers become leaders as they exercise organizational leadership? Is this simply

a matter of interpersonal influence, for example when a teacher is unusually articulate or persuasive? Is it the calculated, political response of a principal confronting a strong alliance of teachers who disagree with him? Or does active leadership by teachers arise because the principal deliberately seeks their perspective on the problems of the school and how they might be addressed?

Smith and Berg (1987) provide insight into this interaction with a theory explaining how authority works dynamically in groups. In an analysis that is similar to Ogawa and Bossert's (1995), they note that authority is usually thought of as "something that flows down from above" (p.133). However, focusing on the "*dynamics of authorizing* rather than on [formal] authority itself" reveals "that authority is something that is built or created" (p.134). That is, authority, like leadership runs throughout the organization. They observe that authority "flows from many places to many people," as individuals authorize others to "enact certain things on their behalf." For example, teachers can authorize principals to advance a plan for school change, while principals can authorize teachers to test and criticize the plan. Through such interactions, individuals holding various positions "can have an influence on the work of the group and the group can be influential in the larger system to which it belongs" (p.134). Smith and Berg assert, "in this regard, authority is closely linked to empowerment. One develops power as one empowers others" (p.134).

Paradoxically, Smith and Berg explain, one gains rather than loses authority by authorizing others. The potential to authorize others, like the potential to lead, is not solely defined by one's designated role. Principals who encourage teachers to help in shaping their school's approach to change stand to benefit when their plan is informed by teachers' experience and expertise. These principals also acquire greater authority, themselves, by authorizing

teachers to act. It is this kind of give and take that characterized the most generative forms of leadership among teachers and principals in the schools we studied, such as Giovanni. However, Smith and Berg (1987) also observe that "the very avoidance of taking and using the available power makes individuals in the group, and ultimately the group as a whole, feel powerless" (p.134). In our study, when teachers or principals were limited by their position and conventions of formal authority, reforms sputtered or stalled and the potential of leadership fell far short of the school's needs and realities.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

This exploratory study has many implications for those concerned with the improvement of schools serving students from high-poverty, urban communities. As discussed earlier, studies conducted during the 1990s made important contributions to illuminating the importance of teachers in school-wide improvement (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman & Whelage, 1995). Today, federal and state accountability policies have riveted the public's attention on failing schools and created a sense of urgency about their students' needs. Meanwhile, a new generation of teachers is gradually replacing a retiring generation, introducing new expectations and norms in schools where organizational leadership is increasingly needed (Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004).

Because many studies about school improvement conducted since 2000 have relied on quantitative rather than qualitative methods, recent research has told us more about *whether* an intervention improves test scores than about *how* it works or *why* it succeeds or fails. The need, therefore, is great for focused, rich case studies that analyze the perspectives and interactions of administrators, teachers, and others who seek to make schools serving high poverty communities more successful.

This study can remind policymakers that organizational change is complicated, uneven, and often contentious. These schools' experiences suggest that meaningful change takes time and significant resources. Turnaround—if it happens at all—does not occur immediately as a result of swapping out individual teachers or administrators (Johnson, 2012). If we regard the school, not as an egg-crate composed of isolated classrooms, but as an interdependent organization where ongoing interaction among adults is at the heart of leadership, then administrators and teachers should be encouraged to invest and interact in new ways, bridging boundaries and sharing responsibilities. As we saw at Stowe Middle School, adopting promising structures, such as team time for collaboration or data tracking systems, will not in itself ensure productive change. Such structures are only mechanisms through which teachers and principals can work together, but they require individuals' ideas and investment to make them useful. They may be necessary, but they are, in themselves, insufficient. Policymakers and researchers would do well to go beyond determining the failure or success of efforts to improve struggling schools and turn attention to more deeply explore the approaches that are used and the responses they elicit so that others can learn from them.

Districts all too often approach principals instrumentally and, in doing so, lose the benefit of their acquired expertise, best ideas, and sustained commitment. Not surprisingly, principals then transfer the same piston-like pressure to their teachers. The district's role in selecting and developing effective principals is key. School administrators must have the kind of expertise and inclusive approaches that teachers value, realizing that they cannot improve schools simply by relying on good hiring decisions or securing teachers' "buy-in" or compliance. Principals must recognize the leadership that runs throughout their organization and ensure support for teachers who are prepared to take the lead on school improvement beyond their classroom. In doing so,

they will see that this does not mean that they have lost authority, but rather that they have increased influence and effectiveness as they authorize others to lead on behalf of the school.

This study also illustrates the significant opportunities that exist for teachers who choose to work in high-need, urban schools. The challenges are daunting and the demands are great. However, these cases of high-poverty, urban schools demonstrate that teachers can play generative roles in shaping the course of improvement beyond their classroom. They can exercise considerable influence in school-wide improvement efforts both as leaders and followers. Like principals, however, they must recognize the complex relationship that exists between authorizing those who have greater formal authority and being authorized to lead. As Smith and Berg (1987) suggest, when teachers and principals are able to develop patterns of mutual authorization and inclusive leadership, they will "have the potential to be greater than the sum of their parts" (p. 132).

Endnotes:

[1] We have chosen Ogawa and Bossert's theory to frame our analysis of teachers' leadership in this study, although we were also influenced by the subsequent theory of distributed leadership, formulated and developed by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001, 2004). Their theory, which was partially predicated on Ogawa and Bossert's work, was intended to be used analytically, not normatively—that is, as a tool to consider *how leadership is distributed* within schools and school districts, rather than *how leadership ought to be distributed.* However, many policymakers, practitioners, and even researchers have interpreted this theory to be prescriptive, thereby confusing its use. Because we want to be clear that our approach is primarily analytic, we rely here on Ogawa and Bossert's theory.

[2] We use pseudonyms for the schools and their principals.

[3] Student growth percentiles are a measure of relative performance. Essentially, every student is measured against the distribution of students with a similar history of test score performance in previous years. The conditional performance of a student represents his growth percentile. The median growth percentile across all students at a school is the school's SGP for that year.

[4] The patterns of leadership practice at the two remaining schools in our sample, Morrison and Whitman were consistent with the findings reported here. Whitman was a school where teachers appreciated an inclusive approach to leadership and Morrison was a school in transition, where leadership practice remained in flux. We did not discuss these cases here so that we could examine the four featured schools in greater depth.

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