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Juli Anna Swinnerton

Learning to Lead What You “Don’t (Yet) Know”:
District Leaders Engaged in Instructional Reform

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requirements for the degree of

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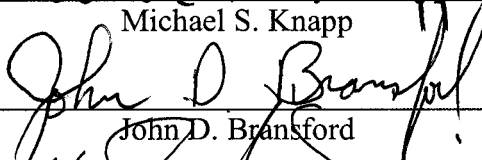


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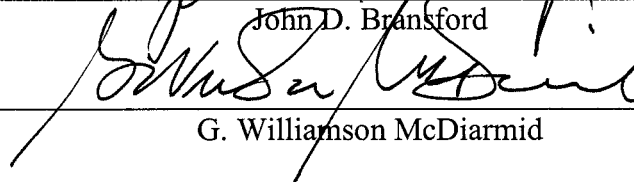
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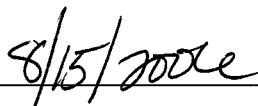


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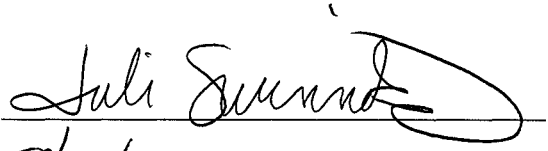


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Abstract

Learning to Lead What You “Don’t (Yet) Know”:
District Leaders Engaged in Instructional Reform

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This qualitative case study examined the emerging instructional leadership practice, and related learning, of five central office leaders in a midsize urban school district. These leaders were actively engaged with each other and with external consultants as they developed their capacity to lead system-wide instructional reform. Learning for these leaders was not an individual activity, rather, it occurred in the midst of social interactions with fellow district-level leaders, school-based staff, and external consultants. For these leaders, learning and leading took place concurrently; in essence they were “learning-while-leading.” Using an analytic frame informed by both cognitive and situated perspectives of learning, this study illustrated how leaders’ thinking and practice changed over time, in the midst of a district-wide instructional reform initiative. In addition, the study explored questions about how leaders managed issues related to leading ambitious instructional reform models that they themselves “did not yet know.”

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the central office leaders in Emerald Sound. Thank you for your willingness to “let me in” in order to be a witness to your learning journey. Your passion for making a difference in the lives of all students through your individual and collective leadership inspires me. Even more, the integrity and authenticity you bring to the critical work of system-wide instructional reform has significantly impacted my thinking as both a practitioner and a scholar.

Chapter 1. **Learning-while-leading System-Level Instructional Reform**

School district leaders (e.g., superintendents, chief academic officers, and principal supervisors) face a daunting task—they are expected to oversee a wide range of activities associated with leading a complex educational organization; navigate national, state, and local policy environments; and address unexpected crises. Leaders in schools and districts today face an ever-changing landscape in education, from demographic shifts in communities and changes in performance expectations for students and educators, to rapidly changing technologies designed for wide spread information access and efficient, global communication. Usdan (as cited in Hardy, 2004) suggested many superintendents may have been well trained for the political and managerial aspects of their job, but are not necessarily equipped to be instructional leaders, “. . . the job has changed so tremendously . . . All of a sudden, the grounds on which they are judged have changed” (p. 35).

Efforts to *maintain* the current state of such a complex system can be overwhelming, but simply maintaining the status quo is no longer acceptable in public education—leaders of complex educational systems now face unprecedented performance expectations for all students. A sense of urgency also surrounds reform efforts; expectations are not only high and accountability pressures looming, but results are expected almost immediately. When asked about her thoughts concerning the No Child Left Behind legislation, one district leader in this study described the moral responsibility associated with a significant percentage of students not learning; “That’s

morally wrong. You have to do something, AYP¹ or not” (Dorothy, personal communication, 2005).

Regardless of the quality of preparation or stage in career, no leader comes to his or her position knowing how to accomplish everything expected of school district leaders. Just as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for optimal teaching are not something that can be fully developed in preservice education programs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), leadership preparation programs cannot fully equip emerging leaders with all they need to know. One way the field has addressed the challenge is to shift the focus away from the attributes and skills of an individual “heroic” leader toward leadership practice that is enacted by many players in a system (e.g., Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Spillane, 2005). A distributed view of leadership—which focuses on the collective interactions among leaders, followers, and their situation (Spillane, 2005; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001)—is a useful lens for analyzing and understanding leadership practice in context, as opposed to narrowly studying leaders as individuals.

Focus of Inquiry: The Simultaneous Challenge to Learning and Leadership

However, even with a distributed view of leadership, district leaders in education, whether new to the job or seasoned veterans, face a major *learning challenge*—they must learn “on the fly” how to create, support, and sustain a system that prepares *all* students

¹ Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—a performance measure associated with the federal legislation.

to meet high standards of performance. This challenge does not take place in the safety of a university classroom or a professional development workshop; rather, leaders face this challenge while simultaneously leading a system. In a classroom or workshop, leaders may feel a sense of freedom to admit confusion or lack of knowledge as they assume the role of a learner—a role that often requires testing hunches, making mistakes, and revising thinking based on feedback. While expected from learners, these attributes are not necessarily expected or appreciated when displayed by leaders.

People often expect leaders to have answers and may become frustrated when leaders make mistakes (Schein, 1992; Vaill, 1996). Leaders do not necessarily have the option to stop leading the system while they explore and learn new ways to address the challenges before them—they must either operate within the boundaries of their current expertise and accept the limitations this may impose on their practice, or take a potentially more risky path of learning-*while*-leading, with hopes that this will help them meet the challenges they face. Thus, the title of this study—*Learning to Lead What You Don't (Yet) Know*—signals the ongoing development and adaption of knowledge in the midst of leadership practice.

While there is a large body of research focused on leadership preparation (e.g., Bridges, 1977; Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; Portin et al., 2003) and what effective leaders do (Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988), there is little research about how leaders come to learn about and understand their work over time (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Although professional common sense and some formal evidence suggest that on-the-job experience is most likely to be the primary source of learning, we know little about what experiences support leaders'

learning and why (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992). There is the distinct likelihood that, without some kind of “scaffolding” or intentional support for learning, raw experience by itself may not be the most effective teacher (National Research Council, 2000). Yet we have few images of what might scaffold or support leaders’ learning-while-leading.

In addition to a lack of insight into *how* school district leaders might go about learning while in the midst of leadership practice, we also need to understand better *what* it is they are learning. Given the complexity and variety of district leaders’ work, it is therefore important to answer the question, “learning about what?” The scope of possible learning is broad, ranging from resource allocation and policy compliance to the improvement of teaching and learning across the system. Heifetz (1994) distinguished between two kinds of problems or challenges commonly found in complex organizations: *technical* problems—those about which there exists a legitimized set of known organizational procedures guiding what to do and who should do it—and *adaptive* problems that have no predetermined adequate response or solution. Given the fact that few, if any, school districts in the United States can claim to have *all* students meeting high standards of performance, the learning challenge described above is not primarily about technical problems that can be solved with existing knowledge, but instead, concerned with adaptive problems requiring new thinking, persistent attention, and willingness to tolerate ambiguity.

Finally, the fact that leaders engage in learning while immersed in their leadership practice, and often do so publicly, raises unanswered questions about how the act of learning affects their leadership practice. Given the expectations of followers and other

stakeholders and the intense scrutiny under which school district leaders operate, it is particularly important to understand whether the often public act of learning-while-leading changes how leaders approach their work as leaders and the impact it has on others.

This study was designed to better understand this particular learning and leadership challenge by focusing on the work of urban school district leaders actively developing and adapting knowledge and expertise related to system-wide instructional reform. For these leaders, learning and leading took place concurrently. Three key questions guided this exploration:

1. What are central office leaders learning about instructional leadership at the system level in the context of their instructional leadership practice?
2. What conditions support and enable their learning in the context of leadership practice?
3. What does assuming a public “learning stance” imply for the way these leaders approach their practice and the impact it has on others?

This study focused on leaders’ learning in the context of a particular reform effort that unfolded in partnership with an external support organization, the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) associated with the University of Washington. CEL’s work with districts has two distinct, but mutually reinforcing dimensions: (a) defining the instructional practices, structures and routines that are conducive to “powerful”² student learning and to the adult professional development that supports it; and (b) honing the leadership practices and routines which support, nurture, and push the development of such practices across the district (Center for Educational Leadership [CEL], 2003). The

² CEL borrows this term from Brandt (1998); all students master cognitively demanding curriculum.

second dimension can also be described as a particular form of “instructional leadership,” according to the director of the organization:

We tend to use Elmore’s generalized view that “the purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.” Specific to instructional leadership we believe that leaders’ beliefs about teaching and learning must be grounded by content knowledge, and that leadership actions designed to improve the quality of instruction should grow out of this grounding (Fink, personal communication, 2005).

By opening their practice to researchers, the participants in this study provided an opportunity to better understand how one group of school district leaders learned how to exercise the kind of leadership described above.

The Research Problem in Context

“You can’t lead what you don’t know” is the self-proclaimed mantra of the CEL. Upon first glance, this phrase may seem like common sense, but is it really? As leaders are first introduced to, and begin to learn, new reform models, they do not stop leading. In a sense, they have no choice; they must lead what they “don’t know,” at least in the case of a new reform agenda. However, the hope is that their knowledge and understanding develops quickly. In addition, based on the continuous nature of professional learning, there will always be something that leaders don’t know. The journey from “not knowing” to developing a deeper understanding of what it means to lead system-wide instructional improvement is an important journey to study.

The sense of urgency and moral responsibility to serve all students well in our schools is a frequent topic of conversation among many who are interested in public

education. It is not the *what* that is in question—high performance for all students in all schools—but the *how* that sometimes leaves educators and those leading educational systems scratching their heads. In fact, it has never been done it before, at least on a large scale, across an entire K-12 school district. There are places where reform efforts have not only taken root, but also stood the test of time, as in the case of former Community District #2 in New York City (Elmore & Burney, 1998; Stein & D'Amico, 2002), but those examples are few and far between. Other districts, including San Diego—a district that has approached instructional reform with many of the ideas developed in District 2—have yet to demonstrate that instructional reform can be sustained across time and across a large system of schools. District 2 was primarily a K-8 district, while San Diego attempted to bring reform to a much larger, K-12 system. Can the lessons learned in New York, and emerging lessons from San Diego inform the practice of other districts? The answer is “maybe” and this study is poised to explore such possibilities, given the fact that many of CEL’s consultants worked previously in New York’s District 2 and San Diego City Schools.

This study is situated in one of the partnerships set up between CEL and school districts wishing to undertake ambitious instructional reform. The Emerald Sound School District (pseudonym) partnership with CEL began in August 2003, and since then, CEL consultants have devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to working with district staff, including a team of central office leaders who were responsible for leading instructional improvement across the system. Accountability pressures and potential sanctions for lack of progress were frequently part of central office conversations. Although there was a positive trend of increases in student achievement during the past

few years, district leaders felt a sense of urgency to improve the current state of instruction in most classrooms.

The reform work unfolded at all levels of the system, including individual classrooms, entire schools and district-wide meetings designed to promote and support a collective vision for improvement. An important piece of the vision included the specific efforts of CEL consultants and the CEL program manager who orchestrated the partnership work. The setting offered an instructive case of district level leaders continuously engaged in intensive learning across 3 years about instructional reform in the context of their own attempts to guide an instructional reform initiative. Their individual and collective learning in this endeavor offers a particularly good window on the phenomenon of study, given the explicit attention that was paid to leaders' learning. Learning was not simply a buzzword or leadership rhetoric, but there were specific structures and expectations put into place to support the professional learning agenda. Significant financial investments were made to support professional learning, over \$600,000 in years two and three of the CEL partnership.

This study provides an opportunity to address the gap in the literature about leaders' learning by developing a better understanding of the nature of school district leaders' professional learning within the context of a district-wide reform effort. A community of five central office leaders (chief academic officer, two secondary and two elementary directors) engaged in system-wide instructional reform within a midsize urban school district provides a particularly rich opportunity for study. As part of a larger study looking at the nature of the partnership between an external support provider and the school district (Gallucci, Boatright, Lysne, & Swinnerton, 2005), this study draws

from 18 months of data collected from September 2004 through March 2006. As a result, the research questions and study design emerged from data as well as being informed by research.

Learning for these district leaders—both as individuals and as members of a learning community—was multidimensional; they were learning about particular approaches to instruction and the kind of leadership needed to guide system-wide instructional improvement. These leaders learned about issues related to Stein and Nelson’s (2003) construct of *leadership content knowledge*—the knowledge needed to develop and support instructional leadership across multiple subject areas throughout a school district system. This knowledge includes some degree of content knowledge (e.g., literacy and math), the ability to “know strong instruction when they see it, to encourage it when they don’t, and to set the conditions for continuous academic learning among their professional staffs” (p. 424).

These central office leaders often assumed what might be called a “learning stance” as a regular part of their leadership practice. Leaders who assume a learning stance publicly can model how leadership is about more than guiding and supporting *others’* learning; a public learning stance demonstrates the leaders themselves are also learning, or at least trying to learn. Assuming such a stance may have associated costs, such as the need to admit having created a policy that does not make sense in light of new learning. This possibility materialized in this case: at one point the central office leaders pulled back on their expectations for all teachers to implement a particular instructional approach once they realized the extent of the learning and support required for teachers to develop the requisite knowledge, skills, and understandings to meet existing expectations

for the implementation other recently introduced strategies. This is an example of Fullan's (2005) description of how leaders set policy without having deep understanding; it was not the initial policy action that is of most interest, but how these leaders changed their policy based on new learning, while trying to maintain their legitimacy as leaders. This study closely examined examples, including this situation about expectations for reading instruction, in which leaders' learning directly influenced changes in system-level instructional leadership practice.

Premises That Guide This Investigation

This study explored how one group of school district leaders learned to exercise—both individually and collectively—leadership for instructional improvement, to develop other instructional leaders (e.g., principals and coaches), and to create and sustain a system that supports learning for both student and adults throughout the system. Results of this study provide insights into what and how leaders learn “on the job” within the context of a particular system-wide instructional reform effort. Several lines of recent scholarship suggest premises on which an investigation of this research problem may rest.

Premise 1. The central office—and the leaders within it—play a consequential role in guiding instructional reform throughout the district. One recent line of literature helps to demonstrate how the district central office—and by extension, the leaders within it—often assume the role of “teacher” in guiding the efforts of classroom teachers and others working in the district's schools (e.g., Elmore & Burney, 1998; Hightower, Knapp,

Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002; Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The district in such instances acts as a collective “instructional leader”—exerting influence on the core activity of schooling (teaching and learning) through a variety of means. Though a far cry from the earlier notions of the instructional leadership exercised by the school principal, the concept of instructional leadership in this instance can aptly be applied to the activities of leaders and other staff from the district’s central office, who are working in a variety of ways to guide, direct, and support the improvement of teaching and learning across the district’s schools. This line of research brings into view both the potential for districts to exercise instructional leadership and some of the challenges they face in doing so.

Recent examples from both research and practice also provide “images of the possible” in terms of districts working to bring about system-wide instructional reform (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Elmore & Burney, 1997, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2004). In their study of New York City’s District 2 story of system-wide reform, Elmore and Burney (1997) identified seven key principles driving the district’s strategy for improving instruction in all classrooms: (a) a focus on instruction; (b) an understanding that instructional change is a long, multistage process; (c) a belief that shared expertise is the driver of instructional change; (d) a focus on system-wide improvement; (e) a belief that good ideas come from talented people working together; (f) a plan to set clear expectations, then decentralize; and (g) the importance of values that support collegiality, caring, and respect. A variety of other recent studies also suggest districts can positively influence the nature of instruction across a system (Cuban & Usdan, 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Massell &

Goertz, 2002; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Together, these studies highlight efforts of school districts across the United States working to change the nature of teaching and learning in *all* classrooms, not only a selected few.

Premise 2. Leaders do and can learn in the context of leadership practice. In one sense, it is trivial to assert that leaders learn in and from their practice. However, this assertion begs many questions about what leaders learn, how they learn, and how—if at all—leadership experiences translate into professional expertise. In addition, a certain number of leaders take on what might be called a *learning stance*, which rests on the assumption that the visible act of learning, both symbolically and in real terms, is an important part of leadership work. As stated earlier, we do not know much about what and how leaders learn in practice (Leithwood et al., 2004). However, research on teacher learning provides insights into how not only teachers, but also leaders, are likely to learn in the context of their practice. Ball and Cohen (1999) suggested teachers must learn “in and from” practice, given the uncertain nature of teaching and learning. “Teaching occurs in particulars—particular students interacting with particular teachers over particular ideas in particular circumstances . . . no amount of knowledge can fully prescribe appropriate or wise practice” (Ball & Cohen, p. 10). Leadership practice also occurs in particulars, resulting in the same conclusion that leaders must also learn in and from practice.

The particulars of leadership occur on an even larger scale, and often in public view—particular system actors (e.g., teachers, students, principals, board members, and community members) interacting with particular issues (e.g., curriculum decisions, resource allocation, performance expectations, and accountability systems) in particular

circumstances (e.g., organizational changes, funding crises, union conflicts, and changing state expectations). Much of what leaders need to know cannot be scripted or learned in preparation programs or professional development workshops; learning often occurs in context and in the moment. Job-embedded learning is a key factor in building capacity for reform (Fullan, 2005). However, research on the development of expertise also shows that we do not simply learn *from* experience, but we also learn *to* experience given the fact that what we notice is guided by what we know (Bransford et al., 2006). As leaders develop expertise, what they notice in a given situation and what they learn from experience also changes.

Some scholars and practitioners believe learning should be a central component of leadership practice. For example, leaders in San Diego City Schools assert continuous learning to be a “professional norm”—learning is never complete, but part of a continuous learning cycle that is a system obligation of all professionals (Hightower & McLaughlin, 2005; Nelson & Sassi, 2005). According to the Institute for Learning (IFL),³ the external support provider in District 2, continuous learning in pursuit of educational improvement is a norm expected not only of students, but also of all professionals within an education system. In essence, learning is the work of all members of the system:

An education system that is a learning organization must treat upgrading of instructional competencies as a key part of its definition of professionalism. It should be structured to inspire and, when necessary, to require continuous learning on the part of everyone in the system, from teachers to senior administrators. It must foster continuous and ubiquitous learning. (IFL, n.d., 4th para.)

³ The Institute for Learning was founded in 1995 as a partnership of school districts committed to standards-based education and system-wide reform. It serves as a liaison between its parent institution, the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, and educators in school systems nationwide. <http://www.instituteforlearning.org>

It is not only learning in general that is important, but also the *kind* of continuous learning that matters. Research on both student and teacher learning highlights the importance of differentiating between *exposure* to new ideas and experiences and the development of *deep understanding* (Bransford & Donovan, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; National Research Council, 2000). In the same way, leaders need more than exposure to new ideas if the goal is to develop deep understanding about how to improve instruction across a system. Fullan (2005) suggested leaders need to have deep understandings of where they want to go and how to get there if reforms will make a lasting difference:

We find that the terms travel easily—*professional learning communities, networks, capacity building* and so on—but the meaning of the underlying concepts does not. Icebergs don't travel well if you are just trying to move the visible part. Many leaders try to take shortcuts by slicing off the visible part of the iceberg, assuming they have captured its full power. (p. 67)

Leaders seeking to go beyond the “shortcuts” described above need ongoing opportunities to learn. This does not mean leaders need more workshops, but instead, learning should be embedded in the daily work of leadership. Research on teacher learning highlights the importance of examining professional learning in practice. Ball and Cohen (1999) suggested teachers should assume a “stance of inquiry” in order to actively learn as they teach—to separate learning from practice is akin to “expecting someone to learn to swim on a sidewalk” (p. 12). The same likely holds true for leaders—learning-while-leading makes good sense.

Premise 3. Professional community is likely to play a central role in the learning of leaders while in the context of their practice. Although we know little about what

experiences support leaders' learning and why (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 1992), we know even less about the role of professional community in leaders' learning. However, recent research on the role of professional community in teachers' learning can provide insights into this issue. Collaboration with colleagues, often in the form of formal or informal professional communities, can play a significant role in teacher learning:

The ongoing study and improvement of teaching is difficult to accomplish alone. Novices need opportunities to talk with others about their teaching, to analyze their students' work, to examine problems, and to consider alternative explanations and actions. If novices learn to talk about specific practices in specific terms, if they learn to ask for clarification, share uncertainties, and request help, they will be developing skills and dispositions that are critical in the ongoing improvement of teaching. (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1030)

Teaching has often been described as work performed in isolation (Lortie, 1975; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), and in the case of school district leaders, the situation is even more severe. It is not uncommon for a school district leader to be the only one in a system with a particular job title or function. For example, in this study, only two of the five central office leaders had a colleague with the same job title. However, despite different roles and responsibilities, leaders can come together around common goals, such as improving instruction and leadership across an entire school district. Working with other professionals enables teacher (or leaders) to "compare their interpretations and decisions with others, to confront the inherent inconclusiveness of knowledge, and still strive for reasoned and reasonable professional judgment" (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 17). As a note of caution, Ball and Cohen emphasized the importance of situating professional discussion in artifacts of practice or concrete tasks in order to ground the conversation, "Without such grounding, a common analytic vocabulary, and strong norms of analysis,

professional conversation tends to become an exchange of buzzwords and slogans more than specific descriptions and analyses with concrete referents” (p. 17).

In a study of professional learning communities among teachers, McLaughlin (1993) described strong professional communities as those with a shared focus on student learning; norms of collective responsibility, mutual support and obligation for teachers’ practice and student learning; and high levels of professional, normative controls. One can imagine a similar description for a strong professional community among school district leaders, where the “students” are other adults in the systems (e.g., principals and literacy coaches). There would likely be a similar support and obligation for not only teachers’ practice and student learning, but also the practice of principals, coaches, and other district leaders.

Premise 4. External resource organizations may play a central role in prompting and guiding district leaders’ learning while in the context of their practice. Important as professional community may be to the learning of leaders while on the job, it is unlikely that the impetus for learning, the exposure to new ideas, and continuing support or scaffolding for leaders’ learning will come from *within* the district organization. It is simply too easy for the exigencies of their job, combining within their own blind spots and prior learning, to set arbitrary limitations on leaders’ learning in the context of practice. As an emerging body of work on the role that third-party “resource organizations” suggests, such resource organizations can offer long-term support for instructional reform (Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003; Honig, 2004; Smylie & Wenzel, 2003). These organizations offer a wide array of support for districts, ranging from technical support and fee-based support for capacity building to those with well-

developed reform agendas. Although the specific nature of support varied, most external support organizations focused on the systemic improvement of schooling, often with a particular focus on teaching quality and student learning (Gallucci, 2006).

The literature is mixed when it comes to assessing the impact of these kinds of third-party arrangements. A recent study of the Institute for Learning's district reform efforts in three urban districts reported both promises and challenges associated with these kinds of reform relationships:

Our case studies also show that it is possible for an intermediary organization to assist districts in addressing a persistent constraint to reform by building the capacity of district staff to engage in instructional reform. . . . However, our research also illustrates that many obstacles and unanswered questions remain to achieving wide scale improvements in teaching and learning in urban districts. (Marsh et al., 2005, pp. 134-135)

Some third-party organizations make a point of targeting the learning of leaders and the building of "leadership capacity" in the district (or school). Emerging evidence suggests that this may be one place that such organizations have considerable impact. For example, the IFL study mentioned that central office and school administrators consistently reported that IFL gave them a common language, as well as knowledge and skills to help them lead instructional reform (Marsh et al., 2005). This final point directly connects to this study, as it suggests the kind of role third party organizations may play in prompting and supporting leaders' learning about leading instructional reform at the system level.

These premises provide starting points for an investigation of leaders' learning-while-leading. Moving away from the more common conversations about leadership preparation, this study takes a look at what happens once leaders are on the job. The term

“lifelong learning” is commonly quoted in many circles, but what does it actually look like in practice? This inquiry helped to create a more detailed conception of what ongoing learning in practice actually entails in one particular district context.

Rationale for This Study

This investigation comes at a time when public education systems in the United States are under intense public scrutiny. With increased performance expectations for students, system-level leaders face the daunting task of guiding and supporting systems to facilitate what’s never been done before—help *all* students, not only a select group, perform at high levels. This study rests on the assumption that system level leaders can play an active and defining role in instructional improvement, which is something Elmore (2000) believed is critical for large-scale improvement:

If schools, school systems, and their leaders respond to standards-based reforms the way they have responded to other attempts at broad scale reform of public education over the past century, they will fail massively and visibly, with an attendant loss of public confidence and serious consequences for public education. The way out of this problem is through the large-scale improvement of instruction, something public education has been unable to do to date, but which is possible with dramatic changes in the way public schools define and practice leadership. (p. 1)

Despite Elmore’s grim prediction of the consequences potentially ahead for public education, he and others provide a reason to believe change may be possible, especially by focusing on large-scale instructional improvement supported by strategic leadership practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Elmore, 2000; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Hightower et al., 2002). But how do leaders develop the necessary expertise to achieve

results that have eluded education systems for so many years? This study provides an opportunity to better understand how one group of central office leaders began to lead the kind of large-scale instructional reform described by Elmore and others. This investigation takes as its starting point the complex, practical work of district-level leaders leading a system engaged in system-wide efforts to improve instruction in all classrooms. For these leaders, learning was an ongoing part of leadership practice.

It goes without saying that a single leader cannot do this work, but it is probably also true that no single *category* of leader can successfully shoulder the burden that district-wide instructional reform implies. If this is true, one comes inexorably to the need for, and potential of, leadership distribution across school districts, and also between units and individuals within the system alongside units and individuals outside the system. This study was not primarily about leadership distribution, but about the learning that happens while leadership was shared among system and “nonsystem” actors (Gallucci et al., 2005). While CEL consultants did not hold formal positions in the system, the data suggests these nonsystem actors had ongoing and direct impact on both instructional practice and leadership practice across the system. This example brings forth a new way to conceive of system-level instructional leadership that is not only stretched across many actors and their situation, but the nature of the distribution changed as leaders developed expertise to lead the reform agenda. In essence, leadership was dynamically distributed for a specific time and a specific purpose: to build the capacity of system actors while also supporting instructional improvement efforts across the entire system at the same time. Rather than simply “dividing labor” among various players in order to increase collective capacity for instructional leadership, the partnership prompted

professional interactions that also supported the increased personal capacities of all participants.

This study provides insights into not only the content and structures that supported leaders' learning about system-wide instructional improvement, but also the kinds of opportunities and tensions that emerged in the process. A qualitative approach afforded an opportunity to better understand how these leaders made meaning in the midst of their practice as both leaders and learners. This story was one of district leaders working side-by-side with each other and outside consultants to develop expertise about leadership, instruction, and system change. The findings from this study may help leaders in other districts reflect on their own learning and consider new ways of making learning an ongoing part of leadership. In addition, those who work in, or study other external support organizations may gain insights into their own practice as well. According to Weick (2001), knowledge is not something people possess in their heads, but something people *do* together. This study captured one group of leaders' "doing" in the context of district-level leadership and as a result, will contribute to a growing knowledge base about leading large-scale reform.

This research also provides an instructive set of case-based insights about how leaders learn in the context of their practice. Although a growing body of literature is exploring how students and teachers learn (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; National Research Council, 2000), there is a dearth of literature providing insights into leaders' learning, especially on-the-job learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Images of the kind of leadership necessary for educational reform abound in popular literature, scholarly journals, and practitioner reference material (Bennis, Spreitzer, & Cummings,

2001; Fullan, 2001, 2005; Knapp et al., 2003; Senge, 2000), but empirical studies focused on how leaders learn to transform these images into reality are difficult to come by. Situated in a district actively engaged in multilevel reform, this study moves beyond general descriptions of what might be possible in large-scale reform, and provides a picture of how leaders in one district developed understanding about instructional reform, and lead change efforts over time. The study began in the midst of early reform work, rather than beginning with a “best practice” case and asking leaders to reflect on how their practice evolved over time. While there was previous activity that attracted attention from both scholars and practitioners, the reform work was emerging and evolving during the course of the study. Both scholars and practitioners interested in school district leadership, system reform, and the professional learning of educators will benefit from this investigation.

How the Remainder of This Report is Organized

Chapter 2 of this report provides a discussion of conceptual framework that informs this study, which brings together literature about distributed leadership, professional learning, and adaptive expertise. Following that discussion, chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach and details my approach to data analysis. In order to set a boundary for leaders’ learning, chapter 4 provides a picture of system-level instructional leadership as enacted by these district leaders, followed by two cycles of learning-while-leading described in chapter 5. In essence, chapter 4 answers the “what” of these leaders’ learning and chapter 5 gives insight into how they learned over time.

Chapter 6 takes a step back from the specific activities of leadership practice and deals with questions of how learning-while-leading is facilitated over time by an external support organization. Chapter 7 explores the tensions associated with learning in the midst of leadership practice and offers concluding thoughts about this study as well as issues for future research.

Chapter 2. **Conceptual Framework: Learning While Leading Instructional Reform**

The learning and leadership challenges sketched in chapter 1 beg for a more precise conceptualization so that they can be productively studied. Several lines of scholarship provide the base for building such a conceptualization—one that brings together ideas about what a leader is learning in the context of their practice, what supports that learning, and how that learning interfaces with the leadership practice itself. I present this thinking first by reviewing pertinent bodies of literature—distributed leadership, professional learning, and adaptive expertise—and then combining them into a conceptual framework that guides the research. Based on that framework, I then elaborate the three broad research questions posed in chapter 1.

Converging Ideas from Existing Research

This study draws on ideas rooted in several lines of recent scholarship. First, although originally framed within a single school context, the notion of distributed leadership practice (e.g., Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001) can also apply to the district as a whole. Informed by activity theory and notions of distributed cognition, this perspective assumes leadership practice as “stretched over” leaders, followers, and their situation. Scholars are beginning to consider the nature of leadership distribution at the level of the district system, and also between units and individuals within the system alongside units and individuals outside the system (Knapp et al., 2003).

A second line of inquiry draws from research on professional learning in the context of district instructional reform (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Wagner, 2004). For this particular group of central office leaders, learning was a central part of leadership practice as they were challenged to rethink various assumptions related to system-level instructional leadership, including what “good instruction” looked like in practice, the roles leaders could play in supporting instructional form, and the importance of deep subject-area knowledge.

A third and final line of inquiry, which concentrates on the nature and development of expertise, highlights qualitative differences in the kinds of learning in which people engage (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Schwartz, Bransford, & Sears, 2005). By contrasting “routine expertise” with “adaptive expertise” Hatano and Inagaki (1986) provided a useful analytic frame for understanding how leaders learn in and through their practice. Rather than supporting the idea that leaders need to always provide answers—and that learning is therefore about the acquisition of the requisite body of knowledge—the notion of adaptive expertise shifts attention to the leaders’ ability to learn, when confronted with ill-structured problems, and challenges for which “there are no easy answers” (Heifetz, 1994).

Together, the three lines of inquiry support a fourth key idea: that district leaders engaged in system-wide instructional reform can assume an *adaptive* “learning stance” in their leadership practice. Such a stance invites and provokes their own learning on the job, while at the same time communicating important messages to others, whenever this stance is on public view.

Distributed Instructional Leadership at the District Level

Given the potentially influential role that the district central office can play in instructional reform, as noted in chapter 1, the nature of the “instructional leadership” that might be exercised by central office leaders needs to be conceptualized and what it might imply for the configuration of expertise and activity among central office staff. Although there is not a single definition of instructional leadership, generally it can be defined as leadership activity that focuses on the core business of schooling—teaching and learning (Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001).

Stein and Nelson (2003) suggested in addition to knowing one subject deeply, instructional leaders need to “know strong instruction when they see it, to encourage it when they don’t, and to set the conditions for continuous academic learning among their professional staffs” (p. 424). Both of these studies suggest that instructional leadership draws from a complex professional knowledge base that includes areas specifically associated with instruction (e.g., subject matter knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum) as well as an understanding of how to create systems designed to support the development of such a knowledge base.

There is a key distinction between instructional leadership and an instructional leader. The former refers to an *activity* that is often associated with the work of multiple actors (e.g., directors, principals, literacy coaches, and teacher leaders); the latter refers to a single person, often in a formal role of positional authority. It is unlikely that a single leader, no matter how skilled, will provide expertise necessary to support improvement in all aspects of instruction. Instead, system-level instructional leadership is inherently an

activity enacted by multiple players in a K-12 school district, in short, it makes sense to treat it as a “distributed” function.

In line with distributed leadership work at the school level (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001), the leadership practice of central office staff who offer instructional guidance and support was stretched over interactions among many actors—both inside and outside the organization—and their situation. Together, they are engaged in a joint, “distributed” instructional leadership practice. In this particular context, instructional leadership practice was also exercised by leaders who reside outside the system—consultants employed by an external support provider—who came alongside central office leaders, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers in a concerted effort to improve instruction in all classrooms.

The work of system-level instructional leadership is not only about multiple actors involved in a collective practice. Rather, an important point is that leaders, both within the system, and residing externally, can form an interrelated set of actors who collectively encompass the wide range of expertise that is required to support the ambitious reform goals they espouse. As one district leader remarked, “If I had Rebekah’s (consultant) knowledge and skills, you would be paying me \$3000 a day.” The nature of the distribution of expertise among actors, the learning that emerges from professional interactions among those actors, the ways that leaders come to assume collective responsibility for the instructional leadership function, and the situation in which leaders work is a phenomenon worthy of exploration.

Professional Learning in the Context of District Instructional Reform

Districts are not always successful in planning, delivering, and supporting the professional development demanded by intellectually ambitious reform agendas (Stein & D'Amico, 2002). One reason may be rooted in the learning challenge described in chapter 1; leaders are not only expected to be managers or strategic planners but also instructional leaders who make instruction a top priority of their practice (e.g., Elmore, 2000; Knapp et al., 2003; Supovitz & Poglioco, 2001). For some leaders, this shift away from prioritizing managerial issues, toward a central focus on teaching and learning may require a qualitatively different kind of knowledge, especially given expectations of subject matter knowledge for instructional reform (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003). As a result, learning becomes a critical part of leadership practice. Research studies and other publications about educational reform frequently include references to the importance of learning, not just for students, but also for all adults working in schools and district systems (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Fullan, 2005; Kegan & Lahey, 2002; Knapp et al., 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Senge, 2000; Wagner, 2004). But what does it mean for leaders to learn? There is no single definition of learning; the definition changes based on perspective and tradition—for example, behaviorist, constructivist/rationalist, and situative (Bransford et al., 2006). Drawing from both situated and cognitive perspectives on learning, this study treats learning as a change in thinking and practice. This definition purposely sits in between these two different perspectives on learning in order to achieve a definition that highlights both group interactions in context (practice) as well as the thinking associated with the interactions. Some scholars may view the conceptual differentiation between thinking and practice as

a false dichotomy (e.g., Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999), but this definition fits with emerging research that describes the upcoming “decade for synergy” in which various theories “have the potential to mutually influence one another in ways that can transform how we think about the science of learning” (Bransford et al., 2006). There is a tension associated with using a definition that moves toward synergy between different perspectives rather than a definition that is rooted in a single research tradition. This study purposely sits in the midst of such tension.

While a focus on thinking is rooted in a cognitive perspective of learning, an examination of practice as enacted in a social context can be understood from a situated perspective. This study attempts to explicitly link leaders’ cognitive development (changes in thinking) with changes in instructional practice that occurred over time. A more detailed discussion of these perspectives is included later in this chapter, and chapter 3 provides a more detailed discussion of how these different theoretical perspectives of learning informed decisions about study design and methodology.

The nature of learning in the context of school district reform may be problematic if the reform in question focuses on intellectually ambitious, subject-area reform. Hubbard et al. (2006) asserted that teachers who have an impoverished understanding of subject matter and a limited grasp of how students learn the subject, will necessarily be hampered in their ability to make “in-flight” decisions about instruction (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The parallel likely holds true for school and central office leaders who are crafting and supporting an instructional reform agenda. It is possible, if not likely, that many teachers and leaders have neither learned the subject nor learned to teach it in the ways demanded by many current approaches to instruction reform (Hubbard et al.).

As a result, leaders may find themselves leading a reform agenda that centers on an instructional approach that they themselves “don’t know.”

This central and possibly problematic challenge is an important part of this study—how leaders manage the potential tension of leading a reform agenda based on an intellectually rigorous instructional approach they are only just beginning to learn themselves. The challenge is especially difficult in light of social expectations of leaders, such as the desire or expectation for leaders to be “answer-filled experts” instead of “accomplished novices” (National Research Council, 2000; Schein, 1992; Vaill, 1996). While activities associated with learning (e.g., making mistakes, trial and error) in the context of a classroom may be valued, and even encouraged, the same practices enacted in the midst of leadership practice can be detrimental to one’s credibility as a leader. For example, a leader who sets and then changes policies based on new learning may be perceived as indecisive or inconsistent, even if the changes make sense in the eyes of followers. The nature of the reform effort in this particular study amplifies this tension given the unscripted nature of the new approach to instruction espoused by the district, that was in stark contrast with previously valued teaching practices. According to one external consultant, “There is no recipe or script to follow”—the instructional approach relied upon teachers developing deep knowledge of content and pedagogy in order to inform in-the-moment professional decisions that supported individual student learning.

It is not only what leaders learn in their practice that may be important, but also what leaders “unlearn.” Some scholars and reformers highlight the importance and necessity of unlearning as a crucial component of educational reform (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Kegan & Lahey, 2001). According to Kegan (as quoted in Bucuvalas,

2002), “school improvement may require as much ‘unlearning’ as learning. In order to ‘leave no child behind,’ those who run our schools may need to significantly alter their own beliefs about effective teaching, and this is incredibly hard work” (Bucuvalas, n.p.). Recent work in the cognitive and developmental sciences supports the notion that what leaders “know”—and may need to unlearn—is based on their prior knowledge and experiences (National Research Council, 2000). Constructivist learning theory⁴ asserts all new knowledge and understanding is constructed on the foundation of existing knowledge and beliefs (e.g., Cobb, 1994). In addition, research in the learning sciences shows how people often hold on to preexisting understandings and misconceptions, even after new information is taught that contradicts their preexisting understandings (National Research Council). For example, despite new research demonstrating how struggling readers can perform at high levels when provided access to high-quality instruction and appropriate learning conditions, some educators hold on to the misconception that due to limited literacy exposure for some students prior to entering school, students with missing or limited pre-literacy supports in their early years (a “critical period”) will not be able to “catch up” (Moats, 2001; National Research Council, 2000; Peterson, Caverly, Nicholson, O’Neal, & Susenbary, 2000).

The popular literature is filled with discussions of “critical periods” for learning, and the assumption persists that the ability to learn certain kinds of information shuts down if the critical period is missed and learning is affected forever . . . there is emerging evidence that the brain is much more plastic than heretofore assumed, and that the idea of rigid “critical periods” does not hold. (Bransford et al., 2006, pp. 15-16)

⁴ The constructivist theory of knowing (existing knowledge is used to build new knowledge)—based on the work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget—is different than, and commonly confused with, constructivist theories about teaching. This theory of knowing holds regardless of pedagogical approach.

Leaders who maintain this kind of assumption about struggling readers will likely make different decisions than those willing to “let go” of their assumptions and alter their understanding about supports necessary to help struggling readers improve. Contributors to Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) described the difficulty and emotional pain teachers can face when trying to unlearn routines or change beliefs such as the belief about “critical periods” described above. Leaders likely face the same kind of emotional distress as teachers when faced with the need to unlearn routines and alter beliefs, especially when this unlearning may happen in public view.

Adaptive Expertise in a Leadership Context

Despite the emotional distress possibly associated with such efforts, unlearning is a hallmark of adaptive expertise; people having characteristics of adaptive expertise change core competencies and examine assumptions as part of their ongoing learning. Adaptive experts also hold knowledge “flexibly” and are willing to shift thinking and practice when new information and experiences lead in that direction (Bransford et al., 2006). Adaptive expertise highlights differences between “routine experts” and “adaptive experts” (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Routine experts develop a core set of competencies applied over time with greater and greater efficiency, while adaptive experts are more likely to change their core competencies and continually expand the breadth and depth of their expertise (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; National Research Council, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005). Adaptive expertise provides an important model of learning:

Adaptive experts are able to approach new situations flexibly and to learn throughout their lifetimes. They not only use what they have learned, they are

metacognitive and continually question their current levels of expertise and attempt to move beyond them. They don't simply attempt to do the same things more efficiently; they attempt to do things better. (National Research Council, p. 48)

The notion of “adaptive expertise” implies an understanding that learning, in terms of the development of expertise, is an ongoing process, especially as assumptions, knowledge and skills may need to be adapted, and even changed in new situations. The Adaptive Expertise theoretical framework (see Figure 2.1) provides an informative lens for understanding the nature of central office leaders' approach to learning (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999).

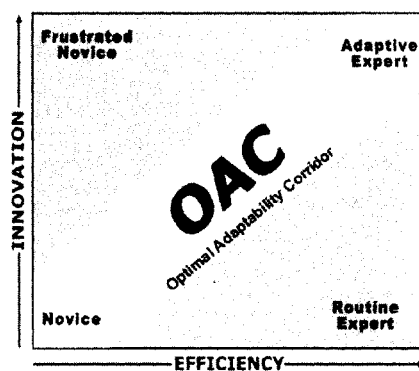


Figure 2.1. Adaptive expertise (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999).

This concept does not explicitly appear in the leadership or district reform literature, but one can imagine a leader with adaptive expertise as one who is willing to let go of current knowledge (even though this may appear to compromise efficiency or conflict with former publicly-shared beliefs) and change practice (even though this may appear to retreat from a specified innovation agenda) in order to improve practice. Although this framework appears to illustrate learning from a linear and primarily

cognitive perspective, it is helpful to think about this as an “activity space” rather than a fixed description of individuals or groups. The traits (e.g., routine expert, frustrated novice, and adaptive expert) are most likely situational descriptions that may be applied to the same person or group in different contexts. For example, leaders at the district level might operate as “intelligent novices” as they are prompted to change fundamental understandings about literacy instruction and the professional learning required to support and sustain such instruction, yet at the same time in undertaking their work managing budgets they might be described as “routine experts.”

Given the breadth and complexity of school district leaders’ work, it is unlikely that a leader, or group of leaders, could be defined by a single term; instead, their work, and in this case their learning, may fall in multiple regions of the adaptive expertise framework, depending on the content and the context of their learning. This is especially true when examined from a situated perspective on learning that treats context and social interaction as constitutive elements of practice. While much of the expertise literature to date has concentrated on individuals’ development (e.g., deGroot, 1965; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; Miller, 1978), in the context of whole district reform, in which leadership is more distributed, it makes sense to assume a collective view of expertise, pertinent to and enacted in particular situations.

Assuming an Adaptive Learning Stance in the Context of Leadership Practice

Leaders’ learning, whether associated with developing routine or adaptive expertise, can occur in many settings, ranging from formal workshops to informal conversations with colleagues. Although learning may be happening all the time, some

leaders choose to make learning an explicit and public part of their leadership practice. In some philosophies of educational reform, learning is a big piece of “public business.”

According to Tony Alvarado, former Superintendent of District 2 in New York City and Chancellor of Instruction in the San Diego City School, the “job” of teachers and administrators is professional development:

The underlying vision for professional development is that it is continuous, and that it is for everybody. . . . Many school districts—perhaps most of them—still have a very constricted view of professional development. It goes like this: Some of us are teachers; some are administrators; and professional development is something we go somewhere to have dosed out to us. The point I’m trying to make is that our work is professional development. Thinking about our work and improving what we do—these things are professional development. . . . The job is professional development, and professional development is the job. When we learn that—really learn it—we’ll be on our way. (Alvarado, 1998, n.p.)

This notion of continuous learning confronts the notion of “leader as expert,” at least in the sense of an expert having all the answers. A better match is the idea of a leader as an accomplished novice or adaptive expert who relies on their expertise to inform new learning. In addition, learning is a continuous part of professional practice, which means leaders are learning in public, among their peers, alongside consultants brought in to share their expertise, and finally with those under a leader’s supervision, such as principals. Being a learner is not the opposite of being a knower, but instead, learning becomes the vehicle for improving professional practice over time.

The notion of a “learning stance” provides a way to better understand how a leader may approach learning in various contexts within their practice. The word “stance,” is primarily defined⁵ in two ways: (a) the attitude or position of a standing

⁵ Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1989.

person or (b) a mental posture, point of view.” In education circles, stance is often used to describe particular orientations educators and organizations assume in their practice. For example, Lytle and Cochran-Smith (1999) described how taking an “inquiry stance” in the classroom allows teachers to “generate local knowledge, envision and theorize their practice, and interpret and interrogate the theory and research of others” (p. 50). In addition, the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) has been described as having a “learning stance” based on how the organization adopts new strategies or adapts current strategies as a result of ongoing learning and feedback (Weschler & David, 2003). Borrowing a definition from Evensen, Salisbury-Glennon, and Glenn (2001), I use the term stance to indicate an individual or group’s orientation that guides perceptions and governs practice.

A learning stance is not necessarily fixed, but more likely dynamic and situated due to the influence of particular contexts. For example, a leader’s orientation toward learning while working alongside colleagues in the central office may be different than the same leader’s orientation toward learning when working alongside principals they supervise within a hierarchically structured school system. It might be easier for a leader to admit confusion or ask questions when surrounded by peers than when leading a meeting of principals under his or her supervision, due to social expectations of leaders having certain levels of expertise. In a similar way, one’s leadership stance is likely situated—in a time of crisis, a leader may assume a more “command and control” stance whereas when debriefing a classroom observation the same leader may assume a stance guided more by asking questions than providing answers.

*Bringing It All Together: Leaders' Learning and Support for Learning
in the Context of Leadership Practice*

The ideas just reviewed provide useful building blocks for a conceptual framework concerning leaders' learning about system-level instructional leadership practice—formal and informal, individual and collective, and private and public—while engaged in that practice. The framework necessarily focuses on both leadership activity and learning in context. Figure 2.2 highlights the key features of reform activity associated with leaders' learning: (a) sources of and supports for learning, (b) mediating factors and the development of expertise, and (c) changes in thinking and instructional leadership practice over time. Each of these areas is discussed in more detail in the following section.

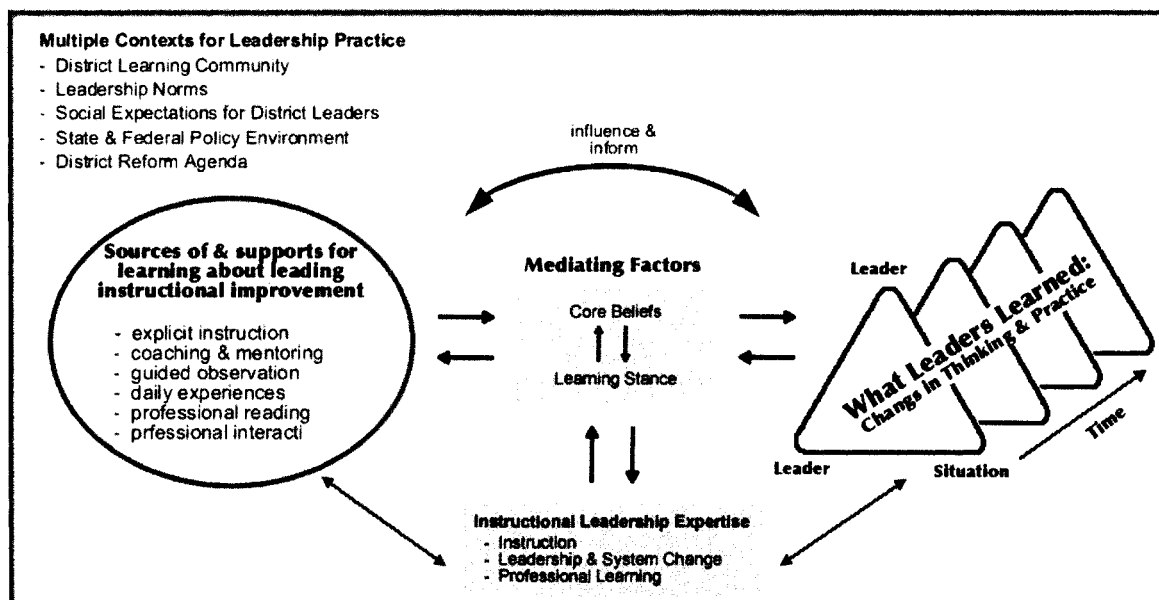


Figure 2.2. An interactive perspective on leaders' learning.

Sources of and Support for Leaders' Learning about Leading Instructional Improvement

As indicated earlier, to say that leaders are learning in and from their practice may seem trivial. However, in some systems, prompting and supporting leaders' learning about instruction and the leadership necessary to bring about improvement across a system is an explicit aspect of a reform agenda. Districts typically have some kind of improvement initiative in place, whether focused on a new approach to literacy instruction, curriculum alignment, or increasing cultural awareness among staff members. Typically, workshops are held in late summer to prepare leaders for fall implementation, and sometimes follow-up sessions are held throughout the year. These workshops can be understood as opportunities to provide explicit instruction for the issue at hand.

In addition to formal learning experiences, some systems provide coaching and mentoring programs for leaders, especially for leaders who are new to the system, or are in the early stages of their leadership career (Daresh, 2001; Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). The job-embedded nature of coaching and mentoring allows for learning opportunities grounded in leaders' immediate experiences. For example, mentors and leaders may participate in school walkthroughs together and engage in guided classroom observations as a way prompt conversations about pressing issues.

Many leaders also take it upon themselves to engage in self-directed professional learning by participating in seminars, professional associations and keeping abreast of professional texts in areas of focus. For example, each summer the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) hosts a summer leadership institute designed as an "interactive idea exchange" and opportunity for professional networking. The University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership also offers a summer leadership

institute each year designed to promote professional reflection, interaction with faculty and guest presenters, and engagement in collaborative planning for future leadership work.

Finally, the current accountability environment prompts leaders to focus efforts on improvement, which likely results in daily questions and reflections about how to increase student achievement. The everyday interactions with staff, community, and others outside the system can be both sources of and support for leaders' learning in the midst of leadership practice. However, research suggests that this kind of informal learning based on personal experience may not be as productive given the sometimes unexamined and false assumptions that underlie thinking (National Research Council, 2000).

Mediating Factors and the Development of Instructional Leadership Expertise

Providing structures and support for learning are only one part of the interactive picture of leaders' learning illustrated in Figure 2.2. All leaders come to their work with core values, beliefs about themselves as learners, and existing expertise about leading instructional improvement. These various factors influence and mediate both what and how leaders learn; and in some cases, these factors also influence the sources and supports for learning. For example, a mentoring or relationship usually begins with the leader's needs or areas of need—one way to think about expertise—rather than from a fixed curriculum. As questions and level of expertise change over time, so does the nature of mentoring work.

The stance leaders assume towards learning also influences and mediates the relationship between learning and their leadership practice. For example, some leaders may approach learning opportunities from an additive perspective, which means they will be adding to their toolbox of skills without necessarily examining what beliefs and assumptions influence their thinking and action. However, other leaders may assume an adaptive learning stance, resulting in explicitly examining assumptions that impact their practice as well as developing new competencies. In both scenarios, leaders are learning, but the nature of the learning is qualitatively different.

The examination of core values, beliefs, and assumptions may be explicitly prompted—which is often the case in coaching and mentoring relationships—or may be inherent in a leader’s view of the world. One can imagine a group of leaders engaged in workshop where some assume an adaptive stance, and raise question about underlying issues, whereas others are focusing attention on adding new technical skills to their repertoire of solutions to known problems. The same learning context, when approached from a different perspective or stance, may lead to a different outcome in leadership practice. The same holds true for leaders with different levels of expertise. A group of leaders may observe the same instructional episode, but see very different things based many issues, including the depth of instructional understanding, and knowledge of the local context. This goes back to Bransford et al.’s (2006) assertion that what we notice is guided by what we know, or in other terms, our expertise informs the nature of and outcome of observation.

What Leaders Learn: Changes in Thinking and Practice

Before discussing the content of leaders' learning and how their learning was enacted in thinking and practice, it is important to set a boundary definition for learning. As mentioned earlier, this study uses a definition of learning that focuses on changes in thinking and practice. This definition draws from both cognitive and situated perspectives on learning (e.g., National Research Council, 2000; Resnick & Hall, 1998; Rogoff, 1990). Building upon Piaget's (1977) notion that people construct understanding rather than simply recording it as in the case of a camera or recording device, cognitive scholars often focus on how prior understandings influence learning. The field of learning science has also begun to pay closer attention to the situated nature of learning, in particular, the role of social context in learning (e.g., Bransford et al., 2006; Nasir, 2005; Saxe, 1994). As a result, the theoretical distance between these two perspectives may be less defined.

Building upon Vygotsky's (1978) work as well as other efforts to understand distributed cognition and sociocultural activity theory (Engestrom, 1987; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990; Werstch, 1998), Spillane et al. (2001) argued that leadership can be understood as a distributed function that places situation—tools, organizational structures, routines, and language—on equal conceptual footing with the actions of leaders and followers. Rather than simply affecting practice, situation is *constitutive* of leadership practice (Spillane et al.). The third section of Figure 2.2—what leaders learned: changes in thinking and practice—is an adaption of the distributed leadership analytic frame that foregrounds a three-way interaction between leaders, followers, and their situation. Given the focus of this study on leaders and their contexts for learning, rather than a detailed examination of leadership practice and its impact on

the system, my figure replaces “followers” with “leaders” in the three-way interaction that illustrates leadership practice. Much of this story focuses on interactions between different groups of leaders (e.g., consultants, district leaders, principals, and coaches). Conceptually, study participants are both leaders and followers, depending on the context, but for purposes of simplicity, I will use the term leader throughout.

In order to understand how leaders’ thinking and practice changes, it is important to look at how their instructional leadership practice changes over time. The overlapping interactive triangles represent the emerging nature of leadership practice, which changes over time based on learning. In some cases, practice shifts as a result of new learning encountered in a workshop, or a new tool introduced by a mentor. In other instances, practice changes after a colleague shares an idea for improvement, such as using a particular professional text to support teachers’ learning about a specific aspect of reading instruction. Although the figure suggests change over time, it is quite possible that leadership practice remains consistent across time. While looking at snapshots of the three-way interaction of leadership practice may be informative, an analysis of changes that take place between snapshots provides more detailed insight into leaders’ learning. For example, the introduction of a new observation tool—part of the situation—directly impacts instructional leadership practice. It is not just the change in tool that requires scrutiny, but also the leaders’ thinking in connection with its use.

Multiple Contexts for Leaders’ Learning

Several contextual factors can influence district leaders’ learning, including participation in a professional community, leadership norms, social expectations of

leaders, the state and federal policy environment, and the district reform agenda. As stated earlier, scholars suggest a professional community can play a significant role in supporting leaders' learning by breaking down the silo structures that govern most educational institutions (Hargreaves, 2006; Hord, 2004). The nature of leaders' community can prompt, or support, as well as hinder learning. Closely tied to the idea of professional community is the notion of leadership norms shared by a particular community. For example, central office leaders may have expectations of themselves and their colleagues that professional learning is an ongoing part of their leadership practice. On the other hand, central office leaders may focus leadership efforts on prompting and supporting others' learning (e.g., teachers, students) rather than their own.

Moving beyond the leadership community brings up issues related to expectations held by others. Leadership practice takes place in a co-constructed context, influenced by potentially different expectations from several sources: the central office leadership community, followers (principals, teachers, and students), and other constituents (board members and parents). For example, at times, principals and board members may expect central office leaders to provide answers while the leaders see themselves differently—as co-learners engaged in an ambitious reform agenda. These and other expectations will impact the way leaders approach their work.

The reality of learning in and from practice can be very challenging for leaders, especially when considering commonly held expectations of leaders as those with “all the answers.” When asked about the notion of “learning-while-leading,” the former dean of the College of Education at a large research university recently quipped, “They don't pay you not to know!” Although his response was partially in jest, he described the tension a

leader faces when others come seeking answers and clear direction, but instead are met with questions to prompt further thinking. Ironic as it may seem, leaders in educational institutions may not feel “safe” modeling learning behaviors (e.g., experimenting, asking questions, and trial and error), partially due to social expectations of leaders. Although leaders may place a high value on being “lead learners,” at times they may face followers who want answers rather than questions or responses about central office leaders learning something for the first time.

Research also informs why learning in practice may be difficult for leaders. According to Schein (1992), no one wants “the leader to be uncertain, to admit to not knowing or not being in control” (p. 91). This notion of “leader as expert” is linked to commonly held—although often implicit—beliefs that experts are people who know all the answers. Researchers in the Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt discovered that this model of “answer-filled experts” placed severe constraints on new learning because of the tendency to worry about looking competent than to publicly acknowledge the need for help in certain areas (National Research Council, 2000).

Finally, the district, state, and federal policy environment plays an important role in shaping instructional leadership practice at the district level. Central office leaders often feel like they are under intense scrutiny given the current accountability environment in education. While teachers may feel a bit protected from the reform pressures, given their relative anonymity in relation to test student achievement, attention tends to focus on people in central office leadership positions. When you are the only one in the system with a particular job title, all eyes are on you. For those charged with

leading instruction, and by association, insuring the academic opportunity and success of all students, the pressure cannot be ignored.

Elaborating Questions for Investigation

By framing the research problem in this way, it is possible to identify more specifically what can be productively explored in the way school district leaders learn about system-wide instructional and leadership reform, while simultaneously leading a system engaged in such reform. Leaders in this particular district were “learning-while-leading,” as their individual and collective learning was often carried out in public view. With the help of external consultants and other resources⁶ provided through the partnership with CEL, central office leaders, principals, and literacy coaches throughout the district were learning together what it meant to transform instruction through instructional leadership and a coordinated system of professional learning opportunities. For example, principals, school-based literacy coaches, and central office leaders gathered monthly to learn from an expert in literacy instruction. Although access to certain learning opportunities was not equally distributed—central office leaders had significantly more direct contact with outside experts than others in the system—at times, everyone was involved in learning particular aspects of the reform (e.g., analyzing various texts attributes in order to determine reading difficulty) at the same time.

The exploration of ideas in the preceding framework discussion help to pinpoint more specific subquestions that can be investigated in the data assembled for this study:

⁶ Resources such as access to demonstration sites and support for system-wide reform planning.

1. What are central office leaders learning about instructional leadership at the system level in the context of their instructional leadership practice?
 - a. What aspects of instructional leadership practice does their learning inform?
 - b. How, if at all, is their thinking and practice changed?
 - c. To what extent does their engagement with learning-while-leading help them develop adaptive expertise and an adaptive learning stance?

2. What conditions support and enable or constrain their learning about leading instructional improvement in the context of leadership practice?
 - a. What internal structures support leaders' learning?
 - b. Specifically, how does interaction with an external resource organization and participation in the community of central office leaders inform and influence leaders' learning?
 - c. What seems to constrain leaders' learning about leading instructional improvement?
 - d. In what contexts do leaders adapt or change current thinking and practice about leading instructional improvement based on new learning?

3. What does assuming a public "learning stance" imply for the way these leaders approach their practice and the impact it has on others?
 - a. In what settings do they assume a public learning stance?
 - b. How, if at all, does their learning stance change over time?
 - c. How do other system actors (e.g., peers, principals, coaches, and outside experts) respond to leaders who make their learning public?

Chapter 3. Study Design

Studying learning-while-leading entails several kinds of overarching design decisions, as well as a host of more specific decisions about design components. First, it is essential to locate the work in relation to situated and cognitive approaches to learning, each of which implies different approaches to sampling, data collection, and analysis. Second, given a resolution of that set of issues, an appropriate methodological tradition must be chosen—in this instance, a qualitative case study approach. Within that tradition, specific decisions need to be made about setting and sample, sources of data and how that data will be elicited, and how to make sense of the data, in relation to the study questions.

Cognitive and Situated Approaches to Studying Learning-While-Leading

As part of a larger study looking at the “pedagogical relationship” between a third-party support organization and the K-12 school district located in Washington State (Gallucci et al., 2005), this qualitative study examined one case of emerging instructional leadership practice at the system level—specifically, the collective practice of five central office leaders. I focused on leaders’ individual and collective instructional leadership practice in the context of an ambitious reform agenda that focused on improving both instruction and leadership across the district. By showing changes in specific examples of instructional leadership practice over time, this study provides a detailed look at leaders’ learning in context.

The decision to focus on the collective practice of school district leaders is rooted in lines of inquiry that focus on activity rather than individuals (e.g., Engestrom, 1987; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978), including notions of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001) and the social construction of knowledge (Rogoff, 1990; Shulman, 1986; Wenger, 1998). Spillane (2006) defined leadership as a “relationship of social influence” that is not confined to actions of an individual, but instead emerges from the interaction between leaders, followers, and their situation. Given this definition, leadership can only be understood by analyzing collective activity in context. Thus, system-level instructional leadership is a situated activity, and can be defined further as a “system of practice made up of a collection of interacting component parts in relationships of interdependence in which the group has distinct properties over and above the individuals who make it up” (Spillane, 2006, p. 16).

As leaders and followers engage in these “relationships of interdependence,” they are actively constructing knowledge, which can also be described as learning. Vygotsky (1978) believed learning to be socially situated and that social engagement a source of thinking. According to Putnam and Borko (2000), some scholars and educators are moving away from a focus on individual construction of knowledge toward a view of learning that asserts social interaction and one’s environment significantly influence both what is learned and how learning takes place:

The sociocentric view (Soltis, 1981) of knowledge and learning holds that what we take as knowledge and how we think and express ideas are the products of the interactions of groups of people over time. (p. 2)

Taking a similar view that foregrounds the importance of social context and interaction in learning, in their study of San Diego reforms, Hubbard et al. (2006), treated learning in organizations as:

Something that happens between people when they engage in common activities because this trains attention simultaneously on individuals and the collective . . . We will say learning has occurred when communities of individuals gradually transform their practices over time as they engage one another in response to changes in their environment associated with reaching the organization's goal of improved student learning. (p. 15)

This definition supports my decision to focus on the *practice* of instructional leadership at the system level. In order to understand learning in the context of this study, I examined how various leadership practices changed over time. Rather than highlighting the practice of a single leader, I chose to focus on the individual and collective work of a group of five central office leaders, all charged with leading system-wide instruction improvement. In order to understand instructional leadership practice, I needed to look at group interactions as enacted in particular social contexts.

Although individuals are not the only element that constitutes leadership practice, individuals are certainly part of the leadership story. Groups are made up of individuals and thus, an examination of individual thinking and learning is appropriate. In addition to drawing from perspectives that highlight the situated nature of learning, this study also built upon cognitive research about the development of expertise rooted in individual and shared experiences, as well as the constructive nature of knowledge (Bransford, Franks, Vye, & Sherwood, 1989; Cobb, 1994; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; National Research Council, 2000; Schwartz et al., 2005).

Contributors to the National Research Council's report *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*, assert new understandings are constructed on a foundation of existing understandings and experiences (National Research Council, 2000). Building upon the work of Piaget (1977) and Vygotsky (1978), this notion that knowledge is *constructed* in the midst of experience points to the importance of studying leaders' practice as enacted in context. However, it is not only the interactions among many individuals and social context that are important from this perspective, but the thinking of an individual as well. Individuals construct knowledge based on prior experiences; although groups may have collective experiences, each member's prior understandings likely vary, which may lead to different individual understandings.

Drawing from both situated and cognitive perspectives may seem problematic given fundamental differences about the nature of knowledge and how individual thinking is understood. Sfard (1998) made a case for research that draws from multiple traditions, even if those traditions seem to be in opposition about fundamental concepts related to learning. Researchers from sociocultural and cognitive perspectives often differ in understandings about the nature of knowledge—something to acquire as opposed to something in which one participates—and the relationship between social context and learning. Sfard used two metaphors of knowledge—acquisition (AM) and participation (PM)—to illustrate the differences between these traditions, and makes the case for using both to gain a more complete picture of learning:

The relative advantages of each of the two metaphors make it difficult to give up either of them: Each has something to offer that the other cannot provide. Moreover, relinquishing either AM or PM may have grave consequences, whereas metaphorical pluralism embraces a promise of a better research and a more

satisfactory practice. The basic tension between seemingly conflicting metaphors is our protection against theoretical excess, and is a source of power. (p. 10)

This kind of side-by-side model may seem unrealistic when there are such fundamental differences in how knowledge and learning are defined, but one need not look any further than scientific theories of light—as waves or as particles—that coexist despite fundamentally, seemingly irreconcilable differences in definitions. Each theory provides a different kind of insight into the phenomenon in question. The same held true for this investigation into central office leaders' learning in the context of instructional reform.

This study drew upon the thinking and experiences of five central office leaders who contributed to the collective practice of instructional leadership at the system level. Learning for these leaders was not an individual activity that took place in a formal classroom, but occurred in the midst of leadership practice, alongside fellow district-level leaders, school-based staff, and external consultants. A community of five leaders gathered regularly to learn together, both formally and informally; this community served not only as an important context for each individual leader's learning, but also as a key component that mediated and influenced learning. According to Stein and Spillane (2005), learning occurs in interactive, social contexts: “As individuals exchange views, listen to and critique others' contributions, and expose their own beliefs and assumptions, they together create a shared new understanding” (p. 37). Because the purpose of this study was to examine leaders' interactions over time and understand how new learning influenced instructional leadership practice at the system level, an approach that attends to both their individual cognitively construed learning experience and expertise, but also

their joint socially construed learning experience and changes in collective practice makes sense.

A Qualitative Case Approach

Given the dearth of research on leaders' learning (Leithwood et al., 2004), I selected a qualitative case study design in order to gain a deeper understanding of one case of instructional leadership at the system level as it occurred in its natural setting. This approach generated knowledge through the systematic gathering and interpreting of empirical evidence and aimed for knowledge that contributed to conceptual understandings that inform practice beyond a specific context (Riehl & Firestone, 2005). Rather than attempting to generalize to all district settings, using a case approach provided for understanding an example in depth rather than finding what was generally true of many (cases of system level instructional leadership) (Merriam, 1998). Case studies offer a means for investigating complex social situations and human interactions consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. In addition, case study research can offer insights and illuminate meanings that expand a reader's experience, shed light on an emerging theoretical perspective, and contribute to further inquiry (Merriam).

This approach to research is supported by the interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is a human construct; the researcher's aim is to explore perspectives and meanings in order to develop insights into particular situations (Glesne, 1999; Wellington, 2000). In order to understand the multiple, socially constructed realities in

any given context, qualitative researchers interact directly with participants, and as a result, the researcher becomes the instrument as he or she ask questions, observes a variety of settings, and interacts with research participants (Glesne). A qualitative approach combining analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) of data collected through semi-structured interviews, observations of key events and activities, and an analysis of artifacts and leadership tools provided a lens for exploring the questions framed in this study. The details of how this analytic work unfolded are included in the later discussion entitled, *Approach to Analysis*.

Setting: The Emerald Sound District, the CEL Partnership, and the Partnership Study

This study was situated in a particular setting, comprising a district system of schools, its partnership with a third-party organization, and an ongoing, comprehensive investigation of this partnership.

The District. The Emerald Sound School district, a mid-sized, urban school district in Washington State, was the primary setting for this study. Over 50% of the districts' 17,700 students participate in the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program, and the student population has changed dramatically over the past few years. Figure 3.1⁷ provides the demographic breakdown, which does not include the fact that together students represent 81 different nationalities and speak 70 different languages (Gallucci et al., 2005).

⁷ Available: <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>

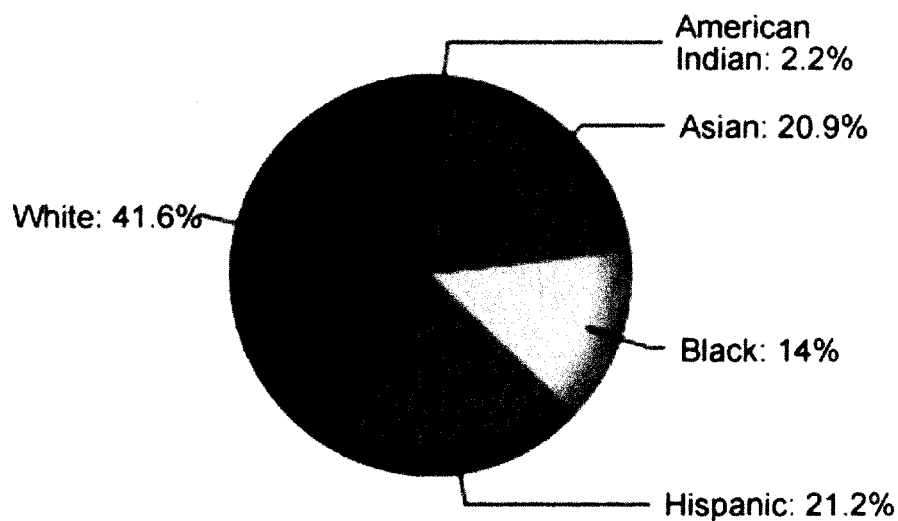


Figure 3.1. Demographic breakdown of Emerald Sound students (October, 2004).

Despite steady gains over the past few years, Emerald Sound faces many academic challenges, especially as they pursue their explicit goal of “9 out of 10,” which means 90% of the student population performing at standard and graduating prepared for “college, career, and citizenship.” Figure 3.2 shows the recent 3-year reading and math achievement⁸ trends in 4th, 7th, and 10th grades. The district was in the first year of “district improvement” (a Washington State accountability designation) in mathematics during the 2004-2005 school year. Middle school math was identified as a critical area in need of reform (Gallucci et al., 2005).

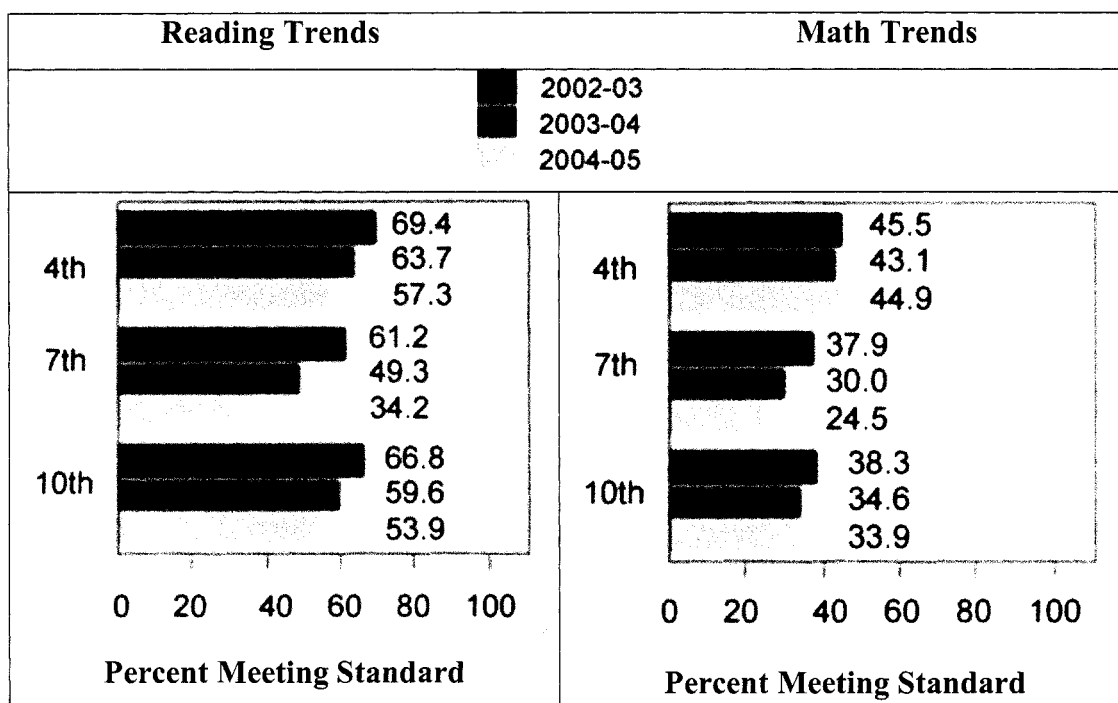


Figure 3.2. District achievement trends.

The CEL Partnership. Beginning in the fall of 2003, the district entered reform-oriented partnership with both the Panasonic Foundation and the University of Washington's CEL. In addition, the district engaged in a high school reform initiative funded by a grant from the Department of Education. The Panasonic work—focused on system alignment and the development of leadership capacity—required a broad representation, including central office staff, community members, school board members, and school-based staff. CEL's work targeted instructional improvement efforts and leadership capacity building across the system. This study focused primarily on the work with CEL, although data was also collected during a quarterly meeting for the Panasonic grant.

During the first year of the partnership, CEL provided over 150 days of leadership coaching and approximately 55 days of instructional coaching for teachers in reading instruction. Although the level of financial investment was comparable, the way the district assigned CEL consultants changed during subsequent years. Drawing on both the academic resources of the University of Washington and the consulting services of a variety of external consultants, CEL offered a variety of services to help craft and support Emerald Sound’s instructional reform agenda. While CEL took a flexible approach to partnership work by customizing the work based on district needs, their core philosophy directly informed their work. (See Appendix A for a detailed description of CEL’s reform theory.) CEL’s reform approach rested on three “basic footings”:

1. *Helping the system to “get smarter” about powerful instruction*—a term used to describe learning environments that enable all students to be taught and, with effort, to master cognitively demanding curriculum (Brandt, 1998)—through monthly, all-day general study group sessions for district and building leaders and coaches; and leadership coaching.
2. *Working directly with content coaches and teacher leaders at school sites with the aim of connecting new learning to classroom practice.* The theory of action aims to accomplish this through (a) specialized study group sessions for coaches and teachers leaders (these usually occur monthly on the day after the general study group sessions); (b) instructional coaching—each district partner negotiates the specifics of this coaching; and (c) creating existence proofs (such as demonstration or lab classroom settings).
3. *Ensuring that the necessary policies, practices, and structures are in place to support powerful instruction (system-wide).* Here CEL proposes two vehicles: leadership conferences (district planning meetings) and project management to accomplish the goal. In each district partnership, there is a Project Director who oversees the work and coordinates the efforts of various external consultants that CEL brings into the district context (Gallucci et al., 2005).

CEL staff and consultants collaborated with Emerald Sound personnel regarding instructional leadership development and support for the improvement of teaching and learning in a number of specific settings designed to support professional learning. Table 3.1 provides a list of these learning structures, along with brief descriptions for the kind of activities that took place. Explicit instruction—provided largely by CEL consultants—focused on subject-specific instruction and the kind of leadership at the school and district level needed to bring about such instruction across the system. This included a focus on professional development, developing instructional leaders throughout the system, and building a system to sustain learning for all members of the system. Specific decisions for focus and direction were developed collaboratively between school district leaders and members of the external support organization.

Central office leaders engaged in ongoing formal learning opportunities (e.g., monthly leadership seminars, ongoing leadership coaching, and guided visits to other sites). In addition, leaders had informal opportunities to share thinking and learn from others, including conversations with other educators in the system, and ongoing “instructional visits” to school sites. At times, the school visits served as formal learning opportunities when outside experts explicitly taught, but in other instances, the walkthroughs were informal learning opportunities as leaders gleaned new insights and considered questions prompted by what they saw in classrooms.

Table 3.1. Learning Oriented Reform Structures

Structure	Description
Leadership Seminars	These monthly, all-day teaching sessions for building principals and coaches were CEL’s foundation activity for teaching literacy content and instructional leadership. District leaders took an active role with CEL staff and consultants in the planning and the execution of the sessions. Sessions typically involved participants in observations of content-focused demonstration lessons with Emerald Sound students as well as teaching and learning activities related to reading instruction.
Tuesday Meetings	Central office leaders met each week to “calibrate” their leadership practice. The CEL program manager often attended these meetings in order to talk about upcoming consultant sessions and keep abreast of pressing issues.
Leadership Coaching	Coaching was a “non negotiable” part of CEL’s work as they believed leadership seminars and school-based professional development sessions were insufficient for achieving results across the system. CEL staff believed coaching made learning “real” because coaches could help educators “think through” issues in their local context. Coaching sessions happened side-by-side during school visits, as well as during central office meetings where consultants joined in as knowledgeable peers engaged in joint problem solving.
External Site Visits	CEL encouraged and facilitated site visits to New York, (former) Community School District #2 and San Diego Unified School District. One CEL Project Director referred to Emerald Sound as “really studying the work” through their visits to San Diego. School staffs and district leaders from Emerald Sound visited both districts.
Site-Based Professional Development	While leadership seminars provided learning opportunities for leaders and coaches, CEL also developed on-site professional development opportunities for teachers to engage in instructional reform work. Although teachers were the primary audience for these sessions, principals and coaches also attended, both to “lead the work” as well as develop their own instructional capacities.
Summer School	Beginning in summer 2004, CEL consultants provided intensive professional development for teachers involved in summer school. Each team of two teachers had one class for the duration of summer school. The first week was spent planning for and learning about new approaches to instruction followed by occasional visits from the consultant when students were present. Teachers were paid for an additional hour of time each day set aside for group collaboration.

The Partnership Study. In the fall of 2004, a research team initiated a qualitative research study into what, and how, a third-party support provider—the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington—engaged districts in a

collaborative teaching and learning partnership about instructional improvement. A key problem for research regarding school district and third-party arrangements guided the inquiry: how does the *pedagogy* of the external provider matter in helping to grow leaders' and practitioners' capacity to reshape and improve teaching and learning? Gaining this understanding meant looking closely at the way professionals at all levels of district systems learned by engaging in new practices and learning about new possibilities for their work.

At the core of this phenomenon were fundamental, unanswered questions about the nature of the relationship between districts and third-parties, the “pedagogy” of third-party engagement, and the dynamics of “system learning” (Knapp et al., 2003). Three central questions about the pedagogy of third-party support providers guided the pilot study of the partnership between CEL and Highline School District: (a) what is the nature of the partnership between the third-party support provider and the school district? (b) what (and how) does the relationship with a third-party support provider *teach* about the practice of leadership for instructional improvement? (c) what do district actors *learn* from their partnership with a third-party? (Gallucci et al., 2005).

As part of the research team in the larger partnership study, I focused my research efforts at the central office. While clearly related to the larger study, my inquiry targeted the collective learning of five central office leaders—the Chief Academic Officer, the Executive Director of Secondary Learning, the Secondary Director of Curriculum, and the two Executive Directors of Elementary Learning. In order to capture changes in thinking and practice over time, I spent considerable time observing these leaders in various contexts, including, but not restricted to their CEL-related activities. During the

first year of data collection, I probed leaders about their past practice—both before the CEL work began as well as the first year of the partnership that had unfolded prior to our data collection. In addition to recording retrospective accounts of past practice, I was also capturing their current and emerging instructional leadership practice.

Study Participants

This particular group of leaders was selected based on a “snowball” sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), which relied on recommendations from informants to identify potential study participants. In this case, I followed CEL’s suggestion to study Emerald Sound central office leaders because of their efforts to make learning a regular and intentional part of their practice. These leaders engaged in a wide range of both informal and formal learning activities such as monthly leadership seminars, leadership coaching, planning sessions with outside consultants and daily interactions that prompt further thinking and questioning. Their learning included both new understandings about literacy instruction as well as what it means to lead for instructional improvement. Figure 3.3 illustrates the relational connections among study participants. Although I include school principals and coaches in the figure, my primary focus was on central office leaders and CEL actors. However, I conducted single interviews with a selected group of principals and coaches. In many situations, representatives from CEL, the central office and school, were working side-by-side as they engaged in activities related to the reform agenda.

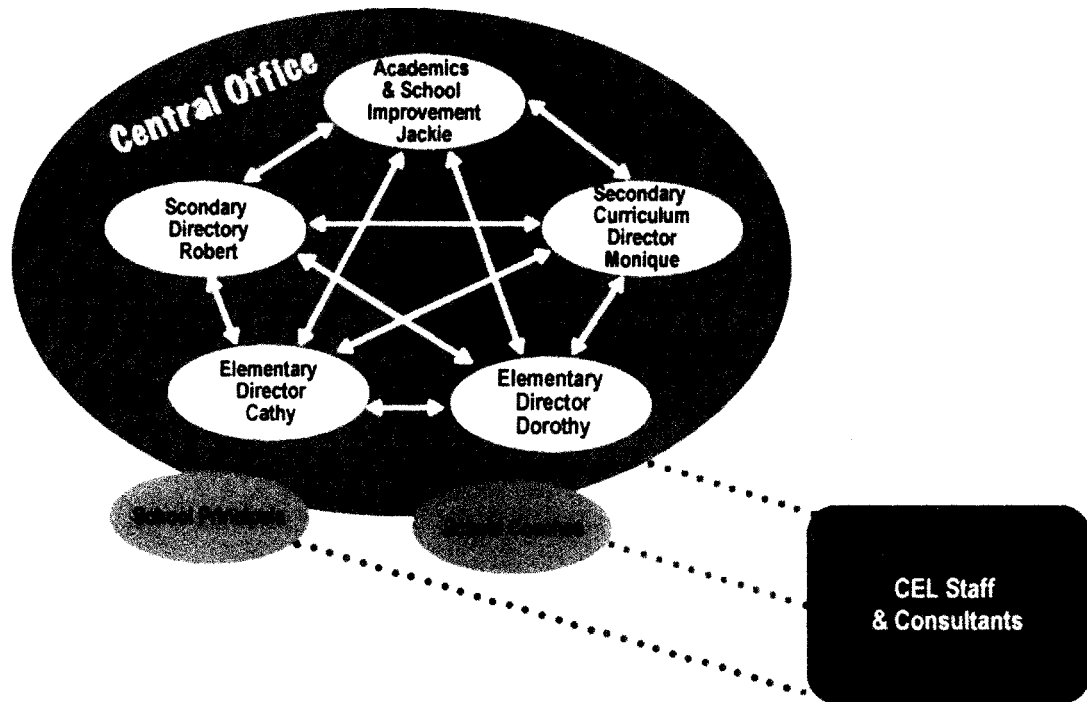


Figure 3.3. Relational map of study participants.

The primary informants for this study were a group of five central office leaders and the CEL consultants with whom they worked. Below is a brief description of each of the key district players in this study (see Appendix B for detailed descriptions of CEL staff and consultants). Of particular note is the fact that four of the five leaders began their teaching careers in Emerald Sound, and three essentially “rose through the ranks” to become central office leaders.

Emerald Sound Leaders:

1. *Jackie, Assistant Superintendent, Teaching, Learning & School Improvement*
Jackie began her career as a teacher in Emerald Sound before taking central office jobs in other districts. She returned to the district in the fall of 2004, the second year of the CEL partnership, to oversee instructional issues across the district. During the previous year, she had attended some of the monthly leadership

seminars, despite working in another district at the time, so she was familiar with the general direction of the reform effort when assumed the new position.

2. *Cathy, Executive Director of Elementary Learning, Title, LAP & Bilingual*
Cathy began her teaching career in Emerald Sound as an elementary teacher, and after three years as an elementary principal, joined the central office team as the director of Title 1 and Bilingual Education in the fall of 2002. In 2003, she became one of two elementary directors, which meant adding principal supervisor responsibilities to her job. She worked very closely with Dorothy, the other elementary director, especially in relation to the instruction reform agenda.
3. *Dorothy, Executive Director of Elementary Learning & Instruction*
Dorothy spent fourteen years as an elementary teacher in Emerald Sound, followed by fourteen years as an elementary principal before retiring. Shortly thereafter, she was convinced to come back to work as the district language arts coordinator in the fall of 2001. She became an elementary director along with Cathy in the fall of 2004. In addition to her director duties, she oversees several other district programs, and has twelve people working under her.
4. *Robert, Executive Director of Secondary Schools*
Robert began his career teaching music before serving as principal and vice-principal in both elementary and secondary schools. In the fall of 2002, he became the Director of Assessment in Emerald Sound, and in the fall of 2004, moved to his current position as the Director of Secondary Schools. In addition to the work associated with the reform effort associated with CEL, much of Robert's work focused on the district's high school transformation initiative.
5. *Monique, Director of Secondary Learning & Instruction*
Monique was the primary "outsider" of the group, having only joined the district in the fall of 2002 (although Jackie spent several years working in nearby districts and Dorothy had one year outside as well). Her background included work as a secondary English teacher, librarian and technology specialist. Unlike Cathy, Dorothy, and Robert, she did not supervise principal, although she was certainly a member of the leadership team. She worked closely with secondary reform efforts and worked with librarians throughout the district.

Although each of these leaders had specific duties that were unique to them, they came together regularly as a group and functioned as a leadership team overseeing instructional improvement in Emerald Sound. It is their individual and collective practice—as learned and enacted over time—that was the focus of this inquiry. Rather than isolating and

comparing individual actors, my design revolved around capturing their interactive work in natural settings, often alongside CEL staff, consultants, and school-based personnel. Beginning in the fall of 2005, a new director of Assessment, Evaluation and Systems Accountability joined the team of five leaders; she appeared in my data as a member of the collective, but not as an individual informant.

Sampling Plan

My sampling decisions were guided by three key factors: (a) availability of retrospective data in order to track changes over time, (b) evidence of emerging system level instructional leadership practice, and (c) indications that learning was an explicit and public part of leadership practice. Since this study was connected to a larger research agenda looking the district's partnership with CEL (Gallucci et al., 2005), there was prior data that suggested Emerald Sound was a potentially rich case of leaders who were both enacting and learning about system-level instructional leadership.

Once the district was determined, I created a more detailed sampling plan that included specific contexts in which leaders were simultaneously leading and learning. In addition, I needed to identify the primary participants for my study. I wanted to follow those central office leaders who were charged with supporting and prompting instructional improvement across the system. During the initial year of data collection for the larger study (2004-2005), it quickly became clear that the group of five leaders (described in the earlier section) worked collectively in such a capacity. Although their job titles differed in scope and by level in the system (elementary or secondary), their

collective practice, along with those from CEL, served to provide system-level instructional leadership in Emerald Sound.

In addition to selecting district actors, I needed to determine which CEL consultants would be key informants in my study. Along with Anne, the CEL project manager, three other consultants met regularly with district leaders and provided important perspectives on this work. At times, I spent time with other CEL consultants in the contexts of school-based professional development, but I only chose to interview those CEL consultants who worked primarily with central office leaders. Although school-based consultants provided learning opportunities for leaders, the main focus for their work was school coaches and teachers. Below is a brief description of the key CEL actors who worked closely with the central office leaders (see Appendix B for more detailed descriptions):

1. *Anne, Program Manager for Emerald Sound*
Anne worked with CEL's director to develop their district partnership model. At times she took on the role of a consultant in Emerald Sound by modeling lessons in classrooms, but most of her time was spent overseeing and managing the partnership work. She worked to bring coherence and coordination to an organizational relationship that involved many "moving parts."
2. *Rebekah, Literacy and Math Consultant*
Rebekah began her work in Emerald Sound as a literacy expert, but in 2005 she added math. Her extensive knowledge base and range of experiences allowed her to serve both functions. Her work included a focus on coaching and other forms of professional development. She came to the district two days a month to provide all-day learning sessions—one day with principals, coaches and central office leaders, and a second day with literacy coaches.
3. *Kay, Leadership Consultant*
Kay was one of the few central office leaders in San Diego who was kept in place when Alvarado came to the district. She had some experience with IFL's work, so her knowledge base served her well. Her primary role in Emerald Sound was to provide leadership coaching and mentoring for central office

leaders and principals.

4. *Norma, Leadership Consultant*

Norma was a principal in San Diego under Alvarado, and Kay was her supervisor. She moved to the central office and worked closely with the reform efforts in San Diego, including work with Rebekah as an external consultant. The Emerald Sound leaders were drawn to her gentle, yet firm approach to leadership—they called her “Aunt Norma.”

Selecting specific activity settings was also an important part of the sampling plan, especially when using a distributed frame for analysis that includes “situation” as a constitutive element of leadership practice (Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2001). The first year of data collection gave me an idea of the range of possibilities, including monthly leadership seminars, planning sessions with CEL players, one-on-one consulting sessions, weekly “calibration meetings” among central office staff, and other events that surfaced during data collection. I specifically chose to spend times with central office leaders when CEL consultants and staff were not around in order to get a sense of their leadership practice apart from settings that were formally organized to support their learning. As a result, I attended the weekly calibration meetings designed as a check-in and problem-solving time among the leadership team. I also shadowed each director—those charged with principal supervision—on at least two school walkthroughs in order to better understand their work at the school level.

The range of leadership activity for this group of central office leaders went far beyond those included in this study. For example, I did not attend school board meetings, community meetings, and off-site retreats such as Title 1 planning and state-sponsored reform activities. Instead, I chose to sample those activities that were directly connected the district’s instructional reform agenda, especially those including CEL staff and

consultants. As a result, this is not a study of system-level practice in all its forms, but rather a representative, purposeful sample (Patton, 1990) of individual and collective instructional leadership practice.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Data collection occurred across two school years, beginning in the fall of 2004, and continuing through March 2006. There were two phases of data collection; Phase 1 included gathering retrospective accounts of previous practice (before the start of the CEL partnership and during the first year of partnership work in 2003-2004). Phase 2 began in the fall of 2005 and marked a slight departure from the larger partnership study. I continued to collect data each week—through March 2006—while the larger research team focused their efforts toward data collection in other districts.

The central office leaders in Emerald Sound engaged in new learning while also exercising instructional leadership across multiple levels of a school district. For example, central office leaders frequently went on walkthroughs with a school principal, literacy coach, and at times with an external consultant in order to assess instruction across classrooms in a particular school. Although central office leaders had positional authority over principals and coaches, in this situation, they were co-learners gaining new insights from each other and the consultant about how to support, encourage, and ultimately improve literacy instruction. As a result, the walkthroughs provided data about leaders engaging in both learning activities and leadership practice.

Table 3.2. Data Collection Timeline

Phase 1										Phase 2					
Sept '04	Oct '04	Nov '04	Dec '04	Jan '05	Feb '05	March '05	April '05	May '05	June '05	Sept '05	Oct '05	Nov '05	Dec '05	Jan '06	Feb '06
Monthly Leadership Seminars										Monthly Leadership Seminars					
District "calibration" meetings										District "calibration" meetings					
			Int						Int		Int				Int
					W	W						W	W	W	
							LPM	LPM	LPM			LPM	LPM	LPM	

Int = Interview W = Walkthrough LPM = Leadership Planning Meeting

The following data sources were especially useful for developing a better understanding of leading-while-learning across a variety of contexts:

1. *Semi-structured interviews.* The five district leaders were interviewed two times during my investigation for approximately an hour, which provided a total of four interviews per leader across the 18-month timeline. In addition, key informants including six principals, six literacy coaches, the CEL program manager and three external consultants were interviewed once by me and once by the research team the prior year. These interviews were semi-structured, and focused on topics related to leaders' learning about leading system-wide instructional improvement. Illustrative interview items for each group of professionals appear in Appendix C.
2. *Observations.* I attended several events in which learning and leading occurred for these leaders (e.g., planning meetings, school-based professional development, and debrief sessions with consultants). Observations were linked to the interviews conceptually, in the sense that I was watching to see how leaders interacted in various settings, especially in terms of the connections, if any, between leaders' statements about their learning and leadership practice. Often these observations prompted specific questions for the final interview, especially as leaders often spoke in meetings about changes in practice over time. See Appendix D for illustrative observation guides.

3. *Documentary review.* Documents (e.g., district policies, emails, instructional letters, and job descriptions) were readily available for my collection and review. For example, the school district leaders developed a matrix used during instructional visits to document what they observed in classrooms in order to plan for professional development. In addition, the district has created several documents that outlined expectations for leadership and powerful instruction. These documents were analyzed for their relevance to study questions and emerging themes. At times they were also a source of ideas for final interview questions.

4. *“Think Alouds.”* Each of the five district leaders and the CEL program manager received a recording device in order to capture their reflections in an audio format. During the 2005-2006 school year, participants recorded some individual reflections and conversations. Use varied among individuals as some seemed to be more comfortable with this activity than others. Although my initial intent was to capture individual thinking, two leaders decided it would be valuable to record potentially important conversations about leading reform when I was unable to attend. The audio recordings provided an opportunity to regularly tap into the thinking of very busy professionals who were unable to provide ongoing one-on-one interview time with a researcher. In addition, I was able to capture leaders’ conversation—a vehicle that reflected their thinking—as it occurred in natural settings rather than relying on mostly public conversations that took place in leadership seminars and during school walkthroughs. I also had access to consultants’ thinking directly after their work with schools, often minutes after the sessions ended.

Data gathered from these sources provided a rich picture of how these leaders understood themselves as learners and as leaders working to improve instruction for all students. Central office leaders often communicated their perspectives in formal ways (e.g., weekly letters to principals, handouts for workshops) given the nature of their jobs that made it difficult to rely on face-to-face relationships. As a result, I had access to a wide range of documents that captured change over time, such as the initial and revised job descriptions for literacy coaches. The semi-structured interviews and recorded reflections provided opportunities to gather descriptive data in the leaders’ own words

and helped me develop insights about how leaders interpreted their experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

In addition, the interviews and reflections provided an opportunity to learn about issues that cannot be directly observed (Glesne, 1999). The observations served as a way to gather firsthand information about leadership practice, instead of only relying upon the leaders' secondhand account of an experience (Merriam, 1998). Analyzing artifacts (e.g., meeting agendas, instructional letters, and walkthrough protocols) helped uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relative to the research problem (Merriam). According to Glesne, documents and other artifacts provide both historical and contextual dimensions to observations and interviews. In addition, documents "enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions. Your understanding of the phenomenon in question grows as you make use of the documents and artifacts that are a part of people's lives" (Glesne, p. 59).

Approach to Analysis

My analysis was based on a "grounded theory" approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that relied on a systematic generation of theory. The researcher conceptualizes "what's going on" using empirical data, using a process of simultaneous data collection and analysis for the purposes of developing theoretical and thematic explanations (Glaser & Strauss). The analysis involves comparing the data applicable to each conceptual category, integrating the categories and their properties, and writing up the theory (Jorgensen, 1989).

The process of analyzing narrative observational records, interview transcripts, participant reflections, artifacts, and leadership tools was iterative, and thus began early in the research process (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Early data analysis guided the structure and direction for further research efforts. According to Glesne (1999), doing data analysis and data collection simultaneously allows the research to focus and shape the study as it proceeds. For example, during the first year of data collection, a tension emerged about competing elementary literacy programs, one relied more on direct instruction while the other was more individualized based on students' needs and abilities. District leaders spoke about their "side-by-side" model that allowed for both approaches, but some principals, coaches, and consultants believed the approaches were philosophically at odds with each other (Gallucci et al., 2005). The apparent tension became a topic of interviews with elementary principals, literacy coaches, and the two elementary directors. This tension was not originally part of my inquiry focus, but instead emerged during early data analysis. In particular, I became interested in how leaders thought about the different approaches and if their thinking changed as they learned more about the "new" approach that did not have teacher's edition with explicit guidance for teaching decisions, but rather relied upon professional judgment and teacher decisionmaking. In addition, how did new learning affect their leadership practice, especially in terms of expectations for the side-by-side model?

After the first year of data collection, while I was working with the larger research team, I created a detailed analytic memo that provided information in the following areas: (a) summary of data sources, (b) big ideas, (c) nature of relationships between CEL and Emerald Sound, (d) what is being taught, (e) what is being learned, and (f) tensions.

While this broad level outline did not focus on the particulars of my study, the analytic work involved in writing the memo provided me insights that informed how I approached my inquiry process. For example, the issues related to having a side-by-side model for literacy instruction caused me to think about how leaders' new learning might inform leadership practice and how that change may impact others in the system. Before the CEL partnership began, the district espoused a direct-instruction approach to literacy instruction, but the reform work seemed to be sending a very different message about what was now valued. Phrases such as “now that we know more” were common in my data and I continued to wonder how “knowing more” (or learning) impacted leadership practice.

In order to get at this more fine-grained analysis, I used a software program called HyperResearch to organize my data. Approximately 100 individual files (e.g., interview transcripts, observation notes, and transcribed meeting conversations)—excluding official documents produced by the district—were imported into the system. I organized the data into five general categories: (a) CEL interviews, (b) Emerald Sound interviews, (c) district meetings, (d) school visits, and (e) leadership seminars. Next, I read through and coded the entire data set using the research questions and an emergent set of codes to guide the development of potential themes. The code list was initially informed by the earlier study and insights, and the list became more refined over time. I was able to change codes mid-stream, and the system would apply the changes to any instance in which the code was used in the entire study. The software also had a feature that allowed me to run a variety of reports, including by code, across all five general categories, or

within any combination of categories. This allowed me to identify themes that cut across people and settings. The following key themes emerged during this process:

1. Aspects of system-level instructional leadership.
2. The role of content knowledge in leading instructional reform.
3. Analyzing instructional practice.
4. Planning for professional learning.
5. Leader as learner.
6. Leader as expert.
7. The role of the leadership community.
8. Working with external partners.
9. Changing course based on new learning.
10. Adapting, not adopting reform ideas.

The themes were summarized with examples from the data and subsequently used to build a refined framework for coding and categorizing the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I evaluated emerging themes and findings by triangulating evidence from multiple data sources (Denzin, 1978). According to Stake (2005), although no observations or interpretations can be repeated perfectly, “triangulation serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen” (p. 454). The emergent themes directly influenced the final interview questions with the five central office leaders. The final interview protocols were customized for each participant based on issues that emerged during analysis. For example, I only asked the elementary directors about the side-by-side literacy model because it was not an immediately relevant issue to the other three leaders.

Another important part of the analysis process included thinking through my data using the frame of adaptive expertise (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999). This concept has not been used previously to analyze leadership practice, specifically the learning aspect of leaders' work. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) recently used the adaptive expertise in relationship to teaching practice, but I wanted to consider how this concept related to school district leaders. This process allowed me to go beyond my basic learning definition—changes in thinking and practice—towards a more nuanced look at the nature of leaders' learning. For example, how, if at all, were leaders “letting go” of old ideas and how did that impact their practice? What does it mean to change course, innovate and tolerate ambiguity—all attributes related to adaptive expertise—in a leadership context? These and other related questions guided a second level of my analysis.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study Design

Case study research, like all research designs, has both strengths and limitations the researcher must consider when making decisions. Case studies offer a means for investigating complex social situations and human interactions consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. In addition, case study research can offer insights and illuminate meanings that expand a reader's experience, shed light on an emerging theoretical perspective, and contribute to further inquiry (Merriam, 1998). This group of central office leader routinely used laptops during meetings and welcomed me to do the same, which allowed for initial typed transcripts that were later refined using the audio recording. By using the audio device, I was able to

capture most meetings verbatim rather than relying on fieldnotes that are necessarily incomplete. In addition to reading through my data, I was able to “re-live” meetings by listening to participants engage in conversation as it occurred in its natural setting. This process allowed me to better understand the nuances of meaning that come with verbal interchange, such as voice inflection and wait time that is not as easily captured in written transcripts.

However, there are also limitations to the case study approach. For example, because this study represents a distinct period of time, thus, findings only represent a “slice of life” (Merriam, 1998), not an entire picture of what it means to learn while leading. Also, the complexity of life in an urban school district cannot be completely captured by a single research study. I chose to exclude certain activities such as board meetings and community interchanges, which eliminated opportunities to observe how leaders’ learning and leadership practice might play out in those settings.

My own experience working in the central office of a nearby district might have been both a strength and limitation of this study. First, my experiences gave me a perspective on central office work that may not be as easily understood by those who have never “walked in those shoes.” For example, my own work has taught me how school-based personnel often have an “us and them” perspective of those who work in the central office; a perspective that filters thinking and often leads to a questioning of reasons behind various decisions. What may make sense from a school perspective may not make sense from a system perspective, at least in my own experience. When data from various informants seemed contradictory on the surface, I was able to look again and see if a person’s location in the system might be a source of the discrepancy. I also

believe that my central office experience allowed me to build trust with these leaders rather quickly, due to the fact that they said I was one who “got it,” especially since my own district struggled with similar issues around instructional reform.

On the other hand, my personal experience may have led to questions and interpretations that would have been challenged by other researchers who lacked central office experience. I tried to limit my bias by relying on transcripts rather than general summaries of conversation that more easily allow for person interpretation, but it is difficult—if not impossible—to make meaning from text without the influence of personal experience. Another limitation is associated with the effect I had when present in conversation. Participants knew that “learning-while-leading” the broad basis for my study, and as a result, they may have consciously or subconsciously framed conversation in ways that related to my questions. During a final interview, one leader commented that my presence had caused them to do the important work of reflection that may not have happened otherwise. This could be seen as both a strength and limitation of this approach to inquiry.

Although the data collected from these leaders was rich and informative, it was limited in scope due to the necessity of sampling situations within a fixed period of time. The story that unfolded was also limited by the necessary interpretation of the researcher. Part of the power in case study research is rooted in the fact that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, but a human instrument, despite best intentions and methodological safeguards, can fall prey to issues of bias, and subjectivity. Glesne (1999) wrote about the qualitative researcher’s struggle with representation: “A life as told is a re-presentation of that life; the life and the telling are not the same thing. Rather,

the narrative—the telling or the writing—is always an interpretation of other peoples”
(p. 178).

Chapter 4. What Leaders Learned: The Enactment of Instructional Leadership at the System Level

This chapter provides an overview of how one group of central office leaders came to understand and enact instructional leadership. In short, it offers a picture of *what* they learned about system-wide instructional leadership, in the context of exercising that leadership. It is not an exhaustive description of their work, or what might be considered as possible work for other system-level instructional leaders, but rather, it is an illustrative collection of the kind of practice in which these particular leaders engaged—practice that was intended to guide, support, and prompt instructional improvement across the Emerald Sound School District. The chapter is divided into two sections, beginning with an overview of the reform context, and followed by descriptions of the district leaders’ instructional leadership practice.

The Reform Context

Given the assumption that the context of leaders’ work helped constitute their instructional leadership practice, it is especially important to understand the district’s reform history that brought these five leaders to their current positions. Notes from an unpublished study (Lenssen, 2001) looking at reform in Emerald Sound between 1998 and 2001 stated that many district-level staff at that time described their attempts to “become an adaptive learning organization” and make inquiry-based decisions drawing from Peter Senge’s work and other contemporary thinkers focused on leadership and change. In addition to focusing on system change, there were many instructionally-

related reforms in place in some schools, including the following programs: (a) Success for All, (b) Core Knowledge, (c) Different Ways of Knowing, (d) Atlas, and (e) Coalition of Essential Schools. However, it appeared that there was little coherence across the system in terms of an instructional reform agenda. In addition to these programs, the district also contracted with several external consultants in the areas of math instruction, cognitive coaching, and content-area course planning. With a wide range of reform strategies in place in various locations across the district, the study notes indicated leaders tried to focus instructional efforts on reading and mathematics. Central office leaders at the time also wanted to change the nature of professional development for teachers:

District leaders also suggest that they are being more intentional about how they provide professional development. They acknowledge that traditional stand-up-and-deliver models, as well as the trainer-of-model, are not effective for the type of classroom change that needs to result from professional development sessions. The new approach they advocate for professional development is sustained, engaging, modeled on best practices, and intuitive to the needs of participants. (Lenssen, 2001, p. 47)

The notes from this earlier study provide an overview of Emerald Sound reform efforts and priorities before CEL arrived, at least from the perspective of researchers who spent three years collecting data from 1998-2001. The focus on reading and math was likely influenced by the growing state accountability agenda that focused in those two areas. The district was not a blank slate when CEL arrived on the scene, but rather a system engaged in a variety of seemingly disconnected reform efforts.

Central office “churn”—ranging from altering job titles and responsibilities to making fundamental changes in the expectations for interactions between principals and their supervisors—aptly describes the nature of system-level activity related to

instructional leadership in the Emerald Sound School District beginning in the late 1990s. Table 4.1 highlights key events that preceded the data collection timeframe for this study, including the central office hiring of all five primary participants (identified by pseudonyms in the table).

Table 4.1. Central Office Personnel History

TIME FRAME	EVENT
1998-2001	Clark — a self-proclaimed “school improvement junkie” — serves as Director of Human Resources
Summer 2001	Clark becomes Executive Director for Student Learning, and hires Dorothy out of retirement to serve as K-12 Learning Director
Summer 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clark’s title changes to Academic Officer for Academics and School Improvement ▪ Stan hired as Deputy Superintendent ▪ Monique hired as Director of Secondary Learning ▪ Robert hired as Director of Assessment ▪ Cathy hired as Director of Title 1 and ELL
Summer 2003	CEL Partnership begins
Summer 2004 <i>Data collection begins Sept. '04</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clark leaves for a nearby superintendency ▪ Jackie hired as his replacement ▪ Robert becomes Executive Director of Secondary Schools ▪ Dorothy and Cathy become Directors of Elementary Schools ▪ Robert, Dorothy, and Cathy assume principal supervision responsibilities
Summer 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stan becomes superintendent ▪ Jackie’s title changes to Assistant Superintendent ▪ Dorothy & Cathy’s title changes to Executive Director of Elementary Learning ▪ Betty hired as Director of Assessment and Accountability

As signaled in Table 4.1, Clark was a significant actor in Emerald Sound's reform story; although he left a few months before my data collection began, his name was often brought up in conversations as leaders talked about their early reform efforts. Clark actively recruited a particular kind of central office leader to join him in supporting instructional improvement. He hired four of the five central office leaders involved in this study, all but his own replacement. Via e-mail, Clark shared his thinking about hiring Dorothy, the first to join the leadership team he developed after becoming the Academic Officer:

When I was hired as academic officer, I needed help, needed it now and I needed quality and wisdom. I called Dorothy. Most of the first two years was spent persuading her that YES I did indeed want her to stay on permanently, not just fill in. She is a pillar of the work. She knows how to do the "nuance" work . . . listen to people, attend to needs, provide support, and ask for the order.

After a year of working together, and taking advantage of new central office vacancies, Dorothy and Clark hired a larger team. Dorothy wanted help with secondary, so they hired Monique as the Director of Secondary Learning in the fall of 2002. The desire to build a collaborative team was a key factor in their hiring decisions. Dorothy reflected upon her early conversations with Monique:

Monique and I made a pact that we were not going to be fighting over whether elementary should have the money for this or secondary. We were going to make an intelligent decision together about what was best for Emerald Sound School District and the kids. It was not about buildings, silos, and little fiefdoms.

In addition to looking for "team players," Clark and Dorothy looked for leaders who also saw themselves as learners. Clark described their thinking about hiring Cathy and Robert:

For Cathy, we intentionally looked for a good learner, not a good knower. Everyone else was telling us that *we* [his emphasis] were the model for ELL and

Title 1, and we knew we didn't have the answers. So we turned to principals who were good leaders, knew good instruction and were good learners, and were willing to learn the ELL and Title part. It turns out Cathy has this incredible ability to attend to a myriad of details and a sixth sense about just how big of a bite to take in involving others. She was one of the first to step up to demonstrate the literacy work by adopting a classroom.

For the Assessment Director, we turned down statistics people (non-educators), and hired Robert because he had experience at elementary and secondary levels, and had a track record as a learner and instructional leader. We bet on the fact that he could learn the statistics, and he has brought this incredible instinct to ask good questions that can be illuminated by the data. In other words, he puts numbers to use in service of learning rather than allowing learning to become the servant of testing and numbers for their own sake.

Clark and Dorothy's comments about the central office leaders illustrated how their core values of leaders being both learners and team players were critical factors that informed hiring decisions.

In the winter of 2002, after assembling a central office staff of "lead learners and team players," Clark searched for external providers to support their reform efforts. He contacted the director of the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) at the University of Washington because he knew of the organization's work in addressing issues related to equity and student achievement, as well as its work focused on supporting leadership development and instructional reform efforts. Anne, the CEL program manager, recalled their early partnership conversations:

Clark heard Elaine Fink and Tony Alvarado [from District 2 and San Diego] a couple times, visited some small high schools in New York, and got some pictures of classrooms. A group went down to San Diego too, and Clark got turned on to this idea of instructional leadership. He was carrying the torch, and turning over ever rock, stone and stump, and basically said, "I want to do this and we want some help in knowing how to do it."

Although CEL did not have a district partnership program at the time of Clark's initial request, Anne and the CEL director quickly began to consider how CEL might develop a model for supporting district reform efforts. (Chapter 6 provides a detailed description of the CEL-Emerald Sound partnership.) The CEL director had an extensive history working as a consultant supporting district reform efforts and Anne brought first hand knowledge of the kinds of system-wide instructional improvement work that had unfolded in District 2 in New York City. Anne described their initial thinking,

We had to jump in and start, just like they [district leaders] did. And to their credit, they were so open. They had looked at a lot of their data; they really came with a lot of heart and urgency about how to do this work.

The partnership between the Emerald Sound School District and CEL drew inspiration from reform activity that took place in both District 2 and San Diego—the work associated with Tony Alvarado. Similar themes emerged (e.g., instruction as the central focus, principals as instructional leaders, the importance of content-focused coaching, and walkthroughs) although all participants were quick to point out that the work was not simply a replication of models used in other locations. The Emerald Sound reform effort had the “DNA” or family resemblance of earlier Alvarado work, rather than being an identical twin. According to a leadership consultant who worked as a central office leader under Alvarado in San Diego:

Right now Emerald Sound is the West Coast model or example of the work that used to happen in San Diego as a whole system, and it has the influence of both San Diego and New York, which is fascinating to me. They've really reached out and done their homework about where it was going well or where they thought [it wasn't] the best model, and they tried to make it work within their system. That says a lot about their commitment to making it work, taking the best of both coasts and making it fit here.

A key difference was the fact that Emerald Sound did not have someone internally with the depth of instructional knowledge and leadership experience of Alvarado, at least in relation to the particular reform approach. Rather than relying on a single charismatic leader to lead the reform, central office leaders worked individually and collectively with CEL consultants—many who had experience teaching and leading in either San Diego or District 2—to simultaneously learn and lead the system-wide instructional reform.

The official partnership began with leadership workshops in August 2003, followed by a year of ongoing coaching and professional development focused on literacy instruction and the kind of school and central office leadership necessary to bring about instructional improvement. CEL was not the only external organization working with central office leaders on issues of reform. The district also received a grant in 2003 from the Panasonic Foundation to assist with building system capacity to support reform efforts as well as a U.S. Department of Education grant supporting high school transformation.⁹ During the 2002-2003 school year, plans were developed—likely informed by both CEL and Panasonic partnerships—to significantly change the structure of the central office to better support instructional improvement, including the restructuring of principal supervision responsibilities. Although Clark took a job as superintendent in a nearby district, the plans moved forward. Beginning in fall 2004—the same time data collection began for this study began—Robert, Dorothy, and Cathy all received new job titles and assumed responsibilities for principal supervision. All three

⁹ The district also received a \$5.6 million “systems grant” from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the spring of 2005.

leaders had experience as principals in the system, but principal supervision was a new role for each of them.

As these leaders grew into their new roles and deepened their understanding of literacy, math, and instructional leadership, their practice changed. What follows is a picture of collective leadership practice as enacted in current form, rather than a picture of emerging practice over time. In other words, what I describe below can be thought of as a picture of what they learned about system-wide instructional reform—the result (so far) of a three-year learning process. Chapter 5 provides a more detailed look of system-level instructional leadership practice from the vantage point of how leaders learned over time and how their learning prompted changes in practice.

*What the Leaders Learned about Enacting Instructional Leadership
at the System Level*

The concept of system-level instructional leadership, as these leaders came to understand and enact it, applied to their activities around guiding, directing, and supporting the improvement of teaching and learning across the district's schools. Data collection for this study began at the same time as the new principal supervisory structure was established. As a result, this research captured an evolving picture of system-level instructional leadership, from the perspective of five central office leaders engaged in learning about and leading a particular instructional reform initiative. The story is not one of transformation within a long-standing organizational hierarchy; rather, it concerns emergent instructional leadership practice within one significantly restructured school district central office.

The following section provides illustrative examples of these leaders' individual and collective practice of instructional leadership. Although Cathy, Dorothy, and Robert were the key informants for this study given their roles supervising principals, Jackie, the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching, Learning and School Improvement, and Monique, the Director of Secondary Learning, also played critical roles in how instructional leadership practice emerged over time. What follows is a picture of the collective, emergent understanding and practice of these five central office leaders. Drawing from grounded theory methodology and a constant comparative approach to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I examined 18 months of emerging system-level instructional leadership practice as represented in both the conversation and practice of these five central office leaders. What developed from this analysis was a picture of dynamic and changing practice that can be categorized into five streams of activity (see Figure 4.1): While serving as a helpful analytic tool for analyzing practice, the boundaries between categories are artificial. The data suggests activities did not always fall neatly into a single region, but instead often cut across categorical boundaries.

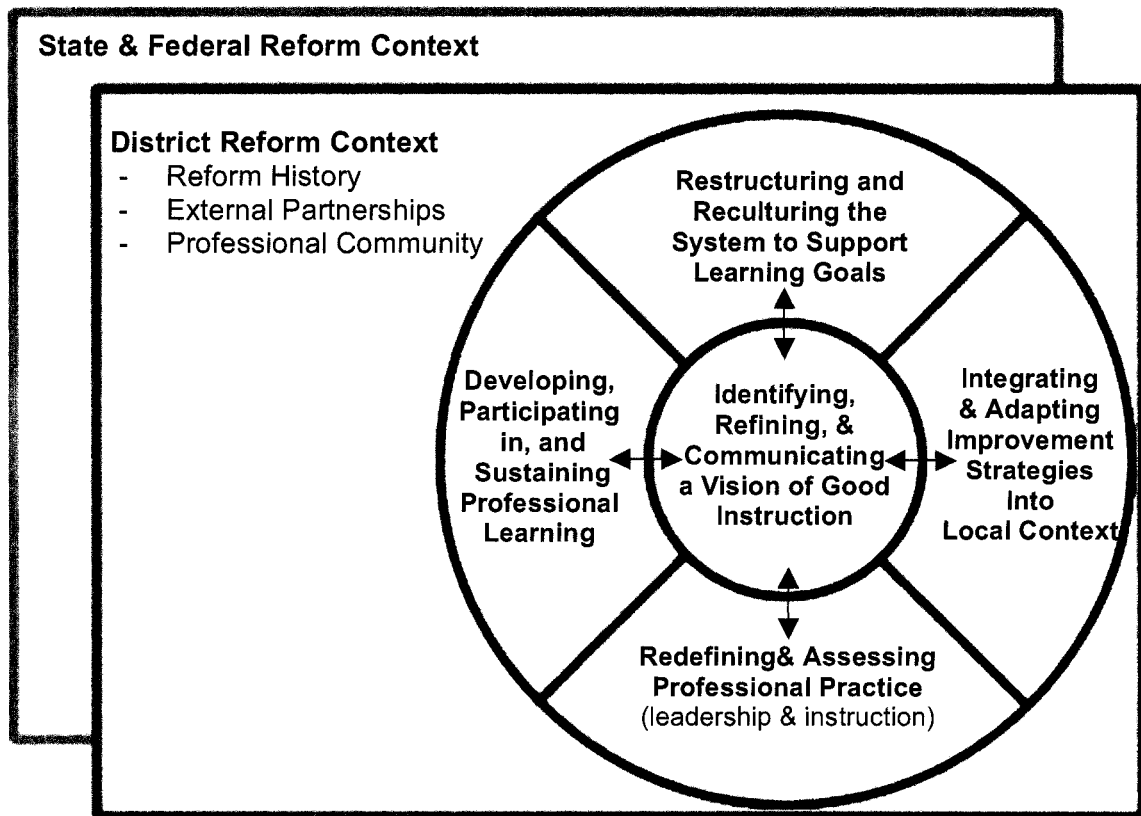


Figure 4.1. The enactment of instructional leadership at the system level.

In describing these five interrelated areas of district-level activity, I am presenting what the district leaders learned to think and do about their new roles as a collective instructional leadership team, and what they have come to do in practice on the basis of that learning. At the same time, their learnings reveal a lot about how they came to approach instructional leadership practice as they currently do: through what they were explicitly *taught* to think and do by consultants from the external resource group, but also what they discovered and “taught” each other to do. The discussion here leaves out the details of the learning process—a topic I deal with in greater detail within chapter 5—I

have tried to include some of their reflections on both what they learned and how they learned it.

Identifying, Communicating, and Refining a Vision of Good Instruction

The central component of Figure 4.1 reflects a major and evolving concern of these leaders as they developed a picture of their collective instructional leadership practice. The thoughts and actions that were central to their practice can be summarized as identifying, refining, and communicating a vision of good instruction. These leaders' vision was rooted in a collective sense of urgency informed by a shared moral purpose to meet all students' learning needs. As their vision changed over time, other aspects of their instructional leadership practice were impacted, including those primary activities included in this framework. For example, as the vision of instruction become more complex, leaders realized new structures were needed to support teacher learning.

Reform-oriented central office leaders explicitly communicate their visions of teaching and learning in strategic ways (Knapp et al., 2003). Idealistic statements figure prominently on school district Web sites, in community newsletters, and in speeches at formal gatherings, as visionary leaders attempt to focus attention on teaching and learning. The Emerald Sound School District was no different—one of the five strategic goals was “achievement for every student” and a common motto was the desire to prepare students for “college, career, and citizenship.” But what did these statements really mean, and how did these words translate into action? As Figure 4.1 implies, these leaders' evolving vision of instruction directly impacted other aspects of their instructional leadership practice.

The vision of good instruction that sits at the core of instructional leadership activity had many sources (e.g., central office leaders' individual and collective beliefs, ideas shared by CEL consultants). In the spring of 2005, central office leaders created a list of eight components that made up what they called "powerful" instruction:

(a) standards-based lesson design based on the state-issued Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), (b) high standards of student engagement, (c) teaching transferable skills, (d) teaching for independence, (e) designing lessons to meet the needs of students, (f) data-driven decision making, (g) looking for evidence of student learning, and (h) reflective practice in improving our own learning. Chapter 5 describes how these components were developed in consultation with input from CEL consultants. What follows is a picture of some ways these central office leaders communicated their vision of the kind of "powerful" instruction they believed would lead to achievement for all students.

Central office leaders utilized various tools for communicating their vision of good instruction. Two examples provide a sense of how communication unfolded: (a) instructional letters, and (b) "openings" and "closings" during professional development sessions. In addition to communicating with words, leaders enacted their vision of good instruction in their daily practice as they prioritized activities related to both student and adult learning (Grubb, 2006). Based on leaders' comments, issues related to more managerial aspects of central office leadership often became a secondary priority, although at times crises (e.g., a bomb threat, basement flooding) demanded immediate attention.

Instructional letters. Instructional letters were a tool used by Dorothy, Cathy, and Robert to communicate with their principals about ideas, thoughts about new learning, emerging questions, and expectations about instructional issues. According to Grubb (2006), two CEL consultants who were former central office leaders in San Diego provided sample letters to illustrate the difference between an “instructional letter” and the more traditional “welcome back to school” letter, that focused on issues other than those closely linked to instruction. In one of his monthly letters to secondary principals, Robert explained the purpose of an instructional letter:

First off, they’re mostly informational. Sure, there are letters, such as when I lay out expectations, where I am asking for follow through. Those will be clear. But for the most part, it’s a kind of a weekly think aloud. I feel that I owe it to you to be clear where I’m coming from as an educator and as a leader—my vision, if you will. I’m trying to share my reflections on the work and to build some common reference points for all of us to use in our work.

The topics of instructional letters changed on a regular basis, depending on what issues were in the forefront of leaders’ thinking. In the beginning, letters were more general, but as time passed, leaders used the letters to communicate very specific messages related to instructional improvement efforts. In a weekly memo to principals in January 2006, Cathy shared specific ideas about connecting ongoing professional development work in reading instruction to emerging work in mathematics:

Last week I visited a classroom where students were highly engaged in small group work with an Investigations [math] lesson. At the conclusion of the lesson, the teacher stopped the students and indicated that on Monday they would be talking about their strategies. My question was “Would we do this with a read aloud?” Would we read and wait for a weekend to discuss the reading? Do we need to make sure we include enough time to do a “Mathematical Congress” (I love that term!) before we end the week?

In her memo, Cathy went beyond general comments about instructional improvement and used a specific example of classroom practice to communicate her message about the need to incorporate what teachers had learned about instruction in reading into their math lessons as well.

The central office leaders also used instructional letters to communicate their own learning related to instructional improvement, and in this respect they assumed a public learning stance. Beginning in the fall of 2005, the district began to focus professional development efforts on math as well as reading instruction. Dorothy shared reflections that emerged after two math-focused professional development seminars held the previous week:

First, Using our leadership voice to change beliefs: [her emphasis] We know that many adults and students do not think that they can do math. To make matters worse, they think that this is acceptable for themselves and for students. While these same folks would readily agree that it is essential to be able to read, somehow it has become a part of our collective belief system that proficiency in math is desirable, but not essential. We must use our leadership voice to begin changing these beliefs. It is imperative that students understand the importance of math.

Dorothy used the term “leadership voice”—a concept introduced by CEL consultants—to describe how leaders communicated their beliefs and expectations to their constituents. Instructional letters were one way central office leaders used their own leadership voices to communicate with principals. At times, the messages were supportive, congratulating principals for good work in the field, but there were times when the tone of the letters changed. For example, after a school visit in June 2005, Robert became very concerned about the use of the Channel One televised news service in secondary schools. He used his monthly letter to communicate his concerns with principals:

In participating schools, students spend 12 minutes a day watching a newscast and commercials (assuming the kids are watching, which they often aren't). In practice, I've almost never seen it take fewer than 14 minutes. Schools with Channel One lose a complete 50-minute period every four days. They lose almost a whole period a month to commercials alone. I think it needs to go. If we wanted to extend the high school day by 14 minutes, it would cost *us roughly a half million dollars annually in salaries* [his emphasis].

Openings and closings. Instructional letters were only one of the many ways central office leaders identified and communicated their vision of instruction, which included highlighting issues—such as Channel One—that might have been barriers to change. Leaders also spoke about their vision in formal and informal gatherings. The primary vehicles for face-to-face communication in formal gatherings were referred to as “openings” and “closings,” which were another feature of reform efforts associated with Alvarado. Each month, principals, school coaches, and central office staff gathered for leadership seminars and other professional development sessions designed to support learning about literacy and math instruction and the leadership necessary to support instructional improvement. These sessions provided central office leaders with an ongoing opportunity to communicate their vision of powerful instruction in person, rather than through written communication as was the case with instructional letters.

Central office leaders primarily relied upon external consultants to provide content-focused professional development for principals and school-based coaches. The sessions usually included demonstration lessons as a way to model “powerful” instruction. As a result, external consultants and district leaders co-constructed and collectively communicated a specific vision of instruction. However, the leaders were encouraged to take responsibility for the “openings” and “closings”—orienting and summary remarks at the beginning and end of the professional development sessions—

which allowed them to connect the learning to the local context and to take personal, public ownership of the ideas presented in the sessions. In the beginning, central office leaders relied heavily on written notes, sometimes scripted, in order to deliver a very specific message, but over time the scripts disappeared.

Although there was a shared sense of the components of a “powerful” opening and closing (e.g., communicating urgency, communicate specific expectations), each leader developed an individual communication style. Dorothy and Robert often used episodes from the *West Wing* television show to capture attention, while others drew from personal experiences or connected to current events. For example, in January 2006, Jackie used data to paint a picture of the “State-of-the-Union” for student achievement:

What I’m going to do today is to give you a little bit of a recap of the State of the Union of Emerald Sound in terms of our data. This won’t be a surprise to you that we have fewer than 5 out of 10 of our kids reaching standard. At 4th grade, about 700 kids haven’t met standard and if you project that out over elementary, that would be over 4000 kids that aren’t there yet. That’s a big mountain to climb. It is going to take all of us getting better and better in mathematics to make a difference.

The openings set the stage for content-focused professional development, and leaders often used the public venues to create a sense of urgency around reform efforts and speak about themselves as learners. While consultants had deep knowledge about instruction and adult learning, they could not connect the work to district efforts, or build urgency in the same way as those inside the system. From the beginning, the central office leaders in Emerald Sound described a sense of urgency around their work. Dorothy and others spoke of the “moral imperative to do something.” As they shared statistics like the ones above, they often asked participants to consider having a child who was in the

group who was not making it: “What if that was your child? What would you be OK with those statistics?” Closings were primarily designed to re-cap the day’s learning and set clear expectations for “next steps.” At times, closing remarks also directed attention to fundamental issues about core beliefs and classroom culture, such as how teachers thought about the students in their classrooms.

While identifying, communicating, and refining a vision of good instruction and leadership resides in the center of system-level instructional leadership practice as enacted by these leaders, a compelling vision, no matter how effectively identified and communicated, can only take a system so far. In the Emerald Sound School District, casting a vision of powerful instruction was only one part of the complex and dynamic enactment of instructional leadership at the system level.

Developing, Participating in, and Sustaining Professional Learning Opportunities

In order to realize their emerging and evolving vision for instruction, central office leaders knew they faced a professional learning challenge, both for themselves and for other adults in the system. With extensive support and guidance from external consultants, Emerald Sound central office leaders developed and continually revised a district-wide professional learning agenda. Learning was not an activity reserved for students, and at times for teachers during occasional workshops; rather, professional learning was expected to be ongoing part of professional practice for central office leaders, school coaches, teachers, and other district staff. During her opening for the leadership seminar in March 2005, Dorothy spoke of the importance of learning as both a professional responsibility and an intentional act of leadership:

Each of us has the obligation to continue our own learning with professional reading and sharing with colleagues. Examples of this at the elementary level are principal triads and book groups as well as coaches meeting informally to support each other's growth. At the middle school level there are visits to each other's schools in order to learn from each other. This is just a start. *You must take the initiative to keep the learning going* [her emphasis]. As you know, the purpose of our work today and everyday is learning. We know that each one of us must be Lead Learners.

An overhead with the bold title, "PURPOSE OF OUR WORK, TODAY and EVERY DAY is LEARNING" was often shared during openings and closings as a symbolic way to keep learning as a focus of daily leadership and instructional improvement practice. This was one way leaders communicated an urgency for learning at all levels of the system. However, this focus did not stop with symbolic gestures and words. Central office leaders, with coaching from external consultants, created an evolving system of professional learning opportunities, including monthly content-focused leadership seminars, site-based or "embedded" literacy, math, and leadership coaching, and "best practice" seminars highlighting research-based practices in literacy and math.

These structures were not fixed, but instead evolved over time as leaders developed an increasingly more sophisticated understanding of content-specific instruction and the leadership and learning opportunities needed to increase teachers' abilities to provide such instruction for their students. What follows is a detailed description of one "classroom residency," a model designed to simultaneously support central office leaders' principals', teachers', and coaches' learning about literacy instruction. Rather than going to an off-site workshop to learn from "experts," consultants came to selected school sites on a regular basis to provide "embedded coaching" for a

select group of participants. School teams, consisting of the principal, literacy coach, and one or two willing teachers who showed evidence of “trying on” new learning, were expected to work together to implement new learning on an ongoing basis.

A residency experience lasted two or three days in one site in order to provide participants the opportunity to see how instruction developed over time, rather than a one-shot, isolated picture of practice. A typical experience included planning a lesson with the consultant, modeling the lesson, sometimes revising and trying the lesson a second time in a different classroom, debriefing the lesson, and planning for the next day of instruction. A middle school principal described her residency experience:

[The consultant] comes in and we start the morning usually with a conversation about where the kids are, and what’s going to happen in the classroom. We go into the classroom and watch a teacher teach. [The consultant] may, or may not, jump in depending on who the teacher is and what the plan is for the day. She may do some coaching. She may model some coaching—student coaching. Then when the lesson’s finished we’ll come out and we’ll debrief. It’s always lively discussion around what happened in the lesson.

An elementary literacy coach reflected on her understanding of residencies as a support for professional learning:

From a teacher learning perspective, I think that takes me back to student teaching where you have somebody observing you all the time and pushing you all the time at a level that—or at a rate that’s faster than just we can normally do within the school. You have a level of accountability that’s higher than a lot of teachers, I think, feel. Because I think it’s really easier to go to professional development and then go back to your classroom and just kind of keep doing what you’re doing.

As suggested in this coach’s comments, those involved in residency experiences were expected to “take back” what they learned and “try it on” in their own classrooms. This aspect was a significant shift away from the typical practice of teachers attending

workshops that often resulted in little, if any, impact on their practice. Several principals mentioned having expectations for residency participants to model for their peers who did not attend. One elementary principal said, “We want them to model for their peers because that’s really where the most powerful learning comes.”

Central office leaders played a critical role in creating, supporting, and sustaining the residency as a professional learning opportunity, including managing the ongoing challenge of securing enough substitute teachers to release participants. The residencies brought professionals with a diverse set of perspectives together in one room to share a common experience. More importantly, participants engaged in conversations about the *thinking* behind instructional practice rather than only observing the actions of students, teachers, and coaches. Monique shared how listening to the running commentary about instructional decisionmaking in the moment, rather than during a debrief session, helped move leaders’ thinking:

When we went to New York to explore the idea of a residency, we were working together on what did we want the teachers at the school to do. And we said we wanted the teacher to really voice her metacognition. What was she thinking? Upon what did she base her teaching moves? It’s the tacit knowledge that we really need to go deep in right now, the things that we do unconsciously that we don’t even know we’re doing. That’s the hard part of our work now.

The residency experience prompted consultants, central office leaders, principals, coaches, and teachers to engage together in focused, locally inspired conversations about instructional improvement. Although the notion of bringing educators together for professional conversations is gaining attention (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004), the residency model in this district had an added component of seeding the conversation with

content-specific expertise from outside consultants. The CEL program manager shared her perspective on the importance of this kind of “knowledge infusion:”

You need to have the sort of vision of possibility about what you’re aiming towards so that they [teachers, coaches, leaders] can really see folks who have been doing it for a long time who seem to be getting some really good results. It’s that apprenticeship notion. And I think it’s the doing of it—not just the verbiage of job-embedded professional development—that matters. Where’s the new knowledge infusion? You can’t think about reinventing yourself if you don’t constantly also have access to a vision of what that might mean or look like.

Not only did the residency model create a space for learning about content-specific instruction in very concrete ways, the model also created a space for actors from all levels of a frequently disconnected and hierarchical district system to share a common experience and learn from one another. Fullan (2005) asserted that changing a system requires changing the context—the structure and culture—within which one works. The residency model, although significant, was only one of the ways central office leaders exercised system-level instructional leadership by creating new contexts for supporting the learning of all professionals in the system. Chapter 5 provides a glimpse into other related practices that supported professional learning.

Restructuring and Reculturing the System to Support Learning Goals

The residency model for professional development was one example of both restructuring and reculturing in the Emerald Sound School District. In addition to being a new structure for adult learning, the residency created a cultural shift in conversation among teachers, coaches, principals and central office leaders, moving from infrequent, management-oriented talk, to very specific mutual engagement around instruction. There

were other significant changes as well. Beginning in the fall of 2004, the central office of the Emerald Sound School District was restructured in order to better support instructional improvement efforts. One major change involved the supervision of principals. Cathy, Dorothy, and Robert all assumed newly created director positions that were designed with a primary emphasis on supporting principals' development as instructional leaders and the overall improvement of instruction across the system. Especially for elementary principal supervision, this change was significant, moving from one director with responsibility for all 21 schools,¹⁰ to two directors sharing the load. Among the many reasons informing the new organizational structure was the desire to combine principal supervision and professional development responsibilities, along with traditional duties associated with curriculum development and oversight. Dorothy reflected upon the importance of aligning these duties:

I was a language arts consultant down here [central office] years ago, and really up until now, there was a disconnect between curriculum, instruction and supervision. That is really hard. We would plan, cajole, reason, try and persuade, try and beg, you know, whatever, to try and get folks to change out there [in schools], but we weren't their evaluators. Not that you want to ever use heavy-handed stuff. But you don't even have to, because it's just implied. You have to be connected. It has to be connected if you want change to happen out there.

Cathy also reflected about how the restructuring created a new kind of relationship between central office leaders and school principals:

I can tell you what I experienced as a building principal; I saw my supervisor twice a year. He had 26 [including middle schools]; I have eleven. That's a big difference. I'm able to be in my buildings twice a month for at least two hours, and four times a year it's an entire day where I'm really talking with the principal. I'm rolling up my sleeves, looking at data with the principal, and generating ideas. We're brainstorming together, walking through classrooms, talking about

¹⁰ The district closed 2 elementary schools after the 2004-2005 school year.

instruction together. It's December and I really know my schools. That's far more than I felt that my supervisor knew me in three years.

The new dynamic between central office leaders and school principals—as described by Cathy only four months after she assumed supervision responsibilities—illustrated another aspect of how central office leadership practice had changed.

As suggested in Cathy's comment about the nature of her work with principals, there was a cultural shift—at least perceived by some system actors—in how central office leaders approached their work. Robert shared his perception about how the secondary director position changed from being the “answer man” to the “lead learner:”

Truthfully I think that it's hard for them [principals] to get used to—in the sense that the job [principal supervisor] was defined is in a very managerial sense before. They were used to going to that person for answers. I've changed the conversation so we're not talking about whose approval do I need to take a field trip to Oregon—which there is an answer—to how do we help a kid who is struggling with math to get to algebra two. There's not an answer in the policy and procedure manual, so I think that was hard. I think it's something that in redefining my role has been an issue because it's been the answer-man position and not the learner position.

This description of central office leaders as “lead learners” was reinforced—at least symbolically through leaders' written and oral communication—on a regular basis in many ways, including openings and closings, instructional letters, and informal conversations. For example, during her opening for the leadership seminar in October 2004, Cathy made the following statement:

To be an educator is to be in a constant state of learning, and that has been so true for me in the last 1 1/2 months. There is an element of risk in being a learner; I want to reveal my own learning about what I've read. It's a risk I'm going to take—it's a risk you take every day. I feel unbalanced, as I grow deeper into leadership and literacy. I feel the humbleness of being a learner, not a knower.

For some, the cultural shift from “answer man” to “lead learner” was comforting while for others a desire for clear direction and answers remained. (See chapter 6 for an extended discussion about issues related to central office leaders being “lead learners.”)

Redefining and Assessing Professional Practice

As central office leaders developed new visions for instruction, and highlighted the importance of adult learning, they began to prioritize attention and resources to support instructional improvement. Out of this reprioritization came an ongoing assessment and redefinition of professional practice—both instructional practice and leadership practice. Central office leaders did more than identify and communicate their vision of instruction; they regularly spent time in schools assessing the work for themselves. According to Dorothy, leaders could not “lead from afar:”

You can’t lead from afar. You can’t. And if it’s the principal—that’s why they have to be in the classrooms. They can’t lead from the office. If it’s the central office, like me, I can’t lead principals from the central office. I have to be out there with them, shoulder to shoulder, walking through classrooms—you know, struggling with their struggles, dealing with their problems alongside of them. You can’t do it from afar.

In order to counteract the tendency of leading from “afar,” principals were expected to be in classrooms two hours each day, and central office leaders spent as much time as they could in schools, which at times meant at least part of four days a week. Originally called “walkthroughs,” and eventually referred to as “instructional visits,” the time was designed to give leaders a chance to observe instruction first-hand. (See chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of walkthroughs.)

Central office leaders believed understanding, observing, and creating supports for improving instruction should be a primary focus of their leadership practice. Cathy shared how her thinking about system-level leadership had changed:

I previously thought I had to understand leadership, I had to understand systems; I just can't do my job without knowing it. I do believe that systems are important. I believe that putting together those larger systems and knowing how to lead is important. And we can't do it [improve instruction] in isolation of that. However, I believe we can do that forever and unless we understand how to change instruction in the classroom with the students we have, we're never going to reach all of our kids. But what I really understand is instruction; I can't defer instruction to the specialists or the coordinators or the coaches in the building.

The importance of understanding and assessing instructional practice was also expected to be the primary work of school principals. In her opening for the January 2005 leadership seminar, Dorothy shared the following expectations:

I am convinced that sharpening our leadership tool kit is the most important thing that we can do as leaders. Without these skills we cannot be effective instructional leaders. This holds true whether or not you are a principal, coach, teacher leader or are in a central office support position. The first set of tools involves being able to assess teachers' practice—as individuals and collectively. If we cannot do this, how can we lead the work? In order to be able to assess practice we need some basic skills including being able to script lessons in order to analyze practice, and understand the content and strategies needed in order to improve instruction. You can't lead what you don't know.

During most, if not all, instructional visits, central office leaders and principals visited classrooms together in order to analyze instruction and compare perspectives. After visiting several elementary classrooms during math instruction, Cathy and a principal had the following conversation about what they noticed:

Cathy: So what did you think?

Principal: One thing that stands out right away is I would have like to see that [class discussion] done in a gathering area, not at desks, so students would not

have been as distracted. I think that would have ramped up the engagement level a little bit. They were able to hide behind their desks.

Cathy: I agree, that would have helped a lot. I know the teacher has been trained in CMP [math curriculum] but I know that what we saw wasn't a CMP lesson. That's a wondering for me. I was curious why would you use the fractions $\frac{5}{6}$ and $\frac{7}{8}$ and tell the children to use equivalent fractions? If you truly understand "fractionness," as an adult, would you really use equivalents to compare $\frac{5}{6}$ and $\frac{7}{8}$?

Cathy went on to explain the need for teachers to plan intentionally, including choosing practice problems that supported specific instructional goals and considering questions that might emerge during instruction. She wondered why the teacher had selected a comparison between fractions that could be solved with using the common denominator procedure, but yet still asked the students to use that strategy. Given her strong mathematics background, Cathy was able to call out instructional choices that possibly ignored students' conceptual understanding of fractions.

Principal: That's what the girl I talked to said. She said, "I knew because $\frac{7}{8}$ is only $\frac{1}{8}$ away from one and $\frac{5}{6}$ is $\frac{1}{6}$ away from one."

Cathy: If he had said, "compare these fractions"—what a great conversation. All of that learning was taken away from the kids because they were told to do equivalent fractions, which doesn't make sense if you understand fractions. It doesn't make sense if you're a mathematician.

Principal: Now what you're saying makes sense.

Cathy: If he wants to do equivalent fractions, choose different samples. It's thinking ahead of time about what makes sense based on your instructional objective.

The conversation between Cathy, the principal, and coach continued as they analyzed the other classroom visits together. Although the conversation represented above may seem to be evaluative, the purpose was to think about the teacher's current practice in very

specific ways, and how the principal and coach could help the teacher improve his practice.

The visit described above was not a formal walkthrough that included pre and post conversations with the teacher, but instead it was part of a system-wide plan to gain a general sense of the level of math instruction across schools. However, the conversation was still very focused on specific aspects of instruction; it was a time for Cathy, the principal, and the coach to think together about teacher practice and what they might do to support one teacher's learning. The principal described the "messiness" of moving from old traditions of teaching math as procedures to the new approach that focused on building deep understanding:

We have to give ourselves a chance to get a little messy as we move from algorithms to different strategies. It's a transition and I want the teachers to know that that's OK. I don't want to think that if I come into their room and it's noisy, I'll be concerned. I'm afraid that it's ingrained in teachers' thinking that if their class is noisy then students must be off-task.

One conversation between Cathy and the leadership team at one of her elementary schools represents the kind of cultural shift that happened as leaders throughout the system tried to make instructional improvement a central focus of leadership practice.

The same principal described his perspective how his interactions with central office leaders had changed:

It's gone from being a loose system where every once in a while somebody from Central Office might pop out and make sure everything's okay to an ongoing, supportive relationship. My time in the classroom is a time for ongoing support to help the teacher, provide coaching, and provide ideas to help the teacher get better. And Central Office's relationship with me is the same way. It's to come, spend time with me, and provide the ongoing support so I can get better as an instructional leader.

The process of leaders coming together to assess and redefine instructional practice gave central office leaders first-hand knowledge of instructional trends across the system. Leaders also had opportunities to assess and support principals as they learned about what it meant to exercise instructional leadership at the school level.

Integrating and Adapting Improvement Strategies into Local Context

The instructional reform effort in Emerald Sound was not a purely “home-grown” effort, but instead built upon others’ thinking and experiences. Just as Cathy “played” with concepts about math instruction during her instructional visit, central office leaders “played” with ideas from other districts about system-wide instructional reform, specifically reform efforts in San Diego and New York’s Community District 2. However, rather than *adopting* a model created by others, central office leaders *adapted* ideas, approaches and suggestions by integrating new learning with their knowledge of the local context.

The reform efforts in San Diego and District 2 associated with Tony Alvarado serve as an existence proof that students in urban districts, when given the right kind of learning environments and support, can achieve at high levels (Hubbard et al., 2006). Central office leaders in Emerald Sound not only read about and heard stories of these reform efforts, they spent time in both districts to see the results for themselves. The visits were instrumental in helping leaders create not only a vision of what they wanted to see in schools and classrooms, but also gather some ideas about how to bring about similar practices in their own district. However, the trips and stories did not provide leaders with a recipe or formula, but rather served as sources of inspiration, as was the

case with the connection between the New York City visit and the development of the classroom residency model for professional development. Dorothy recalled her thinking during her time in New York:

We saw how the teacher interacted with her building coach, and we saw how she acted with her guest coach [external consultant]. We saw the supports that she had from those folks, and the different roles that each would play. The building coach could then follow up with what the guest coach started. We were all struck with is how important the adult think-aloud is in teaching other folks. What we've been doing is waiting to the end and then hoping we would remember to say all that stuff. But how much better and more powerful to just do that adult think-aloud, take thirty seconds, say what we're doing and why we're doing it.

Anne, the CEL program manager working with Emerald Sound, shared what she believed to be the importance of giving leaders an opportunity to visit other districts:

They need to see places that are doing it better than them because it's so new. It's just like when you see really good practice, a vision of what it could look like, or kids performing at higher levels. You need to have the sort of vision of possibility about what you're aiming towards so that you can really see some folks who have been doing it for a long time who seem to be getting some really good results.

Once central office leaders had an image of what was possible, they did not just replicate models of professional development or borrow reform documents. What unfolded was a dynamically changing practice of system-level instructional leadership, informed by visions of practice in other locations, their own experiences as educators, and an ongoing conversation with external consultants. Those consultants who had recently left San Diego brought stories of the “unraveling” of earlier reform efforts—a part of Alvarado’s legacy that Emerald Sound leaders wanted to avoid. Robert described a “softer touch” toward principals who showed resistance to reform:

There are a few principals who haven't changed on a dime with regard to this instructional leadership model. We've had some degree of tolerance for that, and I

think that was a source of discomfort for our leadership consultant initially. We've kind of worked around resistant principals whereas in San Diego I think they would have started World War III. I think her point of view has changed partly because she is seeing the work that's moved forward, in spite of a little softer touch, and partly I'm sure because of the turnover in San Diego.

While often admiring the work that unfolded in San Diego, Robert shared his conscious decision to follow a different course of action in terms of his interaction with principals. This is an example of how leaders *adapted* reform ideas to meet local needs. While not giving up his belief in the importance of a principal being an instructional leader, Robert was willing to use a "softer touch" rather than follow Alvarado's seemingly more heavy-handed approach to principal supervision.

Kay, a CEL leadership consultant, drawing from her experience as a central office leader in San Diego both before and during Alvarado's tenure, made the following comments about leaders' efforts to make their own decisions about reform:

They're learning, studying, and they're willing to try things on, even though sometimes it might seem to outside consultants that they're not moving fast enough or pushing enough. I think they're making decisions about the speed at which they go about this work, the intensity and the way they go about it because it fits the culture. They are trying to hold high expectations and to be explicit about what needs to happen and still do it in a way that's not going to blow the system apart, especially with the new superintendent. It says a lot about their commitment to making it work and taking the best of both coasts and making it fit here.

Jackie, the assistant superintendent, reflected about how district leaders were asserting themselves in their work with external consultants:

We're starting to be in what I would call a healthy place, being able to define how CEL can help us best rather than taking only their lead in how they can help us. And I think that's healthy. It may feel awkward when we may want to go in a direction that may not be exactly what CEL folks would recommend, but it's

where we feel we need to go. We end up developing our own theory of action and taking those lumps or those off-roads and on-roads as we learn them.

One example of district leaders selecting a different path is illustrated in the area of reading instruction. Unlike San Diego leaders, who officially adopted a reading workshop approach, Emerald Sound leaders decided to support a “side-by-side” model by bringing in new, more intellectually demanding approaches to reading instruction alongside the adopted, more scripted curriculum. Dorothy explained her interactions with a former consultant who had philosophical concerns about the district-adopted curriculum:

We’ve had to sit by [some] consultants’ side and while sixty or seventy percent was wonderful, you had to be there to kind of kick them under the table at times. I don’t think that they understood the impact that they might have. They would say to teachers and coaches, “You don’t need to do the basal. You don’t need to do Open Court [adopted curriculum].” Well, this is a Read First school. I’m sorry, yes, they do need to use Open Court and we’ve committed to that. Don’t even go there. I mean, if you don’t believe that yourself, that’s one thing, but don’t tell it to people who are wrestling and grappling with it and have to do it.

Although Dorothy understood and supported the workshop approach to reading instruction, she was dealing with the political reality of having a grant-mandated, officially adopted reading curriculum in her schools. It was not helpful to have an external consultant telling teachers and coaches not to use the adopted curriculum, even if there was value in the reasons for such a suggestion. The kind of frustration shared by Dorothy above was an exception, not the rule for how leaders interacted with CEL consultants. In fact, that particular consultant was not invited back the following year for many reasons.

For the most part, consultants were valued for their insight, outside perspective and extensive experience in education. Dorothy described what she had learned from Kay, one of the leadership consultants from San Diego:

Kay has such a deep knowledge of the leadership part, and she knows the literacy too. She has been in the principal role; she has been in my role as a central office person, both of them. I will go to her and say, "You know, we're beating our heads against the wall here with, moving this principal forward. Give us some suggestions." And she's been there; she's done that. She also knows the political part of it, that you can't just ramrod it; there's that political nature to it and you have to finesse things. She's really smart about helping us with that kind of thing.

The conversations that unfolded during planning sessions with consultants also showed how central office leaders were trying to "fit" outside ideas into their local context. In December 2005, Robert and Kay talked about how he might address the mounting political pressure from parents concerned about possible changes in the high school program for advanced students. Rather than bringing answers, Kay asked questions, listened, and shared her thinking informed by related experiences in San Diego. She responded to Robert's concern about political issues that were brewing about the high school reform work:

Kay (consultant): I wonder if you just do the band-aid approach. I think you are right. How do you try to do the reform work and still respond to the political pressures; it is always a question. God knows I don't have the answer to it. As I told you in San Diego, the high school system, it's an entity unto itself. It just operates—and I think it still does to this to this day—like a school district unto itself. None of the reform efforts ever really touched the high school. Alan Bersin [former San Diego superintendent], I think, cut his losses early and let them go. I wish I knew. Until the instruction gets to be soooo [her emphasis] good that your parents are dying for certain teachers who are just good teachers and can teach everybody . . . that's the hard part.

Robert: I think, to sum it up, there are a significant number of families who want the traditional high school. I think we can't keep things exactly status quo but I think having one traditional high school is O.K. for right now.

Kay: The superintendent does have to make the political call as well as figure out the big picture. I don't know what that is. Also, I don't know where your Board stands on this issue.

Robert: What I regret is that there's so much out there that's so far from true, or responsible.

Kay: Maybe that is something you could do; come up with a strategy for communication. I think Alan Bersin used to go out a lot in the beginning—you call it town hall meeting—just to quash so many rumors. Maybe like the way you did with the Board, the [high school transition to small schools] presentation to the board. You've already got a framework to do the presentation. Could you take that kind of thing on the road?

In the previous conversation example, Kay did not provide answers or a specific model of reform for Robert to adopt, but instead acted as a sounding board and wise counsel with related experience in another setting. At the time of data collection, Emerald Sound leaders were not ready to follow the San Diego model and focus mainly on grades K-8. Instead, they choose to continue to pursue instructional reform at the high school level, knowing that there were few, if any, models from which to learn. As a result, district leaders did not have the option to adapt, or even adopt a high school model from another setting; instead, they were charting their own course, hoping reform efforts would gain traction across the K-12 system.

Summary: What the Leaders Learned

This chapter provided a broad picture of the collective, emergent understanding and practice of five central office leaders as they guided, directed, and supported the

improvement of teaching and learning across the district's schools. Their work evolved over time and can be categorized into five interrelated areas of district-level activity: (a) identifying, refining, and communicating a vision of good instruction; (b) developing, participating in, and sustaining professional learning opportunities; (c) restructuring and reculturing the system to support learning goals; (d) redefining and assessing professional practice; and (e) integrating and adapting improvement strategies into the local context. Their leadership work did not always fall neatly into a single region, but instead often cut across categorical boundaries.

Looking beyond the particular activities provides additional insight into what leaders learned about the enactment of instructional leadership at the system level. First, there is not a fixed "body of knowledge" to be mastered and subsequently applied, but rather instructional leadership entailed an ongoing process of adapting and developing ideas and strategies that seemed appropriate for the issues at hand. It was a process that included listening to outsiders, engaging in professional dialog with educators in the system, and constantly adjusting practice as warranted. A second insight, closely related to the first, indicates that leaders were continually refining and re-framing their understandings about instruction, leadership, and system change. Statements, such as "Now that we're smarter," were commonly heard in conversation among leaders. Lastly, the evolving nature of these leaders' practice suggests they may not have had a fully articulated theory of action to guide their work, at least in the early stages of the reform effort. While broad ideas were in place, such as the need for central office leaders to "focus on instruction" rather than only managerial issues, these leaders may have initially

lacked a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of how the revised priorities influenced daily interactions in classrooms, schools, and across the system.

Chapter 5.

How Leaders Learned: The Dynamic Nature of Learning-While-Leading

A critical aspect of this story is the iterative process of learning and leading—as leaders developed deeper understanding and skill about good instruction and instructional leadership, their leadership practice changed. Rather than focusing on a fixed body of knowledge to be acquired and subsequently applied, these leaders engaged in continuous learning and leading cycles, signaled by their ongoing conversation about “next steps.” New learning prompted changes in core understandings, which lead to changes in leadership practice (see Figure 5.1). As practice changed, new learning challenges and questions emerged, prompting another iteration of the cycle. As a result, the enactment of system-level instructional leadership was both a *learning practice* and a *leadership practice*. A detailed analysis of how these leaders’ instructional leadership activity evolved over time provides insight into how the iterative cycle of learning and leading emerged in practice.

Figure 5.1 highlights the interactive nature of the learning-while-leading cycle as enacted by district leaders in this study. As leaders’ understanding about instruction and instructional leadership practice changed, their leadership practice changed as well. The circles represent the ongoing and evolving nature of the instructional leadership practice I observed in the Emerald Sound School District during 18 months of data collection.

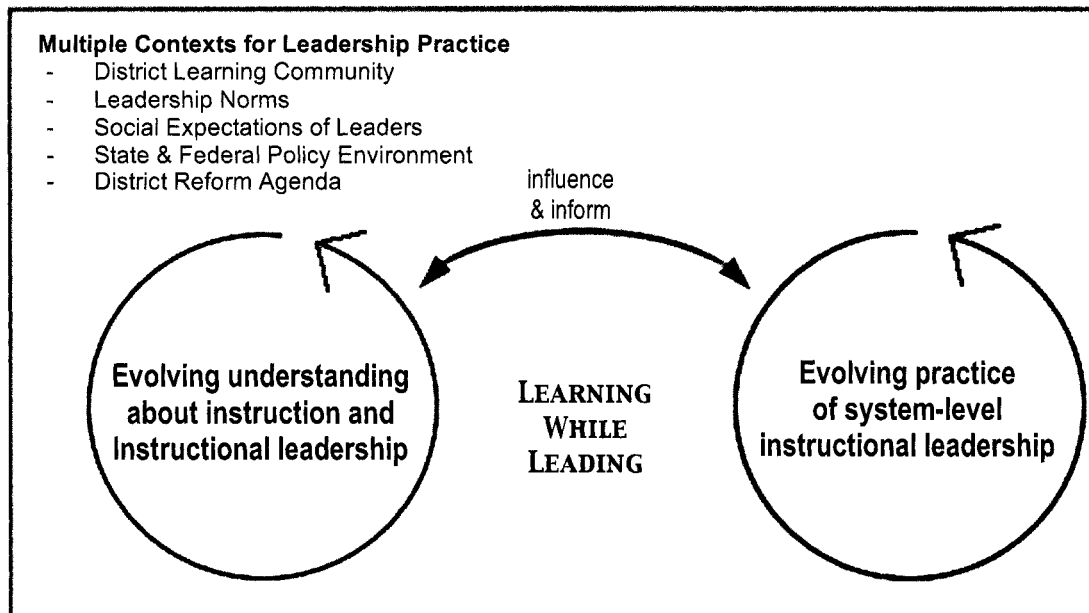


Figure 5.1. Initial learning-while-leading cycle.

The learning-while-leading cycles took place within multiple contexts for leadership practice, including a learning community among five district leaders who were engaged in a particular reform agenda aimed at improving literacy and math instruction as well as instructional leadership across the system. This handpicked team of leaders shared a set of norms that guided their learning and their leading. For example, learning was a publicly valued aspect of leaders' practice. Leaders were not expected to be experts, but rather willing participants engaged in "trying on" new approaches to instruction and leadership practice. Although some followers wanted leaders to "have answers," the central office culture valued professionals who would take risks and change their practice as prompted by learning. For example, central office leaders' opening comments during leadership seminars often included displaying a handout with the

following words, “The purpose of our work today and everyday is learning. We know that each one of us must be Lead Learners.”

Finally, for this particular group of leaders, learning-while-leading took place in the midst of growing accountability pressures from both the state and federal governments. Although trends in student achievement showed positive gains over the past three years, these leaders felt acute pressures to improve the level of instruction in all classrooms. Many students were not being successful, at least according to state test data, and these leaders were determined to do something about it. There was also a keen awareness of the upcoming 2008 graduation requirement; for the first time in Washington State history, students would have to pass the WASL (state assessment) in order to graduate. The accountability pressures were referenced in many conversations, especially in terms of needing both short-term and long-term strategies for improvement.

The Learning-While-Leading Cycle in Action: Two Examples

What follows are two examples that illustrate how the learning-while-leading cycle played out over the course of 18 months: school walkthroughs and new perspectives on the role of content knowledge in both teaching. After a detailed description of the changes in understanding and practice over time within the particular context, I analyze each example using a common set of questions about the content and process of leaders’ learning, how the changes in instructional leadership practice can be understood from a learning research perspective, and the leadership dynamics associated with each example.

This section is designed to illuminate the interaction between leaders' learning and their practice. The two examples of this interaction comprise substantial changes in thinking and practice. As such, the story may seem to be an overly positive portrayal of work that was often messy and imperfect. While change is not synonymous with improvement, the reader may see the changes here as indicators of improved leadership practice in this particular system. While improvement may have happened, this study only highlights changes in leadership practice over time, rather than examining the impact of such practice. It would be wrong to automatically assume that any change in practice will lead to positive outcomes for students. The purpose here was to examine the relationships between leaders' learning and subsequent changes in practice, rather than evaluate the impact of their efforts.

From School Audit to Instructional Visit: The Evolution of a Walkthrough

School walkthroughs, an increasingly common activity associated with instructional reform efforts, offer a first example of the learning-while-leading cycle in action. There are a variety of purposes for walkthroughs, including monitoring reform efforts, creating a culture of dialog around classroom practice, and measuring the ability of principal candidates to analyze instructional practice (Dexter, 2004; Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002; Marsh et al., 2005). Usually conducted by principals, teacher leaders, and occasionally central office staff, a walkthrough consists of a series of classroom visits—usually 10-15 minutes each—designed to surface teaching and learning trends across a school and/or district system. Walkthroughs can also be an opportunity for mutual engagement and meaning making as leaders develop instructional leadership skills

(Hubbard et al., 2006). A walkthrough may elicit various reactions from participants, largely influenced by position in the educational hierarchy. For some, walkthroughs provide information needed to inform future professional development, while others see walkthroughs as unwelcome surveillance by outsiders.

Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, the Director of Elementary Learning (who left in 2005) decided to implement school walkthroughs as a regular feature of central office instructional leadership practice in the Emerald Sound School District.

Cathy explained the rationale for walkthroughs at that time:

The reason that whole thing [walkthroughs] came about was because [the Director of Elementary Learning] had actually been on a school audit team in another district and he realized that he knew more about that school than he did about schools in our district.

Organized in various teams, central office leaders were deployed to schools to observe classroom instruction. According to Robert, building trust was a key focus during early walkthroughs:

I'll never forget the first time that we had all of the elementary principals at Blue Lake Elementary; it was like a cotillion. We asked permission to visit, and we wrote thank you notes. We explicitly talked about smiling at the teachers and just trying to be on our best behavior, you know, to have great manners and build trust. In fact, I think that we agreed that we would give positive feedback but really no negative feedback, which was good for building trust.

In addition to a focus on building trust with school personnel, central office leaders were also looking for evidence of curriculum implementation specifically associated with the newly adopted Open Court elementary reading program. One leader described the early walkthrough experiences as "school audits." Cathy reflected upon her initial walkthrough experience at Green Park Elementary:

We really focused on reading because we had just adopted Open Court. We were seeing Open Court, but it was so superficial. Did we see the teacher's manual and are the sound/letter cards up? It was where we were [in our understanding] at the time. When we went into their classrooms, we had some honest conversations about not seeing Open Court materials. As a group, we were telling them to implement Open Court when they were really a little bit beyond Open Court.

Cathy's reference to "where we were at the time" indicated that her thinking about the substance and purpose of a school walkthrough changed over time. Given a more limited understanding of reading instruction, she and other leaders looked for surface level evidence (e.g., teachers manual, sound/letter cards) of curriculum implementation. Instructional leadership practice was directly influenced by their surface knowledge of reading instruction. Cathy felt embarrassed as she reflected back upon her leadership practice during her initial visit to Green Park Elementary:

It is embarrassing to go back and think that we were slamming them for not doing Open Court and they were doing the stuff that we're asking people to do now [three years later]. They were doing guided reading groups and they got some pretty harsh comments back from central office because we were looking for something different. It's humbling to think about that. There was some good instruction happening that we weren't able to recognize at the time.

Cathy's insights about central office leaders' inability to recognize features of more complex reading instruction illustrate what scholars have found to be the connections between expertise and noticing. Experts have an extensive knowledge base that informs what they notice and how they organize, represent, and interpret information in their environment. Their knowledge, in turn, affects their abilities to remember, reason, and solve problems (National Research Council, 2000). Robert shared his own reflection about his thinking after the walkthrough at Green Park Elementary:

We were concerned. When you don't know the work, you guide by secondary and tertiary indicators. Without knowing what we know now and need to continue to learn in the future, we were heavily influenced by the symbols. When your value system is these peripheral indicators versus classroom instruction, it's a completely different lens.

As highlighted in the previous example, Robert's comments pointed to the connection between expertise and the ability to notice the nuances and complexities of classroom instruction. During a planning meeting with a consultant in January 2006, Cathy and Robert shared how their thinking had changed since their walkthrough experiences at Green Park Elementary:

Cathy: We used to be really happy with a meeting area and turn & talk [classroom structures associated with effective reading instruction]. And that was it—woohoo! Now we realize there's more. But we couldn't see it even if it was there before. Remember that walkthrough, Robert, at Green Park Elementary?

Robert: Oh my gosh, yes, I'm so embarrassed.

Rebekah (Consultant): That's why I think that idea that we've got to see it before we can lead it is deceptive because you didn't know what you were seeing or not seeing. You just saw a meeting area for reading, and you were like, "Right on!"

As the conversation unfolded, Rebekah pointed out the important connection between knowledge about reading instruction and one's ability to analyze teaching practice. A "meeting area" and "turn and talk" are structures associated with certain approaches to reading instruction. Rather than sitting in desks, students sit in close proximity to the teacher and to each other in a "meeting area" in order to stay focused during instruction. When prompted to "turn and talk," students turn and face one another in order to have a conversation about their reading.

Although these structures were easy to recognize during a walkthrough, the deeper purpose—students engaging with text and with each other in sophisticated conversation—may go unnoticed by inexperienced eyes. What mattered more was the nature of student talk and by association student thinking, not the simple act of students talking to each other. Monique, the Director of Secondary Learning, shared how she came to better understand these structures and their relationship to good reading instruction:

I think that we had an incomplete understanding of what the walkthroughs were supposed to do. Now that I'm understanding them much more fully through my experience, I think I'm much more comfortable with them. I think the missing part was the thinking. What were the kids thinking? We had a hint of that at the end of last year, and it's been a profound change for me.

As central office leaders developed deeper and more nuanced understandings about reading instruction and how student thinking—rather than only a curriculum manual—guided instruction, the nature of the school walkthroughs changed. Rather than looking for surface structures such as meeting areas and turn and talk, leaders began to use walkthroughs as opportunities to gather data needed to inform future professional development.

Moving away from the initial perception of a walkthrough as an opportunity to assess compliance to a curriculum adoption, central office leaders began using the term “instructional visit” to signal a change in purpose. As they developed a more complex view of reading instruction (a change in thinking about instruction), central office leaders realized the immense need for professional development for principals, teachers, and school-based coaches. Thus, instructional visits were reframed as opportunities for

formative assessment (a change in instructional leadership practice) in order to adjust professional development to match school needs.

Once leaders began looking beyond surface classroom routines and structures, walkthroughs provided learning opportunities as they engaged in conversation with other professionals about instructional practice. The classroom was not only a context for student learning, but for leaders' learning as well, especially when consultants attended the classroom visits. Debrief conversations included more sophisticated questions, such as "How does student talk provide clues for instructional decisionmaking? Do our teachers know how to identify instructional needs as they listen to student conversations?" Although Emerald Sound leaders did not always have answers to these questions, they were beginning to analyze complexities of instruction that were lacking in previous walkthroughs.

The following conversation, which took place after an observation in a middle school language arts classroom, illustrates how consultants "taught" through debrief conversations. The conversation began with open-ended questions to elicit responses from school leaders—a way to surface and engage prior understandings—before the consultants shared their thinking. Notice how Kay and Anne used very specific language to talk about how they analyzed the classroom episode:

Kay (CEL consultant): One of the students said, "We are supposed to be expressing our thoughts." He really wanted them to "read their books, to use stickies on any conflict that they found anywhere." Then they were to "share their ideas with each other, and then at the end there were to formulate the group thought." I think he was trying to model by showing how those three separate conflicts from *The Most Dangerous Game* could be pulled together under one main idea. I think that was him trying to model the "how." But why are they doing this work?

Literacy Coach: He did say that reading is something you enjoy with others.

Anne (CEL program manager): Clearly, the kids love him; it's terrific . . . In order get a window into his thinking, I'd want to ask him, "So what does it mean to talk about literature in terms of how to scaffold kids' learning?" I'm thinking about how teachers can scaffold conversation moves . . . So what does it mean to discuss literature? Do we want the kids to have a one-sentence summary of the conflict? They can get that from the back of the book; or are there other things? Often as adults, we haven't had those opportunities ourselves. It's discussing literature as a window into student thinking about how they are making sense of the text.

Kay and Anne's comments were based on exactly what the teacher and students said during the lesson (e.g., "use stickies"), rather than a generalization about instructional practice. Although Robert was not active in this part of the conversation, he also asked specific questions about the instructional episode. This level of detailed analysis of instructional practice represented a significant change from his walkthrough experience as Green Park Elementary where he was looking for teacher manuals and sound cards.

What did central office leaders learn about walkthroughs? As the previous examples illustrate, the nature of walkthroughs changed over time, signaled in a basic sense by the participants' shift to the term "instructional visit." As leaders' understanding deepened about the complexity of reading instruction, they began to focus instructional visits on observing very explicit kinds of practice. In doing so, the visits shifted from being primarily about monitoring instructional compliance to being an opportunity for formative assessment (e.g., gathering data to inform future professional development).

In addition to having a better understanding of instruction, central office leaders developed a more robust knowledge base about how to support instructional

improvement along a developmental continuum, which had a direct influence on the nature of instructional visits. Knowing the ultimate goal for instruction was only part of the equation; giving teachers and principals feedback to take the “next step” was equally, if not more important. Instructional visits became the context for those conversations about improvement rather than a time for central office surveillance. The CEL program manager reflected upon this fundamental shift in thinking:

Central office leaders started with what I would call generic sort of walkthrough and visiting buildings the year before we came on board. And they were looking at things like checking for understanding, engagement, and rigor. But the fact is, they didn't have a whole lot to hang their hat on because they didn't know enough to know if what the kids were engaged in was rigorous. So, are the kids engaged? Yeah, they look like they're all doing something. Oh, are the kids talking? OK, good! They're talking. But now the leaders are saying, huh, you know, it's not as important that we see kids turning and talking. The important thing is, what are they talking about and how do we get it to higher and higher levels?

This statement, along with the earlier examples, provides a glimpse into how instructional leadership practice changed as leaders' understanding about instruction become more sophisticated. At first, surface elements such as students talking and teachers using adopted materials were the focus of observations, but as understanding deepened, leaders began to look for particular aspects of instruction. During the instructional visit to a middle school language arts classroom described earlier in this section, Robert shared his thinking with the school team—principal, literacy coach, and vice principal—about how he approached classroom observations:

One of the things I look for is who's doing the thinking, is it students or teacher, and among the students, is it all students, and then is it sometimes or always? You can really see Kylie [a teacher they just observed] is changing her practice. One of the next steps is how can she help the kids to do some of that thinking.

Clearly, this level of observation was more deeply connected to reading instruction than earlier visits that focused on having sound and letter cards posted or teacher manuals in view. In addition, Robert's comments represent his knowledge of how a particular teacher's practice has changed over time. This shows that rather than leading "from afar," he had personal knowledge of what has happening in at least some classrooms. His own learning about the role student thinking plays in instruction and how the teacher should not own the "thinking work" showed a more complex understanding of instruction. Thus, these leaders learned that walkthroughs served many purposes, ranging from gathering formative data about instructional trends to modeling for principals and coaches how to analyze instructional practice. Walkthroughs were no longer designed primarily to assess compliance, but rather served as opportunities for both learning and leading for school and central office leaders.

How did central office leaders learn about walkthroughs? Central office leaders began walkthroughs with a limited understanding of how these structures supported instructional improvement. While born from a desire to "know our schools," the early attempts were informed by general views of instruction and expectations for curriculum compliance. As these leaders began working with CEL consultants, walkthroughs became an opportunity to learn about instructional leadership alongside someone with a different frame of reference. Going into classrooms side-by-side with external consultants provided an opportunity for reframing what was being observed. The following statement from an initial walkthrough agenda provides evidence of how consultants influenced leaders' thinking: *As one of our [CEL] coaches pointed out, there are only three ways we*

can learn about instruction: watching students learn, talking to students about what they are learning, or looking at student work.

Unlike more traditional forms of professional development that are often disconnected from authentic work, the instructional visits with consultants allowed for learning in the midst of leaders' daily work. Walkthroughs represent a specific context for learning-while-leading. Drawing from a shared experience, such as visiting a classroom together, consultants and leaders (usually central office leaders, principals, and literacy coaches) talked together about what they observed. In February 2005, all four middle school principals gathered together with Kay, a CEL consultant, and Robert to do a group instructional visit. After visiting several classrooms, the group had a debrief session:

Robert: You [principal] opened up your school to let us muck around. My main focus is to talk about the role of the principal and how to move practice.

Principal #1: I know the teachers, where they've been and where they are headed. I was pleasantly surprised to see Matt not talking. The assistant principal and our literacy coach have spent time with him. Now that the students are running their own literature circles, he's not sure what to do. He's used to controlling the conversation.

Kay (CEL consultant): I'd love to encourage him to take notes about what students are saying. It gives him a focus. What are the patterns he notices in student thinking?

Principal #1: Matt's challenge is that he plans in his head; he's usually shooting from the hip. He's being pushed in many different areas these days. He's getting better.

This conversation not only represented a learning opportunity for the principals, but also for Robert. Kay modeled system-level instructional leadership as she gave

principals specific suggestions for supporting teacher learning. During the first year working with CEL, Robert and his central office colleagues had over 40 days to spend in schools with consultants like Kay, most often in the form of an instructional visit. Each building principal received four days of coaching, but central office leaders had the benefit of working alongside consultants in many schools. Given their desire to learn, it was not unusual for several central office leaders to join an instructional visit at a school they did not supervise.

As walkthroughs became more focused on analyzing instruction, central office leaders realized the need for all leaders in the system to deepen their capacities in this area. The monthly leadership seminars became a venue for discussing and practicing specific strategies for analyzing instruction. Observing demonstration lessons provided a hands-on opportunity to practice analysis in a structured learning environment. Although the environment was not completely authentic—a teacher and about 30 students surrounded by over 50 adult observers—it helped leaders gain skills to support their ability to analyze instruction beyond surface features.

During the October 2004 leadership seminar, Rebekah, one of the CEL consultants, shared strategies for analyzing her upcoming lesson:

We will look at scripting as data; scripting is the way a principal can gather data about what is going on in classrooms. Principals, you need to be able to give teachers specific ways to improve. There is no point in giving teachers feedback like this: “You did it wrong, do it better.” With a script, you can tell a teacher, “When you ask this question, students do this . . .” Do not just write down turn & talk—make sure you include the specifics of conversation. Turn and talk about what? Telling a teacher they did 23 turn & talks is not very helpful. That’s not enough. Jot down what students are talking about.

Rebekah continued the conversation by suggesting specifying things leaders should pay attention to during classroom observations (e.g., a teacher's "instructional moves," student responses to questions). She cautioned leaders not to include judgmental statements in their notes, but instead focus on scripting actual conversations as enacted during instruction. She warned, "As soon as you start being critical, you stop scripting."

Scripting lessons was one of the many specific skills leaders learned during leadership seminars that helped develop their capacity to leverage walkthroughs as a tool for instructional leadership. Using scripts to analyze interactions between students and teachers was a fundamentally different kind of leadership practice as compared to early efforts that focused on surface classroom features. The specificity of the conversation between Cathy and the elementary principal about the lesson on fractions (described in chapter 4) and the middle school classroom debrief earlier in this chapter illustrates how leaders used scripts to bring an important level of specificity into their conversations about instructional practice. In the math example, the principal knew precisely what one student had said about $\frac{5}{6}$ and $\frac{7}{8}$ in relation to the value of 1 because he had scripted the classroom observation.

How does this example relate to research on learning? The ability to analyze specific features of instructional practice is a critical component of an instructional visit. Although leaders may observe a classroom environment together, what they notice about instruction could vary greatly based on various factors. Research on the development of expertise indicates that experts have differentiated knowledge structures that allow for noticing nuances and specific properties that may be overlooked by novices (National Research Council, 2000; Schwartz & Bransford, 1998). Cathy and Robert's discussion

about their first walkthrough experience illustrated this point. They admitted their previous inability to “see” particular kinds of reading instruction due to their limited knowledge about literacy. As time passed, their ability to analyze instruction improved due to their deepening knowledge about instruction as well as the opportunities they had to witness how those with more expertise analyzed practice.

By viewing instruction together and listening to consultants explain what they noticed, leaders—including central office leaders, principals, and literacy coaches—began to grow their capacity to “see.” Understanding developed over time as leaders and consultants engaged in conversation about various aspects of instruction. Three well-established principles of learning—engaging prior understandings, the essential role of factual knowledge and conceptual frameworks in understanding, and the importance of self monitoring or metacognition (National Research Council, 2000)—shed light on how these conversations supported leaders’ learning about analyzing instruction. Debrief sessions usually started with open-ended questions that allowed those present to share their “prior understandings” about instruction. As consultants probed with questions and shared their observations, they made their thinking transparent and explicit—a form of metacognition—and modeled how content knowledge informs what observers “see” during an instructional episode.

This debrief strategy can be thought of as a type of “legacy cycle” of learning in which learning activities—in this case analyzing classroom instruction—are organized into an inquiry cycle that anchors learning in a shared experience (Schwartz, Brophy, Lin, & Bransford, 1999). The initial “challenge” was the simple question, “What did you see?” followed by open conversation and then access to “resources” or input from others

with more expertise. Although all members in the group observed the same instructional episode, there was a difference in the level of specificity used to describe observations. The differences, shared during the debrief conversation, set the stage for new learning, which in this case was a marked difference in the level of detail describing instructional practice.

The debrief conversations represented what researchers have described as “anchored collaboration” (Barron et al., 1995).

Anchored collaboration allows us to appreciate others’ perspectives because people from different backgrounds bring unique perspectives to a common problem or project. This has a powerful effect on appreciating others’ insights because it usually allows people to view a problem from new points of view. (Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1997, p. 120)

The conversations served as “anchors” of collective experience that were a potential source for learning. Rather than having general conversations about instruction, these leaders and consultants engaged in a level of specificity that promoted deeper understanding. Without the right level of specificity, discussions tend to be vague and participants may think there is common understanding that may not exist. The words may be the same, but shared meaning does not necessarily exist, which is an example of how knowing surface level facts without conceptual understanding often leads to misunderstandings and misconceptions (Fullan, 2005; National Research Council, 2000).

Anchored collaboration was not only apparent when external consultants were working with central office leaders. The five central office leaders made a concerted effort to work side-by-side whenever possible in order to calibrate their work with each other and continue their own learning. Dorothy and Cathy were often together in schools,

likely due to the fact that they shared the same job title. Anne reflected about how their ongoing partnership supported their learning:

Whether they're in classrooms or professional development sessions, they have some common stuff from which to talk about. So it's very different when you've actually got the artifacts, real artifacts to talk about—be it student work, be it a classroom vignette, be it you heard the same speaker, whatever the stuff is. It's not just theoretical. It's not just this sort of trading of activities—I go into classrooms. I go into classrooms [too]. I look for purpose. I look for purpose [too] . . . It's powerful for them to have that person to sort of push back against, “Well, this is what I'm thinking. Is that what you got from that?”

This type of anchored collaboration allowed central office leaders to model ongoing professional learning for other educators in the system (e.g., teachers, principals), as well as model conversation grounded in artifacts of practice rather than relying on more general ideas, buzzwords or slogans (Ball & Cohen, 1999) about instruction.

What leadership dynamics were at play in the context of instructional visits? The notion of school and central office leaders focusing on instruction as a core aspect of leadership has become common rhetoric among both practitioners and scholars (e.g., Elmore & Burney, 1998; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Supovitz & Poglinco, 2001). However, this example of learning-while-leading suggests a shift in priorities—from managerial to instructional issues—requires much more than simply adjusting how leaders spend their time and focus attention. This example highlights how these leaders' knowledge of instructional practice directly influenced the quality of feedback they provided. Even when attention is focused on instruction, what leaders actually “see” is directly related to their expertise (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003).

There may be leadership costs associated with principals and central office actors doing walkthroughs if they are not well grounded in ideas associated with the goals of a

particular reform (Hubbard et al., 2006). In this case, a limited understanding of reading instruction lead to feedback that was originally superficial, and not necessarily helpful for improving instruction. Toward the end of data collection, these central office leaders shared their concerns about the likelihood of principals “knowing less than teachers” and giving not only vague or surface feedback, but potentially wrong or misguided feedback. This issue of leaders’ ability to adequately analyze instruction becomes a critical issue as systems consider various ways, including walkthroughs, to evaluate teaching performance.

From Generic Pedagogy to Instruction Guided by Subject Matter Knowledge

The previous example of how leaders developed their capacity to “see” during instructional visits leads to an important question: What is the role of subject matter knowledge in instructional leadership? According to Stein and Nelson (2003), leaders need to “recognize good instruction when they see it,” but given the previous discussion illustrated how the ability to recognize is informed by a particular knowledge base. Shulman (1986) used the term “subject matter content knowledge” to describe the kind of subject matter knowledge teachers needed in order to teach effectively. (This is different than pedagogical content knowledge that integrates subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.) This included the ability to define for students the “truths in a domain.” Ball and McDiarmid (1990) asserted this kind of knowledge “encompasses an understanding of the intellectual fabric and essence of the subject matter itself” (p. 439).

This next example of the learning-while-leading cycle shows how these central office leaders came to understand the role of subject matter knowledge in instruction. The

following quote from Jackie, the Assistant Superintendent, summarizes a major theme of leaders' learning in relation to their instructional reform work—the difference between general instructional approaches (e.g., using cooperative learning, asking intellectually robust questions) and teaching “moves” that rest on a deep, subject-specific knowledge base:

I've learned that knowing content deeply is critical for leaders, and I don't think I knew that with conviction before I was here. Most of my professional development in those areas I would say now was surface. They were more process or thin lenses from which to view work rather than deep, not only content and pedagogy together. I can see the difference now that I've been exposed to it. I wouldn't have been able to see the difference if I hadn't been exposed to the CEL work.

As leaders began to understand the role of subject matter knowledge in instruction, they began to see related implications for leadership practice. While all five leaders came to their central office leadership positions after experiencing a certain level of instructional success at the school level, all shared feelings of inadequacy about their subject-specific instructional knowledge, especially in the area of reading instruction. As leaders' thinking moved beyond generic pedagogical structures (e.g., student engagement, levels of questioning), they began to develop a more nuanced and sophisticated view about how deep subject matter knowledge influenced instructional decisionmaking. Coupled with a growing understanding of what they knew was an acknowledgement of how much more they needed to learn.

Leaders' understanding of reading instruction changed significantly as they worked closely with CEL consultants and visited classrooms in New York City and San Diego. One example can be observed in how leaders changed their thinking about the

meaning and underlying structures of the Independent Reading component of the district's literacy initiative. (See Appendix E for a detailed definition of this and other components of Balanced Literacy.) In July 2004, Dorothy and Cathy composed a letter to their elementary principals that outlined expectations for the upcoming 2004-2005 school year. The expectations were based on the previous years' learning initiated and supported by CEL consultants. The letter identified specific expectations for changes in reading instruction:

As you think about the work ahead, plan carefully so that you can make the most of launching the work in August. Knowing that your staff will be expected to implement Read Aloud by December and Independent Reading by June, what supports will they need in order to make these components a part of their daily practice? Plan backward in order to provide supports for them to be successful.

While the suggestion to implement Independent Reading by June made sense to these leaders at the time, and gave principals very specific performance targets for the upcoming school year, by November, Cathy, Dorothy, and others realized their initial expectations were unrealistic. As they began to better understand the complexity of Independent Reading—which assumes teachers have a deep knowledge base of reading instruction—these leaders realized the need to revise their original expectations. This new learning prompted changes in leadership practice, which in this case meant communicating a new vision of instruction and professional learning. Emerald Sound leaders worked with CEL consultants as they thoughtfully considered how to communicate the revised expectations to principals and literacy coaches.

During the debrief session after the November 2004 leadership seminar, the topic of how to prepare for Independent Reading came up because it had been explicitly stated

as an expectation for implementation in elementary classrooms. A central office leader who worked with school-based literacy coaches asked Rebekah if the coaches could “learn Independent Reading now so they won’t be learning it as they are doing it with teachers.” Rebekah responded with concern about what she believed to be unrealistic expectations:

Is Independent Reading next? Wow. Independent reading is a reflection of what we’ve taught. For Independent Reading you have to know 1000’s of texts. I will barely scratch the surface [of how to analyze text] with 3 hours. Your literacy coaches need an incredible amount of knowledge—24 hours at least—in reading and analyzing text together. I don’t know how to get them ready for Independent Reading in the next month.

Cathy added to the concern, sharing that people were still confused about the difference between Read Aloud and Shared Reading, and were not ready to take on Independent Reading. Rebekah replied, “The difference between Read Aloud and Shared Reading is subtle – they don’t understand what makes text more complicated. People will get better.” Rebekah shared her concerns in detail, and used the time to talk about subtle yet complex components of reading instruction:

Rebekah: Am I lazy or is my heart racing? I think we need to start with your definition of Independent Reading. What do you want with Independent Reading? Do teachers have classroom libraries?

Monique: You just said a whole lot of bad things.

Rebekah: I hate to rain on our parade. Independent Reading is about having a plan for every reader. I don’t know of any district that’s done this without lots of time to level¹¹ texts first.

¹¹ Leveling involves identifying the appropriate reading level of a particular text.

The conversation continued as Rebekah shared her concerns that the work was still growing, which meant Emerald Sound leaders and coaches were not yet ready for Independent Reading. She believed other skills—such as analyzing what made text challenging for readers—needed to be better understood before expecting people to implement Independent Reading. She shared about her experiences with similar issues in San Diego:

The knowledge a teacher needs [to support Independent Reading] is huge. Meaning is not the same thing as word calling. Teachers need to know how to organize classroom libraries for access, and they need to know what makes text hard. Independent Reading is truly a measure of what teachers have taught. Some of your people for the first time are looking at how to level books [*determine the reading level of a book*]. What is it that makes text more challenging? What's appropriate at multiple levels? That's where we fell all over ourselves in San Diego.

This conversation represented how leaders learned through professional dialog with external consultants who brought deep understanding and prior experiences to bear on the issues at hand. The adopted curriculum in Emerald Sound did not require teachers to deeply understand what made different texts challenging to read. In addition, many teachers used a computer program called Accelerated Reader that provided a numerically based system to identify reading levels; the teachers did not necessarily understand why books were rated in a particular way. A computer test—rather than the teacher—identified a student's reading level.

Cathy and Dorothy's letter in July 2004 outlined expectations that were based on their limited understanding about Independent Reading as an instructional approach. As their knowledge increased (a change in understanding), they realized the need to revise expectations (a change in leadership practice). The next month, along with input from

consultants, central office leaders explored options for revising the original expectation for implementing Independent Reading by the coming June. Making mid-course corrections was a necessary, but challenging part of their instructional leadership practice. The leaders wanted to maintain realistic expectations, but also knew that “changing their tune” might challenge their legitimacy as leaders. The group planned carefully how to justify and communicate their new thinking for principals and coaches:

Anne (CEL program manager): What would feed understanding as we build a foundation for implementing Independent Reading in the future? What makes text challenging? How to match text and readers? There are aspects that inform Independent Reading that would feed people. Push back on that idea. We want to honor what the district said we’re working on and still give people tools.

Monique: What would be the firmest to build on? We have been teaching kids as a group rather than as individuals.

Dorothy: Other than lip service.

Rebekah: When people don’t know what Independent Reading is, and we have Accelerated Reader and SSR [sustained silent reading] in place, then that slide will show up. How do we shift beliefs about Independent Reading? What does that time look and sound like?

During this conversation, Anne tried to help leaders re-frame their thinking and consider the revised expectations as a decision to slow down, rather than change course. Rebekah acknowledged that educators may learn new terms—in this case, Independent Reading—but will hold on to “slides” or old conceptions unless prompted to fundamentally change their thinking. She assumed many teachers were associating Independent Reading with SSR or Accelerated Reader. Although both structures include students reading books independently, the underlying philosophies—explained by Rebekah later in this section—

are very different. The conversation continued as they considered how to communicate the revised expectations to principals and school-based literacy coaches:

Kay (CEL leadership consultant): The depth won't happen yet; today's session about planning with standards seems to be plenty. Just looking at professional development for the rest of the year is big. I don't know where to go. It's a shame to change the current course.

Cathy: I think we just stay with text analysis.

Monique: Discuss for me again, that SSR doesn't equal independent reading.

District Literacy Coordinator: We could show them the big picture of Independent Reading, but we'll start here. They think it's coming. I'm trying to get them up for it so they get the big picture. We need to give them the rationale.

Kay: They've asked for it.

Jackie (Assistant Superintendent): I think we need to tell them that we've rethought and we want to be successful. We're not saying no [to teaching Independent Reading]; instead, we're starting here and will eventually get there, but not by June.

This conversation represented the challenge presented when leaders were learning in the midst of practice. While developing a deeper understanding of Independent Reading had value, such learning created a leadership challenge: How do we [central office leaders] change expectations with our losing credibility? Cathy and Dorothy could not turn back the clock and re-write their opening letter, but they could revise current and future expectations. The next step was figuring out how to communicate the change.

Just over a month after the previous conversation, as part of the opening of the January 2005 leadership seminar, Dorothy shared publicly how her thinking about Independent Reading had changed. There were clear connections between her public statement and the debrief conversation among leaders in November:

We have learned, the less you know the more simple things seem. The more I learn, the more complex it gets—like layers of an onion. Think back to Read Aloud—I was coming from a “read-to” lens. That’s easy, we’ll just add that strategy on. Then I learned about bringing kids close, the importance of text selection, teaching reading strategies, and the importance of Accountable Talk. Many teachers are already trying on Independent Reading. Lots of folks at least have a placeholder. Maybe right now it’s Accelerated Reader or SSR [Sustained Silent Reading]. Eventually, it will be much richer. Having kids reading “just right” books [matched to reading level] is critical for Independent Reading. In order to lead the work, we must have a good working knowledge of reading instruction.

Dorothy chose to signal a change in thinking about expectations by sharing her own learning rather than saying the leaders had been “wrong.” As learning happened, thinking changed, which caused the revision of expectations. Rebekah began her teaching time that day by explicitly reinforcing the message in Dorothy’s opening:

Our goal for students is independence. What do teachers need to know to make that happen? Dorothy, what you said—the less you know, the simpler it looks—is so true. Independent Reading, how hard is it? It’s crucial. When I taught 4/5th grades, I thought challenging text was longer, smaller print and harder words. That was before a lot of professional study. Independent Reading is a time when instruction is happening, practice is happening; kids are in “Just Right” books. It is not DEAR [Drop Everything and Read], SSR, Teacher Time, and not a time for teachers to model reading. It is not a time to “hang out with books”. In Independent Reading, students are practicing what teachers have taught.

Although there was not an official, public announcement of a change in expectations about implementing Independent Reading by the end of the year, leaders, including Rebekah, sent the message in more subtle ways. Once leaders had a more refined definition of Independent Reading, their questions, and in turn their learning, shifted to issues of creating opportunities for teachers and leaders to develop knowledge in four key areas (reading standards, text selection, reading behaviors, and student needs) necessary for Independent Reading to happen. Gaining mastery over each area would require

significant time in order for deep learning to occur. Developing deep understanding about state reading standards, how to select appropriate texts for individual students, and how to teach reading behaviors can be associated with Shulman's (1986) description of the kind of complex knowledge teachers need to be successful. Given their new understanding of the complexity involved, central office leaders knew expecting Independent Reading implementation in three months no longer made sense.

What did central office leaders learn about subject matter instruction? The fact that subject matter knowledge plays an important role in instruction is something that many people would agree to on the surface, but what does that really mean? For central office leaders, the work with CEL consultants brought them to a deeper, more specific understanding of how a specific knowledge base about reading instruction impacted teaching practice. Rebekah used a handout (see Figure 5.2) to illustrate the knowledge teachers needed to plan for Independent Reading.

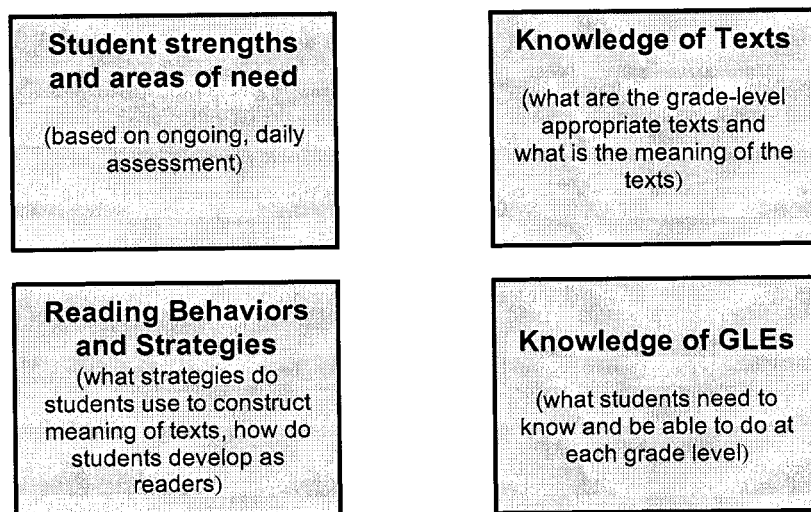


Figure 5.2. Planning based on students' needs.

During a time for small group discussion set aside for participants to look over the new handout, Cathy told Rebekah that her diagram (Figure 5.2) was very powerful:

Cathy: The four circles diagram was very powerful; it is a valuable take away. Principals needed to know how today fits into the overall work of Independent Reading, at least that was the push back that we got.

Rebekah: I'm sure people are thinking, "ignorance was bliss—it was easier before I knew." I don't want us to be totally overwhelmed. Knowing why Open Court gets harder is important; it's a window into understanding text more. It will help us for Shared Reading, and looking at GLEs [Grade Level Expectations set by the State]. This is where the rubber hits the road. This is just the tip of the iceberg. I haven't touched reading behaviors.

This handout, and the conversation it prompted during the leadership seminar was an important instructional tool used by Rebekah to help leaders and coaches in Emerald Sound begin to understand the complexities of reading instruction, and the specific subject matter knowledge that was necessary when planning for Independent Reading instruction.

As central office leaders interacted with consultants with deep subject matter knowledge of math and literacy, they came to understand the difference between surface level instruction and instruction that was informed by deep subject matter knowledge. They came to realize that a skilled language arts teacher might not be equally skilled in teaching science, given the different knowledge bases needed to teach each subject well. Robert reflected that observing a high school language arts consultant working side-by-side with teachers helped him to better understand the importance of subject matter knowledge:

She has a very specific knowledge base, and she gave some very deep feedback that was a different kind of feedback [than the coaches working with high school transformation]. It just illustrates that you can only get so far without somebody sharing some really deep content with you.

Robert was comparing the kind of subject matter-specific coaching provided by the CEL consultant with coaching teachers had received from a different organization focused on helping the traditional high school break into smaller learning communities. This kind of embedded “content-focused” coaching (West & Staub, 2003)—which at times involved in-the-moment suggestions about teaching moves—was a very different kind of coaching model than what leaders had experienced before. For example, in order to help a teacher better understand how to confer with students about their reading, the CEL consultant modeled a student conversation, and then had the teacher “try on” a similar conversation with a different student. Afterwards, the consultant provided specific feedback to the teacher and asked her to try another conversation with a third student, making changes based on the feedback she had just received. The conversation was content-specific, rooted in knowledge about how students make meaning from what they read, and the kinds of questions teachers can ask to understand student thinking. Next, the teacher and consultant discussed how the student conversations informed future instructional decisions.

As central office leaders observed model lessons and coaching work in specific classrooms, as well as engaged in professional dialog with consultants and peers, their vision of high-quality instruction changed. Specifically, these leaders gained a new awareness of the complexity of instructional planning and decisionmaking that required a deep knowledge of subject matter in addition to knowledge about how students learn and

what appropriate performance looks like across grade levels. This new knowledge caused changes in leadership practice, especially in the area of professional development. As their vision of instruction became increasingly more complex, so did their plans for professional learning.

How did central office leaders learn about the role of subject matter knowledge in instruction? The phrase “seeing is believing” aptly describes one important way central office leaders came to understand the importance of subject matter knowledge in instruction. The opportunity to watch consultants work in various settings gave leaders the opportunity to see clear differences between what was going on in most Emerald Sound classrooms versus what was instructionally possible. CEL consultants were not only *talking* about different kinds of instructional practice, they were *modeling* those practices with Emerald Sound students. In doing so, the consultants took away the ability for teachers, coaches and leaders to say, “That wouldn’t work with OUR kids.” Clark (former Academic Officer) reflected on the importance of seeing consultants working with “their kids” and with students in similar urban settings:

A consultant can come into a classroom and do wonders with our kids. I guess that’s one of the mantras we have in education—do you have to believe first? Well, I think that’s a real tough because we only know what we know. But if you can actually see it, well, maybe I could learn this. Somebody’s making it work with kids like mine. Somebody that puts on two shoes at a time like I do.

Observing demonstration lessons and visiting other classrooms set the stage for conversations about *how* consultants approached their work, and it was in conversation, as well as in observation, that learning about the role of subject matter knowledge took place.

For example, in the January 2005 leadership seminar, Rebekah modeled a second grade Shared Reading lesson, which leaders and coaches were expected to observe and script for later analysis. Rebekah provided an observation protocol to scaffold the scripting work—participants chose to script one of three lesson features: teacher questions, student responses, teacher moves. After the lesson, observers asked several questions about specific things that happened during the model lesson:

Principal: How do you know what students need?

Rebekah: I drive people nuts because people want a formula. There is no formula. My decisions are based on my purpose. It is important to help teachers learn how to take notes on their kids as they go in order to answer the question, “What am I learning about students now that will inform Independent Reading?”

Principal: What would you do next?

Rebekah: For the next 25 shared readings, I would work on inference, [often using the question] “That’s what the text says, so what does it mean?” Next time, let’s do more than one read with the same group of students. [Shared Reading] is not just a Read Aloud on an overhead.

As seminar participants interacted with Rebekah, she continued to answer “next step” questions in ways that highlighted the deep knowledge base that informed her practice. She often spoke about teachers “doing the best with what they know” and pressed school and central office leaders to think about how to provide ongoing, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers. These leaders’ learning did not stop with conversations about instruction. Principals, coaches, and central office leaders often returned to schools, assumed the role of a teacher and “tried on” different kinds of instructional practice. In doing so, they bridged what business literature refers to as the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

How does this example relate to research on learning? This example—leaders coming to understand the role subject matter knowledge plays in instruction—supports research that identified a complex, subject-specific knowledge base that underlies high-quality instruction (Ball & Bass, 2000; Ball & McDiarmid, 1990; Shulman, 1986). This means not only having deep knowledge of a subject, which builds upon Bruner’s (1960) notion of the “structure of knowledge” that includes the theories, principles, and concepts of a particular discipline, but also understanding how students come to know and understand particular kinds of content. Not all educators know what having deep content knowledge, and more importantly pedagogical content knowledge, actually means in practice. Jackie, the Assistant Superintendent, reflected on her learning about the difference between knowing content and knowing strategies:

Rebekah’s work to me is always about what is the content we’re needing to learn in literacy and how does that line up to rigor as we’re defining it for Washington State, rather than here’s a strategy you can use in literacy. An important question is, what are you teaching to in literacy? Strategy comes in too, but after this year, I’m deeper in my knowledge of what those look like. I wouldn’t have known the difference unless I had this experience.

While the notion of pedagogical content knowledge directly relates to teachers, leaders who make instructional analysis and professional development a central feature of leadership practice benefit from having such subject-specific understanding as well. For example, according to Nelson and Sassi (2005), principals with conceptual knowledge of mathematics have advantages over those who lack deep understanding because it gives those principals the ability to follow student mathematical thinking and better judge a teacher’s ability to adequately handle student misconceptions.

The ability to understand and compare the difference between generic, “content-neutral” instructional approaches and those driven by a sophisticated understanding of a particular subject matter represents a kind of “contrasting case.” According to learning scientists, a powerful way to help people learn is to have them examine contrasting cases in order to identify distinct features of a given phenomenon (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999; Gibson & Gibson, 1955; Schwartz & Bransford, 1998). As a result, learners develop a structured account of what they perceived, and can adapt their current models based on new information. According to Bransford and Schwartz (1999):

Experiences with contrasting cases can affect what one notices about subsequent events and how one interprets them, and this in turn can affect the formulation of new hypothesis and learning goals.

Contrasting cases can address the fact that novices often miss important ideas because they lack the differentiated knowledge structures commonly associated with experts (Schwartz & Bransford, 1998). For example, participants in this study struggled with understanding the difference between a Read Aloud and Shared Reading as they began to learn about a new, more open-ended approach to reading instruction. The differences between the two strategies contrasted in delivery—reading from a book versus reading from an overhead—but the instructional nuances was not easily seen by novice eyes. (Appendix E provides a more details description of Balanced Literacy terms.)

While the reading strategies may have lacked clearly recognizable contrasts, the nature of instruction provided by consultants was quickly seen as fundamentally different than what happened in most classrooms. Two cases were not held up side-by-side for comparison, but instead the adults’ extensive experiences in “traditional” instruction

provided a stark contrast to the new instructional models provided by consultants. Monique's description of a CEL consultant's work in a high school language arts classroom illustrated this point:

I've seen a lot of high-performing secondary school students in rich districts but I haven't seen very many high-performing, intellectual conversations in real poor schools. And so, you know, she was the miracle worker. We're seeing good work with hard kids being intellectual and analytical about text. We've not seen that before.

Monique and others witnessed a fundamentally different kind of conversation between the CEL consultant and the students than she had seen in the same classroom on prior occasions. Jackie, the Assistant Superintendent, shared how seeing contrasts gave her a new lens for "seeing":

Every time then that I do a walk-through at a school, I have one more layer to interpret deeper practice in order to see what's happening in that classroom. A year ago, I would only have been able to look at periphery pieces. I might be able to say the teacher is teaching an objective, not knowing how the objective is deeply tied to standards, or deeply tied to the strategy. It was much more superficial. Last year I could sit down and listen to students talk about the character. The deeper work is [to ask the student] "Tell us about what's in the heart of the character, tell us what the character is thinking, tell us about the process . . ." It's the metacognition of what you're learning. I remember one of our high school Principals saying, "Gee, it's like I'm getting a PhD program in literacy because we think we know content, but we always don't."

From a learning perspective, the consultants provided contrasting cases of instruction, which not only set the stage for new instructional possibilities, but also gave observers an opportunity to closely examine how one instructional approach differed from another. Although observing demonstration lessons may seem to be a passive way to learn, using the lens of contrasting cases helps to explain how adults can learn from workshop environments. While only observing a single case of instruction, their personal

experiences in classrooms act as the contrast between new models and prior understanding.

The use of contrasting cases also potentially creates a sense of disequilibrium that can prompt future learning (Piaget, 1977). In addition to helping to create a sense of disequilibrium by showing how students in this district could perform when given a particular learning environment and high quality instruction, consultants provided a critical learning support through their ability to talk explicitly about how they planned for, enacted, and adjusted their practice to meet student needs. Novice observers were not left alone to figure out the differences between contrasting cases, but those with more expertise helped participants make sense of what they saw.

What leadership dynamics were at play as leaders learned about the role of subject matter knowledge in instruction? This second example of the learning-while-leading cycle is closely related to the first in the sense that a leader's expertise influences their ability to observe instruction, especially if the hope is to look beyond surface features of the classroom. In this example, the discussion focused on the role of subject matter knowledge in teaching practice. A key question emerges related to leaders' knowledge of subject matter: How can leaders be expert in all subject areas in order to adequately observe and evaluate teaching practice? The answer is simple, realistically, they can't. However, it may be possible for leaders to develop deeper understandings of subject matter in at least one content area.

Stein and Nelson (2003) use the term "postholing" to describe how a leaders who are deeply rooted in one subject area might be able to dig down "deeply enough in a small but representative slice of knowledge" (p. 443) in order to develop understanding in

other subject areas. While this notion may be theoretically possible, Ball and McDiarmid's (1990) research on teachers' understanding of subject matter illustrates why Stein and Nelson's assumption may be problematic:

Most prospective teachers have few, if any, opportunities in school, college, or the wider culture to come to understand the substance and nature of their subject matter or to develop dispositions that would enable them to teach in ways that their students, in turn, can understand in meaningful, connected ways.

If teachers often lack "deep" understandings about subject matter, it is likely that the same holds true for school and district leaders.

The structures of leadership in school systems also perpetuate the problem of leaders overseeing something they may not know deeply. Robert shared how leadership structures supported the notion that content knowledge was not as important as knowing "good instruction:"

It became very clear to me that my job [high school vice principal] was to be on some level an expert. Not that I was an expert. But, you take that mantle of responsibility on. It's not long before you realize, OK, I am supervising math teachers, language arts teachers, deaf and hard-of-hearing teachers, and I don't sign, Spanish teachers, and I don't speak Spanish. Pretty soon you figure out the content doesn't matter—you have to "know good instruction" because obviously this is the job. They've given me a lot of responsibility to do this job and obviously it's the job. Well, what we learned through our work with CEL is you need to know content deeply, and you learn that by finding people who know content deeply.

Robert's exposure to instruction that was grounded in subject matter knowledge helped shift his thinking about what constituted "good instruction." Although there may be generic "best practices" associated with teaching any grade level or subject area, research has shown that teaching for understanding is not content-neutral (National Research Council, 2000; Shulman, 1986; Stein & Nelson, 2003). While there is a place for general

instructional practices that cut across disciplines and settings (e.g., establishing routines, asking open-ended questions, and engaging student thinking), instruction designed to help students develop deep understanding in any discipline requires teachers to know their content well (Ball & Bass, 2000; Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003). It may be that leaders need to also know at least one content area well, not only to appropriately evaluate teaching practice, but also to create the kind of professional learning opportunities that will help teachers develop the subject matter knowledge necessary to support all students' needs.

Looking Across Examples

Three key themes emerged as I compared these two examples of the learning-while-leading cycle. First, knowledge is constructed, based on prior understandings and experiences, and it is important to take this issue into account when supporting anyone's learning, whether is about what to look for in a classroom observation, or how to support teacher learning about literacy instruction. Second, anchored collaboration provided an opportunity for leaders to develop and learn within the context of a professional community of peers and external support providers. And third, the use of contrasting cases can be a way to help leaders notice easily missed features and attributes of a given phenomena, be it "teacher moves" during classroom instruction or how students to make meaning from text. In the context of education, personal experiences as students, teachers, and leaders provide one set of "cases" while interaction with outside experts and

those working in other educational settings (e.g., San Diego, District 2) can be the contrast needed for comparison.

Figure 5.3 builds upon Figure 5.2 presented earlier in this chapter by adding two important factors that supported central office leaders' learning in this study: the ongoing infusion of expertise and anchored collaboration within a professional community.

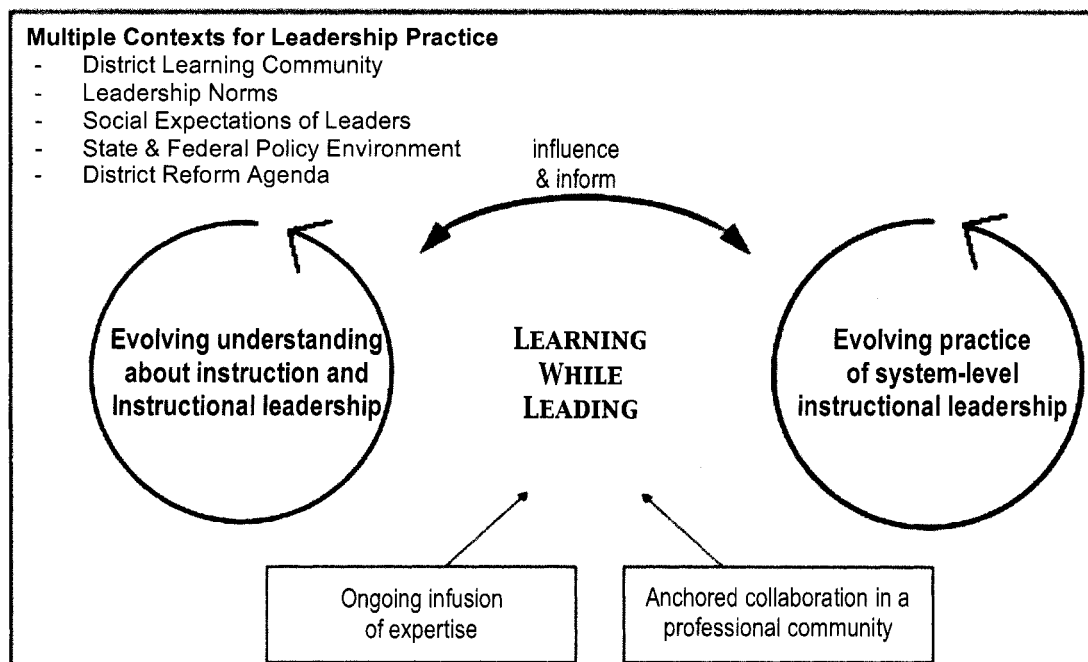


Figure 5.3. Learning-while-leading (revised).

The first factor is the role the professional community played in how central office leaders in Emerald Sound engaged in system-level instructional leadership. School district leadership is emotionally demanding work, especially when that work includes initiating change in a system that often resists change (Fullan, 2001). All of the central office leaders in this study shared about the important role the community played in both their leading and their learning. They came together on a regular basis to plan, strategize,

support, and learn from one another. Jackie said the team was unlike any she worked with in her two previous district settings:

Unless you've seen it, I don't know how to explain to someone else the difference. They all respect each other; they want to be as consistent as possible—when it's important to be consistent. They'll take on a piece for one another. They'll learn and say, ooh, you write the best instructional letters. Let me take that. Ooh, you're the best organizer. Let me take that. It's so unique.

Monique echoed Jackie's sentiments:

It wouldn't be fun to be here if it wouldn't be for the absolute respect and trust that I have of the people I work with. I don't see egos. I don't see silo building. I don't see backbiting. I don't see duplicity. I don't see zealots and I don't see orthodoxy, that there's only one way and it's my way. I love the conversation.

It is important to remember that Clark handpicked four out of the five members of this team based on two criteria: being a learner and a team player. Jackie also said a key question during her interview process was about her ability to be a team player.

The second factor—the ongoing infusion of expertise—was also an important part of leaders' learning. The cycle of learning might have occurred without input from external consultants, but those external voices helped to keep leaders from falling into a community that does what McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) described as sharing and reinforcing ineffective practice. Consultants provided new visions of what was possible in urban systems as well as ideas about how to move the system toward such a vision. More importantly, the consultants were there on an ongoing basis over time in order to adapt their work to the changing context. Leaders were not always ready for what consultants had to offer—as was the case when consultants questioned leaders' rationale for having literacy coaches working with teachers in any high school department rather

than focusing on language arts teachers. The leaders shared how the consultants had influenced their thinking and practice related to instructional improvement. Robert reflected on his early learning alongside consultants during walkthroughs:

In three days of walkthroughs, I might see a Read Aloud modeled eight times with maybe four at primary and four at intermediate. The consultants were using different books and emphasizing different skills in each classroom. That was very, very powerful for my learning.

Dorothy talked about Kay's ability to help her think through leadership issues:

Kay has such a deep knowledge of the leadership part, but she knows the literacy work too. She has been in the principal role; she has been in my role as a central office person—both of them. She also knows the political part of it, that you can't just ramrod it. There's that political nature to it, and you have to finesse things.

Whether is was learning about specific kinds of teaching practice or general issues of instructional leadership, CEL consultants played an important role in keeping reform conversations from becoming stagnant or limited to what was happening in local schools. By sharing expertise, insights, and experience, the consultants helped broaden leaders' perspective of what was possible as well as what might be done to move the system. The next chapter explores how the evolving nature of the partnership between CEL and the Emerald Sound School District helped to create a context to support leaders' learning about prompting, supporting, and sustaining instructional improvement across the system.

Chapter 6. **How-Learning-While-Leading Was Facilitated Over Time**

While chapter 5 provided examples of how central office leaders came to understand and exercise system-level instructional leadership, the focus of the discussion was on the leaders' learning. This chapter takes a different analytic angle by examining the conditions that enabled and supported the learning-while-leading cycles in Emerald Sound, specifically those associated with the work of the Center for Educational Leadership (CEL), the third-party organization that worked with the district. Three key themes emerged from the data that helped understand how learning-while-leading was facilitated over time: (a) the evolving nature of the district-CEL partnership, (b) CEL's role in creating and adapting contexts for leaders' learning, and (c) system-level distributed leadership as a vehicle for supporting learning-while-leading.

The previous two chapters provided glimpses of the nature of facilitation between CEL actors and Emerald Sound leaders. For example, Norma facilitated leaders' learning about how to convey their "leadership voice" in their instructional letters as she shared models from her previous experience working as a central office leader in San Diego. In another example, Anneke supported leaders' learning about new models of professional development when she designed the trip to New York City to visit a classroom residency. All of the leaders who traveled to New York City mentioned this experience as significant in developing their understanding about how to support professional learning for teachers, literacy coaches, and principals. Finally, the side-by-side classroom walkthroughs with CEL consultants illustrate how leaders' learning was continuously and intentionally facilitated as part of the partnership between organizations. As consultants

pointed out nuances of instructional interactions during classroom observations, they scaffolded central office leaders' learning by helping them “see” instruction in more sophisticated ways. The next section explores how this facilitation story evolved over time.

*The Evolving Nature of the District-CEL Partnership:
Looking Back over Three Years of Collaboration*

The first theme associated with how learning-while-leading was facilitated over time focuses on the nature of communications and interactions between CEL and district actors—specifically how the relationships changed over time and how this change impacted leaders' learning about leading instructional improvement. According to the Director for the Center of Educational Leadership, an important goal for the organization is to “work themselves out of a job.” This means their district partnership work was designed to build the capacity of district staff in order to eventually carry on the reform work without such intensive support from external consultants. However, the Emerald Sound Superintendent believed external partners would always play a support role in some capacity:

I believe we can't do this alone. We don't have the expertise to get all of our kids to reading, writing, and math at grade level, get all of our kids graduating on time and ready for college and career. We cannot do this alone. And so the partnership piece is going to be the way we will get there from here until eternity. We will never not have partners. (Gallucci et al., 2005, p. 1)

In the beginning, the CEL consultants—who were carefully selected for their expertise as well as their “match” with district needs—provided the kind of expertise about

instruction, professional development, and leadership that would help improve the system. According to the Superintendent, the system alone lacked such expertise. Consultants brought professional knowledge and insights informed by previous educational experience in districts such as New York City's (former) District #2, San Diego Unified School District, and Chicago Public Schools (Gallucci et al., 2005). In addition, Anne, the CEL program director, brought a set of outside eyes informed by reform work across the country. She was essentially a resource broker who matched consults with district needs; she also played a critical role in weaving together conversations between the various actors. What follows is an overview of how the reform work emerged over the first three years of the partnership, specifically in terms of the interactions between central office leaders and various CEL players, and how these interactions allowed consultants to “bring capacity to build capacity.”

A brief walkthrough of the first three years of this relationship between an external resource organization and district leadership team reveals an evolution in the leaders' capacity to absorb and enact what the “work” was all about. The process was one of capacity building, in which the external resource organization had to *bring capacity* initially in order build the appetite, understandings, and skills of the central office leaders, and to support their progression through ongoing learning-while-leading cycles.

Year One (2003-2004): We Need Help, Can You Save Us?

During initial interviews in the fall of 2004, study participants provided retrospective data—including artifacts such as written protocols and e-mail messages—about their work during the first year of the partnership between CEL consultants and

Emerald Sound leaders. Anne used the metaphor of a dinner invitation to describe the nature of the partnership in the first year:

We were strangers knocking on other strangers' doors trying to just be polite enough to get our foot wedged in the door to then have the door be opened so we could actually sit down at the dinner table and demand the meat and potatoes that we really wanted. We needed to just be in there long enough to let the work speak for itself and to build enough of a relationship [to make it work]. But we were *really* building the plane as we were flying. I was hired in July and Clark wanted consultants in August, so we scrambled—every month we scrambled.

The “scrambling” included the initiation of the monthly leadership seminars as well as school walkthroughs that brought central office leaders together with consultants at the school level. While central office leaders had a strong sense of moral purpose and urgency around reform, they did not have clarity about how to improve. Anne described how leaders continually looked to consultants for help:

The district leaders really came with a lot of heart and urgency about how to do this. They would say, “You gotta have help figuring this out.” The first time I met some of these folks, I had a big hug from one leader who said, “Oh, you’re just going to save us.” I thought, Oh, my gosh, I’m not going to save anybody. But they had that sense that somebody’s going to tell us what we need to do.

Consultants did not bring specific answers for all the pressing problems in Emerald Sound, but instead they began to provide leaders with new ideas, understandings, and experiences about what was possible in an urban school district.

During that year, Robert, Dorothy, and Cathy did not supervise principals, but yet participated in school walkthroughs with CEL consultants as way to learn about “the work.” They were part of a larger group of central office leaders who held mainly support, rather than supervisory, positions (e.g., Director of Assessment, Special Education, and Curriculum Specialist), and were assigned to “coaching teams.” Each

team had a liaison assigned with the responsibility of ensuring coherence of instructional leadership and communication of the primary purpose of “the walk.” The protocol form also included explicit language reminding participants that the purpose was for central office leaders’ learning as opposed to evaluating a teacher or principal.

According to Clark, the former top academic officer, the early walkthroughs were disjointed because they were not connected to an overall system of professional development. He described his initial experiences with consultants (referred to here as coaches):

The walks were done by a half a dozen different people. So, to some extent, we were all feeling different parts of the elephant. It is so nuanced in terms of having a coach that knows the work, knows how to lead, and knows how to coach. Some consultants can help you figure out how to lead, but they don’t necessarily know what [*instruction*] they’re trying to lead. Others know what to lead, but they’ve never been a principal, so they don’t know how to lead it. And some know those two, but they don’t know how to coach. So, it was kind of like, well, I’m here from wherever and I’m going to tell you everything that I know.

Clark’s comments highlighted the fact that the first year of the partnership was also a learning experience for CEL as an organization. A key issue that emerged was how to match external consultants with the needs of the system.

For Clark and other central office leaders, the first year of on-site work with consultants gave them an opportunity to observe instruction with an “expert other.” In addition, they learned to voice their opinions about the success or challenges associated with various outsiders. Some consultants were not invited back for future work.

According to Clark, the decision to cut ties with at least one consultant sent a message to others about the need to work differently in Emerald Sound than they may have worked in other districts:

That [“firing” a consultant] sobered some of the other coaches, I’m told, in retrospect, which might have been good. I don’t know. In that they did need to walk gingerly because we knew that we didn’t want to go where San Diego went.

The reference to San Diego meant that Emerald Sound leaders did not want a top-down, authority-driven approach to reform. Consultants had to earn the right to be heard rather than automatically delivering difficult messages regardless of the audience. A common term in conversation was “Northwest Nice” as a way to describe how educators talked to one another, which was a change for consultants used to Alvarado’s more direct, passionate, tell-it-like-it-is approach.

In order to get a broader picture of “the work,” many people from Emerald Sound, including Dorothy and Cathy, visited classrooms in New York City and San Diego during the first year of the CEL partnership. The first year of work with CEL consultants gave leaders exposure to and experience with a different vision for the kind of instruction that was possible in urban classrooms. In addition, school and central office leaders engaged in initial experiences with the kind of instructionally focused leadership needed to support such instruction. Leaders increased their capacity to envision high quality instruction, beyond what was happening in local classrooms. During the first year, teachers were not a primary audience for CEL consultants, although they were certainly part of the school walkthroughs as leaders observed instruction in many classrooms.

As planning began for the 2004-2005 school year, leaders considered what they could do to begin moving the system in a new direction. With an initial vision and a driving moral purpose to improve, they began to think about the kinds of professional development opportunities they needed to create to support professional learning.

Monique shared her recollections of early planning meetings:

I was there in the forming meetings, and I was there in deciding what would be the priorities. I didn't know what we were talking about. I didn't know what coaches from New York and San Diego would really do and I didn't know what planning whole district professional development once a month would be. A lot of energy was spent on designing and figuring out how the initiative is working, how the partnership is working, who are these people and are they saying the same things, and what if they're not saying the same things?

With the myriad of consultant and CEL staff "voices" entering the conversation, leaders were sometimes frustrated about what felt like a lack of consistency and coherence.

Although trips to New York City and San Diego brought some definition to consultant words, the vision of where they were going and how to get there was only beginning to emerge. As leaders listened to many different voices, they tried to make sense of the messages. Clark likened the process to making sausage:

We would pull the coaches together, and that was a little bit like watching the sausage being made, in that we'd get all these diverse points of view from all of the coaches depending on which schools they were working with and what part of the "elephant" that they had seen. They kept saying, you just have to do this, you just have to do this, you just have to do this. You just have to get out there and do this. And I thought, do what!? Try on the work. Oh, OK, what would that mean? I had just enough information to say, "Oh, I kind of get it."

It was a vision that would continue to be refined and re-defined over time. The next year brought more consistency and coherence as they streamlined plans for working with a smaller group of CEL consultants on a regular basis throughout the year. This represented one kind of capacity that was emerging—the ability to coordinate and leverage external expertise. Leveraging external expertise also meant asking for specific feedback about the system and ideas about how to improve. Anne recalled a meeting in December 2003 where consultants gave central office leaders very honest feedback about what they noticed across the system:

We had one of our Saturday meetings, the Superintendent was there, Clark was there, Dorothy was there, all of our consultants stayed an extra night to spend four hours debriefing with them. Central office leaders said, “Tell us. Don’t sugar coat us. Tell us what we need to know about our district.” We told them. The consultants weren’t nasty about it, but they told them the truth.

This truth telling helped leaders plan their future reform work. One consultant used the terms “current” and “ideal” state as a way to help leaders frame conversations about what “was” and what they hoped to be, primarily in terms of instruction and leadership practice. However, despite a plan that improved coherence and consistency in terms of professional development and a more specified vision of instruction, challenges, confusion, and ongoing concerns about the wisdom of past decisions continued to emerge in conversation.

Year Two (2004-2005): We Trust Your Suggestions, But What Do They Mean?

The second year of the CEL partnership unfolded in a fundamentally different leadership context than the prior year. Clark became the Superintendent in a nearby district, and Robert, Dorothy, and Cathy assumed new central office roles that included responsibility for principal supervision. Jackie replaced Clark as the new top Academic Officer, bringing central office leadership experiences and perspectives from two other districts. She was familiar with CEL’s work, as she had attended several leadership seminars in Emerald Sound during the previous year, and had previous experience teaching in Emerald Sound.

The work with external consultants was more structured in the second year; a handful of leadership consultants were hired to work side-by-side with principals. Principals had four days with their assigned consultant, spread across the year.

Walkthroughs continued to be a common activity. Rebekah was hired to facilitate the monthly leadership seminars, which brought consistency of voice and message to those experiences. Several leaders mentioned the importance of having a common language to talk about reform efforts in order to minimize confusion. Monique believed their need for language consistency was indicative of their limited understanding, especially related to learning about different approaches to literacy instruction:

We're at such infancy in our learning that we need things to be the same way. Once we have more sophistication, we won't need that, but right now we do. We need the lexicon, we need the glossary, and we need the work tools for us to identify what is comprehensive and what is balanced and what's the difference? Balanced literacy has been used in a lot of districts [including San Diego and District 2]. But that now is tainted. It now comes with a political value next to it.

The meaning of words was a significant theme of the work during the second year of the partnership. As district leaders and coaches heard about new approaches (e.g., read aloud, shared reading, and accountable talk) they began to use those words to describe the reform work. However, the presence of common language did not indicate shared meaning. Anne described the partnership as ongoing negotiation and meaning making:

It's a partnership, which means that it's not just our ideas, but clearly they're contracting with us because we have something that they think they want. But the interesting rub is that they don't quite understand what it is; they're still in the process of defining the work. Helping people put better language to defining what the actual work is doesn't mean just telling somebody something. It's about teaching someone, but at the same time it's about being taught by where they are and making sure that the two work with each other. It's a lot of active negotiation and meaning making on both sides.

The kind of active negotiation Anne described was an ongoing feature of the partnership work. At times, the negotiation seemed to be driven by limited knowledge and misunderstanding, but at other times there was a difference in opinion about reform

strategies or what made the most sense given Emerald Sound leaders' understanding of their local context.

In the spring of 2005, during a session with literacy coaches, Rebekah (CEL consultant) had a self-described “tirade” about the use of language to describe the literacy work.

I was so fed-up with people saying, “We’re doing a Balanced Literacy initiative.” You’re not doing a Balanced Literacy initiative until you’re using all the components. We’re out of balance. We’re doing reading, there’s also writing. “I just spewed out this stuff that Jackie, Dorothy, and Cathy happened to hear for the very first time all at once. “You’re talking about powerful instruction. You’re talking about standards-based instruction, high levels of student engagement, rigorous questioning, reflective practice.” The literacy coaches were saying, “You’re right.” Dorothy was typing it out, Cathy was typing it out, and they said, “She’s re-framed it.” But it was really a tirade that I was on. I finally said, this is what I think you’re involved in—you can reject it, but this is what I think it is. It was a very big, ah ha, moment.

That moment was pivotal in how central office leaders thought about and spoke about the literacy initiative. Language about Balanced Literacy faded and the phrase “powerful instruction” became the focus. After that session, Dorothy sent out an e-mail that stated, “This message [about powerful instruction] needs to be repeated over and over by all of us and certainly from Rebekah in work this summer and as we begin the [next] school year.” As highlighted in chapter 4, a primary role for these system-level instructional leaders was the communication of an instructional vision, and clearly this is what Dorothy is talking about in her e-mail. However, Rebekah responded to the e-mail with a few words of caution:

May I push back a bit on that suggestion? Before we repeat ‘the message,’ I believe we still need to figure out the message. My suggestion: let’s discuss internally, as a leadership team, what the work really is about so that we can come to common understanding and clarity. The clearer we are and the more solid our

collective understanding is, the better we will be at improving instruction for students. Once we're clear on the message, then we'll be repetitive. Does that make sense?

A month later, central office leaders met with one of CEL's leadership consultants for a daylong retreat to plan for the upcoming year. One of the items on the agenda stated: *To clarify, deepen our commitment to, and design strategies for feedback into our emerging principles and components of powerful instruction.* The team talked about the initial list based on Rebekah's "tirade" and then added an additional component called "Reflective practice in improving our own learning." The conversation centered on how this approach to defining their vision for instruction would fit across grade levels and across content areas. The prior focus on approaches to reading instruction had—in their view—limited the conversations about how to improve practice. During the meeting, Monique said, "I would rather take those components as the drivers for the work than the strategy."

This example of Emerald Sound leaders collaborating with Rebekah to create a more focused and cross-cutting vision for instruction shows how interactions between CEL and district players was more give-and-take rather than CEL bringing answers that were unchecked by district leaders. While Rebekah may have seeded the idea, and helped leaders consider how, and when, to communicate the vision, the leaders took it upon themselves to add a component and make it their own. The honest and straightforward nature of the exchange also indicated a certain level of trust between players. The term "push back"—used in Rebekah's e-mail about communicating the "message"—was commonly used as Emerald Sound leaders and CEL actors engaged in problem solving

and planning together. Usually the term prefaced a new idea, concern, or question about the topic at hand, and also invited disagreement or honest feedback.

Year Three (2005-2006): We Have Ideas, But We Need Your Input

Year three of the partnership marked a new level of stability for both CEL and the district, partially due to the fact that Robert, Dorothy, Cathy, and Jackie were entering their second year in the same positions. Rebekah was going to spend a second year facilitating the monthly leadership seminars, and her background allowed her to easily embrace the central office leaders' decision to set aside three months to focus on math instead of literacy. The other CEL consultants were also consistent between the second and third years, with the exception of one who joined the team to work with elementary literacy. Although initially hesitant to add a new voice into the conversation, the group of leaders had grown to trust Anne's judgment and eventually agreed with her suggestion. After the new consultant's first visit to schools, they were very happy with the decision.

The residency model (described in chapter 4) began during the third year of the partnership. The idea was sparked by a visit to New York City and was refined over time with input from various CEL players, especially Anne and another CEL consultant. Cathy and Dorothy were the primary keepers of the vision, but they relied on input and suggestions from others as they planned for and implemented the model. After the first set of residencies in October 2005, several central office leaders met with Anne and CEL consultants to talk about what worked with the new model and future adjustments might have been needed. A concern emerged about the work in the struggling schools:

Consultant 1: Having two groups on the first day is tough intellectually and emotionally, but I think it's worthwhile.

Dorothy: Because you're changing at noon. You're going from one set of 12 people in the morning and then you have a whole different set in the afternoon.

Consultant 2: I found that it changes completely when I have the right people around the table. In some places, I can still assess the context in the first day, but I then really am able to whisper in their ears and move forward right from the beginning.

Anne: That raises a good point. When you are working with teachers who want to play, who want to be public, and with principals who want you in the building, it makes all the difference. [Consultant 2] is working in some schools that are not necessarily like that.

Cathy: The support system is lacking in some of those places.

Cathy's statement pointed to the fact that some of the residencies took place in schools that had been labeled as the most needy in the district. The original plan was to "go with the goers" and provide residency experiences in schools that had structures and people in place that indicated a certain level of readiness. However, the new Superintendent directed central office leaders to provide additional support for the "Focus Schools" and the residency was one example of that support. The conversation continued as the group brainstormed ideas about how to adjust the model:

Dorothy: I'm going to throw something out here, and everybody will probably lynch me for it after we've done all this preparation. By putting the struggling schools together in one group to provide more days of support, is that like putting all the low kids in the same group . . .

Consultant 2: . . . giving them the new teacher? [strained laughter]

Dorothy: To try and get sparks off of one another is pretty tough . . . we did this for the best of reasons, but did we fall into the same old trap of creating Buzzards

and Bluebirds reading groups? [a reference to traditional ability-level reading groups]

Anne: It's a great question that I know you continue to wrestle with—we know from doing this work that the rationale for having a residency [with a high caliber teacher] is to get some pretty good traction right away. That's why you pick high performing classrooms. Your intention for giving those targeted schools more focused support with more days make sense, but it begs the question if more days gives the right kind of support.

Dorothy: I don't know the answer to that. I know they need a whole lot more and a whole lot faster if we are going to accelerate learning for those kids.

The conversation lasted for an hour as the group grappled with tradeoffs of different models. In the purest form, a residency model assumed working with willing teachers who had a certain level of capacity to “move the work.” However, the new Superintendent's guidelines for supporting Focus Schools changed their original plans. As a result, there was an ongoing negotiation between the ideal model and the local needs. The consultants did not provide answers or tell leaders how to proceed; the conversation was a problem-solving dialog among professionals.

As some of the participants themselves noticed, there was noticeable growth in leaders' capacity to ask questions about how to sustain their reform efforts rather than basic questions about the “what” of reform. In addition, leaders seemed to be less concerned about the emotional aspects of reform work (e.g., were teachers happy?) and more concerned with what people were learning. A consultant working with high school language arts teachers described the changes in central office leaders from her perspective:

The first year they had no clue, last year they just were trusting, and this year they have opinions. It is not just about people being happy about the work. I've noticed people have moved past, “Oh, teachers are happy.” Now they say, “Teachers are

working hard and really getting smarter.” That value seems to have changed a bit. They ask, “What are teachers learning? What’s the student work that is coming out of your time together?” There is a change in what professional development is and what it means to work with an outsider. It is now about the work. That’s a real breakthrough.

Evolution in Partnership Relationship Across Three Years

Looking across the three-year partnership, it appears the interactions between CEL players and central office leaders evolved from a kind of direct instruction communication approach between teacher-learner to a peer coaching relationship, in the sense that while expertise differed, conversations were better characterized as a professional exchange of ideas rather than one group giving answers to another. All players did not have the same kind of expertise, but they engaged together in order to move “the work” forward. While consultants had extensive experience and knowledge about leadership and instruction, Emerald Sound leaders had expertise about local politics and system culture that is not always apparent to outsiders. In addition, the local leaders had “people knowledge” (Bransford, Lin, & Schwartz, 2000) that informed how various constituents interacted with or reacted to the reform initiative. As central office leaders developed a deeper understanding of the reform work, especially in terms of how to leverage relationships with consultants (a change in learning), their interactions with CEL changed, especially in terms of creating and sustaining professional learning opportunities across the system (a change in leadership practice). The next section provides a closer look at the kinds of contexts for learning (Fullan, 2005) that emerged as a result of CEL’s work in Emerald Sound.

CEL's Role in Creating and Adapting Contexts for Leaders' Learning

One of the most prominent features of the CEL-Emerald Sound partnership that facilitated leaders' development was the creation and ongoing revision of multiple contexts for adult learning. Although improved student learning was the ultimate goal for all involved, a major focus of instructional reform activity was the development of professional learning opportunities that were focused on math and literacy instruction and the leadership needed to bring about instructional improvement across the system. Emerald Sound had a long history of reform-oriented work with consultants, but CEL brought a level of depth, coherence and frequency that had not been seen before. In addition, the job-embedded nature of professional learning was in stark contrast to previous experiences that primarily relied on summer institutes and workshop models.

As outlined in chapter 3, CEL's approach included formal learning opportunities to help system actors "get smarter about instruction;" ongoing, side-by-side coaching with CEL consultants; and project management designed to help the system examine—and when warranted, alter—structures, policies, and practices across the district. Chapter 4 provided a window into understanding how some of CEL's work unfolded in Emerald Sound, specifically how the walkthrough structure evolved, and how consultants helped leaders develop a more sophisticated understanding about the role of subject matter in instruction. Each example represented the situated nature of knowledge that developed over time. Leaders' learning about instructional leadership was directly connected to the context in which their learning took place. For example, the trip to District 2 that allowed leaders to see a Teacher's College consultant do a "think aloud" in the midst of modeling

instruction was an “ah-ha” moment that pushed leaders’ thinking about how to better support teacher learning. It was not only the experience of watching the work unfold, but being away together for several days allowed for a level of planning and reflection that would have been difficult in their local setting where a multitude of issues demanded attention.

In addition, the collective learning experience likely played a significant role in how the future residency work unfolded. Monique, Dorothy, and Cathy frequently referred back to their shared experience as they planned and revised the residency model for Emerald Sound. Orchestration of the visit to New York by Anne’s, CEL’s program manager in Emerald Sound, was a critical part of the learning experience. She not only planned the logistics for the trip, but also shared in conversations both during and after the experience. The trip to District 2, along with the residency work that followed, exemplified Fullan’s (2005) notion of capacity building:

In complex, uncertain environments, where roles are often not well coordinated, a major, explicit effort is required to develop new capacities . . . [Capacity building] is not just workshops and professional development for all. It is the daily habit of *working together*, [*his emphasis*] and you can’t learn this from a workshop or course. You need to learn it by doing it and having mechanisms for betting better at it on purpose. (p. 69).

If CEL’s work in Emerald Sound needed to be captured succinctly, the data suggests it might be most accurate to describe it as creating contexts for professional learning about instructional improvement—contexts for principals’ learning, central office leaders’ learning, coaches’ learning and ultimately teachers’ learning. The content of learning ranged widely, from how students make meaning from text, and how principals observe classroom instruction, to the focus of this study—how central office

leaders learn about and exercise system-level instructional leadership. As adults in the system continued to “get smarter” about instruction and instructional leadership, their practice changed, which led to a new set of learning needs and opportunities. CEL players were an ongoing presence in the cycle of learning-while-leading, and offered support for both professional learning and the exercise of instructional leadership. The next section examines CEL’s role in system-level instructional leadership in Emerald Sound, as seen from a distributed perspective.

*System-Level Distributed Leadership as a Vehicle
for Supporting Learning-While-Leading*

The distributed leadership frame (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001) provides a conceptual tool for understanding how CEL actors and Emerald Sound leaders jointly exercised system-level instructional leadership during the timeframe of this study. I assume a definition of leadership that emphasizes exercising influence, as opposed to having positional authority, in a system. CEL consultants had no positional authority in Emerald Sound—they were paid outsiders—but the data strongly suggests these non-system actors had significant influence on both leadership practice and instruction (M. I. Honig & Coburn, 2005). While much of the literature about distributed leadership focuses on leadership activity, there is little attention to the individual and collective learning that occurs as such practice is enacted over time.

Given this study’s focus on leaders’ learning, it makes sense to examine how the leadership distribution between CEL and Emerald Sound leaders served both leadership and professional learning functions. As CEL actors exercised instructional leadership in a

variety of settings, their efforts simultaneously provided scaffolds for professional learning. What follows is a detailed review of how the evolving summer school structure—which was designed as an intensive professional development opportunity for teachers—can be understood as a context of both system-level instructional leadership and a support for central office leaders’ learning about supporting instructional reform efforts.

Summer School: A Context for Supporting Professional Learning

It is not uncommon for school districts to offer summer school learning opportunities for students, especially for those students who struggle academically. While offering a variety of course options for students in the summer was not a new practice in Emerald Sound, the nature of summer school changed dramatically in the summer of 2004. In planning for summer school, Monique and Anne discussed a variety of ways to maximize learning opportunities for teachers. Monique described the initial model:

I think it was the New York model where you invest in teachers; you pay them as much as you possibly can to give them an incentive and you make the conditions be optimal for their learning. And so, I can remember thinking, well, let it be so. So I did whatever I could to make it be so that we could create the optimum learning environment. They need to learn from CEL’s language arts consultant.

With the driving priority of creating a context to support teacher learning, Monique and Anne developed a summer school model that had never been done before in Emerald Sound. Teachers would work in pairs with a standard class of 30 students, and if possible, a smaller than average class size. The pay structure was designed to fund a week of intensive work with the CEL consultant before students arrived, as well as an hour each

day for group “planning and reflection.” Specific materials were purchased to support the new workshop approach to secondary literacy instruction, and teachers would be able to keep the materials for the upcoming school year.

In previous years, summer school teaching was available to anyone who wanted to sign up. However, that changed as leaders began to think about summer school as a venue for professional development, not just a place for students to catch up or get ahead. Teachers spent four full days with a CEL consultant planning for instruction, in addition to meeting with other teachers after school to reflect on their practice and plan for upcoming lessons. The consultant also provided periodic in-class coaching during the summer session. As Robert said, “Teachers learn in the summer what they will apply in the fall.” Monique believed the new model was a powerful way to support teacher learning:

I think that that idea became a very powerful one because then teachers started the year in September being these powerhouses. They had done it before. They had all the materials. We let them keep the materials that they used in summer in the year. And I think the students—you know, our heart tells us that it was good for the students. We saw them being different the next year.

Although data collection did not include observations during summer school, leaders continued to talk throughout the year about the power of the summer school model as a vehicle for professional development. In addition to the value of having time with the CEL consultant, the team teaching model created a sense of peer accountability that seemed to be an important factor in “trying on” the new learning from the prior week. The model began with secondary teachers, but quickly grew to include elementary teachers. For summer 2006, plans are in place for similar models in literacy for high

school, middle school, and elementary school levels, and both elementary and secondary math sessions. In addition, leaders plan to strategically select teaching teams—a literacy coach or experienced teacher leader paired with a less-experienced teacher.

When analyzed from a lens of system-level instructional leadership as practiced in Emerald Sound, the new summer school model represents several components:

(a) developing and sustaining professional learning opportunities, (b) restructuring and reculturing the system to support learning goals, (c) redefining and assessing professional practice, and (d) integrating and adapting improvement strategies into the local context.

This model was not transplanted from another location, but instead emerged in conversations over time based on the collective experiences, wisdom, and problem solving of both CEL and district actors. A key change involved re-framing summer school from seeing it only as a learning opportunity for students, to a new understanding of summer school as a context for teacher learning.

Summer School in Emerald Sound was not only an example of an outcome of instructional leadership—it was also a context for leaders’ learning about how to develop, sustain, and support professional learning across the system. The process of developing and refining the summer school model for teacher learning was a powerful source for central office leaders’ learning. This was not a model that was adopted, or even adapted, from another district, but was created in conversations about how to best support teacher learning. In essence, leaders jumped in and tried something new, alongside trusted experts, and in the process, learned new ways to better support teacher learning. Not only did having access to knowledgeable “master practitioners” seem to be important, the peer accountability that grew out of working in community was equally, if not more

important. As one teacher reportedly joked, “You can’t get away with anything when there’s another adult in your room.”

The summer school model that played out in 2004 was not the same as the version in 2005, or as the current model planned for summer 2006. The learning-while-leading cycle is embodied in the planning, enacting, and revising of summer school as a context for professional learning. Each year the planning became more sophisticated, as seen in the current plan to create strategic teaching teams rather than accepting whoever applied. School-based literacy coaches were recruited for summer school teaching positions in 2006 as a way to provide them with direct experience in teaching reform-based practices, because many of the coaches were hired without teaching experiences similar to the ones that are now expected in Emerald Sound Classrooms.

Distributed Leadership: A Source of Instructional Leadership for the System and a Context for Leaders’ Learning.

While examining the reform activities in Emerald Sound using a distributed leadership frame highlights the collective nature of the instructional leadership work as exercised across time, it does not necessarily portray the way the distribution supported leaders’ learning. As CEL consultants exercised instructional leadership, they were also modeling the practice for central office leaders. Consultants were in effect bringing capacity to build capacity, rather than simply adding outside expertise to the system. For example, as Rebekah taught leadership seminar participants each month about various aspects of instruction and possibilities to support teacher learning in those areas, she was modeling how to exercise instructional leadership at the system level. Her work achieved

multiple purposes at the same time: helping coaches, principals and central office leaders develop a more complex view of instruction, rooted in subject matter knowledge; modeling how to support teacher learning about the same issues; and showing central office leaders how to prompt and support instructional reform across a system of schools.

While central office leaders did not take over consultants' roles as literacy and math experts, they began to exercise more leadership in the areas of supporting professional learning and supporting the development of instructional leadership at the school level. The nature of leadership distribution changed as Emerald Sound leaders gained expertise and confidence in their abilities as instructional leaders. Earlier, I described the relational change between CEL and central office leaders as one that moved from a teacher-student to a peer coaching relationship; this relationship prompted related changes in the ways in which instructional leadership was both exercised and distributed among system and non-system actors.

Chapter 7.
Concluding Reflections: Productive Tensions and Other Issues Inherent in Learning-While-Leading

As the analysis in the preceding three chapters has suggested, learning-while-leading instructional reform at the system level, at least for this group of central office leaders, is an ongoing iterative process. Rather than trying to master a fixed body of knowledge and then apply it, the process of enacting system-level instructional leadership required both leadership and learning activity. According to Nelson and Sassi (2005), “there is no ‘end state’ of effective instructional leadership. Effective leaders are effective, generative learners” (p. 172). While borne out in some sense by the findings of this study, this assertion leaves unattended several issues about learning-while-leading that complicate both the learning that leaders do in the context of their practice, and their actual leadership work.

Following a brief recap of the study findings, this final chapter first explores two cross-cutting themes that emerged as “productive tensions” inherently connected to leaders’ ongoing learning about prompting, supporting, and sustaining instructional reform. These tensions become apparent (a) in reconsidering CEL’s mantra “You can’t lead what you don’t know,” and (b) in exploring what it means to maintain leadership credibility while changing course. Then, stepping back from these attempts at making larger sense of the study’s findings, the chapter reflects on what the study has and has not accomplished, noting limitations and unanswered questions that further research, not to mention the continuing efforts of the participants in this setting, may try to answer.

What the Study Found

This study was grounded in three primary research questions: (a) What are central office leaders learning about instructional leadership at the system level in the context of their instructional leadership practice? (b) What conditions support and enable their learning in the context of leadership practice? (c) What does assuming a public “learning stance” imply for the way these leaders approach their practice and the impact it has on others? Out of these questions grew three findings chapters that I will briefly review before the final discussion of productive tensions that emerged as Emerald Sound leaders were learning-while-leading.

What Leaders Learned: The Enactment of System-Level Instructional Leadership

The five areas of system-level instructional leadership activity—identifying, revising, and communicating a vision of good instruction; developing, sustaining, and participating in professional learning opportunities; restructuring and reculturing the system to support learning goals; redefining and assessing professional practice; and integrating and adapting reform strategies into the local context—provided an overview of the kind of practice that emerged over time in Emerald Sound. Collectively, the five leaders learned to guide, support and prompt instructional improvement across the system in a variety of ways (e.g., creating new contexts for professional learning). As leaders developed more sophisticated understandings of instruction and leadership, their leadership practice changed, such as moving beyond observing surface features of instruction (e.g., using a teacher’s manual) toward an examination of specific

instructional activities (e.g., the sophistication and intentionality of student-teacher conversations). While chapter 4 provided a conceptual overview of the nature of instructional leadership at the system level, chapter 5 examined how these leaders learned to do their work. Chapter 4 provided a detailed, yet limited, slice of specific instructional leadership activities that unfolded at all levels of the system. While central office leaders do not have a direct impact on classroom instruction, they do have the ability to directly influence teachers and principals by setting up expectations, supports and structures designed to prompt and guide reform-oriented activities.

How Leaders Learned: The Dynamic Nature of Learning-While-Leading

The findings of this study center on questions about central office leaders' learning in the midst of practice; specifically, this study focused on leaders engaged in a reform-oriented partnership with an external support organization. The term learning has a double meaning; the same word refers to a process and an outcome. Chapter 4 focused on the outcome of these leaders' learning while chapter 5 examined the process that supported the learning outcomes. Guided by a conception of learning as a cyclical interaction between understandings and practice, in the context of a professional community, I examined two instances of how leaders' practice changed over time. First, I looked at the evolution of classroom walkthroughs, followed by a discussion of how leaders developed an understanding of the role of subject matter knowledge in instruction.

Some important related themes emerged from the examples of the learning-while-leading cycle. First, leaders constructed new knowledge and understanding through

shared experiences of anchored collaboration, including classroom walkthroughs, monthly leadership seminars and visits to other district settings. Leaders' learning was prompted and supported through collaboration and professional conversations rooted in specific experiences rather than abstract ideas. The use of contrasting cases allowed leaders to notice features of instruction and leadership that prompted ideas for future work. Finally, the ongoing infusion of expertise helped leaders move beyond local images of practice in order to create a more robust vision of the kind of instruction that was possible in all classrooms.

How Learning-While-Leading Was Facilitated Over Time

The final findings chapter began with a discussion of how the reform partnership between CEL and Emerald Sound evolved over time. Of particular interest was the way in which the nature of the partnership changed, moving from a relationship similar to teacher and student toward one more closely compared to peer coaching. Central office leaders exerted more leadership in the partnership as they developed confidence in their instructional and leadership expertise.

The chapter ended with a discussion of how the CEL-Emerald Sound partnership could be understood as distributed instructional leadership at the system level. Collectively, both system and non-system actors engaged in the joint work of leading instructional improvement across the district. Further, the nature of leadership distribution was not static, but instead roles shifted over time in a similar way to the nature of the relationships between people.

Building upon the *what* and *how* questions associated with these leaders' learning, the discussion now revisits two broader issues associated with learning-while-leading in the context of an ambitious instructional reform agenda: (a) making sense of a mantra, and (b) maintaining leadership credibility while changing the message.

Making Sense of a Mantra

Leaders who assume a learning stance send signals that they are not necessarily sources of answers, but also people who have more to learn. This notion of a leader being a learner, on the surface, seemed at odds with a fundamental belief frequently communicated by CEL players. One of the five guiding principles of CEL's work states, "You cannot lead what you don't know; in order to improve the quality of instruction, leaders need to know what good instruction looks like." This principle, prominently featured in CEL publications, and frequently used by Emerald Sound leaders and CEL consultants, raises questions about leaders' ability to lead an initiative that may involve areas beyond their collective expertise. The notion that "you can't lead what you don't know" grew out of Tony Alvarado's belief that leaders in education needed to know "good instruction" in order to effectively lead and support improvement across a system. He was not alone in his belief about the importance of leaders' knowledge about instruction (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Spillane, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003). But what does this statement really mean for leaders? Do they need to become experts in all areas of instruction before they can become effective leaders? According to Anne, CEL program manager, this is most certainly not the case:

I hope people have not gotten the message that you can't lead what you don't know [implied the need to] retire or step aside. Who else is going to take on the work? If not them, who? I mean, who really knows this work? All we can do is take the best that we think we've learned from others and from our own intellect, and try to craft this new suit together.

However, some scholars assert that to be effective, instructional leaders need to have deep subject matter knowledge, knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of what good instruction looks like in practice, as well as knowledge about how to lead and support others to improve their practice (Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003).

How Leaders Grapple with What it Means to Know

When asked about the meaning of the mantra, one leader quipped, “It means I can't lead very much.” Although her comment was intended as a joke, the underlying truth was that the mantra—whether intentional or not—was initially interpreted by Emerald Sound leaders that they should be instructional experts in order to be effective instructional leaders. During her opening of the January 2005 leadership seminar, Dorothy described specific skills (e.g., assessing teaching practice) that were necessary for principals to be effective instructional leaders. Lurking in her statement is a particular notion of “expertise”—a set of technical skills that, once known, would make the instructional leadership work doable. Along with it, is an initial image of what it means to draw on one's expertise, something more akin to the “routine expert” identified by Bransford and colleagues (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986).

We know from chapter 5 that leaders' ability to analyze practice changed over time—and with it, in principle, their notions of the kind of expertise they needed could change too, as their actual enacted expertise. In the beginning, their knowledge was

limited as they focused on surface features and “symbols” of instruction rather than looking deeply at practice. As a result, leaders were in the position of leading something they didn’t know very well, which often left leaders questioning their capacities to effectively lead reform efforts. As leaders faced their self-perceived lack of knowledge—especially related to subject-specific instructional practice—they considered implications for leadership. Robert, secondary director, grappled with expectations for his knowledge:

I think you have a much better chance to lead what you know than what you don’t know. [In math] I would have led us down a road that wasn’t as robust as it would have been if I had their [CEL consultants’] knowledge. But there we’re trying to do some coping with this [partnership]. I don’t think anyone would say I need to have the expertise of Rebekah, but I have to know what I’m talking about. And I have to know what I’m seeing. I guess I want to say that there’s a real conflict between that approach and cognitive coaching which was the rage about 10 years ago. According to their theory, you don’t have to know anything; you just have to know how to help a person discover. I’m pretty convinced that you’d be much more effective knowing some things.

This tension or dichotomy between knowing and learning lies at the heart of the issue. The key word in the mantra is how to define the word “know.” If knowing refers to possession of a specific and fixed body of knowledge of some complexity (e.g., literacy, math, and effective instructional practices), then many sitting leaders may be ill-equipped to carry out their assigned duties. However, if “knowing” refers to the process of interacting with and developing a deeper understanding about these and other emerging bodies of knowledge about instruction and leadership, then the notion of a “lead learner” makes good sense. Leaders may not need to be experts in instruction, but an important issue is knowing how to obtain resources and initiate a learning process for themselves and other adults in the system. This understanding of what it means to know seems to make the mantra much more attainable.

Leaders may have a clear sense of the kind of instruction they want to see in classrooms, or a deep desire to change the status quo, but they may not have the skills themselves to bring a new vision into practice across the system. In this study, that's where CEL consultants stepped in and played a critical role as they shared knowledge, experiences, and maybe most importantly, asked questions to prompt reflection and collective problem solving.

The idea of knowing referring to either a body of knowledge or a process relates back to earlier discussion about the difference between technical problems and adaptive problems. Technical problems are those about which there exists a legitimized set of known organizational procedures guiding what to do and who should do it, while adaptive problems have no predetermined adequate response or solution (Heifetz, 1994). Many of the problems facing system-level instructional leaders may be better described as adaptive rather than technical, which leads to the natural conclusion that there exists no definitive body of knowledge of effective reform practices that one can master.

Redefining What it Means to Know

Although scholars and practitioners look to District 2 as an existence proof that urban systems can educate all students at high levels (Hubbard et al., 2006), according to Rebekah (CEL consultant) who spent her entire teaching career in District 2, what it meant to "know" in that system was as much about a process of inquiry as it was about understanding a specified approach to instruction and leadership. Rebekah's experience as a consultant in San Diego gave her an additional perspective on the importance of paying attention not only to the *what* of system reform, but also to the *how* of reform

work. She had two very different reform contexts and sets of experiences informing her thinking. She wondered about how to help support systems to engage in problem-solving processes as opposed to only helping them learn about and adapt work that unfolded in San Diego and District 2:

I think the “it” got lost in San Diego. . . . Here’s an example: People will look at a graphic organizer, read what’s on the paper, and they think they know what you’re talking about. But, it was really the eight hours that led up to the creation of the document that taught everyone. I think Balanced Literacy has become this symbol of what worked in District 2, but it was the culture of “We can’t just do it this way, or this way, we need a balance.” I think it was all those conversations that mattered most—it’s the process and not the product. You can’t take the curriculum and expect it to be formulaic. I think people see the approaches (e.g., Read Aloud, Shared Reading), and want to start with an approach, but it is the creation of the rationale for the work that is so important.

This distinction between the process of learning and the product or outcome of learning is important for those thinking about leading instructional reform efforts. While attention is often paid to the structures of reform (e.g., classroom walkthroughs, new materials), it is equally important to consider the kind of learning necessary to achieve the desired goals. For example, in Emerald Sound, the walkthrough structures were initially implemented without deep consideration of what leaders needed to know and be able to do in order to best leverage walkthroughs for instructional improvement. While leaders do not need to “reinvent the wheel,” the lessons from Emerald Sound highlight the importance of paying attention to issues of leaders’ learning, in addition to the leadership activity needed to support the reform agenda.

Seeding Expertise: The Balance Between Bringing Ideas and Cultivating Inquiry

Rebekah's reflections raise an important issue—possibly an enduring dilemma or ideological tension—of system-wide instructional reform: *how do system leaders—indeed, the system itself—learn from the experiences of others while not falling into the model of expecting answers in a world filled with adaptive problems?* When working with consultants, there seems to be a delicate balance between bringing ideas and suggestions without shutting down a culture of inquiry that may lead to a collective ownership of knowledge developed through shared experience, experimentation, and struggle. It brings us back to the notion that students have a difficult time learning from the experts since they have bypassed all of the experiences that fed into the development of that expertise (Bransford et al., 1989).

The example from chapter 5 about planning for and making changes to the residency model illustrated how central office leaders learned through experience about how to support teacher learning. Dorothy and Cathy met with CEL consultants to think about other ways of supporting struggling schools after they began to have concern about grouping all the struggling schools together. The consultants did not bring answers, but instead shared their experiences and perspectives as the group collective considered other options for how they might adjust the model.

Leaders Feel an Urgency to Know

A related tension arises in the press for short-term solutions—which tended to make leaders impatient with a learning process that takes time. In this regard, District 2, San Diego, and Emerald Sound faced or are facing distinctly different sociopolitical

contexts, with implications for how much room leaders had, or felt they had, to learn while leading. Central office leaders may not feel the luxury to engage in more open-ended, time-consuming inquiry processes given the reform press of NCLB. While this was not a focus of this study, there were several conversations about what to do with schools that had been labeled in various ways based on NCLB guidelines. Despite having a district culture that valued being “lead learners,” the expectations for immediate improvement impacted how leaders approached their work. In this study, leaders seemed torn between the time they believed was required for deep learning to occur and the performance expectations for immediate improvement set by state and national leaders.

This issue about balancing long-term reform strategies with short-term performance expectations likely resonates with central office leaders in other district settings. As leaders in Emerald Sound listened to consultants who explained why traditional remediation models did not necessarily lead to improvement, they asked, “Then what else can we do? We know that a second dose of bad instruction won’t work.” The lack of suggestions—other than the long-term solution of improving instruction—left leaders wondering what they could do to address their pressing concern about student performance in math. While the leaders embraced the plan to support teacher learning and acknowledge that there was no “silver bullet,” they still looked for ways to address the issues in the short term. Jackie summed up this concern in the following way, “We know there is no silver bullet, but I do not feel OK using hope and crossing our fingers as our only strategy.”

While it may not be possible to speed up the learning process and disseminate experiences that are critical in the learning process, there may be ways to avoid

reinventing the wheel. There seems to be a balance of “seeding enough expertise” to push thinking and help educators see beyond their own sometimes limited experience, while not setting up a culture of “waiting for the expert.” Finding such a balance continues to be a question Rebekah considers as an outsider coming in to help systems accelerate their learning:

We’re getting back what we teach. I show up, I do a daylong session and people are asked to take some of it back to their teachers. I gathered feedback from people I’ve worked with about when their learning was most powerful. Most of them said it was some sort of experience when they went from feeling panicky and ignorant to realizing, “I can figure this out.” And then saying, “I want that for kids.” We haven’t done that with the principals in the leadership work. . . . I keep giving them the concrete so they keep showing up the next month saying, “Rebekah is going to give us some more concrete,” when I don’t believe the concrete is what’s going to help them. I’m doing exactly what I think doesn’t help in the long run. In the short term, it makes people feel really good; they leave with some good notes.

Rebekah’s concern relates back to Fullan’s (2005) description of leaders who initiate reform based on limited understanding caused by taking shortcuts—the tip of the iceberg—that limit understanding. Too many answers from too many experts may shut down inquiry or lead to “iceberg shortcuts,” while no infusion of outside expertise or guidance may limit innovation and possibilities for improvement. A second mantra sheds light on this aspect of learning-while-leading—what does it take for leaders to let go of knowing concretely and step into a world filled with more questions than answers.

Revisiting the Mantra

Martin Luther King Sr. spoke the following words in an address to Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association in 1940: “Again and again has it been said we cannot lead

where we do not go, and we cannot teach what we do not know.” Although the second half of the quote raises once again the question of knowledge, however this time related to teaching, the first part of this quote suggests leadership requires more than knowing, it also requires courage to “go.” The alternative definition of knowing implies that leaders need to be comfortable, or at least willing, to be in a state of not knowing and as a result, make learning a regular and intentional part of their leadership practice.

In short, a different form of the CEL mantra—a slight restatement of Martin Luther King Sr’s statement—may be what is really at work in the story of the district administrators’ learning-while-leading: *You cannot lead where you are not willing—and trying—to go; and you cannot teach what you are not struggling to know.* Such a restatement more accurately reflects a principle the participants in the Emerald Sound case live by, and can continue to live by, as they pursue a deeper understanding of instructional reform and ways to lead it.

But living by this principle is not necessarily easy or comfortable, and it does imply the discomfort of relinquishing some of what is familiar. At times, learning involves letting go of long-held beliefs and experiences, which often causes a sense of discomfort or disequilibrium (National Research Council, 2000). This may be especially difficult for leaders who work in a context where they are expected to be “knowers” rather than learners. Dorothy shared advice for other leaders who might engage in similar reform work:

I’d say expect it to be messy—expect a lot of disequilibrium. I think you have to really be comfortable in your own skin and confident in yourself as a person. That doesn’t mean that you know it all because you don’t. You’re going to be the one leading, and learning a lot of stuff that you don’t know about. You have to be

comfortable enough to make a mistake. I think that we all want it to be neater and tidier than it is. The folks that are looking to us for leadership and depending on us want it to be neater and tidier than it is. In their past experiences, leaders might say, this is where I want you to go and these are all the finite little steps to get there; we'll support you in getting there. What we've really done is say, this is where we want you to go—this vision out there. And here are some steps that we kind of think are in between, but we're not sure. So come on, head that way with us.

This desire for answers may be cultivated and perpetuated by the American culture of schooling. According to Vaill (1996), educational institutions have “ingrained generations of learners with an obsession with getting the ‘right answer’ ” (p. 36), rather than focusing on the messy, sometimes emotionally challenging, process of learning. He also asserts that leaders must engage in continual learning in order to survive in the modern, “whitewater” environment in which we live. Letting go of the need to know and tolerating the often ambiguous nature of learning may require the kind of courage Martin Luther King Sr. alluded to in his comments.

Together, these two mantras—you can't lead what you don't know and you cannot lead where you are not willing, and trying, to go—create an image of leadership that requires courage to head into an unknown landscape of reform and the willingness to engage in ongoing cycles of learning-while-leading. This is the kind of journey Emerald Sound leaders were taking, and continue to take, as they try to meet their goal of having nine out of ten students at standard by 2010.

Data from this study suggests that having a professional community guided by a shared moral purpose for improvement and a commitment to individual and collective learning, along with opportunities to engage regularly with others who bring additional expertise, may better support leaders in this context. The title of this study—*learning to*

lead what you don't (yet) know—suggests a twist on CEL's original mantra. Rather than starting from a place of needing to know, and risking the interpretation that knowing refers to mastery over particular bodies of knowledge, this new mantra highlights the importance and ongoing nature of learning as part of leadership practice. The word “yet” sets the stage for a learning-while-leading cycle. It is not that leaders will never come to a place of knowing, or that knowledge is not important for instructional leadership, but rather, the process of coming to know may be equally, or even more, important than knowing. As Rebekah said, “it's the process that matters, not the product.”

This idea of leaders taking the stance of a “lead learner” rather than the “answer man” may come across as overly positive and free from conflict. However, that was certainly not the case in Emerald Sound. While the formal and informal rhetoric used by central office leaders and others in the system privileged leaders who took a learning stance, there were certainly challenges associated with the perception that they were leading what they didn't know. The next section explores these tensions and challenges.

Maintaining Leadership Credibility While Changing the Message

Leaders who engage in learning-while-leading cycles are poised to reflect about “being smarter” or “knowing more” than they did before. Leaders who share their learning publicly may elicit different, sometime opposite, reactions from followers. For example, several principals shared positive comments about their leaders “coming alongside as learners” and engaging in the difficult work of reform together. However, for others, having leaders who admitted making mistakes or sent inconsistent messages

was frustrating, not only for the followers, but for the leaders themselves. While this study did not include extensive data collection at the school level, several principals and coaches (14 in all) shared their perspectives about having supervisors who assumed a learning stance.

For example, one literacy coach shared her frustration about leaders who seemed to be sending conflicting, or at least incomplete, messages about their vision for literacy instruction:

It's hard right now. The whole flying the plane while we're building it, I never want to hear that again because I think sometimes we're having to undo things just because we didn't have the big picture. We sort of put things in place that don't make sense now. Last year, when Rebekah shared the eight components of powerful instruction, it was the first time that I really felt like I had the big picture of what we believe and what we're about and where we're going. That's a little disconcerting that this work has been happening without a vision beyond we're really worried about our scores.

The idea of building the plane as we go describes a “lead learner” rather than a leader who is leading what they already know. The prior section explored the tensions and possibly inevitable nature of leaders not having the answers, or in other words, not having all the plans for the plane prepared before takeoff. The coach's reference to the late introduction of a clear vision may have been unavoidable for leaders who were redefining their vision based on new learning, unless leaders had approached their work in a way that helped them understand the work deeply before publicly launching the reform effort. On the other hand, deep understanding may have only been possible given lessons learned from the experience of doing as opposed to learning in a more passive way.

While engaging in cycles of inquiry and learning-while-leading may make sense from a learning science perspective, the situation may be understood differently from a

leadership perspective. Learning from mistakes and changing course is a natural part of the learning process, but these activities can be very difficult, sometimes career-ending for leaders. If leaders change course too much, they can be portrayed as inconsistent or ineffective, even if the changes in course make sense based on new learning. One leader remarked, “I don’t mind being vulnerable, I just don’t want to look stupid.”

The use of language is an important leadership tool, and the way leaders craft their messages about being lead learners can be interpreted in various ways. In addition to learning about specific approaches to instruction, leaders in Emerald Sound learned how to choose their words carefully. They often joked about no longer using the phrase, “We hope . . .” but replacing it with “We will . . .” Public statements about being learners pushed leaders to balance the need to model and encourage a learning stance while also inspiring followers with a sense that leaders knew where they were headed.

Leaders sometimes manage the balancing act between maintaining credibility and changing their message by explicitly point out growth over time as evidence of improvement. For example, Dorothy contrasted past and current practice during her opening for the September 2005 leadership seminar. After showing a timeline of their initiatives (see Appendix F), moving from “plowing the soil” with initial walkthroughs in 2002-2003, to “going deeper with literacy and leadership” in 2005-2006, she shared a T-chart comparing past and current values for instructional practice (see Table 7.1). Although it’s hard to know how principals, coaches and other central office leaders interpreted Dorothy’s words, her use of this chart as a leadership tool provides one example of how leaders can explicitly send the message that the district had changed course by clearly stating a change in values. Rather than shying away from admitting

leaders had changed their thinking about “good instruction,” in this situation, Dorothy was unapologetic about the shift in thinking. Dorothy balanced her opening message between being encouraged about growth over time with the ongoing distance between current practice and where they wanted to be in the future.

Concluding Reflections

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, when you lead people through difficult change, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more than to offer perhaps than a possibility . . . Anyone who has stepped out on the line, leading part or all of an organization, a community, or a family, knows the personal and professional vulnerabilities. However gentle your style, however careful your strategy, however sure you may be that you are on the right track, leading is risky business. (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 2)

Table 7.1. A Change in Instructional Values

BEFORE	NOW
➤ Student in rows	➤ Pods – seating that promotes collaboration
➤ Silent students valued	➤ Discourse and sharing thinking valued
➤ 1 student sharing their thinking at a time	➤ Partner sharing
➤ Few classroom libraries	➤ All classrooms with libraries
➤ Many students trying to read at a level that was too hard or too easy	➤ Students in just right texts
➤ Few gathering places for mini lessons	➤ Most classrooms using gathering places
➤ Little evidence of community	➤ Evidence of community learning – charts

Table 7.1 (continued)

BEFORE	NOW
➤ Classrooms disrupted if one person came in	➤ Students and teachers used to opening their doors and sharing the learning even with large groups
➤ Staff sees themselves as needing to be “knowers”	➤ Staff sees themselves as learners
➤ Belief that students impacted by poverty and diversity can’t achieve at high levels	➤ Growing belief that all students can learn
➤ Belief that a program – silver bullet is the answer	➤ Understanding that components of powerful instruction that meets the needs of a diverse student population is the answer
➤ Data used as a report card for students – I taught they – but they didn’t get it syndrome	➤ Data used as our report card, to identify students needing intervention and increasingly use of data to plan daily instruction.

This quote from Heifetz and Linsky (2002) likely resonates with those who have experienced being leaders in public settings, especially those who lead from the central office of a school district. This study was designed not only to better understand how one group of central office leaders exercised the “risky business” of system-level instructional leadership in an urban setting, but also to explore the learning that occurred in the process. It is interesting to note that the Heifetz and Linsky’s quote identifies that leaders will challenge what *others* hold dear, but it does not explicitly discuss the changes the *leaders themselves* may undertake as they simultaneously ask their followers to do the same. This study did just that—it highlighted specific ways these leaders not only led others through the challenging waters of change, but also how they themselves learned and changed in the process. In this final section, I will reflect on what my study has and

has not accomplished; what its limitations are; and what questions it has not answered, as well as how further research might address them. In addition, I will include concluding remarks about how what has been learned from this study might be used or useful to its various audiences.

What This Study Has and Has Not Accomplished

This study has provided an in-depth analysis of one case of how central office leaders in an urban school district come to understand and enact system-level instructional leadership. Rather than drawing boundaries only around what these leaders did in practice, this study went one step further to examine how these leaders learned to exercise instructional leadership. This level of analysis provides a window into practice that is often left unexamined in other studies of leadership practice. While knowing what effective leaders do is important, it may be even more important to understand how leaders learn to do what they do. If not, the conversation can easily focus on heroic individuals and unique cases that do not necessarily inform work in other locations. By focusing on the conditions that support leaders' learning about leading instructional improvement at the system level, this study provides insights and questions that may begin new kinds of dialog among scholars and practitioners. Instead of looking only to issues of preparation, getting the "right" leaders in place, and designing effective systems, those interested in school reform may begin to consider how leaders' learning might be a critical factor for improving academic achievement.

However, these statements are merely conjecture on my part because this study stopped short of analyzing the effect of these leaders' practice. While it seems safe to

claim that Emerald Sound leaders were developing deeper and more sophisticated understandings about instruction and the kind of instructional leadership that can prompt and sustain the improvement of teaching practice, I cannot say that their learning led to improved student achievement across the district.

This study also does not make claims about leaders' learning in other district settings. Given a situated perspective on learning, it is not possible to simply transfer conditions that supported learning in one location to another and assume similar results will be found. Context was part of the learning process, and it is virtually impossible to replicate the interactions between leaders and their situation that took place in this study. However, by providing descriptions of the range of ways leaders engaged in learning about instructional leadership, I give the field a new kind of conversation in which to participate. For example, this study brings the notion of anchored collaboration from the learning literature (Barron et al., 1995; Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1997) into the realm of literature focused on school reform and instructional improvement. This study serves as a bridge between research on human learning and research on instructional reform in a school district setting.

Another interesting outcome of this study is a kind of blurring of the lines between what is typically thought of as the lines between leadership scholars and practitioners. Scholars can be thought of as learners who take a systematic approach to learning about a given phenomena, and in this case, central office leaders were engaging in similar kinds of work. While the guiding questions and ultimate purposes for learning may be different between the two groups, taking a learning perspective on leadership brings them into closer alignment than is typically described in both circles.

Questions for Further Research

Given the fact that this study did not attempt to look at the impact of these leaders' practice, an important piece of the school reform puzzle was left unexamined: did all this learning and the associated changes in practice make a difference for principals, teachers, and students? A recent study about principal sensemaking in the context of Emerald Sound's literacy initiative suggests that collectively, both central office leaders and CEL consultants had direct impact on principal learning and practice (Grubb, 2006). By definition, central office leaders have an indirect effect on student learning; both principals and teachers mediate leaders' work. In order to make a link between leaders' learning, their changing practice, and student outcomes, more research is needed at the school level. While I did interview a selected group of principals and school-based literacy coaches, I did not capture changes in their practice over time. Rather, my purpose was to include a diverse set of voices in the conversation about central office leaders' learning.

The following set of illustrative research questions would help the field better understand the connections between central office leaders' learning and changes in practice at the school level:

1. How do principals respond to central office leaders who assume a learning stance toward their work?
2. What, if any, are the connections between central office leaders' enactment of system-level instructional leadership and principals' enactment of instructional leadership?
3. Is there evidence of learning-while-leading cycles at the school level? If so, how do they compare with similar cycles at district level?

4. What kinds of contrasting cases and opportunities for anchored collaboration prompt and support professional learning for principals and teachers?

Another important question for future research includes issues that pertain to the kinds of learning that may happen when long-standing leaders engage in the kind of ongoing, explicit learning that was presented in this study. The Emerald Sound leaders were relatively new to their positions, so they were not in a place of changing long-held personal routines. While the system itself had a long history, and the study provided instances that showed a certain level of transformed practice over time, most of the individual leaders were just beginning their work as central office instructional leaders. For example, I began collecting data at the same time that three of these leaders began supervising principals. A follow-up study that examined central office leaders working in a similar reform setting might offer additional insights into how system-level leaders can be supported to think and lead in new ways.

Finally, this study provided images of CEL's work in one context over time, but that alone cannot adequately describe how an organization approaches the work of supporting central office leaders' learning elsewhere. Given the evolving nature of CEL's work, it is important to study the organization in a variety of settings, and look across several cases for crosscutting themes. A study¹² of this kind is currently underway, and those findings, along with findings from this study may prompt other issues for future inquiry.

¹² Researchers from the University of Washington are currently conducting research on CEL's efforts in three districts. The study focuses on the "pedagogical relationship" between CEL and district systems.

Potential Uses for This Study

This study is of use to scholars and practitioners interested in studying issues of education reform across a system of schools in at least four ways. First, this work provides an example of why adopting reform models may be problematic, primarily because “wisdom can’t be told” (Bransford et al., 1989). There may not be any way to short-cut the kind of learning that happens through experience, rather it might be important to demonstrate how that learning can be scaffolded and informed by previous work in the field.

A second potential use of this study is for those interested in the professional development of leaders. While there is extensive work in both scholarly and practitioner circles about leadership preparation, there is a dearth of activity associated with leaders learning over time, other than the same kind of professional development (e.g., workshops, summer institutes) that has proven to be only partially helpful in supporting teacher learning. If “sit-and-get” workshops have limited utility for teachers, the same likely holds true for school and district leaders.

Looking in a new direction toward the teacher evaluation movement that is gaining ground provides a third use for this study. The desire to measure and evaluate teacher performance—such as the value-added models based on student test scores (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2004)—and the emerging attention toward assessing leadership practice (Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006), sets the stage for a system that may put assessment processes in place without paying attention to the learning needs of those who participate as evaluators. The example about how school walkthroughs changed over time based on leaders’ ability to “see” and understand what

was happening in the classroom should suggest problems that might be associated with leaders evaluating practice that they may not understand deeply. Many systems implement walkthrough protocols as a way to get teacher performance data other than student test scores, but such data may not hold much value if the person collecting it does not understand what they are observing. District and school leaders engaged in walkthrough routines can learn much from these examples about how to make these routines more effective.

Finally, this study takes the conversation about distributed leadership from primarily examples at the school level, to a system level. In addition, I attempted to broaden the conversation by not only examining how leadership is distributed across both system and non-system actors, but also what learning may be supported by such a distribution. This may be of interest for scholars interested in issues related to distributed leadership and leadership development as well as those interested in how external organizations can play a role in educational reform, specifically the ability for external organizations to “bring capacity to build capacity.”

Clearly, there is no system that is meeting the needs of all students; this study attempts to shed light on one aspect of system reform that has been out of the spotlight—learning-while-leading in the central office—in hopes of adding a new dimension to the conversation between and among scholars and practitioners. District leaders may frequently consider how they prompt, support and sustain the learning of *others* in the system (e.g., students, teachers, and principals), but it may serve the field well for central office leaders, and those working to support and guide central office leaders, to consider their *own* learning, especially when that learning features the development of adaptive

expertise, such as a willingness to let go of assumptions, to hold knowledge flexibly, and approach issues from a learning stance. Monique, the Director of Secondary Learning in Emerald Sound, summed it up this way: “So maybe the transformation has to happen within the unknowingness, because if we knew it, we would have solved the problem.”

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Appendix A. CEL Partnership Prospectus

Leadership as learning: Closing the achievement gap by improving instruction through content-focused leadership

The Center for Educational Leadership (CEL) exists to eliminate the achievement gap that divides students along the lines of race, class, and language. CEL believes that the achievement gap will be eliminated only when the quality of instruction improves, and that instruction will only improve at scale when leaders better understand what powerful instruction looks like in order to lead and guide professional development, target and align resources, engage in on-going problem solving and long-range capacity building. It is one of CEL's mantras that "you can't lead what you don't know."

This prospectus outlines a professional development partnership between a school district and the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington. Partnerships are based on the belief that powerful instructional leadership is the nexus for improving student achievement. Though each partnership is tailored to the particular context of the district(s) involved, the overall theory of action guiding the work has three basic footings:

The first footing is about *helping the system to get smarter about powerful instruction* and the leadership necessary to guide that instruction. The second footing involves working directly with content coaches and teacher leaders at school sites with the aim of *connecting new learning to classroom practice*. The third footing is about *ensuring the necessary policies, practices and structures are in place to support powerful instruction* by working directly with district level leaders to examine their own district contexts. Whether in literacy or math, sustained, in-depth examination in one content area grounds leadership practice squarely within the work of instructional improvement; this ensures that the three footings of CEL's theory of action are closely aligned.

The focus on leadership for instructional improvement has two distinct, but mutually reinforcing dimensions: (1) defining the instructional practices, structures, and routines that are conducive to powerful student learning and to the adult professional development that supports it; (2) honing the leadership practices and routines which support, nurture, and push the development of such practices across the district.

With these two dimensions in mind—"instructional practices" and "instructional leadership"—the Center for Educational Leadership provides the following:

HELPING THE SYSTEM GET SMARTER ABOUT POWERFUL INSTRUCTION

General Study Group Sessions for School and District Leaders

The *General Study Group Sessions* serve as a central component of the professional development partnership. The purpose of these sessions is two-fold: (1) to study high-quality instruction in a specific content area (literacy or mathematics) and (2) to define and refine the communication and instructional leadership strategies conducive to improving student achievement through high-quality instruction.

Participation in *General Study Group Sessions* is an expectation for all K-12 principals, assistant

principals, literacy coaches, key teacher leaders, and central office leaders. The configuration of each study group depends on the size and needs of the particular district(s) involved. All *General Study Groups* are initially designed for district-wide participation. Over time, however, the configuration of the *General Study Groups* may change to meet the evolving needs of a district. Some districts, for example, have organized *General Study Groups* around particular grade-level bands (i.e. elementary and secondary).

General Study Groups meet for a series of one day sessions across the school year and are conducted by leaders in the field of literacy/mathematics instruction and instructional leadership. The goal of *General Study Group Sessions* is to support school and district leaders, instructional coaches and/or teacher leaders in their own learning of quality instruction and instructional leadership. Specifically, these sessions are aimed at helping participants:

- Recognize, articulate, and teach the critical attributes of powerful instruction
- Build pedagogical content knowledge
- Hone skills for curricular planning informed by knowledge of standards, curricular resources, pedagogical content, and ongoing assessment of student needs
- Develop shared language for talking about teaching and learning
- Develop specific leadership skills that can assist in the movement towards more powerful and effective instruction
- Cultivate an interdependent professional community for teachers and leaders
- Become more effective at planning, coaching, and collaborating with teachers in developing powerful instruction

The format of each session generally includes presentations of exemplary instructional practices; demonstrations of strategies with adult and student groups; time for individual/team/school planning with support of CEL coaches; sharing of professional development tools, resources, and texts to support the work.

While each *General Study Group Session* is built upon the needs of the district(s) and the work of the previous sessions, the scope of the *General Study Group Sessions*—regardless of content area focus—includes specific knowledge and skills which serve as the foundation for *Leadership and Instructional Coaching*. These include:

Instructional Practice

- Learning Environment/Conditions for Learning
- How People Learn/Developing Pedagogical Content Knowledge
- Teaching in the Zone of Proximal Development
 - Supporting Students Towards Increasing Independence
 - The Role of Modeling
 - Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners
- Data Based Inquiry
- Assessment Driven Instruction
- Using Standards to Inform Curricular Planning and Instruction
- The Crucial Role of Talk in Learning

Instructional Leadership

Communication

- Developing a “Teachable Point of View”
- Setting Clear Expectations
- Framing the Work—articulating rationale for priorities, creating a sense of urgency,
 - writing instructional letters, crafting openings and closings for meetings
- Data Based Inquiry
 - Using School Based Data to Determine Student and Teacher Needs
 - Using Data as a Leverage Point
- Planning for Professional Development to Support Teachers’ Growth
 - Identifying Teachers’ Learning Styles and Needs
 - Crafting Feedback for Teachers
 - Developing the systems and structures to nurture and support professional learning
- Identifying and Working with Teacher Leaders

Leadership Coaching

To apply the learning from *General Study Group Sessions* to leadership actions at the district or school level, *Leadership Coaching* is a key component of the professional development partnership. All principals and their district office supervisors receive coaching from accomplished instructional leaders. The exact number of *Leadership Coaching* days is negotiated as part of the overall partnership contract, but a minimum of four days per person is recommended. The configuration of the leadership coaching is also negotiated as part of the contract. In some districts, principals receive coaching in dyads or triads. In other districts, coaching is one-on-one. In all cases, leadership coaching is school and district embedded, carried out in the actual context of leaders’ work.

Facilitated instructional walkthroughs are one element of leadership coaching. Leaders utilize information from walkthroughs to deepen pedagogical content knowledge, analyze classroom instruction, ascertain the strengths and needs of teachers, support teacher growth, and plan professional development opportunities for individual, small groups, and whole staff learning.

CONNECTING NEW LEARNING TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Specialized Study Group Sessions for Coaches and Teacher Leaders

Approximately one day per month (commonly following the General Study Group Session) serves as an opportunity for additional study focused on the work of content coaches and/or teacher leaders. These sessions are intended to deepen their understanding of the content introduced at the General Study Group Sessions and to prepare them to work with colleagues at their own sites.

Specialized Study Group Sessions are designed to address an additional body of knowledge specific to the work of content coaching and professional development planning. Coaches and teacher leaders learn how to organize, develop, and sustain study groups in their respective schools and districts; how to structure coaching work with teachers; how to grow and utilize lab-site classrooms within and across schools; how to work with principals to plan for, stage, and deliver professional development; how to utilize video tapes and other resources for their own and others’ learning and professional growth.

Instructional Coaching

Instructional Coaching or *Content Coaching* is an essential vehicle for connecting the learning from Study Group Sessions to classroom practice. The specific number of and configuration of coaching days is negotiated as part of the overall partnership contract; CEL Project Directors work with district leadership to make decisions about how to invest coaching resources to achieve the greatest impact.

CEL coaches spend approximately 1-4 days a month “on the ground” in schools with school and district teacher leaders. These coaching days extend the work of both the *General* and *Specialized Study Group Sessions* by providing teacher leaders with additional opportunities to “try on” new teaching strategies and to work with teachers in their classrooms—all with the support of an outside coach who models in classrooms, debriefs with teachers, co-teaches, co-plans, observes and provides feedback. *Instructional Coaching* may focus on developing pedagogical knowledge in a particular content area (literacy or math) or in the area of coaching and professional development itself.

Creating Existence Proofs

Whether through observing a coach model a lesson in a classroom, visiting schools with demonstrated success, or participating in professional development residencies in the classrooms of exemplary teachers, people need to see images of what is possible in order to develop a sense of urgency and deepen their commitment to the challenge of improving student achievement everyday, in all classrooms. When teachers see their own students—or students like them—engaged in rigorous, standard-bearing work, it elevates the expectations for what is possible.

To this end, CEL works with each partnership to design a plan for cultivating expertise among teachers, and creating existence proofs within each district. Some districts, for example, develop lab-site classrooms as places where teachers and coaches can “try on” new instructional strategies with support.

While districts are growing the necessary expertise within their systems, the Center for Educational Leadership connects them with a network of schools and districts across the country engaged in similar work. CEL orchestrates a variety of opportunities to learn from the experience of others through visitations to and residencies in exemplary schools and classrooms.

ENSURING THE NECESSARY POLICIES, PRACTICES AND STRUCTURES ARE IN PLACE TO SUPPORT POWERFUL INSTRUCTION

Leadership Conferences

The purpose of the *Leadership Conferences* is to provide an on-going venue for the application of the principles and practices learned with the *General Study Group* and *Leadership Coaching*. Regular meetings are scheduled over the school year with key central office leaders and principal representatives. These meetings are planned in consultation with the Project Director(s) from the Center for Educational Leadership. The extent to which the *Leadership Conferences* are facilitated by CEL representatives depends on the nature of the partnership; districts take on increasing responsibility for planning and leading the *Leadership Conferences* over time.

The aim of the *Leadership Conferences* is to (1) further flesh out and develop the school district’s

professional development plan; (2) coordinate this effort between and among schools; (3) identify the systems level policies, practices and structures that need changing in order to improve instruction. The content of *Leadership Conferences* addresses how the district might develop its own “green house” for cultivating expertise among teachers, how to identify and utilize current teacher leadership that exemplifies high-quality instruction, and ongoing examination of their own instructional leadership skills.

Project Management

Each partnership is unique and the professional development needs of a district continually evolve with new learning. For this reason, each district partnership is managed by at least one Project Director from the Center for Educational Leadership. Initially, this person is instrumental in working with district leaders to develop the partnership contract, and to conceptualize how the various components will manifest and reinforce the three footings outlined above. The Project Director is the main interface between the district and CEL coaches and representatives.

As district leaders develop their understanding of powerful instruction and the district-wide implications for leadership, they become more adept at refining long-term goals and problem solving along the way. Over time, project management involves monitoring, reflecting on, negotiating and reconceptualizing the partnership work in response to identified goals. For example, the Project Director may work with district leaders to develop other learning opportunities such as specialized residencies in CEL’s partnership schools, professional development attached to summer school for students, and intervisitations among partnership districts.

There is significant flexibility regarding how the various components of the partnership play out over time, provided that the basic footings of the theory of action are not compromised. While the Center for Educational Leadership remains open to the number of actual content and coaching days, as well as the specific content to be addressed, the partnership is contingent upon a district commitment to invest in learning opportunities and structures to help the system get smarter about instruction, connect new learning to the classroom, and ensure the necessary policies, practices and structures are in place to support powerful instruction.

Appendix B. Information about CEL Consultants

1. *Anne, Program Manager for Emerald Sound*

After teaching elementary school for many years, Anne pursued her doctorate in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. Her graduate work included research on district reforms in New York, which put her into contact with the kind of work going on in District 2 and San Diego. She worked CEL's director to develop their district partnership model. At times she took on the role of a consultant by modeling lessons in classrooms, but most of her time is spent overseeing and managing the partnership work. She helped bring coherence and coordination to an organizational relationship that involved many "moving parts."
2. *Rebekah, Literacy and Math Consultant*

Rebekah began her teaching career in District 2, which included work as a teacher leader. She followed Alvarado to San Diego and spent several years as a consultant with that system before focusing her time primarily with CEL. She began her work in Emerald Sound as a literacy expert, but in 2005 she added math. Her extensive knowledge base and range of experiences allowed her to serve both functions. While seen initial as the literacy expert, she referred to herself as a "math person." She had been a national trainer for district's adopted math curriculum, so she was well equipped to serve as an outside expert in both subject areas. Her work included a focus on coaching and other forms of professional development. She came to the district two days a month to provide all-day learning sessions—one day with principals, coaches and central office leaders, and a second day with literacy coaches.
3. *Kay, Leadership Consultant*

Kay was one of the few central office leaders in San Diego who was kept in place when Alvarado came to the district. She had some experience with IFL's work, so her knowledge base served her well. Her primary role in Emerald Sound was to provide leadership coaching and mentoring for central office leaders and principals.
4. *Norma, Leadership Consultant*

Norma was a principal in San Diego under Alvarado, and Kay was her supervisor. She moved to the central office and worked closely with the reform efforts in San Diego, including work with Rebekah as an external consultant. The Emerald Sound leaders were drawn to her gentle, yet firm approach to leadership—they called her "Aunt Norma."

There were several subject matter experts who worked mostly in classrooms.

Appendix C. Sample Interview Protocols

Initial interviews with Central Office leaders

1. What are the most important things you learning about leading system-wide instructional reform?
 - a. Has anything surprised you or made you re-think your beliefs or approaches?
2. I've heard district leaders publicly refer to themselves as learners, especially during leadership seminars. Talk to me about the safety of talking about your learning in such public ways?
 - a. Are there times when it's not safe to refer to yourself as a learner or one who lacks expertise?
3. I've often heard leaders in Highline refer to themselves as a learner who is "trying something on." What does that mean?
 - a. Describe at time when you did this?
 - b. How do principals, coaches and teachers respond to you as you try things on?
4. What, if anything, have you learned in the last few weeks that changed your thinking?
 - a. What, if anything, did you do differently as a result of this learning?
 - b. Did you tell anyone else – if so, whom?
5. A mantra I've heard around here is "you can't lead what you don't know" – what do you think about that statement?
6. Tell me about a time you were really stretched professionally (in your current position).
 - a. What was it like? What was going on?
 - b. How did you acquire the information or skills to do your job?
7. Please describe your work with the external consultants.

Initial interview with CEL staff and consultants

1. How does someone in your position impact instructional improvement in system?
2. What are you learning about helping leaders who are learning about system-wide instructional reform?
3. As you look ahead to a second year of reform work, what changes, if any, do you anticipate?
4. What burning questions do you have as you consider the year ahead?
5. Last year, I heard district leaders say many times in leadership seminars, "now that we know more" or "now that we're smarter" – what does that mean for leaders to talk about learning in such a public way?

6. I've often heard leaders in Highline refer to themselves as a learner who is "trying something on." What does that mean? (can you give me an example of when you did this –what happened?)
7. What, if anything, have you learned in the last few weeks that changed your thinking? What, if anything, did you do differently as a result of this learning? Did you tell anyone else?
8. One of CEL's mantras is "you can't lead what you don't know" – what do you think about that statement?

Initial interview with school principals and coaches

1. In the last few years, what kinds of changes have you seen in the districts' professional development strategy for principals, teachers and coaches?
2. What kinds of learning opportunities have impacted your work in significant ways? (consultants?)
3. Have you had any major changes in thinking about issues related to instruction, professional development or school change?
4. Please describe your interactions with central office leaders around instructional issues and has the nature of your interactions changed over time?
5. I've heard several Highline leaders say things like, "we're learning this for the first time, or we're trying this on together." How do you respond when your supervisor is learning alongside you and may not have all the answers?
6. What does it mean to you to be an instructional leader in this school? How, if at all, has your understanding changed over time?
7. Can you think about any "Ah ha" moments or times when you made fundamental shifts in thinking?
8. Please reflect on your own experience as one who is "learning-while-leading".
9. Have you had opportunities to learn alongside teachers and coaches? What was that like?
10. What are your burning questions about leading instructional improvement?

Appendix D. Observation Guides

Fieldnotes will be recorded during observation of relevant events such as: (1) district leadership seminars (attended by all building principals and school coaches, as well as district leaders and CEL staff) and (2) district leadership team planning meetings, (3) School walkthroughs, and (4) Consultant Residencies Fieldnotes will record the following kinds of information:

Leadership Seminars:

- Meeting purpose/focus
- Facilitators
- Audience
- Activities
- Script of dialog/conversations
- Role of district leaders & external consultants
- Questions raised

District Leadership Team Planning Meetings

- Meeting purpose/focus
- Facilitators
- Audience
- Activities
- Script of dialog/conversations
- Role of district leaders
- Questions raised

School Walkthroughs

- Pre-planning & debrief conversations
- Types of interactions
- Activities
- Focus of dialog/conversations
- Interactions between district leaders, principals, coaches, teachers and external consultants

Consultant Residency

- Pre-planning & debrief conversations
- Types of interactions
- Activities
- Focus of dialog/conversations
- Interactions between district leaders, principals, coaches, teachers and external consultants

Appendix E. Balanced Literacy Approaches

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Read Aloud

- Teacher provides a model of how to use reading strategies to construct meaning of text
- Students construct meaning through conversations about the text
- Teacher reads text to students, modeling proficient oral reading.
- Expands access to text beyond student's independent reading ability
- Immerses students in a variety of genre, language patterns, vocabulary, and rich literature at a level beyond what students can read independently
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after Read Aloud to inform planning and teaching

Shared Reading

- Teacher demonstrates how to use reading strategies to construct meaning of text
- Students construct meaning through conversations about the text
- Students follow along as the teacher reads the text and may read with the teacher
- Students have opportunities to “try on” or practice using the reading strategies with teacher support
- Text may be at a reading level above what students can read independently
- Text is accessible to all students (i.e. enlarged or individual copies)
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after Shared Reading to inform planning and teaching

Guided Reading

- A small group of students read, think and talk about the meaning of a specific text with guidance from the teacher and other students as needed.
- Students talk to each other and the teacher to deepen their own understanding about the meaning of the text
- Students use reading strategies demonstrated in Shared Reading, Read Aloud, and Word/Language Study with guidance from the teacher and other students as needed
- Text is at students' instructional level
- Students with similar reading strengths and needs are grouped based on teacher assessment
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after Guided Reading to inform planning and teaching

Independent Reading

- Students construct meaning of text that they read independently
- Students use strategies taught in Read Aloud, Shared Reading, Guided Reading, and Word/Language Study
- Students may interact with peers and teacher to deepen their own understanding of text
- Students select texts that match their interest and independent reading level
- Teacher confers with individuals to monitor progress of their ability to use strategies as they read on their own
- Teacher observes, assesses, and reflects upon student strengths and needs before, during, and after Independent Reading to inform planning and teaching

Appendix F. Emerald Sound Reform History

* As told by Dorothy during an opening for a Leadership Seminar

History

2002-2003 –

Plowing the soil- How can we raise the level of student learning for ALL students?
Larry Nyland + Connie Hoffman.

2003-04 = Year 1

Instructional audits – Creating cognitive dissonance.

- Stamped out Round Robin
- What will students know and be able to do as a result of the instruction??

2004-05 = Year 2

Content of literacy + instructional strategies

- Read Aloud
- Independent Reading
- Shared Reading
- Accountable Talk

Instructional leadership

- Leadership voice
- Ability to assess teacher practice

2005-06 = Year 3 = Going deeper

Content of literacy + instructional strategies -

- Read Aloud
- Independent Reading
- Shared Reading
- Accountable Talk

Powerful Instruction – adding math + link to literacy

Instructional leadership

- Leadership voice
- Ability to assess teacher practice
- **Designing “just Right PD for Adult learners**

VITA

JULI ANNA SWINNERTON

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- | | |
|------|---|
| 2006 | Ph. D., Educational Leadership and Policy Studies,
University of Washington College of Education |
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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 2000 - | Instructional Technology Specialist, Seattle Public Schools |
| 2004-2006 | Research Assistant, University of Washington College of Education |
| 2000-2004 | Instructor for Summer Institute, Whitworth College |
| 2000-2003 | Instructor for Summer Workshops, Puget Sound Center for Teaching,
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| 1998-2000 | Staff Development Instructor, Mukilteo School District |
| 1997-2000 | Member of Teaching and Learning Committee, Mukilteo School District |
| 1993-1994 | Member of Foreign Language Essential Learnings Committee, Mukilteo
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| 1994-2000 | Middle School Teacher, Mukilteo School District |
| 1993-1994 | Junior High Teacher, Central Kitsap School District |

PUBLICATIONS

- Knapp, M., Copland, M., & Swinnerton, J. (in press). *Data-informed leadership: Insights from current research, theory, and practice*. New York: Wallace Foundation.
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