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The Who, How, Why, and What of Leadership in Secondary School Improvement: Lessons Learned in England

Although arguments in scholarly journals claim that leadership is critical in initiating and sustaining school improvement, ambiguity surrounds the sources and role of leadership. In addition, little research documents how educators involved in school improvement perceive who leads, how, why, and for what purposes leadership is important. This article reports on a case study of headteachers' and teachers' perspectives of leadership in an English secondary school involved in a university-based school improvement program. Specifically, we present a summary of the research as well as interpretations and themes constructed from the data analysis. Interpretations support recent theoretical claims that schools are complex organizations requiring multiple leaders and a distributed model of leadership to accomplish improvement goals; and academic writing that urges a rethinking of school improvement. In concluding we argue that the development of professional expertise is key to fostering successful schooling over time and call for a consideration of emergent perspectives of leadership in addressing issues related to influence and inclusion of teachers in goal-setting and leadership in school development.

Alors que l'on retrouve dans les revues académiques des arguments selon lesquels le leadership est essentiel pour initier et maintenir l'amélioration des écoles, les sources et le rôle du leadership sont entourés d'ambiguïté. De plus, peu de recherche a porté sur la perception du leadership qu'ont les enseignants impliqués dans l'amélioration de l'école, sur leurs interprétations du qui, comment et pourquoi du leadership et des raisons pour lesquelles il est important. Cet article présente une étude de cas portant sur les points de vue qu'ont des chefs d'établissement et des enseignants du leadership dans une école secondaire britannique qui participe à un programme universitaire visant l'amélioration de l'école. Plus précisément, nous présentons un résumé de la recherche ainsi que les interprétations et les thèmes qui se dégagent de l'analyse des données. Les interprétations appuient d'une part, les théories récentes selon lesquelles les écoles constituent des organisations complexes exigeant plusieurs leaders et un modèle réparti de leadership pour atteindre des buts liés à leur amélioration et d'autre part, les travaux académiques prônant que l'on repense l'amélioration des écoles. Dans notre conclusion, nous évoquons l'importance cruciale de développer une expertise professionnelle pour maintenir le succès d'une école. Nous encourageons également la considération de points de vue naissants

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portant sur l'influence et l'inclusion des enseignants dans l'établissement d'objectifs et dans le leadership de l'école.

Introduction

Despite a lack of consensus in the field of organizational study about what is meant by leadership, prominent scholars (Bass, 1981; Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991) who have reviewed the literature agree that most definitions assume that leadership is a process whereby influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure and facilitate activities and relationships in organizations (Yukl, 1998). Where definitions differ, it is argued that it is in "who exerts influence, how influence is exerted, the purpose for the exercise of influence, and its outcomes" (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 46); and whether leadership should be viewed as a specialized role or as a shared influence process (Yukl, 1998).

Similarly, in the field of education, confusion surrounding the notion of leadership has prompted scholars to challenge the pervasive view that equates school leadership with the principalship (Donaldson, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert & Walker, 2002; Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002; Southworth, 2002). Drawing on their review of the literature, Heck and Hallinger (1999) argue that the predominant role-bound view of leadership has caused researchers to "ignore other sources of leadership within the school" (p. 141), and to assume that "student achievement ought to be the dominant criterion for assessing leader effectiveness" (p. 158). These authors conclude that this narrow conception of leadership has undermined efforts to understand successful school improvement. Successful school improvement, it is argued here and by others, is the enhancement of student learning through focusing on the teaching-learning process and the conditions that support it (Hopkins, 2002).

During the current period of accountability with increased emphasis on improving schooling, it is not surprising that researchers are looking beyond the principalship and investigating different perspectives of school leadership that are not role-bound and view leadership as a shared influence process. Although some emergent perspectives depict leadership as a shared (Barth, 2001; Donaldson, 2001; Lambert & Walker, 2002) or distributed process (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2000), there is a relative absence of research documenting how administrators and teachers understand their participation in leadership and construct its relationship to school improvement. Drawing on findings from their in-depth study of leadership in schools that had successfully implemented renewal initiatives, Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) emphasize the need for further study of the perspectives of both administrators and teachers involved in school-based leadership and school revitalization. Similarly, based on their examination of emergent perspectives, Heck and Hallinger (1999) call for inquiries that address blank spots in our understanding of the leadership phenomenon, including in-depth descriptions of how principals and teachers "create and sustain the in-school factors that foster successful schooling" (p. 141). These scholars conclude that studies that adopt a constructivist perspective can contribute to this research agenda by investigating:

How leadership unfolds within school settings as a shared, constructed phenomenon. It forces us to accept that our educational organizations are constructed realities, as opposed to systems or structures that operate independently of the individuals in them. (p. 148)

The study reported here was conceived and designed in this context.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to address the need to understand better the relationship between leadership and secondary school improvement through an investigation of the perspectives of principals, headteachers, and teachers. The research questions guiding the investigation were: (a) how do principals, headteachers, and teachers in secondary schools that have been involved in a school improvement program construct the concept and practice of leadership? and (b) how do they perceive and understand the relationship between leadership and school improvement? To address the research questions we conducted case studies in two secondary schools that were involved in formal school improvement initiatives. We have reported elsewhere on the first case study, which was conducted in a high school in Manitoba that for 10 years had been part of the Manitoba School Improvement Program's network of schools (Foster & St. Hilaire, 2003). The second case study, which is the subject of this article, was an English secondary school involved in a university-based school improvement program. Specifically, by selecting a secondary school where a program for school improvement had been in place for six years, the objectives were to collect, document, and analyze headteachers' and teachers' constructions of the concept and practice of leadership, perceptions, and understandings of the relationship between leadership and school improvement, and perceptions of the supports for, and barriers to, participation in leadership

Conceptual Framework

Because the aim of this investigation was to examine how principals, headteachers, and teachers conceived of leadership and how they perceived and understood the relationship between leadership and school improvement, we decided that a constructivist research orientation would be most appropriate. We argue here and elsewhere (Foster & St. Hilaire, 2003) that a constructivist leadership research orientation allows the researcher to "examine how leaders and others in the organization create shared understandings about their role and participation in school" (Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 146). The strengths of a constructivist orientation, Heck and Hallinger contend, "is in illuminating that which is little known or hidden from view" (p. 147) and in revealing the degree to which social interactions shape and are shaped by leadership. Further, we believe that correspondence and tensions in constructions of leadership allow the researcher to examine issues related to sources of influence, roles, and purposes of leadership. The constructivist research orientation in leadership study assumes that school-based educators share a concern about understanding and making sense of their context and is distinct from prevalent positivist and post-positivist orientations that examine how designated leaders carry out administrative tasks.

Methods

To conduct this investigation we adopted a case study approach that was instrumental in design (Stake, 1995, 2000). In a case study, Stake (2000) contends, "cases are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding ... about a still larger collection of cases" (p. 437). This approach was selected, as underpinning Stake's case study design are constructivist assumptions including (a) in any organization there are multiple ways of viewing and interpreting reality, (b) individuals come to know and make sense of reality through their interactions with others, and (c) knowledge about the case is socially constructed. Stake emphasizes, "in their experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge" (p. 442). In adopting a case study approach informed by constructivist notions, the intent was to provide readers not with a theory about leadership and school improvement, but rather with interpretations that serve as the raw material to support the reader's own generalizing and judgments about transferability (Stake 1995).

The case study reported in this article was conducted over a six-month period in 2002-2003. A large secondary school of approximately 1,000 students in a rural center in the Midlands of England was selected. We selected this school because for six years the teaching staff had been working in partnership with a local university in implementing innovative research-based teaching methods aimed at improving pupils' learning. As well, we had heard of the school's success from English colleagues and were curious about leadership in the school. This school, which we have given the fictitious name Pinewood Hall, served a socioeconomically diverse, but stable student population in years 7-12. The grandparents and parents of many of the students, for example, had also attended Pinewood Hall. Although there were several long-time members on the teaching staff of 60, Pinewood Hall also had a large contingent of newly qualified teachers. Most of the staff lived in an urban center located approximately 40 minutes driving distance from the school.

Data Sources

Because the aim of this study was to understand leadership and its relationship to school improvement from the perspectives of headteachers and teachers, data were collected primarily through individual interviews in the manner described by Stake (1995) and focus group interviews as described by Noonan (1997). The same eight individuals, four men and four women, participated in both the individual interviews and focus group interviews. The headteacher, a deputy headteacher, and six teacher participants were interviewed on two occasions, each interview lasting approximately 40 minutes. Teacher participants were selected from an alphabetized list of the 60 teaching staff members in the manner described by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) as "systematic sampling" (p. 173). Specifically, every 10th teacher on the staff list was invited to participate; all those invited became involved. Table 1 provides specific information about the participants.

In total 16 individual and four focus group interviews were held. The first two focus group interviews, one with the two headteachers and one with the teacher group, were conducted before beginning the individual interviews. A second focus group interview with each group was undertaken following the

Table 1

Participant	Sex	Years experience in teaching	Years at Pinewood Hall	Teaching expertise
Headteacher	Male	25	9	Sciences
Deputy Head	Female	28	18	Sciences
Teacher 1	Male	22	22	Humanities
Teacher 2	Male	3	3	Humanities
Teacher 3	Male	17	17	Humanities
Teacher 4	Female	5	5	Humanities
Teacher 5	Female	20	20	Sciences
Teacher 6	Female	2	2	Mathematics

completion of the individual interviews. The focus group interviews provided the opportunity to explain the intent of the research in the first instance, and preliminary interpretations in the second instance. The conversations that took place in the first set of focus group interviews prompted participants to exchange views and experiences and understand their role and the purpose of the study. During the second set of focus group interviews, participants' feedback about our initial analysis helped us to understand better the degree to which participants' constructions of leadership and school improvement corresponded and where there were tensions. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed, and a printed copy was returned to the respondents for a member check before being analyzed as data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Other data sources included direct observations of classrooms, extracurricular activities, and staff meetings. We each kept a field journal in which we recorded observations and interpretations. Documents including the school handbook and a school improvement newsletter published by the partner university were collected and examined as data.

Data Analysis
Data analysis was undertaken in the manner described by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), with the first stage occurring while data were being collected and the second stage when data collection was completed. After completing the data collection, each of us reviewed field journals, documents, and interview transcriptions. Following this independent analysis, we met on several occasions to discuss categories, emergent themes, and proceed with the interpretations. When the data analysis and the written research report were completed, further analysis supported the identification of major themes and implications for research, policy, and practice. To enhance trustworthiness of the research, throughout the investigation we consulted with other scholars familiar with school leadership to provide for investigator triangulation, namely, the "search for additional interpretations, more than the confirmation of a single meaning" (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

Interpretations and Discussion
This section includes a summary of interpretations and a discussion that draws on the data analysis. We begin with an overview of school improvement at Pinewood Hall. Grounded in the experiences of the interview participants, this

historical account includes key aspects of the interrelationship among the perspectives of these respondents. The purpose of including this account is to provide the reader with thick description and the opportunity to live vicariously through the perceptions and experiences of these educators. The interpretations and discussion that follow the story are organized using the headings (a) constructions of leadership and school improvement, (b) perceptions of the role of the university-based school improvement program, and (c) perceptions of the barriers to participation in leadership. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

School Improvement at Pinewood Hall

When Ronald Leeds was hired as headteacher in 1993, he was given the job of changing the school. It was the view of the Local Education Authority hiring him that Pinewood Hall had become a drifting school. Supporting this view were data from the government-administered examinations indicating that the school had been "underperforming" for some time. The Local Education Authority believed that the stable teaching staff at Pinewood was caring, but resistant to change and protective of conditions of employment and the status quo. In Ronald Leeds' words,

> When I arrived in 1993 the school was highly unionized. The past nine years have been a long, slow job of nurturing and winning people over to the idea that the main thrust is for achievement through good teaching and learning. We have had to recognize that not all children learn in the same way, and that a variety of teaching methodologies are required if all children are to be successful. (Headteacher, interview 1)

Soon after he arrived at Pinewood, Ronald hired two deputy headteachers to assist him in beginning the change process. One of the new deputies, Rena Watkins, had worked previously at Pinewood as a teacher, head of department, and head of sixth form. She had an extensive background in curriculum development, evaluation, and teacher training, and was put in charge of curriculum and professional development. The other new deputy headteacher, Jerome Munn, was hired to attend to the pastoral needs of students and staff. It was Ronald Leeds' view that his job as headteacher was to create a senior management team that built on the strengths of the members. In addition, he believed it was critical to give freedom and encouragement to the two deputy headteachers as they developed plans for improving instruction and student support. During the first three years of working together, the senior management team initiated change by "tweaking systems" and getting parents as well as staff involved in goal-setting for the school. The three headteachers were proud of how staff and parents worked together to improve the monitoring of homework and school uniforms. They were also frustrated by the end of the third year with the limited positive effect these incremental changes had had on pupil achievement.

A major turning point occurred in 1996, however, when Rena Watkins heard a researcher from the nearby university speak about involving local schools in a new program focused on increasing pupil achievement and success. The researcher described an approach to school improvement premised on the assumption that pupil performance improves when teachers are involved in learning about and practicing innovative teaching methods. Late in

the 1996 school year, the same researcher came to Pinewood Hall to explain to the teachers how the university's new program could support them in their schoolwide goals for improving pupils' learning. He stressed the importance of teacher participation in university-sponsored professional development activities and action research. At that meeting, more than 80% of the teaching staff voted to work in partnership with the university to improve learning at Pinewood Hall. Through their involvement with this university-supported program, teachers received intensive training in several methodologies including inductive teaching, cooperative learning, accelerated learning, differentiated instruction, learning styles, inclusive education, and peer coaching. In 1998 a team of researchers studying the effect of the school improvement program at Pinewood observed and wrote,

> People are really lined up for this. They are excited. They feel involved and
> they know what the main purposes of the school are and where it is going. It is
> as if the school has caught fire. The changes in such a short time are
> remarkable, and the improved scores on examinations and improved
> graduation rates are proof of the value of the changes. Teachers, parents, and
> students have confidence in the school. (School Improvement Newsletter, 1998)

The three teacher respondents who had been at Pinewood since 1996 believed that the school's involvement in this school improvement initiative had been the catalyst for change. All claimed that the school had gone from underperforming to high performance because of increased teacher skillfulness and innovative teaching methods. All eight respondents were proud that Pinewood Hall, in recognition of its excellent student achievement, had been designated by the government of England a *training school* in 2000. Because of this designation, colleagues from other schools came to observe teachers in the school, and teachers from Pinewood were frequently asked to go to other schools to make presentations about effective teaching strategies.

Constructions of Leadership and School Improvement
During the focus group and individual interviews, it became clear to us that all eight respondents were proud to be staff members at Pinewood Hall. Although all respondents claimed that leadership was a critical aspect of the school's success, there were differences in how individuals viewed the role and sources of leadership in the school. This finding prompted us to ask how the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and teachers constructed their own and understood each other's roles in school improvement.

Headteachers' Leadership Role in School Improvement
There was a high degree of correspondence among the views of the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and three long-time teacher respondents. The three newly qualified teachers, however, did not view the deputy and headteacher's leadership roles in the same way. Following is a discussion of these perceptions and questions that emerged from our analysis and interpretations.

Perceptions of headteachers and senior teachers. When asked about leadership and school improvement at Pinewood, the deputy headteacher and senior teachers pointed to the arrival of Ronald Leeds in 1993. One teacher who had

been at the school during the previous administration commented on the changes since Ronald Leeds' arrival.

> I would say that the atmosphere of learning, teachers as well as pupils, has been the big change. When Ronald arrived as headteacher he started this change by encouraging us to take risks and try new approaches. In effect he gave us the license to get it wrong. That there would be no reprisals was an important element in our development as individual teachers and a faculty. We were willing to try things and share the successes and failures. We are constantly looking for ways to improve our teaching and pupils' learning. (Teacher 1, interview 1)

Deputy headteacher Rena Watkins also appreciated that Ronald encouraged innovation and did not constrain her in her role as head of curriculum and professional development. She explained, "He is a good boss because he does not instantly know how everything must be done. He consults and includes people before making decisions." Reflected in both the teacher's and deputy headteacher's comments were the headteacher's own stated beliefs about leadership:

> It is important to have a clear and shared vision of good teaching and learning, but you cannot beat people over the head with it. It is implicit in what we say and what we do. It is important to work in teams and from people's strengths and let the group find the answer. As headteacher I think it is important to respect teachers' autonomy and support them in their professional development. I believe it is important that innovation not grow too quickly, and that there is a sense that whatever innovation one takes on, it is worthwhile and can be maintained. Our training school model is a very good example of that. People have tremendous pride in what they have accomplished since Pinewood became a training school. (Headteacher, interview 1)

When asked about leadership in the school improvement initiatives going on at Pinewood, Ronald Leeds praised Rena Watkins for her initiatives aimed at improving instruction at Pinewood. In his words, "Without her leadership, Pinewood would not be the high performance school it is today." All three senior teacher respondents respected Rena's efforts at "getting us started in school improvement." When asked about her role in leading the school improvement initiatives, Rena talked of how her own views of leadership and school improvement had evolved since involvement with the university program.

> In the beginning we didn't realize that school improvement was a process and not an event, and that it would take the development of leadership throughout the faculty. We heads were highly prescriptive about training, and directive until teachers took ownership. The training school and the mentorship program for our newly qualified teachers are really off shoots of what we have learned. They are part of our leadership journey. (Deputy Headteacher, interview 1)

Implicit in the views of these long-time school members was the belief that there had been a change in leadership at Pinewood. Over time, the management of the school had become a function they considered separate from leadership in the improvement of instruction and pupil achievement. By way

of illustration, the three senior teachers believed they were autonomous in working with colleagues to innovate in teaching. This finding helped us understand why when asked about leadership in school improvement, the newly qualified teacher respondents did not refer to the headteacher and deputy headteachers alone.

Perceptions of newly qualified teachers. When asked about leadership in school improvement, the three respondents who were beginning their careers referred to the interesting curricular programs for pupils, teachers' opportunities for professional development, and the support of colleagues. One newly qualified teacher remarked,

> I think the emphasis on teaching and learning is the strength of the school leadership. I have learned so much being here. At college we just seemed to be making worksheets all the time. Now I can do so many more things. We have had some brilliant inservice days. (Teacher 4, interview 1)

This teacher also commended the headteachers for providing financial support for professional development. At the time of this study, there was a teacher shortage throughout England. Newly qualified teachers had a choice in their first teaching position. One of these junior teachers explained,

> What drew me to this school was that it seemed very supportive, and that has proven to be the case. I have had tremendous help from the two deputy headteachers. They have come into my classroom and helped me help the pupils. I have never felt judged, isolated, or alone, and I am learning. I think that is very important in your first year of teaching. In my practicum I had a terrible time because we were isolated and worked alone. Autonomy is important, but I have that here along with support. (Teacher 5, interview 1)

Over the time spent studying Pinewood Hall, it became evident that all eight respondents believed that leadership in this high-performing school was collegial and motivated by a shared commitment to provide optimal learning opportunities for children. This finding encouraged us to inquire further about how these respondents perceived teachers' roles in school development initiatives.

Teachers' Leadership Roles in School Improvement

Although all respondents believed that sustaining Pinewood's reputation as a high-performance school required leadership that was collegial, there were multiple views on how teachers participated in leadership. Once again the views of the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and senior teachers differed in certain aspects from the junior teachers' views. Following is a discussion of these perceptions and questions that emerged from our analysis and interpretations.

Perceptions of the headteachers and senior teachers. During the first focus group meeting with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, we asked about teachers' leadership roles in general and in school improvement in particular. The headteacher remarked,

> Pinewood is a traditional school in many ways. Given the size of the school and our National Curriculum and Government mandates, I am not sure that we could function otherwise. There are the three of us on the senior management team, five heads of department, and six heads of forms that try

and manage so that teachers are free to concentrate on pupil learning. Having said that, I think it is important that all people holding formal management positions teach and stay tied to the chief enterprise of the school. We three heads each teach a group of pupils. (Headteacher, headteachers' focus group 1)

The deputy headteacher added,

We also manage in non-traditional ways that involve teachers more directly in leadership. For instance, we have regular Wednesday morning briefings where we talk about pupils who are experiencing difficulty. We also have scheduled meeting time where members of the school improvement steering committee get together and plan, sometimes with university researchers. We have mentorship meetings for the newly qualified teachers. I think these activities help build teachers' commitment and sense of responsibility to the school. (Deputy headteacher, headteachers' focus group 1)

The headteacher, deputy headteacher, and three senior teachers were unanimous in their belief that the government training school model implemented in 2000 was the vehicle that best supported colleagues as they developed their leadership skills. One senior teacher explained,

Within the training school model we are always looking for people who have an interest in doing outreach work. That is where staff development comes in. You learn so much by working together to prepare these sessions and by going out and sharing ideas. Last time a group of us went and tried to explain one model of teaching to a group of teachers in another town. One of the new teachers came with us. In the audience was someone who had trained with her at university. There she was, a first year teacher explaining to an audience of newly qualified and senior teachers how certain methodologies of teaching work with certain learners. I think we have had about 20 who have done some training. That is approximately one third of the staff. (Teacher 2, interview 1)

Where this group of respondents' views differed the most, however, was the degree to which they perceived teachers at Pinewood had equal opportunity to participate in leadership. One senior teacher claimed,

I don't think that the senior management team necessarily knows what all is going on in the school. There is a danger. If Ronald announces on the briefing that Rena and somebody will be going somewhere on a Saturday, people then start to feel left out and think, "It doesn't say what I have been doing." There is a growing feeling that the senior management team only appreciates and knows about the things in which they are directly involved. (Teacher 3, interview 2)

Comments by this and other senior teachers helped us understand why the junior teachers tended to view their participation in leadership differently than their senior colleagues.

Perceptions of newly qualified teachers. When the three newly qualified teachers were asked about teacher leadership, they again referred to the professional support, encouragement, and mentorship they enjoyed from senior teachers and the headteachers. One explained, "We meet every week and exchange ideas about teaching. Our mentor has been a teacher for over 20 years, but he says he is learning from us." When asked about how specifically teacher leadership supported school improvement, however, these three junior teachers referred to innovations in curriculum and instruction, supportive col-

leagues, and opportunities to participate in interesting professional development like the training school activities. However, they were unclear about the school's history with the university-based school improvement program. One commented,

> I have only heard other teachers talk about the university program and what has been going on over the years. Many are beginning to sound a bit jaded. I think that they sometimes feel like they get told they have to do things to suit the senior management team and the university. I think they get their backs up. (Teacher 6, interview 1)

This comment, along with the remarks of the senior teachers, prompted us to ask the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and senior teachers for more specifics about the history and current role of the university program in building and sustaining the positive reputation of the school.

Perceptions of the Role of the University-Based School Improvement Program
There was a high degree of correspondence among the views of the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and three senior teachers. For example, all credited the university-based program for being the catalyst in changes that had transformed Pinewood Hall from an under-performing to a high-performing school. A senior teacher on the school improvement steering committee remarked.

> There has been a change. Talking and sharing teaching strategies for improving pupil learning has allowed us to have coherence in the school. I don't see that in other schools. I think if you don't have coherence in a school, then there are problems. No one really knows why they are doing anything. For me, the school improvement work fitted well with my own work and philosophy. (Teacher 2, interview 1)

However, another long-time teacher, a self-proclaimed cynic, confronted this notion by describing leadership of the school in this way.

> I think this is a school that has always had many initiatives. I have been here 17 years. From the very beginning we were taking on initiatives. We used to call them Mickey Mouse initiatives. If it brought extra funding we were doing it. But the professional development and action research we've done through the university have been the best, and I think that is because they make us look at how pupils learn, and then encourage us to make that part of our normal teaching. It is not just something we do for six months. We keep it going. That is the difficulty with any new idea. We do things for a while and then it fades away. (Teacher 3, interview 2)

The headteacher, deputy headteacher, and one teacher serving on the current school improvement steering committee believed the partnership with the university had provided the necessary resources and expertise to initiate change. They also believed that continued involvement was critical to sustaining the school's success. The tension between how the headteachers and senior teachers perceived the importance of the school improvement program, and how the junior teachers understood the role of the university-based program, prompted us to ask how respondents viewed potential barriers to leadership development and the challenges of sustaining school improvement.

Perceptions of the Barriers to Participation in Leadership

In one sense there was a high degree of correspondence among the views of the eight respondents. For example, all respondents mentioned the current union action as a chief barrier. During this investigation, the national teachers' union issued a directive to its membership to attend a maximum of one meeting a week. Five of the six teacher respondents supported the action and believed that this directive addressed larger issues of teacher workload and time commitment to activities outside of classroom teaching. The sixth teacher, the deputy, and the headteacher found the "one meeting a week" directive created problems. The teacher claimed,

> I think if you were to talk to some people you'd hear that they don't want to spend long hours. I spend long hours, but I don't think that everyone should have to do that. It is individual choice. The one meeting a week rule has had an impact. (Teacher 1, interview 1)

All respondents believed that the union action had contributed to existing tensions between senior management and teachers. Shortly before we began our study, the government of England had designated Pinewood Hall a technology school as well as a training school. The headteacher believed that this prestigious designation had caused tensions among departments in the school, as "some departments were included in the proposal while others were not." All six teacher respondents referred to the mounting resistance to the technology school initiative. One senior teacher claimed, "Many faculty are convinced that this is another example of the senior management team not consulting and not communicating with teachers" (Teacher 3, interview 2). Similarly, one junior teacher commented,

> I think what happens, where the problem is, is that new initiatives are then foisted on the staff without much consultation, or consultation with certain people and not everyone. I think that issue of consultation has become a major one. I think when there are decisions made and staff haven't been consulted it's like a flag going up and staff think, "It's happened again." (Teacher 6, interview 2)

When asked if the university-based school development program had the potential to continue to support the development of leadership skills among the teachers, senior teachers responded Yes. The three newly qualified teacher respondents were noncommittal. Both the headteacher and deputy headteacher, however, expressed concern that several of the academics with whom the teaching staff had worked recently had left for other universities in England. As a result, the school improvement program had been moved out of the university and privatized. Both the headteacher and deputy headteacher believed that without university support, the quality of the professional development initiatives sponsored by the school improvement program would deteriorate. Implicit in their concern was the belief that research and research-based training models were critical in promoting and sustaining the expertise required for continued school development.

In summary, the major perceived barriers to participation in leadership and school improvement were divisiveness caused by teacher union action; limited meeting time, which meant less consultation and communication; and the loss

of university support for the school improvement program. These findings encouraged us to inquire whether the faculty might eventually withdraw from leadership in school improvement and whether lack of resources would undermine the school's reputation for innovation and success. All respondents said No. Even though implicit in the responses were multiple views of leadership and school improvement, there was a general consensus that the professional commitment to provide optimal learning opportunities for pupils was an institutionalized aspect of the school culture.

Implications

Analysis of our written research report supported the construction of three major themes. In this section a discussion of these themes provides the context in which we suggest implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Skillful Administration and Teacher Leadership

Important in the first instance is that interpretations based on our analysis of educators' constructions align with the growing recognition among researchers that schools are complex learning organizations that require multiple and distributed sources of leadership (Gronn, 2002, 2003) to "create an environment that fosters long-term school improvement" (O'Day, 2002, p. 318). In particular, skillful school administration is critical and supportive, but is distinct from leadership in school improvement. Based on educators' views in the Pinewood Hall study, we suggest, in schools with goals of improving teaching methods and pupil performance, leadership comes from varied sources; is not equated with the principalship or others with designated management roles; and is a shared influence process (Yukl, 1998) that is distributed throughout the organization (Gronn, 2002, 2003). For example, all respondents in our study believed there were multiple sources of leadership and diverse leadership activities geared to improving teaching and learning opportunities for pupils. In addition, headteachers and teachers believed they shared, to varying degrees, responsibility and influence in setting goals and the agenda for school improvement. Finally, all respondents believed teacher collegiality and commitment to professional learning was critical in the development of leadership supportive of school success. In a similar vein, researchers Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) also argue that the potential for school improvement is enhanced through teacher leadership and liken the development of teacher leadership to the "awakening of the sleeping giant." In addition, findings from their five-year investigation of school leadership in successful schools prompted scholars Crowther et al. (2002) to theorize that parallel leadership was required to implement and sustain school improvement. These scholars define parallel leadership as "a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity" (p. 38). Based on their review of the teacher leadership literature, Smylie et al. (2002) emphasize the important relationship between teacher leadership and school improvement and endorse new approaches to teacher leadership that "depart from individual empowerment, role-based models," "reframe teacher leadership as a more collective, task-oriented and organizational enterprise," and "appear to be more effective" in "promoting school improvement" (p. 163). These scholars conclude that much is to be learned from further investigation of these emergent per-

spectives. Drawing on our interpretations in the Pinewood Hall study, we argue here as we have elsewhere (Foster & St. Hilaire, 2003) that future research of teacher leadership, especially collaborative approaches, has the potential to inform policy, practice, and models of teacher and principal professional preparation and inservice programs.

Rethinking School Improvement

Important in the second instance was the highly divergent perspectives in the Pinewood Hall case study about what was meant by school improvement and how respondents understood the relationship between leadership and school improvement. The headteachers and long-time teacher respondents tended to define school improvement by referring to the school's involvement and history with the university-based school improvement program. Newer faculty members, who had not experienced the catalytic effect of the initial involvement with the program, tended to refer to the faculty's concern for pupil achievement and professional development as important aspects of the school's culture and critical to sustained success. The tensions in these perspectives lead us to conclude, as have others (Seashore-Louis, Toole & Hargreaves, 1999) that the term *school improvement* is ambiguous and problematic. That the concern for the amelioration of schooling has been a consistent focus in educational research since the early 20th century helps in understanding the current preoccupation with the term (Willower & Forsyth, 1999), but does not account for the multiple and often conflicting views of what is intended by school improvement. The constructions of the long-time respondents in the case study reported here lead us to conclude that involvement in formal school improvement programs can promote deliberate change through the provision of additional resources and expertise to which the school would not normally have access. Deliberate change over the short term, however, is no guarantee that improvement will continue when the extra resources are no longer available. Seashore-Louis et al.'s (1999) critical review of the school improvement research prompted them to conclude that the assumption that external aid from agencies and networks is needed to support effective change is problematic; and that there is a need for the "rethinking of school improvement" (p. 270). In a similar vein, Levin and Wiens (2003) argue that successful school improvement is a "long-term project that can only be judged retrospectively" (p. 663); is not necessarily "high profile"; and is based on "the best available research and evidence" (p. 664). Like these scholars, we argue that more research is required that addresses new questions, including "what is the source and role of leadership in initiating and sustaining transformational change" (Seashore-Louis et al., p. 269) in schools?

Barriers to Participation in Leadership and School Improvement

Important in the third instance was that respondents in our study perceived lack of resources and professional expertise and issues of influence and inclusion as chief barriers to leadership development. In particular, issues of influence and inclusion, many believed, created tensions that could potentially undermine the school's continued success. All respondents believed that union action limiting teachers to one meeting a week had undermined teachers' abilities to influence goal-setting, be included in important decision-making

about school improvement initiatives, and would inevitably affect professional learning and the school's status as a training school. Based on these educators' perspectives and our study of Pinewood Hall, we argue that to create and sustain in school factors that foster successful schooling over time, adult learning and the development of professional expertise are key. Their review of the research prompted Smylie et al. (2002) to claim that "school improvement and the improvement of teaching and student learning depend fundamentally on the development of teachers' knowledge, abilities and commitments" (p. 167). In a similar vein, we argue for more research that investigates conceptions of school leadership and school improvement that link leading to learning (Barth, 2001; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Lambert & Walker, 2002; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), and more in-depth theoretical explorations of alternative perspectives that challenge the orthodoxy of school leadership (Harris, 2003). Finally, based on this research, we urge researchers and theorists to continue to examine leadership in successful schools (Crowther et al., 2002; Donaldson, 2001) and raise critical questions about "who exerts influence, how influence is exerted, the purpose for the exercise of influence, and its outcomes" (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 46). In brief, more research is needed as we fill out our understanding of the relationship between leadership and school improvement: put simply, the who, how, why, and what of leadership in school improvement.

Conclusion

In this article we present key interpretations and major themes from a study that examined the perspectives of headteachers and teachers in an English secondary school with a long-time involvement in school improvement. A constructivist leadership research orientation was adopted to "examine how leaders and others in the organization create shared understandings about their role and participation in schooi," and what is meant by school success (Heck & Hallinger, 1999, p. 146). By including interpretations and a discussion related to the educators' constructions of leadership and their perceptions of barriers to participation in leadership, our aim was to provide readers with a thick description to support their own generalizing regarding the transferability of the findings. To provide a context in which to suggest implications for research, policy, and practice, we present a discussion of three major themes that emerged from the case study. In particular, by examining the correspondence and tensions in the respondents' constructions of leadership in the study, our intent is to encourage researchers to consider how emergent perspectives of school leadership might address gaps in our understanding of how leadership contributes to school development and success (Harris, 2004). Finally, by raising questions about issues related to influence and inclusion in school leadership, the hope is that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners will critically examine current models of school leadership and their implications for school development and success.

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