Thinking Globally: The National College of School Leadership: A Case Study in Distributed Leadership Development

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Leadership matters. Excellent school leaders are pivotal in creating and maintaining effective schools, as defined by student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Mulford, 2002; Rosenholtz, 1989). This knowledge, coupled with an ongoing national agenda for raising student achievement, drives a call for improvement in school leader preparation. Local, state, and federal governments, education organizations, businesses, and foundations match that call with increased investments in leadership development. Yet, although we know leadership matters, the complexity of leadership yields a wide variety of opinions and research conclusions on what leadership is, how it works, and how to develop it within people.

Although scholars and practitioners alike lack universal agreement on what leadership is, both can see clearly that the nature of school leadership has changed. Leaders' responsibilities have increased tremendously and now include:

- instructional leadership for narrowing the achievement gaps between demographic groups;
- human resources leadership for teachers and staff;
- community leadership for developing and sustaining a collective vision for the school and maintaining a positive organizational culture and climate;
- resource leadership for strategic management and leveraging of fiscal, physical, technological, and community resources, including the use of data to guide decision-making;

- governance, administration, and policy leadership for working with governing boards; navigating local and state politics; understanding, applying, and shaping policy; and
- change leadership for identifying gaps between current and desired outcomes, analyzing underlying problems and challenges, navigating and balancing competing interests, strategizing, and ultimately implementing appropriate changes. (English, 1995; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; ISLLC, 1996; Jossey-Bass, 2002; Lambert, 1998; Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002; Murphy & Louis, 1998; Norton, 2005).

Furthermore, the context of school leadership has changed. America's schools and school systems were conceived and developed in an industrial age and were relatively stable and predictable. Now, in the information age, school systems have grown complex, unpredictable, unstable, and uncertain (Norton, 2005). For example, school leaders face a host of competing assumptions about what is wrong with schools and how to fix them (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002). As they struggle to do their jobs, they must delicately balance centralized system control with decentralized institutional management (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002), respond to increasingly diverse and conflicting external forces, and navigate competing interests.

Some studies suggest that school superintendents and principals are inadequately prepared for these and other present-day realities of their jobs (Lepard & Goster, 2003; Levine, 2005). Far broader in scope, function, and process than in the past, normative hierarchical leadership strategies have grown increasingly ineffective for contemporary educational leadership. Nor will simple collaboration suffice. Commission reports and research papers from a whole host of organizations and scholars call for shared decision-making structures (Lieberman et al., 1988/2000). The Council of Chief State School Officers (2000, p. 5), for example, wants individual school leaders to create and work with multiple leadership teams.

Although much has been written and spoken about the need for distributed leadership, a review of research yields only a small body of scholarship concerning what it is and how to do it, and even fewer practical examples of how to actually develop it. This study responds to that knowledge gap, presenting a case study on the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) in Nottingham, England, an exemplary program that uses distributed leadership philosophies to develop school leaders. The study aims to provide practical knowledge for improving distributed leadership development in the US.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Distributed leadership theory suggests that leadership occurs through many individuals across the organization. It acknowledges the complexity of the organization; the diversity, maturity, and interdependence of the participants within it; and our deep cultural values of democratic governance.

Distributed Leadership in Theory: Eight Hallmarks

Hallmarks of distributed leadership include: shared responsibility, shared power and authority, synergy, leadership capacity, organizational learning, an equitable and ethical climate, a democratic and investigative culture, and macro-community engagement.

Shared responsibility

Distributed leadership theory regards leadership as the aggregated (Spillane et al., 2000b) or synchronized (Gibb et al., 1954) behavior of many individuals rather than an assigned role (Heller & Firestone, 1995). The theory holds that organizational goals are best achieved through a multi-style, multi-participant manner.

Shared power and authority

"[Power is not a limited pie. It is wonderfully elastic [and] can be divided without shrinking" (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, p. 237). Power distribution might divide power and authority into multiple segments, or dispense with hierarchies altogether (Gronn, 2002a). Shifting from a paradigm of command and control, the new focus lies upon democratic principals of participation, empowerment, dialogue, and cooperation (Furman, 1998).

Synergy

With the locus of leadership dissolved and dispersed throughout a structure of shared decision-making, relationships take on a greater importance than roles (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Interpersonal synergies solidify as participants develop mutual understandings and strong group norms; intentionally share, overlap, or blur their roles; and engage in spontaneous collaborations (Fonda & Stewart, 1994; Gronn, 2002a; Wheatley, 1999/2000). With performance assessed for groups, not individuals, participants begin to leverage their skills and knowledge through each other and compensate for deficiencies (Fonda & Stewart, 1994), exhibiting higher productivity than traditionally managed organizations (Wheatley, 1999/2000, p. 340).

Leadership capacity

In distributively led organizations, leadership is a collective achievement based on the contributions of every participant. The leadership capacity of an organization is a function of the collective knowledge, skills, and dispositions of its members. Those who practice distributed leadership ethically use themselves and others as instruments for achieving goals, encouraging the assumption of responsibility at every level, and discouraging passive followership. They remain alert for synergetic opportunities - examining connections between people, ideas, and processes; harnessing the leadership potential of others; and nurturing potential

leaders and successors along the way (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). It becomes critical to invest in, develop, and maximize participants' abilities.

Organizational learning

Information is facts and figures; knowledge is a state of awareness that exists within and among people (Fullan, 2001). Because leading and managing are knowledge-based activities, a collectively led organization must also collectivize the process of creating, sharing, and applying knowledge. The hallmarks of a learning organization echo many of those of distributed leadership itself. Participants view themselves as interconnected not isolated, take ownership of problems and responsibility for change, share common values, collaboratively construct meaning, and hold mutual beliefs that they work together for the good of the whole (Lambert, 1998, 2003; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Equitable and ethical climate

Expanding the decision-making process to include those who will be affected by and have to implement decisions increases the likelihood that the consequences of decisions – good or bad – will not fall disproportionately to any one group. Additionally, multiple participants and their synergized efforts increase the likelihood that erroneous information or assumptions (Gronn, 2002a) and unethical decisions will be detected and corrected. Together, these foster a more equitable and ethical climate.

Democratic and investigative culture

Organizations have distinct cultures that they inculcate in their members (Lipman-Blumen, 1996, Taguiri & Litwin, 1968). Those cultures simultaneously encompass both what people do (customs, practices, policies) and why they do it (beliefs, attitudes). Organizational beliefs and attitudes, sometimes unconscious, include shared identities, shared definitions of what is important (Schein, 1992), and shared understandings about the efficacy of certain behaviors or activities (Wilkins &

Patterson, 1985), based on mutual experiences (Schein, 1992). In distributively led organizations, shared responsibility, shared power and authority, and an equitable and ethical climate exude a democratic culture, while organizational learning and leadership capacity convey an investigative culture.

Macro-community engagement

Distributive leadership takes a systemic perspective. It not only concerns itself with the interconnectedness of immediate participants but also considers the organization as situated in its external environment (Lipman-Blumen, 1996). Distributive leaders are connective leaders, who perceive complex connections among people and organizations (Lipman-Blumen, 1996), and seeing their environment as networks of exchange and reciprocity. The ability to read, understand, respond to, and work with groups in the external environment is a part of the leadership capacity of the organization.

Distributed Leadership in Practice: American K-12 Education

Distributed leadership holds promise for American K-12 education.

The promise of organizational learning and a democratic and investigative culture

Culture influences every aspect of a school's activities, including the levels of collegial and collaborative interaction, communication among participants, organizational commitment, and motivation (Deal & Peterson, 1999). It fosters or foils school effectiveness (Norton, 2005; Schein, 1992). A healthy, positive culture can be discerned immediately upon walking in the door. One can tell "whether people want to be there or not. The sense of belonging (or not) is palpable" (Wheatley, 1999/2000, p. 347). Several studies evidence organizational learning as an attribute of effective schools (Lambert, 1998, 2003).

The promise of shared power and authority

Over the past two decades many schools have attempted to flatten their hierarchical authority structures as an approach to improving educational quality, giving teachers more responsibility for the quality of their practice and more accompanying authority for making decisions that affect student learning (Goldstein, 2004). This approach, known as shared-decision making (SDM), **"**is a reform of significant proportions, altering . . . the balance of power in schools" (Weiss & Cambone, 1994/2000, p. 366-7). SDM includes all constituents, such as administrators and teachers at varying levels, members of school governing bodies, and possibly even students (Gronn, 2002a).

Furthermore, many school systems nationwide have experienced decentralization or a move to site-based management (SBM). SBM typically includes transferring to individual schools those responsibilities that were formerly held centrally, such as the oversight of financial, technological, and human resources (Gronn, 2002a). Yet, SBM is not pure decentralization, as many responsibilities are still centralized or remain under central control, such as curriculum.

SDM and SBM, however, are still relatively rare among schools and systems. Without adequate preparation, implementing distributive leadership in K-12 schools can pose great difficulties (Weiss & Cambone, 1994/2000). Americans continue to manage K-12 education predominately hierarchically, with power and authority concentrated at the top.

The promise of shared responsibility and macro-community engagement

School effectiveness and successful school reform depend upon a sense of ownership among all participants (Bennett et al., 2003; CCSSO, 2000; Elmore, 2000). At the micro level, everyone within a school has the potential and right to engage in organizational leadership (Lambert, 1998; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond,

2000b). The act of leadership might be shared, or distributed, among participants in any given enterprise within a school in at least three ways: collectively, collaboratively, and coordinated (Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2000). In collectives, participants work separately and independently, but their activities are necessary contributions to a common goal. In collaborations, each participant's work builds upon the others' and their activities are interdependent. In coordinated distributions, participants work both separately and also interdependently, as their activities must be synchronized in order to accomplish a common goal.

At the macro level, a school must view its institution as a collective enterprise that involves groups and individuals outside its walls. The last 15 years have brought expanded networks and increased partnerships inside the school (teachers and administrators) and between the schools and external institutions. (Kochan & Reed, 1995). Schools are but one part in an education system that extends beyond school boards, school districts, and state departments to include the federal government, non-for-profit agencies, and the for-profit sector (Spillane, 2004). The way we conceptualize a school community also has greatly changed and now includes the professional communities of teachers and administrators, student communities of learners, cross-cultural communities of difference, and the institution itself as a member of local, national, and ultimately global communities (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002). A systems perspective in educational leadership is critical for large-scale improvements in student learning (Elmore, 2000). Savvy principals and superintendents seek to increase internal involvement in leadership responsibilities and external involvement in the policy decisions that shape the educational goals, administrative regulations, and available resources under which their schools must operate.

The promise for an equitable and ethical climate

America's K-12 schools continue to yield inequitable educational opportunity and outcomes for students (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Schultz, 2002). Furthermore, the national movement toward ensuring equitable outcomes and ensuing assessment pressures on schools, teachers, and students has led to incidents of academic dishonesty (Norton, 2005). Inequality surfaces among staff as well, with disparate salaries and career advancement divisible according to employee ethnicity and gender (Norton, 2005). Distributed leadership, which fosters an equitable and ethical climate, could help foster equity for students and employees and guard against unethical practices.

The promise for developing leadership capacity and synergy

Because most schools and school systems fail to fully share responsibility, power, and authority among teachers and staff, the synergetic potential of schools and school systems remains unrealized. So too, does the leadership capacity of teachers and staff. Although we have a near excess of programs for preparing school principals and superintendents (Levine, 2005), programs for preparing teacher leaders and staff leadership are fewer. Considering the ratio of school staff to school heads, perhaps the proportions of those programs ought to be in the reverse.

Developing Distributed Leadership: A Theory to Practice Gap

Perhaps, one reason why the majority of American schools cling to a hierarchical model is that we fail to adequately train school leaders for distributive leadership. We have little theoretical research on how to actually develop distributed leadership and even fewer models of distributive leadership development in practice.

Insufficient theory and practice

The field of educational administration lacks substantive research on leader preparation, in general. Murphy & Vriesenga, (2004) in their study of over 2,000

articles in leading journals in school leadership found that only 8% of the articles dealt with descriptions and analysis of preparation programs. Worse, only 3% of the articles were empirically based investigations on school leader preparation. In fact, they concluded, “We know very little about how we recruit and select students, instruct them in our programs, and monitor and assess their progress. Organizational life inside programs [has been] hardly touched upon in the research literature. We also learn[ed] very little from the journals about [those] who develop and operate these programs” (p 28).

Books are no more helpful than the journals. For example, although an entire two-volume, 1,000+ page international handbook on educational leadership and administration addressed the need for distributed leadership (Leithwood & Hallinger, 2002), no author talked about how to develop it. An entire section on school leader preparation thoughtfully considers how individual school leaders are trained, selected, and developed. It includes analyses of leadership development programs from a variety of fields and from more than a dozen countries (Ackerman et al., 2002; Gronn, 2002b; Huber & West, 2002; Tomlinson, 2002), without advancing a single practical model of distributed leadership development. Kochan and Reed have come closest to laying out what a distributed leadership development program might look like. In talking about collaborative leading, community building, and democracy in public education, they describe “several strategies and activities that might foster this type of leadership during the preparation period” (1995, p. 81), centering on two facets of preparation programs: the curriculum and the structure.

The curriculum, they suggest, must be infused with readings, experiences, and structures that foster democratic ideals, and center on values, equity, and social justice. It must also instill an understanding of the broader political framework affecting K-12 education. Pedagogy should include opportunities to discuss and critique ideas and values, to gain an understanding of leadership in the broader

context among other professions; and to engage in policy advocacy and form mutually beneficial relationships with legislators (Reed & Kochan, 2001).

In essence, the structure of a program to develop collaborative leading should be based upon the same principles and practices it tries to instill. It should, for example, be based on cohorts (Kochan & Reed, 1995). When cohorts engage in open dialogue, they provide a built-in means to model and explore collaboration (Stevenson & Doolittle, 2003). The structure should also model democratic principles (Kochan & Sabo, 1995), including partnerships and involvement with schools, communities, and universities. It should further center on the continuing professional development of educational leadership, not just new-leader preparation.

This model is a helpful start. Kochan and Reed (1995), however, point to no such program in practice and leave out many practical considerations. For example, in considering structure, what should partnerships include? What should be the venue for a distributed leadership development program? Should it be a traditional degree program in a university or a professional development program? In considering curriculum, what pedagogical strategies might such a program use? Discussion should be a central feature, as Kochan and Reed suggest, but what else? Should the format center on brief conferences, modularized seminars, or a formal program of extended duration? What should be the use of technology?

There are other facets of preparation programs that Kochan and Reed did not discuss. For example, what admissions criteria or procedures might be used? How much should it cost participants, schools, and districts. Distributive leadership insists that everyone can and should participate in school leadership, yet we need ways for individuals to diagnose their readiness for leadership positions (Lepard & Goster, 2003). We have only a thin understanding of how leaders are selected, groomed, inducted, and further developed once in their role (Mulford, 2002). Finally, how might a program evaluate participants' work and its own effectiveness?

A knowledge gap

Changes in the division of labor in schools directly impact the effectiveness and utility of current training and preparation programs for prospective school leaders (Gronn, 2002b). As schools begin redefining roles and responsibilities, authority, and power to create flatter structure, school leader preparation programs that train individuals to be directive heads of a hierarchical organization will become limited in their effectiveness and utility. We know we need to move toward distributive leadership development in our school leader preparation programs, but we have insufficient theory and models of how to prepare individuals for it.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Qualitative studies (Maxwell, 1996, Patton, 1990) are the preferred strategy when the intent is to understand contemporary phenomena within real life-contexts, to unravel the processes by which events or actions take place, and to discern the importance of context. In order to provide practical knowledge about developing distributed leadership for K-12 education, this paper presents a case study of an acclaimed leadership development programme[1]. Specifically, it focuses on the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) in Nottingham, England, purposefully selected (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Patton, 1990) on the basis of its growing international visibility and reputation for stellar leadership development programmes and its support of a distributed leadership philosophy.

NCSL, launched in 2000, is charged with the responsibility of preparing and developing educational leaders for England's primary and secondary school system. It describes its purpose and activities as follows: "Working with school leaders and the wider education community, we aim to: provide a single national focus for school

leadership development, research and innovation; be a driving force for world-class leadership in our schools and the wider community; provide support to and be a major resource for school leaders; [and] stimulate national and international debate on leadership issues," (NCSL, n.d.-a).

NCSL has done so well with its charge that it has eclipsed the country's postsecondary education system and local education authorities (LEAs) as the primary means of preparing school leaders. Certification from NCSL is now a requirement for entry into the headship – the equivalent of the principalship in England.

This study asked: What would a NCSL-like model of distributed leadership development look like in practice? What organizational and contextual elements contribute to creating and sustaining distributive leadership development? How might the success of distributed leadership development be evaluated?

The intent was to systemically gather broad and deep information about NCSL as related to the research questions, while keeping a holistic view of the relationships between people, organizations, events, and perspectives (Patton, 1990; Weiss, 1998). Key constructs include the eight hallmarks of distributed leadership and four facets of preparation programmes (see Table 1).

Case data, collected during spring and summer 2004, include documentary, interview and focus group data, a field journal, and research memos. As a basic source of information about the organization at the study's outset, NCSL documents served as a stimulus for generating interview and focus group questions (Patton, 1990). Additional NCSL documents were added as a result of site visits and interviews. Documentary data subsequently proved an important source of information for illuminating and confirming findings from the interviews. Common

[1] Editors Note: This section of the manuscript modifies the spelling of program to programme, recognizing the preferred format of our UK readers.

documents included curricular materials, marketing materials, policy papers, and research produced and disseminated by NCSL.

Interviews and focus group followed a semi-structured protocol to explore respondents' individual understandings of NCSL as an organization and its individual leadership development programmes, including their perceptions of organizational and programmatic strengths and weaknesses and, if applicable, their experiences as participants. These included 13 one-hour interviews with NCSL staff, instructors and researchers, purposefully sampled from different areas of the organization and from different levels within it, in order to get different points of view and avoid elite bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994); and a one-hour focus group discussion with seven students selected from two different cohorts in one NCSL programme, in order to add comparative data from the student perspective. A detailed research journal recorded observations and insights during NCSL site visits.

Data analysis followed a constant comparative strategy, using memoing, coding, and contextualizing (Maxwell, 1996; Strauss, 1987). Memoing and reflecting on the data were immediate and ongoing processes during its collection that informed the subsequent coding process by highlighting emerging concepts, themes, and their possible relationships (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each new set of data were compared against all others, analyzing different answers and perspectives, and looking for similarities, differences, and possible relationships (Flick, 1998; Patton, 1990; Thorne, 2000). Emerging interpretations were discussed during the interviews and focus groups for on-going member-check validity. The final coding scheme was organized around a range of conditions, interactions, strategies, and consequences associated with each of the key constructs of the study (see Table 1), and managed through N*Vivo software. Colleagues at another university generously served as peer reviewers, debriefing following the site visits, reviewing emerging findings, and questioning methods and interpretations (Creswell, 1998).

Table 1
NCSL Case Study: Research Questions and Key Constructs

Key constructs

Hallmarks of distributed leadership	Facets of preparation programs	Research questions
1. Shared responsibility	1. Structure	1. What would a model of distributed leadership development look like in practice?
2. Shared power and authority	2. Curriculum	2. What organizational and contextual elements contribute to creating and sustaining distributive leadership development?
3. Synergy	3. Admissions	3. How might the success of distributed leadership development be evaluated?
4. Leadership capacity	4. Evaluation	
5. Organizational learning		
6. Equitable and ethical climate		
7. Democratic and investigative culture		
8. Macro-community engagement		

Nevertheless, the study has limitations. Documents, interview, and focus group participants were selected based on their availability and relevancy, and thus may reveal only certain aspects of the organization and programs (Patton, 1990). Furthermore, interview and focus group data relied on hand-recorded notes, less preferable to audio-recordings (Maxwell, 1996) but a necessary delimitation established by NSCL.[1] Triangulation and peer review minimized these limitations (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990).

The next three sections present findings for each research question. The last offers implications for building distributed leadership development programs in the US.

FINDING 1: DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE AT NCSL

What would a model of distributed leadership development look like in practice? This section reviews NCSL according to three of the four key facets of preparation programmes - structure, curriculum, and admissions.

Overview of NCSL Structure

Organization

Neither a college nor a university in the American sense of the term, the National College of School Leadership is a quasi-governmental organization. It serves - yet is independent of - the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), an agency of England's central government. NCSL operates under the direction of its own leadership team, with strategic guidance and support provided by a governing council. The College has three core activities: a) leadership development, b) leadership research, and c) facilitating networked knowledge communities of school leaders. The College is based in Nottingham, but its activities extend throughout the country.

Context

England has 25,000 primary and secondary government-maintained schools, and 3,000 independent schools.[2] School leaders face many of the same needs and challenges as their US counterparts. They need to adapt to decentralized management and shared responsibilities. "The Education Reform Act 1988 reallocated the balance of responsibilities and authority for managing schools from local education authorities [LEAs] to the headteacher and governors [school governing boards] of individual schools. This shifted a much greater responsibility for decision-making to the school level. In recent years, the proportion of funding

delegated to schools' own control has increased, empowering headteachers and governors to manage their schools" (OFSTED, 2003, p.5).

England's schools also feel the same sense of urgency and accountability for meeting higher standards as do US schools. In 2001, the government established a demanding agenda for schools including raising standards for student attainment in literacy and math skills, implementing strong interventions to tackle school and student failure, diversifying the curriculum with more vocational routes, giving teachers greater support, and giving schools greater autonomy for site-based management (NCSL, n.d.-b).

Over 2,000 headteacher (principal) vacancies occur annually just due to the natural turnover of an aging and retiring generation. "We have to create the pool of qualified candidates," said one NCSL staff member interviewed for the study. "Many of these jobs go unfilled and get reposted. Schools cannot find qualified and interested candidates." Not too long ago, teaching and school leadership had diminished as desirable careers in England, with unfavorably viewed status, salary, and working conditions. Fewer people were willing to move into headteacher positions, "partly due to the hassle and complexities of the job," he said. "In recent years the government invested considerable money into improving salaries and working conditions. Teaching and school leadership have never been better paid than they are right now." Yet, filling those 2000 vacancies requires training at least 1,700 new headteachers annually and addressing the resulting wave of vacancies among other administrative and teaching positions.

Recognizing that England faces an impending shortage of trained leaders, school leadership makes a critical difference in school effectiveness, and schools need a new kind of leadership for contemporary needs and challenges, NCSL was created to:

- provide a single national focus for school leadership development, research, and innovation;
- be a driving force for world-class leadership in our schools and the wider community;
- provide support to and be a major resource for school leaders; [and]
- stimulate national and international debate on leadership issues" (NCSL, n.d.-a).

Overview of NCSL Curriculum

Leadership development framework

Most US school leader preparation programs give attention to preparing and certifying principals and superintendents. NCSL, in contrast, also gives a unique and strong attention to mid-level managers, filling a critical professional development void in a layer of England's school leaders. NCSL conceptualizes a five-stage view of school leadership that is both distributive and developmental:

1. emergent leadership (teachers who aspire to or are beginning to take on management and leadership responsibilities),
2. established leadership (mid-level administrators),
3. entry to headship (those who aspire to the headteacher position, including preparation and induction),
4. advanced leadership (experienced headteachers who need professional renewal and new and/or updated skills), and
5. consultant leadership (senior headteachers and community leaders who are ready to train and mentor others, or take on other responsibilities, like research and evaluation).

The College believes that professional development should reflect prior learning and experience, and that individual development needs will vary with experience and context (NCSL, n.d.-b).

One NCSL staff member interviewed explained the Leadership Development Framework this way,

> Leadership doesn't reside in the headteacher. It's something that lots [sic] of people are responsible for. Lots of people have a leadership role in the schools: the deputy headteacher, [3] for example, the heads of subject,[4] the heads of years.[5] If England has 25,000 maintained [public] schools, we think of leadership as extending to about 300 to 350 thousand school leaders. In some large schools there might be 14-20 leaders, in smaller ones there might be three to five. You don't need to wait until you are a headteacher to make a difference. You have to lead where you are.

Another said,

> The process of grooming a head should start farther down the hierarchy. Heads have to make decisions to give professional development to their deputy headteachers, to their heads of subject, heads of years. They have to develop their staff, while knowing that they are essentially growing them to leave. Heads have to recognize that…in releasing their budget dollars and preparing their own good staff to move onward and upward . . . they are giving something larger to the school system, and their staff will contribute to their school while they remain.

Curricular building blocks

NCSL began with elements already in place for developing England's school teachers and leaders: The National Standards for Headteachers, several continuing

professional development programmes developed by the DfES, and an array of other programmes being run by LEAs, school boards, professional associations, universities, and private companies (NCSL, n.d.-b). NCSL extended, improved, and brought synergy to these elements.

> The programmes for headteachers were not linked together before the NCSL," explained one staff member. Professional development was largely the purview of the LEAs, and there are 150 LEAs in England.[6] The scope and quality of their work was spotty. Only a few were giving attention to distributed leadership. Some had no offerings for middle level leaders, some did.The NCSL replaces, consolidates, improves upon, and extends much of what was formerly being done by the LEAs.

The consolidation has enabled stronger standards in school leader development.

Course offerings

A brief description of NCSL's programmes illustrates the range of offerings according to their five-stage Leadership Development Framework. For emergent leaders:

- *Leadership Pathways* provides modularized, personalized leadership learning for individuals;
- *Leading from the Middle* for small groups of mid-level leaders, focuses on the role of mid-level leaders as part of a leadership team and builds team capacity;
- *Taking Women's Leadership Forward* provides professional development support to increase women's representation in mid-level and senior leadership positions;
- *Equal Access to Promotion*, offered in partnership with the National Union of Teachers, provides professional development support programme to increase ethnic minorities' representation in mid-level and senior leadership positions;

- *Bursar Development Programme* provides job-specific training for bursars; and
- *Certificate of School Business Management* provides training in facilities and environmental management, risk management, and financial and office systems management for current and potential school business managers.

For established leaders, NCSL offers:

- *Established Leaders Programme* for assistant and deputy headteachers who do not aspire to headteachership, focuses on student learning, organizational learning, and shared leadership for school improvement;
- *Diploma of School Business Management* for school bursars, provides training in needs assessment, change management, strategic management, and school improvement; and
- *London Leadership Strategy*, which focuses on all aspects of leadership capacity for education professionals in London's secondary schools.

For entering the headship, NCSL offers:

- *Trainee Headteacher Programme* for developing potential headteachers and deputy headteachers to work in at-risk primary and secondary schools;
- *National Professional Qualification for Headship*, the mandatory licensure programme for all new headteachers in England;
- *National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership*, the licensure for leaders in multi-agency, integrated early-childhood centers; [7]
- *Headteacher Induction Programme* for supporting new first-time headteachers; [8] and
- *New Visions,* providing personal and professional development and support for new first-time headteachers in their first two years of headship.

For advanced leaders:

- *Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers* is an intense personal-professional development programme for experienced headteachers who want to increase their effectiveness;
- *Leading Small Primary Schools* addresses specific and unique needs for established headteachers of small primary schools;
- *Safer Recruitment* increases headteachers' professional knowledge in personnel recruitment as a strategy for safeguarding children;
- *Strategic Leadership of ICT*, offered in partnership with the British Educational Communications Technology Agency (BECTA), trains headteachers and technology teams to strategically lead information and computing technology;
- *Developing the Capacity for Sustained Improvement* (for cross-level teams) and *Working Together for Success* (for cross-function teams), improve team effectiveness and build organizational capacity;
- *International Placements for Headteachers* provides small groups of current headteachers with international study visits; and
- *Partners in Leadership*, a collaboration between NCSL and Business in the Community (BTC), teams up school leaders and business leaders for peer mentoring.

For consultant leaders:

- *Development Programme for Consultant Leadership* trains headteachers to serve as programme leaders, participant mentors, and coaches;
- *Primary Leadership Programme*, a collaboration between NCSL, the DfES, and the LEAs, trains consultant leaders to work with leadership teams in thousands of primary schools across England;
- *Research Associate Programme* trains mid and senior level leaders to become NCSL research associates; and

- *School Improvement Partners* trains and accredits individuals to provide support to secondary schools that are seeking to raise standards. Serving as a conduit between the school, the governing board, the LEA, and the government, School Improvement Partners replace the former DfES school inspectors.

Pedagogical philosophy

NCSL (NCSL, n.d.-b) specifies three principles of learning. First, the College believes that effective leadership starts with knowing and managing oneself, and educational professionals should therefore acquire the basic knowledge, skills and understandings of management early in their careers.

Second, the College recognizes diversity of learning needs, learning styles, career stages, and professional contexts, and therefore, follows a signature blended learning approach, mixing independent study, team-learning, e-learning, face-to-face interaction, experiential learning, and intervisitation (the practice of visiting a variety of schools and businesses to see leadership in other contexts). One study participant summarized NCSL's pedagogical philosophy this way:

> We refer to a shallow-deep-profound learning model, in which we reject the shallow, which focuses on memorization, information, replication, extrinsic rewards, compliance, dependence . . . and embrace deep and profound learning, which focuses on dialogue, reflection, linkages between theory and practice, the use of expert professionals, and the like. In our programmes we emphasize skills, like listening, dialogue, engagement . . . not debate, winning arguments. We teach school leaders how to come to a point of shared meaning with their staff. All of these things have changed the way that head teachers who have participated in the programmes think about education. They come to realize that the pedagogies we use here are not just effective

for their own adult learning but can be translated into their curriculums and change the pedagogies that they use to instruct children.

Third, the College believes that leaders have a responsibility to develop their colleagues. Therefore, they train and encourage experienced leaders to develop schools as professional learning communities to build the next generation of leaders.

Selected Details from Two Programmes

Selected details from two programmes, Leading from the Middle (LfM) and New Visions (NV), evidence how NCSL infuses distributed leadership into the curriculum.

Leading from the Middle

LfM targets mid-level school leaders. “The middle leaders -heads of subject, heads of year - are the key implementers of any change initiative that takes place in schools, yet they receive little training, little support,” explained an NCSL executive. “The professional development available to midlevel leaders is localized, offered by the LEAs, and has been patchy at best . . . in terms of quality, and . . . in terms of how widespread the offerings are. Some LEAs offer little to nothing.”

The programme aims to enhance middle leaders’ confidence and competence by identifying and developing their leadership and management skills. Recognizing that these individuals lead within their schools as part of a team, NCSL requires participants to register for the programme as school-based groups of two or more, along with their deputy head teachers.

The programme adheres to the College’s signature blended learning approach, rotating between face-to-face sessions with the whole cohort, independent study, school-based coaching, web-mediated instruction, and online collaborative learning. Their online learning community/component includes a sophisticated virtual

school tool through which participants either collaboratively or individually tackle real-world problems - trying solutions, making mistakes, and trying it all over again. For participants' convenience, the face-to-face sessions are held all around the country at non-affiliated centers, which the NCSL contracts. "This programme is revolutionary thinking in the UK," commented a staff member. He continued,

> If you look at this group of people and compare them to their business counterparts, educators get very little in terms of training, but their business counterparts would be going to middle-level management training programmes right and left. There was nothing available of any worth for these people.

NCSL endeavors to make the LfM programme as personalized and meaningful as possible. Participants undergo 360-degree leadership assessments, getting feedback on their leadership abilities from their peers, headteachers, and individuals under their management. Although some participants have had difficulty in handling such frank assessment, "The goal is to develop a leadership focus," explained an NCSL staff member. "We ask, 'what is it that the individual needs to learn?' Then, we tailor the programme to help them learn this. This is a personalized learning approach."

Collectively, each team develops a list of desired learning themes, immediate issues or needs that they want to work on for their schools. The College then provides that team with cutting-edge, relevant resources developed jointly by the BBC and NCSL. Each team's leadership coach (deputy headteacher) receives not only their team's curricular materials but also a copy of the facilitator materials used to run the programme. The coach further receives ample training on how coach post-

programme learning and expand leadership development within his or her own school, “reinforcing distributed leadership at the school level,” (NCSL staff member)

New Visions Programme

NV, part of the headteacher induction programme, targets new headteachers. All participants are recent graduates of NCSL’s National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) programme. NPQH is content-driven, focusing on what individuals need to know in order to become head teachers. NV, in contrast, centers on strategy, on surviving and thriving in the role of headteacher. Ideally, new headteachers would come through NV within the first two years of becoming a headteacher.

Participants meet eight times a year for 2 days at a time. “It’s good to space out the programme over the course of a year,” explained an NSCL director, “because so much learning goes on in between the times the cohort actually convenes. They get a chance to go back to their schools and apply what they’ve learned. Plus, so much learning happens in the online communities that run year round.”

NV incorporates the College’s blended learning strategy, emphasizing participant inter-visitation and observation of each other’s schools and model schools, online learning communities, face-to-face meetings, and individualized learning and reflection. Participants receive a thick binder of materials on the headship, leadership, and personal development that they work through over the course of the year. In addition to working through these binders, participants are expected to keep learning journals.

Students described the purpose, process, and benefits of each of these components in the following ways:

> This programme gives me a chance to come away from where I work, to have quality time, reflective time, to sit with others and share . . . It’s been

> incredible. In our first meeting we looked at values and vision. In the second, we looked at issues and strategies. I haven't always come away feeling positive about what I'm doing in leading my school. I realize there are different approaches, different choices I can make. I can do it more effectively.

Another noted,

> I came because (location), where I live and work, is big but not cutting edge. It's full of rural villages and farms, small schools of 30-50 students. I wanted to get a national picture of the issues and strategies for leading schools. Head teachers can be so isolated. Here, I feel a part of a community. I get to meet new leaders, like myself, who are concerned with the same issues, undergoing the same experiences. We share ideas, practice reflective thinking, talking [sic] about strategies. It has made quite a significant change in the way I lead my school.

Two new head teachers remarked,

> This programme offers big support for being new at the head teacher position. We visit several schools as part of the programme. We talk about our problems and put them through a triage, problem solving, sharing best practices, action learning.

Their male colleague added,

> When I hear a fellow participant talking about the problems at his or her school, then I chime in with my own parallel problems. We collaboratively think through issues, like how will we make our curriculum at our schools our own? How will we deal with the tone of our school, the diversity? How will we

> hire to fill certain vacancies? In order for all this [reflective sharing and collaborative problem-solving] to happen, we needed ground rules. We practice confidentiality, mutual respect, openness . . . This programme couldn't run without that. We share deep personal and professional problems here.

As with each of their programmes, NCSL endeavors to make NV as meaningful and beneficial as possible for participants. Two students summed up their views on the quality, relevancy, and immediacy of NV:

> T]he quality of what the NCSL is trying to do is world class," said one. They're in touch with day-to-day practice and international research. I have a master's degree in education. I had to force myself to read that material in college. In this programme, we have homework and assigned readings, but I don't really feel reluctant to do it because it's all current, all relevant, all applicable to my real world of work.

The other student added to this,

> The facilitators who run this cohort are knowledgeable, focused, with experience in headteaching. They change the content and delivery of the programme to adjust to participants' needs. This is individualized learning, tailored, very helpful . . .. They've gone out of their way to help me succeed as a new headteacher.

Overview of NCSL Admissions

Marketing

NCSL's primary marketing target is headteachers because England's schools now practice site-based management and control more of their own budgets,

including that for professional development. NCSL also cross-markets specific programmes to mid-level leaders.

"We were deliberately slow in marketing it to people initially," admitted an NCSL director, "until we brought more of our strategic plan to fruition and increased the range of programmes and number of placements." There were 25,000 participants in NCSL programmes in 2004, the year of data collection for this study.

Admissions

Admissions criteria differ for the various programmes. A few are open to all school professionals. Others require letters of recommendation. For programmes geared for specific career levels and job titles, participants have to be at the appropriate level or place in their career and admissions criteria are tighter. For example, applicants for the certification programme for new headteachers (NPQH) must undergo a rigorous assessment. "We do a school-based assessment first, choosing three people at the school," explained an NCSL director.

> One of these must be the participant's line manager. The other two can be of the participant's choosing. These people are charged with taking a look at the individual's professional development needs, plan for development, and progress on that plan. We also assess participant's decision-making, leadership, and group interaction skills. We do an exercise in which we bring in actors to stage a real management issue that the participants are asked to resolve. We do one-to-one interviews about critical incidents in their schools and careers. At the end of the programme, the facilitators do a final and formal evaluation of the participants, based on their leadership development portfolios.

NPQH has an 85% admit rate, with the average annual cohort size ranging from 2,500 to 3,000 participants (2003 and 2004 data). All applicants for programmes that have a significant e-learning component must take an Internet communications skills test and, if necessary, follow a preliminary basic skills course.

FINDING 2: CREATING AND SUSTAINING DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AT NCSL

What organizational and contextual elements contribute to creating and sustaining distributive leadership development? Key resources include human, physical, technological and fiscal resources, and a complex web of relationships with practice, business, and the government.

Staff: "We grow our own leaders here"

Approximately 250 people work at NCSL, divided into administrative, research, and instructional staff. Some have had life long careers in university-based training, research, and service related to school leadership. Others have been teachers, mid-level school leaders, and headteachers. A few hail from government posts.

Those interviewed for this study indicated a general absence of careerism or competition among NCSL staff, research associates, and facilitators. They spoke of their responsibility to the profession, their obligation to meet leaders' needs and to create better educational outcomes for students. They viewed the College's research, programmes and accomplishments as collectively produced and owned. All mentioned a commitment to improving schools through developing and sharing knowledge.

Research and content development

NCSL develops its own programme materials through distilling traditional academic research and conducting original research. NCSL develops its content and research agenda through talking and listening with scholars, practitioners, and government.

> We know the education research community's concerns. We are connected with business and management schools. We know the current issues in leadership studies. We are connected with government agencies and policy people, including ministers, the secretary of state, and other policy makers and so we know their concerns, like driving standards up and modernizing processes. We are tapped into the schools themselves and we know the concerns of professionals, their concerns with jobs satisfaction, recruitment, retention, strategies for leading more effectively . . .. We look at all of this and make strategic choices regarding what we want to study. If the data do not exist or are unavailable, then we send out research teams to collect the data. (NCSL staff member)

All original research is action-based, conducted collaboratively by NCSL staff and research associates. The College contracts and trains headteachers, who must apply to the programme, to serve as research associates. At the time of the study, the College retained about 30 research associates from 21 schools, with typically six associates serving per project. "We think the best people to look at school leadership are those who do it themselves," noted an NCSL staff member.

Research associates speak positively of their experiences and affiliation with the College. "The NCSL has been a blessing to school leaders," said one. "When I was a school leader, I was largely without support. I was isolated. Then I met these

like minded people, and my work with them energizes me, improves me professionally, and makes me feel like I'm making a difference in education." Another, speaking of the time involved in being a headteacher and an NCSL research associate said, "I love it. The work that I'm doing, the work that the NCSL does, is making a difference in children's lives. It's worth every minute of my time." An NCSL executive, commenting on research and content development opined,

> We think we build on the existing knowledge base far more, far better than our academic colleagues. We insist on a full literature review before any research work is undertaken by NCSL research associates. There is no need to replicate the work that the university does . . .. We are in the area between administrative theory and practice, and place a strong emphasis on practitioner research and practitioner use research. We test findings with schools. What practitioners are hungry for is actionable research, information we can use, information we can do things with.

Delivery

NCSL contracts and trains facilitators to deliver its programmes. Most are individual consultant leaders, either former or current headteachers with many years of experience. Others are hired from public and private education organizations. All are trained by NCSL and follow NCSL content. "We contract facilitators to give us flexibility," explained one NCSL staff member. "Many facilitators' contracts are continually renewed, and some have long term contracts." Another said,

> We grow our own leaders here. Most are chosen from previous year's cohorts. All … have been senior leaders in their schools or have worked with the LEAs. It's very important to emphasize that their role is not about delivery. They do not lecture, provide answers, etcetera. It's about facilitating. They come to

> the session with a repertoire of materials and facilitate the learning of the leaders. The facilitators receive periodic professional development days themselves [to] help them improve their level of facilitating, really challenge their thinking about learning, about learning leadership. Then they go back energized, with more strategies to add to their repertoire.

Physical Infrastructure: "A New Level of Professionalism"

Much of NCSL's face-to-face leadership training occurs around the country in schools, businesses, and at conference facilities. NCSL, itself, is set on a small, quiet campus on the edge of Nottingham. "The architecture was designed to reflect our purposes and the philosophy," commented the College's CEO. She continued,

> The comfortable, executive quality of the environment reflects our desire to emphasize a new level of professionalism among school leaders . . . . . that these are jobs worth having, that the work they do is worthwhile, that investing in their leadership development is an undertaking as vital as investing in management development of any top commercial organization. The open, airy feeling of the building reflects the spirit of open inquiry, which [sic] we want to infuse into the field of improving school leadership.

The three-story building has four inner sections. One section holds NCSL administrative offices. The other three host instructional spaces of various sizes and types, each with glass corridor walls and glass doors. Two of the three sections have central atriums that hold comfortable lounge-like break out furnishings. The third has an elegant dining room. The entire back wall of the building, which faces a lake, is glass. The upper two floors of the three programming sections feature participant guest rooms ringed around balconies overlooking the atriums. At night, the tea and

coffee counter in one atrium becomes a sophisticated bar where participants relax and socialize.

Technology is everywhere: public portals for logging into the NCSL website and the Internet, “smart” meeting rooms and conference facilities. The effect is indeed one of openness and executive comforts. “This was an expensive building,” confided one NCSL director. “We didn’t spare expenses. We wanted it to demonstrate our commitment to the importance of leadership in education . . .. One enters it and feels uplifted.” Another staff member echoed,

> The physical environment of the NCSL is an important part of its success. People go through much time and expense to come here . . .. When we built it, we decided to treat headteachers with five-star accommodations to demonstrate that we value what they do. Their jobs are just as important as head executives in any successful commercial company or industry.

During one site visit to the College a programme was in session. Through the glass walls, groups of school leaders could be seen engaged in conversation. In the atrium, clusters of school leaders sat around tables drinking tea, leaning forward, talking animatedly. Their body language conveyed interest and engagement. “There’s an energy [sic] to this place,” commented the NCSL staff member who served as a guide on that site visit. She noted,

> Today is rather a quiet time. But when we have several programmes in full swing, when the College is filled with participants, you can feel the buzz, the excitement. It’s an opportunity for them to step out of their daily lives, to reflect, to learn from each other, to come away energized, recharged, ready to look at the schools that they lead in a new way. It’s why I love working here.

Technological Infrastructure: Professional Learning Communities

Perhaps, more important than the physical campus is NCSL's technological infrastructure: Talk2learn, a robust online learning community. The online community management team, with 50 people, is the largest administrative team in NCSL. Talk2learn intersects each of NCSL's activities. A key NCSL director commented:

> NCSL believes that the online community is incredibly critical to the success of its work and to sustaining ongoing leadership development among participants. It's a vital piece of nearly every programme offering. It creates a space for dialogue. It's a forum for current available knowledge. It facilitates conversation. It has powerful collaborative potential.

Talk2learn (see Figure 1) brings together England's school leaders at all career stages. It encompasses communities of practice, programme communities, consultation communities, and project communities. Membership is free and one need not have participated in an NCSL programme in order to join the main community, although specialized communities are restricted.

Communities of practice

Communities of practice are initiated by groups of Talk2learn participants. Because NCSL does not moderate dialogue in the communities of practice in a traditional sense, it screens individuals before granting an access account. Members must complete a profile page that includes a digital photograph, their professional background, and current contact information. The profile serves two purposes. First, it builds a sense of community, adding a personal element to an online environment. Second, it provides a safety feature in that all participants are identified and therefore accountable for what they say. Anonymous postings are not permitted in

Talk2learn. “A key element of the success and richness of the online communities is that registration is tight and everyone is accountable for their contributions,” (NCSL staff member).

Certain communities of practice center on particular professional positions, or particular geographical areas (urban, rural, international, etc.). Others focus on particular issues. The Networked Learning community, for example, connects geographically isolated schools to a larger community of like-minded professionals. Schools join the community as a group, with each individual participant completing a profile page. Members learn and problem-solve together, offer each other consultation, and challenge each other.

Programme communities

Programme communities, restricted to current and past programme participants, give access to NCSL courses. They serve many purposes: content delivery, collaborative learning, independent learning, and supplemental study groups. Teams of NCSL facilitators support these online communities, engaging participants, moving discussion and development along, and are vital to the communities’ success.

Virtual Heads, an example of a programme community, is a mandatory part of the NPQH programme. “We see this as a wonderful way to ensure that the future leaders of schools will be IT [information technology] confident,” explained an NCSL director. Registrants are divided into regions across the country and then further divided into teams, each of which is assigned a facilitator. “We pursue our coursework in our assigned teams,” said one NCSL student interviewed for this study. “But there are sub communities within the communities… geared towards specific issues. Some of them are quite private. The communities are safe spaces to learn and to work things out.”

Leading from the Middle, (LfM) another programme community is for participants of the LfM programme. It offers the same kinds of engagement as Virtual Heads. However, LfM also features a virtual school, an online simulated learning tool designed by NCSL. The module focuses on the professional lives of middle-level leaders, such as heads of subject or heads of year. Taking participants through an entire school year, the module presents the participant with various scenarios, points of decision, and options. Once the participant selects a response to the point of decision, he or she can navigate around the school, enter different rooms, click on teachers in the faculty room and on students in the classroom, and see how their decision has affected those within the school community.

Participants can start, stop, and return to their simulation at any point. They also can go backwards, reverse an earlier decision, and make a new choice after learning the outcomes of their original decision. A great deal of discussion and collaborative learning happens among the simulation participants. Nearly all participants join in one or more of the many online community subgroups that discuss issues and strategize responses to the various simulation scenarios. There are over 100 different scenarios embedded in the simulation. NCSL developed these in collaboration with school leaders around England, who ensured their accuracy and relevance to the lives of midlevel school leaders.

Consultation communities. Open to all Talk2learn members, consultation communities provide school leaders with an opportunity to hear from and directly question leading figures, scholars, and policymakers in the world of education. One mechanism for such communication is the Hotseat, an NCSL-designed programme in which featured guests post short articles addressing issues in school leadership or education. A link provides a picture and biography of the speakers, who have ranged from high-level government officials to graduate students of education. Then, over the next two weeks, Talk2learn community members can post questions or reactions

to the article. The guest speakers thoughtfully answer each question. The strength of this engagement lies in its asynchronous nature, allowing time for reflection before posting and responding to comments. NCSL posts an executive summary on pertinent and practical information surrounding the featured issue. The Hotseat speaker biography, article, and online dialogue from the event are archived for others to view at anytime. “All of the speakers have been delighted to be invited and readily accept the invitation,” said one NCSL staff member.

Project communities

Project communities are restricted to participants of specific projects, such as research associates engaged in NCSL facilitated work, or commissioned work conducted in partnership with school districts, churches, universities, and the like. Research findings, however, are freely disseminated on the NCSL website.

NCSL has received very positive feedback on Talk2learn. Students interviewed for this study spoke animatedly about their online communities praising the current research made available to them, the Hotseat speakers programme, the online learning tools, and rich interactive dialogue. One of them defined Talk2learn as:

> a wealth of information on the web. You can be a spectator. You can be a participant. You can hear commentary straight from leaders in education and you don’t even have to participate in that dialogue . . . but if you do – wow – you are guaranteed a personal response from these incredible speakers.

An NCSL director attributed the success of the technological infrastructure to its lack of legacy.

> The College could embrace new technologies because we are a brand new organization. We do not have a legacy of previously-purchased IT systems, which we were obligated to use. We could buy, design, and use exactly what

we wanted. We had no financial restrictions and could get the best of whatever we felt we needed. With a vision for networked learning throughout England, we built a system that integrates well with other systems. Our government conducted a comprehensive review of NCSL, and one of their key recommendations was to embed e-learning in every single one of our programmes and activities, and we have. In fact, other school systems in other countries now want to buy our Talk2learn programme.

The next version of Talk2learn software will generate automatic email messages to community members, alerting them to when a piece of research has been posted on the website that is relevant to their professional position, programme, school type, or learning needs.

Money: "We cannot imagine wanting more money"

Ensuring a high level of human, physical, and technological resources takes money. NCSL has it. The budget of the NCSL has doubled in the past 2 years, from £60 million to £120 million pounds sterling in 2004 (the equivalent of $210 million US dollars). Nearly 90% of that comes from annual government operating grants. NCSL embodies government commitment to raising the level of school leadership for a nation.

"In the first year," reported an NCSL executive, "all of the programmes were free . . . fully subsidized by the government grant. Now, we have to offer a reduced subsidy of 70%, so that participating schools have to provide the other 30%." Still, that represents a very generous discount. "We cannot imagine wanting more money," he said simply. Yet, education funding worldwide depends on the politics and priorities of those in office. Therefore, NCSL wisely plans for a time in which government funding may be reduced. "We are moving towards increasing other

sources of income," said a College director. "We anticipate that we'll have the opportunity to package and sell our programmes or our consulting services internationally."

A Complex Web of Relationships

In addition to money, NCSL also depends on a complex web of relationships. The College sees the mission of raising the level of school leadership in England as a partnership with the profession, government and business.

Partnering with the profession

The College built programme offerings and curricular content based on the needs, realities, and lessons learned from the profession. Its organizing documents state:

> The College should be perceived as belonging to the profession and adaptable in meeting leaders' needs . . . We have made it a priority to find out the views of headteachers and other school leaders about the current state of leadership development in the profession. [We've done this by]talking and listening to more than 10,000 school leaders at conferences and other events; market and opinion research. [We] complemented [this]. . . by a wide-ranging baseline evaluation, commissioned from [a university] by the DfES; consultative groups of professional associations (including independent schools), and stake-holders (LEAs, the churches and the governor associations); debates in the 'Virtual Heads' and 'Talking Heads' electronic communities; [and] researching the work of fourteen international leadership centres in nine different countries (NCSL, n.d. - b).

Professional partnerships were critical for NCSL's reception and survival within England's education community. In the beginning the LEAs were very protective of their territory in professional development of school leaders. As NCSL has reached out to work with them collaboratively, those attitudes have changed.

The consolidation of professional development offerings for all levels of school leaders across the nation has fostered a sense of national unity in the school leader professions that had not been achieved through their professional associations. "Up until now," said one NCSL student interviewed, "headteachers had nowhere to go to get leadership development outside of their LEAs. [NCSL] has given headteachers somewhere to go, a community of school leaders." A staff member offered another perspective:

> We brought focus to the position of the headteachership. England's three largest programmes for head teachers weren't even linked together before the NCSL. We are linking them. Now one thing melds into another. [Furthermore, s]chools in the UK have always seen themselves as islands, serving the pupils and parents in their immediate area. This school is one island. The school down the road is a different island. We try to get [members of] each level of schoolteacher and leader to see themselves as part of a national – no - part of a worldwide education system. It's been difficult to get people to think this way, to focus out, not in.

Partnering with the profession and creating a national professional community necessitates a shared professional language. Said one NCSL director:

> In some of the schools we are thought of as being pretentious because we use words that are not a part of everyday language. But we are professionals.

> Every group of professionals has its own language. Doctors, lawyers, accountants – each has a specific set of words that they use to describe their work and the issues that they face. Why shouldn't educators be allowed to have their own professional language too without being thought of as pretentious? There are a number of very specific key processes associated with learning, with teaching, with educational leadership . . . . . co-create, intervisitation, . . . These are powerful processes that should be described accurately by their professional terms. Now, in any of our programmes, you can hear the language of the participants changing over the course of the year.

An NCSL student echoed those comments:

> [Among traditional venues for professional development] there is a tendency to tell teachers things in very plain language. It's very patronizing, like we are stupid or less intelligent. Many of the professional development programmes that I have seen before the NCSL was created might have more appropriately been called, 'The Idiot's Guide to Administration and Leadership.'

Partnering with the government.

NCSL holds a unique role. The government gives it a monopoly on licensing headteachers and other midlevel leaders, as well as the office of training and certifying school improvement partners (a function formerly performed by government school inspectors). It also uses NCSL research to inform public policy. Yet as a non-departmental agency, the government entrusts NCSL to do its own work and operate independently of the DfES. One NCSL executive explained,

> When working in government, policy, and practice always precedes you, in effecting guiding, and limiting what you can do. This can be comforting, but it's also constricting. When the NCSL was developed, however, they [the government] told us 'We want you to meet these goals, but you invent the process.' It was a green field, both literally and figuratively. In fact, I came here because it was a chance to be able to help shape something having a vital national impact.

NCSL holds a unique role in government at the local level too, serving as a conduit between the profession, schools and their governing boards, local education authorities, and the central government. The government has begun listening to education professionals through the NCSL. For example, policy makers have begun using the Hotseats as a vehicle for exploring possibilities before a policy is ratified so that the government and the education community can see potential problems and issues before policy is set rather than after. This is exciting synergy.

However, maintaining government support and wide latitude takes concerted effort. NCSL does a fair amount of public affairs work, avoiding alignment with any one political party so as to ensure its chances of survival as elections change political power. NCSL also partners with other government agencies, such as BECTA (British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) and the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), to develop curricular content and conduct research.

NCSL involves the government in the life of the College, its programmes, and the community of England's school leaders in many ways. NCSL wants its participants to understand and interact with government and the policymaking process. They see this as an essential part of leadership development. Thus, policies

and the policymaking process are part of curricular materials, and government guest speakers are invited into the curriculum to host online forums (Hotseats).

> One of the more challenging things [about NCSL work] is the line between independence and slavishly following government lines. Our view is that if we want to have credibility with the people, then we must demonstrate independence of thought and action. Always there is tension in trying to be both independent and a government agency. Are we a government agency, independent, or both? Can we be both? We have demonstrated independence, we think, but we have to work on it. The profession won't take us as seriously unless we can demonstrate the independence. Each year we conduct opinion research with school leaders . . . [asking] . . . about the reputation of the College . . . [and] whether they think the NCSL is an independent voice in education. The majority does, and nearly half of the respondents also think that we help shape the political agenda and policy" (NCSL Director).

Partnering with business

The College's partnerships with business are few, but promising. NCSL infuses wisdom from business leadership into its curricular offerings for school business and technology problems. For example, it collaborated with Business in the Community (BTC) to develop the Partners in Leadership programme. BTC is an association of over 700 of the United Kingdom's top business who are committed to building their positive impact on the community. Partners in Leadership pairs school leaders with business leaders from these companies for peer mentoring.

Finding 3: Evaluating Distributed Leadership Development

How might the success of distributed leadership development be evaluated? Although a young organization, NCSL has already published three self-evaluations, *School Leadership 2003, School Leadership 2004,* and the currently available *School Leadership 2005* (2003, 2004, 2005). These reports lay a baseline that will allow the College to do inter-programme comparisons, longitudinal comparisons, and participant development analyses over time. Their evaluations blend qualitative and quantitative assessments and cover questions, such as: Who are NCSL programmes reaching? How is NCSL engaging participants and the education community? What have participants learned? How is this knowledge being used? Is this work having an impact at the school or system level? What changes are resulting? What have we learned or done that actually makes a difference in the education of children?

Evaluations from individual programme participants, overwhelmingly positive, comprise the largest component of NCSL's self-assessment. "Other strategies for assessing programme impact on individuals are not clear" (NCSL staff member). For example, NCSL created an online tool to track the leadership development of participants, accumulating artifacts and certificates from NCSL programme work and from participants' other professional activities. However, although the College can host these portfolios on their website, content accuracy and completeness rely on individuals. "Participants have to feel that they own their portfolios . . . see them as a valuable development and career advancement tool, take responsibility for keeping them up to date," explained the staff member.

Each year NCSL conducts opinion research with school leaders, asking about the reputation and perceived efficacy of the College. Over 70% of school leaders in the 2004 opinion survey reported that they believe NCSL is having an impact on the educational attainment of children. However, providing the quantitative data to

support these opinions is a difficult task. Although NCSL staff members have pupil performance data coming out of its ears, they still lack hard answers demonstrating the programme's impact.

The College, government, and the education community recognize that it will take time to demonstrate any direct link between NCSL and the educational attainment of England's school children. Still, NCSL has become obsessive in their thinking about assessment. "How is the NCSL's work having an impact on the classroom? On the children? This is the question we keep asking ourselves," said the College's chief executive officer. "We must demonstrate that the government money poured into NCSL is having a direct impact on children's educational attainment."

NCSL strongly believes that distributive leadership fuels school improvement. The problem lies in how to link it to the performance of children within individual schools. As the locus of leadership diffuses throughout a school, so does the ability to link school performance to individual school leaders.

Impact evaluation teams, headed by former headteachers, may provide the answer. These teams are studying a sample of 100 NPQH graduates to understand what happens to graduates at 6 months, 9 months, 12, and 18 months after their NPQH experience. When the sample has completed their surveys and interviews, the team will select 15 and follow up with them to validate those participants' self-reports, visiting their schools and assessing whether what is going on there is an accurate reflection of the self-reports. Eventually the team will track the careers of the 15 and do a leadership story. The evaluation team will subsequently develop and launch a similar study of middle-level leaders for the Leading from the Middle programme.

Whether the right assessment strategy has yet to found, or whether their programmes have yet to come to fruition, one thing is clear: inquiry at NCSL is central. "We train school leaders, but we are also researchers, students of our own

work. We analyze our strengths and weaknesses and develop ourselves and our programmes. Our research feeds back into our programmes. It's part of our internal inquiry process," (NCSL staff member).

IMPLICATIONS FOR DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE US

As evidenced through the National College of School Leadership, developing distributed leadership skills extends beyond simply adding relevant content into the curriculum. Programmes need to embody the very principals that they try to teach. At NCSL, the eight hallmarks of distributed leadership are infused through all facets of the organization and its programmes.

Living the Eight Hallmarks of Distributed Leadership Development

Macro-community engagement: shared responsibility, power and authority.

NCSL makes developing school leaders a shared enterprise, aggregating and synchronizing the efforts of many constituencies, modeling democratic participation and cooperation. Its success relies on macro-community engagement, on the complex web of relationships and partnerships it has developed with education, government, and business. These partnerships are meaningful, democratic, and based upon exchange and reciprocity.

At the macro level, NCSL develops curricular material collaboratively with practitioners, postsecondary education, and government. The College takes responsibility for synthesizing university research and conducting its own research, following an agenda developed through talking with many constituencies. It then contracts and trains practitioners to serve as course facilitators.

Although several of NCSL's programmes are open to all interested participants, others require the participation of school teams. All are cohort based. Many

programmes necessitate shared responsibility for admissions decisions, requiring letters of recommendation or rigorous assessment that involves the applicant's line manager and peers. In these ways, the College shares with schools the responsibility, power, and authority for identifying and preparing current and future school leaders.

Just as NCSL involves the macro-community in identifying and researching issues, and developing and delivering the curriculum, it also involves government, practitioners, and postsecondary education in evaluating the effectiveness of its work. Members of the macro-community from all sectors complete opinion surveys about the College's work or serve on evaluation teams to collect and interpret data evidencing the College's impact. Additionally, programme participants complete satisfaction surveys and maintain their own learning portfolios. In keeping with the philosophies of shared power, responsibility, and authority, two of NCSL's key evaluation criteria focus on reach – Who are NCSL programmes reaching? – and engagement – How is NCSL engaging participants and the education community?

Climate and culture: equity, ethics, democracy and inquiry

Inquiry is a cornerstone of NCSL's four-part mission: "provide a single national focus for school leadership development, research and innovation, be a driving force for world-class leadership in our schools and the wider community, provide support to and be a major resource for school leaders, [and] to stimulate national and international debate on leadership issues" (NCSL, n.d.-a). Multiple participants sharing responsibility and power for that inquiry ensure that individual and contextual differences are valued, and that erroneous information or assumptions and unethical decisions will be detected. NCSL serves as a conduit between government, local school authorities, school boards, and education professionals, and its research is freely available on its website.

Looking at equity and democracy within the curriculum, courses reflect and adapt to participants' prior learning, experiences, needs, and individual school contexts and accommodate a variety of learning styles. Each course becomes a democratic learning community facilitated by a consultant leader. Students practice openness, confidentiality, and mutual respect, creating safe spaces for school leaders to learn and work out solutions to pressing issues. Participants learn individually, collaboratively and experientially; engaging in democratic dialogue with policymakers; observing leadership in a variety of educational and business settings; and practicing leadership through simulations that evidence how decisions affect others across school communities.

The College promotes and practices continual self-assessment, evaluating outcomes – What have participants learned? - application - How is this knowledge being used? - and impact – Is this work having an impact at the school or system level? Focusing on use and impact is an evolutionary step over many training programmes, which merely assess individual knowledge retention. This demonstrates that NCSL sees itself as but one part, the focal point, of a vast multilayered and multiplayered system of leadership for primary and secondary education in England. Fullan (2001), points out that " . . . sending individuals and even teams to external training itself does not work. Leading in a culture of change does not mean placing changed individuals into unchanged environments. Rather, change leaders work on changing the context . . . " (p.79).

Leadership capacity, organizational learning, and synergy. NCSL does not just prepare headteachers. It is working to change the context, transform schools, and bring a greater professionalism to the career of educational administration in England. The College's programmes and outreach efforts raise the collective knowledge, skills, and dispositions of a nation of educational professionals, nurturing current and potential leaders at all levels. Further, NCSL maintains a long-term

commitment to each participant's training. Support and relationships continue long after each programme actually ends, as participants migrate into NCSL's professional learning communities.

The College has harnessed technology to bring school leaders out of their perceived or real isolation and create powerful professional learning communities. The enthusiasm and commitment of all involved is evident, and the online communities have grown into a national network of school professionals who engage in collaborative problem solving and knowledge sharing. Strong group norms and mutual understandings have risen, including a developing a new language of school leadership based on collaboratively constructed meanings. England's school practitioners want to be a part of the College and its work. They want to participate in building, benefiting from, and sustaining it.

With a nation of 300 to 350 thousand school leaders throughout England, it would take decades to reach them all at the College's average of 3,000 participants per year. That is not NCSL's goal. Through its comprehensive offerings and outreach programmes, the College encourages and trains school leaders to develop the leadership capacity of their staff and to develop their schools as professional learning communities. Ideally, school leaders themselves will take on the responsibility for developing the next generation of leaders. In this, NCSL evidences the ultimate in shared responsibility and power.

Ultimately, the College must demonstrate change – What changes are resulting? – and improvement – What has England learned or done that actually makes a difference in the education of children? Student educational attainment should be the bottom-line evaluation criteria for any aspect of primary and secondary education, because it is the very mission and purpose of the enterprise. NCSL understands that continued improvement in student attainment will not be

possible without shifting to distributed leadership among England's schools. Further, it understands that the best way to lead schools to this new paradigm is to embody and demonstrate it in leadership development programmes.

NCSL as a Model for the US

Policymakers, scholars, and practitioners, alike, call for distributed leadership in American K-12 schools, using terms, such as site-based management, shared decision-making and the like. Yet, schools and school systems remain managed predominately as hierarchical structures, with power and authority concentrated at the top. US school leadership development programs are also run hierarchically, concentrating power and authority. NCSL offers a model with powerful lessons that could be adapted to US school leadership development programs. Specifically, it demonstrates how the very hallmarks of distributed leadership can be embedded in the structure, curriculum, admissions, and evaluation processes of programs.

However, important differences must be acknowledged. First, England is a country far smaller than the United States, with a different history, culture, and social policies, and with a unified national school system. The appropriate NCSL American equivalent would be a statewide, not national, program. Second, NCSL is a brand-new entity with no organizational history to follow or overcome, and with extremely generous funding. America's colleges and universities, which are the chief providers of school leadership preparation, have neither the same freedom nor assets. NCSL benefited from being granted a virtual monopoly on school leader licensure in England, whereas the US has multiple and competing providers, many with capitalistic interests. Furthermore, England has separated graduate degrees in educational leadership from the actual licensure and professional development certificates that NCSL offers. This separation is at odds with the American culture of professional licensure and training that has historically and firmly been entrusted to

our nation's colleges and universities. Context does matter. Leadership is situational in nature, a phenomenon of time and place and all that implies. So too are leadership development programs. An NCSL-like program will not import perfectly and purely onto American soil.

Nevertheless, we can use NCSL's lessons to improve what we already have in place and change how US education leadership programs recruit and instruct students, develop curriculum, and assess student learning and programmatic impact. US programs and school systems can look to NCSL's example for changing our conceptualization of who leads schools, commit to tapping into the intelligence and potential of all school members, and maximize that potential. States, school systems, and leadership development providers can also strive to eliminate the feeling and function of schools as islands, looking not only to develop individual leaders but setting the broader goal of developing entire schools, entire school systems, entire states.

CONCLUSION

The responsibility of creating the NCSL-like focal point for school leadership within states rests with the government. As England's government has taken up the responsibility and provided the resources, so too might each of America's 50 states and its commonwealths and territories. Governments can provide the resources and impetus to create networked learning communities, such as NCSL's Talk2learn internet environment, which forms the glue holding all of the College's activities together. A state might create and run this network within one of its educational agencies, or it might contract it out to a university through competitive bidding. Ensuring a high level of human, physical, and technological resources takes money; and both school systems and postsecondary institutions have been chronically under-

funded for decades. Governments must now step to the plate and match their calls for assessment and accountability with the resources adequate for achieving that.

The responsibility of ensuring the shared responsibility, power, and authority necessary for true organizational learning and synergy rests with colleges and universities. Although many education leadership programs have strong traditions of collaboration with their neighboring school systems, simple collaboration will no longer suffice. Leadership development providers must not only train their current and future school leaders, but they must also invite and train those same school leaders to become part of their work as facilitators (instructors), coaches, leadership consultants, evaluators, and team researchers. An intangible, yet very real, professional hierarchy exists between the postsecondary and K-12 education, evident in its very name “higher education.”

The kind of systems perspective critical for large-scale improvements in student learning that Elmore (2000) envisions must also encompass leadership preparation. Most schools and school systems cannot get to true distributive leadership because although scholars and practitioners know what distributive leadership should look like in practice; we have few models of how to actually develop it in people. NCSL offers much in this regard, which US programs may adopt and adapt.

Where leadership preparation is concerned, it can no longer continue to be the case of “do as we say, not as we do.” Only when postsecondary programs, practitioners, and policymakers begin to intentionally share, overlap, or blur their roles, collectivizing and leveraging their skills and knowledge through each other will the context for distributed leadership in America’s K-12 schools emerge and solidify. We must develop tomorrow’s school leaders by leading the way.

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Endnotes

[1] NCSL offers paid-consultation to organizations internationally, helping them establish or improve leadership development programmes. Audio recording would have infringed on their consulting programme.

[2] Government "maintained" schools are equivalent to public schools in the U.S. The term "public school" in England actually means a private school.

[3] Vice principals and deputy principals

[4] Academic department chairs

[5] Grade-level department chairs

[6] The LEAs exercise local control over primary and secondary education, including staff recruitment and appointments, student application and admission, and school operations.

[7] Part of England's "Every Child Matters" strategy is to have an integrated early-childhood center in every community by the end of the first decade.

[8] This programme was being revised at the time of the study and appeared redundant with the New Visions programme.

(NCSL, n.d.-c)

Figure 1. Organizational map of NCSL's Online Community Network, Talk2learn.