Exploring the Leadership Practices of Elementary School Principals Through a Distributed Leadership Framework: A Case Study

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to explore the leadership practice of two urban elementary school principals through a distributed leadership framework. Methods: The study employed an ethnographic case study and data were collected through semistructured interviews and observations. A case study for each principal was created, followed by a cross-case analysis. Findings: Exploring leadership practice through a distributed leadership framework provides insights into how leadership practice is enacted by individuals and their situational context. Conclusion: Additional research should focus on the how *of leadership practice to provide school leaders deeper insights into the work of school improvement.*

Keywords: distributed leadership, educational leadership, school leaders, leadership practice, principals

Introduction

Creating equitable educational systems to close the opportunity gap is the most significant challenge facing 21st-century education in the United States (Bryant, Triplett, Watson, & Lewis, 2017; Huggins, Klar, Hammonds, & Buskey, 2017; Valant & Newmark, 2016). However, obstacles arise when principals engage in efforts to improve instruction and close the opportunity gap for culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in their schools (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Howard, 2010). Quite often, school leaders, specifically principals, are left to figure out how to create conditions to improve instruction and increase academic achievement by enlisting the support of other individuals in their schools (Bredeson, 2013; Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013). As a result, principals are examining more responsive leadership approaches and seeking to adopt new leadership skills in order to address the challenges of improving student achievement and close the opportunity gap for the diverse student populations in their schools (Dimmock, 2012; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Smith, 2017; Vang, 2015).

The traditional leadership perspective in which one person, generally the principal, is responsible for enacting all leadership functions and responsibilities has quickly given way to a more distributed perspective of leadership practice (Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane, 2006, 2007). A distributed perspective moves beyond this narrow view and invites an examination of the leaders in schools that engage in or influence practice that impacts teaching and learning (Spillane, 2006). The practice of distributed leadership extends beyond traditional roles and responsibilities to integrate coordinated actions and interactions across the school community (Dimmock, 2012; Gronn, 2008; Mulford, 2008; Spillane, 2006). In turn, these coordinated interactions among school leaders can harness human capital and resources to improve teacher practice, which can have a sustained impact on efforts to close the opportunity gap for diverse student populations (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014; Robinson, 2008).

This article examines the leadership practice of two principals working in urban elementary schools that have demonstrated annual gains in student academic achievement as measured by the annual state accountability assessment. The following research question was addressed: What are the leadership practices of principals working in

schools that demonstrate annual gains in student academic achievement as measured by the annual state accountability assessment?

In the following sections of this article, there is a brief review of the literature with a focus on the constructs of distributed leadership as a conceptual framework for examining and analyzing leadership practice in schools. The methods employed to conduct this qualitative case study of two elementary school principals are then described. Next, the themes that emerged from the data analysis and the consequent findings are presented. Finally, the article ends with a discussion of the findings, recommendations, and a conclusion.

Literature Review

Distributed leadership is a relatively new concept in the field of leadership and organizational performance (Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Harris, 2004, 2013; Spillane, 2007). A distributed perspective of leadership provides a conceptual framework by which the *how* of leadership practice can be examined and may serve as a more accurate way of representing patterns of leadership that occur in schools (Bredeson, 2013; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006).

Theoretical Conceptualizations

A growing body of empirical research draws on the distributed perspective in order to understand how leadership practice extends to those with no formal roles in schools (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Dimmock, 2012; Spillane, 2006). Prominent researchers Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), as well as Gronn (2000, 2002a, 2002b), have developed conceptual frameworks for analyzing leadership practice in schools; however, their conceptual frameworks differ (Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

Gronn (2000, 2002b, 2009) describes three patterns of collective action observable in the practice of distributed leadership: (a) spontaneous collaboration, where leadership practice is a result of the collective interactions of individuals with different skills and expertise to accomplish a task; (b) shared roles, where leadership emerges between two or more individuals coordinating their efforts to accomplish a task; and (c) institutional structures, where leadership practice is dictated by formal organizational structures or roles.

Moreover, Gronn (2000, 2002a) proposes that distributed leadership emerges as a result of the interactions of people in a group or groups of people acting as one connected network with a specific purpose. In this conceptualization, Gronn (2002b) views leadership as a concerted action to be explored from a broader understanding of leadership practice rather than a collective of each person enacting tasks. This perspective holds that people in a given organization are working in tandem to merge their efforts and expertise so that the collective outcome of the group is greater than the efforts or actions of one person alone.

In contrast, Spillane (2006, 2015) conceptualizes leadership practice from a distributed perspective where leadership practice is the focus of the analysis (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). A practice lens provides insights into how leadership is enacted in schools, including which individuals are networking together, what they do, and why they do it (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Spillane, 2006). A distributed perspective views leadership practice in schools as an outcome of the interactions of formal and informal leaders, their situational context, their use of tools in facilitating these interactions, and the organizational structures that constrain or influence their interactions (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Therefore, a distributed perspective of leadership practice is always the starting point for understanding the *how* of leadership as it unfolds in the work of schools (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

A distributed leadership framework provides an alternative way of examining the complexities of how multiple individuals and principals engage in the work of improving teacher practice and student learning outcomes (Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Huggins et al., 2017; Spillane, 2005, 2015). This shift in focus further contributes to a more integrated understanding of the leadership practice of school leaders instead of a narrow examination of isolated individuals lacking any situated context (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Dimmock, 2012; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

Methodology

The researcher used a case study design grounded in the ethnographic research tradition (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Schram, 2006) to examine how the complex relationships and interactions of two urban elementary principals in contextual situations intersect as leadership practice and constitute distributed leadership. This article highlights the

two case principals and the range of leadership practice that occurred through their interactions with teachers while situated in various contexts and settings.

Participants

This case study was conducted in a large urban school district in Southern California. The three data sources were (a) elementary principals, (b) leadership team members, and (c) grade-level teachers. Participants varied in gender, age, ethnicity, and length of educational experience. The two case study principals were identified and selected using criterion sampling. Both case principals have spent their entire professional careers in this urban school district. Principal Artavia (pseudonym) worked as a teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal and has been the principal at the case school, Cedro Elementary School (pseudonym), for six years. Cedro Elementary School has a high-poverty (72%), predominately Latinx (99%) student population with 50% of the students identified as English learners. Principal Amado (pseudonym) worked as a teacher, categorical programs coordinator, and assistant principal and has been the principal at the second case school, Almendro Elementary School (pseudonym), for 12 years. Almendro Elementary School has a high-poverty (87%), predominately Latinx (95%) student population with 82% of the students identified as English learners.

Data Collection

Data collected from observations described the setting and context, interactions, behaviors, and leadership practice of both case principals. Interviews and observations allowed the researcher to examine and explore the *how* and *why* of leadership practice. Field notes taken during observations of the case principals described the setting, school cultures, and interactions with leadership team members and grade-level teachers. The use of multiple data sources (Merriam, 2009) enhanced the data reliability through triangulation in two specific ways: (a) first, by asking each case principal to review the field notes, transcriptions, and coding schemes; and (b) second, by sharing interview transcripts and notes with each case principal to ensure a high degree of accuracy in capturing detailed information about their interviews (Glesne, 2011).

The semistructured interviews with each principal lasted two hours. All interviews were recorded using a digital recording device. After each interview, the researcher wrote analytic memos based on personal reflection and perceptions. Interview questions were aligned with the research questions and focused on examining how case principals enacted leadership practice in a variety of settings and contexts through their use of various tools and organizational routines. Additionally, interview questions provided the researcher with an opportunity to collect a wide spectrum of insights and perspectives about leadership practice, and to understand the social patterns and norms of a culture-sharing group (Glesne, 2011).

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were ongoing throughout the study. The data were organized and analyzed in the following sequence: (a) organizing and establishing familiarity with the data; (b) generating categories; (c) identifying themes; and (d) coding of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The researcher examined both case schools, and categorized and noted similarities and differences in each case. As patterns and trends emerged, the researcher was better able to understand the leadership practice of principals in each case school. The synthesis of the data collected from the case schools yielded a deeper understanding of the leadership practice of both case principals. Comparing and contrasting leadership practice provided further insight into the enactment of leadership practice, the distribution of leadership practice across many individuals, and how the tools, routines, and context of a given situation help to define leadership practice in each case school.

The researcher used a professional transcription service for all principal and focus group interviews, and then read and reread all of the transcripts to recheck them for accuracy prior to the data analysis process. A coding system was developed based on the conceptual framework addressed in the literature review on leadership theories and the research questions to generate themes and descriptions and to create relational categories for the data. Upon completion of the data collection and preliminary analysis process, the researcher began a thematic data analysis and interpretation by sorting all of the responses from interview

participants and field notes, including the examination of themes across both case schools.

Data collected from each of the case schools were analyzed through a within-case and cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis was conducted based on where similarities and differences between both case schools were noted and categorized. Data analysis suggested four broad themes of leadership practice that emerged between principals, leadership team members, and grade-level teachers in both case schools that address the research question for this study.

Findings

The case study data are organized around four themes of leadership practice. The leadership practices are (a) a focus on instructional improvement, (b) monitoring instruction in classrooms, (c) structures to promote collaboration, and (d) supporting leadership development for teachers. Each case highlights the most significant leadership practice of each principal and sheds light on the intricacies of leadership practice as it unfolds in the interactions of others. A cross-case analysis of the leadership practice of the two case principals is presented in the discussion section.

The Case of Principal Artavia

A Focus on Instructional Improvement

Principal Artavia understood the need to build a sense of urgency around improving the quality of instruction to reverse the three-year decline of academic achievement and close the opportunity gap. Principal Artavia commented:

> When I first got to the school, there was no question that the priority had to be one of setting a focus, dedicating resources and support for improving instruction. We have a moral obligation to do what we can to improve student achievement because we are talking about children from this community. I tried to make sure that teachers understood that we could and had to do this.

Realizing the daunting challenge of stemming the decline of student achievement and closing the opportunity gap, Principal Artavia gave serious thought and reflected upon how teachers at the school could

be leveraged as leaders in a collective and focused way to address the opportunity gap. What resulted was the establishment of two routines, purposeful goal setting and a data analysis cycle, that would have a direct impact upon instructional improvement and teacher practice over time.

Goal setting. Principal Artavia implemented SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) instructional goals as a high-leverage strategy to maintain a focus on instruction, hold teachers accountable for student progress, and create a way for the school community to measure and see student achievement progress over time. The goal-setting process pushed teachers to become more focused on instruction in a specific way, and over time teachers began to realize how a routine such as goal setting could be instrumental in focusing individual teachers and their grade-level cohorts on instruction. Principal Artavia underscored the importance of goal setting by commenting:

> You begin your work with goal setting. Your reflective questions begin to be about why students are not progressing, and what goals will you set to help them progress. The gains in achievement are mostly because we kept focusing on a process of improving instruction and teacher practice over the years.

Data dialogues. From the principal's perspective, formative and summative data dialogues provided a process and structure for communicating directly with teachers and their grade-level peers about assessment data. Initially, the data dialogues were a difficult sell for the principal, and teachers balked at having to engage in these dialogues. Gradually, however, the data dialogues had a deep impact upon teachers and eventually laid the groundwork for building a school culture focused on improving instruction and creating internal accountability for student academic progress. Principal Artavia provided this insight:

> The data dialogue was my way of focusing individual and grade-level conversations with teachers about what kind of results they were getting with their teaching. Now we are able to see teachers engaging in data dialogues with each other at their grade-level meetings, which has made everyone more serious about making sure all students achieve and show improvement.

Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms

According to Principal Artavia, the school district's Framework for Instructional Improvement became the guiding tool to monitor instruction

in classrooms. The Framework has been instrumental in strengthening the principal's understanding of effective pedagogy and instructional practices, effective classroom management, student-centered learning, and supportive classroom environments. Principal Artavia offered this perspective:

> It would be very difficult, next to impossible, for me as to keep a focus on instruction if I did not visit classrooms regularly to see what was actually happening with teaching and learning. I have a commitment to students to improve their quality of learning by improving the teacher's understanding of effective instruction, and the Framework helps me accomplish this.

Conversations about practice. Principal Artavia believes in the importance of engaging teachers in conversations about practice, a necessary part of monitoring instruction in classrooms. Conducting conversations about practice has been a productive way to make meaningful instructional change, monitor the implementation of instructional strategies, and reinforce the message of a focus on instruction. Principal Artavia emphasizes the importance of principal leadership and a commitment to improving teacher practice and instruction through conversations with teachers as follows:

> You need to have conversations with teachers about what you observe in their classrooms. You give them feedback so they can improve. But you can't have these conversations if you aren't regularly visiting classrooms and monitoring the quality of instruction you see, then meeting with the teacher afterwards. It is about giving specific feedback to the teacher to improve their practice that counts.

Structures to Promote Collaboration

An advocate of removing barriers of isolation between teachers and deprivatizing teacher practice, Principal Artavia took the opportunity to improve upon an existing routine to facilitate teacher collaboration and grade-level articulation: the data analysis cycle.

Data analysis cycle. Principal Artavia established a quarterly data analysis cycle so that teachers would develop a common instructional focus to improve instruction. Additionally, by providing teachers with the opportunity to engage in a process of analyzing data, they were able to

teach each other how to use data to identify instructional goals for improvement. Principal Artavia summed up this process as follows:

> This opportunity where teachers begin to share, begin to take responsibility, begin to take leadership in making commitments about instructional strategies, how they are going to improve teaching and learning is key to why we have begun to see student achievement improve over time.

Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

After months of skepticism, many teachers began embracing Principal Artavia's call to assume leadership roles in the school. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the principal's beliefs about developing teacher leadership practice through job-embedded professional development. Teachers were encouraged and supported in their efforts to take responsibility for creating and leading professional development initiatives at the grade level and during faculty meetings as a way to build their capacity and empower themselves as leaders. Principal Artavia reflected:

> It's about developing teacher leaders, giving all teachers an opportunity to do professional development, to be leaders in their area of expertise. By providing this leadership opportunity it's allowing them to be innovative and creative in how they want to approach meeting their own growth and needs as learners.

The Case of Principal Amado

A Focus on Instructional Improvement

Principal Amado spoke of having inherited a school with a vacuum of leadership. Consequently, the principal was determined to create a sense of urgency surrounding the need for instructional improvement. Principal Amado's leadership practice around this effort is summarized in this manner:

> Remember, it's about having an instructional focus, a pathway for improvement if there is going to be any impact on teaching and student learning. Teachers need to understand the urgency about improving instruction. If they lose this focus, student achievement suffers and it's more difficult to close that gap.

Conversations about practice. From Principal Amado's perspective, efforts to create a strong focus on improving instruction in classrooms often resulted in conversations with teachers about their practice and delivery of instruction. Such conversations are critical opportunities for the principal to provide teachers with feedback so they can improve their practice. At times, conversations with teachers about their practice can create tension, as described by Principal Amado:

> This is about leadership work and setting expectations that everyone must contribute to improving instruction in the school. I set the tone and expectations. Sometimes teachers struggle with the message of what needs to be done to improve. It's hard to have these conversations, but necessary so teachers see where they need to improve in their teaching.

Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms

Principal Amado conducts classroom visitations to monitor the delivery of instruction and the implementation of instructional strategies. Classroom visitations have become a way to monitor the connections between teacher practice and professional development learning over time. Principal Armado highlighted the importance of classroom visitations to monitor instruction as follows:

> Consistent classroom visitations help me to communicate my expectations for what instruction needs to look like every day, and to give teachers feedback and suggestions for improvement. This is part of my effort to keep the focus on instructional improvement. It sets a tone that we take this work seriously.

Peer observations. From Principal Amado's perspective, leadership practice is not solely his responsibility as principal, but should involve all teachers as they work to improve their own practice, demonstrate leadership through observation and participation, and support building leadership practice in others. According to Principal Amado, building leadership practice in others acknowledges that teachers serve a critical role in visiting their colleagues' classrooms and engaging in providing feedback to their peers, while at the same time gaining the experience and skills necessary to have conversations about practice with their peers. Principal Amado summed up the importance of peer observations as follows:

Providing all teachers with the opportunity to engage in classroom observations is a direct way to influence teacher commitment to improving instruction. It can deepen the trust and collaboration between the teacher and the principal over time if done thoughtfully. And over time I can see changes in their practice and how this change impacts student learning in a positive way.

Structures to Promote Collaboration

Principal Amado was very committed to improving upon how teachers and administrators used data to improve teaching and learning. This became the impetus to establish a dedicated time every six weeks for teachers and administrators to analyze formative and summative student data. The data analysis process put in place at the school created ongoing opportunities for teachers and administrators to not only collaborate but to also build their leadership capacity around using data to improve teaching and learning.

Data analysis cycle. Principal Amado believes that a robust, data analysis cycle has been critical to improving student learning and achievement. Additionally, Principal Amado felt it would be extremely difficult for teachers to collaborate and set instructional goals for students without a robust data analysis process. Over time, the majority of teachers were able to see how analyzing formative and summative data assisted them and the principal in determining professional development topics and identifying areas of student need. Principal Amado's gradual delegation of leading the data analysis meetings resulted in an increasing number of teachers realizing that, with the right amount of support and encouragement, taking on this type of leadership role creates a strong culture of internal accountability to student learning and achievement outcomes.

Grade-level meetings. The weekly grade-level meetings were another example of how Principal Amado embraced an existing structure to promote collaboration and reinforce the important message of instructional improvement as a pathway to improving student achievement. Principal Amado relied on an organic process to build teacher leaders by encouraging them to come together weekly to engage in instructional planning based on the needs of their students. Principal Amado provided the following insight into this organic process:

I have made it a point to encourage teachers individually about the importance of stepping up and taking on leadership roles in the school. I encourage them to try leading discussions, to use grade-level data as a jumping off point for discussions, and I encourage them to look at student needs for their grade-level planning.

Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

Principal Amado has played a pivotal role in providing leadership opportunities for teachers. The principal understands the challenges of motivating teachers to become empowered leaders of professional development opportunities at the school. It is through professional development opportunities that Principal Amado has created relevance for teachers by having them take charge of their own individual and group learning. Over time, Principal Amado felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment and pride in supporting teachers as leaders of learning in the school. Principal Amado commented:

Allowing teachers to take a greater role in leading their own professional development has been beneficial for the school. Teachers bring their expertise and knowledge to the table, and that creates opportunities for everyone to learn from each other. That's what leadership looks like in action, and something I am most proud of.

Discussion

This study examined the leadership practices of two urban elementary school principals through a distributed leadership framework to better understand how each principal enacted leadership practice in their schools to improve student achievement and close the opportunity gap. The following section provides a cross-case analysis of the leadership practice of both case principals organized around the four themes of (a) maintaining a focus on instruction, (b) monitoring instruction in classrooms, (c) structures to promote collaboration, and (d) supporting leadership development for teachers.

A Focus on Instructional Improvement

Principal Artavia and Principal Amado understood the importance of maintaining a focus on instructional improvement in order to increase student academic achievement over time. Both case principals were intentional in their conversations with teachers about improving their practice to impact student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2009). The strategic use of routines such as goal setting, a data analysis cycle, and ongoing data dialogues were a personal way for case principals to connect themselves and their teachers to the goals of maintaining a focus on instruction and impacting student learning (Spillane, 2007). The leadership practice that resulted from the implementation of these routines served to strengthen the commitment of administrators and teachers to improving instruction (Bredeson, 2013; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

Monitoring Instruction in Classrooms

The case principals understood the importance of monitoring instruction in all classrooms to improve student achievement (May & Supovitz, 2011). Principals Artavia and Amado were very clear in communicating their purpose for monitoring instruction in classrooms; however, each case principal's purpose for conducting classroom visitations was different.
        Principal Artavia used the Framework for Instructional Improvement as a tool to benchmark teacher pedagogical practices in a more specific way than Principal Amado, who did not use the Framework as a tool to collect and benchmark evidence of teacher practice during classroom visitations (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). In Principal Amado's case, the Framework served as a starting point for providing feedback to teachers about their classroom practice.

Structures to Promote Collaboration

In order to create a more active professional learning community in their schools, both case principals created structures to support teachers and provide time for collaboration around instruction (Bredeson, 2013; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014). Principal Artavia believed in the importance of providing structured opportunities for teachers to engage in planning, goal setting, and data analysis as a way of boosting confidence in their

leadership abilities (Halverson & Clifford, 2013). Contrasting with this is Principal Amado's belief that grade-level meetings provided both the structure and opportunity for teachers to come together based on individual and grade-level needs to address instructional issues, and to focus on the challenges of making their instructional delivery relevant to students (Dimmock, 2012; Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

Supporting Leadership Development for Teachers

Both case principals understood the need for supporting a distributed approach to leadership practice in their efforts to improve teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2009). Principal Amado attempted to make teaching practice more transparent by engaging teachers in a cycle of inquiry using data to identify student learning needs, and then developing improvement strategies to address those needs (Spillane, 2006). By contrast, Principal Artavia attempted to make grade-level meetings more teacher driven and less dependent on principal facilitation as a leadership capacity–building strategy to foster teacher ownership of instructional improvement efforts (Bredeson, 2013; Huggins et al., 2017).

　　　The cross-case analysis suggests that leadership practice was constituted by the ways the principals developed leadership practice in others. The case principals created opportunities for meaningful interactions between themselves and their teachers (Bredeson, 2013). By creating structured opportunities for teachers, leadership team members, and administrators to engage in the work of school improvement, both case principals arrived at similar outcomes of maintaining a focus on instruction while building teacher leadership capacity and practice (Halverson & Clifford, 2013).

　　　Finally, the key to closing the opportunity gap for their students was clear for both case principals: a commitment to strong leadership that provided opportunities for individuals within their schools to have direct responsibility and influence over school improvement efforts. Additionally, both case principals viewed distributed leadership as a framework that could be understood as a combination of both vertical and horizontal leadership (Harris, 2013; Jones & Harris, 2014), which stemmed from the interactions and interrelationships of multiple individuals situated in specific contexts and driven by the aim of improving teacher practice and student achievement.

Recommendations

School leaders must possess leadership skills and knowledge that allow them to address the challenges they face in closing the opportunity gap and creating schools that are responsive to the demographic shifts in student populations. Findings generated from continuing empirical research using the lens of a distributed framework can provide school leaders with perspectives on leadership practice and efforts to close the opportunity gap and improve academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Further examination of how the social and situational distribution of leadership practice occurs, coupled with identifying the tasks, interactions, and resources of school leaders, provides powerful examples of how school leaders shape efforts to create equitable and responsive educational systems. By providing researchers and practitioners with an analytic framework for examining leadership practice, school leaders, including principals, are better positioned to create more responsive and equity-driven educational systems designed to close the opportunity gap for all students.

Additionally, given the magnitude of the challenge school leaders face in closing the opportunity gap and creating schools that are responsive to an increasingly diverse student population, school leaders must look for and apply alternative methods of engaging other individuals in this work. Efforts to close the opportunity gap will likely fall flat, or even fail, if the responsibility for this work is concentrated on only one or two individuals solely because they possess formal leadership roles instead of distributing the work broadly across the school. The principal cannot undertake the daunting task of improving schools as a lone practitioner. Consequently, principal leadership must focus on galvanizing and empowering other individuals to organize for effort, action, and improvement.

Conclusion

Given the magnitude of the challenge posed by closing the opportunity gap, current efforts to create educational systems that are responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students call for a deeper examination and analysis of how school leaders enact leadership practice. Additionally, principal leadership demands the skill of knowing how to motivate and empower others to address the social and academic needs of

diverse students. Since principals cannot undertake the task of school improvement as lone practitioners, they must seek out and enact alternative ways of engaging others in this work. A distributed leadership perspective offers a way for researchers and practitioners to examine leadership practice through the perspective of multiple individuals at all levels of the school, and to rethink how human capital can support school efforts to close the opportunity gap.

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