Teacher Leadership
That Strengthens Professional Practice
What Is Teacher Leadership?

The term teacher leadership refers to that set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school's performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning. Mobilizing and energizing does not occur because of the role of the leader as boss (as might be the case with a principal), but rather because the individual is informed and persuasive. Therefore, an important characteristic of a teacher leader is expertise and skill in engaging others in complex work. It also entails an unwavering passion for the core mission of the school and the courage to confront obstacles to achieving that mission.

Because improvement of a school's performance frequently involves doing things differently from how they have been done in the past, teacher leadership often requires managing a process of change. But this is not always the case. Many times, improvement occurs when teacher leaders motivate colleagues to become more skilled and thoughtful regarding their work, encouraging them not to do things differently but to do them better. At other times, of course, teacher leaders recognize an opportunity to institute a practice that will improve the school's program. In those situations, teacher leadership does require convincing others to use a new approach, but the change process involved is not that of implementing a new program, in which the stages of concern have been well documented (Loucks-Horsley, 1996). Rather, it is a professional exploration of practice.

The popular conception of leadership, whether in the business world, the military, or an educational setting, is that of a lone ranger, a strong individual who works against long odds to accomplish challenging feats. That is not the appropriate image for teacher leaders. Rather, teacher leaders develop a collaborative relationship with colleagues; they inspire others to join them on a journey without a specific destination. They recognize an opportunity or a problem, and they convince others to join them in addressing it. Michael Fullan (2001) put it so well: “The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people's commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things. It is individual commitment, but above all it is collective mobilization” (p. 9).

Background to the Concept of Teacher Leadership

Many aspects of teaching distinguish it from other professions, including its relatively low pay and low status, its lack of an apprenticeship period for novices, its oversight by government agencies, and its relatively high degree of union membership. Furthermore, until recently, teaching was one of the few fields (along with nursing) open to educated women. That fact, combined with the bureaucratic nature of schools and the pattern of mostly male administrators supervising mostly female teachers, has reinforced the public perception of teaching as a relatively low-skilled work with generous vacations. In fact, in many states and school districts, the work of teaching is regarded as following procedures or instructional plans designed by others and under the close direction of a supervisor. While there are historical reasons for these conditions, it should be noted that they do not prevail in many other countries, where teachers are highly respected and work with a great deal of autonomy. In the United States, however, such characteristics define teaching as semiskilled work in which teachers, at the lowest level of the bureaucratic hierarchy, take direction from their superiors. In recognition of this situation, the educational literature is replete with pleas for teaching to become a true profession.

To be sure, teaching is unique among the professions in the degree of government regulation involved. The state has a vital interest in an educated citizenry; education is a critical factor when it comes to casting a vote and serving on a jury, and an educated workforce is essential to sustained economic development. Furthermore, in most
places, students have little choice in the schools they attend or in the teachers in those schools to whom they are assigned. These factors ensure that educators in general, and teachers in particular, are subject to greater state regulation than, say, accountants or architects.

Embedded in the bureaucratic conceptualization of teaching is the fact that teaching is, in most settings, a "flat" profession; the first day on the job for the teacher with 10 years' experience is the same as the first day for a novice just entering the profession. That is, both are the teacher of record, with responsibility for the students in their charge. No architectural firm would ask a newly licensed architect to single-handedly design a major building the first week on the job. Rather, she would work on a team with more experienced architects. Similarly, a newly licensed accountant would not be assigned a major client to handle on his own. At the very least, he would be mentored by an experienced colleague and would gradually assume greater autonomy for the firm's clients.

Clearly, the work of an experienced teacher is not the same as that of a novice. Experience confers many benefits to both educators and their students—familiarity with the curriculum, an understanding of youth, a repertoire of instructional strategies, and deep knowledge of the workings of the school and the district. In other words, experience is frequently (although, it must be admitted, not always) accompanied by expertise. Such expertise results in professional restlessness in some individuals.

Professional restlessness leads to what some teachers have described as a leadership itch: the desire to reach out beyond their own classrooms. In virtually every school and school district, there are teachers who have become skilled in their work with students so that their daily work is not the challenge it was in their first few years. While the profession of teaching is never fully mastered, and while teachers never fully exhaust the potential of their work with students, these individuals seek additional challenges and opportunities to extend their reach. Some teachers want to influence more students than those whom they teach directly each year. Their vision extends beyond their own classrooms and beyond even their own instructional teams or departments. They recognize the school for the complex system it is and see that students' experience in school is a function of more than their interaction with individual teachers; it is influenced by the systems in place in the school.

Traditionally, the only ways in which teachers with an inclination for leadership could satisfy their yearnings for greater reach and influence have been either to become administrators or to become active in their teachers unions. For some teachers, depending on the situation and their individual personalities, such career paths are effective. As has been well documented, the role of administrators is critical to a successful school. In addition, in some settings, teachers unions offer opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership within the profession. However, both of these approaches can require leaving the classroom (certainly when going into administration and frequently when actively engaging in a union). By contrast, there are teachers who want to exercise greater influence while continuing their work as a teacher; they feel an urge to exercise leadership as teachers rather than administrators.

Teacher leaders see themselves first as teachers, although they are not interested in becoming administrators, they are looking to extend their influence. They are professional educators who want to continue to work as teachers rather than as managers. Some of these skilled teachers enter administration only to return to full-time teaching because they miss the daily interaction with students. Teacher leaders are more than teachers, yet different from administrators. Such a concept of teacher leadership reflects an increasingly recognized role in models of teacher professionalism that has not yet been fully explored in the professional literature.

The concept of teacher leadership also recognizes that teachers' tenure in a school is normally longer than that of the administrators who are nominally in charge (20–30 years for many teachers as compared with the typical 3–5 years for a principal). The school change and leadership literature is replete with examples of schools that have been turned around by an inspired, and inspiring, principal but that have then reverted to their previous state when that individual moved to another position. Therefore, the cultivation of teacher leadership may well be a wise investment for a school district committed to improving practice over the long term. It may also prove decisive in encouraging gifted teachers to remain with education rather than abandon the profession for one that offers greater opportunities for ongoing challenge and advancement.

Furthermore, in most schools, traditional norms of autonomy and individuality work against the development of professional learning communities, which are essential for meaningful school improvement. That is, it is increasingly recognized that if schools are to achieve better results with their students, it must be a collective endeavor rather than a collection of individual efforts. Teacher leadership, when exercised by educators respected by their colleagues, makes a significant contribution to de-privatizing practice—so critical for collective learning.
The concept of teacher leadership did not spring into being in the early years of the 21st century. Rather, it has a long history in various forms, reaching back for more than 100 years. However, while the concept of teacher leadership is not new, it has been featured prominently in the literature of school reform and improvement, particularly in light of its connection to broader school reform efforts. As with much else in U.S. education, the antecedents of our current thinking about teacher leadership rest with John Dewey. An important part of Dewey's advocacy of the democratic society was his insistence on democratic schools. This vision included both students and teachers as partners in the democratic venture. Throughout the 20th century, enlightened school boards and administrators recognized that if teachers were to embrace the school's policies and organizational structures, they had to be part of the processes that created them. Hence, many schools created site councils to make decisions affecting the school; teachers have traditionally played an important role on those bodies. These arrangements were in direct response to the notion, best stated by John Dewey (1903), that it was essential that "every teacher had some regular and representative way to register judgment upon matters of educational importance, with assurance that this judgment would somehow affect the school system" (p. 193). In 1986, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy concluded that teachers should have "more control over their work environments" (p. 103). Thus, the concept of teacher participation in school decision making has a long history, with teachers involved in school governance. However, teacher participation in school governance, as important as it is, hinges on the assumption that the principal responsibility for school governance rests with administrators. That is, teachers, rather than taking initiative for what happens in the school, are invited to participate in making decisions. True teacher leadership, as conceptualized in this book, involves spontaneous and organic teacher initiative and facilitation, ideas absent from earlier work in the field.

Connections to Related Concepts

The concept of teacher leadership rests within a web of concepts regarding leadership in educational and organizational settings and is best understood in relation to these other ideas.

Leadership as Administration

In educational circles, the term school leader means the site administrator; university programs for school leaders prepare principals and superintendents for their roles. The professional literature in educational leadership focuses almost exclusively on the role of the principal, with excursions into the leadership exercised by central office administrators such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, staff developers, and curriculum directors.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensing Consortium (ISLLC), an outgrowth of the Council of Chief State School Officers, has defined school leadership (taken to mean administrative leadership) as consisting of six standards, all intended to support the principal's essential responsibility as instructional leader. These standards, which have been adopted by many states as criteria for the licensing of administrators, may be summarized as establishing and maintaining a vision; providing instructional leadership (in all its manifestations); managing the building; interacting with the broader community; maintaining high ethical standards; and interacting with the larger political, social, economic, and cultural context. For each of these standards, the document Standards for School Leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) describes knowledge, dispositions, and performances that, taken together, serve to further define each standard. According to this approach, it is not sufficient for school administrators to be good managers; they must be visionary educational leaders who can mobilize and inspire their school communities in the service of high-level student learning. Hence, ISLLC's definition of leadership, while focused on the role of administrators, does not rest solely, or even mainly, on the administrators as managers; they must also be instructional leaders. Nonetheless, they are undeniably administrators.

Administrative leadership is essential to successful schools. Since the effective schools research of the 1970s, strong administrative leadership has been recognized as critical to high levels of student learning (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). More recently, a study of urban school districts has reaffirmed the importance of the principal's role in promoting high levels of achievement (Simmons, 2004). Although it may be a necessary condition for school improvement, administrative leadership is not sufficient; it must be complemented by teacher leadership, that informal, spontaneous exercise of initiative and creativity that results in enhanced student learning. The litmus test of effective leadership (exercised by administrators or teachers) is whether improved learning survives the departure of the leader, whether it has become institutionalized.

Sustainability goes even further. Sustainability, as described by Andy Hargreaves (in press), is the institutionalization of changed practice but of the habit of critically examining practice. Embedding these habits of mind into the daily work of schools
cannot happen without leadership, and it is part of the leadership exercised by administrators. Therefore, the concept of teacher leadership is neither in conflict nor in competition with the idea of administrative leadership. They are complementary concepts that ideally work together on behalf of students and their learning.

**Leadership as Management of Change**

Some writers, notably Michael Fullan (2001), have conceptualized leadership as the management of change, often large-scale change. Such efforts require leadership skills, to be sure; the history of education is littered with the corpses of innovations that did not survive the departure of a heroic leader. Managing change, therefore, requires not only initiating but also institutionalizing and sustaining changed practice. Furthermore, large-scale change—affecting a school district or indeed an entire state or country—is frequently accompanied by revisions in policy and is typically supported by a large infusion of resources.

But teacher leadership rarely involves large-scale, systemic change. Changed practice that results from teacher leadership is significant and can reach into the very crevices of a school’s program. But it is very different from the large-scale implementation of new programs that is typically involved in systemic change. Although the literature on leadership as management of change is important to our understanding of leadership in general, it does not fully explain the concept of teacher leadership as described here.

**Formal Teacher Leadership Roles**

Many schools have instituted structures in which teachers assume formal leadership roles in the school, such as master teacher, department chair, team leader, helping teacher, or mentor. These arrangements recognize the essential role of teachers as key players in the broader effort toward enhanced student achievement. Such roles are not created to engage teachers primarily in establishing schools as democratic societies. Rather, they are created to distribute the work of running schools to others besides the principal and to enlist teachers as partners in school improvement.

Such role-based positions do represent opportunities for leadership by teachers. And while the term distributed leadership has been used in a number of different senses, it frequently connotes such spreading, or “stretching”—to use Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond’s (2001) vivid term—of responsibility among different individuals in the organization. However, to the extent that teachers are placed in roles of influence and decision making, other teachers may regard them as quasi-administrators. This is particularly the case if teachers must apply for the position and be selected and if the role carries supervisory responsibilities. Even when teachers in formal roles play no part in the evaluation process, some teachers regard those who are “appointed and anointed” to such positions as breaking ranks with the solidarity of teachers, as no longer being true colleagues. In other words, they may be seen as administrators in teachers’ clothing. Furthermore, depending on the selection criteria and process used, those appointed to leadership positions may or may not possess real leadership skills; at the worst, the entire endeavor may smack of favoritism, with the credibility of the entire enterprise undermined. Teachers in formal or semiformal roles are more likely to be trusted by other teachers when the members of the instructional team or the department elect their leader and when the roles rotate each year.

A variation on the theme of teacher as quasi-administrator is the concept of “teacher on special assignment.” Such an arrangement typically enables a teacher (usually selected by the administrator) to serve as the coordinator for implementing a new program or to assist colleagues with a new approach or strategy. The assignment recognizes that teachers may be the true experts in the field and that they cannot serve as resources to their colleagues while teaching full-time. Teachers who hold these positions, particularly when the positions are temporary—as they generally are—are rarely regarded as pseudo-administrators.

When teachers who serve in formal leadership roles remain teachers in the eyes of their colleagues, the concepts of shared decision making or distributed leadership are still of limited value in understanding teacher leadership. They suggest that someone—typically an administrator—is doing the sharing of decision making or the distributing of leadership. This means that those decisions and that leadership are the administrator’s to share or distribute; in other words, these positions are an extension of administrative leadership.

Teacher leadership, by contrast, is spontaneously exercised by teachers (any teacher) in response to a need or an opportunity through work with colleagues. It emerges organically; no one appoints teacher leaders to their roles. And while administrators may (and usually do) play an important supporting role, the initiative comes from the teacher.
Why Teacher Leadership?

As stated earlier, interest in teacher leadership has increased substantially in recent years. Why is this? Why are educators and policymakers suddenly interested in this phenomenon?

The Managerial Imperative

Educational leadership, as described in the professional literature and typically referring to administrative leadership at the school site, has become a gigantic task, beyond the capacity of any but the most capable and energetic principal. Richard Elmore describes it well:

> Reading the literature on the principalship can be overwhelming, because it suggests that principals should embody all the traits and skills that remedy all the defects of the schools in which they work. They should be in close touch with their communities, inside and outside the school; they should, above all, be masters of human relations, attending to all the conflicts and disagreements that might arise among students, among teachers, and among anyone else who chooses to create a conflict in the school; they should be both respectful of the authority of district administrators and crafty at deflecting administrative intrusions that disrupt the autonomy of teachers; they should keep an orderly school; and so on. Somewhere on the list one usually finds a reference to instruction. (2000, p. 14)

The vast literature (and it is vast) on school leadership has defined the principal variously as requiring some or all of the following forms of leadership: technical, professional, transactional, and transformational. Other models of leadership focus on its political, managerial, or cultural dimensions. When distilled, these concepts all seek to establish the principal as the inspirational head of the complex organization called school. The principal is to shepherd the school toward the achievement of demanding imperatives mandated by national, state, and district policy. The sheer range of the descriptions of what the principal's work encompasses attests to the size and complexity of the role.

Not surprisingly, school administrators are staggering under the load; human resources personnel report that principalships are increasingly difficult to fill. As instructional leaders and as managers, site administrators are burdened with huge responsibilities under increasing pressure from their own districts and government agencies and with student populations that are increasingly diverse in academic and social preparation and in English language skills. A principal in New York City has reported that the legal mandates he received from the superintendent's office in a single year weighed in at 45 pounds (Howard, 2004). The job has become virtually impossible to do well. Small wonder, then, that thoughtful educators increasingly recognize that administrators, in order to discharge their responsibilities, must cultivate a culture of inquiry and responsibility for student learning among their faculties. They must, in other words, cultivate teacher leaders. As Elmore (2000) describes it, the job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contribution to the collective results (p. 15).

The School Improvement Imperative

Schools are under unrelenting pressure to improve results for all students, with a particular focus on those students previously underserved. That is, schools must at least make progress toward closing the achievement gap among different groups of students. Of course, a political agenda drives some of the initiatives (from both federal and state agencies), but thoughtful educators support at least the aims of the legislation and regulations, if not the details of implementation. In any event, schools are the locus of accountability; the school can be shut down if it does not show adequate results.

Principals are the technical leaders of schools, and the buck stops with them. They recognize, however, that they cannot improve schools by themselves. There is increasing recognition in both the academic and the practitioner literature that even if principals wanted to be the sole leaders of their schools, they could not meet the standards now being set for them. As Katzemeyer and Moller (2001) put it, "When given opportunities to lead, teachers can influence school reform efforts. Waking this sleeping giant of teacher leadership has unlimited potential in making a real difference in the pace and depth of school change" (p. 102).
Professionalization of Teaching

It is generally accepted that the most important factor contributing to student learning is the quality of teaching, supported by other components in the school’s organization such as the curriculum, the programs and policies for students, and the nature of connections with the external community. And with increasing external pressures for high-level and universal student achievement, many educators recognize that administrators alone do not effect that achievement. Even if they want to maintain a traditional and hierarchical structure, administrators must find ways to unleash the expertise of the teachers on their staffs and to capture the energy and knowledge of those who know the most about what works in the classroom.

Traditional views of leadership as residing exclusively in administrative positions portray teachers as immature beings (children, almost) who need direction and guidance. Some definitions of teaching regard important curriculum design decisions as better left to experts, with teachers implementing others’ designs. By contrast, the view of teaching that underlies the concept of teacher leadership sees teaching as professional work in which teachers are informed by professional research and make complex decisions and exercise judgment and autonomy in support of student learning. Teaching requires complex decision making, frequently under conditions of uncertainty and high levels of pressure. Therefore, the role of leadership in a school setting, whether exercised by teachers or administrators, involves supporting the decision making of teachers in the service of student learning.

Related to the professional nature of teaching is the concept of expertise and where it resides. In any bureaucratic structure in which one group of individuals (administrators) exercises supervisory control over another (teachers), it is assumed that those with authority also have the greater expertise. That is, if the principal’s role is seen to be that of improving instruction, it is assumed that the principal is more of an expert on teaching than are the teachers. This may not be the case. It is virtually impossible for an administrator of a secondary school to be knowledgeable about all the subjects taught there and their accompanying pedagogy. Similarly, primary teachers may be more expert in the area of early childhood learning and development than the administrators who supervise their work. The concept of teacher leadership, while acknowledging the essential role of administrators in ensuring at least a minimum quality of teaching and supporting its continuing improvement, also recognizes that the expertise in a school, in both the content and in the methods of instruction, rests with teachers. The concept also reshares the role of site administrator to that of facilitator of learning for both teachers and students.

Thus, the idea of teacher leadership stems from a conceptualization of teaching as complex work requiring expertise, judgment, and a high degree of autonomy (informed by a knowledge of the professional literature). Teacher leadership is exercised in the equally complex environment of schools, school districts, and government agencies. Small wonder that it is a concept that has not been fully described or elaborated.

Issues Involved in Teacher Leadership

Some educators may fear that teacher leadership would be difficult to bring to life in their own setting. Indeed, there are issues that could present obstacles to fully enabling teacher leaders to emerge. These issues are discussed in the following sections.

Contested Ground

Little (1993) and, later, Lieberman and Miller (2004) describe the “contested ground” between teachers and administrators. Some administrators are reluctant to cede what they consider their authority to teachers, and they don’t provide sufficient opportunities for teachers to work together and exercise leadership responsibilities. Granted, this research was conducted primarily within the context of appointed leaders (for example, department chairs), but the concern is also real in a more informal definition of teacher leadership presented here.

The issue is more than one of time for teachers to work together; it is about power. Principals play an essential role in effective schools. Teachers know that. They know that they can obtain their best results with students only in a school that is well managed under the guidance of a strong instructional leader. But principals, when recognizing and cultivating teacher leadership, enhance their own standing within the school. It is one of the surprising features of leadership that in sharing power, one increases one’s authority. This issue will be addressed more fully in Chapter 8.

Negotiated Agreements

- In some school districts, contracts negotiated with teachers unions include specific guidelines regarding what teachers may and may not be asked to do in the school. Virtually all contracts specify the number of contact minutes teachers have with students. But others also specify that teachers will be compensated for any time they spend on
school matters beyond student contact hours. This typically includes such things as helping out in the lunchroom or the playground and may extend to other matters, such as supervising student activities and clubs. Such provisions may make it difficult for teachers to take on projects on their own initiative. It is not the purpose of this book to undermine either the letter or the spirit of negotiated agreements; their provisions prevent teachers from being exploited and have done a great deal for the profession. At the same time, however, it would be regrettable if these agreements became obstacles to the professionalism of teaching and the efforts of gifted teachers to exercise leadership. In some situations the unions have taken the lead, offering opportunities to their members to acquire leadership skills and to take on projects requiring initiative and support. The recognition that such teachers receive serves to strengthen the profession.

State Requirements

In virtually every state, teachers no longer receive a permanent license to teach; rather, a license is granted for a fixed term (for example, five years) and is renewable on demonstration of a certain amount of professional development, typically counted in "hours." And in some school districts, teachers are eligible for movement on the salary schedule based on their work in school and district projects. The activities of teacher leaders could be accommodated by these arrangements; it is conceivable that a teacher leader's project could satisfy state or district requirements or be sufficient to result in movement on the salary schedule.

Teacher Leadership Versus Formal Roles

Teacher leaders can emerge in very different ways. Occasionally, an external mandate imposes a new requirement on schools, such as, extensive teacher and student use of computers, and a teacher proposes an innovative way to address the mandate (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). In such cases, the teacher leader is opportunistic, using the mandate (and sometimes the funding that accompanies it) as an excuse to mobilize colleagues and pursue important work. In other situations, the initiative is one that simply arises from a perceived need, without the push from external factors.

In either type of situation, what began as a spontaneous exercise of teacher leadership may metamorphose into a more formal role. Margaret's BIG Lessons (from Chapter 1) did just that. Her project began as something she did in her school in which colleagues became interested. However, in the ensuing years, with recognition and funding from state agencies, it has become a formal responsibility three days a week. She continues to teach, but she is also project director of the BIG Lesson concept in Michigan. Similarly, a state initiative for increased technology use was mandated in Maine in 2001. It attracted a teacher who saw a way to implement the initiative in a manner clearly superior to that proposed by the state agency. When it was recognized as such, the state contracted with her to coordinate the statewide effort. In these instances, the teacher leaders did not remain full-time teachers; at least temporarily, their responsibilities changed.

The Relationship with Accomplished Teaching

Some educators argue that teacher leaders have already been identified and recognized through certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. It is true that the National Board process is rigorous and very worthwhile, and that one of the portfolio entries does touch on teacher leadership. But in the main, teachers earn National Board certification by demonstrating their excellence in the classroom, by reflecting thoughtfully on their practice, and by demonstrating deep knowledge of their subjects, their students, and the principles of instructional design.

It is important that teachers who aspire to leadership roles within their school have demonstrated excellence in teaching and been recognized as skilled by their colleagues. This provides critical credibility. That is, a teacher's first responsibility is to her own students; it is only when teaching performance is at (or above) standard that teachers can truly assume leadership roles. Furthermore, other teachers are far more likely to join an effort with a colleague if that teacher is respected in the school as an exemplary teacher.

How Teacher Leadership Is Demonstrated

Teacher leadership may be exercised in any area of school life. This framework for teacher leadership is divided into three areas: schoolwide policies and programs, teaching and learning, and communications and community relations. Each area contains three or four smaller areas, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. For example, Margaret's concept of the BIG Lesson initially involved a different relationship with a community agency (the museum) that later affected instructional practice. Tom's interest in differential participation rates by different groups of students focused initially on instructional practice but had implications for student assignment to classes. And Elena's looping project squarely concerned the school's organizational structure.
close colleagues to attempt a new approach than it is to promote something on a state or even national level; a department or team is more like family and may be more critical of one’s ideas. These settings, together with the areas of school life in which teacher leadership might be demonstrated, are summarized in Figure 2.1. In Part II of this book, examples of teacher leadership activities in each of the three settings will be provided for each area of school life.

The concept of teacher leadership recognizes the daunting challenges confronting schools of the 21st century and the need for schools, as organizations, to meet those challenges through innovative structures. Clearly, the strict bureaucratic hierarchy is not sufficient, nor are other approaches that place teachers in the role of receiver of accepted wisdom. Rather, to bring the best to bear on the challenges of education, the engagement of teacher leaders in the enterprise is an important component of any improvement strategy.

Teacher leadership is an idea whose time has definitely arrived. The profession, through the work of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, has identified the characteristics of accomplished teachers and has devised methods for recognizing that level of performance. In addition, educators have identified the components of skilled administrative leadership. The time has come to render the same service for those teachers who choose to remain primarily teachers of students, but who have the inclination and the skill to extend their reach. The framework for teacher leadership represents a movement in that direction.

Furthermore, teacher leadership is exhibited in any number of settings in the school: within one’s own instructional team or department, throughout the school, or beyond the school in the district, the state, or even the entire nation. For example, Tom’s effort in his high school was conducted primarily within the math department, although it spread to the entire school and beyond. Elena’s efforts in looped affected the entire school (or at least half the school—the primary teachers) right from the outset. Margaret’s BIG Lesson began as a project in her own class but has now spread across the state. Teacher leaders who operate at the state and national level are the voice of teachers on state policy boards or on broader curriculum committees.

None of these settings is to be preferred over any other; they are simply different locations of work. Furthermore, it is sometimes more of a challenge to convince one’s
What Do Teacher Leaders Do?

As described in the previous chapter, teacher leaders work as teachers but exercise leadership with their colleagues in improving student learning in their schools. (For a comprehensive description of the activities of teacher leaders, see Collinson, 2004.) It is an important concept; teacher leaders play a critical role in improvement efforts and demonstrate an enhanced sense of professionalism. For teachers to become teacher leaders, and for administrators to promote the development of teacher leaders within their schools, it is essential to describe in greater specificity exactly what it is that teacher leaders do and how they do it. In other words, what are the patterns of behavior that Margaret, Tom, and Elena demonstrated in exercising leadership in their schools?

The characteristics of teacher leaders are divided into two major categories: skills and dispositions. Taken together, these are at the heart of what is meant by teacher leadership. Furthermore, there are important and complex relationships between teacher leadership and administrative leadership; neither can exist without the other.

Leadership Skills
Teacher leadership comprises a number of specific skills. And while not every act of leadership includes all the skills, all acts require most skills, and in roughly the sequence presented here.

Using Evidence and Data in Decision Making
Decisions about what to do in schools are not based on feelings and hunches. Rather, they are grounded in evidence that actions will serve to accomplish a particular purpose. Therefore, when teacher leaders see an opportunity, when they identify a need, their focus on the area is based on evidence. This evidence need not be a single set of discrete data; it may result from informal, although systematic, observation. And it may not depend on hard data at all; it may reflect informal patterns observed (and possibly even documented) over a long period.

For example, Tom’s interest was piqued by the data regarding differential participation and achievement rates among different subpopulations of the high school in advanced courses. He recognized that if the school was to honor its commitment to educate all students to high levels, such patterns had to be broken. But the first step in changing the pattern was to understand it; for this, the observation of classes (including his own) and the interviews with students were absolutely critical. And when he and his colleagues made some changes and achieved results, those results were captured in data, both hard data regarding enrollment and anecdotal data regarding student willingness to participate in discussions and to take risks in class.

Margaret noticed that her students were not fully engaged in the museum’s exhibits; she saw that they preferred milling about in the gift shop over learning from the docents. Her evidence in this case was her observation of student conduct. Elena, on the other hand, was persuaded by the research literature on student grouping and achievement as a consequence of the relationships between teacher and students. In addition, through conversations with educators in other schools using the looping model, she learned of the results that came from practicing the approach.

Other teacher leaders might be motivated in their choice of areas to improve by an observation (frequently supplemented by the comments and complaints of other teachers) that students are seriously deficient in an important aspect of their learning, such as writing. They may have determined, and may have been told by teachers from the next grade or level, that students’ writing is unclear, poorly organized, and weak in its use of language.

Teacher leaders do not interpret evidence and data narrowly; they fully understand the limitations of standardized tests. Although test results can, at times, point to a weakness in a school’s program, there are many other sources of evidence of both problems and indications of progress that can be used. These include attendance rates;
enrollment patterns in advanced courses, discipline referrals, student work, and survey or focus group data from students, teachers, or parents. Teacher leaders, while recognizing the need for evidence, are flexible and creative in their use of that data.

Recognizing an Opportunity and Taking Initiative
A critical characteristic of leadership is the ability to take initiative. When asked for examples of teachers who have demonstrated leadership, educators consistently cite individuals who have taken initiative in addressing a problem or in improving the school's instructional program.

All three teachers discussed in Chapter 1 demonstrated this characteristic. Margaret was troubled by student engagement, or lack of it, in the museum's offerings. But she did not simply wring her hands or complain to her colleagues. Instead, she thought it through. She set up a meeting with the museum staff to explore options. She discussed the idea with her principal. In other words, she took initiative. So did Elena. Elena was motivated less by a problem than by an opportunity to improve. That is, the previous method of assigning students to teachers was not causing difficulty; the school could have continued it with no ill effects. But Elena saw what she thought might be an opportunity for improvement and initiated a focused examination of looping. And Tom, as a result of examining the data, initiated a project to look beneath the data to try to understand the causes for the numbers.

An important aspect of taking initiative consists of looking around and being alert to opportunities for improvement; in that sense, it is the opposite of complacency. Teacher leaders are never content with the status quo, recognizing that no matter how successful a school is, it could always be a little bit better. So the skill of taking initiative is coupled with an ongoing quest for, and commitment to, improvement.

Mobilizing People Around a Common Purpose
A teacher leader is able to describe a vision for a better future and can communicate it clearly and persuasively enough to colleagues to help them both see its potential and join in the effort. A teacher leader does not simply see an opportunity and take initiative to address it all alone. Instead, he engages others in the project. Furthermore, the approach is invitational, perhaps taking the form of, "I've been noticing that _____, and I wonder whether _____ couldn't help us address it. What do you think? Do you agree that it is a problem? Do you think that might work? Or is there a better approach?"

Again, all three teachers involved others in their approach. But it should also be recognized that they all had done some preliminary reading and thinking. Elena made herself familiar with the workings of looping before she mobilized her colleagues to examine it more deeply. Margaret had preliminary conversations with the museum staff before she developed the idea of the BIG Lesson sufficiently to describe it to other teachers. And Tom summarized the enrollment data before he made his initial presentation to the full faculty. In all three cases, the concept as implemented was somewhat different from (and presumably better than) the original idea. In Tom's case, the initial effort was to collect information and gain an understanding of the factors that were contributing to the findings. In all cases, the projects took on lives of their own, shaped by their originators but also influenced by the perspectives of others. The vision remained constant—that is the role of the leader—but the details of action resulted from collegial conversation and deliberation.

In addition, at the stage when Margaret's and Elena's ideas were to be put into action, the parents of the students involved had to be convinced of the merits of the plan. This is an important communication requirement, and one for which they both needed and took advantage of the principal's essential role as the official voice of the school to the outside world. In addition to fostering parent understanding of and support for the plan, communicating the idea to parents is an important step in refining the plan itself. In the course of the discussion, parents may have suggestions to strengthen the approach.

Marshaling Resources and Taking Action
At some point, it is time to take action, to try something. This "something" can range from embarking on a large-scale new project to approaching a business to ask for lab equipment. In the end, talking about doing something is not sufficient. Teacher leaders can do their homework, they can talk to colleagues, and they can conduct research, but they may have to simply commit to a course of action without fully knowing its consequences. At some point in the planning and implementation of a project, it is essential to make a commitment to action. In other words, talking can go on only so long before people become restive at the lack of real action. Teacher leaders provide the energy for
that action; they are the individuals who, at the appropriate point, are willing to roll up their sleeves and just do it.

It is a reality of school life that resources are sometimes needed, such as funds to pay for conference fees, an outside consultant, or substitute teachers, to provide teachers with the opportunity to meet. These resources may be assembled from school funds or from outside the school; in either case, they need to be garnered. The teacher leader may be the one who will take the initiative in obtaining resources, although frequently the assistance of the site administrator is needed.

To try her idea of a weeklong museum study trip, Margaret needed buses for five days’ travel to the museum, rather than the one day typically allocated per class. She also hoped to enlist volunteer help during each of the days, and her lesson plans required some additional materials and supplies. All in all, she required additional resources to implement the extended study lesson, and she solicited them, with the help of her principal, from “downtown,” from the parents of her students, and from the museum itself. In later years, as the project spread to other schools and communities, she was able to obtain support from the state government and from a foundation grant.

Elena’s initial requirements were more modest. She did the initial exploration of looping on her own, but when she attracted the interest of colleagues, they appealed to the principal for funds to be used to purchase some books and articles, to give teachers time to hold extended planning meetings, and to visit schools where the practice was in use. These needed resources were not enormous, but neither were they negligible. When it came time to implement the looping plan, the teachers discovered that they needed professional development to be effective with students in grade levels different from those they had been teaching. That is, when the 1st grade teacher moved with her class to 2nd grade, or when the 4th grade teacher moved with her class to the 5th grade, she had work to do in learning the curricula and the teaching methods for older students.

In Tom’s case, also, the resources needed initially were modest and primarily consisted of substitutes who could relieve the members of the study group from a small portion of their classroom responsibilities so they could meet together and observe one another’s classrooms. But the interview questions for students, the observation protocols, and the subsequent data analysis were strengthened by the participation of an evaluation expert paid for by school funds. In addition, for the research reading portion of the project, the teachers wanted to purchase a few books and locate relevant articles for discussion.

Monitoring Progress and Adjusting the Approach as Conditions Change Teacher leaders are alert to changing conditions and unexpected outcomes. In other words, they recognize that nothing is ever finished; everything is subject to revision and improvement. This applies to almost any sphere of school life in which a teacher leader would operate, from a new program for students, to an approach to professional development for colleagues, to a partnership with the business community.

Monitoring of progress is accompanied by skill in reflection. Teacher leaders engage in critical reflection on the consequences of actions, on the impact of an approach on student learning. The power of reflection on the practice of teaching has been well documented (Kolb, 1984), and teacher leaders engage in critical reflection on their own teaching. They extend this habit of mind to other projects with which they are involved, ensuring that difficulties are recognized and adjustments are made as the work progresses.

Margaret’s BIG Lesson concept has been evolving since its inception. It has expanded significantly to include five locations, and teachers and institutions all over the state are now involved. In addition, the Internet has become a significant resource for the project, since it enables teachers to share ideas with one another and precludes the need for teachers to develop every lesson from scratch. Other teachers have contributed their own ideas as to where to take the concept of the BIG Lesson, exploring collaborations with organizations in their own communities.

The looping concept, as implemented, represented a modification of the models the study group examined; that is, none of the schools they visited or read about had an approach that Elena’s group thought would fit perfectly at Elm Ridge. And even as they were engaged in their detailed planning year, the teachers discovered that some of their initial plans had to be altered.

Tom’s examination of the achievement gap was always expected to evolve as the members of the study group learned more. The project was established as an exploration—initially an exploration of the causes of the gaps in participation and achievement, which was later extended to an exploration of the teachers’ own practices that might contribute to such gaps. Once some of these factors were identified, the shape and direction of the project changed accordingly. And, as Tom and his colleagues
would fully admit, the project is not finished; indeed, there is probably no such thing as "finished" in such an effort.

Adjusting the approach does not always mean making minor changes. It is conceivable that as a project moves forward, the participants may recognize that the entire approach is misguided. That is, the adjustment could take the form of subjecting it to a major overhaul or even abandoning the effort.

Sustaining the Commitment of Others and Anticipating Negativity

Teacher leadership involves, of course, enlisting the interest and support of colleagues in an identified area. But getting people involved is not sufficient; they need to stay involved. Many projects run into the sand when the initial flush is over, and people and behaviors return to their old patterns.

Sustaining the commitment of others involves skills of facilitation and group process, such as listening, joint problem solving, honoring other people's ideas, maintaining focus, and knowing when to move forward. Teacher leaders are able to be clear about purpose and to remind colleagues of that purpose when needed, while conveying a genuine respect for the concerns and contributions of colleagues. In addition, they are not derailed by colleagues who choose not to become involved or who plant seeds of doubt with others to subtly undermine the effort.

All three teachers in our stories exercised skill and perseverance in maintaining the commitment of others as their projects moved forward. Margaret had to maintain her focus on the goal of richer contacts with the museum; it would have been easy and perhaps tempting to revert to a traditional field trip approach. But in her discussions with the museum staff, her negotiations with her principal and district officials, and in her explanations of the approach to colleagues and parents of students in her class, Margaret demonstrated clarity of vision and persuasiveness in keeping others on board. To be sure, she adjusted the approach based on others' thoughts and contributions, but her role in keeping people involved was vital.

Elena's leadership in maintaining others' commitment to looping was also essential. She had a vision and guided her colleagues to examine it closely. At the critical stage of making the concept a reality, she kept the energy level high and persuaded others to take on parts of the detailed planning, such as room allocation, materials, training, and parent meetings, that were needed to bring the concept to fruition.

In Tom's case, the need to maintain others' commitment was imperative, and indeed, he was not fully successful in that one teacher dropped out of the study group. But it could also be argued that convincing teachers to examine their practices deeply is more challenging than redesigning field trips as study trips. In any event, as Tom's study group moved forward in its work, and as teachers began to identify factors that contributed to the issue he had raised, Tom played a significant role in sustaining their commitment to the project. It became easier as time went on, particularly as the teachers began to see positive results from their efforts.

It is important to recognize that it is at this stage that many worthwhile projects falter. Teachers, after all, have important and time-consuming work in their own classrooms; in the popular vernacular, they already have day jobs. When a teacher leader approaches colleagues to become involved in an additional effort, it is just that: additional. Not all teachers, particularly those new to the profession, can take it on, even when someone else is providing the leadership. Convincing others to spend time on such a project and sustaining that commitment requires skills of persuasion and clarity of vision: in other words, leadership.

Contributing to a Learning Organization

It is not only individuals who learn, but organizations. As teachers in a school improve their practice and share their findings with colleagues, the collective wisdom increases. Furthermore, as more teachers are engaged in the pursuit of improved practice, the school itself becomes increasingly defined as an organization that learns. Of course, innovative practice is worth doing even when it is carried out by a single individual. However, it is only when shared that improved practice and the habit of improving practice can become institutionalized into the life of the school, or even more broadly. Teacher leaders make an active contribution to the school's collective wisdom not through bragging or attracting attention, but by sharing findings and extending the application of new practices.

Again, all three teachers have made significant contributions to their own schools and, more broadly, to the profession. Margaret's Big Lesson concept is used all over Michigan, and educators everywhere can log onto the Web site to receive inspiration and perhaps ideas for their own planning. In Elena's case, looping has now become one of the local models. Not only have all the teachers in her school seen the benefits and a few drawbacks to the approach, but the school now hosts visits from educators
from other schools who are investigating the practice for possible implementation in their own settings. And Tom’s group, by presenting their approach and findings to the school’s faculty and to the faculties of other schools in the district, has made a substantial contribution to the collective understanding of all the district’s educators.

Teacher leaders may also contribute to the collective wisdom of the profession through outreach to educators at other schools or presentations at state and local conferences. They recognize that the true benefits of improved practice are not realized when confined to a single setting; they must become incorporated into the more general professional community.

Dispositions
Dispositions largely define an individual’s approach to situations; when we think about a person, we recall less about that person’s skills or even interests than we do about their traits such as optimism and energy. Teacher leaders possess certain dispositions that influence their work with both students and colleagues. These dispositions share some characteristics with, but are not the same as, the habits of mind described by Art Costa and Bena Kallick (2000). Teacher leaders are “can do” people; they do not adopt a defeatist attitude when things go poorly. Instead, when the going gets tough, they get busy. But they don’t forge ahead blindly; they weigh options, consider alternatives, and assemble colleagues to help solve problems.

So what are the dispositions that tend to define teacher leaders? This list does not purport to be comprehensive, but it provides a sense of the personalities of those teachers who emerge to lead their colleagues in important initiatives.

Deep Commitment to Student Learning
First of all, teacher leaders have an essential focus on the core mission of enhancing student learning. They never lose sight of that purpose, even when such a focus requires bucking the system or pointing out to colleagues that a proposed approach or an existing practice will undermine learning for some students.

It is not sufficient to espouse, as many educators do, that “all children can learn” and then continue to live and work in schools where many students are not learning or at least are not learning to their potential or even close to it. Teacher leaders know that this is not an acceptable situation, and they focus their energies on changing it. No matter what project they take on, these teachers recognize that the scale by which the school and the efforts of the educators within it is measured is the extent to which it is able to promote high-level learning on the part of all students.

Optimism and Enthusiasm
Attempting new approaches or seeking better ways to achieve previous goals implies that a person believes that better results are possible. The teacher leader is not resigned to business as usual with less than optimal results. Instead, the actions of a teacher leader are driven by optimism and the belief that any situation can be improved.

Teacher leaders tend to look on the bright side of things. They hold high expectations for themselves and expect the best of others. When interpreting others’ actions or statements, they tend to attribute positive motives. This carries a danger, of course, of naivete; it is possible to be suckered in by the words and promises of others. But the consequence of always doubting the motives of others is worse: it is cynicism. Teacher leaders, by taking an optimistic view of life, tend to steer events in a positive direction.

A characteristic that sets some people apart from others and can be highly motivational to colleagues is enthusiasm. An attitude of “Let’s try it!” can infuse energy into an otherwise dispirited group of educators. This attitude is not, it should be clear, a matter of immature exuberance, where action is unrestrained by thought or planning. Instead, it represents energy to pursue a project with vigor and commitment.

Open-Mindedness and Humility
Teacher leaders are careful not to become stuck in their own ideas. They actively solicit the thoughts of others and ensure that those ideas receive careful consideration. In doing this, of course, they demonstrate the skill of looking at evidence, and indeed, they help specify what would even count as evidence of the success of a proposed approach. But as a disposition, open-mindedness conveys a willingness to consider alternatives rather than approaching colleagues with a full-fledged program that they are trying to convince colleagues to adopt. Such an approach may feel to other teachers like a solution in search of a problem.

In addition, open-mindedness is accompanied by humility. Teacher leaders don’t assume that their own idea is the best one or indeed that a proposed course of action will turn out to be the best approach. They are quite willing to admit that they don’t know everything and that information may surface that would cause a shift in their plan. This open-mindedness and humility, of course, are consequences of a deep
respect for colleagues and a commitment to collegiality. Respect and collegiality help to prevent the phenomenon, noted by some educators, of an energetic and skilled teacher who has lots of good ideas but a personality that can only be described as obnoxious. Teacher leaders who genuinely respect their colleagues and who convey the notion that the best ideas emerge from collective effort are rarely offensive to others.

**Courage and Willingness to Take Risks**

At times, teacher leaders must go out on a limb; success is not always guaranteed. In taking a new approach or persuading others to join in a project, they may have to go against the grain of traditional practice. Furthermore, they may be called on to gently and tactfully confront negativity or resistance from colleagues. Indeed, sometimes teacher leaders must find ways to challenge the larger school culture if it is characterized by cynicism and professional jealousy. The teacher leader is willing to swim upstream in such situations when the goal warrants it. Such actions require courage; school improvement is not for the faint of heart.

The connection between the courage of teacher leaders and the broader school culture is close. In order for educators to take risks, they must operate in an environment in which such courage is valued, where they are safe. This environment is established, by and large, by the administrative staff. But even within such a safe environment, not every teacher has the stomach to try a new approach, particularly one involving a significant departure from current practice; teacher leaders do.

**Confidence and Decisiveness**

Teacher leaders are individuals who have experienced success in their lives, frequently through their own hard work. Thus, they are reasonably confident of success in the future, provided they don’t make avoidable mistakes. This expectation of success gives them a degree of confidence that rubs off on others; it is contagious. Everyone wants to be associated with a successful project; by conveying confidence, teacher leaders persuade others to join in the effort.

Confidence contributes to both courage and risk taking. Educators are not likely to step out and try something new if they do not have confidence in their ability to pull it off. So an underlying confidence is essential for teacher leaders: confidence in their skill as teachers, confidence in their skill in thinking through a new approach, and confidence in their skill in persuading colleagues to join them.

Accompanying confidence is decisiveness. Teacher leaders know that when all is said and done, when the extensive discussions have run their course, action is necessary. This requires decisiveness in the face of uncertainty. Such decisiveness is accompanied, of course, by openness to the changing situation and conditions. It is not rational to pursue a course when it has become clear that it is not successful. So decisiveness is always accompanied by flexibility. But teacher leaders do not allow uncertainty to paralyze them and keep them from taking a course of action they believe to be the right one.

**Tolerance for Ambiguity**

Projects undertaken by teacher leaders are rarely planned in detail in advance. Instead, they are undertaken in response to a need or an opportunity and are subject to multiple midcourse corrections. It is in the nature of school improvement that many of the important issues can neither be known in advance nor planned for in detail. Therefore teacher leaders, in convincing colleagues to participate in a project, are inviting people to join them on a journey. They must be comfortable with the unstructured nature of the endeavor and be able to make adjustments as needed. But more important, teacher leaders do not feel the need for a detailed roadmap before the journey begins. They are able to go with the flow and are able to coordinate seemingly disparate aspects of a situation in their minds simultaneously. Teacher leaders can’t be rigid in their approach.

**Creativity and Flexibility**

Teaching and learning are complex endeavors, and schools are complex places. Even if an educator encounters a program or practice that seems to have merit and wants to implement it in her own setting, it is unlikely to be able to be imported wholesale. At the very least, the program or practice will have to be modified to fit the environment. Some situations won’t have models; in those cases, educators must create their own solutions. Teacher leaders are able to think creatively and flexibly and can encourage their colleagues to do the same.

- Few projects move along as planned; adjustments are needed. Teacher leaders don’t become trapped by their idea, sticking with it even in the face of evidence that it should be modified. They are flexible, able to stay true to the goal but willing to adjust the approach as needed.
Perseverance
Although flexibility is important, so is perseverance. A lot of success in implementing a new approach consists of holding firm even in the face of initial difficulty or resistance. The first attempt at anything is, practically by definition, more difficult than subsequent efforts will be. Everything is unknown and unfamiliar, and there are no established patterns. But as time goes on, routines are established and educators become more comfortable in the new practice.

Perseverance is not the same as stubbornness, of course; it must be tempered by flexibility and informed by reflection. But assuming that such reflection and flexibility are present, then an attitude of not giving up can inspire confidence in others. It gives them the strength to stay the course when they may be tempted to abandon it.

Willingness to Work Hard
Teacher leaders know that projects don't take care of themselves. They must be planned and implemented. Good ideas, without the hard work of planning and implementation, remain just good ideas. Real change, as Adam Urbanski (2004) has famously reminded us, is real hard. But teacher leaders are not only willing to work hard; they devise ways to work smart. And as noted above, they persevere in the face of setbacks and obstacles.

These dispositions are not displayed one at a time by teacher leaders; rather, they constitute a cluster of traits and ways of looking at the world that tend to reinforce one another. Teacher leaders are confident, open-minded, enthusiastic, optimistic, and flexible. They persevere and are willing to work both hard and smart. These traits, as much as the specific ideas teacher leaders bring to a project, motivate their colleagues to join in and stay with that project.

All three teachers described in Chapter 1 displayed these traits. They approached their projects with energy and enthusiasm, optimistic that their efforts would yield positive benefits. They were open-minded to new approaches and persevered in their pursuit of a goal. And in convincing others to join them in the effort, they were not only persuasive but they also demonstrated both creativity and flexibility. Tom, in particular, was also courageous; he offered his own teaching as the first example of practice for his colleagues to examine. Taking that sort of risk required courage and trust in his colleagues that they would not abuse his vulnerability. All these dispositions, in addition to the skills described earlier, embody what it takes to be a successful teacher leader.

The dispositions of teacher leaders as described here also contribute to exemplary teaching. In their work with students, excellent teachers are also optimistic, confident, flexible, and creative. The dispositions are the same; teacher leaders simply exhibit them in the context of leadership activities with their colleagues.

The Administrative Role
Teacher leaders do not work alone; their activities and projects are facilitated by strong and sensitive administrative engagement. Some of the essential roles played by administrators concern creating an environment and culture in which teacher leadership can develop; that is the focus of Chapter 4. In addition to promoting a positive and professional culture, how do administrators contribute to the work of teacher leaders?

Some teacher leaders report that the best administrators, from their point of view, are those who take a laissez-faire attitude toward teacher activities; these teachers report, favorably, that the principal stays out of their way. In some situations this attitude may help teacher leaders accomplish what they want to do. But a weak administrator could actually thwart the work of energetic teacher leaders. And an inflexible administrator following a highly bureaucratic, authoritarian style might discourage initiative on the part of teachers. While a weak administrative style might, in general, be better for teacher leaders than a dictatorial one, it is hardly optimal. Better than either is an administrator who actively supports and promotes the development of teacher leadership, who honors the contribution of teachers to instructional improvement, and who supports teacher leaders in their work.

In supporting teacher leaders, the role of administrators can be, and ideally is, important; what that role is, and how administrators can do it, is described below.

Set the Tone and Culture and Maintain the Vision
Although every member of the professional staff has a responsibility to respect the school’s vision for student learning and to promote a culture of hard work, respect, and professional inquiry, administrators play a unique role. They are, after all, the official leaders of the school; their approach to issues of culture matter, and they matter a lot. Site administrators convey messages from district headquarters; they let teachers know what districtwide projects and mandates must be implemented. It is the administrator's
responsibility to ensure that the entire staff understands and demonstrates commitment to the school's goals for student learning. While teacher leaders exercise their influence by persuasion, administrators have the authority of their position, when needed, to back up requests. The matter of culture, and the administrator's role in establishing it, is the subject of Chapter 4.

Convey and Build Confidence in Teachers
Teachers unaccustomed to taking initiative and exercising leadership may not believe that their ideas will be valued. They may not even be sure their ideas have merit. Administrators are in a position to send important signals to teachers that their ideas are important and that the teachers play a critical role in improving the school's program. These signals are sent in many ways; among the most effective are the informal ones, in which principals invite individual teachers to discuss more fully an idea the teacher has put forward. Alternatively, principals can give public recognition—for example, at a faculty meeting—to an idea that has come from a teacher and invite others to explore it.

Clarify Ideas and Plan an Approach
A teacher may approach the administrator with the germ of an idea, a perceived opportunity to improve the school's program. But the idea is likely to not be fully developed. It may conflict or be redundant with another initiative of which the teacher is unaware. The principal has an important responsibility to help the teacher leader hone the concept and develop a plan of action that is likely to succeed. This can take the form of asking clarifying questions, suggesting ideas, proposing alternatives, or helping to talk it through. Whatever form it takes, the engagement of the principal conveys professional respect and the sense that the teacher's thoughts and ideas are valued. Moreover, the resulting approach is likely to be superior to the original, simply by having the benefit of another's perspective and expertise.

Marshal Support from Downtown
Some initiatives can be implemented solely within a school; others need to be condoned by others in the district organization. Principals play an important role as advocates for projects initiated by educators in their school, ensuring that the projects are understood and supported by the larger administrative team. There may be opportunities to coordinate an effort with an initiative in another school; discussions across the entire district can bring these opportunities to light.

Locate Additional Resources
Administrators are typically connected with district and other external resources that can support an initiative. Such advocacy is essential. In addition, administrators frequently have access to other support networks, such as business roundtables or foundations. Teacher leaders themselves, of course, might make a presentation to a business or parent group. However, the resources are not likely to be liberated on the strength of a teacher's presentation alone; the principal's sponsorship is essential.

Demonstrate Support to the Ranks
Teacher leaders, when they embark on a project or an investigation, are taking a professional risk. They are demonstrating initiative and assertiveness in front of their colleagues, and they may be regarded with suspicion by the old guard. This is partly a cultural issue. But at least the administrator, by publicly offering support to the teacher leader, can send a signal to the entire faculty that good ideas and good questions are valued. It is a concrete way in which the administrator can support the efforts of a teacher leader.

Present Innovations to the Public
Any new practice must be understood and valued by the public, particularly by the parents of students involved. Insofar as the principal is the official voice of the school, it is important that the message emanate from the principal's office. Teacher leaders may be involved in this effort, but it cannot happen without the principal.

As mentioned briefly in the leadership stories in Chapter 1, Margaret, Elena's, and Tom's principals facilitated the projects they undertook. The administrators helped Margaret and Elena hone their ideas after they had given them preliminary shape. Tom's principal provided time at a faculty meeting for his initial presentation. When necessary, the administrators provided or located resources to pursue the ideas; they gave the school's official stamp of approval to the ideas as they were being developed. The administrators did much more than get out of the way; they played positive and supportive roles in the evolution of these teacher leaders.
Teacher leaders, in exercising their leadership, follow some general behavioral patterns. Regardless of the setting in which they work or the area of school life in which they operate, teacher leaders display the skills and dispositions described here. Some may be more important in some settings than in others, but they all come into play to some extent.

In sum, true teacher leadership is exercised spontaneously and may be demonstrated by any teacher in the school; it is not conferred by role. Furthermore, it is not a permanent state; depending on their personal and professional situations, teachers may elect to be involved in a leadership effort one year but not another. Lastly, teacher leadership is fluid. Once a teacher has demonstrated certain skills, he establishes credibility with colleagues and is recognized as a person who gets things done. And in getting things done, in improving the school's program, teacher leaders demonstrate certain skills and dispositions.

A framework for teacher leadership is not complete without consideration of the school in which such leadership is exercised. This critical concept, the extent to which teachers will be able to acquire and exercise leadership, in addition, when teacher leaders exercise their influence on educational change, so in specific areas of school life. For example, they might start a new practice or they might take initiative in establishing it.

While the implementation of a new practice represents a good initiative reflects important aspects of the school's culture and vision of high-level learning for students. Therefore, all leaders within a cultural context encompassing the school's culture's influences not so much what people do but how they do it. How individuals treat one another, the expectations people have of each other, the behavior, and the belief structure underlying school practice. For a comprehensive investigation of school culture, see Deal and Peterson (1992).

The culture of the school has an important influence on how and the extent to which it can achieve positive results for its students. A school's culture is not a trivial matter nor an afterthought. Rather, issues of school culture, dysfunctional culture can undermine the efforts of even the most skilled teacher leaders.