

**LEADING IN**

**Synergy**

**Teacher Leaders and Principals  
Working Together  
for Student Learning**

**JILL HARRISON BERG**

*Foreword By Andy Hargreaves*

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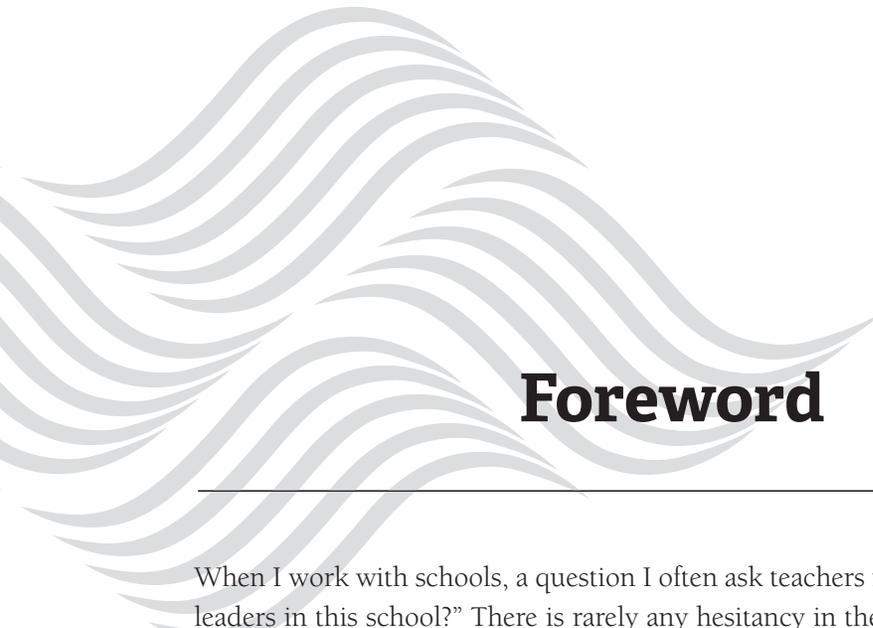
# LEADING IN SYNC

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## Teacher Leaders and Principals Working Together for Student Learning

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# Foreword

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When I work with schools, a question I often ask teachers is, “Who are the teacher leaders in this school?” There is rarely any hesitancy in the answer. The same two or three names come to the surface time and time again, even though they may have no official leadership position in the school. “Why are they teacher leaders, in your view?” I then ask. Again, the answers are fairly consistent—because they have widely recognized expertise as classroom teachers, because they are respectful of their colleagues, because they work incredibly hard, and because they are in it for the students, not for themselves or their own careers.

But ask teachers in general about the virtue or value of having teacher leaders and all kinds of concerns will rise to the surface. Will they swap sides to join the administration? Why should they be paid more if they are not obviously better than anybody else? Shouldn’t teachers be rewarded for doing better work in the classroom instead of taking on jobs outside it?

For a long time, teachers and their professional associations have been at best ambivalent about teacher leadership. This is odd because the original Latin word for “education” comes from the Latin *educare*, meaning “to lead out.” All teachers are already leading, whether they like it or not. So if it’s OK to lead children, why should leading colleagues be a problem?

Jill Harrison Berg has been a teacher leader and helped to prepare great numbers of teacher leaders herself. She is no innocent when it comes to the issues. She’s heard all the objections from administrators, unions, and teachers themselves. But from the research, including her own on what motivates teachers and keeps them going in the job, and through years of working with teacher leaders in courses and consultancies, often with very challenging schools, Jill has learned why teacher leadership matters, how it can make all teachers become better, and how this helps the students in our schools.

Jill sets out a compelling case for teacher leadership in full awareness of all the objections to it. She provides compelling cases of improvement and turnaround where teacher leadership has come to the fore. She provides practical tools and protocols to help teachers support each other as teacher leaders. She builds on the assets of what teachers have rather than perseverating on what they allegedly lack. She highlights beautiful moments when teachers see, in the work of their leadership, the chance for their colleagues to shine. But she also demonstrates that effective teacher leadership doesn't only rest on structures and protocols; it also depends on the willingness and ability to establish trust and solidarity within the teacher community and with the administration of the district or the school.

In my own work across the world, including our latest study of collaborative professionalism among teachers (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), I've seen the power of honest feedback that teachers can give to each other in environments of openness and trust. I've witnessed how teachers learn to give up the idea that they are the boss of everything in their own classes when they start planning curriculum innovations with colleagues in other schools. I've seen teachers seize the leadership of professional learning communities from their principals and then see the principals thank them for it. We know what teacher leadership can do and we know what it looks like when teachers really know how to do it. Here, Jill also shows you, concretely, practically, and realistically, how you can help develop other teacher leaders and become a better teacher leader yourself.

The world needs newer, better, greater leadership from the many, not bad leadership by a few. The best place to begin that movement is in our schools. Jill Hargreaves' book is a great step forward in that overdue direction.

—Andy Hargreaves

Research Professor, Lynch School of Education, Boston College  
President, International Congress of School Effectiveness & Improvement  
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# Leadership as Influence

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## IN YOUR CONTEXT . . .

- To what extent are students benefiting from the expertise of the whole faculty, instead of just those teachers to whom they are assigned?
- In what formal and informal ways do teachers influence the quality of one another's teaching?
- How effectively is your school maximizing its leadership capacity?

The job of a school principal used to be like that of a ship's captain: monitoring the boat from the bridge and sending orders down the chain of command. The captain might have risen up through the ranks, developing familiarity with the route and most of the boat's roles until ultimately taking command of the boat or transferring from a ship that was likely quite similar.

Today, this metaphor no longer applies. Instead of an ocean, we're facing a river that is constantly changing course and moving at a quick pace. Navigation calls for a more efficient and responsive vessel. An effective principal might choose a crew boat, requiring all to take up an oar and in which each teammate has a unique role. As teammates practice their moves, they'll hone their ability to stay in sync, oars moving in together and out together, effectively and efficiently gliding toward victory. Just as crew boats strategically maximize the skills of each individual on board, today's effective schools strategically maximize the leadership influence of teachers.

## Leadership for All Students

I'd like to believe that all students will learn at high levels. Honestly, this is hard to do while recognizing that high-level learning requires access to a kind of teaching that most U.S. schools are not organized to provide. In most U.S. schools, an elementary student's entire learning experience each year depends on the one teacher to whom the student is assigned for the year. If one 3rd grade teacher has strengths in science education and the one next door has a passion for teaching writing, by design, students will benefit from one or the other, but not both. Our schools do not acknowledge—or capitalize on—natural variation in strengths of teaching practice and teachers' expertise.

Middle and high school students are not much better off. If my son's 10th grade math teacher is new to the profession, absent with a family emergency, or simply has not mastered the vast array of knowledge and skills required of this year's new curriculum, my son may miss his one chance to engage deeply—and possibly fall in love with—the year's math content, even though a teacher with deep mathematical expertise may be next door. Some percentage of teachers will *always* be new or absent, and in today's information age, teachers will always have new areas to grow their teaching knowledge and professional practice. Currently, our system is not designed with this variation in mind.

In fact, the problem is even worse, given that in addition to developing subject area knowledge, we want today's students to develop 21st century skills, be college and career ready, and be happy and healthy. We also want their learning to be personalized and engaging and to take place in a safe and welcoming environment that maximizes technology for authentic learning. It's easy to see that the current system, in which students benefit from only a limited number of educators, cannot guarantee such an experience for every student. Some students will *always* be underserved by this system. The system controlling access to high-quality teaching and learning today is a lottery. Thus, we have inequitable outcomes by design.

We know that the quality of teaching is the most important school-based influence on student learning, and school leadership is the most important influence on the quality of teaching in a school. In this book, we explore how school leadership systems might be reconceived to maximize their influence on the quality of teaching and, thereby, on student learning.

The traditional view is that school administrators influence teachers and teachers influence students. This model positions teachers' expertise as a classroom-based asset and overlooks the potential value of teachers' expertise as a schoolwide asset. This would be fine if it were possible for school administrators to have mastery of the entire knowledge base on teaching required in a school, yet the range of teaching expertise required across a single school is simply too vast (see Figure 1.1).

**FIGURE 1.1 RANGE OF TEACHING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS REQUIRED WITHIN A TYPICAL HIGH SCHOOL**

Pedagogical Knowledge and Skills	Content Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding early adolescents</li> <li>• Understanding young adults</li> <li>• Understanding human development</li> <li>• Understanding individual students</li> <li>• Understanding special student subgroup populations in the school</li> <li>• Gaining insight about students through partnerships with families</li> <li>• Applying knowledge of students to build positive relationships</li> <li>• Recognizing and capitalizing on students' diversity, commonalities, and talents</li> <li>• Creating a learning environment in which fairness, equity, and diversity are modeled, taught, and practiced</li> <li>• Adapting instruction and resources for fairness, equity, and diversity</li> <li>• Maintaining safe and positive learning environments for all students</li> <li>• Creating and capitalizing on educational settings</li> <li>• Fostering and monitoring the climate of the learning environment</li> <li>• Fostering and supporting positive behavior</li> <li>• Teaching and fostering social skills</li> <li>• Developing students' self-confidence and self-determination</li> <li>• Encouraging the development of social and ethical principles</li> <li>• Knowledge of pedagogy</li> <li>• Establishing instructional goals</li> <li>• Selecting appropriate materials and resources</li> <li>• Partnering with colleagues, families, and the community as resources</li> <li>• Designing and implementing instructional strategies</li> <li>• Engaging students in reading and viewing a wide range of texts</li> <li>• Providing instruction in processes, skills, and knowledge related to writing</li> <li>• Equipping students to become effective communicators</li> <li>• Developing students' appreciation for and capacity to use language</li> <li>• Developing students' abilities to think mathematically</li> <li>• Teaching inquiry</li> <li>• Expanding the core curriculum to ensure the success of students with exceptional needs</li> <li>• Evaluating student progress and making changes as necessary</li> <li>• Creating and selecting diverse and valid assessment tools</li> <li>• Differentiating instruction based on student strengths and needs</li> <li>• Using assessment results to promote learning</li> <li>• Providing feedback</li> <li>• Collaborating to improve instruction and student learning (with families, colleagues, and the profession)</li> <li>• Serving as links in family resource networks</li> <li>• Advocating for students, subjects, and the profession</li> <li>• Ensuring access to quality learning experiences</li> <li>• Understanding how philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of the field inform effective practice</li> <li>• Supporting student transitions and career development</li> <li>• Managing time and human resources productively</li> <li>• Engaging in reflective practices</li> </ul>	<p>Content knowledge for each subject taught in the school, which may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American literature</li> <li>• Contemporary literature</li> <li>• Creative writing</li> <li>• Debate</li> <li>• English language and composition</li> <li>• Humanities</li> <li>• Journalism</li> <li>• Poetry</li> <li>• World literature</li> <li>• Algebra</li> <li>• Calculus</li> <li>• Geometry</li> <li>• Multivariable calculus</li> <li>• Probability</li> <li>• Statistics</li> <li>• Trigonometry</li> <li>• Biology</li> <li>• Chemistry</li> <li>• Earth science</li> <li>• Environmental studies</li> <li>• Physical science</li> <li>• Physics</li> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• International relations</li> <li>• Economics</li> <li>• Political studies</li> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• Sociology</li> <li>• U.S. government</li> <li>• U.S. history</li> <li>• Women's studies</li> <li>• World history</li> <li>• Visual arts</li> <li>• Performing arts</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Physical education</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• World languages, which may include but not be limited to                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» American Sign Language</li> <li>» Ancient Greek</li> <li>» Arabic</li> <li>» Chinese</li> <li>» French</li> <li>» German</li> <li>» Hebrew</li> <li>» Italian</li> <li>» Japanese</li> <li>» Korean</li> <li>» Latin</li> <li>» Portuguese</li> <li>» Russian</li> <li>» Spanish</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Numerous electives</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from NBPTS Standards for Accomplished Teaching (EA-AYA/ELA, EA-AYA/Math and Exceptional Needs). Retrieved from <http://www.nbpts.org/standards-five-core-propositions/>.

It's unlikely, for example, that a high school principal—even one who has been a high school teacher—will have the expertise required to be an effective instructional leader with regard to every subject area, pedagogical practice, assessment strategy, student population, and special needs represented in a single high school.

The required expertise is not likely to exist in one individual, but it is likely to exist across a school. If we expand our thinking about what *leadership* means to include all who have expertise that could be a resource for improved teaching and learning, we begin to think beyond the principal and other formal members of school administration. We recognize the vast potential of teachers as leaders.

## **Leadership by All Teachers**

From a distributed perspective, teachers are already leading in their schools. Leadership, at its core, is social influence (Chemers, 1997; Spillane, 2006), and teachers influence each other and each other's professional practice in many ways. They influence each other in formal and informal, intentional and unintentional, positive and negative ways. In this book, all of the ways teachers influence the quality of teaching and learning beyond their own classrooms are regarded as teacher leadership. In fact, their status as teachers enables them to have an influence throughout their schools.

### **Teachers' Leadership Influence**

Teachers' influence on the quality of one another's teaching is obvious when a teacher is assigned to a role with a formal title or job description, or is supported with pay or release time to work in a role with a transparent objective that they pursue in a deliberate way (Berg & Zoellick, 2017). Such formal roles might include instructional coach, mentor, or leader of a professional development workshop. We tend to be less cognizant of informal ways in which teachers influence each other as they watch each other at work during a school assembly, motivate another to try a new strategy over lunch, share a resource at the copy machine, or engage in dialogue about student work on a bulletin board. From a distributed perspective, these informal interactions, when they are perceived as influencing the quality of one's teaching, are also potentially powerful forms of leadership (Spillane, 2006).

In fact, informal leadership is often quite unintentional. Recently a national board-certified teacher told me about one of his most powerful professional learning experiences. His student teacher looked around the classroom after the students had left for the day and asked, "Why is everything where it is?" They started at one end of the room and worked their way to the other, reflecting together on

the position and layout of each main feature in their 2nd grade classroom and its impact on student learning, and—in the process—made significant improvements to the learning environment. The student teacher’s probing question influenced this teacher in ways that had a powerful impact on student learning; thus, from a distributed perspective, the novice teacher’s inquiry could be considered an act of leadership. What could be accomplished in a school where all teachers are in the habit of asking such probing questions?

Further, leadership can just as easily be experienced as negative instead of positive. We’ve all been part of a staff meeting where a new initiative is introduced. All it takes is one socially connected person to cross her arms and roll her eyes, and it is all over. The comments and body language of just a few can—intentionally or unintentionally—make or break the success of that initiative.

Unauthorized “stealth” teacher leadership is prevalent in schools, whether teachers are aware of it or not and whether principals would like to admit it or not. Leadership is occurring every time interactions affect the school’s core work: student learning. The Leadership Tracking Tool in Figure 1.2 can help teacher/leaders note where stealth leadership may be happening in their schools. It does so by directing their gaze toward key leadership functions and who is behind them. From a distributed perspective, these are all leaders. Figure 1.2 presents this tool with sample responses. A blank copy is provided in Appendix A, as well as online.

**FIGURE 1.2 LEADERSHIP TRACKING TOOL**

Use the provided organizer to help you identify the interactions (tasks, activities, routines, etc.) that influence student learning in your school and the people who are involved.

<b>Leadership Functions Necessary for Learning<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Interactions</b> What tasks, activities, or routines occur in your school to influence this? In what ways is this being modeled, monitored, or advanced through dialogue?	<b>People Involved</b> Who are the people or teams involved in these interactions, in both intentional and unintentional ways?
<b>School Learning Climate</b> In what ways do our school’s aims, values, and culture provide a focus on teaching and learning for students, teachers, administrators, and the wider community?	<i>We revisit our core values and mission statement each year.                      We hold an assembly focused on one Core Value each month.                      We have a PBIS system.                      We communicate what we stand for and provide evidence of how we do that via our school website.                      We have shout-outs at the beginning of each faculty meeting.</i>	<i>Parent Council (leads core value and mission discussion each year)                      Faculty (has a voice in core value and mission revisions)                      Student Council advisor (directs Student Council in planning assemblies)                      Middle School Student Council (plans monthly school assemblies)                      PBIS Team (monitors PBIS system)                      School website webmaster (solicits content for website)                      Ms. Green (regularly offers shout-outs that focus on teaching and learning)</i>

(continued)

**FIGURE 1.2 LEADERSHIP TRACKING TOOL** continued

<b>Leadership Functions Necessary for Learning<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Interactions</b> What tasks, activities, or routines occur in your school to influence this? In what ways is this being modeled, monitored, or advanced through dialogue?	<b>People Involved</b> Who are the people or teams involved in these interactions, in both intentional and unintentional ways?
<b>Professional Capacity</b> What ways does our school have for building individual and organizational knowledge about effective teaching and learning?	We have 40 hours of professional development (PD) throughout the year. Teachers who participate in PD beyond the school on release time are required to share their learning back at school. We have (voluntary) book clubs. We have subscriptions to professional literature in the teachers' room. We have mentors for every teacher with fewer than three years of experience.	Principal (sets priorities for PD; requires PD reports on external PD) Instructional Leadership Team (plans and evaluates PD; sometimes provides it) District departments (provide PD) Faculty (book club leaders and participants) School Parent Council (pays for book club books) Mr. Brown (leaves professional journals in the teachers' room) Mentor teachers
<b>Shared Instructional Expectations</b> In what ways do educators engage in dialogue that leads to shared expectations about teaching and learning and/or influences classroom practice?	At the start of each school year, we discuss shared expectations for instruction. We engage in looking at student work (LASW) at least four times per year in grade-level team meetings. We develop and collaboratively review common assessments. Each summer we review and adjust vertical curriculum maps for one content area. The district provides a list of sample "Look Fors" for each domain on the teacher evaluation rubric. Most teachers use the same lesson-planning template.	Principal (sets and communicates expectations) Grade-level team leaders (lead LASW) Teachers (bring work to LASW and/or contribute to conversation) Content leaders/department chairs (lead development of common assessments and curriculum mapping) District Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction (distributes Look Fors) Ms. Black (shared her lesson-planning template)
<b>Family and Community Involvement</b> In what ways does our school involve students, parents, and the wider community as partners in supporting student learning and their own learning?	We have an annual Math Night and a Literacy Night. We have a calendar of monthly family events. We have our Student Council produce monthly assemblies that demonstrate and reinforce our Core values. We hold three-way conferences (student-parent-teacher) twice per year. We have university partners that provide student teaching and leadership interns. We have a monthly parent breakfast with the principal.	Math Department Leader (takes lead in organizing Math Night) ELA Department Leader (takes lead in organizing Literacy Night) Family Engagement Team (supports parent participation in all events) Student Council Advisor and members (Plan assemblies) Faculty (initiate parent conferences) University partners (assign interns; train mentor teachers) Ms. Blanco (attends parent breakfast to support communication with the principal, who doesn't speak Spanish)

**FIGURE 1.2 LEADERSHIP TRACKING TOOL** continued

<b>Leadership Functions Necessary for Learning<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Interactions</b> What tasks, activities, or routines occur in your school to influence this? In what ways is this being modeled, monitored, or advanced through dialogue?	<b>People Involved</b> Who are the people or teams involved in these interactions, in both intentional and unintentional ways?
<b>Student Outcomes</b> In what ways are we accountable for the impact of instruction on learning?	We share student work at three-way conferences with families. We make learning visible via assemblies, bulletin boards, and our website. We publish, share, and discuss our annual summative assessment scores. We use formative data to identify student learning gaps and adjust our teaching.	Students (choose student work to present at three-way conferences) Student Council (solicits assembly content) Faculty (determine content of their own bulletin boards) Webmaster (solicits website content) Principal (shares analysis of annual data results) Instructional Leadership Team (leads faculty discussion about annual data results) Grade-level team leaders (facilitate analysis of formative assessments and instructional responses to data) Ms. Burgundy (reminds us to disaggregate data and look at subgroup performance)
<b>Other</b> If we were to ask educators in our school to name the tasks, activities, and routines that have the most significant impact on the quality of the teaching and learning in their classrooms, what would they say? If they were not already captured above, add them here.	We have an annual opportunity to acquire new, high-quality instructional materials. We regularly revisit and revise our curriculum.	Principal (allocates budget allotment for new instructional materials) Mr. Grey (retired teacher returns as a volunteer to support curriculum development)

**Examine the third column. These are all leaders.**

- What patterns do you notice? What’s missing?
- What was predictable to you? What surprised you?
- What do you wonder?
- What kind of small, strategic moves could increase the positive impact that formal and informal leaders are having in your school?

<sup>1</sup> School leadership encompasses responsibility for many aspects of schooling, from school operations to personnel management to program implementation. The leadership functions in this tool, adapted from *Organizing Schools for Improvement* (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010) and the National Center for School Leadership’s model of learning-centered leadership (Southworth, 2005), encompass only the leadership functions that are most directly concerned with the quality of teaching and learning.

To be sure, principals have a significant measure of control over the conditions that support or limit teachers, parents, and students to be willing and able to interact and lead in these ways. These individuals and teams are performing leadership at the same time, whether they do so strategically and intentionally or organically and unintentionally. By reflecting on these interactions together, teacher/leaders can see a range of possibilities for increasing the impact of these formal and informal influences on student learning, and they can see a wealth of reasons why attention to co-performance among these many forms of leadership is needed.

Although much of the popular practice and literature on teacher leadership focuses on formalized leadership roles, this book takes a broader view: It seeks to maximize the ways in which *all* are leading in schools. From this perspective, teacher leadership is a culture change for all, not a special opportunity for a few. This perspective presents possibilities and challenges for schools.

### **Possibilities of Teacher Leadership**

As teacher/leaders begin to recognize the many small ways in which classroom teachers are already influencing the quality of each other's teaching, it becomes useful to examine why and how this influence is possible. Doing so allows us to consider how teacher leadership might be tapped more deliberately as a strategy for greater student success.

**Influence of teachers.** One opportunity lies in understanding how teachers' influence is distinct from the influence of other leaders. Literature on teacher leadership points to a number of ways. First, teachers' work, occurring at the intersection where teaching and learning happen, gives them *grounded knowledge* that is unique to their position and is an asset when exerting influence (Elmore, 1990; Paulu & Winters, 1998). They know the students in front of them and are attuned—in a way other leaders are not—to the real place-based opportunities and challenges involved in trying to teach these students in this context. This gives teachers' leadership influence a unique brand of authenticity.

Second, teachers' *stance alongside their colleagues* is an asset. The traditional us-them dichotomy between teachers and administrators, which is often exacerbated by evaluation routines, tends to be absent in teacher leaders' relationships with their colleagues. To be sure, feelings of injustice or jealousy over the assignment of limited formal roles can occur and relationships can still feel hierarchical among teachers. Yet researchers have found that having one foot in the classroom may give teachers more credibility and influence in pushing their colleagues' instructional practice than is the case for positional leaders like principals (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008) and that working with colleagues can provide the boost of confidence and sense of self-efficacy that teachers need to take risks and improve their professional practice (Katzenmeyer &

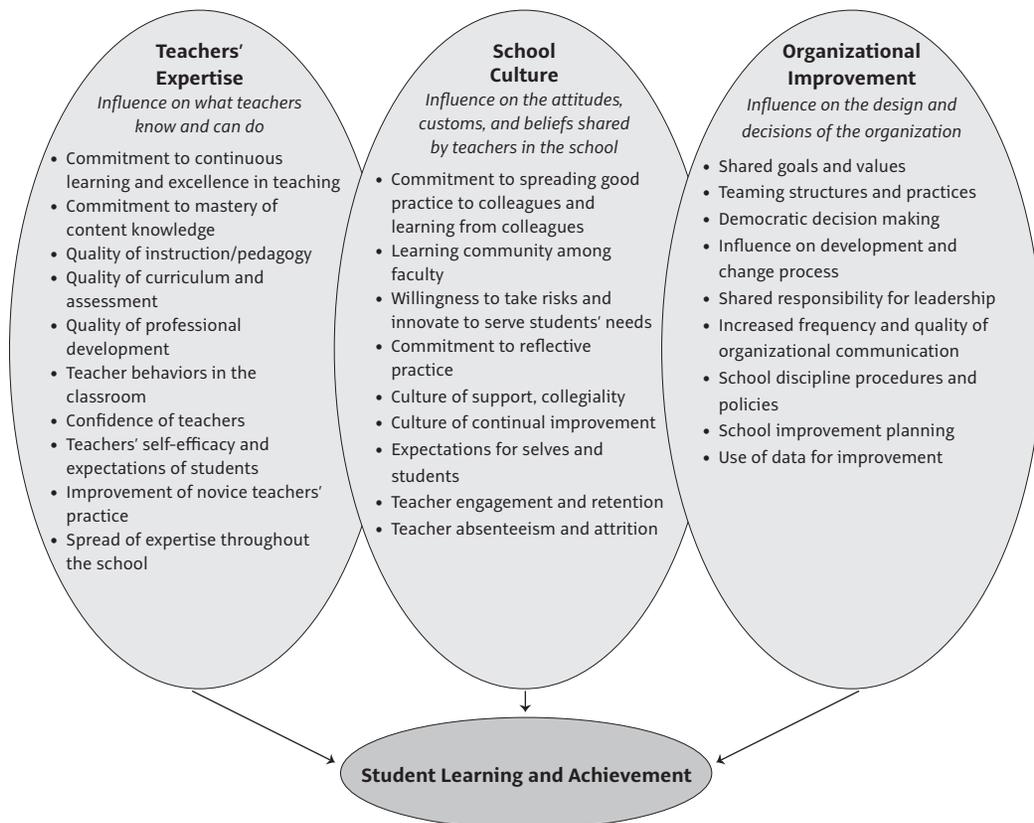
Moller, 2009; Ovando, 1996). As they do so, they deepen relationships and lines of communication that support further change (Poekert, 2012). As members of the same “team,” teachers may feel that teacher leaders are committed for the same reasons and that their actions will support or reflect poorly on all of them.

Finally, teachers tend to be *more accessible* to their colleagues than other leaders. They have more everyday opportunities to engage in the kind of casual, low-stakes conversations that build trust and are a necessary precursor to more challenging conversations that influence professional practice. In one study, teachers were more likely to approach each other informally than to approach formally designated teacher leaders (Supovitz, 2008); it seems accessibility matters, and it makes a difference for their learning. Teachers’ close and frequent proximity to their colleagues allows teachers’ professional learning to occur as close to practice as possible, which is seen as critical to truly changing teachers’ practice (Frost, 2014; Fullan, 2007).

**Influence on student learning.** Another opportunity lies in thinking about the pathways through which teachers’ leadership influence might have an influence on student learning. Although the progress of research on teacher leadership has been stymied by disagreement about what teacher leadership is (Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), patterns can be found in the many ways researchers have traced a line—in theory or in practice—from teacher leadership to student learning. That is, teacher leaders can have an impact on student learning through their influence on teachers’ expertise, school culture, or organizational improvement (see Figure 1.3).

Teachers can influence their colleagues’ *expertise* in a variety of ways. They might do this, for example, from the vantage point of formal roles as mentors or instructional coaches, or by serving as professional learning leaders capable of increasing both the quantity and quality of professional development (Danielson, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). They might also exert influence in more subtle ways, because teachers tend to see their knowledgeable colleagues as resources regardless of whether or not they hold formal leadership roles (Margolis & Deuel, 2009; Spillane, Hopkins, Sweet, & Shirrell, 2017). Teaching is complex work involving a multitude of macro- and micro-decisions that require professional judgment. When teachers have the time and space for professional conversations with colleagues, they learn from each other’s experiences and improve their decision making, regardless of any titles teachers may have (Danielson, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

Teachers have also been found to influence *school culture* in ways that lead to school improvement. Engaging in teacher leadership can increase teachers’ satisfaction and commitment (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012), which not only can set a tone throughout the school but also can affect their retention and result in

**FIGURE 1.3 HOW TEACHER LEADERS INFLUENCE STUDENT LEARNING***Cautions:*

1. These are potential influences. Teachers' leadership influence on these factors might be positive, neutral, or negative.
2. Context matters! Ask yourself: Under what conditions might teacher leadership result in this particular influence?

organizational stability that supports school improvement (Daly, Finnigan, & Liou, 2017; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). Teacher leadership can also improve morale and teachers' feelings of professionalism, both of which pay dividends in an increased sense of responsibility and collaboration (Harris & Muijs, 2004). Collaboration, for its part, has been found to have a systematic and positive effect on student learning outcomes (Ronfeldt, 2017; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Some principals view this ability of teacher leaders to shape school culture as a real value. In one study, principals reported recruiting and growing national board–certified teachers with the deliberate intention of creating a climate more deeply committed to students' learning, reflective practice, and collaboration (Berg, 2007).

Teachers also influence the *organizational improvement* processes in their schools. They routinely engage in complex decision making in their own classrooms, but

when they have a voice in schoolwide decision making, results are clear. They are able to bring their authentic, grounded classroom experiences to the table and contribute to better school procedures and planning processes (Ingersoll, Sirindes, & Dougherty, 2017; Little, 1990; Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000). In addition, in schools with teacher leadership, there can be improved implementation of new policies (Griffin, 1995), which may be due to a greater acceptance of school reform (Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Teacher leadership is helpful, and possibly even necessary, for strengthening schools as learning organizations (Silins & Mulford, 2004).

These opportunities point to important ways schools could tap in to teachers' individual passions, aspirations, and areas of expertise to elevate the quality of each other's work. It should be possible for teachers to be in the habit of influencing each other with challenging questions, exchanging expertise in ways that make all classrooms richer, and lending their informed voices to help shape the direction of the school. In these ways, each student in the school would be able to benefit from the collective expertise of the whole faculty, not just the teacher to whom they are assigned . . . in theory. In practice, this has proven a bit more difficult.

### Challenges of Teacher Leadership

Until recently, teacher leadership development has largely been focused on the roles and capacity building of individuals, and not seen in context of the organizations in which teacher leaders work (Smylie & Denny, 1990). As a result, teachers who are otherwise prepared and trained to lead their colleagues frequently run into roadblocks. They encounter structural constraints, as they find they do not have the time they need, access to the information and people required, or the physical space to engage in formal or informal leadership roles. They often find that members throughout the organization are confused about the leadership role they hold: what it is, what authority it has, and how the role and its goals interact with other leadership roles or priorities (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mitchell, 1990). In many schools, teacher leaders encounter professional norms that interfere with the notion of teachers influencing each other's instruction. Where teachers see feedback as intrusions on their autonomy, leadership roles as a threat to the egalitarian status quo, and seniority as more important than demonstrated expertise (Berg et al., 2005), they face a "triple threat" against teacher leadership that has persisted for decades (Johnson & Donaldson, 2007).

Principals have an essential role to play in addressing these structural, conceptual, and cultural barriers (Berg, Bosch, & Souvanna, 2013), but they can't do it alone. Teacher/leaders are all part of a system, and a change within one part of a system has repercussions throughout the system that teachers and principals do best to troubleshoot together. Where teachers in leadership roles have the

principal's support in addressing these organizational issues, they are more effective (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) and both teachers and principals are more satisfied (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Marks & Nance, 2007).

## Teacher Leadership Within a Leadership System

Getting all leaders—formal and informal, intentional and unintentional—on the same page is essential. Leadership is influence, and no one wants to be influenced in multiple directions at once. Thus, as we begin thinking about strategic support of teacher leadership, it's important to see teacher/leaders as part of a system.

When we take a distributed view and consider the wide range of stakeholders in a school that are perceived to influence teachers' professional practice, we see that the problem of incoherence could be considered inevitable. Although stakeholders tend to have the same general goals for students—21st century learning, college and career readiness, health and happiness—there is less agreement on what we will accept as evidence that we are meeting these goals. Reliable and timely data that are publicly acceptable and professionally credible for this purpose are elusive. Sources of data and evidence do exist, but the sources to which each stakeholder in the system has access (see Figure 1.4), and the meaning they make of them, vary.

**FIGURE 1.4 STAKEHOLDERS AND THE EVIDENCE THEY HAVE ABOUT THE SYSTEM**

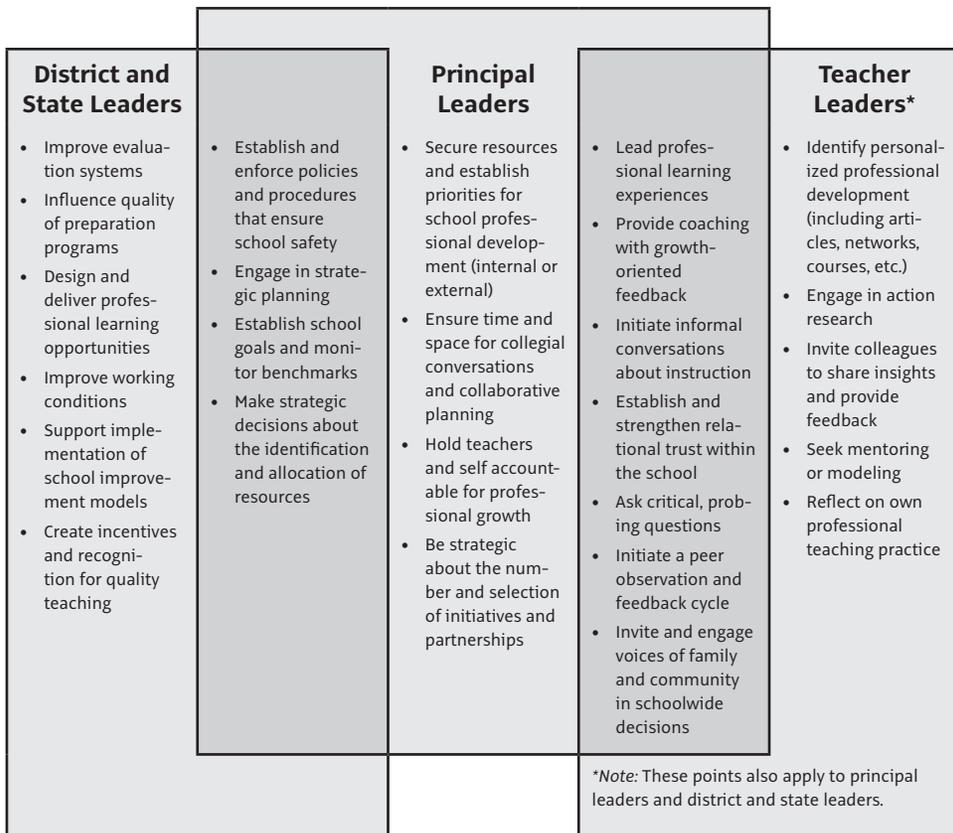
Educators in the System	Evidence of School Success/Catalysts for Change
District and state administrators	State-, district-, and school-level data on student achievement (standardized test data only); political priorities; community input; teacher evaluation scores; educator retention data
School administrators: principals and assistant principals	School- and classroom-level data on student achievement, attendance, and behavior; climate surveys (teachers, families, students); classroom walk-throughs; teacher observation data
Classroom teachers	School-, classroom-, and individual-level data on student achievement; student intervention data; student work; observations of student engagement; conversations and observations about attendance and tardiness; family conferences; team conversations (e.g., looking at student work and collaborative planning)

From this perspective, it makes sense that teachers struggling to meet math goals would be angry about new district investments in a reading program, or that state administrators with a research-based plan for school turnaround cannot understand why district-level support seems to be lacking. None of these stakeholders has the whole picture.

Educators working within one system, yet looking at different forms of evidence from the vantage point of their own distinct roles and drawing different conclusions about a shared goal, could view this contrast of perspectives as a crisis, or they could work to make it an opportunity.

When committed educators at any level—classroom, school, district, or state—notice a gap between where they hope schools will be and what their evidence is suggesting, they get creative (Senge, 1990). The observation is a catalyst. They innervate and innovate. They think about what they can change. But they each have influence over different leverage points within the system. The Venn diagram in Figure 1.5 illustrates the kinds of changes that educators can make at different levels of leadership. The figure helps to highlight the unique and important contributions of each stakeholder, as well as the interconnectedness of those contributions.

**FIGURE 1.5 POINTS OF LEVERAGE FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING, BY SYSTEM STAKEHOLDER**



As we come to recognize that certain aspects of the system are visible only to select stakeholders—because of the evidence to which they have access for review—and that stakeholders can take only certain actions by virtue of their positions, we come to see the value and importance of working together. Each action taken by one stakeholder has implications for the others, so taking actions in sync is important. All of this requires the kind of attention to coordination that is not currently seen in most schools.

As a resident of Boston, I see this type of coordination quite frequently in a very different context. Few sights in Boston are as beautiful as the view of a crew team skimming along the Charles River at sunset. The coordinated effort of a crew team looks graceful and seamless . . . and easy. Crew team members will assure you it is not.

How do crew teams do it? Their success depends on being in sync. The angle of the oar and the shape of the stroke matter less than everyone's doing it together.

Crew teams work hard to develop a shared understanding about how their boat will look and feel when it is achieving peak performance. Such unity of vision enables each to make the decisions needed to do their part toward rowing in sync. If one member is eager to reach the finish line, she understands that rowing faster will not help.

### **CO-PERFORMANCE IN CREW; VIDEO ACTIVITY**

**WATCH:** This short video—<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmoqjFRpu8A>—features a college crew team discussing their co-performance.

**EXTEND:** What additional connections do you see between a crew team rowing a boat and a school leadership team improving a school?

**CRITIQUE:** In what ways does this metaphor break down as a way of thinking about school improvement?

Crew team members also have a clear idea of the specific role each will play. Each seat in the boat has a different purpose and every member does not have to be good at every position. There's strategy, then, in matching each rower to an appropriate seat. Everyone is positioned to maximize their talents in service of the shared goal. And they have developed and practiced (and practiced and practiced) systems for communicating across their roles so that they can stay in perfect synchronization with one another as they go.

Finally, crew team members trust one another. They have faith that others will do their part and will work hard to be good at it, while showing respect and regard for teammates who are also trying their best. As

they speed over the water in a direction they cannot see, they trust in the commitment of their peers and the call of the coxswain to synchronize their efforts and bring them safely and swiftly over the finish line.

These teams have something important to teach schools about co-performance of leadership. As educators open their eyes to the reality that teachers are already leading in powerful ways and open their minds to the many ways in which teachers have specialized expertise needed to transform schools, it becomes necessary to think about the practicalities of how best to tap into and align all of that capacity.

If we think of our school colleagues as a crew team, we recognize that we tend to share a general sense that the finish line has something to do with “student success,” and spurred by an intense sense of urgency, we tend to hop into the boat wielding any kind of paddle, oar, or stick that we think is best and start splashing away. Such uncoordinated, well-intentioned actions inevitably counteract each other. We may find ourselves going nowhere, going in circles, or capsizing altogether. Even among faculty members with a shared agreement about the finish line and the ideal angle of our oars, we tend to overlook the need to keep track of how we’re rowing, who should be seated where, and when we are rowing out of sync.

The subsequent chapters will help teacher/leaders learn together how to establish a shared vision for teaching and learning, develop routines to keep their efforts to pursue this vision in sync, and cultivate the trust needed to work and learn together.



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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Jill Harrison Berg** is a leadership coach and school improvement consultant. With Jill's support as a critical friend, professional learning leader, and strategic planning partner, education leaders are able to strengthen their capacities for creating powerful, coordinated systems that maximize the leadership potential of teachers.

Jill also consults with various local, statewide, and national institutions on matters of research and policy. Since 2013, she has served as a faculty member for the Network to Transform Teaching, a networked improvement community of cross-stakeholder teams representing 10 states that was convened by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to apply Carnegie's principles of improvement science to learn together how to bring accomplished teaching to every student every day. Currently, she is also co-principal investigator on a research study under way through the Consortium for Policy Research in Education to explore the range of ways programs across the United States support and develop teachers as leaders and to examine the impacts of such programs. Other institutions that have tapped Jill's expertise include the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Washington's Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession, Educational Development Corporation (EDC), WestEd, and the National Research Council.

Jill has been an educator of leaders at all levels. She began her career in the classroom, with a passion for teaching elementary and middle grade students to be leaders who take ownership of their own learning and strive to be a positive influence on the learning of others. After earning National Board Certification, she left the classroom to pursue a doctorate, and continued to support the development of teacher leaders and other school leaders through various institutions of higher

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Throughout more than 25 years working in educational practice, research, and policy, Jill has written many articles on the topics of teacher leadership, teaching quality, and leadership development, and is the author of *Improving the Quality of Teaching Through National Board Certification* (Christopher-Gordon Press, 2003). She earned her doctorate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education while working as a researcher with the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. She also holds a B.A. from Harvard University and an M.Ed. from Lesley University, and she was one of the first teachers in Massachusetts to become a National Board Certified Teacher (1998).