A Literature Review on Using Distributed Leadership to Foster Systemic Change in a Schoolwide Reading Initiatives

Jason Sutton

George Mason University

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There has been a sustained effort to restructure public education. This restructure, also called whole-school reform, is intended to transform school structures and practices to promote student learning and instruction (Brooks, Scribner, & Eferakorho, 2004). In this era of reform, schools are being required to consistently support evidence-based practices and initiatives to foster student academic success (Fullan, 2007). This cannot be more evident in public education with our continued effort to promote reading initiatives in school. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2015) notes that 31% of 4th graders, 67% students with disabilities (SWD), perform at the lowest, below basic, level of reading achievement. One group in particularly, who struggle with reading and instructional practices are students with learning disabilities (LD).

With the focus on implementing reading initiatives that support students with LD, schools should reform their practices to understand what practices are effective for students with LD (Lunenburg, 2010). Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, Al Otaiba, Yen, Yang, and O'Connor (2002) say the 50% of SWD show inadequate response to reading interventions. These inadequacies have led to a reform that has led us into an adoption phase that is grounded in a strong knowledge base of evidence-based practices (EBPs) (Cook & Odom, 2013). These EBPS are a direct result of the fusion of research and practice. The intentions of these practices and initiatives is to enhance teaching and learning for all students (Slavin, 2002). EBPs have become increasing discussed, with implementation practices, for with students with LD and reading. Who is responsible to support these changes has been given to the building school administrators. This imperative responsibility by school leaders needs them to have the skills to initiate techniques to develop student success.

In school structure reform, there has been a restructuring of public education to empower the building school administrators called site-based management. Site-based management is when the school districts release centralized aspects of school management to principals (Hess, 2005). This release gives the school administrators the authority/responsibility to lead schoolwide initiatives within their building to support student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). This also requires school administrators to have the capacity to address their school cultural and foster systemic change in their building. With the various roles and autonomy school administrator encompasses, they may find it difficult to balance a multitude of tasks to promote schoolwide student achievement. The school administrator may lack (a) an awareness of the gap between research to practice to effectively led schoolwide initiatives, (b) a clear understanding of students with LD and the need for systemic change to implement EBPs, and, (c) a school leader’s individual roles in supporting a schoolwide reading initiative and core skills needed to implement.

**Gap Between Research and Practice**

Questions concerning the gap between educational research and practice have been

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(Gather-Thurler, 1993; Huberman, 1993; Wagner, 1997; Mortimore, 2000;

Depaepe, 2002; Gore & Gitlin, 2004; Levin, 2004; McIntyre, 2005; Whitty, 2006;

Chafouleas & Riley-Tillman, 2005; Bauer & Fisher, 2007; Broekkamp & Van

Hout-Wolters, 2007). These debates have a long history in many western countries

(Lagemann, 2000; Levin 2004; Oancea, 2005; Stark & Mandl, 2007) and are

dominated by monocausal analyses (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007).

One argument suggests that this gap reflects two sharply contrasting types of knowl-

edge. On the one hand, we have research-based knowledge that is published in scientific

journals. On the other hand, we have pedagogical knowledge which is used by classroom

teachers in their day-to-day teaching (McIntyre, 2005). Bates (2002) argues that tension

exists between researchers and practitioners, as the practitioner asks for new solutions

to operational problems while the researcher seeks new knowledge.

Traditionally, researchers have published their findings in academic venues and it was left to individuals to discover the findings and make sense of the research. This has led to concerns by creating a gap between educational researcher’s findings and those findings being implemented by practitioners in the field (Biesta,2007). For example, there is a constant flow of research- based knowledge being published in scientific journals. At the same time, practitioners have a need for pedagogical knowledge that they can use directly in their classroom on day-to-day instruction (Bauer & Fisher, 2007). This gap can also be explained in a sequence. First, you have researchers publishing knowledge, while practitioners are looking for practices they can implement at once in their classroom. This can cause tension between the two camps because researchers are seeking out new knowledge while practitioners are asking for other solutions for problems that are occurring in their everyday teaching (Bates, 2002). Next, is the practitioner’s inability to implement the practices discovered by the researcher. Finally, practitioners lack the skills to use educational research discovered in a study (McIntyre, 2005). Even with practitioners having the skills to implement the research there is still a problem, in some instances, the researchers lack conclusive results in educational research that can have a direct impact on student achievement. No more is this prevalent in the field of special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Researchers in special education have long been concerned about communicating their research-based findings to teachers and other stakeholders in a purposeful way (Cook, Cook, & Landrum, 2013). In special education, attempts to bridge the research to practice gap by identifying EBPs to support reading achievement continues to be a struggle as common practices in the classroom. EBPs are defined as “instructional techniques with, meaningful research supporting their effectiveness that represent critical tools in bridging the research-to-practice gap (Cook & Cook, 2011).” EBPs that have been proven to produce a positive impact with students with disabilities are not implemented commonly in classrooms (Cook & Cook, 2011). Special education practitioners continue to use practices from their personal experiences, department pedagogy, and opinions of other colleagues to support instruction in their classroom(xxxx). This behavior leads to special education practitioners partaking in instructional practices that have little or no impact for their students. For example, special education practices have reported using modality instruction as an effective teaching practice instead of practices that are supported by research (e.g., graphic organizer, Cook & Odom, 2013). These results have had a direct impact on students with disabilities, particularly those students with learning disabilities (LD) and reading.

**LD Reading**

The gap in research to practice, with EBPs for students with LD are particularly alarming in reading in middle school (Vaughn, Hughes, Moody, & Elbaum, 2001). There are 2.7 million students with LD in grades K-12 (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014). Learning disability is a universal term used to describe an individual with a disorder in one or more of the psychological developments involved in “understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations” (National Center for Learning disabilities, 2014, p.2). Roughly 80% of students diagnosed with LD have been described as having a disability in reading (Lewandowski, Cohen, & Lovett, 2013).

Students with LD continue to struggle in reading particularly from the transition from elementary school to middle school. One explanation for the increased gap can be attributed to the fact that students struggle from the need to understanding expository text. Middle schools should implement effective instructional strategies (interventions) to support students with LD and reading. Cleary and Callan (2014) says an intervention is a specific program or set of steps to help a child improve in an area of need. It is not only important to identify EBPs but have the capacity to implement the practices in a school.

**EBP and Systemic Change**

To some extent, there is agreement in various fields that EBPs are from high-quality studies that used research-based designs to have meaningful impact (Cook & Cook, 2011). Until recently, what is less agreed upon is EPBs in special education and how to effectively implement the practices in the classroom (Cook & Odom, 2013; Fixsen et al., 2013). In the field of special education, Gersten et., (2005) and Horner et al., (2005) developed criteria for identifying EBPs in the field (Cook & Odom, 2013). These predominant works in the field solidified the identification of EBPs, however, did not address the concern of the implementation of EBPs. The question of EBPs is shifting from *what* practices to implement to *how* do we implement these practices?

To understand the implementation science of EBPs, systematic change must be considered (Ainscow, 2005). Systemic change is defined as identifying the modifications needed to restructure standard operational procedures (work norms and school values) within a school building (Adelman, & Taylor, 2007). An essential component of systemic change in a building is the school leaders. With EBPs, it is crucial the school leaders possess the basic concepts of the change cycle, to foster systemic change, to prepare themselves and their staff before implementation.

The ability to communicate the change cycle effectively and rationally will decrease stress that can occur when trying to employ systemic change in a school. Change can be a difficult process for many people who may need extended time to embrace change. Two-thirds of organizations that try to implement change fail (Bolman & Deal, 1999). The change cycle is defined as a map that depicts the human experience at each stage of change – all changes, big or small (Fullan, 2006). In a school, with a new schoolwide initiative, the change cycle can be seen in a clear systematic process. First, the staff may show signs of emotions of anger (internally/externally). This behavior can be displayed with them saying phrases like, “*Another initiative. How am I supposed to do this and teach?*  *etc.*” Then, staff move from anger to confusion, asking why there is a need for the initiative. In the school, you might hear phrases like, Next, “*I have been teaching for… I already know what to. etc.*” Then, the staff will transition to understanding the need for the initiative. This can be displayed by stakeholders volunteering to be on committees for the initiatives, seeking out PD, etc. Lastly, the staff will accept the initiative. In a school, evidence of acceptance can be seen in teacher’s daily instruction (Fred & Irby, 2006; Fullan, 2006; Lewin, 1975; Piderit, 2000). To further support the change cycle, the school leader needs to discuss the mindset of the staff, effectively communicate with the staff, and create buy-in from the staff (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Dweck, 2012; Fullan, 2006). These practices, with the school leaders support, will aid in the execution of systemic change to introduce a new reading initiative in a school.

**School Leader**

The school leader is the catalysis in promoting systemic change when introducing a schoolwide reading initiative, like using EBPs to support reading instruction in a classroom. To implement systemic change effectively and purposefully, one must consider who is leading the change and how are these individuals prepared to offer change (Fullan, 2007)? Being prepared, involves the school leaders grasping the barriers that they might encounter.

With EBPs and reading, school leaders ought to be aware of barriers and factors that can affect systematic change that can be essential to support students with LD? Some barriers and factors include identifying your stakeholders and their belief system, the ability to clearly communicate with your staff, interpreting and communicating what changes will occur, and giving opportunities for buy-in from the stakeholders.

With current pressure in educational reform with student achievement, school leaders must consider what leadership practices best support systemic change. The school leader must be prepared to deal with the systematic occurrences that occur within a schoolwide initiative, such as adoption of a reading program. Only then, is the adoption of a schoolwide reading program attainable. School leaders need to incorporate leadership practices that support systemic change. The purpose of this study has two goals. First, investigate distributive leadership (DL) and explore how the practices imbedded in DL could be incorporated by school leaders to support systemic change. Second, what actions are required from the school leaders to use DL for a schoolwide reading initiatives.

**Leadership Theories**

Historically, over the last 100 years, there has been an increased interest in the psychology behind leadership, specifically what makes a great leader (Northouse, 2016). This interest has created several theories (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). There has been an evolution of leadership theories to explain the nature and characteristics of how leaders become great. The theories have questioned the notable qualities of leaders and followers, while others seek to explain leadership in situational factors and skill levels (Hallinger, 2003). While many leadership theories are prevalent, table 1 describes the evolution of leadership styles supplemented by the work of Short & Greer, 2012. Table 1, is an outline of the evolution of leadership theories. The table explains the evolution of the great man theory to the current paradigm of contemporary leadership theories (CLT).

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| Table 1 | | | |
| The Evolution of Leadership Models | | | |
| Theory | Description | Pros | Cons |
| Great Man Theories   * Thomas Carlye * 1840’s | Leadership is inherent trait passed down from one generation to another. The leaders are brave with a destiny to led. The theory was used heavily for military, political, and industrial leadership and considered the qualities of a male. | * Introduction of human traits with leadership. * Leadership is for males. | * Not scientific evidence * Focus on single gender |
| Trait Theories   * Ralph Stogdill * 1940’s | Sharing similar characteristics of the great man theory, individuals inherit characteristic and traits (capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, and status) that make them better matched for leadership. | * Traits help in finding potential leaders. * Traits allow for behavior modifications of good leaders. | * Traits are non-transferable * No situational awareness with traits |
| Situational Theories   * Several authors proposed * 1950’s | Leadership depends on a variety of factors related to task. Different situations need different leadership styles. No one leadership style is the best. Leaders choose the best course of action based upon group or social setting in which leadership is practiced. | * Considers different situations. * Motivates leadership thinking subjectively. | * Expressed to general to have specific application value * Identifying situation is subjective |
| Behavioral Approach   * Ohio State Studies * 1950’s | Based on a leaders’ ability to led in an authorization or democratic style. The belief that great leaders are made, not born. | * Helps build relationships with people. * Effectiveness in organizing the work of the organization. | * Behaviors only account for 15% productivity * Better performers may require supportive leadership |
| Contemporary Leadership Theories   * Foster * 1980’s | Leadership is not based on an individual. Leadership is task specific, leader-member partnership, leader charismatic personality, and environment. Relationship with leaders and followers (political). Leadership as a special form of power, power is the use of resources to achieve valued goals and ends (critical). | * Encourages leaders to use social/emotional intelligence. * Democratic less threating work environment. | * Place high need on personality trait * Practical need for hierarchy |

**Contemporary Leadership Theory**

CLT is the result from theoretical evolution of leadership. A change in thinking from the heroic charismatic leader with their faithful followers to leadership practices infused with collaboration, shared responsibility, open dialogue, and distribution of power. Komives and Dugan (2010, p.111) states, “these theories reframe leadership as a dynamic and reciprocal process between people pursuing a common goal.” CLT can be interpreted as theories in leadership that place greater focus on social purpose and moral discourse with followers (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Spector, 2014). It is a shift away from traditional leadership theories that encompass sole authority, individual traits, management and production. CLT takes into consideration society norms, open systems, dialogue, and systems structures (Komives & Dugan, 2010).

There are a multitude of theories that are in CLT’s. Table 2 is an illustration of the predominant theories that are discussed in educational leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Bush & Glover, 2014; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Northouse, 2016; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Although the theories appear to be different, they generally share fundamental themes. The common themes include importance of self-awareness, social responsibility, and moral and ethical leadership (Spector, 2014).

With the predominant theories for CLT developed and encouraged as models for school leaders, less is agreed-upon on what CLT’s have a greater impact to foster systemic change with implementing a schoolwide reading initiative. As noted earlier, systemic changes require a leader who understands the restructuring of standard operational procedures (work norms and school values) within a school building. In table 2, the leadership model that supports the characteristics of systemic change is DL. DL encourages a positive school culture, solicits buy-in from staff, and builds leadership capability within the staff. The characteristics of DL lends well to nurturing systemic change to adopt schoolwide initiatives (Klingner, Boardman, & McMaster, 2013).

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| Table 2 | | |
| Contemporary Leadership Theories | | |
| Theory | Description | Strength |
| Transformational Leadership   * James V. Downton * James Burns * Bernard M. Bass | An approach that changes and transform people by making a connection with their emotions, values, ethics, and standards to increase their motivation. These include aligning the staff sense of identity and self to the mission. | * Extensive research from several fields. * Advocating for change aligns with society notion of leadership. * Emphasis on followers needs, values, and morals. |
| Distributive Leadership   * C.A. Gibbs * Edwin Hutchins * [Lev Vygotsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lev_Vygotsky) | The leaders’ ability to use all staff members by their level of ability with shared responsibilities of tasks. All staff are equal, working on a common goal. | * Helps develop positive building culture. * Supports buy-in and ownership with staff. * Develops leaders throughout the building. |
| Shared Leadership   * Mary Follett | Within teams, each team member works together to accomplish a goal. Leadership is shared and power is directed to all members on the team. | * Teams develop effective practical solutions. * Fosters better communication and understanding of goals. * Teams are empowered and committed to the goal. |
| Authentic Leadership   * James Burns/Bernard Bass | Pattern of leader behaviors that fosters ethical and positive environment. Promotes self-awareness and transparency with staff. | * Develop a sense of trust in a building. * Broad guidelines of a moral self-aware individual. * An explicit and moral dimension. |
| Servant Leadership   * Robert K. Greenleaf | Focuses on staff growth, being attentive, and nurturing. Shares power and puts the need of staff first. Determined to help staff develop and perform as highly as possible. | * Altruism is the central component. * Share power and influence with all. * Support staff who are ready for support and empowerment. |
| Instructional Leadership   * James Coleman * Larry Lezotte * Wilbur B. Brookover * George Weber * Ronald Edmonds | The managing of functions relating to teaching and learning. | * Places a focus on student learning. * Focus the leader around compliance. * Offers quality indicators of successful school leaders. |
| Cultural Leadership   * Gerard Hofstede * Robert Lord and others | Awareness of effectively communicating with cultures in the building. Understanding how cultures are interconnected with staff, students, parents, and the community. | * Communication and trust with staff, teachers, and the community. * Discuss cultural bias that impeded student learning. * Address complexities in global schooling. |

**Distributive Leadership**

To gain a deeper perspective on the practices of DL to support systemic change of a schoolwide reading initiative a systematic literature review was conducted. The literature review sought to discover the core concepts of DL. The concepts include its historical concepts, arguments on its purpose in the field, and challenges with implementation and practices.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted looking at all peer-reviewed articles in all major database ( PsycINFO, Social Science Citation Index, Education Research Complete, and APA Education Psychology Handbook) to identify studies using a combination of various key words included: *students with learning disabilities, reading achievement, evidence-based practices, educational leadership, leadership, systemic change, distributive leadership, shared leadership, contemporary leadership, and educational reform.* All dissertations were excluded. However, books were included. All articles must be written in English and pertain to research done in school systems. Hand searches of relevant journals included *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, Exceptional Children, Journal of School Leadership, and Journal of Organizational Behavior* were reviewed to discover other articles.

**Inclusion/Exclusion**

Studies were included in the literature review if (a) DL was implemented in a school K-12, (b) it incorporated the historical, use, and implementation of DL, and (c) was mentioned as a turn-around measure to support school change. Articles were excluded if (a) DL was implemented in private, and alternative schools, (b) public schools not in united states and (c) they were not peer-reviewed.

**Historical Concepts of DL**

The concept of distributive leadership is not new. Researchers suggest that the constructs of DL can be traced back as far as 1250 BC (Bolden, 2011). This leadership practice makes it one of the oldest notions for leadership for filling organizational goals to people. However, in the terms of DL in theory, it is an idea that can be traced back to the 1920s (Harris, 2009). The first researcher, Gibb (1954) to explicitly refer to DL was quoted saying, “leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group.” (Groon, 2000, p.324).

Even with interest in understanding the relationship with leadership being carried out by groups, the idea of DL laid in a dormant stage for a period. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when new accounts of school leadership were being discussed that DL became part of the discussion (Barry, 1991; Beck & Peters, 1981). DL was vaguely being mentioned with the new leadership practices of transformational and charismatic leadership in schools. Hence, the characteristics of DL begin to resurface. Although, the characteristics were being discussed, DL did still not have a definitive role in educational leadership.

The work of Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) characterized the theoretical origins of DL being rooted in activity theory and distributed cognition. Activity theory is understanding human actions that are meaningful to motivate an object into an outcome, which can be either material or intangible (Yen Ho, J.P, Chen, D.V., & Ng, D., 2016). Activity theory is based off Vygotsky’s concept of understanding the relationship between a subject and object is mediated by cultural artifacts. Distributed cognition is descriptive framework that describes human work systems and experience in informational terms to analyze problem-solving solutions (Bolden, 2011). Distributed cognition was developed by Ed Hutchins and his colleagues. Together, these two theories allow us to understand that human activity is complex, emerging, and an open environment that allow us to recognize that social interaction is an important part of individual intellectual achievement (Spillane et al., 2004). Meaning, to maximize the capacity of an individual, they must have the ability to interact with themselves and others in achieving a goal. This characterization from these individuals ignited a new interest in DL as a critical theory in educational leadership (Groon, 2000; Harris, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2009).

DL was now considered in significant discussions and research concerning educational leadership. As once only noted as a pragmatic tool that leaders would share their increasing workload, DL had a new concept that applied to leadership influences working with other individuals. It became the most contemporary example of multifaceted nature of theory in educational leadership (Spector, 2014). Nature of theory refers to the varied nature of the problems related to schools that have no one single solution for al leader. A leader is needed to have multi-perspectives and approaches to address school related problems. DL had become the mantra for reshaping leadership practices in schools (Seashore, Mayrowetz, Smiley, & Murphy, 2009). Lumby (2013) reveals that more schools are trying to adopt and implement DL and official agencies are encouraging them to do so. This literature review will discuss (a) misconceptions about DL, (b) characteristics of DL, (c) the interpretation and implementation gap of DL, (d) effectiveness of DL in a school, and (e) the school leader’s role of implementing and sustaining DL.

**DL and Misconceptions**

There are fundamental misconceptions about DL that are worth discussing. Within the practices of DL there seems to be a notion that everybody will lead. Practicing DL in the school allows those best skills or positioned to carry out a certain goal or task and lead that goal or task (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). This practice does not mean that every staff member will lead. It is up to the school leaders to have the capacity to find the skills within their staff to carry out the goal. The same identified staff members must have the capability to give positive progress in carrying out these goals. There is more of an emphasis on capability within DL and individuals rather than all individuals. For DL to have a positive impact on a school’s performance, it should be carefully designed and wisely executed by the leader (Camburn and Han, 2009).

Another notion is that there is a DL model to follow. There are no definitive blueprints, roadmaps, or procedural guidelines for a school leader to implement DL in a school (Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). Nonetheless, there are principles and guidance about the norms, strategies, and approaches that have a greater impact on schools. Researchers suggest, that is standard rise prescription for DL should be avoided at all costs (Harris, 2013). For a school leader, one should think of DL as a type of infrastructure or the conditions, that would enhance positive distributive leadership practices. Schmoker (2011) is strategic in outlining infrastructural essentials critical for DL in a school that will help with enhancing DL practices. The infrastructures that a school should incorporate to set up DL practices are: (a) coherent curriculum (what we teach), (b) fully developed lesson plans (how we teach); and (c) authentic literacy across all content areas (Marzano, 2005; Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz, 2009; Schmoker, 2001). As Schmoker (2001) notes, it difficult to outline the infrastructure because these essential elements are often pushed aside by various initiatives every year in schools. Even though there are misconceptions about DL in a school, it easier to describe the characteristics of DL.

**Characteristics of DL**

Although there are current discussions on the interpretation of DL and how it could be implemented in a school, there are general characteristics that are agreed-upon. DL recognizes that people will have the potential to display leadership in a school, but the success of that individual leadership depends on the facilitation of power by the school leaders. The core concept of DL is the notion that leadership is not fixed to a certain individual but is a fluid concept shared by multiple individuals, even at times simultaneously (Bush & Glover, 2014; Harris, 2009; Spillane, 2006). DL recognizes the powerful relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes. This translates into school change and development are enhanced when teachers have opportunities to collaborate and to actively engage in change and practices (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Although all the characteristics of DL may be difficult to capture, the illustration in table 3 are a few from researchers in the field.

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| Table 3 | |
| Characteristics of Distributed Leadership | |
| Author(s) | Description |
| Bolden et al., 2009 | A focus on three themes: leadership is shaped as the common product of the group and because of interaction among individuals; borders in leadership are not definitive and strict, they are open-ended and diversity in practice is obtained with a part or even all the members. |
| Davis, 2009 | Based on ability, knowledge, and contributions created because of relationships network among individuals who direct, guide, and work with teachers improving education. |
| Elmore, 2000 | Creates a climate in which learning is regarded as the “common good” for everyone’s benefit. |
| Gibb, 1954 | The leader cannot be a single individual and leadership needs to be shared. |
| Groon, 2002 | An identified member is assigned for duty in some leadership functions and that some leadership functions can be undertaken by different individuals at different times. |
| Firestone & Martinez, 2007 | Teacher leaders are involved in administrative task like: setting standards for student behavior, deciding on budgets, and discussing personnel issues. Focus on issues of curriculum and instruction and increasing teacher pedagogy. |
| Harris, 2005 | The collective contribution of all leaders to the organization and therefore it is distinct from all other theories. |
| Harris, 2013 | Actively, helping and supporting the leadership of others. |
| Lumby, 2013 | The leader’s ability to share their power with individual staff to foster staff empowerment. |
| Murphy, 2006 | Administrators build strong leadership with teachers, rethinking conceptions, and reorganizing structures. |
| Spillane et al., 2001 | The distribution of tasks among the leader and the audience and integration of these tasks overall. |
| Spillane et al., 2006 | Leadership is the results of ties among individuals. Cooperation between individuals is carried out among themselves thus fostering leadership. |
| Storey, 2004 | Leadership role is not assigned to an individual in the group; all members of the group undertake this function willingly as if it is their duty. |

**Interpretation and Implementation Gap of DL**

As more research is being conducted about DL in schools, the lack of interpretation of DL has caused clarification about the concept of DL and how to effectively implement DL in a school (Bennett et al., 2003; Harris, 2008).

With the widespread interest in the ideas of DL, this has led to conflicting interpretations of DL. Within the current literature, the idea of DL has overlapped with the concepts of shared leadership, shared collaborative, democratic leadership and various other leadership concepts. This has led to any concepts of distribution of power with leadership to be called DL. It has become a *catch all* for shared leadership practices in schools. This practice alone has caused confusion with the understanding of what is DL. To bring clarification to this concern there has been countless studies done on the conceptualization of DL. The results from the research have named three main approaches to help offer clarification to the concept of DL. The three main approaches are (a) modeling distributive leadership practices, (b) comparing distributive leadership with similar concepts, and (c) questioning the concept of distributive leadership (Groon, 2002; Tian, Risku, & Collin, 2016; Spillane, 2006).

To discuss the application of DL in a school, various approaches have been named. There are number of factors that may call for one approach against another. Consequently, there have been three predominate approaches to discuss the application of DL in a school. The three approaches are (a) examining the capacity for distributive leadership in the building, (b) evaluating the impact of implementation of DL, and (c) finding any risks of implementing DL in a school (Groon, 2002; Tian et al., 2016; Spillane, 2006). As research is being conducted on how to interpret DL and how to foster it in a school building, the central issue of *power* and its redistribution is another variable in the implementation of DL.

**Power.** The concept of power and how it is effectively distributive in DL has not been given a lot of attention in the literature. Researchers note that power is conceived in DL that varies in different circumstances. Researchers occasionally reference power and how it should be redistributed in DL (Harris, 2003; MacBeath, 2009; Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Seashore, 2009). For example, Harris (2003) discusses that DL needs a redistribution of power among individuals involved in carrying out a desired goal. The literature on DL tends not to discuss the allocation of power which can be problematic in DL. It does not even mention how power is changed by gender or race. This lack of emphasis on power may affect the effectiveness of DL in a school (Hartely, 2010).

Within DL, power can be inferred to as an intention or action of how something is distributed. This makes the focus of *how* power is distributed making power one-dimensional in DL (MacBeath, 2009). Meaning that someone distributes power to another individual to cause action. For instance, one-dimensional power can be showed when a school leader appoints individuals to lead a common goal. In this action, the school leader is reshaping structures within the building and developing a deeper pool of leadership. Additionally, power is not only shared from a leader to an individual. Individuals can randomly share power within themselves. This is from the notion that power spontaneously flows from leaders to individual staff members and from individual staff members to other staff members (Bolden et al., 2009; Harris, 2008). In a school, this fluid movement of power can result into two actions. In one perspective, power is increased by the approval of others. The more the leader gives power to individuals around them, the more the leaders power increases. On the other hand, this same action of power distribution from person to person can decrease the leaders power because it is no longer absolute. Power is spread so widely within the school it is no longer effective. Regardless of how power is interpreted, it is important that the focus of power be discussed. When implementing DL in a school, the dynamics of how power is distributed and who receives that power is a vital component in the success of the leader. Even with power being acknowledged, there is no right answer of how it should be distributed. It depends on the perspective of individuals on how power is shared, received, and enacted. Along with the various definitions, characteristics, and an inconsistent understanding in how to implement DL in a school, there is still questions from researchers on the effectiveness of DL in a school.

**Evidence of DL**

Current evidence on DL and its effectiveness in schools is still emerging. Research has been focused on the different practices of DL in a school. Practices of DL is defined as, agreed-upon task or functions, that occur in the school, of those giving leadership (Groon, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2007). Researchers have focused their understanding on how different patterns of implementing DL impact student achievement and school organizational change (Harris, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2007; Spillane, 2006).

In the literature, on school improvement, the literature correlates a positive relationship between DL and student achievement (Harris, 2013). To explain his correlation, practices in DL emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement in the decision-making process. When the teacher can be involved in decisions, it can result in them handling their actions. For instance, if a teacher had the ability to decide that a certain evidence-based reading strategy was best for kids in reading, they would be more likely to implement that strategy with fidelity because they are part of the decision to practice the reading strategy in the classroom. In fact, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) concluded that distributing leadership activities to teachers resulted in a positive influence on teachers’ effectiveness and student engagement. It should also be noted that teacher leadership had a greater impact on student engagement that outweighed principal leadership (Spillane et al., 2001). This practice fosters strong collegial relationships with teachers, administrators, and students. Harris (2007) concluded that effective schools share commonalities of values, norms, and positive behavior characteristics.

There is increasing evidence that DL can foster school change because it allows certain structural and cultural barriers to be removed (Harris, 2005). DL does not automatically result in school improvement. As previously briefly said, DL highlights the importance that configuration of distribution matters in a school. In schools, DL can be implemented in two distinct forms of *additive* or *holistic* practices (Groon, 2002; Leithwood et al. 2007, Spillane, 2006). Additive forms of distribution are recognized as patterns of leadership in which different individuals are engage in leadership functions but little is considered of leadership efforts of other individuals in the school. Holistic forms of distribution are recognized as consciously managed relationships of individuals in a school. Meaning that all individuals are working together to carry out the same goal. Everyone has an important part to contribute to reaching the goal. School leaders should be conscious of how they are distributing leadership roles and how these individuals are working together in a school. DL supports human potential availability to be used within an organization. It is what Groon (2000) terms “an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pull their expertise” (p.318). DL focuses on capacity building within a school. Building one’s capacity within a school helps foster change.

**Role of School Leader and DL**

A school is a complex, ever changing environment that interacts with societal systems (McCombs, 2003). Social systems are defined as two or more persons working together in a coordinated manner to achieve a goal. The features within a school are (a) they consist of people, (b) they work toward a common goal with a coordinated effort, and (c) constantly interacting with their external environment (Lunenburg & Irby, 2006). The features of a school make it an open system. Schools are constantly changed with the degree of interaction with their environment. Specifically, schools are constantly in a flux of change. Rather this being staff turnover, new students, or new schoolwide initiatives.

When a school is applying a new schoolwide initiative, like a reading initiative, it needs to begin with a clear outline and a design for what changes are to be made. It is crucial to have a well-designed map to support the change (Crow, 2009). Specifically, a coherent design is needed for implementing, monitoring, and supporting the reading initiative. This factor make the actions of the school leader crucial to the success of the reading initiative. While school leaders are implementing DL, to support the reading initiatives, simultaneously they should strategically maneuver their school through the change cycle. This will help foster systemic change. As noted earlier, the change cycle requires a school leader to understand the staff mindset, communicate effectively with the staff, and create buy-in from the staff.

**Mindset.** Staff in a school have a belief, positive or negative, which is deeply engrained in their minds about school. For instance, we develop a set of beliefs about school from our personal experiences that translate into our own viewpoint of how a school should function (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013). This translates into how students should act in school, what supports students need in school, the role of the teachers, and relationship between staff and administrators. For school leaders to influence one’s mindset, the school leader must have the skills to interpret the beliefs of their staff and how those beliefs manifest in the dynamic system of the school (Dweck, 2012). This allows the school leader to decide which degree of support a staff may need changing their mindset. This is important to DL because the core practices of DL can be challenging to the mindsets of staff in a school building.

**Communicate.** A school leader must be able to clearly communicate and explain to their staff what changes will occur, within the process of implementing DL. School leaders must remember that the change cycle occurs differently based on the pace of the stakeholder. When school leaders can predict the change cycle and effectively communicate the cycle to the staff, this can offer the necessary resources to encourage the change. Foreshadowing this cycle will support a smoother transition with the implementation of DL and decrease stress that can occur with change. With DL, the school must purposely articulate to the staff *why* DL is being implemented in the school and barriers that occur when implementing DL.

**Buy-in.** To foster change,school leaders must solicit buy-in from as many staff members as possible. To encourage buy-in, the school leader offers staff members opportunities for ownership with DL. One of the core elements of DL is giving teachers the opportunities to lead agreed goals set forth by the school. Staff buy-in is important because when implementing an initiative, like reading, several issues arise, (a) stakeholders meet organizational conflict, (b) they usually are trying new practices, and (c) stakeholders are taking on extra work by engaging with colleagues in planning, implementing, and evaluating improvement initiatives (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). With buy-in, school leaders play a large part in the staff to buy-in to combat the issues.

As the school leader incorporates the change cycle with the staff, there are specific actions the school leaders must address to effectively apply DL in their building. School leaders occupy the critical space in the teacher leadership equation and centerstage in the work redesign needed to implement DL in a school (Leithwood et al., 2007). First, there are individual actions the school leader’s practices and accept before deploying DL in their school.

**School leaders**. DL requires a changed role of the school leaders. The actions of a traditional school leader will need to be adjusted. The school leader must shift their thinking from a single individual that makes decisions in a school, to see their role as developing leadership capability and capacity of teachers. This is a fundamental change in the understanding of school leadership and the role of school leaders (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). It implies, sharing authority and power and distributing that role with staff members in a school. School leaders are required to understand how to help their leadership style to be more collaborative. For a school leader, this may require new skills and new approaches to fit their role in DL.

Another skill the school leader would focus on is their interaction with the staff. A leader’s interaction is more important than the nature of their leadership roles, responsibilities or functions (Harris, 2013). Another skill of the school leader is the ability to understand patterns of influence within their building. The school leader should also have the skills to discuss any influences that might have a negative impact on DL and implementation in a school. The school leader should possess the ability to transform individuals and culture in a school (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis, 2009). As Murphy et al., (2009) said, DL is challenging work, but if school leaders do not focus on themselves first, it is not likely they will be effective in implementing DL. They will not be able to develop a sense of security with their staff that is a necessary ingredient with DL. When school leaders pass initial stage of focusing on themselves, then they are prepared to move forward and begin to develop structures that support DL.

**Traditional structures.** Within the literature, there is abundant evidence that current traditional schools have well-established structures that are barriers to the implementation of DL (Harris, 2013; Murphy et al., 2009; Smylie, Conley & Mark, 2002). For instance, there is often a culture in schools where it is hard for administrators to see teachers as leaders, as well the teachers seeing themselves as leaders, compared to their colleagues. The common practices of DL are inconsistent with the values embedded in a school. The values consist of the concepts of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and institutional structures of schools (Smylie et al., 2002).

There might also be resistant from the political entities that support the traditional structures of schooling. Within traditional structures in schools, there has been some level of success. Although schools have not guaranteed to educate all students, it has at least met the goal of ensuring universal access and if access to all students. Second, the traditional structures have a power arrangement that benefits a certain group of people. For example, a sitting principal might have been the administrator for 15 years and was the sole decision-maker. That principle may be reluctant to change their understanding and values of leadership and implement DL. Lastly, the traditional structure is the structure that most individuals were exposed to. This is the same structure that has been passed down from one generation to another (Copland & Boatright, 2006; Donalson, 2001; Harris, 2013; Lambert, 2003, Lieberman and Miller, 1999; Murphy et al., 2009; Smiylie et al., 2002).

**Structures to support DL**. It is the role of the school leaders to address the traditional structure of the school to implement DL. School leaders are in the right position and have the influence to create school structures that are conducive to DL (Frost & Durant, 2003). This is where school leadership becomes essential. The school leader can begin to reshape the structures to nurture DL. In nurturing DL, the school leaders can develop new policies and school practices to support the new structures. One of the most essential practice that a school leader can implement begins with creating opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership. This contradicts the traditional structures in a school that support the concepts of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and institutional structures of schools (Smylie et al., 2002). With this leadership opportunity, teachers are selected to take responsibility of a roll to accomplish an agreed-upon goal for school improvement. As noted earlier, this is when a school leader begins to relinquish power and distributes that power among staff (Murphy et al., 2009). It is important that a school leader develops protocols to identify and select teachers (Harris, 2013). This will aid in establishing credibility of the teachers chosen and not show favoritism (XXXX). Along with protocols, the school leaders should develop structures for named teacher leaders to allow them the time to support their role. Once the school leader has found individual teachers, the next step is to address the school culture and identify factors that may impede the practices of DL.

**Traditional school culture.** The idea that school leaders distribute leadership opportunities among the staff violates cultural foundations that define schools (Spillane, 2006). One core dimension of school culture is teacher autonomy in a school. There is an embedded norm of freedom within one’s classroom which has become an unspoken contested right (Murphy et al., 2009). This norm breeds a culture of isolation within a building. It encourages teachers to assume responsibility for their classroom and only what goes on within their classroom. It does not promote or suggest that teachers interact with other teachers (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). As a result, teachers are expected to interact with each other on a minimal level with their primary focus and concern relating to their individual needs in their classroom. With school cultures, there is this belief that teachers are equal and no one is better than another. This equates to all teachers having an equal position and status.

The traditional school culture does not share the same cultural beliefs as DL. DL seeks to empower staff members (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). This empowerment is a direct violation to the equal position and status that is the cultural norm in a school. Teachers who go against this norm and embrace leadership opportunities may find themselves rejected by their colleagues.

Another dimension of school culture that hinders DL is teacher leaders and the possibility of confrontation with other staff members (Harris, 2007; Murphy et. al., 2009). Traditionally, with teacher autonomy and teachers having an equal status, it is often difficult for teacher leaders to confront their peers with behaviors or actions that impede the practices of DL. In a traditional school culture, teachers typically support the status quo and do not challenge other teachers.

School leaders are the one variable in shaping the culture of the school. The school leader encourages and support leadership distribution. School leaders not only create opportunities for teachers to lead but establish a culture and climate that encourages teachers to assume responsibility. For example, school leaders should communicate to the staff the expectations that they have for teacher leaders. This can help to alleviate any animosity that might occur between teachers and establish objectives that shape a new school culture into concrete actions. To address teacher autonomy that is prevalent in a school, the school leader can bring people together to create opportunities to accomplish a goal which helps to foster the practices of collaboration. This can be done on an individual basis or more strategically designing a planning time this collaboration can occur. These added actions will create a new school culture. The school leaders must be intentional with their actions by developing, supporting, and managing new forms of leadership (Smylie et al., 2002).

**Conclusion**

Overall, this paper had two goals. First, in response to whole school reform with student achievement, it sought to understand how the practices in DL can aid school leaders in supporting systemic change for schoolwide reading initiatives. Second, it discussed the actions of school leaders to implement DL to promote a schoolwide reading initiative. The paper describes key concepts in education and how the concepts of (a) educational reform, (b) underperformance of students with LD in reading, (c) research to practice gap with EBPs to support reading achievement, and (d) school leadership are affecting student achievement. The paper recognizes the connection between school leaders and leadership to address the key concepts in education. It brought to light the need for systemic change to implement schoolwide initiatives (Cook et al., 2013; Fullan, 2000).

In general, this literature review showed that practices of DL can be implemented in a school to support systemic change. There are important actions that need the school leader’s adherence. The literature discovered (a) the importance of school leader’s distribution of power, (b) teacher leadership, (c) addressing the structures to support DL, and (d) the importance of addressing the school culture. The literature discussed the change cycle and described the how instrumental it can be to support the implementation and practices of DL.

Throughout the literature, the one constant that had to be present was the school leaders. The school leader is the catalyst of the school and a main contributor to systemic change. With implementing the change cycle, addressing school structures, restructuring the school, empowering teachers, the school leader is in the forefront. Leadership skills are critical in the execution of DL. Another constant in the literature was the disagreement on how to best implement DL in a school and develop a school model. The literature discussed the attributes of DL in a school but was scarce in discussing how to best implement DL in a school.

Results also confirm that DL not also supports systemic change but has a direct result in other factors. DL can promote and foster teacher empowerment. This empowerment can result in teachers increase in self-confidence. Their self-confidence translates into teachers volunteering to be on committees, seeking out PD, etc. DL also allows for the redistribution of school leaders power. This redistribution of power can result in the school leader having the flexibility to focus on other job duties (Robinson, Lylod, & Rowe, 2008).

Future research is needed to understand the concepts of power and how it can be distributive appropriately. Although the literature describes the importance of the school leader and DL, it does not discuss how to properly prepare a school leader to implement DL. Although the change cycle was discussed, are there supplemental actions further needed by the school leaders? What factors should school leaders consider before implementing DL? For example, should school leaders investigate the organizational capacity to implement a program. It does not describe what tools are needed to sustain DL. Lastly, there was a lack of literature in the field about systemic change and public schools. Much of the articles found about systemic change related to organizations.

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