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Distributed Leadership in Schools: Conditions for Success

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Distributed Leadership in Schools: Conditions for Success

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Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and

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the candidate alone.

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Abstract

Teacher leadership has always been a necessary part of school dynamics. Through committees, union/administrative negotiations, formal and informal leadership roles, teachers play an important role in the growth and change of an educational institution. The purpose of this study is to examine teacher leadership through the perspective of distributed leadership theory; identify the conditions and components of both schools and administrators that support distributed leadership and identify essential steps to transform leadership practice to a distributed model.

This is a qualitative text analysis of current theoretical papers and relevant research on the subject of distributed leadership. The information was used to identify qualities and actions of both individuals and organizations that can help create a formalized practice of distributed leadership. Results indicated that creating certain conditions in school environments and modeling and nurturing trust can support organizational change toward distributed leadership.

Chapter 1 Introduction

A scenario in a northern California K-6 public school recently was classified as Title I and must restructure much of its core language arts time to incorporate a Response to Intervention model of instruction (The National Center for Learning Disabilities, Inc., 2014). The school administrator at that time of the classification clearly stated the need for curriculum restructuring. A teacher committee was charged with the task of designing and implementing the program. Countless discussions, research and meetings resulted in decisions about curriculum and instruction that guided the path of the school.

After a process such as this, one must ask: Where is the true leadership happening? Is it in the committee led by a teacher leader, or by the administrator who delegated the task? Which was more important, the communication of a need for change, or the collective body that led the school to an outcome? It is increasingly acknowledged that teachers instead of traditional administrators consistently and successfully take leadership roles. Whether it is a curriculum committee of specialists, teachers and administrators shaping the scope and sequence of a language arts program, or a school in which transformative change and vision generates from a broad range of teachers and administrators, the acknowledgement and utilization of shared leadership is emerging as a necessary and effective leadership model.

Statement of Problem

A traditional conception of leadership typically brings to mind a charismatic individual who can inspire and guide others in change and growth. In the traditional school model, teachers look to the principal to find the motivation, inspiration and support toward school goals. But when one takes time to look deeper, leadership and change can be found emanating from a

variety of sources like committees, department heads, informal groups and influential teachers. This shared leadership is often under-acknowledged and not legitimized through institutional eyes. Shared leadership has been an integral part of schools since the earliest days of institutionalized education. Teachers have always taken leadership roles through departmental collaboration, committee work, community outreach and curriculum development. These roles are frequently top-down directives, informal ancillary tasks or the result of delegation by administrators. In the past decade, many schools have begun to make a formal transformation to a distributed model of leadership. By utilizing distributive models that go beyond mere delegations of duties, schools have created structures that enable administrators to be more effective and faculty to be more empowered in the leadership process. When leadership is defined in terms of a social process instead of the work of one "heroic" individual, administrators and teachers begin to utilize the leadership strengths from all across their organization, not just from "the top." As more schools begin to explore ways of flattening the leadership hierarchy and begin to share leadership responsibilities among both administrators and teachers, understanding the conditions and models that have led to success is vital. Schools wanting to move to a distributed leadership model must know the components necessary to make the change successful. In order to make a successful transition in to a distributed model, certain conditions must be in place.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze a body of knowledge and research on the practice of distributive leadership and identify essential traits of individuals and groups and

conditions in school environments that can support the success of formalized distributed leadership.

Research Questions

What are the essential characteristics of administrators that can support the success of distributed leadership? What are the essential components/characteristics that make a distributed leadership model work? What conditions can support a schools transition to a distributed leadership model?

Theoretical Rationale

The researcher drew from the theory of distributed leadership, a theoretical framework that has emerged formally in the past decade. Distributed leadership theory asserted that leadership is conceived of as a collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actors (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Anderson and Bennett (2003) identified three premises regarding distributed leadership:

1 - Leadership is an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals

2 - There is openness to the boundaries of leadership

3 - Varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few.

Absent in this theory is the assumption that individual leaders hold the power and vision in an organization. Administrators no longer shoulder the burden of outcomes and deciding upon vision and change. Gone are the "hollow" forms of sharing leadership like delegation and directives, replaced by empowered collective decision-making, as individuals across a school

share his or her particular leadership strengths to support the entire organization. There is a distribution of leadership responsibilities to individuals whose strengths match the needs.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed traditional execution and allocation of administrative roles and tasks are outdated, inaccurate, and ineffective. Structures that consolidate leadership and power into the administration of one individual fail to acknowledge the shifting nexus of leadership that shares leadership with teachers who have particular expertise in certain areas. The hierarchies of leadership in the educational environment no longer accurately reflect where change, vision and guidance lie in schools.

The researcher assumed that administrators in school spend the majority of time in meetings discussing what changes and how changes should happen, while teachers on committees and in adjunct positions work to collaborate, coordinate and affect real change and leadership. Effective administrators are an important and vital part of a school community but redefining and restructuring the task that they should be responsible for is necessary.

Background and Need

The call for teacher leadership is nothing new. Choosing instructional material, shaping curriculum or designing staff development are only a few of the ways teachers participate in the decision making process. Roland S. Barth (2001) made the case for teacher leadership starting by identifying the many opportunities teachers have to participate in influencing school direction and change. Teachers can "lead by following" by choosing to support efforts of teachers: "For anything of consequence to get done in schools, many people are needed to contribute in a

hundred subtle, periodic and reliable ways" (Barth, 2001, p. 446). Or when teacher join

committees and work in teams, they can exert leadership and influence in a gregarious context,

adding to multiple perspectives of a group. Barth (2001) also identified "lead alone" teachers

who, either because of frustration, impatience or disenchantment, work alone to affect change

around them. Lastly, Barth (2001) described the "lead by example" teacher who "brings others in

– to observe their work, to reflect together, and to exchange their craft knowledge about teaching"

(Barth, 2001, p. 446). Teachers have always led and influenced vision and change in both formal

and informal ways; the challenge is to begin to change school structures and processes in order to

maximize the ways teachers can lead. Most importantly, Barth (2001) continues the conversation

about what teachers gain by leading: "[Teachers] experience a reduction in isolation;

…satisfaction that comes from improving their schools; a sense of instrumentality, investment,

and membership in the school community; and new learning about schools, about the process of

change, and about themselves" (Barth, 2001, p. 449) Powerful and transformative things can

happen when leadership is shared across a school.

Margolis and Huggins (2012) and Firestone and Martinez (2007) continued to show how

leadership distribution is already happening. Margolis and Huggins (2012) documented "Hybrid

teacher leaders" who have formalized schedules that include both teaching students and leading

teachers. Their study attempted to define and categorize hybrid teachers' job descriptions, where

funding for these positions came from, and other aspects of this particular model. Identifying

and categorizing the teacher leader positions helps to once again validate the leadership already

taking place in schools community members other than administrators. Margolis and Huggins'

(2012) work underscores the fact that much of the transformation to a distributed model is more

importantly a validation and legitimization of leadership that is already happening. Firestone and

Martinez's (2007) work has focused on how teacher leaders can influence teaching practice and the relationship between teacher leaders and districts in educational change.

Summary

Distributed leadership is an emerging model that is being adopted more and more in many school organizations. It taps into the abilities of a group of professionals, each of which is suited to take on some level of leadership, either by directly leading change or building the consensus to act upon it. Teachers have long been capable of collaborating, leading, and affecting change in schools. Distributed leadership works to legitimizes what has already been happening for many years and formalize the structures and conditions that can make affect significant change in teaching, learning and student achievement.

It is worthwhile to note that a school's transformation to distributed leadership does not call for the end of administrative jobs. On the contrary, administrators still are an important part of leadership and supporting the empowerment of teacher leaders. The paper will reveal the important role principals and other administrators need to play to ensure success. Their trust in letting go of traditional administrative roles forms part of the new concept of shared leadership. Also, administrator trust in teacher ability to take on leadership responsibilities is a vital condition for the success of shared leadership. The second chapter reviews the literature on shared leadership.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section is an examination of the research literature models of shared and distributive leadership models. In addition, the researcher looked at the important role trustworthiness plays in the success of these models. Information was gathered from academic library searches using online resources.

Distributed Leadership Origins

Notions of distributed leadership have emerged many times in the past. It has been suggested that forms of this type of leadership can date back to 1250 B.C., (Oduro, 2004) making it a historical "grandfather" for leadership theory and practice. More recently, in the 1950s, Gibb proposed, "leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group" (Gibb as cited in Gronn, 2000, p. 324).

A fuller body of research emerged through numerous researchers from the 1980s on, utilizing a variety of theories like distributed cognition, activity theory and social learning theory. Currently, a review of the literature reveals thousands of results for the phrase "distributed leadership" showing its emergence as an established and growing body of material on the subject.

Current frameworks of distributed leadership clearly move away from hierarchical structures of leadership wherein one individual provides the leadership and visions for a school. The model shifts the locus of leadership from "the one" to the group, placing authentic control

and leadership with people who have the greatest expertise in a given area (Copeland as cited in Angelle, 2010.) With this perspective, an organization no longer views an individual as gatekeeper or controller of change and decision-making. It is important to note that distributed leadership in this context does not simply refer to delegations and assignment of duties within a school. Distributed leadership necessitates a true transference of leadership authority and power to multiple individuals. It frames leadership as a social dynamic that exists within an organization, emanating not from one individual, but from the collaboration of many.

Harris and Spillane (2008) examined the theoretical and practical considerations of distributed leadership and both positive and negative considerations of its leadership approach. The authors posited that there are three significant reasons for the growing trend toward distributed leadership. One reason is the normative power of this type of leadership. That is, current changes in leadership practice in schools "[have] resulted in the expansion of leadership tasks and responsibilities" (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). This reflects the shift away from the more traditional model of leadership emanating from an individual and shifts the focus toward leadership through teams with greater emphasis on teachers, support staff and even students as leaders (Harris as cited in Harris and Spillane, 2008). A second reason, as stated by the authors, is the representational power of distributed leadership. The growing responsibilities and demands on schools have required many schools to restructure their leadership teams and create new roles. As "schools engage with complex collaborative arrangements, distributed forms of leadership will be required to 'cross multiple types of boundaries and to share ideas and insights' " (Wenger et al. as cited in Harris & Spillane, 2008). With more complex problems and demands are asked of schools, there is growing acknowledgement that old organizational structures will not meet these challenges. Lastly, Harris and Spillane cite the growing body of empirical data that

supports the efficacy of distributed leadership. A growing number of studies indicate a "powerful relationship between distributed forms of leadership and positive organizational change" (Harris et al. as cited in Harris & Spillane, 2008). Work such as this can build the rationale for the "why" of distributed leadership.

Harris and Spillane (2008) also acknowledged concerns regarding the limitations of distributed leadership. Firstly, they identified the concern that with the broad range of collaborative leadership theories, distributed leadership could evolve into a generalized term describing any type of shared leadership. This could obscure the distinct characteristics of distributed leadership and hinder an understanding of its distinct approach. Secondly, the authors identified the "tension between the theoretical and practical interpretations" (Harris & Spillane, 2008). This tension poses a considerable list of questions about how leadership is distributed, what effect it has and does distributed leadership significantly affect things like student achievement and school improvement. Harris and Spillane (2008) cautioned that from a theoretical perspective it could be viewed as merely an abstract analysis of leadership and from a practical perspective it could be only another iteration of shared leadership practice.

Harris and Spillane (2008) shared important reasons for the rise in interest in distributed leadership and raise important questions about its future. By identifying the changing and increasing demands of leadership in education that create conditions for distributed leadership, begin to make the case for how this model can transform educational leadership. Identifying challenges like distributed leaderships potential dilution with similar theoretical approaches and a body of research that is still relatively small underscores the importance of further study. The authors bring to light important considerations that help shape the discussions around, and evolution of distributed leadership theory and practice.

Creating the Right Environment for Change

An important step toward identifying elements of success for distributed leadership is in understanding what leadership dynamics and conditions can foster a distributed model of leadership. In order to create the organizational conditions that can transform school leadership to a distributive model, one must identify leadership attributes that can help those conditions arise. By knowing what skill set is needed for an administrator in order to support a shift toward distributed leadership, more effective and prescriptive pathways can be created.

Giles (2007) explored effective leadership as seen through the filters of organizational learning and distinct leadership practices. Much of the current research in educational leadership focuses on the growing demands of national policy changes, student achievement, and a variety of mandates that truly test the limits of traditional leadership. The author feels despite the growing pressure of these forces, reform has come in the form of merely "intensifying existing organizational arrangements" (Fullan & Sarason, as cited in Giles, 2007) rather than more collaborative and social approaches. Giles' (2007) study examines the successful collaborative capacity-building practices of successful school leaders in three schools and identifies leadership practice that supports a more collaborative approach to leadership.

In this mostly qualitative case study, Giles (2007) analyzed data gathered from three US schools. Giles (2007) looked at four core leadership practices as identified by Leithwood (2006): setting direction, developing people, designing the organization, and managing the instructional program and related that to conditions for collaborative work in the schools. In this analysis the author found that a vital quality to begin to foster collaborative dialogue was the ability to

effectively manage the instructional program. By creating a safe and structured teaching environment, keeping facilities in working order and ensuring that "scheduling, buses, reports and other day-to-day operating procedures" functioned efficiently (Giles, 2007) leaders could create a stable context in which address curricular and instructional needs. The experience of one of the schools in the case study showed that without first "restoring order" to the school environment, other important instructional collaboration could not take place. The data supported the importance of designing the organization and managing the instructional program. By creating and utilizing a collaborative school based management team, as well as action teams that could implement identified goals, one school principal created an organization structure that both encouraged and valued collaboration, and respected the decisions made by the groups. In another school, the principal created formal structures like School Improvement Teams, subject departments and grade level teams, all focused on the process of improvement over time (Giles, 2007). Once again, the practice of intentionally designing the organization in a manner that distributed the decision-making work through grade level and subject departments improved and increased collaborative opportunities. Also of note was the importance of Leithwood's (2006) practice of developing people. In two of the schools, teachers viewed their leaders as providing numerous opportunities for professional growth through classroom inter-visitation, collaboration with other educational institutions, curated readings, and outside courses.

Giles (2007) identified important administrative practices that can help transform schools into collaborative environments. In three different schools, Giles (2007) was able to show that creating an orderly, structured environment and designing organizational group norms were important steps to school change. By identifying the conditions that can create school contexts that are receptive to change, schools can make intentional choices to support those conditions. Of

additional significance is the importance of the sequential steps for the different leadership practices. As schools begin to take on the notion of transforming into a distributed leadership model, it is important to recognize that without first implementing proper, effective management of the learning environment, further growth into a more collaborative organization will not be seen.

Eilers and Camacho (2007), looked at leadership factors that resulted in significant change for a particular school. The study attempted to show that specific leadership practices result in dramatic change at a school in a shortened time frame. It focused on research based factors that have shown to support system-wide improvement such as communities of practice, evidence-based practice, and collaborative leadership (Eilers & Camacho, 2007). The research utilized data from multi-year interviews, surveys and observations. They sampled school and district-wide performance data and both individual and focus group interviews of teachers from a broad range of grade and experience levels. The utilization of multiple measures helped Eilers and Camacho (2007) to collect a variety of both quantitative and qualitative data about the leadership factors influencing the school's growth and change.

Eilers and Camacho's (2007) data show that initial structural and system organization facilitated the growth and effectiveness of collaborative dynamics. The researchers observed that, by re-thinking time and space, leaders at the school were able to create a schedule that allowed for both common teaching times of core subjects and common prep times for teachers to meet together. The principal "implemented grade-level teaming among the teachers by creating shared teacher prep time. This was a start to providing structure for the teachers to convene as professional communities" (Eilers & Camacho, 2007, p. 619).

In addition, the researchers found that specific behaviors by the administrator led staff members to view their principal's collaborative style in a positive light. By showing a willingness to participate with the teachers and to let others lead, the principal was able to "lead by example" as they began to work more collaborative ways. The administrator demonstrated collaborative leadership in two important ways: "either by serving as a model to teachers by practicing continuous learning himself or by collaborating with staff and various resources offered by the district" (Eilers & Camacho, 2007, p. 628). These types of findings underscore the importance of an administrator's willingness to be seen as a member of the learning community not as someone "above it all" issuing directives and mandates. To successfully shift toward leadership by a community, as distributed leadership tries to do, school leaders must not only lead by example but also create structural environments that enable the collaboration to happen.

Another notable study by Margolis and Huggins (2012) identifies the importance of clarity and accountability in defining distributed leadership roles for teachers. In a rigorous quantitative study, the researchers found that teacher leaders working in a distributed leadership model faced challenges that emerged from conflicting or non-existent job descriptions and relational deterioration among co-workers.

Margolis and Huggins (2012) focused their work on the role of hybrid teacher leaders (HTL). They defined HTLs as "teachers whose official schedule includes both teaching K-12 students and leading teachers in some capacity" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 953). The authors additionally make the distinction between "older models" of teacher leaders and new roles that are not just creating "quasi-administrative positions" but rather [roles where teachers] serve as instructional coaches to mediate curricular and pedagogical initiatives from outside the classroom for teachers working inside the classroom" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 957).

Over a two-year period, Margolis and Huggins (2012) researched teacher leaders in six schools, utilizing focus groups, interviews and observations to gather their data. From the data they gathered, descriptive codes were created and the researchers looked for patterns and relationships between "organizational plans for teacher leadership and how they were lived by educators in the school organization" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 962).

Margolis and Huggins' (2012) findings reveal much about the types of conditions that can help or hinder change with regards to distributing leadership in schools. Foremost was the effect of a lack of clear job description for the teacher leaders. Without a clear definition, administrators often defined HTLs roles in vague ways that would allude to larger goals but no specificity on how the goals would be achieved. "Through codifying ambiguity, administrators exhibited tentativeness in formalizing the direct connections between the HTLs and the reforms sought…" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p.963-4). This often left teacher leaders lacking knowledge of the specific tasks and roles their job required, resulting in teacher leaders being utilized in a variety of ways that were not necessarily related to any leadership role, but a more administrative, support role. Another contributing factor to the lack of clear job definitions came from how the teacher leader roles were funded. Often teacher leadership roles would have to directly relate to a funding source and job expectations would have to change. For example, one teacher leader role "was now being funded by a new grant and therefore seemed to change. However, she struggled to understand how that change added to the way in which she used her time" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 964). Change in leadership was another obstacle to defining HTL roles. When leadership change occurred either at the school or district level, often times new district reform initiative would be forced upon the HTL or new leadership would attempt to define how the teacher leader would be utilized. Many times this would result in "re-

branding" of old initiatives or a return to more "quasi-administrative task. The final contributing factor to undefined HTL roles was the quantity of new initiatives in the schools. With both school and district initiatives arising, they were "often too numerous to be cohesive or coherent enough to be implemented effectively" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 967). Having multiple initiatives from various sources all directed at the teacher leader for implementation led to individual teacher leaders having to redefine their already ambiguous roles, as well as prioritize an expanding list of tasks.

The ambiguous and transient nature of the HTL's role had significant effects of the teacher leaders. Margolis and Huggins (2012) found negative ramifications that fit into three categories: misuse, underuse and inefficient use. Misuse most often came in the form of "performing duties that were managerial or administrative" even thought initial statements defined teacher leader roles and non-administrative (Margolis & Huggins 2012). In addition, with all six of the HTLs in the study, new initiatives or committees almost always involved the teacher leader, despite relevancy or appropriateness of task. Many times teacher leaders would be asked to assume mundane tasks such as covering for teachers or supporting students during tests. Underutilization was another result of the lack of clear role definition for the HTLs. Often times teacher leaders would find themselves not being used for the skills they were selected for, or in the ways they had perceived they should be helping. Teachers would be dismissed without giving a teacher leader the chance to support them with modeling, feedback or any type of support. As timed passed, the HTLs felt there were many missed opportunities and saw the as being related to the larger issue of the "ill-defined nature of their positions" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). Lastly, ambiguous and absent role definition resulted in inefficient use of the HTLs. Teacher leaders would consistently be involved in time-consuming meetings and

collecting and analyzing data that wasn't used. This continued to even further remove the teacher leaders from being connected to the classroom and supporting teachers and instruction. The researchers were often observing the HTLs in "lengthy meetings that had no clear direction or agenda" (Margolis & Huggins, 2012, p. 971). These types of tasks pulled the teacher leaders away from leadership meant to "maintain a closer connection between reform efforts and teachers, teaching, students and curriculum…the teacher leader roles became ineffectual, disconnected from the classroom and often subsumed into the managerial emergency of the day" (Margolis & Huggins, p. 971 2012).

Margolis and Huggins (2012) make a strong case for the importance of clear roles and job descriptions for teacher leaders. The absence of clearly defined goals creates numerous challenging obstacles that can then lead to the ineffectiveness of emerging teacher leader roles. Colleagues can begin to see teacher leaders as "bosses" who merely take on an additional administrative role, instead of seeing them as a potentially highly effective resource to improve teaching and learning. Creating teacher leader roles should assist in supporting specific tasks, not merely being a new place to send all new initiatives and programs.

When considering what types of conditions are beneficial to changes in leadership structures, the specificity and scope of new leadership is vital. Unambiguous and focused roles give both teacher leaders and their colleagues a shared understanding of the capacity of these leadership roles. It can help the effectiveness of teacher leaders by giving them clear boundaries as new initiatives arise and can help them maintain and sustain their job focus.

Trustworthiness

Emerging from the research around leadership is the importance of trustworthiness. Green and Cooper (2012) conducted a study on the important dispositions of leadership. Out of 15 dispositions of administrators, including commitment, communication, honesty, integrity and the like, trust was ranked by 30% of participants as a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd choice in a study by Green and Cooper (2012). Above it were the dispositions of vision, integrity and character, out of which it may be argued that trust is implicitly represented in character and integrity. When a school leader demonstrates consistency in his or her words, actions and behaviors, teachers know decisions and agreements made by the administrator will be implemented and he or she will follow through. This consistency creates the trustworthiness that can motivate and empower teachers when schools work toward significant change and growth.

Beycioglu, Ozer and Ugurlu (2012) offer a quantitative look at the perceptions of trust in the context of distributed leadership. The authors' intent was to find out if there "are any differences among teachers' perceptions about leadership behaviors of principals and organizational trust, and that of their colleagues" (Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu, 2012, pg. 3316). Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu (2012) looked at perceptions of distributed leadership of teachers as compared with perceptions of trust in colleagues, principals, and students and parents. Using a sample of over 200 teachers it found a statistically significant correlation between perceptions of distributed leadership and trust. It found in its data that teachers who felt their school was utilizing distributive leadership practices also felt high levels of trust. The "newness" of distributed leadership as a legitimized leadership approach makes quantitative studies like this one important additions to the body of knowledge of this leadership theory.

Research by Bryk and Schneider (2003) underscores the important relationship between trust and meaningful change in education. By looking at relational trust in a rigorous, decade long study, Bryk and Schneider (2003) show how high relational trust contributes to improved collaboration and student achievement in school contexts.

Relational trust is described as the trust that exists between stakeholders in each person's ability to uphold his or her obligations and expectations. As the authors state: "Each party in a relationship maintains an understanding of his or her role's obligations and holds some expectations about the obligations of the other parties" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p.41). Relational trust focuses on the interrelated dependencies in school communities and dependency of all participants on each other to achieve change and growth (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). As individuals interact with one another, they are constantly determining the intentions of the actions of others and evaluating how these actions help or hinder their own interests. These perceptions are linked to previous interactions, general reputation and other factors such as race, gender and social status (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Bryk and Schneider's (2003) study included case study research and longitudinal statistical analyses of over 400 Chicago schools, spending over four years in 12 different school communities. In addition, the authors analyzed surveys of teachers, administrators and students and trends in student achievement scores. The scope of the research showed the "powerful influence that …trust plays as a resource for reform" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

The study organized the perceptions of trust into four areas: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities, and personal integrity. Bryk and Schneider (2003) suggest that as teachers, principals, parents and students interact with each other in meetings, through communications, in classrooms, and other social interactions, they are constantly

regarding these four aspects as they evaluate trustworthiness. High levels of trust as seen through these discernments supported collective decision making with broad teacher buy-in, "a crucial ingredient for reform…" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 44). In addition, the authors found schools with high relational trust were more likely to "demonstrate marked improvements in student learning" and positive characterizations by teachers of their colleagues as being "committed and loyal to the school and more eager to engage in new practices…" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 43).

Of note in Bryk and Schneider's (2003) work is the acknowledgement that building relational trust relies on the individual's everyday words and actions reflecting his or her sense of obligation towards others. It's not enough to only provide workshops and trainings; people need to see the actions of their community members supporting the expectations of the school.

Bryk and Schneider's (2003) work is significant because it highlights the importance of trust in enabling schools to affect meaningful change. Building a high level of relational trust creates an environment in which parents, teachers, administrators and students perceive each other as invested and committed to the communities vision and goals. This trust both creates opportunities for improved academic achievement and supportive attitudes so that "even when people disagree, individuals can still feel valued if others respect their opinions" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 43).

A comprehensive and informative study by Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy and Lewis (2007) underscores the powerful influences of trust when implementing distributed leadership practices. The researchers engaged in a three-year long comparative case study of six schools. Each of these schools was involved in State Action Education Leadership Project, an effort by state agencies and non-profits to give grants specifically promoting the development of

distributed leadership (Smylie et al., 2007). The authors of the study drew from a variety of urban, suburban, and rural communities as well as both middle and high schools. In addition, they drew from both relatively high achieving schools and low achieving schools. The researchers then conducted bi-annual interviews, which were then thematically analyzed to identify ways trust might relate to the development of distributed leadership (Smylie et al., 2007). They then narrowed their focus on two schools: one that demonstrated positive effects of trust, named Fox River, and one that revealed effects of the absence of trust, named Middle Fork.

Smylie et al. (2007) found data suggesting the significance of trust in the development of distributed leadership. The "initial levels of trust laid foundations for the design of distributed leadership initiatives at both schools [and] helped to shape the subsequent development and performance of distributed leadership in dynamic, mutually reinforcing ways" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 493). Of important note is the effect of cultivating trust in a wider range of contexts besides distributed leadership development.

The absence of trust at Middle Fork undermined changed greatly. Both faculty and administration perceived a lack of integrity, care and competence (Smylie et al., 2007). The school began with a limited design of distributing leadership and continued implementation in a way that undermined trust and leadership. Throughout the initiative, there was extremely limited intervention to change. In addition, while pursuing a change toward distributed leadership, the administration "worked largely independently of the faculty, seeking little input or involvement from the teachers…" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 494). The principal justified this unilateral approach by the scale of the problems at the school, which could be seen as further evidence of the lack of trust (Smylie et al., 2007). Much of the administration's initiative focused on redistributing workloads, not empowering teachers to lead. The faculty's role was limited to mandatory

trainings without any real tasks. The majority of the "substantive work involved [was limited] to proposals and plans created by the central office and school administration" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 494). At Middle Fork, the distributed leadership team lacked any real power or control to initiate its own activities and most of its work centered on reacting to plans created by the administration. Plans that were decided upon by the distributed leadership team were reversed or were not supported by the administration. The numerous ways the lack of trust was revealed at the school both created and sustained a context where any significant change in leadership structure could not take hold.

At Fox River, the school where the researchers suggested high levels of trust helped the leadership model change, a considerably different picture emerged. Concerns of trustworthiness of teachers from the principal were with "regard to their initial competence to engage successfully in distributed leadership work [not] their care and integrity" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 496). He also held confident the beliefs that the teachers would be able succeed with sufficient support. Teachers felt a more "provisional" lack of trust that stemmed from the newness of the administrator and impending change, not from any wider administrative influence. The researchers felt that trust was manifest in the design of an incremental plan of work, with emphasis placed on fostering collaborative leadership skills and processes, which provided a substantial amount of autonomy in decision making (Smylie et al., 2007). By "promoting open communication, establishing collaborative work processes, expanding responsibility across the faculty, actively reaching out to the skeptics and proactively focusing on issues of concern to teachers" the principal demonstrated concrete and tangible manifestations of his trust (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 497). Most importantly, the community at Fox River saw their work and the development of trust as being "dynamic and positively reinforcing" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 498)

as their leadership collaborations fostering trust which created a context for more distributed leadership opportunities.

Smylie et al. (2007) made a strong case for the influence (both good and bad) of trustworthiness in a transition to distributed leadership. While they caution that their study reflects only a small sample of two out of only six schools, they provide their data as "clear illustrations of contours of a theorized relationship between trust and distributed leadership development" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 499). The study showed that trust is clearly important when developing models of distributed leadership. Both in perception and acceptance, levels of trust will influence how teachers attribute actions and change. Further, as mentioned earlier, "the relationship between trust and distributed leadership appears to be dynamic and reinforcing" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 499). Initial levels may have a significant effect on how distributed leadership initiatives grow. The researchers suggest that it seems some initial level of trust is needed for distributed leadership to be embraces and for its adaptation. This threshold is unclear but the "data suggests that some foundation of positive or provisional trust seems necessary" (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 500). A last point the researchers make is that leadership by the principal is vital to the development of distributed leadership. Without a proactive and positive change agent supporting both teachers and the distributive leadership process, lasting and significant leadership chance may not succeed. When a principal is able to "cultivate trust proactively and strategically within and beyond [the] school's distributed leadership initiative" the reinforcing cycle of trust and leadership change can evolve.

Other Factors of Influence

It is important to understanding the myriad of factors that can support distributed leadership in school contexts. Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon and Yashkina, (2007) take significant steps toward this understanding with comprehensive research from schools actively engaged in distributed leadership. By categorizing patterns of distributed leadership, leadership functions, characteristics of non-administrator leaders and influences on the development of distributed leadership, Leithwood et al., (2007) were able to begin to identify qualities in these areas that showed statistically beneficial influences on supporting and utilizing distributed leadership.

Drawing a sample from a large and diverse school population, Leithwood et al. (2007) selected a sample of eight schools balanced evenly between elementary and secondary schools with principals who had at least two years of tenure. All of the schools showed a demonstrable commitment to shared or distributed leadership. In addition, the director of education who had been serving for over ten years had been working for many years with the district to create conditions supportive of shared leadership approaches. The researchers then gathered substantial qualitative data from interviews of selected non-administrative and administrative leaders which were then analyzed and coded based on: patterns of leadership distribution, sources of leadership functions, characteristics of non-administrative leaders, influences on the development of distributed leadership and outcomes associated with distributed leadership.

Leithwood et al. (2007) findings identified complex and significant characteristics of individuals, processes and structures that help support and sustain distributed leadership practice. The researchers noted many instances of what they called "planful alignment", which is defined in the study as "the tasks or functions of those providing leadership have been given prior,

planful thought by organizational members" Leithwood et al, 2007, p. 40). With high priority initiatives, both teacher leaders and administrators generated clear roles and goals for both the leaders involved and the groups with which they would work. Evidence also indicated that planful alignment's effectiveness still required regular monitoring, and sometimes intervention, by an administrator to keep agendas moving forward.

The study also revealed patterns of specialization with regards to sources of leadership functions. Non-administrator leaders were often involved in creating expectations, motivating others, developing teachers, providing individual support and modeling appropriate values and practices. Informal leaders were also greatly involved in organizational redesign as well as sharing information. School administrators were involved with identifying and articulating a vision, delegating, staffing and providing resources. Both informal leaders and formal leaders were perceived as being involved in professional development, building collaborative processes/teamwork, monitoring progress and managing programs, committees and meetings. Leithwood et al. (2007) noted that these findings support other substantial studies in that "some hierarchy is unavoidable and necessary in any large organization…[and] for greatest impact some leadership functions need to be performed by those in particular positions or with special expertise, not just anyone in the organization" (Locke as cited in Leithwood et al., 2007, p. 57).

When analyzing characteristics of non-administrative leadership, Leithwood et al. (2007) found data consistent with leadership characteristics in general. Personal qualities like openness, care and extroversion, as well as a characteristic of being "quiet but effective" were identified for non-administrative leaders. These were consistent with attributions found for formal leader roles as well (Leithwood et al., 2007). Other frequently mentioned characteristics were "commitment

to what the initiative was" and interpersonal skills (Leithwood et al., 2007). These findings continued to mirror the characteristics of formal leaders.

A final observation by Leithwood et al. (2007) of the characteristics of non-administrative leaders identified the importance of informal leaders having a complementary set of characteristics. More specifically, informal leaders need to have both the "prototypical" attributes of a leader in addition to possessing significant expertise in their leadership area.

Both informal and formal leaders who participated in the research gave similar responses in regard to important influences on the development of distributed leadership. The results indicated that distributed leadership practice in can thrive when "collaborative structures are established, when the numbers of people collaborating on an initiative is kept manageable and when influence is exercised through expert rather than positional power" (Leithwood et al., 2007, p. 61). In addition, an open organizational culture, encouragement of a strong staff commitment to students and an environment without favoritism and internal dissent were all named by interviewees as supportive influences (Leithwood et al., 2007).

A comprehensive study like this reveals the complex nature of conditions that can either hinder or nurture the development of distributed leadership practices. By looking the dynamics of structural, organizational and individual characteristics, Leithwood et al. (2007) shed tremendous light on what qualities teachers will need to be effective leaders, how formal leaders can best support distributed leadership, which tasks are best handled by whom and the organizational structures that can best support this type of leadership transformation.

Interview with an Expert

Dr. Neil MacNeill (personal communication, November 3, 2014) is currently the head master Ellenbrook Independent Primary School in Western Australia. He has both published articles in academia regarding leadership, pedagogy and change and head of school for a nationally recognized "turn around" school. By building upon high expectations that are clear to all the stakeholders in the school community and nurturing a strong school culture, Dr. MacNeill and the teachers at Ellenbrook shared in the process of transforming their school.

An e-mail interview with Dr. MacNeill, elicited a helpful perspective from a leader who has been working within a distributed leadership model for some time. It is important, according to Dr. MacNeill, to identify the leadership strengths of the teachers and teams and gain "commitment, not compliance" from the staff. Dr. MacNeill stressed the importance of team building and acknowledging that any organization is a social environment, which is always made up of formal and informal leaders, as well as both formal and informal team groupings. Dr. MacNeill also named trust and shared vision and expectations of both the families and teachers as important elements of success. Teachers, parents and students all know the "vision, values and associated strategies" in which the school believes. In addition, creating opportunities for teachers to observe effective practice in other schools, then "try them out" and talk about successes has consistently worked.

Summary

In reviewing the literature, the researcher observed multiple themes regarding distributed leadership. The body of research examined showed leadership theories and research investigating both how distributed leadership is defined and how it is practiced. It is seen in many ways: a

unique, emergent theory and practice, a new iteration of existing collaborative and shared leadership theories, and mis-labeling of teamwork practice that naturally emerges from the delegation of duties. It cannot be said that there is a consensus on the definition of distributed leadership. The research shows how it is important to see distributed leadership not as prescriptive practice, but as a way of looking at, and explaining, how leadership transcends individuals and is a social dynamic that exists in the collaboration and communication between grounds and individuals.

In addition, when one begins to look at schools that begin to formalize a practice of distributed leadership, certain essential conditions can be documented. Dynamics like trust, school culture, school climate and thoughtful design of leadership structures have strong influences on whether or not a school can transform itself.

Research also identified the role of the traditional leadership in schools that have distributed their leadership. Instead of making traditional principals obsolete, or powerless, distributed leadership in practice requires an active and supportive role of the traditional leadership both at the site and district level.

Chapter 3 Method

Research Approach

This qualitative study began with an investigation of the traditional job descriptions of school administrators and attempted to categorize work done by administrators and work done for them. The research relied on content analysis of a sample of official administrative job descriptions from across the country as well as research of different models of leadership. In addition, substantial investigation focused on common important characteristics that successful distributed leadership models had in common.

A survey was also attempted with both administrators and teachers that collected perceptions and attitudes of shared leadership.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 10257.

Sample and Site

The planned sample for the online surveys was from a list of schools in districts in two counties in Northern California.

Access and Permissions

For the survey, the researcher aimed to obtain a list of elementary schools practicing distributed leadership from the Penn Center for Education Leadership, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, 3440 Market Street, Suite 500, Philadelphia, PA 19104-3325, Judith Martin, Director, Leadership Initiatives, Sonoma County Office of Education, 5340 Skylane Boulevard, Santa Rosa, CA 95403-8246, ph. (707) 522-3069, e-mail: jmartin@scoe.org and Mary Jane Burke, Superintendent, Marin County Office of Education, 1111 Las Gallinas Ave., San Rafael, CA 94913, ph. 415-472-4110, e-mail: marinco@marin.k12.ca.us. I contacted these organizations via e-mail describing the nature of the research project and requested a list of schools in the area. The purpose of identifying these people was to inform them of the nature of this research project and request their participation in an anonymous survey on distributed leadership. Participants would then be directed to an online survey application if they wished to participate.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher gathered administrative job descriptions from a variety of K-12 school districts throughout the United States. Specifically collected were job descriptions of principal positions.

Data Analysis Approach

The researcher analyzed job descriptions for distinct and unique job expectations. These varied from curricular based tasks to organizational and personnel management responsibilities.

Results from the online survey were to be analyzed for content themes organized into categories. Based on the respondents' attributions of success and challenge, perceptions of where leadership was occurring and other information gathered, a summary of the survey results would be organized and analyzed.

Chapter 4 Findings

Analysis of Administrative Job Descriptions

An initial task for this study was to look at the immense scale of expectations for traditional administrators. The purpose of looking at a variety of traditional job descriptions was to identify the depth and breadth of expectations schools have for administrators. From an analysis of 10 job descriptions of "traditional" school administrators, an extensive and varying list of duties emerged. The analysis showed on average 24 distinct job expectations for administrators to competently fulfill as acting principals. Responsibilities included chairing meetings facilitating communication, facilitating staff meetings, implementing policies, supervising staff (both certified and classified), facilitating development of curriculum/instructional programs. It brought to light the variety of expectations placed upon administrators in a traditional leadership model. Responsibilities ranged from specific ("Chairs the school based council.") to less concrete ("Facilitates positive faculty and staff attitudes.") (Nelson, n.d.) Identifying the significant quantity of both specific and less-tangible expectations was necessary to frame the focus of this thesis: one individual has never been able to effectively fulfill any official job description of an administrator without the shared leadership from those around him or her. Initial research identified the ever-growing list of expectations put upon traditional administrators. The researcher found on average over twenty leadership tasks ranging from curriculum design and implementation to managing and maintaining supplies and equipment. Many of these expectations were out of a traditional administrators expertise or ability. The job descriptions also reflected a pattern of responsibilities in the realm of ensuring, identifying, encouraging, managing, and the like. This indirectly indicated that the substantive

work to conceptualize, design, and implement instructional, curricular and programmatic change was emanating from different loci of teacher and committee leadership. The expansive list of expectations and requirements of the traditional administrator provided a frame in which to begin to examine where leadership, vision and change was really occurring.

Surveys of Schools Practicing Distributed Leadership

The researcher had varying success from the different aspects of the research. Multiple attempts to obtain lists of schools formally practicing distributed leadership were made to the Penn Center of Leadership, but no responses were received. Solicitations to the Sonoma County Office of Education have not been acknowledged to date. A positive initial response from the superintendent of Marin County Schools gave redirection to local sites within the district, but responses from school were not received and/or could not be identified as formally practicing any models of distributed leadership. The researcher feels that due to the still emerging understanding and development of distributed leadership, many of the solicited schools interpreted the survey as not applicable to them. However, without actual responses, this information cannot be known. The researcher cannot explain the lack of responses from the other sources mentioned.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

Due to the lack of success with survey methodologies, the author relied greatly on the body of literary research utilized during the research process. The author found themes in regards to the formal practice of distributed leadership and the influential conditions of schools and behaviors of administrators that can affect the successful implementation of distributed leadership.

One important finding is the role of the administrator in supporting the success of distributed leadership. The researcher initially assumed any significant and true distribution of leadership would leave traditional administrators "out of the loop" and leave them as an unneeded artifact of an outdated model. Much of the research utilized during this investigation found the contrary: principals, and to a larger extent district-level administrators, play a key role in supporting distributive leadership practice.

One such key component of a school principal's work is to effectively manage the school program; more specifically to create a safe and stable school environment. A variety of studies about conditions for distributed leadership underscored the importance of teachers and students feeling that they are in a school that provides as structured, safe space for growth and change. Discipline issues, worn down facilities, disillusionment and burnout that undermine morale, and impacted, inflexible workloads can greatly impede institutional change; especially change which entails giving more responsibilities to the teachers and their teams. How can a principal expect his or her faculty to take on a more involved and intensive role if they are constantly reacting to negative conditions around them? This emphasizes the importance of the work that must be done

before a school wants to begin a change to distributed leadership. This awareness is essential for principals who may feel the pressure to make progress with leadership transitions. By taking the time to examine the current state of his or her school, a principal can identify what needs to be done to create the environment for change. Have other initiatives been finished? Or will distributed leadership be seen as another item "thrown on the plate?" Do teachers feel that the current school culture will support the work they will do? Effective management of the school program creates the solid, supportive foundation on which new forms of leadership can build.

Another significant task of the school principal is to create organizational structures to support the conditions for distributing leadership. Both Giles (2007) and Eilers and Camacho (2007) found research showing the importance of both rethinking time and space and the structure of how teams could work together. The research identified the importance of a principal's ability to make large-scale changes to the school schedule in order to facilitate collaboration and meetings. Changes like aligning prep time and teaching times of core subjects enables teachers to begin to build professional communities and have the ability to work together within the structures of the regular school day. Continually adding on responsibilities onto existing structures (like schedules or ancillary duties,) stretches the abilities and effectiveness of teachers who are already working within an impacted daily schedule. Acknowledging the importance of the time teacher leaders and their cohorts need in order to take on leadership roles begins with making it part of the formal schedule. Beginning to distribute leadership can succeed when administrators genuinely rethink how the school works instead of merely adding on to existing school structures.

Another essential structural component that led to effective distributed leadership was creating well-defined and accountable leadership roles for teachers. Whether it is leadership as a

curricular or instructional coach, or as a facilitator of teacher assessment and evaluation, clear goals and tasks can lead to both successful implementation and perceptions of effectiveness. Relevant, defined expectations make if possible for teacher leaders to affect change in a measurable way. The alternative is the creation of ambiguous leadership roles that subtly send the message that administrators are uncertain or uncommitted to the sharing of leadership roles (Margolis & Huggins, 2012). Effective distribution of leadership is more than the use of teachers as functionaries of administrative need; it is the intentional and critical utilization of teachers to lead based on their areas of expertise. Creating necessary leadership structures that have tangible influences on teaching and learning; that create significant change in vision or direction, shows all the stakeholders the real transformations in leadership that are taking place.

The researcher found that trust was also greatly influential in schools shifting to distributed leadership models. The trust teachers have in their administrators has tremendous influence on implementation of distributed leadership practices. Studies showed that schools with high levels of trust in their administrators more effectively distributed leadership than schools with low levels of trust (Smylie et al., 2007). While this seems intuitive, it is important to be able to show through research that in fact the dispositions of principals can have strong influence of educational change. For administrators looking to share leadership among the teachers at a school, he or she must be sure to be seen as a full participant and fully engaged in the change process. Bryk and Schneider (2003) suggest that every moment of interaction contains an evaluative component of trust. As principals ask more of their teachers and challenge them to step into leadership roles, they must make sure their relationships with their staff, students and families build on mutual respect and reflect personal integrity and competence (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The researcher found the importance of building trust to be a

fundamental catalyst for change. A certain level of risk will accompany any type of significant school change for teachers as they embark on new initiatives. Having an administrator that teachers trust to support them as they take these risks empowers them to make the first moves in the direction of change. To build this trust, principals must be perceived as a part of the change, not the one mandating it. Being present at professional development with teachers and modeling the expectations they have for their teachers shows a staff that the change happening is a collective, collaborative one, not just something that the teachers have to do.

It is important to also acknowledge the reinforcing aspects of trust. Smylie et al. (2007) documented the dynamic and positively reinforcing nature of trust; as the principals actions showed more trust in their teachers to succeed in new leadership tasks, so too did the teachers show more trust in the guidance and decisions of the principals. Embarking on the lofty task of transforming the perception and implementation of distributed leadership, it is necessary to remember schools are fundamentally social constructs, which require mutually respectful relationships that can foster trust. Trust is arguably *the* essential component for any type of significant change. Principals must constantly reflect on both the actions they are taking and the ones they are asking of their teachers, to ensure that each is reinforcing the transactional nature of trust.

Striving for the definitive, prescriptive steps that can lead to leadership change is a lofty goal. The complex, multi-faceted and unique dynamics of every school organization makes for difficult decisions with outcomes that are often difficult to measure. There will never be a "one size fits all" approach to how distributed leadership is implemented and practiced at school. But the body of research indicates creating certain conditions in a school context and embodying

certain behaviors that reinforce perceptions of an involved, supportive, open and trustworthy principal are necessary actions.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

A major limitation of this research was the lack of success in collecting survey data for analysis. The collection of current perceptions and observations from teachers and administrators in schools practicing distributed leadership models would have been an informative and valuable component. The ability to narrow the information collected into categories that aligned with the research questions would give "real time" feedback about both supportive and obstructive conditions for distributed leadership. The absence of this information significantly limited the potential to add new data to the ongoing body of research. Creating a more fundamental, "layman's" understanding of a distributed leadership perspective could help future respondents feel the topic was applicable to them.

Implications for Future Research

The emerging body of research around distributed leadership, combined with the vast base of research on leadership requires deeper analysis in both what distributed leadership is and how it can be effectively implemented. Distributed leadership both in theory and practice, struggles to be identified as a unique and distinct model of leadership. Its similarity to collaborative and shared models makes some researchers question whether it is a distinct and independent theory. In practice, it may be perceived as merely teams completing higher-level delegated tasks, as opposed to genuine ownership and agency of the leadership process. Further

research can continue looking at the many ways leadership is shared across school organizations and look at these models from a distributed leadership perspective. As acknowledged earlier, much of the work in this area is in identifying and understanding the shared leadership that has been, and continues to happen in schools all over the world. Research that can give schools the language and framework to formalize what may already be happening; and to improve the ways a stratified group of leaders can affect change is greatly needed.

Furthermore, as this study has only begun, continuing to investigate the patterns of success for implementing distributed leadership is necessary. Any type of significant change is a challenge in the school context. Varying and often competing expectations from local, state and federal agencies, limited resources of time and money, and an often inflexible and overworked teacher work force will always be major obstacles for the transformation change distributed leadership requires. Continuing to identify research supported best practices will greatly assist schools that are ready to make such a change.

Overall Significance of the Study

This study advances the academic discussions around distributed leadership by specifically investigating the ways distributed leadership can be successful. The researcher sought to utilize both significant and relevant research and current perspectives from leaders at schools where distributed leadership is practiced. By organizing a manageable, research based set of conditions and components that can support distributed leadership, this study can serve as a starting point for the transition into a new way of framing leadership and change. As seen by the researcher during the development of this study, the ever-growing body of research and information able to accessed can sometimes have a numbing effect on professional educators as

they make research-based, informed decisions about educational pedagogy and leadership practices. Massive, competing and sometimes incomplete bodies of knowledge from multiple perspectives and disciplines can make difficult the task of deciding which sources can effectively inform and guide action. Studies such as this that begin take a summative approach can help to synthesize research findings and make informed action a little bit easier.

About the Author

Dan Noble is an educator teaching in Marin County, California. Having worked in the educational environment with students, teachers and leaders for over twenty years, he is continuously inspired by the dedication and passion professional educators have to affect the most important impact on our society: the education of our children.

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