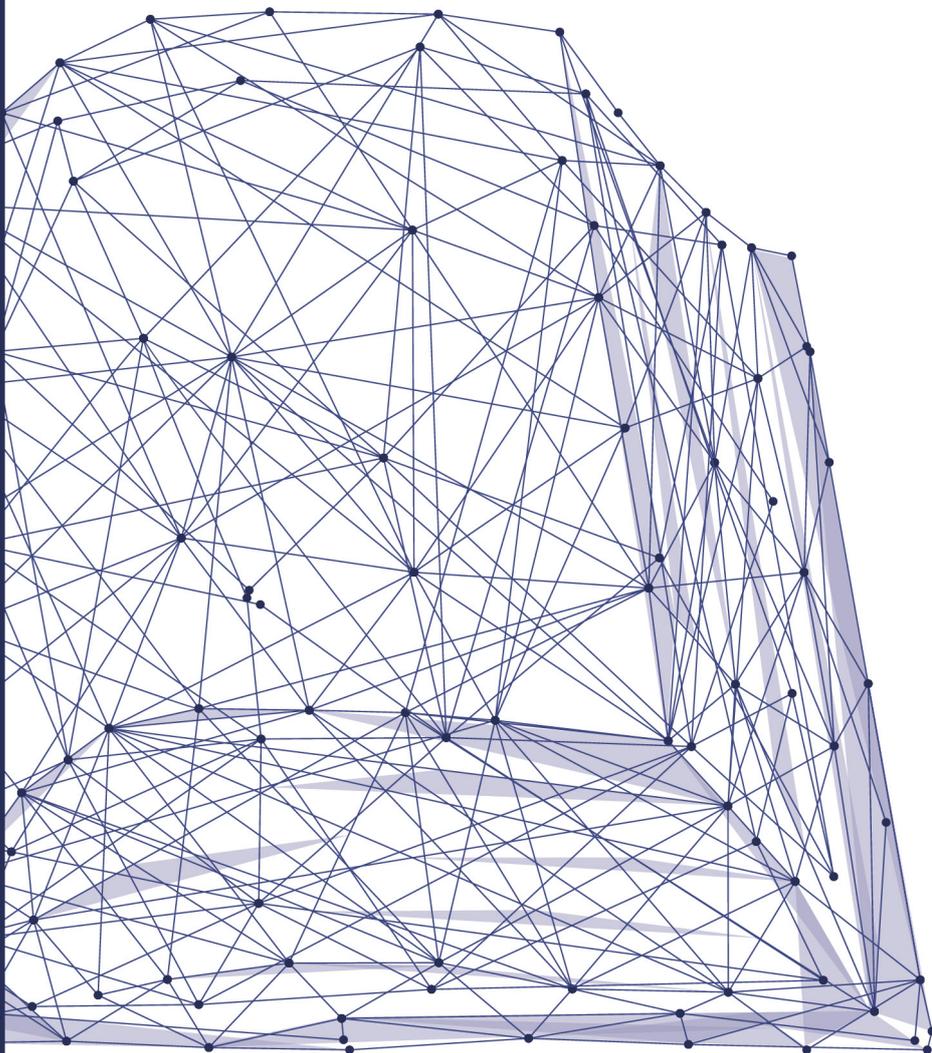


EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP : A MULTILEVEL DISTRIBUTED PERSPECTIVE



James P. Spillane
Richard Paquin Morel
Asmaa Al-Fadala

Executive Summary

In this text we describe and advocate for a model of multi-level distributed leadership in education that integrates diverse sources across education sectors as a tool for improved teaching and supporting equal opportunity. The framework is offered as a response to an environment of narrowing perspectives of learning and educational goals characterized by leadership siloes and increasingly focused on administration and testing.

Effective educational leadership is viewed as broadly embedded in social relationships of influence extended across multiple individual players and organizations. Leadership in education is distributed: policy directions are shaped by context and emerge from an aggregate of leadership sources that produce broadly meaningful benefits in teaching, learning, and opportunity. The framework is grounded in a commitment to a more expansive, dynamic, and holistic understanding of teaching and learning that embraces the full range of human skills for contemporary needs in diverse education settings globally.

Our text traces the evolution of thinking around learning, teaching, and education leadership over recent years. Within the classroom, we consider teaching as a distributive practice, co-performed by students and teachers, in which multiple actors contribute content and value to the learning space. We explore untapped sources of leadership 'beyond the school and the principal' to include families, the wider community, and local and central government. From these perspectives, leadership is fundamentally a social process, emerging from interaction. The framework is designed to manage complexity created by such multiple levels of influence across the education sector, broadly delineated.

The effectiveness of any educational infrastructure hinges on its ability to build collaboration among relationships based on shared vision for teaching and learning.

We explore ways in which learning communities collectively reach coherent understandings of the unique challenges they face in a particular school or system setting. Further, this involves cultivating and channeling the diverse resources that support quality teaching.

We couple the research literature with vignettes to illustrate our concept of distributed leadership in action within the 'schoolhouse' setting, and we extend the discussion to include the greater education system of a region or society at large. Ultimately, our concept of distributed educational leadership extends to an entire education sector. We define the education sector liberally as universal –incorporating any and all of a society's resources in education— and indeed, given our increasing interconnectivity, extending potential resources globally. A multitude of transnational organizations can provide key interfaces in support for teaching, learning, and providing opportunity.

In advocating a multi-level mindset approach to leadership development, the research provides guidance for schools in transition from conventional, centralized leadership, to the more complex, distributed model of the education system. Our investigation acknowledges the variety and range of challenges diverse schools face in their unique contexts globally. This work reveals an ongoing need to identify, investigate, and compare educational leadership contexts, particularly in the non-western world, and envisions several potentially productive research directions.

