Leadership of Inquiry: Building and Sustaining Capacity for School Improvement

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This article reports on findings from a longitudinal study of leadership in the context of a region-wide school renewal effort entitled the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). BASRC's theory of action is multifaceted, incorporating a focus on distributed leadership, continual inquiry into practice, and collective decision-making at the school. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data sources suggests the use of an inquiry process is centrally important to building capacity for school improvement, and a vehicle for developing and distributing leadership. Within a sample of 16 schools where reform processes are most mature, the principal's role shifts to focus more narrowly on key personnel issues, framing questions and supporting inquiry processes. Findings provide evidence of the efficacy of policy strategies rooted in new understandings of school leadership.

THE NOTION of a gifted leader of change conjures up powerful and enduring icons. Images of founding fathers, presidents, CEOs, and leaders of sweeping social reforms are institutionalized in our collective consciousness. The field of education has celebrated its share of individuals exercising this kind of leadership. From Horace Mann's leadership of the common school movement in the 1840s, through to examples of modern day school reformers like Deborah Meier, the educational literature is replete with extraordinary people of vision and action, who have led their respective schools, districts or systems to achieve good results for children, often despite overwhelmingly difficult circumstances.

Such cases of singular greatness in educational leadership, compounded by remarkably enduring early 20th century theories about managing schools (Taylor, 1911; Bobbitt, 1913), subtly perpetuate a collective myth. This myth promotes the expectation that the solutions to the myriad educational woes found in districts and schools across America is tightly wrapped up in finding the right persons to fill those formal roles at or near the top of the education hierarchy–principals, district administrators, superintendents—visionary change agents who can wield formal power to bring about good results.

It is a compelling story and, on rare occasions, it actually comes true. Yet the history of school reform offers a striking contrast regarding the efficacy of such an approach to leadership for widespread improvement in America's public schools. What history tells us is that the traditional hierarchical model of school leadership, in which identified leaders in positions of formal authority make critical improvement decisions and then seek, through various strategies, to promote adherence to those decisions among those who occupy the rungs on the ladder below, has failed to adequately answer the repeated calls for sweeping educational improvements across American schools. While one can locate outposts of excellence where maverick principals or superintendents have resurrected dying schools or districts through these types of strategies, such efforts are recognizable only because they are the exception not the rule. Unfortunately, even in cases where traditional leadership approaches have brought about significant change, such changes

are prone to disintegration once the identified leader moves on.

This article introduces findings from a study of a large-scale school reform effort built on an understanding of school leadership that runs decidedly counter to the prevailing myth. The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC), a five-year reform effort involving schools throughout San Francisco Bay Area region seeks to "reculture" schools in ways that support whole school change. BASRC formed in the spring of 1995 as part of the nationwide Annenberg Challenge, and subsequently became the Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge, funded jointly by Hewlett and Annenberg, which provided $50 million to Bay Area public schools to be matched by public and private funds over a five-year period. The Collaborative established by BASRC included 86 Leadership Schools, each of which received grants of up to $150 per student for three to five years after completing a rigorous, evidence-based, peer-reviewed portfolio process. Leadership schools used these grants to fund support services, time for school inquiry and professional development, and other resources in support of their focused reform effort.

BASRC's theory of action for leadership in schools rests on a handful of tenets. First the theory holds that the important work of improving schools must be accomplished collectively by those at the school level, and implies a change in school culture. Importantly, BASRC designers understand that school reculturation rests in part on a fundamental restructuring of the roles and processes of school leadership. This tenet suggests a model for leadership less dependent on the actions of singular visionary individuals, but rather one that views leadership as a set of functions or qualities shared across a much broader segment of the school community that encompasses administrators, teachers, and other professionals and community members both internal and external to the school. Such an approach implies the need for school communities to create and sustain broadly *distributed leadership* systems, processes and capacities.

Second, BASRC's theory of action imagines that leadership for improving teaching and learning is rooted in *continual inquiry* into work at the school, inquiry focused on student learning, high standards, equity, and best practices. This process of inquiry does not cease; rather, the work is best

thought of as an ongoing effort to build greater *capacity* with regard to instructional practices that improve learning among those who work in the school community. People in the school renorm their basic work around identifying, striving to solve, and continually revisiting critical problems.

Finally, BASRC's theory of action suggests that the decisions made at the school regarding identification of critical problems, and development of solutions for same, should be made *collectively,* and focus on improving the learning of all students. People at the school make decisions together to determine and manage the challenges within their context and sustain the work, sharing the school's progress and challenges in the district and broader community.

Conceptual Framework

The roots of the BASRC theory of action can be traced from two distinct conceptual directions. First, the theory of action relies on conceptual understandings of school leadership that deviate from traditional norms of hierarchy. BASRC's theory supports an approach to leadership that builds on relatively recent notions of distribution and functional expertise. Second, the theory of action has roots in both cognitive and social theories of organizational learning. In this sense, BASRC's strategies focus both on transforming internal cognitive structures, as well as shaping and supporting the organizational systems and structures in which actors operate in service of improving practice.

Distributed School Leadership: Concepts and Definitions

The conceptual beginnings of distributed leadership trace back at least to organizational theory developed in the 1960s. McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Y assumptions about human motivation, for example, were fundamental to a whole generation of scholarship on educational administration (e. g., Campbell, et al., 1971). McGregor suggested that Theory X leaders view people as lazy, work avoidant, and deviously opportunistic, and so have a fundamental distrust of employees, leading to tight controls, close supervision, and heavily centralized authority with little opportunity for employee involvement in organizational decision-making. Theory Y leaders, by contrast, view people as basically honest, industrious, responsible, and willing to take initiative, and

as such are more inclined to delegate authority, share responsibility, and enable employee participation in making various organizational decisions.

From Theory Y and associated human relations perspectives followed notions about how the individual leader's practice can transform the organization not by mandate through channels of formal authority, but by inspiring followers' commitments to a greater shared purpose. The idea of transformational leadership was first fully realized by Burns (1978) and was later extended into noneducational contexts by Bass (1987) and others. Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1991) applied the ideas to education, offering an understanding of transformational leadership that focused school leaders' attention on the use of facilitative powers to construct strong school cultures in which leadership is manifested *through* other people, not *over* other people (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9).

When the efforts of individual transformational leaders are realized, many organizational actors are made powerful in new ways. Leithwood (1992) cites Roberts (1985) who explains:

> The collective action that transforming leadership generates empowers those who participate in the process. There is hope, there is optimism, there is energy. In essence, transforming leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of a people's mission and vision, a renewal of their commitment, and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment.

Initially, then, transformational leadership was conceived as inherent to an individual, a person's ability to inspire others to look beyond self-interest and focus on organizational goals. Over time, the concept took on new meanings to be more inclusive of broad strategies that have been described elsewhere as facilitative leadership (Conley & Goldman, 1994). The focus on facilitation involves behaviors that enhance the "collective ability of a school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance" (Conley & Goldman, 1994).

Over time, other notable educational leadership scholars began to signal broader understandings of leadership. In an early treatise, Sergiovanni (1984) argued that leadership is an artifact or product of organizational culture, and that the particular shape and style of leadership in an organization is not a function of individuals or of training programs; rather, it has to do with the mixture of organizational culture and the density of leadership competence among and within many actors. Sergiovanni posited a fundamental shift, discerning leadership less as a set of management techniques, and more as a set of norms, beliefs and principles that emerge, and to which members give allegiance, in an effective organization.

In a complementary vein, Murphy's (1988) comprehensive analysis of the first decade of instructional leadership literature devoted considerable attention to analyzing problems that emerged from a general failure in the scholarship on that topic to consider both the micro and macro level contextual issues of school leadership. Murphy criticized what he viewed as errantly placed attributions of causality in the literature; attributions that improvements in teaching and learning were due to the efficacy of actions performed by persons in formal roles of authority, rather than organizational conditions. Scholarship of this nature was foundational to the recent emergence of conceptual work to define distributed leadership in schools.

In an important contribution, Elmore (2000) sets out a framework for understanding the reconstruction of leadership roles and functions around the idea of distributed leadership in the service of large scale instructional improvement. A system level perspective, this new way of seeing is rooted in principles of distributed expertise, mutual dependence, reciprocity of accountability and capacity, and the centrality of instructional practice.

Elmore identifies five leadership domains—*policy, professional, system, school* and *practice*—each encompassing multiple actors, and develops a robust understanding of leadership functions associated with each domain. In this way, Elmore pushes the field to relocate the authority and responsibility for improving teaching and learning, separating it from the sole control of those "up the chain" of the administrative hierarchy, and embedding that authority and responsibility in the daily work of all those connected to the enterprise of schooling. Elmore's work sets the stage for a deeper conceptual discussion of distributed leadership as it applies to schools within this research effort.

First, it is clear that scholars understand that *distributed leadership is collective activity, focused on collective goals, which comprises a quality or energy that is greater than the sum of individual*

actions. In a recent literature review on distributed leadership, Bennett, Wise, Woods and Harvey (2003) found that conceptions of distributed leadership highlight it as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals, contrasting it to conceptions of leadership that focus on the actions of singular individuals. Complementary to this understanding, others offer the view that leadership is an organizational quality, originating from many peoples' personal resources, and flowing through networks of roles (Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995).

It is apparent that leadership of this nature is more than just the sum of individual efforts. Implied in the construct is a dynamism that extends beyond simply better articulation of divisions in task responsibility. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2000) suggest that school leadership is necessarily a distributed activity "stretched over" people in different roles rather than neatly divided among them, a dynamic interaction between multiple leaders (and followers) and their situational and social contexts. Lambert (1998) conceives of such leadership as separate from person, role and a discreet set of individual behaviors. Similarly, Gronn (2002) offers a view of distributed leadership as comprising "concertive action," suggesting that distributed leadership is imbued with the additional dynamic which is the product of collective activity focused on well-articulated shared goals, in contrast to a view of distributed leadership as "numerical or additive action," which is the aggregated effect of a number of individuals contributing their individual initiative and expertise in different ways to a group or organization.

Second, *distributed leadership involves the spanning of task, responsibility, and power boundaries between traditionally defined organizational roles.* Bennett et al., (2003) found in their review that conceptions of distributed leadership often signal the openness of the boundaries of leadership. While boundary-spanning activities have traditionally been identified as occurring between an organization and its external environment (Thompson, 1967; Schreiber, 1983) or between innovating subsystems and the larger organization (Tushman, 1977), it is argued here that an aspect of distributed leadership involves the cultivation of internal boundary-spanning activity. Naively simple understandings of what

constitutes teachers or principals' work are made problematic in the shift. Moreover, with distributed leadership, decisions about who leads and who follows are dictated by the task or problem situation, not necessarily by where one sits in the hierarchy.

Efforts to engender a shift toward leadership of this kind may create cognitive dissonance for individuals socialized in traditional school bureaucracies. For principals trained in top-down approaches to leading schools, for example, the distribution of leadership is likely to necessitate a relinquishing of some control to enable others to assume new power. As Leithwood (1992, p. 8) notes, in discussing the loss of top-down control, "one cannot do away with this form of power without losing one's share. It is a zero sum game." Further, for those system actors who find themselves in newly created, boundary-spanning positions, this shift involves renegotiation of institutionalized role relationships. Teachers who assume new leadership responsibilities, for example, may feel some ambiguity about being enveloped in school-wide controversies from which they are normally buffered (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992), or end up isolated from or ostracized by colleagues who view them differently as a result of the change (Lieberman, 1988; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

A third aspect of a conceptual definition is that *distributed leadership rests on a base of expert rather than hierarchical authority.* Related to deconstruction of role boundaries is the idea that numerous, distinct, germane perspectives and capabilities can be found in individuals spread throughout the organization. Bennett, et al. (2003) found that conceptions of distributed leadership involve recognizing expertise rather than formal position as the basis of leadership authority in groups. This conception implies a rather different organizational power base than is typically understood inside schools. Instead of primarily centering on the principal, the expert knowledge and skills necessary to exercise leadership for the improvement of teaching and learning resides within the larger professional community, or "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998). Many, rather than few, have a share of responsibility for the shared purpose, a view of leadership requiring the redistribution of power and authority toward those who hold expertise, and not necessarily privileging those with formal titles.

Such a view of leadership has considerable warrant as a basis for instilling organizational change in schools. As Berman & McLaughlin (1978) pointed out in their landmark study, top-down change, even when it is voluntary, routinely breaks down at the point of implementation. Moreover, the history of school reform shows us that strategies for improving teaching and learning fundamentally succeed or fail in the interaction between teachers and students behind the classroom door. Leadership built from expertise broadly exercised in service of consensual goals offers, at least in theory, a more promising chance for instructional innovation to take root in schools than does a "chain of command" approach to implementing change. The work that education professionals accomplish in changing their own, and each others' instructional practice for the better constitutes the most important and powerful leadership action in schools and school systems. Such a view answers the oft-debated question of whether principals need to be outstanding teachers, suggesting that those in formal positions of leadership *are required* to possess rigorous instructional knowledge and skill in order to exercise expert power. Further, the collective and regular exercise of this power across classrooms in a school offers strong evidence of distributed leadership as it is conceived here.

Scholarly work on leadership distribution is not confined strictly to the theoretical realm. Empirical evidence is also surfacing in support of the notion that, within successful school communities, the capacity to lead is not principal-centric by necessity, but rather embedded in various organizational contexts. McLaughlin & Talbert (2001), for example, examined organizational context effects on teacher community, teaching and teachers' careers and found no instances of administrative leaders who created extraordinary contexts for teaching by virtue of their own unique vision; nor did the study reveal any common patterns in strong principals' personal characteristics. Successful principals were men and women with varied professional backgrounds who worked in collaboration with teacher leaders and in respect of teaching culture. They found various ways to support teachers in getting the job done. The leadership of these principals was not superhuman; rather, it grew from a strong and simple commitment to making the school work for their students, and to building teachers' commit-

ment and capacity to pursue this collective goal. Perhaps most importantly, the responsibility for sustaining school improvement was shared among a much broader group of school community members, rather than owned primarily by formal leaders at the top of the organizational chart.

Building Communities of Practice through the Cycle of Inquiry

For distributed leadership as defined above to take root and succeed in schools, at least three important organizational preconditions are implied, all of which require considerable work, and add considerable depth to an understanding of the construct. First, the definition advanced above implies *the development of a culture within the school that embodies collaboration, trust, professional learning, and reciprocal accountability.* Leadership distributed in the manner defined above demands a culture in which people work together in a collaborative, trusting manner; where, as Resnick & Glennan (2001) note, "principals are accountable to teachers in the same way that teachers are accountable to students. . . . (and) where teachers have professional learning opportunities provided and expected in their schools."

Establishing this kind of culture is easier said than done. The distribution of leadership along the lines mentioned above doesn't happen through some waving of a magic wand; rather it must be grown in the organization over time, and probably necessarily instigated by transformational, facilitative individual leaders seeking to build strong, powerful school cultures. What Sarason noted in 1971 still holds true for many schools today: school cultures are complicated and often fractious; principals and teachers are relatively isolated in their positions; and teachers responsible for student learning often have little time to learn new educational ideas. Sarason (1971) stressed that changing a school culture is difficult work and must be done in a comprehensive way if it is to be effective and of lasting significance. Distributed leadership as conceptually defined here requires collaboration, trust, and time and attention to professional learning if it is to take root.

Second, such a view of *distributed leadership implies a need for strong consensus regarding the important problems facing the organization.* Absent a clear notion of what constitutes the important problems for focus, leadership work can become dissipated and undirected. Moreover,

reaching consensus is rarely a straightforward task, and requires processes to help all system actors deeply understand the nature of the problems they face. This can occur only through the collection and analysis of data that routinely sheds light on progress toward the fundamental goals of improving teaching and learning, and in regular professional dialogue about that progress.

Finally, the conceptual definition of *distributed leadership also implies a need for rich expertise with approaches to improving teaching and learning among all those working in the school,* inclusive of role. If distributed leadership is most centrally manifested in the direct interaction between professionals with expert instructional ability and students, this requires all who work with children in any way to engage in the development of the necessary professional knowledge, skills and attitudes to consistently deliver on that promise.

Wenger theorizes that within organizations, as participants engage in the pursuit of shared enterprises, learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of the enterprise, as well as the attendant social relations. Over time, these practices become the property of a kind of community created by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise—a *community of practice* (Wenger, 1998, pg. 45). Wenger's theory encompasses both cognitive and social aspects. The essence of the "Cycle of Inquiry" strategy employed by BASRC can be understood as an effort to embed structures and processes at the level of the school that promote the sustained pursuit of shared enterprise—namely, improving student learning–through work that is at once the province of groups and individuals.

BASRC's design for reform understands that school improvement necessarily requires cultural change and recognizes individual change as a necessary prerequisite to a change in culture. Such an approach is partly analogous, on the one hand, to cognitive theories of organizational learning (Anderson, 1983; Hutchins, 1995) that view learning as created via individuals' processing and transmission of information through communication, explanation, recombination, contrast, inference, and problem-solving (Wenger, 1998). BASRC's approach also suggests that for individual change to collectively add up to cultural change, structures and processes are required to help define and shape the work of the collective on particular areas of identified need. This no-

tion is supported by theories of organizational learning that focus on the ways individuals learn in contexts, and with the ways in which organizations themselves "learn" (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990; Brown, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991). Such theories focus in part on the infusion of organizational systems or structures that promote and grow institutional memory.

The cycle of inquiry intended to help schools pose, investigate, and respond to questions about policies and practices and has six steps (See Figure 1). The first two steps have to do with selecting and narrowing a question for investigation. The next step is to identify measurable goals. This step recognizes that setting specified targets as measures for success is critical in determining the success or failure of an action. The fourth and fifth steps include creating and implementing a particular action—connecting knowing and doing. The sixth step is to collect and analyze results from data generated by the action taken.

Finally, the cycle connects back to the first step as the problem for focus is refined in light of new evidence. Simply put, BASRC's cycle of inquiry strategy aims to inform schools about the degree to which they are actually accomplishing what they think they should be in terms of a focused reform effort and consequences for students. Importantly, in defining and revisiting a focused effort, members of the school community are not just recipients of someone else's vision for what important work is to be done. Rather, they are an integral part of creating this understanding. Theoretically, this process of inquiry gives voice and merit to the views of parents, teachers, youngsters, and administrators in the development, implementation, communication, and evaluation of a focused effort that defines the school's most important work. Taken together, the steps in the cycle can be understood as a structural/systems intervention akin others found in the literature on organizational learning (e.g., Senge, et al., 2000) and rooted in organizational theory.

The BASRC initiative also attends to the learning skills teachers will need in order to carry out a cycle of inquiry. In an effort to foster teachers' capacity and comfort in generating knowledge of practice, teachers receive ongoing professional development in asking questions and understanding problems, in developing accountability frameworks to guide cycles of inquiry, and in constructing standards against which to measure

1 Identify problems and area of academic focus based on data.

2 Refine the Focused Effort.
- Identify gaps in student achievement relative to content standards (A Question)
- Identify causes of those gaps as related to teacher/classroom practice across the entire school (B Question)

3 Identify Measurable Goals for School, Grade Levels, and/or Departments.
- Define student achievement goals in relation to content standards
- Define teacher practice goals for closing the achievement gap identified in the A Question

4 Build a Concrete Workplan Both Schoolwide, and at Grade Levels and/or Departments.
- Develop a timeline
- Develop a workplan including a clear thinking chart, budget, cycle of inquiry map, data and analysis, and record of agreements
- Research and select evidence-based strategies for implementation
- Plan articulation between grade levels, departments and schools
- Build systems to manage implementation (communication, shared leadership, assessment and governance)

5 Take Action.
- Implement evidence-based strategies
- Implement grade level and/or department cycles of inquiry
- Manage communication, shared leadership, assessment and governance systems

6 Reflect on and Analyze Results from the Data.
- Identify which students made how much improvement
- Identify which teachers/teacher practices affected student achievement
- Identify which practices work best for which students
- Dialogue with community stakeholders about work and results
- Use reflection and analysis to make decisions about agreements to guide next steps
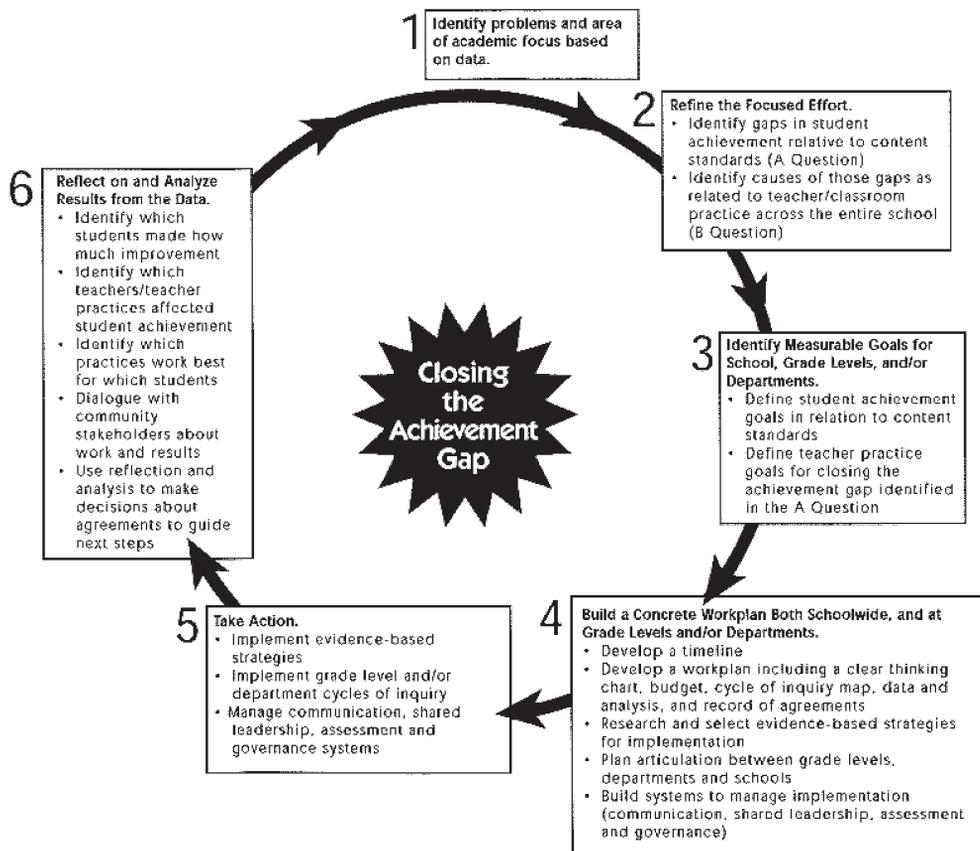
Closing the Achievement Gap

FIGURE 1.   *Cycle of Inquiry (2001): The engine of BASRC's theory of school change.*

their school's progress in their focused reform effort. Furthermore, the initiative provides opportunities for practice and continual attention to these skills, so that they may eventually become a regular part of teachers' professional repertoire.

BASRC's inquiry strategy then, is conceived to promote growth in all three organizational preconditions necessary for *distributed leadership,* as defined earlier, to flourish. BASRC seeks to: (a) promote cultural change; (b) develop consensus and clarity about the problems schools face, and (c) build professionals' instructional expertise to enable them to teach more children more effectively.

This article reports on a longitudinal study of leadership in BASRC schools.

The research has explored several questions to date:

• How is BASRC's inquiry-based theory of action enacted? How do preconditions supporting leadership distribution develop in context, if at all?

• Within schools identified as "leaders" in building leadership capacity, what evidence can be found to suggest leadership distribution is occurring?

• What are leverage points or strategies for promoting and building broadly distributed leadership capacity within a school community?

• What, if anything, happens to leadership functions typically associated with the principal's role within schools intentionally attempting to broaden and share responsibility for leadership? What functions remain crucial to a successful principalship?

• What are the challenges to promoting distributed leadership?

The balance of this article presents a synthesis of the research to date in exploring these questions.

Sample and Method

The research reported here reflects two distinct phases of a larger study of the BASRC initiative.

Phase 1 incorporates findings from a survey of principals conducted across all BASRC Leadership Schools, as well as survey data collected from a sample of Leadership School teachers. Observational data from BASRC-sponsored regional principal gatherings were collected and analyzed, as were various school-level documents related to the reform work. Phase 1 also incorporates qualitative research focused on the use of the BASRC inquiry process in Leadership Schools. In Phase 2, sixteen Leadership Schools were targeted for closer study of leadership issues. Schools within this purposive sample were either recommended by BASRC personnel or identified by members of the research team as potentially rich examples of schools with more advanced reform efforts, as evidenced by their use of inquiry to inform and improve practice. The sample included four high schools, eleven elementary schools, and one K-8 school. With one exception, all schools were members of the first or second BASRC cohorts of Leadership Schools.[1] The schools varied broadly in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity of student population, and school size. The focused research effort within the identified schools involved analysis of a series of interviews conducted with principals and teacher leaders serving in newly created roles as building-level BASRC reform coordinators, and observations conducted by the research team at the school sites.

Enactment of BASRC's Inquiry-Based Theory of Action

First among the research interests was to assess the extent to which elements of BASRC's leadership theory of action as defined above was enacted across the pool of BASRC Leadership Schools. Findings from two different surveys conducted in the spring of 1998, one with BASRC Leadership School principals and the other with teachers in a sample of BASRC schools, provide evidence that shared leadership was emerging across these schools.

Principal Survey Results

A retrospective survey of principals within BASRC Leadership Schools attributed positive changes in the development of teachers' leadership capacity to schools' involvement with BASRC ($N = 63$ principals). Teachers' leadership capacity was defined by a series of measures that assessed principals' perceptions of the extent to which teachers have voice in school decisions related to instructional change and improvement, the extent to which teachers share a consensus about the particular areas in need of change at the school and associated learning outcomes, as well as the extent to which the nature of staff discussions changed to focus on issues of teaching and learning through involvement with BASRC.

The principal survey revealed that 91% of the Leadership School principals agreed or strongly agreed that their school's BASRC involvement was instrumental in changing teacher leadership, while 97% noted agreement that BASRC involvement promoted teachers' consensus on needed areas for whole school change (see Table 1). Ninety-two percent of surveyed principals suggested that the use of data for decision-making had moderately or substantially increased as a result of the school's involvement with BASRC. Sixty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers are engaged in systematic analysis of student performance data. Fully 95% of surveyed principals indicated either agreement or strong agreement that their school's BASRC involvement has promoted staff discussions of teaching and learning, and 71% indicated that BASRC work has promoted teachers' voice in school decision-making.

Leadership School principals also are positive in their assessment of BASRC's role in promoting leadership activity among other stakeholders in the school community. Seventy percent of principals surveyed agree or strongly agree that their school's involvement with BASRC has promoted parent voice in school decisions. Seventy percent also indicate agreement that BASRC involvement has promoted interaction between different stakeholder groups (e. g., classified staff, teachers, parents, community, and district administration).

Teacher Survey Results

Teachers in a sample of 18 diverse BASRC Leadership and Membership Schools[2] responded to survey questions about conditions of leadership in their school, providing additional indicators of leadership capacity in the set of schools for which we have both teachers and principal survey data. The questions focused on the use of the cycle of inquiry, presence of a school-wide vision, broad encouragement of reform work, use of data in making school decisions, and the

TABLE 1

Principal Survey Responses on Development of Leadership Capacity, (N=63)

Question: Indicate your level of agreement that BASRC involvement has changed the following at your school:	Strongly disagree*	Disagree*	Neutral*	Agree*	Strongly agree*
Teachers' voice in school decisions	0	0	29	53	18
Parent voice in school decisions	0	0	30	55	15
Teacher's consensus on desired learning outcomes	0	0	10	53	37
Teacher's consensus on needed areas for whole school change	0	0	3	52	45
Teacher leadership	0	0	9	47	44
Staff discussion of teaching and learning	0	0	5	49	46
Interaction between different stakeholder groups	0	0	30	57	13
	Big Decrease*	Some Decrease*	No Change*	Some Increase*	Big Increase*
Q: How has BASRC involvement changed your school's use of data as basis for decision-making?	0	0	8	50	42

Note. *In percent.

responsiveness of the school as a whole to making changes intended to address student needs.

Teacher responses correlated significantly with responses made by principals to questions of teacher engagement in data analysis and in the general examination of school performance (see Table 2). Teachers' responses about the use of the cycle of inquiry, use of data in decision-making, presence of a shared school-wide vision of re-form, school-wide encouragement of inquiry, and school responsiveness to making changes based on student needs were all strongly positively correlated with principal responses to a question regarding the extent of teachers' regular examination of school performance. Teachers' responses about their level of involvement in data collection, the examination of progress at the school, the school's encouragement of inquiry, and the

TABLE 2

Correlation of Teacher and Principal Responses to Questions of Leadership Capacity

	Principal questions ($N = 63$)	
Teacher questions ($n = 27$)	Are teachers engaged in analysis of student data?	Do teachers regularly examine school performance?
Use of data for decisions?	.26	.54*
Use of cycle of inquiry?	.53*	.63**
School has a vision for reform?	.60**	.60**
School encourages inquiry?	.53**	.60**
Progress is examined?	.60**	.51*
Teachers collect data?	.52*	.62**
School makes changes for student needs?	.57*	.63*

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

presence of a school-wide vision of reform all correlated strongly with principal responses to a question about the level of teachers' engagement in analysis of student data.

Strong corresponding evidence of the development of distributed leadership across BASRC schools surfaced through analysis of qualitative data obtained through interviews and observations on site. Sharing the work of leadership in the context of whole school reform is viewed as a necessity, as illustrated by this comment from an elementary principal:

> Every (staff) person has some form of leadership role because there's not enough time in the world to do all the leadership things that need to be done. So . . . we have grade-level leaders, and during our grade-level meetings, these people take a leadership role in making sure that the agendas are organized and that the work that needs to be done in a grade level is maintained. And then we have content leaders in science, technology, mathematics, as well as literacy and social science. There are many different leadership roles that function across the school. How do they come about? Well, basically, out of need and . . . It's just kind of the culture now. (Principals know) we can't be involved in all the decisions because there's not enough time, so we really have to disaggregate the jobs and kind of fit them where they go.

The Development of Inquiry

Despite this relatively strong agreement among teachers and principals about the efficacy of elements of the BASRC reform, the way that the strategies unfolded varied greatly across the 86 leadership schools. In particular, schools em-braced the Cycle of Inquiry from varying starting points, and they reached differing levels of sophistication in their work at the conclusion of the study. Considerable variation was noted in levels of trust and commitment within teacher communities, and in schools' readiness and experience in working with data. Schools with a reform history, for example those who had participated in an earlier California school reform initiative (SB 1274), had the advantage of building on their prior reform progress and knowledge of whole-school reform practices. They also tended to be farther along in establishing cultural norms, expectations for improving practices school-wide, and connections to resources in the region to support their work.

Across the broader sample of Leadership Schools, an analysis of patterns of inquiry practice that had developed within the schools over time revealed notable differences. Comparing patterns across schools, researchers identified the qualitative differences that distinguish more and less advanced inquiry practice and suggest developmental stages of inquiry-based reform (see Table 3). Importantly, while the categorical descriptions that follow appear static for purposes of differentiating schools by their inquiry practices at a point in time, evidence of schools making progress from one category to another was found over the course of the study. For example, at the end of year two, evaluators reported that many teachers across leadership schools were asking themselves "What's data?"[3] Yet by the end of year four, an analysis of a representative sample of 40 schools' "Review of Progress" documents, which summarized their progress to that point, indicated that three fourths of schools were engaged in disaggregating student achievement data to examine

TABLE 3
School Stages of Inquiry

Stage	Defining characteristic
Novice	• Learning the value of data and learning, and struggling with, how to use data • Experimenting with the inquiry process and becoming comfortable with procedures • Valuing and using data; trying to seek out the best data; sometimes struggling with how to do so
Intermediate	• Inquiry process shifts closer to teaching and learning; may require changing directions to get close to core concerns of the school; "competency traps" possible if school become complacent • Managing data is no longer a struggle but instead the norm for making decisions
Advanced	• The inquiry process is an accepted, iterative process involving the whole school and connected to the classroom level • Actively pursuing sustainability of the reform

Note. Drawn from BASRC Evaluation, Phase 1, Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, Stanford University.

racial/ethnic disparities in student achievement.[4] At the end of Year 4, 37 of 86 Leadership schools (43%) demonstrated to peer reviewers that they were consistently using multiple cycles of inquiry at several levels–classrooms, departments, grade levels, and school-wide–to examine school and classroom practices.[5] Moreover, central to qualitative differences across the Leadership schools was whether individual schools developed consensus around a focused problem or problems that guided their efforts, made use of multiple sources of data, created systems for conducting inquiry, and developed ways to sustain their work.

Novice

Leadership Schools in the novice range struggled to develop problem statements specific enough to articulate the school's concerns and had difficulty aligning BASRC expectations to their own needs. Their hesitancy and desire to "do it right" expended a great deal of energy while not accomplishing much. As a reform coordinator in one elementary school explained, "The questions that we were trying to form . . . really just were not helpful. We were getting caught on things like, '[BASRC says that] one question is supposed to be about school structures and this one's supposed to be about students.' " In another elementary still in the novice range of inquiry development, the principal explained, "We were always inquiring, but we're inquiring perhaps not in as systematic a way as we could with every person in the school being a part of the inquiry." Another principal acknowledged, "Just having the (inquiry) process is not enough . . . What I see that doesn't happen here is the deep level of analysis that results in change. What's the good of having analysis if it doesn't then drive some decision making?"

Teachers in novice-range schools remained daunted by the process of collecting and analyzing data and did not trust that their data collection efforts would be useful to inform their practice. Often schools did not have the information they wanted about student performance or school climate, or needed to develop systems for gathering data, including developing school-wide assessments and surveys. Once they were collected, the sheer amount of data often overwhelmed novice schools. One reform leader explained, "I have suitcases of data—literally. That's how I move it from meeting to meeting." School peo-

ple often did not know how to move from collecting data to using data as evidence to examine teacher practice. One reason that these schools sometimes were paralyzed by data was that teachers were anxious about what the data might show. The data could reveal that a school was sliding backwards rather than moving forwards. It could show that one teacher's class was not progressing as quickly as others. Engaging in such risky work required trust within the teacher community.

Intermediate

In contrast, schools in the intermediate range were able to develop a level of comfort with work through the Cycle of Inquiry and were buoyed by small improvements they connected with their inquiry-based reform. These positive indicators of reform progress served to increase teachers' commitment to their focused effort, and developed confidence in their ability to engage in inquiry practices. Teachers in these schools began to understand how data analysis could potentially improve their practice, and data increasingly became a resource for staff discussions about student achievement and evidence. Reflecting on the potential benefits of using data, one high school teacher in an intermediate-range school said: "Data in and of itself isn't useful. It's what you do with it. Before, we had data. Probably we could have guessed that a lot of those things were the case. But once you formalize it, that implies that you have to do something."

As schools became more sophisticated in their cycles of inquiry, qualitative data were incorporated to balance data from the SAT-9 test, California's standardized assessment, which teachers found increasingly inadequate for measuring student learning or minutely diagnosing student needs around their focused efforts. One high school teacher explained, "I would like to see the school move toward qualitative data . . . [to] provide some in-depth understanding of who our students are." Despite recognizing its potential usefulness, intermediate schools struggled with how to analyze such data in a rigorous manner. As a result, qualitative data were seen as less valid or merely "anecdotal" when compared with other data sources. One high school teacher worried:

> I think a lot of the data tends to be anecdotal . . . but I think in a situation like this a lot of it has to be. Teachers know what feels right and what's working in their classrooms and what is

making their jobs more fulfilling and what is helping their students move forward . . . And I don't know how to collect hard data on that.

Some schools at this stage tended to rush toward a solution without first understanding the nature of their students' academic gaps, particularly when facing external pressures to improve performance or insufficient time to carefully reflect through their inquiry cycles. Rather than using data to develop strategies collaboratively, these schools tended to slip back into the more common reform process of choosing a strategy without first defining their problem. High staff turnover caused learning communities to lose their inquiry focus and return to old habits. For example, a high school administrator in a school experiencing high teacher turnover (30% in one year), commented that some teacher inquiry groups at his school were choosing a strategy before defining a problem. Administrators and reform coordinator realized that they needed to re-train their staff about the inquiry process to reorient the school towards identifying student needs first before changing and refining their instruction.

In some cases, intermediate-range schools failed to advance further on inquiry practices because initial successes they experienced led to "competency traps" (Levitt & March, 1988). In these cases, schools became complacent with the work they were accomplishing and were not compelled to deepen their inquiry and make stronger connections between inquiry practices and teaching and learning. Such schools came to believe they could "do" the Cycle of Inquiry for discrete purposes, conceptualizing the process as a concrete, short-term utilization of a BASRC tool rather than as an ongoing, more fundamental change in the way the school functioned.

Advanced

In more advanced schools, staff successfully moved beyond a focus on how to "do" inquiry toward an emphasis on the content of their inquiry cycles. One reform leader explained the change in focus,

> There's a very fundamental difference in where we were at the beginning of last year. We were very much like, 'Oh, no! What's our Question A? What's our Question B?' And now we're really starting to talk much more about teacher practice and really just trying not to get caught up in the terminology of Question A and B and

what that's supposed to be all about. But that was a really long process.

More advanced schools understood their inquiry processes as fundamental to determining how to help students achieve and the kinds of resources they would need to continue to achieve their goals. Teachers in schools at the advanced range became more demanding consumers of support as they carefully considered the resources they needed beyond school walls. Moreover, teacher communities in advanced schools created knowledge within the school site, becoming more reliant on their own professional community as the source for generating new practices and inventing ideas for reform. External resources were still employed in professional development activities, but for specific technical issues, such as training on a specific instructional technique that filled a need identified through the school's inquiry practices.

At schools in the advanced range of inquiry, teacher communities engaged multiple-level inquiry cycles that were mutually enforcing and explicitly addressed connections and gaps across the school system, classroom practice, and student outcomes. At one advanced school, for example, staff development days focused on examining which students were not meeting grade-level benchmarks in literacy and identifying systems and structures that supported or impeded teachers' ability to conduct classroom-level cycles of inquiry. At the classroom level, teachers targeted a small group of students to identify effective teaching strategies that impacted student performance on the school's literacy performance standards. By connecting this classroom Cycle of Inquiry back to the whole-school Cycle of Inquiry, teachers shared practices that were accomplishing results for students among the entire school community and refined school-wide structures to better support teachers' classroom practice.

Importantly, inquiry processes conducted at the level of the whole school add meaning to classroom-based inquiry. One more advanced school experienced with action research prior to involvement with BASRC quickly saw how this classroom-based research needed to be situated in school-level inquiry if it were to add up to coherent knowledge for school decision making. The principal points directly to the strategic relationship between these two forms of evidence:

Whatever's happening in the classroom that a teacher is doing in terms of action research . . . has to be linked to overall school goals. Because one of the dangers of doing action research is you can have a whole bunch of teachers doing that kind of work and it will look classroom-by-classroom real specific. However, if they don't have any relationship to each other and there's no relationship to overall school goals, the value of it will have very different kinds of results. And also what we find is that for action research you need some people to be involved in some common problem-solving issues [part of the cycle of inquiry]. If there's no one doing something in common, there's nobody to help you debrief and talk deeply about what you might be doing.

As schools' experiences with inquiry reveals, cultural change takes time and continual effort. Novice-range schools tended to stagnate and implement routines that satisfied BASRC requirements. These schools followed the six-step Cycle of Inquiry, often without implicating classroom practice at all. Sometimes hesitant to break norms of teacher isolation and hierarchical leadership, novice-range schools treated completion of a cycle as a compliance exercise. Yet, in schools that progressed to the intermediate range or beyond, teachers grew to collectively value the principles of inquiry. They learned to exploit the cycle's potential to exert their collective leadership in dealing with challenging problems within their schools, as one teacher described:

Just from the point of comparison, in past experiences when teachers got together and talked . . . they talked about problems. They were very reactive, addressing problems after they've happened in the school. And [now with] these groups, they're proactive. We're trying to make things happen as opposed to addressing something after it's happened.

The transition from inquiry as procedure to inquiry as stance signals a cultural shift, from teachers simply "going through the motions" of another reform project, to a realization of their own collective power to improving teaching and learning in the school.

In more advanced schools, the Cycle of Inquiry process matured into an accepted, iterative process of data collection, analysis, reflection, and change. More advanced schools appear to be well along the path toward functioning as learning communities, recultured in the way BASRC's theory of change envisioned, and themselves constitute teachers' essential site and source of learning. The whole school is both the site of inquiry and the focus for change; efforts to improve teaching and learning involve most of the faculty, not just a smaller group of reformers. Discourse about students' standards-based achievement and expectations about evidence are commonplace rather than exceptional. Leadership for change comes from within the school, growing out of the inquiry process. Teachers' new knowledge about how students do across groups and across grades appears to enable them to see ways in which they need to improve, and the kinds of resources they need to begin making those improvements. Teachers in such schools demonstrate increasing clarity and specificity in terms of what their school needs by way of knowledge resources from the outside, and in what form they should be provided. Knowledge of their practice appears to have made them more powerful as consumers.

Leadership Leverage Points, Strategies and The Principal's Role

In-depth study of 16 Leadership Schools reveals more about the question of how schools made progress toward the cultural shifts signaled above, and highlights leverage points and strategies that emerged within schools. While not representative of the entire collection of Leadership schools, this field-based phase of the study provided an opportunity to delve deeper into the inner workings of reform within schools identified as "leaders" within the larger group of 86 Leadership Schools. With regard to their use of inquiry, all sixteen schools were recognized as either intermediate or advanced on the rubric noted in Table 3. Within these schools, the Cycle became a critical component to developing vision, giving credence to shared leadership structures, and constructing a culture of data that de-centers visioning, planning, decision-making, and accountability away from individuals in traditional leadership roles (e.g., school administrators) and seeks to involve and incorporate the broader school community (e.g., teachers, parents, and at the secondary level, students). The use of an inquiry-based approach builds a common vocabulary, enables articulation of the one or two key issues that the school aims to address, and is a key vehicle for building distributed leadership

for improving teaching and learning. Fundamentally, the second phase of the study wondered about how these schools came to be this way.

Not surprisingly, findings suggest, first, that formal leaders (principals and teacher leaders serving in the newly created role of reform coordinator) often provide the catalyst for change early in a school's reform work. Second, new leadership structures have emerged in these reforming schools to promote broader involvement in the work of reform, and the structures are most secure in schools with a long reform history. Finally, as schools advanced in the reform, the principal's role necessarily changes in key ways to enable the reform efforts to deepen and grow.

Leaders in Formal Roles Provide a Catalyst for Change Early in Reform Work

Intentional formal leadership, vested in the role of the principal and/or BASRC reform coordinator, initially puts reform on the school's agenda so it cannot be ignored. As suggested earlier, distributed leadership cannot be created out of thin air. Persons in formal leadership roles are highly important in this sense, providing a catalyst for the work early on, and serving notice that the reform effort and associated changes in professionals' work at the school is not merely another change fad that will quickly pass. For example, one principal from the sample noted:

> There's no substitute for the principal of a school showing that this is what matters . . . I think in the absence of that, people just kind of tend to brush it off as one more thing on their too-full plate.

Of crucial importance within most of the sampled schools is the presence of the reform coordinator. In virtually all cases, BASRC Leadership Schools used a portion of grant funds to hire a coordinator whose primary responsibility focuses on the reform effort. This person is most often a classroom teacher freed from teaching responsibilities, and in fewer cases a classified employee or hired member of the community (a parent, for example), who oversees the reform work, and acts as a liaison with BASRC. Schools decide how to use this resource; some reform coordinators function in the role full-time, while others have teaching or administrative responsibilities assigned as part of their workday. Early on in the process, the work of reform often brings a huge new workload, and without the reform coordinator to handle this extra

work, much of it would logically fall on the shoulders of the principal, a role already overtaxed in most schools.

However, negotiating this new role creates a set of challenges for the persons who occupy it. For example, one reform coordinator illustrates the difficulty of figuring out her place in the organization that as yet lacked structures and supports for sharing leadership:

> The change process can be a very painful thing. I think in my first year of doing (the job of reform coordinator) there were a lot of growing pains of figuring out how to take the negative feedback about all the work, and all the time, and to figure out my role in it . . . being both a teacher and then in this other role that is seen I think, at times, as quasi-administrative. So, walking that line is definitely a challenge.

This comment highlights some of the inherent difficulties that emerged for teachers assuming the new role of reform coordinator—negotiating the boundaries for their authority, and the potential disruptions this creates in the previous leadership structure at the school.

New Leadership Structures Emerge to Support Reform

Across the sample of Leadership Schools studied in depth, several new leadership structures have developed or have been reinforced through BASRC work. Examples include organizational schemes featuring: a rotating lead teacher instead of a principal; two co-principals; principal/reform coordinator partnerships; and, inter-school leadership structures and strategies. Findings suggest that these new leadership structures are linked with developing school culture that supports inquiry-based change.

Rotating Lead Teacher

One new structure examined in this research is the rotating lead teacher. The lead teacher assumes most leadership functions typically associated with the principalship, but stays in the position only for a predetermined term. In a K-8 school included in the sample, the lead teacher holds this formal position for a period of up to three years, and then rotates back into a faculty teaching position, while another member of the faculty steps in to assume the role of "leader." Sharing service in a formal role enables many teachers on the faculty

to develop a system view of the school, including the interface of the school's change efforts with the district, and sustaining the school's valued, shared, ongoing work of reform. Such an arrangement builds capacity within the faculty, and works in favor of sustaining reform. A teacher who formerly served in the role of lead teacher spoke about the perceived merits of this leadership structure at the school:

> Usually (the lead) teachers come up through the leadership organization in the school. People have already recognized that person as a leader and as a person who knows the direction of the school, has some wisdom, and we have confidence in. And, beyond that, is a leader in the school. Almost always that person has been part of the leadership team for three years or more, and so has taken part in professional development, and we've already called on their expertise. So I think they go in first as being valued from the staff as a leader.

Co-principals

Another novel leadership structure features two co-principals. In a similar manner to what Court (1998) describes, the co-principals spread the responsibility for leadership functions across two individuals rather than centering all the work on one person's shoulders. This structure appears to allow the formal leaders greater flexibility in focusing and coordinating their available time, together with other personnel resources in the school, on the work of reform. Two co-principals, Sam and Sally, discuss leadership at their school this way:

> Sally: Sam and I really share the principalship in that we're both experienced principals, so either one of us can do anything here at the school, it's just a matter of what comes up on the calendar. We've divided up the (supervision of) new teachers, and grade levels. We both deal with discipline, we both (work with) school site council. In terms of professional development, we both work with the leadership team. We have a reform coordinator that is a classified (non-certificated) position, and (that person) coordinates all our reports and all our technical kinds of things. (The reform coordinator) makes all the contacts and does all the nitty-gritty stuff. We just do head stuff.
>
> Sam: We have a leadership team that is representative across the grade levels. All of the conversations (around) planning, (about) work on

the (BASRC) review of progress, happen with those people on release days, working with us. In addition, we have different inquiry studies happening throughout the school with groups of teachers all focusing on literacy and reading, each with different questions related to our data and things we want to find out.

Reform Coordinator

Sally and Sam's exchange also highlights the crucial importance of principal-reform coordinator partnerships, which are among the most common new leadership structures in BASRC Leadership Schools. As noted earlier, enriched funding provided schools with the opportunity to hire reform-coordinators who function in support of reform work, providing leadership through oversight, planning, organization, and hands on work with teachers in classrooms focused on goals for school-wide change. In the best of cases, these reform-coordinators function in concert with the building principal, bearing the brunt of much of the "grunt work" inherent in school reform, while also playing a key role in supporting and sustaining the work.

Design Studio

Some emerging inter-school leadership structures and strategies for promoting the development of professional community within, and between, schools are evident in the data. One particularly interesting strategy, called the "design studio," is a process whereby a host school immersed in the development of some best practice, or set of practices, invites other schools to visit, and opens its work up for scrutiny and sharing. Visiting schools use their visit as an opportunity to learn and design for their own school based on what they observe, and to ask questions of those at the hosting site. A high school reform coordinator in a school employing the design studio concept expresses the benefits of this leadership structure:

> The key principle that most (visiting) people keep leaving with is that school is a professional community. The Design Studio really models what it's like to be a professional learning community; people get a sense of what it's like to be part of one right in a school. (The Design Studio) is facilitated by teachers, not by administrators and principals. They're part of it, but they're not the main show. And it's apparent there's a lot of ownership in the school

(among) the people who work there. Design studio says, "There are some things we're really proud of, we want to show you, we think it can be helpful for you. (And) there are also lots of things we're working on, you can help us think through too."

Findings suggest that broad-based leadership structures are linked with a school culture that supports reform work. To illustrate, one school emphasizes that constantly getting new people involved in leadership roles and attending conferences has helped them to gain a shared feeling that the reform work is "integral" to everything they do. One principal expressed that she felt those norms had developed in her school:

> What we've created in the work is the kind of passion for the work that pushes people rather than the (teacher union) contract pushing the work . . . And so because that's systemically there, they're going to think differently about how they lead, how they teach, what responsibilities they're willing to take.

Reform Experience Builds Distributed Leadership Within the School Community

Schools exhibiting the deepest and broadest leadership distribution generally had sustained histories of reform work, in many cases predating their involvement with BASRC. These also tend to be schools that are engaged in multiple reform agendas in addition to their participation in BASRC. In these schools, the distribution of leadership involves increasing participation of new faces who tackle new functions, and work from different vantage points in the school.

In schools with longer reform trajectories, individual classroom teachers assume greater leadership for reform by communicating the school's focused effort routinely and directly to parents. As the most trusted professional in the school from the parents' perspective, the classroom teacher operates from a unique vantage point in terms of the ability to communicate school-wide goals to parents, and to translate those goals into meaningful language connected to classroom work done by students. These conversations occur in a variety of formats which range from individual one-on-one discussions between teachers and parents, to a series of public accountability events required as part of BASRC membership, where evidence about student achievement is presented to the parent community. Regarding this process, one teacher said:

> The accountability events have really been fabulous for us. I mean, I think we've had four of them now, and each one has been really insightful. And I think parents have truly enjoyed and learned a lot (from these events). We've shared the hard data with them. We've shown them we're doing a great job for some kids and not for others . . . we're not doing as well for narrowing the gap for our African-American kids and Latino students, and we've been very clear about it and asking (parents) how they think they can help, both for their own students and then for other students.

An elementary principal in a school with a lengthy reform history articulated the key leadership role played by classroom teachers this way:

> It all comes back to the fact that teachers have such a commitment to developing relationships with their (students') parents. There's a lot of trust. And we also do a pretty good job about letting people know what we don't know, too through our conversations. Again, what happens, is . . . its not what the SCHOOL says or does . . . the power is in the relationship between the teacher and the parent. And if the teachers are on board and really understand, then that is communicated in every drop and drip of conversation.

Many BASRC schools have leadership teams in place that include administrators, teachers, classified staff members, parents and, in some cases, at the secondary level, students. Early on in reform efforts, teams typically function as sounding boards for the principal, but evidence suggests that this conception changes with extended time and effort. To illustrate, in one school within the sample of sixteen, the leadership team has become a group primarily concerned with framing problems, and delegating problem solving to other groups within the school:

> The leadership team has changed now to be instead of a problem-solving team, it's more of a team that sorts issues and . . . helps expedite what's the best way to deal with an issue.

In another school, the reform coordinator shared how a systems approach to accountability has helped keep their focused effort in view, saying,

> (The work will) sustain as long as there's this sort of system in place; that there's a leadership

team that's interested in all the committees, creating goals, reflecting on those goals, and always asking themselves at a broader level, "Is this committee's work tied to our focused effort?"

In schools with greater longevity in the work of reform, evidence exists of principals and teachers sharing a support function—encouraging, nourishing, bolstering and reminding others within the school community of the shared vision and values that serve as motivation for the work of reform. In these schools the provision of support and encouragement takes place beyond formal role-bound rituals (e.g., typical supervision and evaluation processes); day-to-day work is imbued with a spirit of support and encouragement of progress that is shared broadly within the professional community. One principal commented on the relational benefits of engaging in reform work:

> I think the biggest benefit is in the area of relationships. Relational situations tend to make your work either good or bad. Bottom line. And I think that for my staff as well as myself, the relationships that we have developed have been nothing but beneficial.

The Principal's Role

In distributing leadership functions, the role of the principal necessarily changes, and yet remains crucially important in the work of reform. Several strong themes emerged from the data in this regard. Principals who have been successful in promoting shared leadership perform key functions that protect the vision for the school's reform work, and in some cases, act as a buffer between district and school. In addition, principals in schools where shared leadership has taken hold appear to exert less role-based authority, opting instead to engage in framing questions and problems, and provide space and support for inquiry to occur. For many principals this involves a process of renegotiating their "old" authority, and allowing others to step forward to handle important leadership duties. This is not to suggest that principals in successfully reforming schools instantaneously let go of large chunks of responsibility, and that others magically step in to fill the void. Rather, the expansion and sharing of leadership develops within reforming schools where principals view teaching colleagues as professional equals, and intentionally and steadily seek to include others in the work of change.

Principals Perform Key Personnel Functions That Protect the Vision for Reform

Principals have the authority to hire and fire staff to protect the vision of a core group for broadening and deepening leadership without an "anti-reform" group becoming a barrier. They also play a necessary role as a buffer between district and school, protecting the work initiated at the school site, particularly in cases where the work conflicts with other priorities. One elementary principal within the sample of 16 illustrated:

> We have had some teachers join our staff who didn't share our vision after the fact. And I'm telling you the staffing is what makes or breaks anything. So we had some rigmarole around personnel and I have dismissed (teachers), or people would say coerced . . . talked into leaving. Other people are asked to leave.

A high school principal pointed to his responsibility for personnel, and specifically, for hiring the right people, as a tremendously important contribution to sustaining the effort:

> I think that my biggest contributions are the people that we've brought in the last two years. Because those are the people that really stir it up in a positive way—because there are people who stir it up negatively—but they stir it up **positively.** And so I think that as they empower themselves it's going to continue to be a positive force.

Principals Frame Questions and Support Inquiry

Principals in the 16 sampled schools appear to be moving away from leadership that rests on formal role authority in the district hierarchy, to practice that is more aptly reframed as leadership of inquiry. Principals who are successful in broadening leadership typically are not those who exercise authority by telling others what to do. Rather, these principals are engaged in asking questions, exploring data, and engaging faculty and the broader community in questions that can move the school forward. Moreover, they create ongoing, regular time and space for this to occur. In some cases, this means principals have to be willing to let go of leadership functions traditionally associated with the role. To illustrate, one elementary principal noted that the leadership team at the school:

> . . . Organized and completed the Review of Progress (ROP) process virtually without (the

principal's) participation" and went on to extol the shared commitment to the process exhibited by her staff.

In another elementary school, the principal created a daily one and one half hour block of time specifically devoted to staff development through inquiry, processes primarily organized and carried out by teachers.

Where the principal relinquishes control, teachers move beyond typical advisory roles by necessity. To illustrate, in one high school, an ad hoc team of teachers has come together to prepare a schedule of presentations of best practices by teachers and staff for their colleagues. In a middle school, teachers are leading the community selection process of their next principal. And, in another high school, department heads are leading the way in curriculum, working to change their own practices as a group and their ability to articulate what their goals are and why they are important before dialoguing with the rest of their staff.

However, in some cases, turnover in key positions has pushed some teachers into unfamiliar roles. One teacher shared her experience of, "trying to help the people we're working with, but at the same time we don't have all the answers." We see an apparent paradigm shift that accompanies teachers hearing their own voice within reform work. This shift moves from the traditional view that it is not the teacher's role to get the big picture, placing the responsibility for crafting and sustaining a vision with the administration, to a norm where teachers are expected to be leaders, and work through their own cycles of inquiry within the classroom to inform the broader whole school cycle. Data suggest that this is not an easy shift to make while engaged in the work. Some schools still point to their site administrators as the key persons "in charge of" reform and call upon them to "lead the effort."

Reframing the Principalship Doesn't Mean "Letting Go" of Everything

This research effort does not lead to the conclusion that the principal's role is doomed to extinction at any point in the near future. On the contrary, many of the key functions outlined in literature and played out in practice still are part of what the principal must accomplish, even in a system where leadership is shared more broadly. Within the sample of sixteen Leadership Schools, principals continue to play prominent roles as cat-

alysts for change, protectors of vision, and leaders of inquiry. These elements specifically relate back to functions of leadership embedded in conceptions of principal as instructional leader, participative leader, and transformational leader noted earlier. Yet the process of engendering shared leadership does require principals to let go in new and important ways. One principal, who joined a reforming high school quite far along in its work, put it this way:

> The planning team here is a strong leadership group compared to what I was used to in other schools. I mean, I'm used to having strong leaders, but usually it's not a cadre, it's not a large group. It may be isolated individuals working within their own area, but I think this is schoolwide. (That affects the principal's leadership role in that) you have to give up ego and power and any illusion that you can say anything about anything. And that's okay.

Important as well, is the notion that principal leadership can and should change over time. Through this work, the nature of a principal's leadership can be understood as much more situational or context dependent than a static definition will allow. For schools well along in developing a culture that supports shared leadership, such as those included in the sample of sixteen, principals can become one important member of a "community of leaders" as Barth (1990) suggests. In such a situation, the rest of the community would in all likelihood, not tolerate a principal attempting to exercise an authoritarian style of leadership; a principal persisting in this manner would ruin the work of reform. However, for schools at the beginning of an improvement journey, principals may need to be much more active in catalyzing the work, establishing the vision, and developing strategies for building leadership capacity within others.

Challenges to Distributing Leadership for Instructional Improvement

This research provides evidence that BASRC has helped to develop leadership capacity within its funded schools and documents how this capacity develops within schools. The in-depth case studies also highlight challenges that remain for schools engaged in this reform effort. These challenges include recognizing that structural change alone is not sufficient to broaden leadership, and that structures require people with skills to carry out the work. Thus, while thoughtful preparation

for turnover in key leadership positions is crucial to the sustainability of school reform leadership, this occurred in only a limited number of the schools we studied in depth. Further, external stresses create barriers to the development of broader leadership. All schools sit within broader district and state contexts that often created demands for change which competed for attention with the BASRC effort. Finally, sustaining the reform through key formal leadership transitions requires planning, and poses a threat to the reform, particularly in early stages.

Structural Changes Alone are Not Enough to Distribute Leadership

Creating new structures to support changes at school can provide a means for building leadership capacity, but the ability to keep key people in those structures is equally important. Turnover of key leaders, both principals and teachers, make sustainability difficult, and preparation for leadership turnover receives limited attention. Of all the challenges involved in reform work, schools point to leadership turnover as the most disabling factor in the support and encouragement of reform. One reform coordinator we spoke with talked about the tension of being handed different functions by the new principal. She noted, "We're not sustainable, we have (had) 4 new principals. I used to (handle) curriculum instruction, (and) I'm not ready to hand this off yet." When some teachers or administrators are asked what would happen if key leaders left the school, they react with worry that reform as it now exists will not continue. In one example, when a principal was asked what would happen if he and the reform coordinator left, he said:

> We have a couple (teachers) who would try to keep it going, but there would not be a big push, and then it would stop . . . But my honest thing is if (the reform coordinator) and I did not come back on January 3, by March if you came in you probably wouldn't know what the focused effort was. It would be . . . If you asked them, "Well, we used to do that when they were here."

Teachers Face Competing Reform Demands

The weight and breadth of whole school reform can be considerable, and one middle school teacher described the move by teachers to focus inward as "paring back" and "pruning." An elementary school reform coordinator noted that a multitude of new initiatives in the school, added on top of the BASRC effort, were a major contextual challenge:

> We had class size reduction, we had new standards, we had the SAT-9, we had the API (Academic Performance Index) and it has just turned up the heat . . . managing the feelings of stress and overwhelmed-ness that teachers' experience I think is one of the biggest challenges of this work. . . . It is hard for teachers to hold onto their successes and so we are working hard this year to make it more explicit and visible to teachers that our data is showing a trend towards improving student performance. But it is hard for teachers to hold on to that because they are in the trenches thinking about "What am I going to teach tomorrow?" (In addition) the state took away our staff development days and so you are dealing with "Learn more and learn it faster— with no time." That leads to a real sense of crush for people, I think.

With so many competing interests and stresses, many teachers and schools shift their attention to address anxieties they can resolve. To illustrate, in one year round school, reflection and the tracking of progress are challenged by irregular breaks. A teacher noted,

> It's this anxiety about 'Are we moving fast enough'? Are we doing things fast enough? So having so much time between meetings when we can dialogue as a staff and actually do those group decision-making activities is a frustration to me.

Many teachers' attention remains focused largely on their work within the classroom as they seek to understand their particular role within reform before engaging in inquiry around the broader focused efforts at their sites.

Sustainability and Preparation for Formal Leadership Transitions

Reforming schools faced the challenge of sustaining the culture changes that support inquiry particularly as the first phase of the reform effort drew to a close. Becoming *sustainable* meant schools needed to find ways to embed their reform work, and especially their inquiry process, into the culture of the school. An elementary principal explained:

> The key word is 'embedded.' It's how we will do business. It's not a matter of it being done to us. It's who we are and what we do.

Key leadership transition or turnover creates a challenge to sustainability for schools engaged in reform work. However, schools in which personnel have a shared vision work to sustain the reform by preparing for the transition, and hiring people into leadership positions who share that vision. In one school, the leadership team, in conjunction with several teacher-led teams focused on particular issues, led the selection process of their new principal. They were careful to ensure that the applicant's vision matched their own, and as a result, their work continued forward. A principal, new to a high school entering its third year of reform, pointed out the importance of staff involvement in the selection process:

> I think the interview process probably was very helpful in ensuring they (the staff) had a candidate . . . they had selected someone who matched the school. And so I think already there was an awareness on my part and the staff's part that I was in alignment with what the school was doing. And I know there was concern about "Who are we going to get? And what if they're not on board?" I think the staff did a very good job of that, and I was aware that (the reform effort) was a big issue.

It should be noted, however, that an understanding of the importance of preparing for leadership transition appears to remain more the exception than the rule within the identified schools. Attention to this issue endures as a key challenge for schools attempting to sustain the work of reform.

Conclusion

Findings from this study of San Francisco Bay Area schools engaged in reform provide evidence of the efficacy of a policy strategy rooted in a new understanding of school leadership. Key within that understanding is the notion that the distribution and sharing of leadership, built through shared inquiry into improving student learning, provides a policy direction for moving beyond narrow role-based strategies that have defined school leadership for decades. BASRC Leadership Schools' experiences suggest that the distribution of leadership functions across a school, given adequate time and personnel to handle the tasks, can provide the capacity, coherence and ownership necessary to sustain and deepen reforms. Perhaps most significantly, this research provides initial evidence of the power of inquiry as the engine to enable the distribution of leadership, and the glue that binds a school community together in common work. Given that role-based leadership strategies have been essentially unable to meet the complex challenges associated with school change, this research calls for a new look across all roles within school systems with a mission to distribute and sustain the functions of leadership within the broader school community.

Notes

[1] Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 schools were funded between Spring 1996 and Spring 1997.

[2] Teacher survey included a total of twenty-seven teachers from within the eighteen schools.

[3] Center for Research on the Context of Teaching. (1998). *Year two: Assessing results.* Evaluation Report. Stanford, CA: Author.

[4] Center for Research on the Context of Teaching. (2000). *Year four: Assessing results.* Evaluation Report. Stanford, CA: Author.

[5] Ibid, p. 17.

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