



THE EDUCATIONAL Forum

Teachers as Leaders

by Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller

Educators in the United States are being asked to do more with less: school budgets are shrinking, principals are struggling to be instructional leaders in the face of huge management issues, and teachers are trying to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students at a time when a standardized, one-size-fits-all curriculum is mandated. The tenor of schools and classrooms is one of anxiety, stress, and confusion, and at its worst, hopelessness. Why is this happening? What is going on in the world that is affecting schools, teaching, and learning in such profound ways?

Changes in the World

Giddens (2002) wrote persuasively about how basic changes create tensions between fundamentalism and cosmopolitanism. As communities and nations encounter economic and social changes, there is conflict between those who believe in a set of unchanging rules about how the world was created and how life should be lived, and those who believe that change brings diversity and offers opportunities for variety and improvement. For example, in the United States and the rest of the world, family structures are in flux. Alternative family structures are challenging long-held beliefs about the nuclear family as the model of how children should be raised in industrialized countries: who can raise them, and where and at what age their education and upbringing should take place. Conventional roles are being altered, if not reversed. Grandparents are often primary caretakers; same sex partners are increasingly parenting the young; and women are working in high-powered positions while more men are becoming homemakers. Such changes threaten the world that many adults know and lead them to take opposing views on how to deal with the new realities.

Changes in the Economy

Globalization is the word of the day, and the economy is the sector of society most immediately affected. The emerging economy demands a new view of work and career. Instead of holding a job for life, workers are expected to change jobs and careers and to

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switch loyalties several times in their lives (Mazar 1999, 19). There will continue to be a decline in the need for manual laborers and an expansion in the demand for knowledge workers. A high school diploma will no longer be a guarantee of a job or a career; postsecondary education will become a necessity for all.

Schools must adapt to the changing economy if they are to educate a citizenry prepared for the future. People used to go to school because the knowledge was there. Now, however, school is losing its monopoly on learning. Online courses and virtual schools make education accessible from one's living room. Public schools must make the case that they are the institutions best situated to teach students to think critically, evaluate information, and participate as full citizens in a democracy.

Changes in Government and Public Life

Globalization also is having powerful effects on government and public life. The language of the corporate and private sector ethos in the public domain has led to a view that government is the purchaser, rather than the provider, of direct services. This has affected the changing norms of public responsibility, evident in decreased public engagement, lower voter turnout, calls to reduce taxes, and a shift in responsibility between the state and family in meeting the needs of the young.

Schools are feeling pressure to shift from public to private sector norms. Standardized assessments and top-down accountability systems are forcing public education to pay more attention to test scores, which can be tallied, than to the cultivation of learning, which is not so amenable to measurement. Charter schools, magnet schools, home schooling, and vouchers are part of the agenda to reduce the role of government in what traditionally has been part of the public sphere. Schools must figure out how to serve a public mission in a world of increasing privatization.

Changes in Demographics

Along with an aging adult population that is gearing up for retirement, the United States is facing two consecutive baby boomlets that will bring a flood of children into school. Competition for resources is inevitable. Many of these children will be poor, come from diverse countries and ethnic groups, represent different language and cultures, and enter schools with unequal social capital.

The face of the teaching force also is changing. For the first time in American history, the number of teachers leaving the profession exceeds those who are entering. Retirements are greater than expected, and new teachers are leaving in great numbers. Under new federal legislation, all teachers must meet rigorous standards to be highly qualified. This requirement, along with simultaneous shifts in student and teacher demographics, creates unprecedented pressure to recruit, retain, and support new teachers.

The Case for Teacher Leadership

How do schools respond to these changes? As always, there are diverse reactions. The first is what Hargreaves (2003) considered a fundamentalist stance. It supports standardization, accountability, and assessment and leads to policies that hold

schools accountable for meeting externally mandated standards of student achievement. This stance also views teaching as technical and managed work that requires close supervision and a system of externally determined and administered rewards and sanctions.

The second response is a cosmopolitan rejoinder. It supports policies that enable good practice rather than prescribe it; recognize the knowledge, skills, and abilities of teachers; and provide incentives to increase their knowledge. Teaching is regarded as highly intellectual work, grounded in professional communities where teachers assume responsibility for the learning of their students and of one another (Lieberman and Miller 1992). Under this interpretation, teachers assume roles as researchers, mentors, scholars, and developers; they expand the meaning of what it means to be a teacher. They are leaders and intellectuals who can make a difference in their schools and profession.

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We clearly advocate the cosmopolitan response: the building of capacity to transform schooling. One essential element of such a transformation is the development, support, and nurturance of teachers who assume leadership in their schools. Teachers who formally or informally acquire leadership positions can help make change happen. Among the many roles and responsibilities they can assume, three appear critical:

- *Advocates for new forms of accountability and assessment.* Teacher leaders can challenge the dominance of tests as the sole criterion for success and offer alternatives to the current models of efficiency and accountability.
- *Innovators in the reconstruction of achievement norms and student expectations.* Teacher leaders can help schools become communities that prepare students to participate in the new knowledge society. They can influence the organizational practices of schools and work toward distributing resources equitably, upholding high standards, and giving all students a variety of opportunities to learn and participate in their schools.
- *Stewards for an invigorated profession.* Teacher leaders can promote a profession that views itself as an intellectual and collective enterprise. They can advocate for the recognition of teaching accomplishments and for a redefinition of teacher roles.

Learning from Research

The literature on teacher leadership began with empirical studies of individual teachers and organizational realities. Attention has shifted to how teachers learn in practice to

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become teacher leaders and to understanding the broad conceptions of the role and its potential to help reshape school culture.

Individual Teacher Leader Roles and Organizational Realities

These are empirical studies of teacher leadership roles in a variety of contexts, the skills that are required, and how teacher leaders position themselves to earn legitimacy in school bureaucracies.

- Miles, Saxl, and Lieberman (1988) identified the skills that teacher leaders need: building trust and rapport, making organizational diagnoses, using resources, managing work, and building skill and confidence in others.
- Wasley (1991) uncovered the difficulties three teacher leaders encountered in working in bureaucratic systems and assuming new roles, the resistance they faced from peers, and the support they required.
- Smylie and Denny (1990) reported on 13 teacher leaders and detailed their uncertainties about their roles, tensions around time and divided responsibilities, and the frequent mismatch between their expectations and those of the principal.
- Little (1995) introduced the idea of “contested ground,” or how teachers were caught between strategies of commitment and control, and detailed how teachers granted warrants of leadership to those who demonstrated subject matter expertise.
- Bartlett (2001) illustrated how the absence of appropriate structures and culture made it difficult for teacher leaders to balance reasonable personal and professional lives.
- Little and Bartlett (2002) introduced the notion of the “Huberman Paradox,” which suggests that while teacher leadership work can be stimulating, it also can be enervating and ultimately lead to burnout, disaffection, and conflict.
- Spillane, Hallett, and Diamond (2003) found that teacher leaders were awarded legitimacy from their peers based on interactions and subject matter expertise, and accumulated cultural, social, and human capital within the faculty.
- Miller and O’Shea (1992) interviewed four informal teacher leaders in an elementary school and identified four warrants for leadership: experience, knowledge, vision, and respect for children.

Learning in Practice

The literature included here is grounded in professions outside of education. The idea of learning in practice (Gawande 2002, 18) was expressed by a young surgeon:

In surgery, as in anything else, skill and confidence are learned through experience—haltingly and humiliatingly. Like the tennis player and the oboist and the guy who fixes hard drives, we need practice to get good at what we do . . . we want perfection without practice . . . learning is hidden behind drapes and anesthesia, and the elisions of language.

The literature on professional learning develops theoretical foundations rather than descriptions of practice. It begins with the observation that professionals learn by actually doing the work and reflecting on it.

- Schön (1983) laid the foundation for understanding learning in practice when he coined the term “reflective practice” as a starting point for developing a learning theory in professions. According to Schön (1983), learning takes place on the job where people develop theories in use derived from practicing their craft. Schön opened the door for educational researchers to examine the development of teachers’ learning and to explore the connections between learning and context.
- Lave and Wenger’s (1991) and Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning was grounded in four processes: learning, meaning, community, and identity. They viewed learning as social and collective—coming about through social participation in communities of practice where people feel a sense of belonging and a need to make a contribution.
- Hargreaves (2003) cautioned against false communities of practice that value results over process and view learning as transfer rather than making meaning and identity. Such approaches promote standardized scripts and externally imposed rules and regulations. These practices run counter to the joint construction of knowledge, learning, and authority.

Teachers who formally or informally acquire leadership positions can help make change happen.

Broadened Conceptions of the Teacher Leader Role

The third body of literature explored broadened conceptions of teacher leadership and described the development of professional communities where teacher leaders have the opportunity to reshape school culture.

- Fullan’s (1994) conception of teacher leadership lifted the burden of leadership from individuals and distributed it throughout the community. By identifying six domains where teacher leaders could impact school culture (teaching and learning, collegiality, context, continuous learning, management of change, and sense of moral purpose), he laid the groundwork for teachers to assume a broader role in culture building.
- Lambert’s (2003, 13) advocated seeing teacher leadership as “performing actions . . . that enabled participants in a community to evoke potential in a trusting environment, to inquire into practice, to focus on constructing meaning, or to frame actions based on new behaviors and purposeful intentions.”
- McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) observed secondary schools over five years to understand how professional communities that nurture teacher leadership develop. They documented how these communities took form when teachers talked openly about their problems, discussed changes in curricular and pedagogical approaches together, taught one another different practices, and

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committed themselves to collective discussion and action.

- Little (1990) studied how teachers moved from individualism to collegiality. She developed a continuum that moves from storytelling and scanning (occasional opportunistic contacts), to aid and assistance (giving help and advice), to sharing (exchanging materials, strategies, and ideas), and finally to joint work (collective action based on shared responsibility).
- Westheimer (1998) found that community involves interaction and participation, interdependence, shared interests and beliefs, concern for minority views, and meaningful relationships. His study concluded that professional communities differ in their cultural commitment to participation, shared visions, and ways of working together.
- Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) documented the development of a community among English and social studies teachers in a large secondary school

They (2001, 3) noted the “inevitable conflicts of social relationships, and formed structures that sustain relationships over time” and described conflicts due to differences in disciplines, gender, and race, as well as the difficulties of working together.

In the current era, change that calls for the development of professional communities and the emergence of teacher leadership may be even more difficult to achieve and maintain.

The idea of teacher leadership has grown in sophistication and complexity. The studies reviewed here demonstrate an unfolding of descriptions, interpretations, and theories that began with stories of individual leaders striving to “make a dent” in the school organization,

moved on to analyses of how new organizational roles were learned and enacted, and culminated in new conceptions of the role and its possibilities. The research provides a foundation for understanding the power, promise, and perplexities of teacher leadership.

Leading from the Classroom

Teacher leadership often comes from classroom teaching. Yvonne Divans-Hutchinson, who teaches English to a minority population at King/Drew Magnet School for Medicine and Science in Los Angeles, is an example. Hutchinson is a gifted classroom teacher who is an active member of the National Writing Project (NWP) and a National Board Certified teacher. She is part of a literacy cadre and coordinates teachers, from across the disciplines, who are interested in literacy development. A resource teacher in her district, she also serves as a curriculum coordinator,

literacy coach, and cochair of the English department. Last year, she conducted staff development in her school and was an official mentor for new teachers. She was a member of the second cohort of the Carnegie Scholars and recently served as a National Board scholar and an instructor at UCLA and for the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Learning to Lead

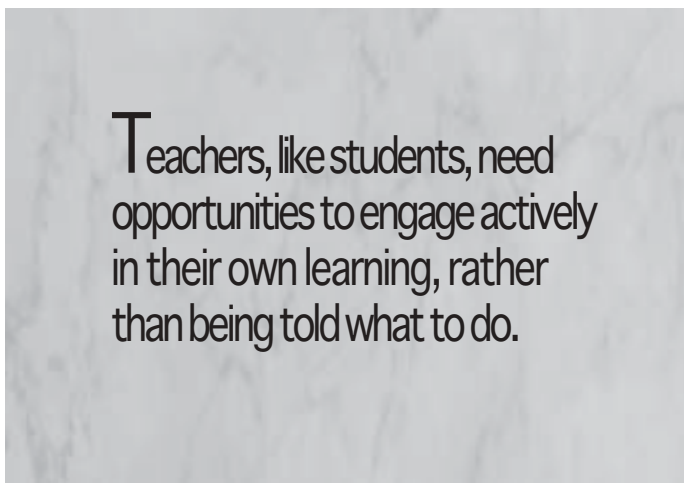
Hutchinson's leadership journey began when she joined the NWP, a network that combines professional development for literacy instruction with opportunities for building teacher leadership. The project is an exemplar of the community of practice that Lave and Wenger (1991) described in their work.

Leading from Classroom Practice

Hutchinson's leadership is coupled with her commitment to student learning, participation, and overall development. She never leaves the role of teacher behind; she takes it with her when she organizes, mentors, and engages other teachers. Her leadership practices with adults reflect her beliefs about teaching, her embracement of difference, and her growing confidence and willingness to go public about her practice. She views leadership in the same way she views teaching—not as handing down information, but creating a circle of people who share and learn from one another. Her approach is to model participation, build habits of mind, and support people in becoming apprentices to their own learning. She often shows her colleagues how she teaches—how she engages students in varied learning activities, how she encourages the development of their voice, and how she places student work at the center of her teaching. By demonstration rather than remonstrance, others see that it is possible for all students to achieve.

She engages teachers in conversations about their practice to help them better understand their motivations and commitments to their students. She encourages teachers to talk about their work and build new strategies that enlarge and deepen their repertoire. Hutchinson understands that teachers, like students, need opportunities to engage actively in their own learning, rather than being told what to do. She asks teachers to use the new and nuanced ideas they learn from one other to build upon what they know about their own teaching.

Hutchinson understands that in leadership, as in classroom teaching, she has to vary approaches for different audiences. Those new to the profession have different



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needs than veterans. Novice teachers are more open and appreciative of opportunities to learn how to engage their students. As students of their own practice, they are more deferential and tentative, but seem eager to do well and join in the collegial conversation.

Veteran teachers approach new ideas in different ways. Because they already have a repertoire of strategies, their interest lies in refining or adding to it. Veteran teachers start with "What else can I do? I tried this and it didn't work." Hutchinson encourages teachers to work together to share what they have developed. As teachers engage in conversations, they replace negative attitudes toward students with strategies for engagement and participation.

Hutchinson takes her own learning seriously. She is supported by colleagues who meet regularly to inspire one another with success stories, swap ideas, and figure out how to fix the trouble spots in their teaching. For further support, Hutchinson has several close friends who share stories about happenings in their classrooms. They provide mutual support, friendship, and guidance through the complexities of their teaching lives because they are connected by close friendship, respect for one another, and a love of teaching.

A major aspect of Hutchinson's persona and one that distinguishes her as a teacher leader is her willingness and courage to go public with her work and to encourage other teachers to do so. Her Web site, *A Friend of Their Minds: Capitalizing on the Oral Tradition of My African-American Students* (2003), reflects her love of literature and her belief in humanity.

Through this Web site, Hutchinson opens her classroom and her teaching to a wide audience. The site includes teacher narratives about thinking with text and question-answer relationships, four videos, and strategies for promoting literate discourse. The Web site is a revelation of how a teacher thinks, plans, revises, and reflects. It demonstrates the confidence, competence, and commitment of an individual who models what she espouses as a teacher and as a leader.

In her leadership work, Hutchinson shows rather than tells, respects rather than prescribes, and engages in authentic conversation rather than lectures. Hutchinson finds ways for teachers to contribute to their own work and that of their colleagues. These are the same values that drive her classroom instruction.

Leading in the 'Middle Space'

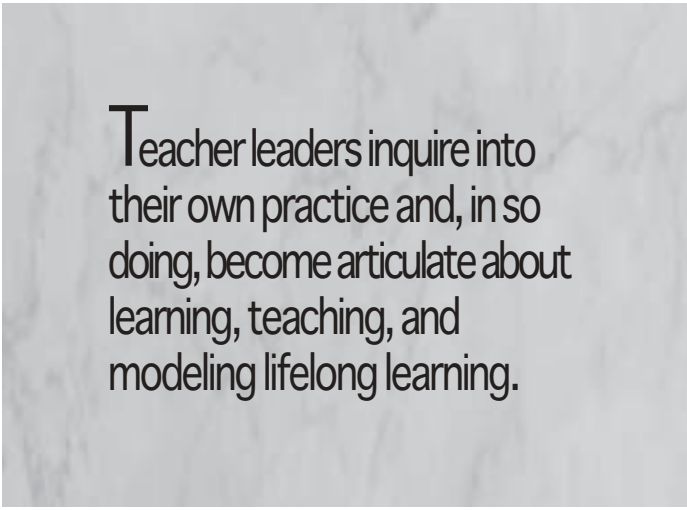
The classroom is but one venue for teacher leadership. Another is what David Galen calls the "middle space" between teachers and administrators. Galen serves in the hybrid role of Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in Falmouth, Maine. He leads the district's efforts to comply with Maine's Learning Results and local assessment system rules and laws. He facilitates National Board Certification for district teachers and works closely with school administrators to create and sustain internal conditions that support teacher leadership, learning, and student success in the face of external expectations.

Learning to Lead

Galen credits two experiences as pivotal in his formation as a teacher leader. One was the influence of a principal who assigned him leadership responsibility in curriculum development and technology. The second influence was his participation in Leadership for Tomorrow's Schools (LTS), a two-year program whose premise is that districts can grow their own leaders in collaboration with responsive university faculty. Like NWP, LTS establishes a community of practice in which participants learn by doing in the company of their peers.

LTS provides participants with access to a community of school leaders by engaging them in the practice of leadership—first in peripheral ways and ultimately as full participants in district work.

Participants have the opportunity to rehearse leadership roles, take risks with support and guidance, and shape their identities as leaders. In the process, they help their districts improve and change. Galen reflected on the experience:



Teacher leaders inquire into their own practice and, in so doing, become articulate about learning, teaching, and modeling lifelong learning.

Being exposed to others who had experience as teacher leaders helped me figure out the structures that allow teacher leadership to be effective. Everything from running a good meeting to doing advance work with skeptics became part of being effective. The experience has made a huge difference in my life. Most important has been having the opportunity to share assumptions, developing a common language, being involved in joint inquiry, finding a direction for my work, learning to craft a framework from shared learning, and seeing how to use existing resources to build capacity to get district work done.

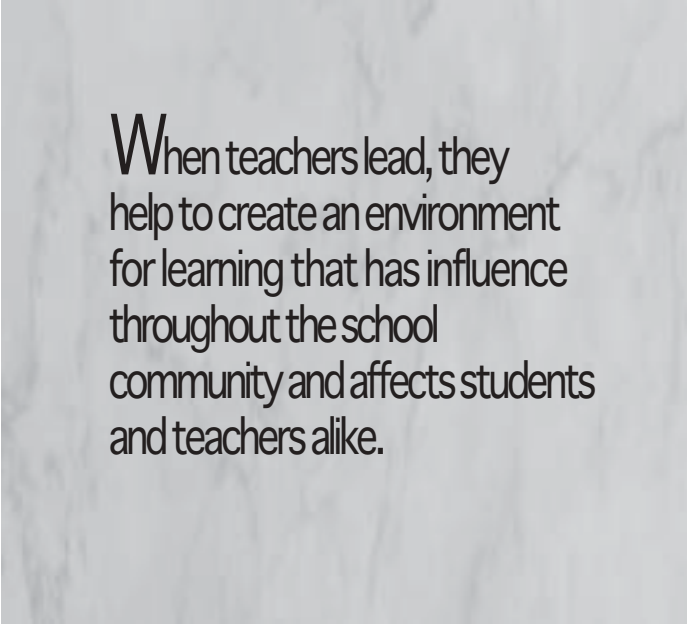
Leading from the 'Middle Space'

Galen spent 10 years as a classroom teacher before he assumed the role of teacher leader. At first, he thought the new role would make him look more like an administrator than a teacher. He found, however, that the position planted him even more firmly as a teacher—this time as a teacher of adults.

Galen's leadership work is varied. He coordinates state and federal grants and oversees district professional development for administrators as well as teachers. He leads K–12 curriculum development and curriculum mapping and works closely with teacher leaders on a stipend. He also helped create leadership teams in the elementary schools, which allowed teachers to take responsibility for math and language arts at grades K–2 and grades 3–4. His most important re-

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sponsibilities are in local assessment development and facilitation of National Board Certification processes.



When teachers lead, they help to create an environment for learning that has influence throughout the school community and affects students and teachers alike.

Galen is in charge of aligning all district curriculum and developing assessment with state requirements. This is a difficult and complex task that requires expertise and technical skills exceeding those of most teachers. Galen sees his role as being a translator. By inviting, mediating, and guiding teacher involvement, he has made difficult work easier to understand and manage. Galen, however, does not view this effort as representative of what he thinks teacher leadership should be about. He worries that by being a translator, he keeps people from owning

the assessment work which leads to people losing their passion. His investment in leadership lies elsewhere.

Galen is in charge of all district professional development, and he elected to understand the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification process. He attended a training session where he learned what the standards entailed, what the certification process required, and how to work effectively with teachers toward demonstration. Galen considers this work to be an empowering form of teacher leadership. He said, "Teachers look at their practice and improve. There is no other supervision/professional development model I've seen that gets people to improve their practice to the same degree."

Galen's vision of teacher leadership has deepened over time. He sees teacher leadership as helping teachers make the transition from looking at curriculum and textbooks to looking at student work and teacher practice. Teacher leadership has moved from telling stories and relating anecdotes to looking at data and using them to make decisions about teaching and learning. Galen believes that for teacher leadership to be successful, it must have an infrastructure and investment at the district level. These conditions for success became apparent to him in the LTS program where he saw a clear distinction between participants from districts that had made an investment in teacher leadership and those that had not.

Galen has come to view teacher leadership as a necessary, but not sufficient, element in school transformation. He said:

Unless you have teacher leadership and strong administrative leadership, you don't get to transformation. Teachers and administrators often get into 'learned powerlessness,' especially when it comes to standards. When a new paradigm is introduced, the default is the known; the instinct is to recreate the second grade classroom you experienced. It is up to both teacher and administrative leaders to create the conditions that push the conversation beyond blame and helplessness, to create a tone. We're smart enough to make good choices for us and for our students.

Teacher Leadership: From Practice to Theory

This paper provides a rationale for teacher leadership as a cosmopolitan response to changes in the world and in schools and demonstrates the realities of teacher leadership being enacted in practice. In studying teacher leaders, the following understandings about their work emerge:

- Teacher leaders inquire into their own practice and, in so doing, become articulate about learning, teaching, and modeling lifelong learning.
- Teacher leaders "go public" with their understandings about students, learning, and teaching, thereby influencing other teachers and impacting the culture of their schools.
- Teacher leaders find and invent opportunities to lead and to maintain connections to classroom practice.
- Teacher leaders learn to lead in communities of practice that promote collegiality and support risk-taking and experimentation.
- Teacher leaders reproduce these communities of practice when they work with novice and veteran teachers and create safe environments for professional learning.
- Teacher leaders are sensitive to context and culture; they know that different contexts and populations require different approaches to leadership. As in teaching, one size does not fit all.
- When teachers lead, they help to create an environment for learning that has influence throughout the school community and affects students and teachers alike.

This is not to say that being a teacher leader is easy or that teacher leadership is fully integrated into the teaching culture. Nor can we gloss over the difficulties that await professionals who seek to change the concept of what it means to be a teacher. Change is always accompanied by conflict, disequilibrium, and confusion. In the current era, shaped as it is by dramatic changes in the world and dominated by a push toward accountability and standardization, change that calls for the development of professional communities and the emergence of teacher leadership may be even more difficult to achieve and maintain. Despite all this, our studies of teacher leaders imbue us with hope. They help envision a future in which teachers lean toward more democratic and enlightened schooling. The teacher leaders we have come to know are committed for the long-term. They do not intend to give up on their students or one another. They plan to continue to assume responsibility for deepening their own practice and that of their colleagues. They are determined to become the architects of vibrant professional communities in which teachers take the lead in inventing new possibilities for their students and for themselves.

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