

**Exploring the Construction of Leadership  
for Instruction in Urban Elementary Schools:  
Leadership as Symbolic Power\***

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## Abstract

Recent educational policy initiatives attempt to change school authority and influence arrangements. The two leading theoretical perspectives for understanding how these processes unfold are the rational-legal and the institutional models. This paper critiques and expands these perspectives by illuminating how the authority to influence classroom instruction is based on a process through which followers imbue leaders with legitimacy – symbolic power – based on their perceptions of the leaders’ possession of human, cultural, social, and economic capital.

## Introduction

At the core of many recent educational policy initiatives is an attempt to change authority and influence patterns in American schools. Dominated by rational-legal conceptions of power (Dunlap & Goldman 1991), many of these models assume that the authority implied in accountability levers will trickle down from the state and district to school administrators and into classroom instructional practices. In contrast, many analysts who adhere to the institutional perspective suggest that because schools decouple administration from the core technology of schooling (i.e., instruction), these external policy mechanisms will have limited impact on classroom instruction (Meyer & Rowan 1977; Elmore 1995).

In this paper we argue that neither the rational-legal nor the institutional perspectives can fully explain patterns of authority and influence with respect to classroom instruction. Rather, using data from a longitudinal study of school leadership in eight urban schools, we demonstrate that teachers identify multiple formal and *informal* leaders who influence their instructional practices. Moreover, when they attribute leadership to formal leaders it is less often about their position than about the various species of capital they possess. We argue that while rational-legal and institutional models contribute to our understanding of instructional leadership, neither can account for the frequent ability of non-positional leaders to influence instruction, or adequately explain the process through which followers attribute legitimacy to *both* administrators and other teachers. By emphasizing positions and ideal-typical categories of authority, rational-legal models assume the actors involved view these positions and categories as legitimate (Hardy and Clegg 1996: 624), rather than examining the *process* through which actors come to see such positions and categories as legitimate (thereby giving the people in those positions power). Institutional theory emphasizes institutional sectors and tends to use aggregated data, giving little attention to the day-to-day interactions between leaders and followers (DiMaggio 1988; Whittington 1992). To expand on these perspectives we construct a model based on Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power.

We begin by outlining the theoretical underpinnings for our work and describing our methodology. We then take up two issues. First, exploring patterns of instructional influence and authority, we examine who or where teachers turn for guidance around their mathematics, literacy, and science instruction. Based on this analysis, we argue that authority and influence over instruction are socially distributed across both formal positional leaders (administrators and specialists) and informal leaders (teachers). Next, in an effort to understand *why* certain people come to be influential, we appropriate Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power to develop an integrative theory of instructional authority, one that is not limited to rational-legal or institutional models. In our scheme, influence and authority are socially constituted; for leaders to lead, others must agree to follow or at least heed the leaders' guidance and direction (Simon 1991; Cuban 1988; Lindblom 1977). Though our research focuses on public elementary schools, the theory we develop can be usefully applied to other leadership contexts.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

We need an approach that builds on the strengths of rational-legal and institutional models, yet transcends their limitations by helping us account for how classroom instruction can be at once loosely coupled from school administration, and yet influenced by multiple actors (not just the principal and assistant principal). We appropriate Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power, defined as "the power of constructing reality" (Bourdieu 1991: 166).<sup>1</sup> As we see it, leaders in an organization must possess the symbolic power to define a situation (Goffman 1959; 1974), tacitly causing followers to act in accordance, a subtle form of coercion. However, the symbolic power possessed by leaders does not rest solely in a position in a hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the possession of symbolic power by leaders depends on a dynamic relationship with followers, a relationship in which followers attribute legitimacy to leaders based on the possession of human, cultural, social, and economic capital.

As a source of symbolic power, human capital concerns a person's knowledge, skills, and expertise.<sup>3</sup> It is generated by the development of skills and capabilities that

enable people to perform in new ways. Cultural capital refers to valued beliefs and worldviews, but also inculcated dispositions that shape our actions in the world and interactions with others (Bourdieu 1984; 1986). As we are using the term, cultural capital reflects an overall cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986), a resource for action informing how people approach and act in the world, manifested in habitual ways of being and doing, a particular interactive style. Social capital takes the form of social networks, but also concerns the relations among individuals in a group or organization. Such networks result from the prevalence of norms such as trust, trustworthiness, and collaboration, as well as a sense of obligation among individuals (Coleman 1988: S101-S102). Finally, economic capital includes money and other material resources.

Though these forms of capital can become a source of symbolic power, in themselves they mean little, and they can only be understood within specific interaction contexts (Lareau 1989, Lareau and Horvat 1999, Farkas 1996). Forms of capital only matter to the extent that other people in the situation *value* them. When a potential leader possesses certain forms of capital *and* followers value them, followers attribute legitimacy to the leader based on these forms of capital. When this process of valuation and attribution occurs, the various forms of capital possessed by a leader are converted into “symbolic capital,” a measure of overall social esteem, a credit that can be deployed as symbolic power.

---[Insert Figure 1 Here]---

To quote Bourdieu, symbolic capital is “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (1989: 17). As we use the concept, a potential leader’s symbolic capital (and symbolic power) can only be understood in terms of the perceptions of those over whom the leader has influence (see Figure 1). For a potential leader to acquire symbolic capital and symbolic power, that person must undergo a *process of valuation*: Based on the possession of human, cultural, social, and economic capital, potential leaders must be perceived as “valid” by followers, who then attribute legitimacy to the leader. Thus, leaders are constructed and given

symbolic power by followers. However, because actors enter social worlds where particular forms of capital have already been defined as “valid,” this construction or “valuation” is not entirely voluntary (Lee 1998). Actors in this situation have the agency to attribute legitimacy, but this agency is both the “medium and the outcome” of existing social structures (Giddens 1979; 1984).<sup>4</sup>

It is this contextually limited process that we emphasize. In doing so we also draw from Weber. Using the terms “domination” and “authority” interchangeably, Weber defines them as “the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (1968: 212). Yet Weber goes on to state “every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is an *interest* (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience” (1968: 212). Thus, we should not assume that authority exists in a vacuum apart from the situation and the people involved. Weber’s emphasis on a “minimum of voluntary compliance” and the interests of those under authority indicate that authority is a form of symbolic power based on a situated process of valuation.

Weber identifies three ideal types of authority: Traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. However, when thinking in terms of symbolic power as a process in which followers attribute legitimacy to leaders, it is more useful to think of Weber’s ideal types as *sources* of authority, rather than types of authority in themselves. In each type the source of valuation varies. “Traditional authority” rests on “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them” (1968: 216). In this case, the source of valuation is “immemorial traditions.” Although monarchies are the paradigmatic example, traditional authority can also be seen in schools, for example the positive valuation of the “sanctity of the cellular structure of classrooms.” Traditionally, teachers are seen as independent operators in their classrooms, a value that attracts people who have a disposition towards autonomy (cultural capital) into the profession (Lortie 1975). School personnel continue to value this autonomy, and the traditional cellular structure of the school is reproduced.

According to Weber, the source of charismatic authority is the valuation of the “exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person” (1968: 215). In times of conflict and war, “charisma” is based on the valuation of heroic deeds. But in the context of everyday life, this “charisma” is likely based on the positive evaluation of human capital (skills, knowledge, expertise) and cultural capital (way of being and doing, interactive style). A “charismatic leader” is one who can successfully use impression management (Goffman 1959) to enact his/her human and cultural capital in a way that is pleasing to followers, causing the followers to value the leader, thereby imbuing the leader with legitimacy and symbolic power.

In contrast to traditional and charismatic authority, the source of “rational-legal” or “bureaucratic” authority is based on a valuation of “legally enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands” (Weber 1968: 215). Rational-legal authority is hierarchic in nature and the idea of expertise (human capital) is folded into this form of power: Followers are thought to evaluate leaders through a rational decision-making process about the merit of the candidates. Persons in positions of authority are valued for their expertise which other people in the organization lack. Yet over time the position itself becomes central, removed from the individuals involved: The roots of power or the legitimacy to exercise power come from the positive valuation of formal roles and rules within hierarchical organizations.<sup>5</sup>

Rational-legal conceptions of power are limited, however, because they often equate power and influence exclusively with those in formal leadership positions within a hierarchy. Research on schools and other organizations underscores the need to move beyond those at the top of organizations in order to understand leadership (Heller & Firestone 1995; Gronn, 2000; 1999; Hennan & Bennis 1999; Lipman-Blumen 1996; Ogawa & Bossert 1995; Pitner 1986; Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams 1995). Cognizant of these findings, we premise our work on a distributed view of leadership for instruction (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2001; see also Connolly, 2000; Gronn, 2000; Leithwood, Jantzi, Steinbach, & Ryan, 1997). We understand influence over instruction as

something that is stretched across people (both formal and informal leaders as well as followers) and the situation (e.g., material artifacts, organizational structures) (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond, 2001). Since leadership for instructional change is distributed, a rational-legal conception of power is limiting because it confines the exercise of power and influence to those in formal leadership positions.

Where rational-legal models emphasize positional authority, institutional models focus on decoupling and/or loose coupling, emphasizing individual isolation and autonomy within the organization. Yet “loose coupling” cannot adequately explain the multiple influences teachers report on their instructional practices. Thus, where rational-legal and institutional models downplay the interactions between multiple actors, we are intimately aware of the actions of individuals as leaders and followers. People matter in our model. However, ours is not a trait-based understanding of leadership. In our model people, the positions they fill, and the forms of capital they possess matter, but only to the extent that others in the situation *value* those positions and forms of capital, converting them into a source of symbolic power. Thus, symbolic power is both created and deployed in particular situations and interactions, as leaders and followers enact and interpret forms of capital based on the meanings those forms of capital have for them (Blumer 1969).

Up to this point it may seem as though we have used a number of terms interchangeably, namely leadership, symbolic power, authority, and influence. Now that we have fleshed out our theoretical frame, we can make some terminological distinctions. In approaching the topic of leadership we use the analytic tool of social distribution, viewing leadership as something that is stretched across people (both formal and informal leaders as well as followers) and the situation (e.g., material artifacts, organizational structures) (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 1999; Gronn, 2000).

--- Insert Figure 2 Here ---

Leadership itself involves the possession and deployment of symbolic power. Symbolic power is the ability to successfully define a reality, causing others to act in accordance, thereby shaping the (instructional) practices of others. Yet symbolic power can be

imprecise, in that when leaders define reality, there is typically room for followers to wiggle, to accept certain definitions and modify others. Thus followers may act in strict accordance to a defined reality (authority), or they may appropriate certain elements of a defined reality, shaping but not determining their practices (influence). Thus, authority and influence can be conceived as the ends of a continuum, the extent to which followers act in accordance with the deployment of symbolic power.

---Insert Figure 3 Here ---

### Methodology

This paper is based on data from the Distributed Leadership Project, a four-year longitudinal study of elementary school leadership funded by the National Science Foundation and the Spencer Foundation. The project began with a six-month pilot phase involving 7 Chicago public elementary schools in the winter and spring of 1999. The first full year of data collection began in September 1999 and involves eight Chicago elementary schools, two of which were also included in the pilot phase (a total of 13 schools).

Site Selection. Schools were selected through the logic of selective (Schatzman and Strauss 1973) and theoretical sampling (Glaser 1978; Glaser & Strauss 1967) according to three dimensions. First, wanting to understand leadership in high poverty urban schools, all schools in our study have a minimum of 60% of students receiving free or reduced lunch (See Table 1). Second, believing that the ethnicity and race of students could be an important context for the practice of leadership, we selected schools that vary in terms of student demographics, including seven predominantly African American schools, three that are predominantly Hispanic, and three that are mixed (See Table 1). Third, we were chiefly interested in schools that had shown signs of improving mathematics, science, or literacy instruction (in terms of either process or outcome measures). Accordingly, we used the Consortium on Chicago School Research longitudinal database to identify elementary schools that had shown indications of improvement on measures including

“academic press,” “professional community,” and “instructional leadership” (process measures) and “academic productivity.”<sup>6</sup>

Data Collection. Research methodologies include observations, structured and semi-structured interviews, a network questionnaire, and videotapes of leadership practice. For the purpose of this paper we focused on interviews with 84 teachers from eight of the schools in our sample (one school from the pilot phase, one school included in both the pilot and year one data collection, and six of the year-one schools). This sub-sample was chosen for the following reason. After analyzing the pilot data, we found that teachers attribute legitimacy to certain leaders, many of whom are not in formal leadership positions. However, we could only understand this process when we pressed teachers on *why* they identified particular people as influential. Because a focus on attribution was not a central concern in the original theoretical framing for the study and did not feature prominently in the original interview protocol, data collection around this issue from the pilot phase was uneven, especially in interview only sites. When teachers from the pilot identified certain people as leaders, sometimes they spoke at length about why and sometimes they did not, leaving a major gap in our data. Based on our analysis of the pilot, our interest in the process of attribution increased and we built it into our overall theoretical apparatus and revised the interview protocols for our next round of data collection (year 01).

Reliability and validity checks on year 01 data uncovered problems with the data relating to followers’ construction of leaders for one of the schools. Specifically, interviewers collecting data in that school had not consistently pressed interviewees as to *why* they identified certain people as influential. Hence, we dropped this school from our study for the purpose of this paper. However, we did include one of the schools from the pilot, where probes had been used to pursue informants’ reasons for attributing power and influence to others.

Data Analysis. Data collection and analysis (ongoing) have been closely integrated, allowing us to uncover patterns and working hypotheses as they emerged from the data

while refining data collection strategies as the study progresses (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Coding categories were developed based on the distributed leadership theoretical framework and initial analyses of our observation and interview data. A commercial computer-based qualitative coding program - NUDIST - was used to code all project data. NUDIST allowed us to code the emerging ideas and concepts from the data into free nodes that can be compared and related to each other, forming larger “parent” nodes that can be stored into an index system that hangs together the different components of the project.

For the purpose of this paper we focused on three index trees of our interview coding system. The first index tree identified who or what influences classroom instruction. Twelve nodes were created to code these data including principal, assistant principal, teacher leaders, other teachers, standards documents, testing, Local School Council, parents, and textbooks. The second tree identified the dimension of instruction over which influence was exercised along two dimensions—subject matter and aspect of instruction. Our third index tree centered on the attribution of legitimacy to leaders identifying the informant’s rationale for identifying a particular leader as influential. Six nodes were created to code these data including economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, human capital, structural (i.e., proximity), and demographics (i.e., race and gender).

### Leadership and Power as a Distributed Phenomenon

Our data show that influence and authority over classroom instruction is distributed among numerous actors and materials in and beyond the school. Authority and influence over instruction typically involve multiple leaders including the principal, assistant principal, teacher specialists, other classroom teachers, and occasionally parents or the Local School Council. Teachers also attribute authority and influence to material artifacts including (but not limited to) state and district standards, student tests, and textbooks. To quote one teacher:

Actually over the past two years I’ve changed tremendously in the way that I teach reading. So I had to pull things out of everywhere. I went to every teacher that I could possibly think of in this school that could help me. I got information

from the reading recovery teachers, from the reading specialists. I went to the library a lot. I did a lot of reading on professional books. I was on the Internet all the time. I joined a first grade newsletter on the Internet where people share different ideas and how to teach different things and I tried everything.

This teacher identifies four different influences on her reading instruction: other teachers, the reading specialist, books, and the Internet. Such examples are typical in our data.

When it comes to instruction, most teachers identify anywhere from two to six sources of influence for their instruction, indicating that authority and influence over instruction are distributed across multiple people and material resources.

This paper is primarily concerned with people as leaders who influence instruction. Of the 84 teachers in our eight-school sample, 71.4% (60) identify being influenced by other people. More specifically, 63.1% (53) identify two or more people, while 8.3% (7) mention just one other person as influential. To understand the nature of leadership, however, we must move beyond the simple identification of an influence to an understanding of the various forms of capital and the process of attribution in which symbolic power is created. Only then can we understand *why* teachers identify certain people as influential leaders.

### The Sources and Process of Symbolic Power

Rational-Legal Sources of Symbolic Power. Teachers in our sample do make reference to “rational-legal” or “bureaucratic” bases of symbolic power. Specifically, they refer to agencies, most frequently Chicago Public Schools’ standards and frameworks. One teacher pulled out a book and told us:

This is our Chicago Public Schools Academic Standards and Framework...we call it our “Bible,” but this is everything that you have to teach and it’s split up by grade level and by subject area. . . So whenever we write up our lesson plans, this is what we look for: “Well, I have to teach this so I need to come up with an activity that goes with this goal.”

This teacher gears her instruction towards certain goals as articulated by city standards and frameworks. Of the 84 teachers in our eight-school sample, 41.7% (35) cited CPS

standards and frameworks as influencing their instructional practices. Another rational-legal structure that shapes instruction is CPS's emphasis on standardized testing:

The system is assessment driven. The whole Chicago system. That's all you hear about in the media. You know, the test scores.... So naturally the teachers are focusing on...making sure their children do as well as possible. So anything that's going to help along that process is useful.

This teacher later states "to increase test scores is definitely a major goal" in the Chicago public school system. Of the 84 teachers in our sample, 46.4% (39) indicate that such tests shape their instructional practices. As these examples illustrate, many (though certainly not all) teachers are influenced by rational-legal structures in the form of city standards, frameworks, and testing goals.<sup>7</sup>

While these examples involve rational-legal bases of authority tied to school district agencies, a few teachers also make similar references to rational-legal structures with respect to school administrators. In explaining why she discussed a particular lesson with her principal, one teacher explained: "I went to Dr. Ordonez because she's the principal. I wanted to be sure that I was doing the right thing." This teacher explains her principal's influence only in terms of position. Another teacher expressed a similar view: "you have to understand the politics of education. I think in the workplace you have to understand, you have to. You know, because the administrator has all the power. He can crush you and bounce you around." Yet for the vast majority of the teachers in our sample, position alone is not a sufficient basis of symbolic power: Only 7 of our 84 teachers (8.3%) cited position alone when discussing the influence of administrators. Further, in some schools teachers *do not* value their boss, and *do not* imbue them with the legitimacy to influence their instructional practices. Such positions only matter to the extent that followers imbue those positions and the people occupying them with legitimacy (a process of symbolic power).

Many of those who exercise leadership in the schools in our study are not positional leaders. To be sure, administrators are very influential. Of the 84 teachers in our sample, 83.3% (70) indicated that the principal shaped their instructional practices,

while 28.6% (24) mentioned the assistant principal.<sup>8</sup> And yet 79.8% of the teachers' (67) identified other teachers as influential. Consequently, we cannot rely exclusively on rational-legal models to account for the patterns of authority and influence found in our study. Still, classroom instruction does not appear to be decoupled or even loosely coupled, as our data do reveal patterns of influence. While teachers in our study identify multiple actors as having an influence on their instructional practices (and not simply positional leaders), to understand *why* these people have the symbolic power to influence teaching practice we must move beyond a rational-legal framework or an institutional framework.

Forms of Capital and Symbolic Power. As discussed above, many of the people who exercise symbolic power in the schools we are studying are not positional leaders. Moreover, even when followers talk to us about positional leaders, followers do not always emphasize positions in the hierarchy as the basis of leaders' legitimacy, or they emphasize other factors in addition to formal positions in the school hierarchy. This legitimacy is a perception in that it refers to the responses of followers to a potential leader; it involves an evaluation by followers indicating that the actions of a potential leader are appropriate and desirable within a socially constructed system (Suchman 1995). Perceptions of legitimacy go beyond mere "position" to include other bases of symbolic power.

While we found some evidence of rational-legal bases of power in teachers' discussions of their practices, when identifying *other people* as influential we found that teachers are much more likely to refer to *other* bases of symbolic power, namely human, cultural, social, and economic capital. When compared to the forms of capital, we can see that a rational-legal approach explains only part of the variation in instructional leadership. The importance of the forms of capital are all the more interesting considering that *all* schools in our study are subject to the same rational-legal accountability mechanisms.

As stated earlier, an individual's ability to exercise symbolic power depends on their "symbolic capital" which is a product of followers' (classroom teachers')

perceptions of various forms of capital —human, cultural, social, and economic— possessed by a leader. Symbolic capital is a kind of legitimacy, and this legitimacy is a credit that can be deployed as symbolic power. Teachers usually refer to multiple forms of capital in evaluating the legitimacy of leaders, and the forms of capital are related in complex ways (some of which will be discussed later). Nonetheless, in what follows, we consider each form of capital separately while distinguishing between formal leadership positions and informal leadership positions. For the sake of clarity, we define “formal leadership positions” as any administrative or specialized teaching position in which more than 50% of the time available is spent outside of the classroom (not teaching). Such “formal leadership positions” include principals, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, instructional coordinators, and any specialized teacher who spends less than 50% of his or her time in the classroom.<sup>9</sup> We define “informal leadership positions” as all other positions in which more than 50% of the time is spent in the classroom (for example lead teachers and teachers).

Human Capital. In attributing legitimacy to those who exercise influence over their work, teachers in our study often refer to the knowledge, skill, and expertise (human capital) possessed by others. Human capital is invoked more often when teachers in our study attribute influence and authority to informal leaders (teachers) compared to formal leaders (See Table 2). Of the 84 teachers we interviewed, 45.2% (38) cite human capital in explaining why they identified another teacher as influential.

---Insert Table 2 Here ---

Teachers attribute legitimacy depending on the sorts of expertise they perceive other teachers to possess. When we asked Mrs. McClain to whom she turned for guidance and why, she replied:

... my team members. We're all very unique. Mrs. Bryant is really very learned and she loves math...[S]he has a way of really showing the kids. And she uses a lot of manipulatives with the kids in math. Mrs. Rodriguez is very knowledgeable in science. And she has a lot of ideas about science. Mrs. Diaz is a strong language arts person. So ...whenever I have a question or I ...want to know about

how to go about a strategy a particular way, I might ask her, “Well, how do you do this?” and “Does this work well with your students?”

Mrs. McClain values the skills, knowledge, and expertise (human capital) that her team members possess, imbuing them with the legitimacy to influence her own practices (symbolic power). Specifically, Mrs. McClain values Mrs. Bryant’s expertise in math, especially her teaching technique and use of manipulatives. However, when it comes to science, Mrs. Rodriguez has a higher level of human capital and influence over Mrs. McClain. As for language arts, when Mrs. McClain has questions about “how to go about a strategy a particular way,” she values Mrs. Diaz’s human capital. Based on their human capital, each of these teachers has the symbolic power to influence Mrs. McClain’s practices. Yet this symbolic power is limited to the particular areas of expertise, distributed across each of these actors by subject area.

Mrs. Archibald exhibits a similar valuation of human capital when she explains why she uses another teacher, Kelly Judson, as a reference for science:

Kelly is a much better life science teacher than I am. So in the next couple of weeks, I’ll be talking to her because I’m sure that I’m going to not like some of the textbooks and I’ll want alternate ideas. And since I don’t have that background, and she does, I’ll go to her.

Mrs. Archibald legitimates Mrs. Judson based on Mrs. Judson’s background in science, seeking her out for advice. In turn, the ideas Mrs. Judson shares influence Mrs. Archibald’s science instruction. Such examples are frequent in our data. For example, one teacher explained of another: “She’s awesome. Yes. She has a master’s degree in reading and knows more about teaching than you and I do. She’s awesome.” Another teacher explains “these are people who are endorsed in their content area.”

In the previous examples “expertise” (human capital) partly involves practical experience and/or formal certification or training in specific content areas and the knowledge associated with this training. However, expertise can also be associated with the duration of teaching careers. As Ms. Terrell explains of an influential teacher:

Ms. Cardinal, she's lower grade where ... we've been upper, but when you are talking about children there is always a common thread to anything. And then you look at the years that she has in teaching . . . I know 10 years for sure so it could've been longer. I mean she has some wisdom on certain things and you feed off of different people for different things.

Mrs. Terrell attributes legitimacy (symbolic capital) to Mrs. Cardinal because of the wisdom associated with 10 years of teaching, legitimacy that can be deployed as symbolic power.

Attributions of legitimacy based on such wisdom are common:

Mr. Brisset had been teaching for about 28 years. Mrs. Gregory has been teaching about 15 years. A lot of them have been here for a long time. They have different theories and I do believe in different theories. I try some of their ideas.

While human capital is invoked more frequently when teachers attribute legitimacy to informal leaders (other teachers), some attribute legitimacy to formal leaders based on human capital. Of the 84 teachers we interviewed, 21.4% (18) cite human capital in explaining why their administrators (principal and assistant principal) are influential, while 7.1% (6) cite human capital in explaining why certain specialists (curriculum coordinators, instructional coordinators, etc) are influential. To quote one teacher regarding her principal:

Another reason I really like working for him is he has a background in reading also. An awful lot of principals really don't know a whole lot about teaching reading and ... he understands it, knows it, has done it himself, has a master's degree in reading and he really supports me when I come up with initiatives that I want to pursue. He... has never said "no" to me on something I really felt was important as far as literacy. So how could I not be supportive of him?

When teachers attribute influence and authority to principals based on human capital it often involves knowledge about classroom teaching, "he understands it, knows it, has done it himself." In cases like these, teachers mention that their principals are former teachers. Teachers value the principals' expertise and knowledge as former teachers, attributing influence and authority based on this human capital. For the most part, teachers in our study invoke human capital more frequently when talking about informal leaders than when they refer to those in formal leadership positions (See Table 2).

Cultural Capital. In discussing cultural capital here, our emphasis is on the possession of certain ways of being and doing, of interactive styles. Such interactive styles are not whimsical moments, but tend to be habitual ways of being. They act as a cultural toolkit (Swidler 1986), providing a range of possible behaviors, enabling and constraining how people go about doing impression management in the course of their interactions with others (Hallett 2000). When other people in the situation value this interactive style, such cultural capital becomes a source of legitimacy. This is especially the case when teachers in our study attribute authority and influence to school administration. Of the 84 teachers we interviewed, 70.2% (59) mentioned cultural capital in explaining why the principal or assistant principals are influential (See Table 2). Consider the following remarks from a teacher as regards to the administrative staff:

Our facilitator sometimes she would, you know, it's just the way you say it and do it I guess. When you're working with a group and the way they come across and talk to you ...I guess I'm just a fool for people knowing how to talk to you and to give you that kind of respect and you get these things done.

For this teacher, the interactive style (what we have termed cultural capital) is paramount, "it's just the way you say it and do it I guess." The teacher values this way of being and doing, thereby imbuing the administration with legitimacy and in turn following their directives: "I guess I'm just a fool for people knowing how to talk to you and give you that kind of respect, and you get these things done." The manner in which the administration interacts with teachers often becomes a source of symbolic power:

They (principal and assistant principal) support their teachers.... I came from a private school where whatever the parents say is true, and the teachers don't mean anything. Dr. Richmond and Mr. O. definitely—they believe everything I say if there's an issue with a parent. Dr. Richmond tells me, don't let a parent come in without her there, you know. She's like my bodyguard, you know—she's good.

Or to quote a different teacher at a separate school:

There's quite a bit. It's just so much. It's just everything. You can talk to them. They have time for you.... [T]hey haven't forgotten what it's like to be a teacher....And they just support you in any way they can. If it's just a "How are you doing today?" It just makes a really, really big difference.

In discussing people in formal leadership positions, these teachers pay particular attention to the ways of being and doing that people bring to their interactions with others. In the examples above, teachers validate those who engage in a supportive style: “[T]hey believe everything I say if there’s an issue with a parent. . . She’s like my bodyguard.” A supportive style is actually a source of symbolic power, becoming the basis of legitimacy and the ability to influence others.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to support, teachers also appreciate autonomy, and attribute legitimacy to administrative personnel who allow for autonomy:

He is not in here everyday to see what I am doing. If I feel like one lesson would be more effective if it were hands on and another I feel that the kids need to focus on and read individually, I have the freedom to do that and I don’t have to justify or validate it. I can make that decision on my own.

In exhibiting a laid-back observation style, this principal allows room for instructional innovation, but also gains credibility for himself, acquiring symbolic capital (legitimacy) that he can later deploy as symbolic power.

Cultural capital also figures in teachers’ evaluations of informal leaders whom they report influence their work, though somewhat less prominently compared with formal leaders. Of 84 teachers we interviewed, 59.5% (50) identified cultural capital in explaining why other teachers are influential (See Table 2). As Mrs. Watson explains:

I go to Mrs. Jefferson a lot. I mean I don’t interact with her—any of her students. I don’t have any of her students but our personalities are very similar . . . She’s . . . very honest and . . . she’ll listen and give me what she thinks is her honest opinion even if it maybe isn’t what I wanted to hear. You know? It doesn’t always make me the happiest, but it is probably what would be the best.

Mrs. Watson is attracted to Mrs. Watson’s honest way of being. As such, Mrs. Watson attributes legitimacy to Mrs. Jefferson, seeking her out for advice despite the fact that they do not share any students in common. Mrs. Watson’s candor becomes a source of symbolic power, providing her with the means to influence Mrs. Watson’s practice.

Social Capital. A third species of capital evident in teachers' attribution of legitimacy to leaders is social capital. Social capital resides in the relations among people in a society, organization, or groups that facilitate action including trust, collaboration, and a sense of obligation among individuals. It also includes social networks or instrumental associations (Coleman 1990; Lin 1981). While social capital is relational in nature, for those involved in the relationship social capital can become a kind of possession and a source of symbolic power. In legitimating a particular leader, teachers in our study frequently refer to their social networks or connections. Mrs. Rhodes explains how her principal's (Mrs. Williams) social network with her former school came to influence Mrs. Rhodes' classroom instruction:

Well you know McKinley was our partner school and we had to go and observe teachers one day and they had the partner reading and we saw how well it went over there and I said that if they can do it we can do it. So I came back and we tried it.

In this case the principal's connection to her former school enabled her to facilitate teacher sharing between the schools, successfully influencing the classroom practices of Mrs. Rhodes. Such networks can be a source of legitimacy.

Trust is another form of social capital that plays a role in teachers' attribution of legitimacy to both formal and informal leaders. To quote one teacher:

I feel like the faculty trusts me and the principal trusts me. . . And I've come up with a lot of ideas for expressive arts that, the principal trusts and he lets me—he just lets me go. He just lets me do it. He hands me an empty plate and as long as I have a rationale for him, I can go. And that's leadership.

The trust between this teacher and the principal not only enables the teacher to experiment with various ideas, but it also fosters a positive image of the principal in the eyes of the teachers. Just as the teacher can trust the principal to let her experiment in the classroom, the principal can trust the teacher to follow his directives when needed.<sup>11</sup>

Social capital in the form of networks and trust often converge, working together to facilitate teacher sharing. Oftentimes (though not always) the practice of grade level team meetings can help to facilitate this process:

We have grade-level meetings once a month. Sometimes a little more depending on what was going on...[U]sually we have an agenda of what we need to do for a grade-level meeting. ...so it really doesn't come up that often in grade level—it more comes informally. And we have a really strong fifth grade team. We work real well together. We like each other. We're constantly sharing ideas with each other and I've had other teachers from other grade levels say "Wow. You guys have such a cool team." ...just because they see that we really do work together when we're planning things and everything.

Grade-level team meetings can put teachers in contact with each other, facilitating the creation of social capital: "[W]e have a really strong fifth grade team. We work real well together. We like each other." What we want to emphasize is that the social capital existing between teachers is a source of power for these teachers. The teachers in this group have the symbolic power to influence each other's instructional practices: "We're constantly sharing ideas with each other." Not only is the social capital shared by this group a source of symbolic power within the group, but it also creates legitimacy for the group in the eyes of other teachers outside of the group: "I've had other teachers from other grade levels say 'Wow. You guys have such a cool team.'"

A teacher's experience at a different school provides another example of how teaming can create networks and trust, thereby influencing instructional practices:

We develop units together. We share materials. We share techniques and so. . . a couple of years ago, you know, when we have to write down at the end of the year . . . our first choice, second choice, our third choice, to work from next year and what grade we would like to work with. . . (when the principal wanted to move her) I said, "No, please leave me here because I really like to work with this group of people...[W]e developed very good professional relationships."

As these examples indicate, social capital is an important source of legitimacy and symbolic power, shaping the practices of others. Social capital seems to be especially important in the attribution of legitimacy to other teachers: Of the 84 teachers we interviewed, 50% (42) cited social capital in explaining why other teachers are influential, compared to 15.5% (13) for administrators and 3.6% (3) for specialists.

Economic Capital. While economic capital does figure in teachers' valuations of those leaders who influence their practices, it is less prominent than human, cultural, or

social capital. Teachers' refer to economic capital in the form of money and material resources, attributing legitimacy to those who control these resources. In reference to the principal at her school, a teacher identifies him as influential in terms of :

The books, instructional materials. You know some schools you don't even have that and we get an extra \$350. Other schools...receive only \$50.00 from the office so we can use that extra \$350 plus more that's allocated for each classroom ...to purchase classroom materials.

The school administration structures the budget in a way that puts increased money for instructional materials in the hands of teachers. The manner in which the administration spreads its economic capital influences how teachers teach. This distribution of economic capital not only provides teacher autonomy, but by distributing money in this way the administration gains legitimacy (symbolic capital) in the eyes of the teachers. Note that this teacher not only spoke of instructional materials, but also made a conscious effort to recognize that the materials come from special budgeting, whereas other schools "receive only \$50 from the office."

A teacher at a different school provides another example of how a particular use of economic capital can be a source of legitimacy. This teacher views the principal as a good leader because "she's listening to what the teachers said about textbooks or lack of resources or need for help and she's making sure that the Chapter One funds, or whatever textbook money is available is spent there." Yet in itself economic capital is not a source of symbolic power. Only when the principal uses this economic capital in a manner viewed positively by followers does it become a source of legitimacy.

School administrators are not the only people in schools who possess economic capital. In discussing her lesson with us, Mrs. Cook explains: "We used some pattern blocks for fractions. Um, there was a book, Mrs. Greyson had a really good book that she'd used before to use pattern blocks with fractions. That was great, I hadn't seen that before. And that worked really well." Mrs. Greyson shares her material resources with Mrs. Cook, resources Cook values. Based on these valuable resources, Cook attributes legitimacy to Mrs. Greyson, seeking her out for advice, and incorporating her materials

into the lesson. In this way Mrs. Greyson has influenced the instructional practices of Mrs Cook. A teacher at another school described a similar resource for instructional guidance: “And then we have the math lab teacher if I have any other problems. Or if I need any hands-on materials to work with. Then I can use the math lab teacher, ‘Listen, I’m working on this. Maybe I can borrow some materials.’ ” In this way the possession of material resources can be a source of legitimacy for both informal and formal leaders. Of the 84 teachers we interviewed, 27.4% (23) mention economic capital in explaining why other teachers are influential, while 23.8% (20) cite economic capital in their discussion of administrators (See Table 2).

### Capital, Symbolic Power, and Leadership Roles

Based on our interviews with teachers, it is possible to examine the relative importance of the various forms of capital as sources of legitimacy for different actors in the schools we studied. As previously mentioned, however, caution is in order as the teachers we interviewed rarely cite forms of capital in isolation. Rather, they discuss numerous forms of capital when explaining why a person is influential, for example, both human capital (skills, knowledge, expertise) and cultural capital (interactive style), or cultural capital and social capital. Hence, Table 2 must be interpreted with some caution. The table is based on 84 teacher interviews from eight schools. Because the interviewees often cite multiple people and multiple forms of capital in one interview, the columns and rows cannot be added down and across, and do not add up to 100%. The percentages represent the percent of teachers interviewed who cite a particular form of capital in reference to a particular person/position. Comparisons across the forms of capital and people/positions involved should only examine the numbers, because the reference point is the number of teacher interviews, and not the total number of references to a particular form of capital or position/person.

One striking pattern is the importance of cultural capital (interactive style) for both informal and formal leaders. Interactive style is a crucial source of legitimacy for both teachers and administrators. To become an influential actor in a school, it helps to possess the kind of cultural capital that others in the school find pleasing (See Table 2 and Figure 4).

---Insert Figure 4 ---

Comparing teachers' attribution of legitimacy to administrators on the basis of different forms of capital, cultural capital appears to be especially important for administrators. Teachers in our study most frequently cite this "interactive style" as the reason why their administrators are influential, with human, social, and economic capital piling in comparison. The importance of cultural capital as a source of legitimacy for administrators raises an interesting question: If administrators are powerful mostly on the basis of their "style," who are the true guardians and transmitters of knowledge about instruction in schools? Our data indicate that teachers are the ones who possess this human capital, becoming a source of legitimacy and acquiring the symbolic power to shape the instructional practices of others (See Table 2 and Figure 4). This is especially so when we look at the dismal score for "specialists" (i.e., curriculum coordinators), instructional coordinators, specialized teachers who spend less than 50% of their time in the classroom. These numbers seem to indicate that teachers believe important knowledge, skills, and expertise around instruction rest with other "ordinary" teachers (See Table 2 and Figure 4).

### Conclusion

This paper examines how teachers attribute legitimacy to school leaders, based not only on rational-legal structures, but also a positive valuation of cultural, human, social, and economic capital. This legitimacy (or symbolic capital) is the basis of symbolic power, the power to influence the instructional practices of teachers. Because many of those who exercise authority and influence in the schools we have studied are not

positional leaders, we suggest that a rational-legal conception of power provides a limited understanding of leadership for classroom instruction. Rational-legal structures, though one base of authority (when valued), explain only a small portion of the multiple influences teachers cite in regard to their instructional practices. Still, classroom instruction is not de-coupled from the administrative structure. Teachers do seek advice and guidance from others about teaching, including but not limited to the administration.

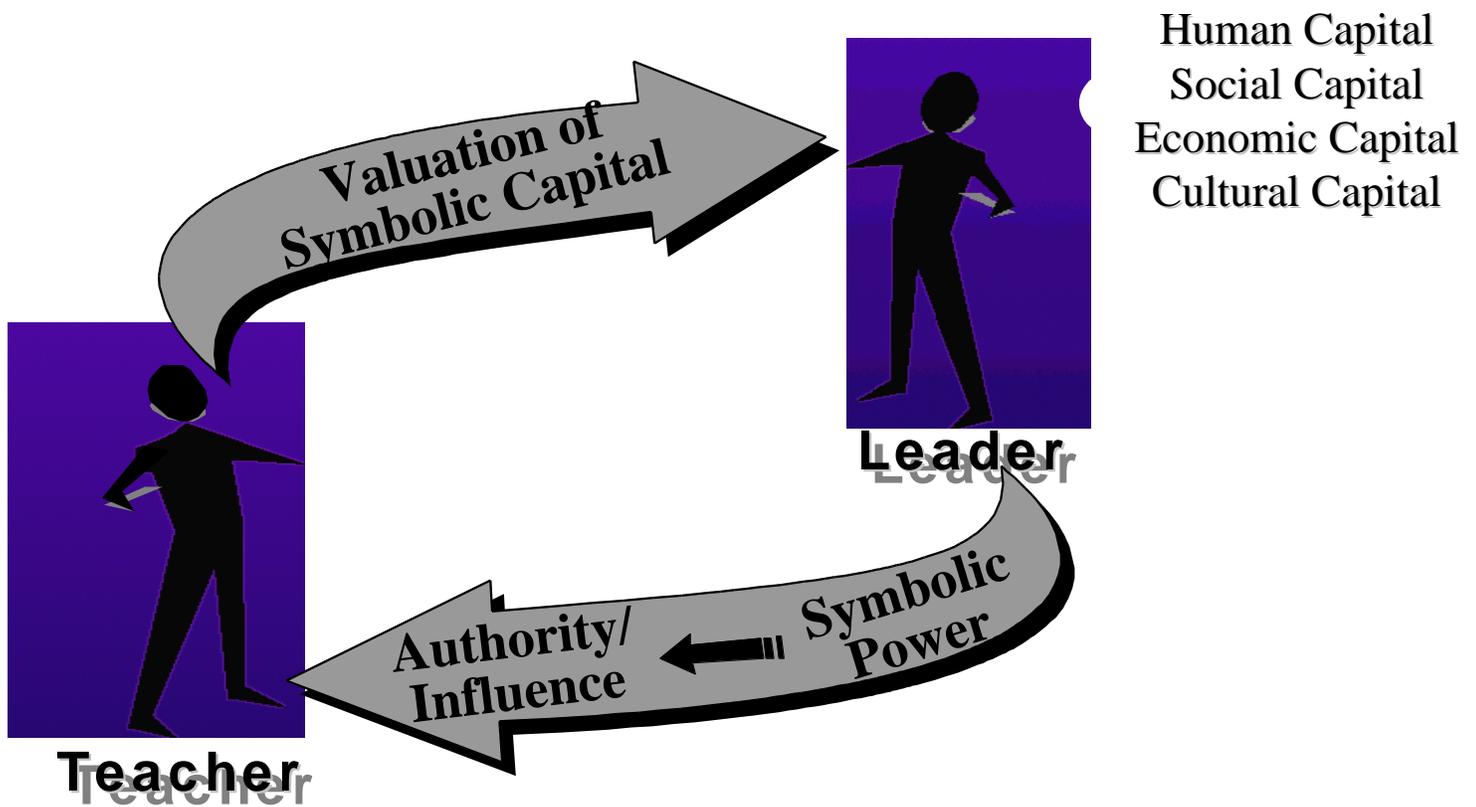
An understanding of how followers attribute legitimacy (symbolic capital) and how leaders deploy their legitimacy as the symbolic power to influence practices presses us to develop more complex and sophisticated models of authority and influence in schools. We argue that efforts to transform the authority and influence structures in schools have to move beyond an exclusively rational-legal conception of power. Accountability measures and other external policy levers that attempt to shape the rational-legal power structure in school systems coexist or work in tandem with other bases of legitimacy, namely cultural, human, social, and economic capital. Only when these sources of legitimacy are valued do actors come to have symbolic power (influence and authority over instructional practices). Our work suggests that rational-legal power structures are nested in a complex authority/influence structure where processes of symbolic power are critical.

While teachers in our study tend to attribute symbolic power to other teachers on the basis of valued cultural, human, and social capital, the source of legitimacy is somewhat different for administrators. For administrators, cultural capital seems to take precedence: Teachers value administrators who share the same worldviews as they do, and/or have a way of being (interactive style) that is open and supportive. Practitioners who know how the processes of symbolic power work in their schools can amend their work to improve their chances of gaining influence and authority over others (gaining symbolic power for leadership). Yet despite all of these different arenas and actors, the overall *process* through which leaders acquire the power to influence instructional practices (symbolic power) is the same, and can be generalized to different schools. In fact, the general process whereby followers attribute legitimacy to leaders on the basis of

valued forms of capital (symbolic capital) and leaders use this legitimacy to define reality and influence the practices of others (symbolic power) occurs in nearly any organization or small group. While the social context within which this process occurs may change, and the key forms of capital may differ, the process is the same. Although symbolic power in a high tech corporation may be based on the valued human capital possessed by leaders (Kunda 1992) while symbolic power in a street gang may be based on a disposition towards toughness and conflict (MacLeod 1987), the general process is the same.

Authority is a situated phenomenon when it comes to classroom instruction. Different arenas consist of different audiences and different relevant actors who value different things. For example, teachers may value other teachers who have human capital in a particular subject area, imbuing them with legitimacy and symbolic power. Practitioners can facilitate this process of valuation. For example, by creating school structures such as grade-level team meetings to increase interactions, matching teachers who share similar cultural capital with each other to help create trust (social capital), and facilitate the sharing of knowledge (human capital). In this way practitioners can enable instructional leadership in their schools.

*Figure 1:  
The Symbolic Power Process*



**Process of Attribution**

Figure 2. Leadership as a Distributed Phenomenon

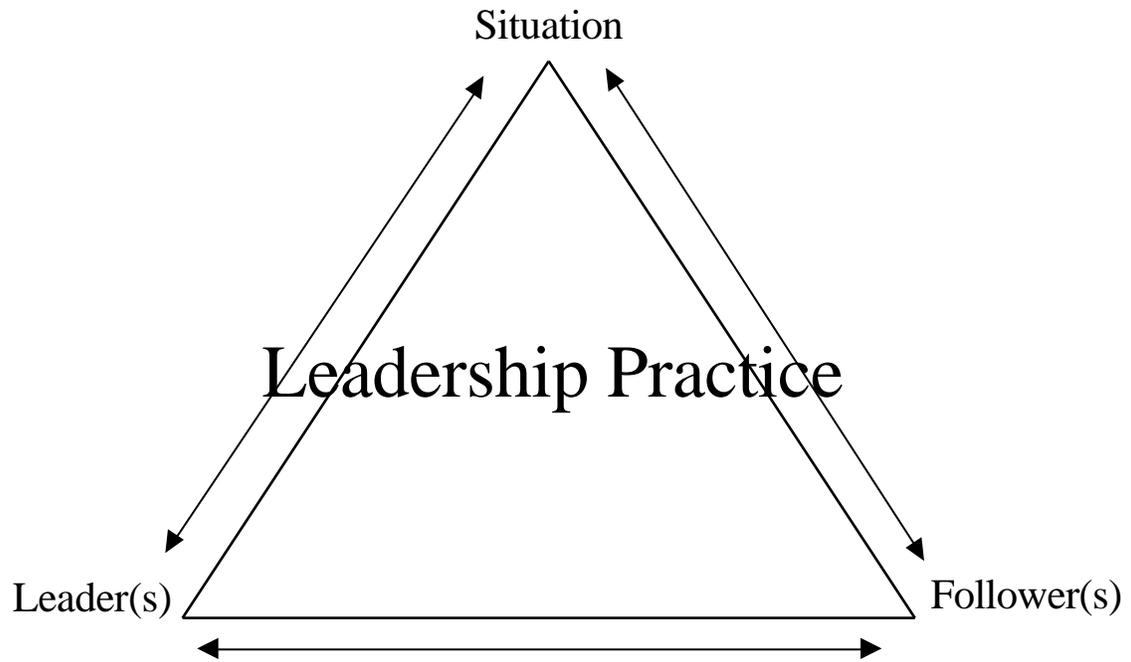


Figure 3. Symbolic Power, Authority and Influence

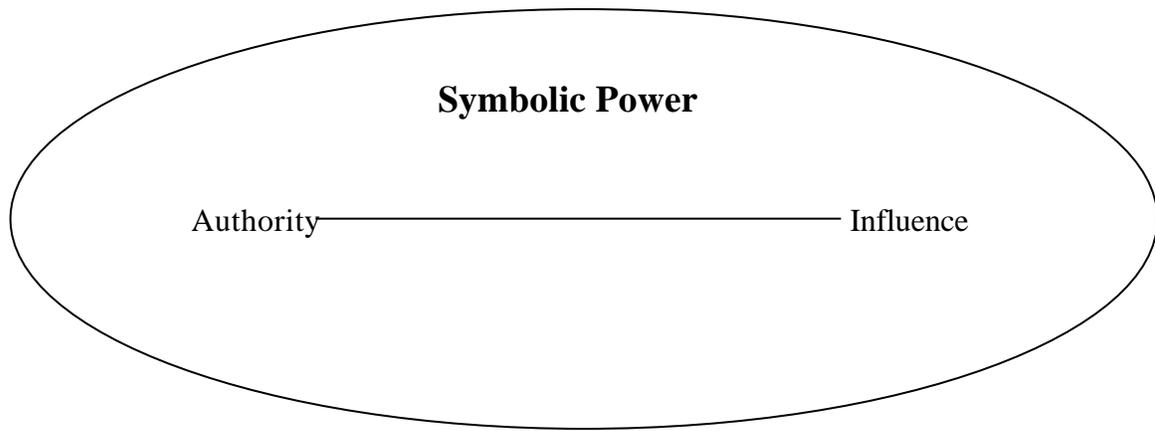


Figure 4. The Importance of Particular Forms of Capital for Legitimacy by Leadership

Role (Number of Teachers Citing)

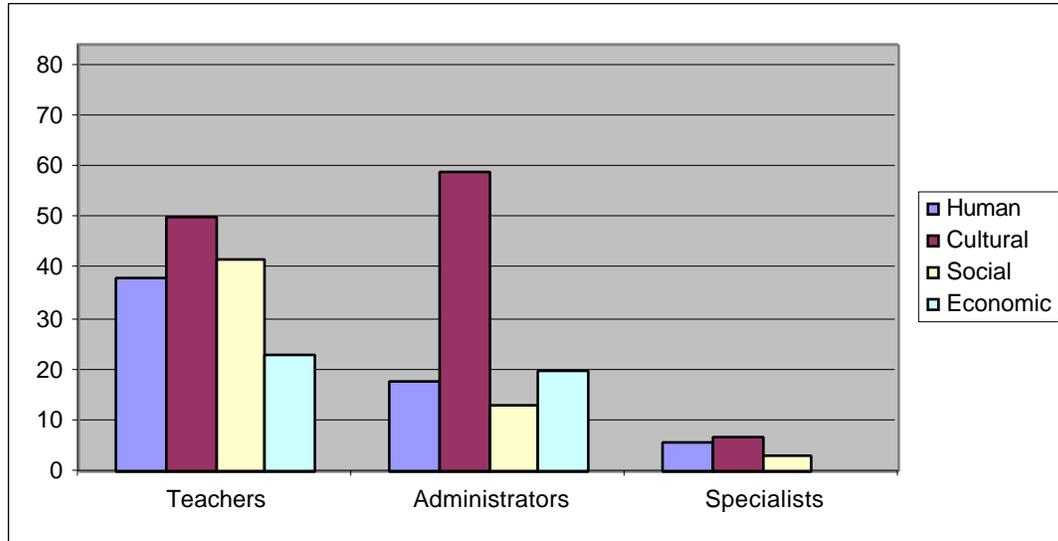


Table 1. School Demographics<sup>12</sup>

School	Student Enrollment	Low Income	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Native American	Limited English
School A	861	93%	100%	0	0	0	0	0
School B	1,048	96%	7	47%	22	24	1	38%
School C	1,498	73%	8	40	19	34	0	48%
School D	287	90%	100	0	0	0	0	0
School E	928	97%	3	0	97	0	0	46%
School F	363	97%	100	0	0	0	0	0
School G	1,054	97%	100	0	0	0	0	0
School H	1,331	96%	4	3	88	5	0	29%
School I	748	61%	100%	0	0	0	0	0
School J	662	88%	100%	0	0	0	0	0
School K	1,363	84%	3%	23%	23%	52%	0	23%
School L	503	64%	3%	53%	43%	1%	1%	25%
School M	889	96%	24%	1%	75%	0	0	36%

Table 2. Teachers' Attribution of Legitimacy (Symbolic Capital) to Other Teachers, Administrators (Principal and Assistant Principal) and Specialists by Form of Capital (84 teachers interviewed)<sup>13</sup>

<u>Form of Capital</u>	<u>Informal</u>	<u>Formal</u>	
	Teachers	Administrators	Specialists
Human Capital	45.2% (38)	21.4% (18)	7.1% (6)
Cultural Capital	59.5% (50)	70.2% (59)	8.3% (7)
Social Capital	50.0% (42)	15.5% (13)	3.6% (3)
Economic Capital	27.4% (23)	23.8% (20)	0.0% (0)

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<sup>1</sup> For the most part Bourdieu examines symbolic power at a meso-level, examining the power of certain “fields” to define reality. In contrast, we are interested in a more micro-level, examining how certain people come to have symbolic power. For Bourdieu, symbolic power is consecrated onto certain people and positions via their location within a field. But for us, in examining leadership in the context of schools, symbolic power is created in interactions between leaders and followers. We appropriate his concepts, but not his overarching theoretical apparatus emphasizing fields and social space.

<sup>2</sup> Though followers can value such positions, becoming a source of symbolic power.

<sup>3</sup> In including “human capital,” we acknowledge Bourdieu’s reservations about human capital that he sees as indistinguishable from cultural capital (1986). However, in the context of elementary schools, it is useful to think of human capital as knowledge, skill, and expertise related specifically to the educational field, apart from cultural capital broadly defined. We also acknowledge that Weber associated expertise or human capital with rational-legal power.

<sup>4</sup> In schools, micro-structures such as meeting schedules, classroom location, and grade level organization put certain actors in closer proximity to each other, enabling and constraining the attribution of legitimacy and deployment of symbolic power. We also suspect that group cultural values, race, and gender (macro-structure) shape processes of symbolic power. We hope to explore these topics in subsequent papers.

<sup>5</sup> In this way rational-legal authority goes beyond authority based on the human capital of people occupying roles within the bureaucracy, and the valuation of the role itself becomes a basis of symbolic power.

<sup>6</sup> The *academic press* measure gauged the extent to which students felt that their teachers pushed them to reach high levels of academic performance. For *professional community* we used measures of collegiality (the degree of collective work ethic among staff), teacher-teacher and teacher-principal trust, and shared norms among staff. The *instructional leadership* measure assesses teachers' perceptions of principal and teacher leadership (e.g., questions about setting standards, communicating a clear school vision). Finally, the *academic productivity* measure uses ITBS scores to determine the academic gain for students spending the entire year at individual schools. This measure is used to determine the productivity of schools over time. While we will use the Consortium’s data on “academic productivity”, a weakness with this measure is

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that the ITBS is inadequate to assess students' mastery of the more challenging reading and mathematics content. Further, all of these measures are proxies for a schools' engagement in instructional improvement and improvement should not be attributed to school leadership. In addition to these measures, we interviewed school personnel and observers of the system to obtain their nominations of potential sites.

<sup>7</sup> The numbers for standards and testing cannot be added to comprise a sort of "total" for rational-legal structures. Doing so would cause double counting, as teachers often cite both in the course of one interview.

<sup>8</sup> These numbers cannot be added to create a "total" for administrators. Doing so would cause double counting, as teachers often cite both in the course of one interview.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note that, in our scheme, a person occupying a "formal leadership position," is not necessarily a leader, because leadership also involves symbolic power.

<sup>10</sup> However, the validation of cultural capital in the form of interactive styles is connected to cultural capital in the form of beliefs and values: teachers validate the interactive styles that *they* believe are important, based on their own beliefs and values. In the cases above, teachers validate supportive and open interactive styles because they believe they are important.

<sup>11</sup> Note that this relationship of trust is facilitated by the principal's laid back interactive style, or what we have termed "cultural capital." As mentioned elsewhere, the forms of capital often operate in combination. But for this paper, for the sake of clarity, we treat them separately.

<sup>12</sup> Schools G- M formed part of the pilot study, with school G and H continuing as case study sites for the research project. In the pilot study, schools A, C, D and E were "interview only" sites, with no classroom observations done. The research currently involves 8 schools A-H.

<sup>13</sup> Table 2 and Figure 4 must be interpreted with some caution. This table is based on 84 teacher interviews from our 8-school sub-sample, counting interviews in which the teachers indicated why a particular person was influential. Because the interviewees often cited multiple people and multiple forms of capital in one interview, the columns and rows cannot be added down and across, and do not add up to 100%. The percentages represent the percent of teachers interviewed who cite a specific form of capital in reference to a particular person/position. The percentages can only be used to compare the people/positions identified in

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association with a particular form of capital. Broader comparisons across the forms of capital and people/positions (Figure 4) can only examine the numbers, because the base number is the number of teacher interviews, and not the total number of references to a particular form of capital or position/person (unfortunately our qualitative data will not allow us to represent the data easily in this way).

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