

Leadership
is not
defined
by a role...

...leadership
is action



Becoming Intentional and Strategic: Developing Middle Leaders in California Community Colleges

A Retrospective Report

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Warmly,

Rose Asera

Introduction

When people talk about “community college leadership,” they typically refer to presidents or other executive leaders, mirroring a common societal perception that leaders are individuals at the top of an organization’s hierarchy. However, leading from the middle is not a contradiction in terms. A growing number of community college educators across all levels and areas of the institution are taking on leadership roles to make their colleges more effective and equitable.

The 115 institutions that comprise the California Community Colleges are facing major transformational changes. *Vision for Success* (2017), the system’s strategic statement, poses ambitious goals for increasing degrees, certificates, university transfer, and future employment. Further, this vision calls for these goals to be achieved with reduced equity gaps and regional disparities.

The major vehicles to address these ambitious goals involve a number of system-wide initiatives, including Guided Pathways, Assembly Bill (AB) 705, and College Promise programs. These approaches call for redesigning the student experience, which means that colleges need to transform not only their institutional policies and procedures, but also their college culture. As community colleges face these changes, middle leaders are essential to strengthening outcomes for all students. Middle leaders, located across the institution, are committed to students, connected to colleagues, and positioned to mobilize change at their colleges.

What do we—as a system and as a field—know about the role of middle leaders in community colleges? What do we know about developing middle leaders and how to amplify the numbers of educators prepared to lead change from the middle of their institutions?

Two leaders describe the experience of gaining leadership skills, understanding the process of change, and developing their identity as leaders:

I have learned that leadership is an action. Everyone can lead, and we can all do leadership together. Leadership is not defined by a role or a position. It is defined by what we do to promote positive change in our environment.

Leadership involves calculated risk, coherence, collective inquiry, belief, and courage. I have learned that I am going to fail, I am going to make mistakes, and I will feel discouraged. However, when these things happen, I have learned that these setbacks are opportunities for learning, developing, and growing as a professional.

These voices above are from community college educators who participated in two statewide leadership development programs: California Community Colleges Success Network’s (3CSN)

I have learned that leadership is an action. Everyone can lead, and we can all do leadership together. Leadership is not defined by a role or a position. It is defined by what we do to promote positive change in our environment.

Basic Skills Initiative Leadership Institute for Curricular and Institutional Transformation (BSILI) and the Research and Planning Group for California Community College’s (RP Group) Leading from the Middle (LFM). This paper draws on the experiences and lessons of those participating in and leading BSILI and LFM, describing an emerging perspective on developing middle leadership and advocating for greater support for middle leaders.

Reader’s Guide

The purpose of this paper is to set the context for why it is critical to foster middle leadership in the California Community Colleges and share an emerging approach for how to develop middle leaders. Examining the experiences of BSILI and LFM leaders and participants can provide insight into the ways that, in the current climate for change, middle leaders are a vital resource to spearhead institutional transformation and lead efforts to increase student success and equity.

From the beginning, both BSILI and LFM have documented their work and collected participant feedback within the program timeframe. This report is a retrospective exploration of effects on participants beyond the temporal boundaries and across the two programs (see sidebar, *Methodology*).

The audience for this paper can be described as a set of contiguous, and sometimes overlapping, circles. In one circle are the community college system-level leaders, funders, policymakers, and campus executives who are in positions to recognize and expand support for middle leaders. Community college educators are in an adjacent circle. Middle leaders themselves, immersed in the work at their colleges, may recognize and appreciate their efforts as described in this paper. Beyond that group is a wide pool of current community college educators—potential and emerging middle leaders—who might find the inspiration in reading this paper to pursue leadership opportunities available to them.

Beyond the community college audience, readers in K-12 schools and other higher education settings, as well as in business, may be intrigued and motivated by an expanded view of middle leadership.

Methodology

This document draws on a wide range of evidence over time. The content is based on the author’s participant observation in LFM and BSILI, a retrospective review of program documents and evaluations, as well as numerous formal and informal conversations with program participants and leaders.

To focus the retrospective view of participants’ experiences, the programs sent a survey in June 2017 to former participants of both programs—eight cohorts of BSILI and five cohorts of LFM—approximately 580 people (although some of those attended more than one time or more than one program). Nearly 100 participants responded; they tended to be more recent participants and those who have taken on program roles as coordinators, facilitators, or coaches.

In addition, the author conducted a series of 15 in-depth individual interviews with participants who have served as program planners, regional coordinators, facilitators, or coaches. Stories and quotes (edited lightly for readability) in this document come from this wide range of sources.

In his book (2009) and TED talk,¹ Simon Sinek advises innovators to “start with why.” Sinek observes that inspired innovators start by talking about *why*. This approach is in contrast to the typical description of work from the outside in: first naming *what* is done, then describing *how* it is done, and finally discussing, almost as an afterthought, *why*. To Sinek, why is about passion and motivation; it is the place to start. How and what provide important information, but they are more powerful when driven by a central motivational why.

This paper begins with a discussion of *why* this is an important time to foster middle leadership in California Community Colleges, including the current forces for change and the ways that a series of student success initiatives over the last decade have contributed to the growth of middle leaders. It then describes *how* BSILI and LFM develop middle leaders and the design principles that both programs apply. Finally, quotes and examples illustrate *what* changed for middle leaders as a result of their participation and what changes they have been able to make at their institutions. These examples are presented in an emerging framework for middle leadership development, based on an examination of the BSILI and LFM outcomes, with a focus on three key areas:

- Collaborating and participating in collective leadership
- Leading college change
- Developing leadership identity

This framework provides insights into the impact on BSILI and LFM participants, including quotes that illustrate these outcomes in action. The conclusion calls for recognition and resources to continue to develop and support middle leadership across California’s community college system.

Defining Middle Leadership in California Community Colleges

Middle leadership has been studied in business (Tabrizi, 2014), as well as in K-12 education in the United States (Fullan, 2015), England (Supovitz, 2014), and New Zealand (Craggs, 2011; Marshall, 2008). The term middle leadership typically refers to program managers, department heads, and others with defined positions with designated leadership responsibilities in institutional hierarchies. For example, district officers and school principals are referred to as middle leaders in the K-12 system. However, few descriptions of inclusive middle leadership in community colleges exist.

¹ View Sinek’s Ted Talk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPYeClTpxw>.

While the term middle leader has been used in community colleges to designate positions such as deans and department chairs with formal managerial responsibilities, in the California context, there are broader middle leadership opportunities available to community college educators. The challenges and opportunities that the colleges face call for a broader definition of middle leadership.

BSILI and LFM participants have included a wide range of faculty, staff, and administrators. Some of these participants have been administrators in titled positions (e.g., deans); others, most often faculty, are in program leadership roles (e.g., Basic Skills Coordinator); and yet others continue in their faculty or staff positions and contribute to collective leadership of institutional change. The collective and inclusive nature is part of what defines middle leadership in community colleges and differentiates it from formal middle leadership positions in business and K-12 schools.

Initiatives in California's Community Colleges

For a decade, a series of system-wide initiatives in the California Community Colleges has catalyzed opportunities for middle leaders. The Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) launched in 2008 initially provided resources to improve the outcomes of basic skills courses. In 2014, implementation of the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP) addressed the integration of student support with academics. Since 2015, the state has required colleges to develop Student Equity Plans (SEP), calling for college actions to address disproportionate impact among student populations by race and ethnicity, as well as persons with disabilities, foster youth, veterans, and low-income students.

These initiatives, as well as federal, state, and philanthropic grants with similar educational priorities, created new leadership opportunities. As colleges expanded student support, academic offerings, and professional development, they created program positions with titles such as Basic Skills Coordinator, First-Year Experience Coordinator, Student Equity Director, or Professional Development Director. Instructors, counselors, classified staff, or administrators may fill these program leadership positions. However, educators in these positions have not necessarily had formal leadership preparation or experience.

As noted above, a number of initiatives are the major vehicles to address the *Vision for Success* goals:

- The Guided Pathways model, as described in *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015), promotes a directed and coherent college experience for students to achieve their academic and employment goals. In 2017, the California legislature supported the adoption of Guided Pathways across the system with a \$150M, one-time allocation in the state budget, intended to fund transformation work in the colleges over five years.
- Assembly Bill 705 (AB 705) calls for the use of multiple measures to assess students' college readiness and places students directly in transfer-level mathematics and

English courses with academic support as needed; this mandate removes the below-college-level remedial sequences that have been found to impede student progress (Bailey, Jeong, & Chu, 2010).

- College Promise programs are a movement to make college affordable to student populations that have historically been left out of higher education. Promise programs provide tuition for one to two years of community college, and in some cases also cover other costs such as books or transportation. Since the California College Promise effort covers tuition, other financial aid that students receive can be used for non-tuition and life expenses. Some localities are using their Promise initiatives to facilitate reform; for example, the nine colleges of the Los Angeles Community College District are using the LA Promise² to comprehensively restructure the first-year experience with priority enrollment, academic support, and career counseling.

What is common across these initiatives is the way they call for a reconceived student-centered educational design. This entails institutional transformation, not only programmatic changes or additions. Transformation entails questioning existing structures and procedures and constructing new practices and norms. The complexity of these changes and the scale of California's community colleges will require effective leadership at all levels of the colleges and the system.

At the same time that the system is preparing for these major changes, institutions are experiencing considerable turnover in executive leadership. In California, community college presidents and district chancellors stay in their offices an average of 3.5 years (Gordon, 2016). Even without the volatility of executive leadership, the demands of transformational change require more than a top-down mandate. Middle leaders are an integral source of innovation and reform at their colleges; these leaders are central to transformational change.

Developing Middle Leaders in California Community Colleges: The Basic Skills Initiative Leadership Institute and Leading from the Middle

In California, two primary statewide leadership development programs work to foster middle leaders, with support from the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO):

- 3CSN's Basic Skills Initiative Leadership Institute for Curricular and Institutional Transformation and

² For more information on LA Promise, visit <https://www.lapromisefund.org/>.

- The RP Group’s Leading from the Middle (LFM)

The initiators of these leadership development programs have worked in the system in various positions; their extensive experiences have contributed to the programs’ content and design.³ These founding middle leaders had to create their own paths to leadership. However, they all believe a great need exists for more middle leaders and that it is possible to support colleagues in developing their own leadership skills.

In the decade since the first BSILI and the six years since LFM began, close to 900 community college faculty, administrators, and classified staff have participated in one or both programs. Participant numbers are not exact because some educators attended the same program more than one time or attended both programs. This overlap and repetition reflects both the colleges’ ongoing investment in leadership development and individual leaders’ commitments to continuing professional growth. Of the 90 colleges that supported participation in these programs, 30 sent teams to both programs. Forty-three colleges enrolled teams in BSILI and 20 colleges enrolled teams in LFM for multiple years.

BSILI Leadership for Curricular and Institutional Transformation

BSILI’s mission is to “develop leaders in California Community Colleges who have the capacity to facilitate networks of faculty, staff, and students for curricular and institutional redesigns in support of increased student access, success, equity, and completion.”⁴

As noted in its mission, building networks is a core value and strategy of 3CSN. Professional networks are a source of relationships, learning, and resources. One of BSILI’s central theoretical texts, *Promoting and Assessing Value Creation in Communities and Networks: A Conceptual Framework* illustrates that networks are essential to social learning (Wenger, Trayner, & deLatt, 2011). Along with BSILI, 3CSN has created a network of Communities of Practice (CoP) in Habits of Mind, Equity, Reading Apprenticeship, and Learning Assistance that BSILI alumni belong to and draw upon.

Launched in 2009, this inaugural 3CSN effort initially aimed to support Basic Skills Initiative campus coordinators. The acronym BSILI is affectionately pronounced “be-silly” and reflects a

³ Deborah Harrington, 3CSN’s Executive Director and initiator of BSILI, was an English faculty member and the Dean of Student Success in the Los Angeles Community College District. Laura Hope and Bob Gabriner founded LFM. Laura Hope, originally an English professor, was Dean of Instructional Support at Chaffey College; served as Executive Vice Chancellor for Educational Services in the California Community College Chancellor’s Office, and is now the Acting Associate Superintendent of Instruction and Institutional Effectiveness at Chaffey College. Bob Gabriner was Dean of Institutional Research, Planning, and Grants, and subsequently Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement, at City College of San Francisco. From 2010-2017, he served as the Director, Education Leadership Doctoral Program, San Francisco State University.

⁴ For more information, visit <http://bsili.3csn.org/about-2/bsili-mission-statement/>.

commitment to the idea that professional learning should also be fun. For 10 years, state funding has subsidized BSILI participant costs. BSILI begins with an intensive summer weeklong residency. Participants meet in person again in the fall at a post-conference workshop following the Strengthening Student Success Conference and the Learning in Networks for Knowledge Sharing (LINKS) conference in the spring; they additionally connect throughout the year by planning and participating in regional professional learning events.

The process of developing the program and the experience of participants are cyclical and iterative. BSILI enrolls an average annual cohort of 45 participants. In the program's early years, a few of the cohorts were smaller; more recently, the cohort has grown to more than 60 participants annually. Many participants attend more than once, returning the next year or a few years later, sometimes with the same team or bringing new colleagues to the experience.

At inception, BSILI designed the institute to support leadership development of Basic Skills Initiative coordinators. It is a measure of progress that BSILI's original name no longer reflects conditions in the field. The existence of basic skills courses is changing, first with accelerated sequences and subsequently with AB 705. Basic skills will no longer be an academic designation, nor a separate funding source. BSILI is still the program name and the spirit of collaboration continues, but 3CSN is shifting the pedagogical and leadership skills that formerly supported basic skills reform toward Guided Pathways and institutional transformation.

Leading from the Middle

Leading from the Middle is designed to foster individual and collective leadership development.⁵ The RP Group launched Leading from the Middle in 2013; in 2017, LFM received a grant from the CCCC Office of Institutional Effectiveness to subsidize participant costs and increase staffing. In 2018, the CCCC increased support to LFM to significantly expand its programming in support of Guided Pathways adoption across the state.

Participating colleges send a cross-functional team of five to six educators to LFM. Each team includes faculty, staff, and administrators. Teams include institutional researchers, both to ensure access to data as part of the team's deliberations and to build leadership capacity among institutional researchers.

Each team comes with a designated change project, typically a campus priority such as developing a first-year experience, establishing a student support center, reworking basic skills courses, or developing meta-majors in preparation for Guided Pathways. Collaboratively planning and implementing the project gives teams the context in which to apply the LFM curriculum and understand the variability of the change process.

⁵ For more information, visit <http://rpgroup.org/Leading-from-the-Middle>.

Teams attend three convenings over a calendar year. During and between convenings, a former LFM participant coaches each college team to support the leadership development of the team, as well as individual team members. Coaches report that not only do they get to experience the LFM curriculum a second time, but they also get to see the change process through the perspective of another college, which contributes to the coaches' own continuing leadership development.

The LFM core curriculum covers tools for planning and communication, aspects of the change process, as well as challenges of leadership. A central resource on leadership and change is Fullan's *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001). Drawing on a convergence of research, Fullan's framework describes five aspects of leadership: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation sharing, and coherence making. LFM participants explore these thematic aspects of leadership through practical cases and local college examples.

For each of the first three years, LFM served teams from 12 colleges and a total cohort of approximately 50 participants. The fourth and fifth year, the numbers increased to 15 college teams with 70 participants. In 2018, LFM doubled in size, with two Academies, one specifically for Central Valley colleges that were already working on regional collaboration, while the second academy served colleges across the state. All college teams focused on the common theme of developing Guided Pathways.

Common Design Principles for Middle Leadership Development

BSILI and LFM share an understanding of the challenges community college educators face, the tools and strategies that are useful to middle leaders, and the experiential process of developing leadership skills. While the two programs differ in many ways, they embrace common design principles and pedagogical approaches for supporting middle leadership development. These design principles offer direction for other emerging middle leadership efforts.

EMPHASIS ON COLLABORATION

BSILI and LFM both believe that collaboration and relationship building are inherently part of middle leadership. Both invite participants to come as a cross-functional team. The programs provide a setting where the team members can deepen their connections and advance their collective work, as well as have the opportunity to interact with colleagues from colleges across the state.

EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY WITH A FOCUS ON PRACTICE

Both programs use a hands-on project-based pedagogy, drawing on the literature related to effective professional learning. BSILI and LFM create a supportive setting for participants to gain and rehearse leadership skills that they can apply in practice. LFM teams work on a designated campus change project. Each BSILI team plans a professional learning hub that organizes campus and regional professional development activities, drawing on 3CSN resources and Communities of Practice.

ATTENTION TO LEADING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

The practical definition of leadership in both programs is the ability to lead campus change. The content of both programs studies the change process and covers planning tools such as logic models and stakeholder maps. The two programs also explore the various ways data and evidence are part of identifying need, making the case for change, and tracking effects.

TIME AWAY FROM CAMPUS

BSILI and LFM stretch over one year; they are not one-time professional development events. Both take place in retreat settings. BSILI starts with a week in the summer at the UCLA Lake Arrowhead conference center; LFM meets three times during the year at the Kellogg West conference center, on the California State Polytechnic University Pomona campus. These retreat settings provide time away from the college to focus on planning, without the constant demands of campus responsibilities. The residential settings give teams time to build professional and personal relationships.

PROGRAMMATIC REFLECTION

Pedagogically, both programs build in regular opportunities for participants to reflect on and learn from their efforts. Moreover, the programs themselves are reflective and continue to learn and grow from their efforts. BSILI and LFM both conduct internal and external assessments.⁶ An external evaluator from UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies has participated and contributed to BSILI. LFM conducted internal evaluations for the first five years. In 2107, Ed Insights, a research and policy center at California State University, Sacramento serving as the evaluator for CCCC Institute Effectiveness Partnership Initiative (IEPI), conducted an external evaluation.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Both programs have created opportunities for program alumni to take on leadership roles within the organization after their initial experiences. BSILI participants can join the team leading the summer residency and/or become a 3CSN regional coordinator. LFM participants can become facilitators and college coaches. These expanded roles offer a way to continue practicing new skills and deepening leadership competencies in a collaborative setting.

⁶ Find LFM evaluation reports at <http://rpgroup.org/Leading-from-the-Middle/Evaluations> and 3CSN reports at <http://californiacommunitycolleges.cccco.edu/Portals/0/FlipBooks/2015-3CSN-Report/2015-3CSN-Report-122315-ADA-Web.pdf>

Developing Community College Middle Leaders: An Emerging Framework for Middle Leadership

3CSN’s Basic Skills Initiative Leadership Institute and the RP Group’s Leading from the Middle Academy create experiences that support the development of middle leaders. The outcomes of these current programs can inform efforts to expand the base of middle leaders in California Community Colleges—leaders who are critical to advancing efforts to increase student equity and success across the system. From program evaluations, a growing body of evidence about middle leadership points to the value of these programs to emerging middle leaders.

Key Outcomes for Middle Leadership Development

Just as BSILI and LFM share design principles, they also have similar intended outcomes for participants. [LFM](#)⁷ and [BSILI](#)⁸ have stated outcomes for participants that include development of near-term applicable strategies, as well as longer-term aspirational outcomes (see *Figure I. Program Outcomes* below).

⁷ For more information on LFM program outcomes, visit <http://rpgroup.org/Leading-from-the-Middle>.

⁸ For more information on BSILI program outcomes, visit <http://bsili.3csn.org/>.

Figure 1. Program Outcomes

Basic Skills Initiative Leadership Institute

- Create a structured plan to build capacity for ongoing inquiry and professional learning that is linked to and focused on student success
- Learn and apply capacity-building tools of leadership to achieve this transformational professional learning program
- Learn techniques for establishing outcomes and considering data/evidence to develop an evaluation plan for assessing this professional learning program
- Create a shared vision of transformational professional learning and inquiry that is an integral part of educational culture and professional identity
- Build a narrative that participants can use to create support/ownership at the college, region, or larger network

Leading from the Middle

- Leadership Development:
 - Develop leadership identity
 - Develop strategies to sustain and support leadership development
- Collaboration and Collective Leadership:
 - Create and sustain professional relationships in which peers share ideas and strategize together
- Leading a College Change Initiative:
 - Engage with existing literature
 - Apply research and evidence to make informed decisions that advance institutional change efforts
 - Strengthen capacity to prioritize and lead departmental, institutional, and other changes through the process of evidence-based inquiry

LFM's three overarching outcomes—leadership development, collaboration and collective leadership, and leading a college change initiative—form the base for a framework of middle leadership skills and development. These three encompass the BSILI mission and outcomes and provide a framework that illustrates how involvement in these leadership development programs impacts participants during and after the program. These outcomes are explored below, including participant perspectives on their value and impact on their leadership development.

Note: the three major outcomes are organized to reflect an emerging understanding of their interaction and sequence. LFM names *developing identity as a leader* as a first outcome. However, program leaders have observed over the years that identity grows out of increased knowledge and confidence gained not only from participation, but also through action and application of the new skills in practice. Thus *developing leadership identity* follows the other outcomes. The LFM outcome named *leading a college change initiative*, has been renamed to

leading college change to reflect the college-wide scope of transformational change. These three outcomes are discussed below as follows:

- Collaborating and participating in collective leadership
- Leading college change
- Developing leadership identity

Collaborating and Participating in Collective Leadership

BSILI and LFM highlight the collaborative nature of middle leadership. One faculty leader describes how collaboration has become characteristic of all her work:

My work is never by myself. I always work in collaboration...so it's not just my ideas.

Both programs foster the development of cross-functional teams that give leaders perspectives from other corners of the campus. In addition, during program retreats, educators build relationships and learn from colleagues at other colleges. These interactions give participants the opportunity to develop a professional network within and beyond their college and to see their campus efforts in the context of work across the system.

Building Relationships: Team Development and Collective Leadership

Human relationships are the medium and connective tissue of leadership, especially for middle leaders. Middle leaders work on problems that are bigger than their individual domain, be it at the classroom, program, or campus levels. Further, middle leaders may not have the power to make things happen by mandate; they rely on relationships and communication to make change.

The retreat setting is important for cross-functional teams, whose members have full schedules that might preclude regular meetings on campus. In follow-up surveys, participants repeatedly expressed appreciation for this team time away from the college because focused extended time for planning without distractions is so rarely available on campus.

Interacting as a team gives leaders the opportunity to appreciate both similarities and differences. Understanding and working with colleagues' different approaches can provide a blueprint for collaboration on campus. An LFM participant describes the satisfactions of the collective team process:

We can accomplish so much more by working together. We also have been able to create trust and the open atmosphere where we can work through differences in perspective. We are so much stronger and can accomplish so much more as a group than we ever could as individuals.

Through their BSILI or LFM experience, a team may bond and become an ongoing work group on campus. One participant describes how the LFM team took stock of each member's connections and strategically utilized those relationships to support their campus change work:

We developed a sense of connectedness, which allowed us to get momentum in our project. We "mind-mapped" resources on campus and identified relationships we had beyond the team.... We looked at those relationships and the committees we served on, in other words, our human capital. This [mapping] was also a way to see the strengths each of us brought to the team. Then, we decided who was the best person to reach out and make the connections to others on campus.

Another leader expressed the critical role the team and community experience play in acquiring middle leadership skills, observing:

We can accomplish so much more by working together. We also have been able to create trust and the open atmosphere where we can work through differences in perspective. We are so much stronger and can accomplish so much more as a group than we ever could as individuals.

One other thing I learned at LFM and BSILI...is that the value of programs like LFM and BSILI is not the content I learned (out of context), but the content I learned within the community that was formed by the program.

The experience of collective leadership, as a design principle of BSILI and LFM, addresses the variations in background among participants. Being part of a team with shared experiences during the leadership programs supports the growth of leaders, regardless of their prior experiences. The team model gives participants an opportunity to identify strengths, support new leaders, and give seasoned leaders opportunity to contribute to a collaborative effort. Further, the team experience models a way to shape collective leadership in campus work.

Extending Networks and Communities of Practice

LFM and BSILI create settings where community college educators learn from each other across campuses. For example, educators hear about different ways that common issues are addressed at other colleges when discussing statewide initiatives. This broader context gives middle leaders the chance to consider their college's practices, as well as to gather strategies to change those practices when needed. They are able to look to colleagues at other campuses for inspiration, models, and support. Participants from BSILI and LFM describe the value of interacting with colleagues from other colleges, noting:

[It's] invigorating to be with other individuals who want to be change agents. What I take away from BSILI is a sense of network and how you can capitalize on others.

Talking to faculty, coordinators, and leaders from other colleges about their own projects and experiences helps give context for what we do, and helps provide a longer-range view of how we might make change in our own school.

Many participants report that they appreciate realizing that they are not alone in their efforts, either as individuals or institutions. They are not alone in their problems and they are not alone in their commitment to serve their students more effectively and more equitably. A faculty leader describes this discovery:

My first time at BSILI was an awakening! I saw all these people working on the same issues and doing amazing things. The community of practice is a way to build out that connection.... I felt empowerment and movement. It's bigger than my program and my campus. My fight is going on across the state and nation. And I have allies across state.

3CSN has created a number of Communities of Practice (CoP) to share knowledge and provide ongoing support beyond the initial experience. For example, the Learning Assistance Community of Practice grew out of leaders' shared experience and common need. A leader whose position included overseeing the tutoring program on his campus found allies in BSILI to develop this regional, and then statewide, community of practice and subsequently work with two other 3CSN regional coordinators to create a professional conference for tutors—the Tutor Expo. He explains:

The second time I came to BSILI, there were only a few tutoring coordinators. I was encouraged to think big, to create an event. I realized that tutors have been marginalized. In grad school, students were encouraged to attend CATESOL [organization for teachers of English to speakers of other languages], to present and have a voice in the field. I wanted to do that for tutors.... I brought the idea into the world; 3CSN built it up.

The first Tutor Expo at a LACCD college was small; in 2014, 60 people attended. The next year, it doubled and continues to grow every year. There are now Tutor Expos for colleges in both northern and southern California. In 2018, over 400 tutors and coordinators attended, and in the same year, this Community of Practice launched a leadership institute for learning assistance.

These communities of practice and extended professional networks provide middle leaders with ongoing professional learning, the chance to interact with colleagues who share challenges and successes, and the opportunity to grow their reach and impact.

Leading College Change

LFM and BSLI were designed to develop middle leaders who are prepared to lead change at their institutions. These programs provide a laboratory setting for participants to practice leadership skills and strategies in a supportive environment. As teams, participants create graphic representations, timelines, and plans—whether for a LFM change initiative or a BSILI professional

development hub. With each hands-on activity, teams have the opportunity to share their product with the large group and give and receive feedback to strengthen their plans.

The yearlong program timeline gives leaders a chance to encounter the realities and complexities of institutional change. Many of the proposed LFM change projects have required collaboration across silos that historically have not worked together. One such example would be the development of early alert programs that relied on close communication between academics and student support services.

As the leadership teams develop their project in their campus setting, they also gain a broader perspective on the complexities of the change process and on the political climate in the state that informs their change efforts.

Applying Tools and Strategies

The curricula of both leadership development programs give participants hands-on experience with planning tools, such as logic models (a graphic tool that maps inputs, outputs, and outcomes), and communication tools, such as the elevator pitch (a short persuasive message aimed at a particular audience).

Participants, particularly those who have not had prior formal training in leadership, report finding these planning tools useful as starting point for change. Two participants reflect on their experiences in BSILI:

[BSILI] gave us concrete tools like Crosswalks and Logic Models to help work better with administration.

Being introduced to design principles and tools like Logic Models, Theory of Change, etc. has changed the way I think about implementing change.

In addition, both programs underscore the role of data literacy and use in the change process. Each BSILI team organizes an ongoing data inquiry group at their college. LFM teams, which include an institutional researcher, bring campus data for review at the Academies. Data are important at every stage, from making the case for change to designing evaluation of impact. Comprehensive use of data includes both making sense of numbers and forming stories—drawing on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative data to convey a message, ask a question, or highlight a pattern of performance.

Participants then have the opportunity to practice using data to support their change efforts. For example, Merced College created a short video⁹ as their “elevator pitch” during the 2018 LFM Academy. The video included excerpts from qualitative interviews with students about their academic aspirations and reasons for being at college, paired with quantitative data on patterns

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPJ70Cbysw0&feature=youtu.be>

of student completion. This combination of evidence tells a powerful story and leads to a call to action. The video was shown at their fall 2018 convocation, attended by all district-wide employees, including faculty, administrators, and staff.

Many participants observe that the effective deployment of tools rests on the soft skills of understanding human responses and communication. In making change at their colleges, middle leaders see the strategic interaction of hard and soft skills, as described by two LFM participants:

The hard skills get the work done. The soft skills lead others to get the work done. You can train people to do business. But the soft skills inspire others. If you don't have that, the results can be mediocre.

The hard skills are not the hard part of developing as a leader. As an informal leader, I apply soft skills proactively across campus.

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Understanding the Complexity of Change

In encouraging middle leaders to undertake efforts at their colleges, BSILI and LFM tell educators inspirational stories of change, as well as cautionary tales. Such stories illustrate that there is no singular way to lead that guarantees change will occur. The process of change is locally shaped, takes time, and is likely to have rough patches along the way.

Understanding the complexity of the change process is a precursor to making change. Those who have been on the frontlines of institutional reform know first-hand that change does not follow a set formula. Both BSILI and LFM emphasize that movement toward change may be recursive: steps may have to be revisited and repeated. It is not unusual for leaders to step back and reconsider what is possible in the process. One participant describes gaining insight into the transformation process and the realization that persistence is inherently part of leading change, observing:

It's necessary...you can't succeed if you don't fail/risk/keep trying/[go] forward.

As middle leaders become more experienced in leading change, they become more strategic, identifying long-term outcomes and choosing effective means to achieve them. One leader described how their college team members strategically positioned themselves on campus and took the message of persistence to heart, stating:

[We placed ourselves] where the decisions get made and [were determined] not to let things stop us...[always] finding a way to move forward.

In BSILI and LFM participants address common issues that can thwart change efforts. Some aspects of change prove to be counterintuitive. Middle leaders learn strategies to effectively work against these forces. For example, in their work on behavioral psychology and

economics, Tversky and Kahneman (2011) articulate a number of predictable obstacles to change, such as status quo bias and the endowment effect. The status quo bias states that people prefer things to stay as they are. Emotionally, present conditions are known; change can be perceived as threatening and loss. A faculty leader describes his understanding that leadership includes disruption, stating:

Leadership is partly disruption, disrupting the status quo. People aren't inclined [to change]. I keep asking questions. We don't have to solve them now, but we have to keep them on the radar.

The endowment effect states that people ascribe value to things because they own them. Thus losing them would be perceived as a great cost. A middle leader describes how understanding the endowment effect informed his work with faculty by anticipating the sense of loss that comes with change, sharing:

Working with faculty, they feel like they are giving up something; I can help them understand that if they participate, they can own it...help them go from something they don't like at first to see value in it and get them to feel connected, that they are gaining something, not losing.

Engaging Stakeholders

Both BSILI and LFM embrace the idea that stakeholder engagement is a core strategy of institutional change and is key to effectively navigating the complexity of the change process. A BSILI veteran summed up the approach he applies at his college, explaining:

We discussed how to be an agent of change: build a logic model, know who the stakeholders are, get their thoughts.

LFM and BSILI participants describe becoming more intentional about who to include and how to engage them in campus-wide conversations. Through their LFM and BSILI experience, they come to recognize that involving the range of diverse stakeholders adds perspectives that might otherwise be omitted in the change process. For example, in one LFM hands-on activity, middle leaders graphically map the individuals and units on campus whose work will be touched by the proposed work.

Sacramento City College offers an example of expanding stakeholder engagement. The college first sent a team to BSILI and subsequently won a 3CSN raffle to attend LFM. The team came to LFM with the idea of a project focused on placing classified staff from offices across the campus in basic skills math classrooms to share information about resources available to students, while at the same time giving students another point of personal contact. The then-Basic Skills Coordinator describes how the team applied their learning about stakeholder engagement to broaden the base of support for and participation in their proposal:

[The LFM facilitator] talked about how [when he worked] at City College of San Francisco, they would take data and "walk it around." As a result, we did so much more

than I'd expected as a faculty member. On my own, I would have stuck with the enthusiastic Basic Skills Steering Committee members and the faculty who were already involved. We made it a larger project, instead of waiting for the usual suspects. We went and presented to the faculty Academic Senate and the Classified Senate. There is a monthly coffee break for staff, we presented there.

Stakeholder engagement becomes even more imperative in transformational change efforts; the definition of stakeholders is inclusive and far-reaching. One leader describes planning for broader engagement in Guided Pathways:

We are involving more voices around the table and making sure campus communication is at the forefront of decision-making.

As mentioned above, middle leaders learn both in theory and through experience during BSILI and LFM that stakeholders do not always respond positively to proposed changes. Both programs emphasize that it is more than likely that leaders will encounter negative responses in their efforts. Sometimes this resistance may reflect exhaustion or initiative fatigue. One faculty leader describes the reaction to any proposed change on her campus:

Change is not seen as "good." People don't want "change for the sake of change." People are tired out by changes...they get burned out. Sometimes they invested effort [in prior initiatives], then the administration pulled the funding.

LFM includes an activity called "engaging resistance" that explores the motivations underlying this opposition and underscores that empathy is essential to working with resisters. Some colleagues will have strongly held opposing views, and others may object loudly if they have been left out of decisions. Through LFM and BSILI, middle leaders come to understand and respect that those who resist may be equally passionate in their commitments and beliefs. It is useful to make space and bring those perspectives to the table. One middle leader reflected on this learning, sharing:

Resistance was the most useful. It's always trickiest, how to deal with people who disagree with you. And we got strategies for each, how to approach resistance as a conversation, not as a battle.

The discussion on resistance prompted our thinking: Why wasn't there more collaboration around improvement?

One college example illustrates the power of planning stakeholder engagement with resistance in mind. Cañada College's team incorporated concepts from both LFM and BSILI in developing a campus-wide professional development program focused on collaborative inquiry for equity, proactively engaging potential resisters. A faculty leader reflected on this experience, stating:

The discussion on resistance prompted our thinking: Why wasn't there more collaboration around improvement? There had been a lot of resentment about Student Learning

Outcomes (SLOs)... We thought through how to navigate faculty response. We approached individually faculty who had been resistant to SLOs and those who tended to complain loudly in meetings. We listened to faculty responses and incorporated their feedback. Faculty [shared they] didn't like being "developed," so [we] called our planned activities "inquiry projects."¹⁰

In another example of engaging resistance, Norco College participated in LFM to initiate Guided Pathways planning. The team—including the English and mathematics chairs; the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) dean; and the institutional researcher—created a draft plan for meta-majors. When they returned to campus and shared it with the counseling department, the team initially received negative feedback. One team member recalled their next steps, explaining:

We needed counseling on the team. We needed someone within the resistance. We needed an advocate, so we added the lead counselor. Counseling was afraid of losing power, afraid students wouldn't come see them. We could identify with that fear and address it. The pathway would include intrusive counseling. We could build it in and make it clear that students need to see the counselor. We could have a hotlink [on the site] to make an appointment. The pathway could integrate counseling. We could ask them to help build it in.

Rooting Change in Local Knowledge while Drawing on the Broader Context to Inform Action

Although there are common elements across successful change stories, the process of institutional change, and even more so of transformational change, is determined by the local setting and players. In BSILI and LFM, middle leaders gain a general understanding of the change process, as well as develop facility localizing their leadership moves to fit their campus context.

BSILI and LFM underscore that navigating the local setting means understanding the college both structurally and culturally. The timeframe for any institutional change is variable. Institutions have their own formal time requirements with requisite lead-time for budgeting, committee calendars, and moving through the approval process. No matter how long

Now I think about things systemically, more broadly, not just my own corner of the institution, but the institution as a whole.

¹⁰ This collaborative inquiry effort at Cañada College received the RP Group Award for Excellence in College Research for "How to Increase Data Democracy and Develop a Culture of Inquiry Within Faculty and Staff: Recipients" (Hsieh, 2016). Additionally, two faculty leaders published a peer-reviewed article describing this work in the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* (Sidman-Taveau, R. & Hoffman, M., 2018).

the structural process takes, leaders are aware that it also takes time for the culture to embrace a change and for a practice to shift from novel to normal.

Through the expanded networks described above, BSILI and LFM participants are able to bring their understanding of the broader state and system context to their local leadership efforts. They have a sense of the bigger picture that is happening across the state and how similar issues are being addressed at other colleges—knowledge that can inform their local strategic choices. Two 3CSN regional coordinators describe how understanding state and regional initiatives informed their local college efforts:

[BSILI] is like being given a behind-the-curtain look at how to be successful...[it's like you are] able to float above the college, stand outside, and have the perspective.... You can be fully entrenched [in your own college] and be aware you are one of 114 colleges. You can see the college and the region and the state.

Working regionally altered my vision of my own campus and district. I realized we are ahead of the curve in some areas and behind it in others.... Now I think about things systemically, more broadly, not just my own corner of the institution, but the institution as a whole. As the Basic Skills Coordinator, I realized how marginalized I was. I got a broader sense of student success in general, and I can bring those ideas to the center of campus from the margin.

One of these regional coordinators leveraged her power as a faculty member by becoming active in the college Academic Senate. When she heard that colleagues in the Academic Senate were making disparaging remarks about basic skills students, she decided that it was important to work through this structure to address this issue head-on. She felt prepared by her BSILI experience, sharing:

A voice needed to be heard in a place it wasn't being heard...the Senate was mostly disciplinary faculty, who haven't taught basic skills. I decided to be in the room to counter what people say, to be at the table to respond to comments when issues of basic skills or equity were raised.

In leading college change, middle leaders demonstrate the many ways they learn to be strategic and intentional.

Developing Leadership Identity

BSILI and LFM provide the structure and setting for participants to establish their own identity as a middle leader, both individually and collectively. Identity as a middle leader grows from experiences and deepens with knowledge, reflection, and taking on new, though measured, risks.

The following section explores what motivates LFM and BSILI participants to step up as leaders and describes the varied backgrounds these participants bring to their participation in the leadership programs. It also examines how to help middle leaders continue to develop and sustain their energy over time.

Motivations for Middle Leadership

Across the system, many educators chose their work because they believe in their students' potential and in the educational possibilities of the community college. In turn, BSILI and LFM participants often view their pursuit of middle leadership as an expression of their commitment to students. Some middle leaders are themselves the product of community colleges and have returned to give back to the institutions that opened opportunities for them. For many middle leaders, social justice and equity are strong drivers in their lives. They seek ways to more effectively serve their students and to impact students at scale. One participant reflects on the journey that led her to teaching and then to campus leadership:

[Being in BSILI] reminded me why I started all this. Social justice. That was what it was all about in grad school. That got lost in the first few years and the demands of full-time teaching.... Now that sense of social justice is coming back. I remember the bigger picture. I came to [community colleges] with a social justice mindset, the socio-political perspective, the ways we perpetuate the system.... I can support people transforming their lives. I had 12-15 years of teaching under my belt. [Teaching was] so delicious, so addictive. You love your students, and they love you, and you're changing their lives. [But then] I remember the big picture. I can affect more students.

Many emerging leaders are motivated by their commitment to students. Another faculty who became a 3CSN regional coordinator recounts the process that led to understanding leadership over time:

At first I didn't think of myself as a leader. I was just intrigued by pedagogy and how to teach better.... It's my personality, I'm stubborn: this needs to happen for the students.... Only later I recognized this as leadership. Now I see myself as a leader.

A Continuum of Leadership Experience

BSILI and LFM participants demonstrate that there is no singular path or common trajectory for community college educators to become middle leaders. What participants bring to and take away from the leadership development experience varies in all dimensions: educational background, professional experiences, and leadership preparation. For some, program participation provides the initial inspiration and steps towards leadership. Others already see themselves as leaders and report that participation in BSILI and/or LFM deepens their commitment and confidence as a leader and expands their repertoire of leadership skills.

Looking across BSILI and LFM participants, a continuum emerges ranging from novice to seasoned middle leaders. Some attendees show up reluctant to see themselves as leaders; they even wonder why they were chosen for the experience. They believe in students and in the possibility of community college education, but may not see themselves as having the capacity to organize institutional change.

At the other end of the continuum are experienced leaders who are comfortable identifying themselves in this way. Many seasoned leaders have worn many hats on campus, worked

extensively in projects and programs, and served on multiple task forces and committees. They have come to see themselves as leaders in whatever position they hold.

This range is described below, with details of how BSILI and LFM contribute to developing and deepening identity of middle leaders, wherever they are along the continuum.

NOVICE AND EMERGING LEADERS

While some participants report that they have actively pursued leadership opportunities over their career, many find they are surprised to be identified by their colleagues as potential leaders. As one LFM participant observed, “Most of us never planned to end up in leadership.” Some faculty participants who come to BSILI or LFM without formal leadership preparation are at first reluctant to take on the title of leader and express an initial preference to be viewed as a “facilitator.”

I was not so comfortable identifying as a leader. I wasn't sure what it meant. I felt rocky, but as I worked through [the experience], I became confident.

Participants who identify as novice leaders indicate that the BSILI and LFM experience helped them become more comfortable with their leadership abilities and come to recognize themselves as leaders. For example, one educator who served in both faculty and administrative positions grew from novice to seasoned leader as BSILI continued over time. Reflecting on her first time as a participant, the environment both overwhelmed and supported her:

I went to the inaugural BSILI and every one since. I had just been hired as an equity dean, and I had the major charge: how to create holistic programs. I took a lot of notes. I felt over my head. I gained the sense of something bigger.

A researcher who participated in LFM for two years was enrolled in a graduate program at the same time he attended LFM. He found formal graduate school theories and the practical professional learning experience to be complementary. Applying the ideas from both reinforced his growing view of himself as a leader:

The first time [I participated in LFM], I was not so comfortable identifying as a leader. I wasn't sure what it meant. I felt rocky, but as I worked through [the experience], I became confident. I didn't understand leadership.... Society romanticizes leadership.... You have to have confidence and credibility so others take you seriously.

The development of novice, or emerging leaders, takes place over time as educators gain skills, experiences, professional connections, and confidence. Participation in a leadership development program can accelerate the development of identity as a leader and the determination to mobilize change at their colleges.

A faculty member in one of the first LFM Academies noted that the effects continued beyond the program. When he expressed interest in becoming an LFM coach he wrote:

Even though I didn't realize it at the time, my LFM experience really changed my perspective on my professional choice and responsibilities as a community college faculty. One thing I learned was of the professional development opportunities outside of my local campus that could help me see the larger picture of where some of the state initiatives were coming from and what they meant and could mean to our students.

Several leaders report that they have been prodded—positively—by BSILI’s advice: “Don’t wait to be asked to be a leader.” A faculty leader described the ways she now seeks opportunities and feels prepared to act on that advice:

Since LFM and BSILI, I am more confident to seek out roles in college governance (esp. on my Academic Senate) that I probably wouldn't have sought or accepted before these two programs. Some of that confidence comes from the fact that from LFM and BSILI, I learned that I have a voice, that I have something important to say about teaching and learning on my campus.

SEASONED LEADERS

At the other end of the continuum are those who comfortably see themselves as leaders when they come to these leadership development programs. They may already be active in initiatives or in a range of innovations at the campus, region, state, and/or national levels. They have worn many hats, and if you ask about leaders on campus, their colleagues are likely to offer their names.

For example, one faculty leader has served as department chair, basic skills committee member, and later basic skills coordinator over the 25 years she has worked at her college. She attended BSILI with campus colleagues and later brought a team to the first California Acceleration Project cohort. She joined the BSILI leadership team and served as a 3CSN regional coordinator. During the same time period, she took on the campus role of professional development coordinator. Throughout all these roles, she has comfortably seen herself as a leader.

Seasoned leaders look for opportunities to continue learning and growing as leaders. They seek out ways to actively contribute to the leadership programs and frequently take on roles as 3CSN regional coordinators and LFM coaches for the broader perspective those roles provide and the opportunity to expand their leadership skills and networks.

Two middle leaders described how experiences working with their own college teams and later coaching with another LFM college gave them the chance to develop a more intentional approach to leadership, stating:

I've known I was a leader. I've been department chair for six years. I've worn the title of leader, but I wasn't really comfortable with it.... Now as a leader, I can think better, not be as emotional, not as threatened. I can look for reasons and not get riled up...we have a job to do and work for the students and do what is needed.

The LFM curriculum gave a name to aspects of leadership. It helped clarify what was intuitive.... I'm still a student of LFM, always learning and continuously applying the

curriculum. As a coach there is more distance, I can be more emotionally intelligent. I'm an outsider to the team, and can be more objective, as I help others go through it. On my own campus, I'm more emotionally involved. After being a coach, I'm now able to be more distant in my own work.

Sustaining Leadership

If middle leaders are going to sustain over time, if they are going to be in for the long haul, they need to be as intentional about self-care as they are about supporting others. One leader recognized that self-care is as essential as other parts of her definition of leadership.

Leadership is about a lot of things, including the capacity to be compassionate and intentional. It is about building coalitions and creating a culture of leadership. And, it is about self-care.

Leadership is about a lot of things, including the capacity to be compassionate and intentional. It is about building coalitions and creating a culture of leadership. And, it is about self-care.

Other ways of maintaining energy and attention over time are collaborative. Professional relationships are part of sustaining involvement as a leader. Without personal and professional support, developing leaders can burn out or give up. Colleagues can provide support, offer different perspectives, and can help a tired leader maintain energy. Peers can prompt a leader to see the big picture and keep things in perspective. In moments of frustration, trusted colleagues can also provide a safe place to rant.

As many acknowledge, middle leadership can be intense and exhausting. Intensity may in fact be an understatement; one LFM director has been known to caution that the process of institutional change can be “a blood sport,” with middle leaders caught in the melee.

Leadership roles come with stress. Middle leaders who mobilize change on campus may be viewed as troublemakers or worse. Their efforts may be unacknowledged or they may intentionally be left out of committees and conversations. Experienced middle leaders have stories of being caught in political turf battles or becoming targets for rumors and attacks. One faculty leader described her eye-opening experience, stating:

Before, I was naïve about campus politics. I thought it wouldn't happen to me on my campus.

When she found herself a target, she turned to colleagues for support and was determined to persist.

A strategy that BSILI and LFM offers middle leaders is to see the big picture—to step back and not take the responses personally. As one participant describes:

I have gained confidence and learned to speak up for equity in venues where that might not be the popular thing to do. I have learned a lot about resistance and am willing to accept criticism without taking it personally.

MENTORING COLLEAGUES INTO LEADERSHIP

Yet another way to sustain leadership is to mentor others, fostering the next wave of leaders. Through BSILI and LFM, middle leaders come to realize that they are in a position to share their knowledge and inspire others. As one participant describes:

I think of myself as a leader, I am not reluctant. Wherever I go, it's my personality to step in with the desire to make things work better. [However], I am learning that having a willing personality is not the only pathway to being a leader.... BSILI has reinforced my desire to develop leadership in others. I can mentor and bring other people in.

I have gained confidence and learned to speak up for equity in venues where that might not be the popular thing to do. I have learned a lot about resistance and am willing to accept criticism without taking it personally.

In another example, one member of a LFM team also served as the institution's professional development coordinator. That year, the college hired 22 new faculty members, and she recognized an opportunity to embed LFM ideas in the year-long new faculty orientation. She described her approach, stating:

I empowered them to think of themselves as leaders, and champions, and shepherds. I fed them the idea that they are already leaders, and you can see them blossoming. They are institutionally engaged, working for the college...[and] they will take over.

Conclusion

Both BSILI and LFM were established several years before the California Community Colleges embarked on the current efforts of implementing AB 705 and designing Guided Pathways, and all the accompanying challenges. When these leadership development programs began, BSILI recognized the need for faculty leaders who were prepared to lead change in basic skills programs and classroom instruction. Informed by the personal experience of middle leaders, LFM initially aimed to fill the gap in ongoing professional development for other middle leaders. Both programs addressed needs and opportunities for educators to take on leadership responsibilities at their colleges. Over the years, faculty, staff, and administrators who participated in these programs have led focused efforts to make their colleges more effective and equitable.

However, in this time of transformational change, middle leaders are even more vital. Middle leaders are positioned to engage educators across the college and create an infrastructure of

information and innovation to support student success. The better prepared middle leaders are in the skills of planning, communication, and data analysis, the more effectively they can collaborate with colleagues to advance institutional change. The more experienced they are in mobilizing coalitions and engaging resisters, the more likely it is that campus culture will shift in response.

What can be done to support and develop more middle leaders across the system?

Recognize and support middle leaders in the field.

The breadth of participants in leadership development programs, who have different experiences and backgrounds, means that varied paths and opportunities will be needed to support middle leaders in the field.

Some educators who have participated in statewide leadership programs may choose to stay in their current positions as faculty, administrators, or staff and continue to be part of collective leadership on their campus with enhanced skills gained through leadership development.

Other middle leaders may be inspired and seek out program leadership positions as directors or coordinators. These positions draw on communication and collaboration skills and give leaders the opportunity to work across silos. Experience in these positions will give these leaders a chance to use skills and strategies they have gained. As they grow in experience and encounter new challenges, they are likely to look for opportunities to continue to deepen their skills as leaders.

Yet other middle leaders may find they appreciate working in a position with broader perspective and responsibility, and they may choose to pursue formal leadership positions in the campus administrative structure. For example, faculty coordinators may apply for a position as a dean. However, they may find that the walls between informal and formal positions are not permeable. At that point, some middle leaders may face a dilemma. If their informal leadership experience is not recognized, they may not be acknowledged as a strong candidate. To advance professionally, they have to move to another college. Once there, it takes time to develop local knowledge and relationships in the new setting. Recognizing the strengths, skills, and experiences of informal programmatic leadership could open opportunities at their own colleges, as well prepare them for moves if they choose to move to another college. Finally, some middle leaders may mature into the next generation of executive leaders. As vice presidents and presidents, they would bring their perspectives and experiences from the middle.

All of these possibilities are open to middle leaders. No matter which path or progression middle leaders follow, or what position they hold, their work as leaders should be recognized with resources, appreciation, and opportunities to continue to grow as leaders.

Expand leadership development opportunities.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office has supported leadership development by investments in both BSILI and LFM. The experiences and outcomes of the programs can inform other efforts to foster middle leaders. Due to both the cost and time commitment, not all educators who might be interested in leadership can attend a residential program. Educators need more opportunities to make early forays into leadership and to extend their skills and confidence as they mature as leaders.

Educators who see their own potential as leaders will look for opportunities to expand leadership experiences and continue to seek ways to deepen their leadership skills. Campus programs, mentoring relationships, and regional workshops, as well as statewide programs, such as LFM and BSILI, could connect in a network and community of practice that would give middle leaders ongoing opportunities to develop and learn with peers.

As middle leaders develop leadership skills and identity, they resoundingly describe the ways in which they become more intentional and strategic. At this time, as colleges face unprecedented transformation, systemic support for middle leadership can and should also be intentional and strategic.

Epilogue: Author's Reflection

I have lived with compelling questions about leadership in community colleges for the last 10 years. These questions first arose when I directed the Strengthening Pre-collegiate Education in Community Colleges (SPECC) at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. SPECC was a three-year action research project (2006-2009) with 11 California Community Colleges that focused on applying inquiry to rework their basic skills programs. Each institution had a team with a designated leader. After I became more familiar with how community colleges work, the question arose: Who were these leaders, and how did they come to be in a position to lead a grant project on their campus?

At the end of the project, I described what I learned through this effort in *Change and Sustain/Ability: A Program Director's Reflections on Institutional Learning* (2008, p.9), observing these leaders had "an inseparable mix of personal warmth and campus-wide experiences...these coordinators are enmeshed in a network of relationships across campus and beyond." Thus, I had the bare beginnings of understanding middle leadership. Most of these individuals were not in titled positions such as "dean." Instead, they had navigated the local cultures of their campuses and carved their own idiosyncratic paths to leadership.

However, with the current changes in California Community Colleges, the need is greater than can be filled by individuals finding their own way to leadership. Having been a participant observer in BSILI and part of the LFM Steering Committee, I have seen how these two programs have systemically and systematically developed middle leaders in order to expand the numbers of community college educators prepared to lead change. The approaches and lessons learned from these two efforts can inform other middle leadership programs, and more broadly, California Community Colleges can serve as a model for scaled middle leadership development.

About the Author

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About Leading from the Middle

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges (The RP Group) launched the Leading from the Middle (LFM) Academy in 2013. LFM was a response to the dearth of professional development to support the growth of middle leaders across California Community Colleges at a time when the community college reform movement was picking up speed, at the system and state levels as well as within the institutions. California Community Colleges need strong, innovative middle leaders—faculty, department chairs, directors, deans, student services professionals, researchers, classified staff—who can effectively respond to the myriad of reforms facing our institutions, facilitate communication, and move stakeholders to action. Since its inception LFM has served more than 450 middle leaders from nearly 70 community colleges. LFM focuses on creating change makers and organizational coherence within each college.

About the RP Group

The RP Group is a non-profit, membership-driven organization that strives to build a community college culture that views planning, evidence-based decision-making, and institutional effectiveness as integral, collaborative strategies that work together to promote student success, increase equitable outcomes, improve college operations, and inform policymakers. Go to www.rpgroup.org for more information.

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