Oxford Bibliographies
Your Best Research Starts Here

Distributed Leadership

James P. Spillane, **Katie Mertz**

Introduction

Over the first decade of the 21st century, a modest but expanding body of work has emerged on what is commonly referred to in the literature as distributed leadership. The idea has also garnered considerable attention from policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists in several countries and international organizations such as OECD, though there is no shortage of scholarship on school leadership and management in particular and organizational leadership and management in general. Still, the appeal of a distributed perspective appears to lie in part in that it offered an alternative to dissatisfaction with the great person approach to theorizing about organizational leadership and management, what Gary Yukl terms the "heroics of leadership paradigm" (Gary Yukl, "An Evaluation of Conceptual Weaknesses in Transformational and Charismatic Leadership Theories," *The Leadership Quarterly* 10.2 [1999]: 285–305, p. 292). At least two ideas are central in writing about and research on distributed leadership. The first is an acknowledgement that leading and managing schools (and other organizations) involve multiple individuals, not just the school principal, including other formally designated leaders and individuals without such designations (e.g., teachers with no formal leadership position, parents, or even students who influenced an organization's core work). In this way, a distributed perspective called for attention to both the formal and informal organization and how these two aspects of the organization worked in interaction with one another (James P. Spillane, *Distributed Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006); Spillane and Diamond 2007, cited under Empirical Work on Distributed Leadership in Primary and Elementary School). Still, writings about distributed leadership often focus rather narrowly on the array of individuals that take responsibility for leadership and management work. The second idea is that the *practice* of leading and managing needs to be a central concern in research and development work on organizational leadership (Gronn 2000 and Spillane, et al. 2001, both cited under Theoretical and Conceptual Work). Rather than narrowly conceptualizing practice in terms of the actions or behaviors of an individual leader, from a distributed perspective practice is framed in terms of the interactions among organizational members as enabled and constrained by aspects of their situation. Studying the practice of leading and managing necessitates examining how the practice is *stretched over* school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation. Thus, careful attention to *interactions*, rather than fixating exclusively on the actions of an individual leader, is necessary when taking a distributed perspective to school leadership and management.

Theoretical and Conceptual Work

In the first several years of the 21st century, several papers and books were published that theorized and conceptualized organizational leadership and management, especially in schools, from a distributed perspective. This work involved conceptualizing and theorizing about school leadership and management using theoretical work from various disciplinary traditions including distributed cognition, sociocultural activity theory, situated cognition and micro-sociological theory. Consistent with the theory building tradition, scholars also drew on their own empirical observations of school leadership and management to theorize about leadership and management from a distributed perspective. The author of Gronn 2000, working in Australia, used work in sociocultural activity theory to theorize distributed leadership. At the same time, the authors of Spillane, et al. 2004, working in North America, used both sociocultural activity theory and work in distributed cognition to theorize a distributed perspective on school leadership and management. Additionally, work in situated

and social cognition has been especially influential in this earlier theorizing about distributed leadership, as in Spillane, et al. 2001. More recently still, work in sociology has also been employed in Spillane, et al. 2003. A key aspect of this conceptualizing and theorizing work centered on the role of the situation in leadership and management practice. Specifically, scholars theorized that the situation, including the materials that people interacted with and the organizational structures that enabled and constrained their daily interactions with one another, did not simply affect the actions of individual leaders from the outside in but rather were constitutive of their practice. Aspects of the situation contributed to defining practice, just like people do, by framing and focusing interactions among organizational members. For example, organizational routines, such as teacher hiring routines or staff meetings, define leading and managing practice. In this way, the material situation does not simply *affect* what school leaders do, it is *constitutive of their practices*, as shown in Spillane, et al. 2001 and Spillane, et al. 2004.

Gronn, Peter. 2000. Distributed properties: A new architecture for leadership. *Educational Management Administration Leadership* 28.3: 317–338.

Gronn argues for a reconceptualized stream of leadership that still values leadership as essential for organizational success but alters the form to fit better with the flow of influence in organizations. He focuses on the activity system model, which bridges leadership or organizational structures and the actions that occur through the agents of the organization.

Gronn, Peter. 2002. Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly* 13.4: 423–451.

This conceptual piece argues for the adoption of a distributed leadership framework, given the dichotomy between traditional leadership paradigms and the division of leadership practice in reality. Gronn reviews different forms of distributed leadership, offers his own taxonomy of distributed leadership, and reviews the literature on the subject.

Spillane, James P., John B. Diamond, and Loyiso Jita. 2003. Leading instruction: The distribution of leadership for instruction. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 35.5: 533–543.

This paper takes a closer look at the notion of leadership as a distributed practice, focusing attention chiefly on the social distribution of leadership practice; that is, the ways in which leadership practice in schools is stretched over both formal and informal leaders for analytical purposes. The authors identify categories or levels of distribution: co-enacted practice and independently enacted coordinated practice.

Spillane, James P., Richard Halverson, and John B. Diamond. 2001. Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher* 30.3: 23–28.

Spillane and colleagues sketch a distributed framework for research on school leadership and management, grounded in activity theory and distributed cognition. The framework suggests that leadership and management practice is not simply a function of an individual leader's ability, skill, charisma, and cognition but also those of others in the situation as well as aspects of the situation that contribute to defining these interactions.

Spillane, James P., Richard Halverson, and John B. Diamond. 2004. Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 36.1: 3–34.

Arguing for the centrality of the study of leadership and management practice in scholarship on leadership and management, the authors develop a distributed framework for such work using activity theory and distributed cognition theory. Their distributed framework focuses on interactions among actors, rather than the actions of individual leaders, and affords the situation a central role in leadership and management practice.

Thornton, Kate. 2010. The nature of distributed leadership and its development in online environments. In *Leadership in the digital enterprise: Issues and challenges*. **Edited by Pak Yoong, 1–14. Hershey, PA: IG Global.**

This chapter looks at how leadership can be distributed in online environments, specifically, in online communities of practice, virtual teams, and online action learning groups. Based on a review of the literature, Thornton finds that leadership actions in the initial stages of such environments are critical for the development of distributed leadership, as are the technologies used.

Walker, A., and G. Riordan. 2010. Leading collective capacity in culturally diverse schools. *School Leadership & Management* **30.1: 51–63.**

This article looks at collective capacity building in schools with culturally diverse staff bodies. Through a review of selected literature, the authors find that in order to build collective capacity in diverse environments school leaders need to have a firm understanding of the school's various cultures, support formal structures that foster intercultural relationship building, and understand how cultural values may influence expectations.

Woods, Philip A. 2004. Democratic leadership: Drawing distinctions with distributed leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education* **7.1: 3–26.**

This report covers the philosophical framework for democratic leadership and the ways in which it is similar to distributed leadership. These similarities include an emergent, cooperative property and an analytical approach. The concept is differentiated from distributed leadership on the grounds that the latter does not include a moral component.

Literature Reviews and Epistemological and Methodological Challenges

Given the relative novelty of efforts to theorize a distributed perspective, applications of the perspective as a conceptual frame in empirical work are not uniform. Many working in the field of school leadership and management have appropriated existing study measures, concepts, and data collection approaches to investigate school leadership and management from a distributed perspective. There is good reason to do that. Still, there are epistemological and methodological challenges involved in studying the school leadership and management from a distributed perspective that are unlikely to be addressed by relying on existing constructs, measures, and even popular methodologies in the field. Loose constructs contribute to fuzzy scholarship as researchers easily talk past one another with broad, ill-defined constructs that denote very different things depending on the user, creating consensus where none may exist. Work on construct conceptualization, study operations and measures, and instrument development will determine the quality of any effort to make causal inferences between leadership and management when framed from a distributed perspective and key school outcomes. Fancy statistical methods, or even random assignment, cannot compensate for loose constructs, weak study operations, and invalid and unreliable measurement. Some scholars have worked on the epistemological and methodological challenges posed by taking a distributed perspective to frame research on school leadership and management. This work has included attention to operationalizing core constructs when using a distributed framework and examining different ways of measuring these constructs, as in Spillane, et al. 2009 and Spillane 2010. The work has also focused on methodological issues by adapting and piloting data collection approaches, such as social network surveys and practice logs for collecting data on school leadership and management from a distributed perspective, as shown in Spillane and Zuberi 2009. Using social network analysis, for example, Pustejovsky and Spillane 2009 and Pitts and Spillane 2009 have designed, piloted, and redesigned instruments intended to identify both formal and informal sources of leadership in organizations.

Bennett, Nigel, Christine Wise, Philip A. Woods, and Janet A. Harvey. 2003. *Distributed leadership: A review of literature*. **Nottingham, UK: National College for School Leadership.**

This review highlights the multiple facets of distributed leadership and how these various understandings have guided the research. The report also discusses the various methodological approaches to studying the concept and makes suggestions for further analysis.

Harris, Alma. 2008. Distributed leadership: According to the evidence. *Journal of Educational Administration* **46.2: 172–188.**

This comprehensive review highlights the major research done on distributed leadership and presents examples of the obstacles that the model can face in education. Specifically, the rigidity that can be seen in school organizations can make it difficult to adapt to a more distributed approach to leadership.

Leithwood, Kenneth A., Blair Mascall, Tiiu Strauss, Robin Sacks, Nadeem Memon, and Anna Yashkina. 2007. Distributing leadership to make schools smarter: Taking the ego out of the system. *Leadership and Policy in Schools* **6.1: 37–67.**

This study investigates the practice of distributed leadership in eight Canadian schools and analyzes which factors make for the most effective distribution of leadership. Results show that distributing leadership among personnel does not diminish the amount of work performed or the demand for leadership from formal leaders.

Pitts, Virginia, and James P. Spillane. 2009. Using social network methods to study school leadership. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* **32.2: 185–207.**

This study examines the validity of a social network survey instrument, the School Staff Social Network Questionnaire (SSSNQ). The study finds that the SSSNQ successfully identified leadership patterns shown in social networks, including informal leadership roles that would not have been identified by focusing only on organizational routines.

Pustejovsky, James, and James P. Spillane. 2009. Question-order effects in social network name generators. *Social Networks* **31.4: 221–229.**

A methods-heavy piece that examines how question-order effects in social network surveys may impact survey results. The authors test their hypotheses using a multiple name generator survey and find evidence of certain question-order effects. They discuss their results within the larger context of social network instrument creation.

Spillane, James P. 2010. A distributed perspective on school leadership and management. In *International encyclopedia of education*. **Vol. 5. Edited by Eva Baker, Barry McGaw, and Penelope L. Peterson, 1–6. Amsterdam: Elsevier.**

This piece reviews the state of the literature pointing out wide variation in the usage of the term "distributed leadership" and noting two broad categories of usage. While some use distributed leadership as a conceptual lens for studying or diagnosing the phenomena of leadership and management, others use it as a prescription—an improvement strategy for schools.

Spillane, James P., Eric Camburn, James Pustejovsky, Amber Stitziel Pareja, and Geoff Lewis. 2009. Taking a distributed perspective in studying school leadership and management: The challenge of study operations. In *Distributed leadership: Different perspectives.* **Edited by Alma Harris, 47–80. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.**

The authors argue that before researchers begin to accumulate evidence on distributed leadership in schools, they must pay attention to the operationalization of the concepts, that is, translating the theory into study operations that can be measured the translation of theory into measurement. This chapter considers different ways of operationalizing leadership from a distributed perspective for the purpose of conducting empirical work.

Spillane, James P., and Anita Zuberi. 2009. Designing and piloting a leadership daily practice log: Using logs to study the practice of leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 45.3: 375–423.

Based on data from an array of formal school leaders and teachers, the authors combine multiple data sources of empirical data including a daily practice log, observations, and open-ended cognitive interviews to evaluate the validity of a Leadership Daily Practice (LDP) log for capturing leadership interactions related to instruction in everyday elementary school practice to show that the LDP log can capture, with some modifications, school leadership interactions.

Empirical Work on Distributed Leadership in Primary and Elementary School

Much of the empirical work on distributed leadership has been conducted in elementary or primary schools using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. Few studies have focused on leadership and management in elementary, middle, and high schools, with notable exceptions being Portin, et al. 2003 and Copland 2003. In this section, we focus on elementary schools but also include studies that addressed both elementary and secondary schools. To date, most though not all of this work is in the descriptive theory-building rather than in the theory-testing tradition, as one might expect considering that consistent work on distributed leadership is relatively recent. The empirical work conducted in various schools around the work suggests that school principals do not have a monopoly on leading and managing schools. Many of the studies listed below find that other formal leaders also play a role, including but not limited to assistant principals, program coordinators or facilitators, subject area coordinators, mentor and master teachers, and coaches. Further, as Heller and Firestone 1995 points out, people outside the school, such as district personnel and external consultants, also take responsibility for school leadership and management. The manner in which responsibility for leadership and management is distributed, however, depends on a number of factors. Principals and assistant principals tend to cover a broader array of leadership and management functions, as shown by Camburn, et al. 2003; Spillane and Diamond 2007; and Heller and Firestone 1995, while coaches, mentor teachers, and related instructional leaders tend to focus more narrowly on leading and managing classroom instruction and its improvement. Spillane, et al. 2003 finds that the school subject also appears to matter, with teachers constructing different leaders depending on the context of the subject area. There is also research evidence to suggest that the ways in which responsibility for leadership and management is arranged differ according to the type of school, such as public, magnet, private, charter, or Catholic, as discussed in Portin, et al. 2003. Some works such as Copland 2003 and Spillane and Diamond 2007 also point out that the distribution of responsibility for leadership and management among school leaders shifts as schools evolve through a change or improvement process and move across different developmental stages. A critical issue when examining leadership from a distributed perspective concerns the arrangements by which different leaders are involved in the work of leading and managing.

Camburn, Eric M., Brian Rowan, and James E. Taylor. 2003. Distributed leadership in schools: The case of elementary schools adopting comprehensive school reform models. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 25.4: 347–373.

A study of over one hundred US elementary schools found that responsibility for leadership functions was typically distributed across three to seven formal leadership positions per school including principals, assistant principals, program coordinators, mentors, and other professional staff. While formal positions such as the school principal performed a range of functions, others such as consultants focused on fewer functions.

Copland, Michael A. 2003. Leadership of inquiry: Building and sustaining capacity for school improvement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 25.4: 375–395.

Using qualitative and quantitative data from sixteen elementary and secondary schools, Copland studies leaderships in schools undergoing the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. The study confirms that principals believe that distributing leadership throughout the whole school is necessary and finds that schools with longer histories of implementing reform efforts exhibit a broader distribution of leadership.

Heller, Marjorie F., and William A. Firestone. 1995. Who's in charge here? Sources of leadership for change in eight schools. *Elementary School Journal* **96.1: 65–86.**

Based on a study of nine elementary schools, Heller and Firestone find that teachers comprise a variety of formal and informal leadership roles within schools. These roles often overlap and lead to redundant efforts. However, redundancy encouraged a shared sense of purpose, encouragement, and performance checks among teachers.

Portin, Bradley, Paul Schneider, Michael DeArmond, and Lauren Gundlach. 2003. Making sense of leading schools: A study of the school principalship. Seattle: Washington Univ.

Using interview data from twenty-one elementary and high schools, this study finds that principals distribute instructional leadership so that they can address other school issues. The pattern of leadership distribution depends on school type: In charter schools and public schools, leadership is distributed across more actors than it is in Catholic schools.

Spillane, James P., Eric M. Camburn, and Amber Stitziel Pareja. 2007. Taking a distributed perspective to the school principal's workday. *Leadership and Policy in Schools* **6.1: 103–125.**

Viewed from the perspective of the school principal's day-to-day work and using log data from principals, the paper shows that who takes responsibility for leading and managing the schoolhouse and the prevalence of co-performance of leadership work vary considerably depending on the type of activity and the particular school.

Spillane, James P., and John B. Diamond. 2007. *Distributed leadership in practice.* **New York: Teachers College Press.**

The book uses detailed case studies of leadership and management in urban schools to explore how a distributed perspective is different from other frameworks for thinking about leadership, providing rich examples of how taking a distributed perspective can help researchers understand and connect more directly to leadership practice.

Spillane, James P., Tim Hallett, and John B. Diamond. 2003. Forms of capital and the construction of leadership: Instructional leadership in urban elementary schools. *Sociology of Education* **76.1: 1–17.**

The paper examines how school leaders and teachers construct others as influential leaders using various forms of capital including human, cultural, social, and economic capital. The construction of leadership for instruction is often situated in various types of interactions (e.g., subject area) and varies depending on the leaders' position.

Spillane, James P., Leigh M. Parise, and Jennifer Z. Sherer. 2011. Organizational routines as coupling mechanisms: Policy, school administration, and the technical core. *American Educational Research Journal* **48.3: 586–620.**

This piece shows that school leaders design new organizational routines and reshape existing organizational routines to more closely couple government regulation with classroom instruction. Organizational routines encourage a focus on practice, which is viewed as a product of staff interactions. Analysis is based on qualitative data from four public elementary schools in Chicago.

Empirical Work on Distributed Leadership in Secondary School, School Districts, and Higher Education

Research using a distributed framework to study leadership and management arrangements in high schools or secondary schools is relatively scarce. While a couple of studies include both elementary and secondary schools (see Empirical Work on Distributed Leadership in Primary and Elementary School), there is a need for more work on secondary schools as the organizational arrangements (e.g., subject matter departments), and the subject matter specializations of teachers create dramatically different conditions for school leadership and management compared with elementary schools. Jones, et al. 2012 shows that the same holds for universities. Yet, there is very limited research on university leadership and management from a distributed perspective. Further, schools, whether elementary or secondary, do not reside in a vacuum but are part of what we refer to as education systems, yet few studies attend to how the work of leadership and management is distributed not only within organizations but also within the systems in which these organizations matter. Two exceptions are Firestone and Martinez 2007, which looks at school districts, and Orborn, et al. 2013, which examines health-care systems. Intra- and inter-organizational arrangements are very likely to matter when it comes to understanding leadership and management from a distributed perspective.

Firestone, William A., and M. Cecilia Martinez. 2007. Districts, teacher leaders, and distributed leadership: Changing instructional practice. *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 6.1: 3–35.

This study identifies specific duties that can be shared by school districts and teachers and factors that influence the effectiveness of these teacher leaders. Teacher leaders can be effectively utilized in district efforts because they can add a human element to directives passed down from district administration.

Gronn, Peter, and A. Hamilton. 2004. A bit more life in the leadership: Co-principalship as distributed leadership practice. *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 3.1: 3–35.

Based on their study of an all-girls secondary Catholic school, Gronn and Hamilton conclude that an alternative model of leadership, defined as co-principalship, has the potential to work as a better alternative for a leadership model. By allowing shared role space, each leader is able to diffuse leadership responsibilities and make the organization more democratic.

Hargreaves, Andy, and Dean Fink. 2003. Sustaining leadership. *Phi Delta Kappan* 84.9: 693–700.

An examination of what it means to be sustainable, this piece develops key principles of "sustaining leadership" using a study of secondary schools in Ontario and New York State. Among these principles are taking a systems approach to leadership, viewing leadership as continuous over time and individuals, and creating a school culture of distributed leadership.

Harris, Alma. 2002. Effective leadership in schools facing challenging contexts. *School Leadership & Management* 22.1: 15–26.

Using case studies of ten secondary schools in challenging circumstances, Harris finds that effective leadership in these schools is characterized by a shared or distributed architecture and is focused on positivity and empowerment. Harris argues that the traditional view of leadership should be reconsidered given these results.

Jones, Sandra, Geraldine Lefoe, Marina Harvey, and Kevin Ryland. 2012. Distributed leadership: A collaborative framework for academics, executives and professionals in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 34.1: 67–78.

Qualitative data gathered in Australia is used to conclude that higher education represents a unique leadership environment, and developing useful models of distributed leadership is important for higher education to keep up with changing internal and external forces. The authors develop a model that focuses on collaboration between the entire staff of a university beyond academic positions.

Orborn, Eivor, Michael Barrett, and Sandra Dawson. 2013. Distributed leadership in policy formulation: A sociomaterial perspective. *Organization Studies* **34.2: 253–276.**

A study of distributed leadership outside the field of education. This paper uses a sociomaterial approach to explore the ins and outs of leadership distribution in health policy development in the United Kingdom—both inside organizations and in the larger healthcare system. Authors find that leadership is constituted by experts together with elected leaders and other social actors.

Seashore Louis, Karen, David Mayrowetz, Mark Smiley, and Joseph Murphy. 2009. The role of sensemaking and trust in developing distributed leadership. In *Distributed leadership: Different perspectives.* **Edited by Alma Harris, 157–180. Dordrecht: Springer.**

This study examines six secondary schools over three years and finds that trust—between teachers, in administrators, and in administrative support—is positively related to teachers' sensemaking about distributed leadership initiatives; a lack of trust leads to negative views of these initiatives. Teachers' sensemaking of distributed leadership initiatives is also influenced by the role key administrators play in the initiative.

Research on Relations Between Distributed Leadership, School Organizational Conditions, and Outcomes

Research on leadership and management from a distributed perspective is still very much in its infancy. While more theory building and the generation of tenable hypotheses is important, there is a great need for more work that investigates relations between different leadership and management arrangements and school organization conditions and outcomes. Several studies over the past few years are beginning to suggest relations between distributed leadership arrangements and various school conditions. Some works, such as Heck and Hallinger 2009 and Boudreaux 2011, connect distributed leadership directly not only to school improvement but to student achievement. Other research, such as Hulpia, et al. 2011, connects distributed leadership arrangements to teacher commitment. Still others, such as Leithwood and Jantzi 1998, point to the limitations of focusing only on the school principal when measuring the effects of school leadership.

Baloglu, Nuri. 2012. Relations between value-based leadership and distributed leadership: A casual research on school principles' behaviors. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice* **12.2: 1375–1378.**

This study investigates two types of leadership used in a school setting and finds that value-driven leadership is often used in conjunction with distributed leadership practices.

Bishop, Russell. 2011. How effective leaders reduce educational disparities. In *Leadership and learning.* **Edited by Jan Robertson and Helen S. Timperley, 27–40. London: SAGE.**

This article outlines the ways in which effective leadership can reduce educational disparities for minority populations, drawing examples from Te Kotahitanga, a large-scale educational reform implemented in secondary schools in New Zealand. Bishop argues that principals must distribute leadership to teachers, parents, and community members in order to successfully lead school reform.

Boudreaux, Wilbert. 2011. Distributed leadership and high-stakes testing: Examining the relationship between distributed leadership and LEAP scores. EdD diss., Southeastern Louisiana Univ.

Examining teacher evaluation of organizational practices, Boudreaux positively links specific aspects of distributed leadership,

specifically school culture, teacher leadership, and principal leadership, with student achievement on a state assessment. Additionally, all forms of distributed leadership had a positive effect on academic assessment results.

Heck, Ronald H., and Philip Hallinger. 2009. Assessing the contribution of distributed leadership to school improvement and growth in math achievement. *American Educational Research Journal* **46.3: 659–689.**

This longitudinal study on elementary schools finds that distributed leadership in the organization of a school has a positive effect on academic capacity, as well as an indirect effect on student achievement.

Hulpia, Hester, Geert Devos, and Hilde Van Keer. 2011. The relation between school leadership from a distributed perspective and teachers' organizational commitment: Examining the source of the leadership function. *Educational Administration Quarterly* **47.5: 728–771.**

This article finds that teachers who perceive the leadership team in their school to be working cooperatively exhibit higher levels of organizational commitment, and the quality of teacher support also has a positive effect on this commitment. Interestingly, the role of the leader providing the support has no impact.

Leithwood, K., and D. Jantzi. 1998. Distributed leadership and student engagement in school. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Leithwood and Jantzi reveal that the effects of principal leadership on students are small but significant, and in fact are no greater than the effect of teacher leadership on the same outcome. Both principal and teacher leadership impact the same aspects of school culture, suggesting the importance of developing teacher leadership.

Penuel, William R., Kenneth A. Frank, and Ann Krause. 2010. Between leaders and teachers: Using social network analysis to examine the effects of distributed leadership. In *Social network theory and educational change.* **Edited by Alan J. Daly, 159–178. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education.**

Using data from twenty-one schools in the US Pacific West region, this study looks at the relationship between distributed leadership and school reform goals. Using social network analysis, it identifies a positive effect of distributed leadership on school reform efforts and a positive effect of informal interactions between teachers on teacher practices.

Timperley, Helen S. 2005. Distributed leadership: Developing theory from practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies* **37.4: 395–420.**

Timperley studied elementary schools in New Zealand over four years and found that literacy teacher leaders took a leadership role in changing other teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the need for teachers to closely reexamine and shift teaching practices to improve student outcomes. This allowed teachers to better address student under achievement.

Distributed Leadership for Practitioners and Policymakers

Theory is a bad word for many practitioners and policymakers. Further, conceptual tools and empirical findings are often lost in translation between the world of policy and practice and the world of researchers. Work on distributed leadership will not be immune from these challenges. While some of this may be inevitable, we believe that scholars can do more to relate their theory in a user-

friendly way to the world of practitioners and policymakers. In applied fields such as education, scholars need to work on making their conceptual and methodological tools useful to and usable for practitioners—school leaders. We take up these three issues here. Several books and papers have been written specifically with practitioners and policymakers in mind. Some of this work, such as Harris 2008 and Spillane, et al. 2005, translates theory and empirical findings on distributed leadership in a way to make it accessible to practitioners. Other work, such as Spillane 2011, Spillane and Coldren 2011, and McBeth 2008, goes even further to engage school leaders in the actual work of diagnosis and design using a distributed framework and providing tools to engage in that work.

Halverson, Richard. 2007. How leaders use artifacts to structure professional community in schools. In *Professional learning communities: Divergence, depth and dilemmas.* **Edited by Louise Stoll and Karen Seashore Louis, 93–105. Maidenhead, UK: Open Univ. Press.**

School leaders acknowledge that in order to foster systemic change in schools, collaborative action must be facilitated in the form of professional community. Artifacts (programs, policies, and procedures that leaders use to initiate instructional reform), if used correctly by school leaders, have the potential to increase collective understanding and collaborative action.

Harris, Alma. 2008. *Distributed leadership in schools: Developing the leaders of tomorrow.* **London: Routledge & Falmer.**

This book introduces practitioners to distributed leadership using concrete examples and case studies from the Developing Leaders Programme. It offers a practical discussion of distributed leadership in schools and argues for developing leaders that are already in schools to maximize distributed leadership potential.

Harris, Alma, and James P. Spillane. 2008. Distributed leadership through the looking glass. *Management in Education* **22.1: 31–34.**

The article examines distributed leadership outlining some of the core ideas in the framework including an acknowledgement of multiple leaders and the centrality of practice as well as considering the framework from both a normative and a conceptual stance, underscoring that the central concern is *how* leadership is distributed and how different arrangements might matter to valued school outcomes.

McBeth, Mark E. 2008. *The distributed leadership toolbox: Essential practices for successful schools.* **Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.**

A resource for educational leaders that outlines a distributed leadership framework and offers concrete case studies and other resources to help school administrators engage in distributed leadership practices. A practical tool for administrators or teachers to begin to explore distributed leadership in practice.

Spillane, James P. 2011. The Distributed Leadership Studies: A case study of research in and for school practice. In *Disrupting tradition: Research and practice pathways in mathematics education.* **Edited by William F. Tate, Karen King, and Celia Rousseau Anderson, 7–20. Reston, VA: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.**

The chapter uses a research and development project on distributed leadership to explore the work of connecting research with practice and policy, including using research findings to engage policymakers and practitioners in diagnosing and design work so as to develop practical knowledge—"how knowledge" as distinct from "what knowledge" about leading and managing instruction.

Spillane, James P., and Amy F. Coldren. 2011. *Diagnosis and design for school improvement: Using a distributed perspective*

to lead and manage change. **New York: Teachers College Press.**

The authors argue that school leaders and practitioners need to engage in the twin process of diagnosis and design in order to lead and manage school improvement. Reform should be mindfully designed with an understanding of how leading and managing for instructional improvement is done within a particular school.

Spillane, James P., Jennifer Sherer, and Amy F. Coldren. 2005. Distributed leadership: Leadership practice and the situation. In *Educational leadership and reform*. **Edited by Wayne K. Hoy and Cecil G. Miskel, 149–168. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.**

Focusing on the situation dimension of the distributed leadership framework, the authors theorize how the situation is both constituted in and constitutive of that practice. Using organizational routines and tools as exemplars, the authors described how the treatment of the situation vis-à-vis practice from a distributed perspective differs compared with prior efforts to take account of the situation in investigations of leadership.

back to top

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS