Leading and Learning: Leadership, Change, and Challenge in a Professional Development Initiative

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LEADERSHIP, CHANGE, AND CHALLENGE IN A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

Dissertation-in-Practice by:

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Abstract

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Schools seeking to increase student achievement often employ professional development strategies to institute instructional reforms, yet research offers little guidance on how leadership behaviors might support professional development aimed at district reform and instructional change. This qualitative case study examined the following research questions in a suburban Massachusetts district:

1. What is the role of leadership in an initiative to change literacy instruction in a small, suburban district? (a) How is leadership distributed, if at all, in this initiative? (b) What leadership behaviors, if any, do teachers and administrators view as contributing to or limiting to positive instructional change in the literacy initiative? Who is exercising these leadership behaviors? (c) What leadership behaviors support or limit engagement in the initiative?
2. How, if at all, do the professional development strategies utilized in this literacy initiative build capacity for teacher and administrator growth and further change?

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with six district leaders, including four elementary principals, the superintendent, and literacy coach; observations of Literacy Leadership Team meetings and study groups; a written teacher questionnaire; and a reflexive journal. Findings revealed that participants favorably viewed the reform-oriented professional development activities and reported that instructional changes had occurred in their schools. Discrepant perspectives on leadership affected its successful distribution. Time and communication concerns surfaced deeper, adaptive challenges related to the collective understanding of the initiative’s vision and priorities, the enactment of instructional leadership by principals and teachers, and trust between stakeholders. Recommendations that arose from the findings provide guidance to the district about how to build professional capacity, shared meaning, distributed leadership, sustainability, and trust.
Executive Summary

Schools face significant challenges as they seek to prepare students for the 21st century and as they meet the increasing demands of standards-based reform (Elmore, 2000). These challenges often call for contradictory goals and measures, such as standardized curriculum, assessments, and outcomes on the one hand and increased flexibility and responsiveness on the other. In order to meet these challenges, school and district administrators must increase their understanding of how leadership behaviors can support targeted instructional improvements, as well as necessary cultural and leadership changes that make those improvements sustainable.

This research examined how teachers and administrators perceived the leadership of a professional development initiative and what professional development strategies led to instructional change in Feltonboro, a small suburban school district in Massachusetts. In an effort to improve student achievement, the district decided to make significant changes in literacy instruction. Feltonboro has faced leadership turnover in the last five years, exemplified by the fact that the district has had three superintendents in four years. At the elementary level, the longest tenured principal has been in her position for only eight years.

Change was at the heart of this study. The district's stated goal for the literacy initiative was to build teacher capacity in instruction and assessment of language arts through professional development. Through interviews, observations of literacy
meetings, and document analysis\(^1\) we examined how leadership was enacted in this initiative and how the professional development strategies might build capacity for further change. Given the current educational climate, characterized by accountability measures and widespread pressure for school reform, the relevance of this study is particularly salient. Therefore, this study provides useful data regarding growth and sustainability to the target district as they engage in professional development initiatives. It also adds to the research literature on leadership for district level instructional improvement.

We began our research operationally defining leadership as a practice that involves influencing and guiding others toward achieving desired goals. A leader is an individual; leadership is the enacted behaviors this individual employs. As we conducted our study and analyzed data, we became aware that issues of culture, change, and trust interacting in a complex system affected many of the leadership behaviors and instructional changes. This report is intended to provide the district with feedback and possible next steps that it may take to further its work as well as add to the research base on how leadership behaviors might influence professional development and instructional change.

\(^1\) Hour-long interviews were conducted with each of the four elementary principals, the superintendent, and literacy coach. Two full-day meetings of the Literacy Leadership Team were observed, along with three separate days of study groups, with multiple observers each time.
Research on Leadership and Instructional Change

A review of the literature explored the nexus between the change process, reform-oriented professional development, and distributed leadership, with coaching as a potential example of both reform-oriented professional development and distributed leadership. Though empirically based research is limited, there has been a great deal written about leadership, professional development, and coaching as avenues of reform.

As much as change was at the heart of this study, trust is at the core of successful change. Ergo, the literature review drew on the definitions of trust proposed by both Bryk and Schneider (2006) and Louis (2006). We also looked to Gordon (2008); Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, and Chrispeels (2008); and Cranston (2011) in order to clarify the impact of trust in a school initiative.

As professional development was the vehicle for change in Feltonboro, the literature review drew primarily on Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon’s (2001) understanding of reform-oriented professional development. Among others, Garet et al. (2001), Penuel et al. (2007), and Guskey (2002) provide insight into the characteristics of effective reform-oriented professional development. Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), Emihovich and Battaglia (2000), and Tschannen-Moran (2009) address the juncture of leadership and professional development, while Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001, 2004), Elmore (2000), and Gronn (2002, 2003, 2008) discuss how leadership might be distributed in a school system.

To identify a connection between coaching and high-quality, reform-oriented professional development and to explore the connection between coaching and
leadership, the literature review chiefly examined Knight (2007), Barkley (2005), and Mangin (2005). These researchers provided the scholarly framework upon which we explored the nexus between the change process, reform-oriented professional development, and distributed leadership, with coaching as a concrete example of such leadership distributed outside the traditional, central hierarchy. Discussion about the way in which these factors overlap, connect, and support each other is limited in the research. Additional research is needed that examines essential practices for change within a school district. This research should explore the promise of each strategy identified above as means to build capacity across the learning organization, with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement.
Findings

Three major findings emerged from the study:

• Professional Development Strategies: The participants in the literacy initiative viewed expertise, competency, modeling, classroom support, study groups and coaching favorably. Implementation of these strategies resulted in instructional change.

• Leadership Enactment: The initiative began with central office and continued to be centrally driven throughout the study. Attempts to distribute leadership through the initiative met with varying levels of success and central office administrators, building principals, and teachers voiced and demonstrated different perspectives about leadership.

• Leadership Challenges: Each stakeholder group encountered technical and adaptive challenges that affected their engagement and enactment of leadership.

Perceptions of Professional Development Strategies

Across the district we found that teachers had engaged in change in their classroom instructional practice. Teachers and principals identified specific professional development strategies utilized by the district that supported that instructional change. Themes that emerged included the expertise of the consultants and Literacy Coach, and the job-embedded nature (on-the-job learning) of the professional development strategies. Study participants identified these as critical and successful components of the literacy initiative.
Participants reported that professional development had completely changed in the district over the last few years and changes were very positive. As one principal shared, “There’s been an incredible change in the level of professional development that is being offered to classroom teachers.” These prevalent positive attitudes regarding professional development strategies within Feltonboro’s literacy initiative bode well for the continued professional growth of the staff and ultimately for the capacity building goal of the district.

**Expertise of the outside consultants.** The expertise and competence of these consultants was overwhelmingly recognized throughout the district. All the principals interviewed viewed the two outside consultants as competent, engaging, and working to build a common understanding about literacy within the district. All four principals shared that they believed the choice of these specific outside consultants was an excellent decision and that they were effective. The literacy coach also spoke of the high level of competence and expertise exhibited by the outside consultants. Teachers’ literacy conversations with consultants, as well as comments on professional development evaluation forms, noted a high regard for their expertise and level of competence.

**Competency of the literacy coach.** Coaching was another area where all interviewed participants expressed favorable attitudes. This classroom support was welcomed and appreciated within the district and seen as enriching the consultants’ work. The competence of the coach and the job-embedded nature of her work were critical factors. As in the case of outside consultants, the expertise of the coach was critical to the positive perceptions and success of the coaching professional development strategy.
addition, it appeared that there were expectations that the coaching model would be a
means to the sustainability of the initiative and a way to develop teacher capacity within
each building. Central office administrators, principals, and teachers expressed
appreciation of the coach’s role and level of competence and expertise. The
acknowledged expertise of the coach supported the expertise of the consultants, all of
which employed a job-embedded model.

**Modeling by outside consultants.** While competency was a critical factor in participants' positive perceptions of the outside consultants, the modeling they provided
while working with teachers also proved critical to changing literacy instructional
practices. Principals and teachers reported that the demonstration lessons were the “best
part.” This approach of teaching, modeling, and supporting practice towards
independence is not only a robust model for teacher learning, it can also be extended to
student learning and ultimately to the ongoing professional growth of teachers beyond
this literacy initiative. This demonstration provided by the consultants sets the stage for
the coach to follow-up in classrooms.

**Classroom support by the literacy coach.** Administrators and teachers alike
expressed support for this newly created position of literacy coach. They described the
follow-up in the classrooms as supportive of the outside consultants’ work and fortifying
the instructional change in which teachers were engaging. The establishment of this role,
a model that is job-embedded by nature, within Feltonboro has been a very positive
strategy and could be critically important to the sustainability of this initiative and teacher
growth.
Study groups. Attitudes expressed regarding the study groups, grade-level and building-based sessions conducted by consultants to discuss new literacy strategies, were mostly favorable. This structure supported learning new content and pedagogy. This venue also provided a structure for sharing teachers’ voices and collaboration around instructional change. The professional development structure of study groups is supporting the growth of teachers as they work to change literacy practices within Feltonboro.

Professional learning culture. Yet another strategy employed by the district to foster the goal of capacity building was to establish voluntary after-school study groups, which were called “professional learning communities.” Only one principal acknowledged that these were effective at her school; this was because all of her teachers had chosen to participate where there was limited teacher participation at the other schools. Through principal interviews, as well as the central office data, it became clear that there were teacher union issues, which constrained the implementation of this specific professional development strategy. Though this one formal structure designed by the district was not embraced as it was designed, the cultivation of a professional learning

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These study groups were referred to as “professional learning communities.” In education research and discourse, however, this term typically refers to larger changes in culture and practice than a single structure (e.g. DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). We have avoided using “professional learning community” here in order to avoid confusion between this larger idea and the structure used in Feltonboro.
culture has been at the core of all professional development strategies employed by Feltonboro.

**Implementing new instructional strategies.** We found that the majority of teachers across the Feltonboro District engaged in changing their classroom instructional practice despite low levels of teacher engagement in leadership practices and professional learning communities. Even when teachers felt stressed by expectations and the change process, they appeared to work to change instructional practices. Behaviors demonstrating instructional change were reported at all the elementary schools, though to differing degrees. Even at the school with the most union pressure, the literacy experts reported that teachers were engaged in changing literacy instruction. This suggests that the coach and consultant-mediated literacy initiative is a vehicle that can support positive instructional change in Feltonboro.

**Student literacy behaviors.** Instructional change was also evidenced through teachers’ and principals’ observations of students. Though we cannot draw conclusions regarding impact on student achievement, we did notice in the data that based on teacher and principal reports, students’ literacy behaviors were changing. Changes included transferring and applying skills to other areas of the curriculum, the use of strategies in different settings, talk about text, improved writing, and expanded language and vocabulary.

**Leadership Enactment**

The goal of the Feltonboro central office in this initiative was to decentralize or distribute leadership among the principals and teachers in the district. Impacting how
various stakeholders enacted leadership were their preexisting conceptions of what leadership is; there was no common understanding of leadership among these groups. Building principals relied on outside instructional experts to lead instructional change, yet promoted teacher engagement in the initiative by attending to teacher morale and supporting technical changes. Teachers involved in the Literacy Leadership Team\(^3\) voiced that they expected the positional authorities to take the lead and expressed concern about being referred to as leaders. In short, each of these stakeholder groups looked to another to provide more leadership in relation to the district’s literacy initiative instead of embracing leadership opportunities. While the central office encouraged the distribution of leadership, principals and teachers continued to view leadership in a hierarchical manner.

**The role of central office administrators.** Central office administrators took three major steps to make the literacy initiative a priority in Feltonboro. They reallocated funds to hire an in-district literacy expert to coach classroom teachers and help them change their instructional practices; they established the Literacy Leadership Team and

\(^3\) In district documents, this group is called the *Literacy Leadership Team*. In observed conversations the group was referred to in this way, but also occasionally as the *Literacy Leadership Committee*. It is typically referred to as the *LLC* in abbreviated form, including in district documentation. While incongruous, we have retained the official and more commonly used conventions of *Literacy Leadership Team* and *LLC* throughout this document.
authorized release time for group members to collaboratively plan the implementation of the literacy initiative; and they made a four-year commitment, at a total projected cost of $200,000, to contract two outside literacy experts. Additionally, one central office administrator wrote that they presently mandate principals to attend LLC meetings. All of these indicate that central office administrators made this elementary literacy reform initiative a district priority.

**Developing teacher leadership.** Data reveal that district level administrators also had an objective to develop teacher leadership in the context of the initiative. Documents from the initial meetings of the LLC indicate that all members on the committee would be involved in the development of a vision and leadership of the initiative. The Director of Elementary Education was convinced that the expectations of teacher leadership of the LLC members were widely understood by teachers. She was taken aback when she discovered that it was not. The teachers perceived teacher leadership as a directive and they did not embrace the idea. Teachers on the LLC were surprised and confused by the expectation.

**Principal instructional leadership.** In addition to teacher leadership, the superintendent and the Director of Elementary Education set out to develop principal instructional leadership in this initiative. Principals reported that in previous years in Feltonboro, they were not asked to lead district instructional initiatives, but instead deferred to central office leadership.

Despite the aim of the superintendent, we did not find principals engaging in instructional leadership. Instead, we found that principals were deferring the opportunity
for instructional and adaptive leadership to the central office and to the consultants. Principals were highly supportive of the ongoing initiative and mostly supported it through technical behaviors (management focused), as opposed to adaptive behaviors (that target cultural change that can involve attitudes, beliefs, trust and relationships). All principals said their physical presence at the LLC meetings and study groups was important. They each understood that they needed to learn with and be with their teachers to support the work of the instructional change. All of the principals indicated that their presence was critical, but that this posed a challenge for each.

**Consultants.** The consultants were hired to lead the instructional (technical) change, but their role quickly evolved into leaders of a district cultural (adaptive) change. Principals’ references to leadership focused on the central administration or the outside consultants, not the teachers or their own roles as school leaders. Principals deferred leadership to the outside consultants because of their level of expertise and professional credibility. In this initiative, it is the consultants and not the principals asking the teachers to change instructionally and culturally.

**Teachers.** Inclusion of teacher voice was identified as a central office objective from the very start of the initiative and some participants identified this as the beginning of the cultural change in the district. Nonetheless, the teacher members of the Literacy Leadership Team, like the principals, expressed a more hierarchical view of leadership. They did not necessarily view their role and voice as that of guiding or leading.

Teachers did two things in the initiative: they took direction and provided feedback related to the implementation of instructional change. Teachers clearly did not
want to be giving the direction, but were happy to problem solve with the group around issues of the implementation of the initiative. They were invested in the instructional change, but most were resistant to the idea of teachers leading it. Tasks that they seemed most comfortable with were ones where they could serve as key communicators, but not leaders or decision makers.

The Literacy Leadership Team represented a structure to foster teacher voice. The establishment of the LLC created teacher engagement for the instructional change. This committee did not create the desired level of cultural change related to teacher engagement in leadership. Though the promise of teacher voice was viewed as a very positive factor, the promise of teacher leadership was not realized.

Central office structured the literacy initiative to encourage principal and teacher leadership. Principals and teachers continued to view leadership in a hierarchical manner. The principals were most comfortable with technical leadership and mostly deferred adaptive leadership to the consultants and to central office. Teachers resisted the label of leader and associated behaviors. Consultants facilitated the instructional change, but evolved into the voice of the cultural change by addressing issues of trust and communication.

The collocation between the teachers’ viewpoints that they were “just” teachers and not being heard, the principals’ perceptions that the teachers were avoiding leadership because it was “too hard,” and the central office’s stance that teacher leadership must be developed inform a pivotal issue. The data show crucial points during the initiative where teachers felt that their contributions were undervalued. Data also
support that there was a level of conscious avoidance on behalf of teachers to fully engage in the leadership endeavor of communication despite verbal and written exchanges that this was an expectation of serving on the LLC. This study did not yield data to support that the cause of teacher avoidance of leadership was due to teacher perception of leadership being a difficult task.

**Leadership Challenges**

Each stakeholder group reported obstacles that affected the enactment of leadership in the initiative. These challenges were both technical, prescriptive changes and adaptive, complex challenges, the answers to which require new learning (Heifetz, 1994).

**Technical challenges.** Some of the challenges faced by leaders in the initiative were technical. While powerful and potentially calling for changes in practice, they presented issues that did not require new learning.

**Communication.** Communication after LLC meetings was sporadic and varied in content. All stakeholder groups described inconsistency of communication between school sites. All stakeholder groups expressed the need for everyone to stay on the same page regarding literacy instruction and wanted to develop a consistent communication plan with responsibilities for both the delivery and receipt of information. This consistent communication around implementation barriers and instructional language is essential for the success and sustainability of the initiative. The LLC in Feltonboro established and implemented a communication plan that was consistent across all school sites. Given the infancy of this communication plan, the level of success that it has generated is unknown.
**Time.** Lack of time to interact with colleagues was an obstacle to the enactment of leadership in the Feltonboro literacy initiative. Teachers felt that they did not have time to communicate with peers regarding the logistical and instructional aspects of the change. Teachers expressed that they did not have time to process new learning with their colleagues and thus create a sense of shared meaning as a challenge. The willingness of principals to step in and “solve” one facet of the time issue resulted in a lost opportunity to empower teachers to have control over the resource of professional time. In addition to processing time, the principals related that finding the time to attend the professional development sessions as a challenge. Principals felt that it was taxing to be at the workshops, be visible, and be present, and to learn with the teachers.

**Adaptive challenges.** Other challenges to leadership that Feltonboro faced in the initiative were adaptive. These required new learning and potentially change in beliefs and values in order to effectively confront them.

**Instructional leadership capacity.** We found a tension between the philosophies of the superintendent and past practice in Feltonboro regarding the leadership required of the building principals in terms of instructional initiatives. The leadership expectations of the superintendent conflicted with the principals’ enactment of leadership. The principals were aware the superintendent’s expectation meant performing in the role of instructional leader, but identified Dr. French’s view of the principals’ role as a change from previous superintendents. The principals’ references to their leadership were defined in terms of managerial tasks. When discussing leadership roles, the principals indicated that they felt strain from the expectations placed on them from central office administrators.
Teacher and administrator disconnect. The majority of LLC members identified structural and cultural obstacles as the greatest impediment to change in Feltonboro. A cultural obstacle that several teachers identified was a disconnect between teachers and administrators. An illustration of this disconnect was the lack of principal attendance and participation in the LLC meetings. Teachers were cognizant of absent principals, despite the attendance of central office administrators. Principals expressed understanding of their role to be that of learner and problem-solver in collaboration with teachers. Teachers, however, felt that building level administrators were not present and learning with them in a true professional collaboration. The teachers’ view of the disconnect between teachers and administrators appeared to be accurate on the surface. Principals said their role was to be learners, supporters, and problem solvers in the context of the initiative, but their lack of presence at a major juncture in the initiative resulted in teachers’ feeling alone in the process. Principals further verbalized that they understood that they were not “fully present” during the activities because of the competing demands of their jobs. Because this recognition was shared between teachers and principals, the disconnect in Feltonboro appears not to be disagreement about what is important; but about how leadership is enacted and by whom.

Vision. Another cultural impediment to the development of collaborative leadership was the lack of shared vision for all elements of the initiative. Despite assertions from central office administrators and Feltonboro’s principals that the vision for the initiative was clear and developed by consensus, not all teachers agreed that there was clarity around the meaning of the vision. Many teacher members of the LLC stated
that Feltonboro’s vision for literacy was embedded with “confusion” and lack of “anchoring [to] the big vision” in the schools. They expressed that teachers generally did not know where the initiative was heading in the longer term. This discord highlighted the teachers’ view of their limited impact on the development of the vision. The perception that they were not involved in the creation of the vision impaired the level of teacher leadership in for the initiative. This disjunction between the views of the teachers and administrators further illuminated the cultural challenges to the distribution of leadership at all levels.

**Expectations for teacher leadership.** Most administrators, both central office and building level, described the literacy initiative as beginning to bring about change in the district. The central office leadership highlighted the development of teacher leadership as a necessary cultural change. Teachers expressed confusion about their roles in the initiative and reluctance to assume leadership roles. Teachers pointed back to the traditional hierarchy of one person with positional authority being in charge. This confusion and reluctance to undertake leadership roles on the part of teachers surprised administrators. In their individual interviews, administrators commonly described a situation where teachers were offered the opportunity to provide input and shape the direction of the initiative, but either actively or passively chose not to take part. Feltonboro teachers appear to be struggling with how to reconcile the voice being offered to them with how they see their work in the classroom and their relationships with colleagues.
Readiness for a professional learning culture. The LLC identified the development of a professional learning culture in Feltonboro as a necessary objective for the district to raise achievement. Teacher comments highlighted the lack of readiness for teachers to take initiative in establishing that culture. Teachers consistently stated that they did not want to be known as leaders. Such statements indicate that teachers may regard themselves as “just” teachers and feel powerless to create the professional culture that they want. This also indicates a district history of low trust in Feltonboro, where teachers perceive the “in group” as being those with the title of leader and the “out” group being somehow below that group on the status scale.

Trust. The role of trust emerged as the key element influencing interactions between teachers and administrators, and can be seen as a theme running through each of the challenges already described. Central office administrators acknowledged a lack of trust between administrators and teachers. The superintendent publicly identified the district as a “low-trust” district and noted that the issue of trust must be openly and clearly addressed in Feltonboro. Several building principals described a lack of trust between teachers themselves, particularly in relationships across buildings. Though there is no direct evidence of a lack of relational trust between teachers and administrators, one possible example of indirect evidence is the lack of teacher response to our research team’s multiple requests for teachers to participate in this research through focus groups, individual interviews, and written questionnaires. A member of our research team is a Feltonboro administrator and this may have influenced teachers’ reluctance to participate. We did receive six responses to our written questionnaire, however, and three mentioned
increased levels of trust as a successful aspect of the initiative. Teachers expressed skepticism that the voice they were being offered in decision-making was genuine.

**Implications**

The Feltonboro School District purposefully sought to provide its educators with high quality, reform-oriented professional development that was sustained over time, job-embedded, and included supports such as coaching and study groups. Many researchers assert that this type of professional development is needed to sustain change and teacher learning, thereby building capacity (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Garet et al., 2001; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, Gallagher & Lawrence, 2007). The viability of Feltonboro’s choices of professional development strategies is well documented in the literature (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovksy, 2005; Garet et al., 2001; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). Changes in instructional practice were facilitated through the work of the outside consultants and the in-class support of the literacy coach. The successful facilitation implied a level of trust and respect for the coach and consultants, as well as an appreciation for their expertise. Research has also documented the relationship of trust to the success or failure of educational reforms (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louis, 2006; Gordon, 2008; Cranston, 2011). One of the four behaviors that Louis (2006) identifies as being essential to trusting relationships is competence. The outside consultants and in-district coach demonstrated high levels of competence, resulting in teacher trust.

While Feltonboro adopted professional development strategies that aligned with the research on high quality reform-oriented professional development, without trust
these strategies would have failed (Covey, 2006). It appears however, that the strategy of combining outside consultants and coaching was viewed positively in Feltonboro due to trust built over time through demonstrated competence. This established trust might enable further growth as the initiative proceeds and should assist in informing next steps.

Changes were reported in teacher practice across the district but the deeper collaborative piece of sharing practice, embracing leadership roles, engaging in inquiry, and reflecting within a professional learning culture – what Peter Gronn refers to as *conjoint agency* (2008) and a marker of effectively distributed leadership – continues to challenge the district. This resembled the two faces of the Roman God, Janus. One face, looking towards the future, is that of an engaged practitioner as he/she works to implement new literacy practices within his/her own classroom. The other face, looking towards the past, is that of a distruster, fearful to lead peers and attend sessions aimed at developing professional learning communities. Fullan (1985) clearly indicates that it is possible for this split in personality to exist as a district works through the change process towards deeper, sustainable reforms. Deep, sustainable change requires “creat[ing] environments in which individuals expect to have their personal ideas and practices subjected to the scrutiny of their colleagues, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subjected to the scrutiny of individuals” (p. 20). All of these factors depend on establishing a culture of respect and trust. Without deeper organizational change, reform will not be deeply realized in Feltonboro.

A question of sustainability remains. Research on sustainability indicates that it is threatened when the work of improving instructional practice is undertaken
autonomously (Elmore, 2000; Emihovich & Battaglia, 2000; Fullan, 2007; Little, 1990). Changes to instructional practice within individual classrooms will not be enough. Sharing practice, engaging in inquiry and enacting leadership is needed and the foundation for all of this lies in the building of a culture of trust. Relational trust has been characterized as the “strongest facilitating factor for developing schools as professional learning communities” (Cranston, 2011, p. 69). As Gordon (2008) notes, “educational reform is a complex cultural endeavor as opposed to an individual enterprise. Attributing a reform’s effectiveness to individual commitment is to underestimate the power of preexisting cultural values and norms” (p. 33).

Administrators in Feltonboro were aware from the outset that this literacy initiative involved instructional change – change in instruction and student performance was at the center of the initiative – and prepared for that process. Thus they worked to build teacher capacity in literacy skills through professional development and emphasized urgency through examination of student learning data. The administration also worked to increase teacher voice and decision-making. The literature describes all these strategies as essential to distributed leadership and change. What was not anticipated in Feltonboro was the need to build the leadership capacity of teachers and administrators. Interestingly, in one of the seminal descriptions of distributed leadership, Richard Elmore (2000) described as essential the need to build capacity to meet any expectations. Most research on distributed leadership, however, describes this in terms of building instructional capacity, not leadership capacity – something that impeded the initiative in Feltonboro.
The relationship between administrators and teachers during the initial phase of the initiative was characterized by missed opportunities to share ownership of the initiative and build leadership capacity of teachers. The distribution of leadership is situated in an educational community where teachers have historically been openly skeptical of leadership, where a “disconnect” exists between positional leaders and teachers, and where an absence of trust influences interactions between them. This context appears to have created an urgent need to treat distribution of leadership itself as change – which neither the research nor the leadership in Feltonboro initially anticipated.

The lack of trust, along with other historical and cultural conceptions of leadership in the district, may prevent teachers on the whole from seeing a change in the form of more voice in the process as desirable. Rather than helping to build trust, the attempt to distribute leadership enhanced an existent culture of limited trust of positional leadership in the district.

At the beginning of this study, we anticipated finding that leadership would be widely distributed from the central office to building principals and then among teachers. We did not find the expected distribution and uncovered a district that was beginning to recognize the need to engage in necessary cultural changes in order to gain wide support for the literacy initiative. We found that leadership for this literacy initiative remained primarily at the district office level. Thus several cultural changes need to occur prior to distributing leadership effectively.
Recommendations

Many positive changes have occurred as a result of the literacy initiative in Feltonboro. Teachers and administrators report higher levels of student engagement with text and observations of classroom discussions related to text. All stakeholders shared and validated positive evaluations about the in-district coach and the literacy consultants due to their competence and expertise. The district and initiative also face challenges, particularly in the form of deeper, adaptive issues. As a result, recommendations for the Feltonboro School District focus on building professional capacity, shared meaning, leadership, sustainability, and trust. Each of these areas is interdependent and thus a recommendation in one area may directly impact another.

Professional Capacity

The literacy coaching model is an example of high-quality, reform-oriented professional development that has been employed successfully in the district. Our research data indicated that attitudes toward this model were favorable across district stakeholder groups and that teachers have increasingly accessed the literacy coach for support and guidance. The district should continue to strengthen and expand the literacy coaching model as one component of a long-term plan to further promote and sustain literacy reform in the Feltonboro School District. At the same time, the role of building principal has undergone a shift in the past five years with the change in superintendents. Building the capacity of and supporting the principals to carry out this role is critical to the success of this initiative.
• The role description for the literacy coach should be clearly and publically articulated, and the workday of the coach being primarily allocated to direct interactions with teachers. Research on instructional coaching indicates that administrators must publically endorse the coach and demonstrate explicit support for the coaches in their schools (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier 2009; Mraz, Algozzine & Watson, 2008).

• We found that two out of three critical components of successful literacy coaching (Mangin, 2005) in Feltonboro – developing relationships and engaging in non-threatening leadership were established, but that the third component, an identified subset of teachers who would benefit from close work with the coach, has not been established. This should be established in a way that the coach and identified teachers will work within the boundaries of the coaching relationship, maintaining the non-evaluative role of the coach (e.g. Barkley, 2005; Knight 2007; Toll, 2006).

• The expectations for literacy instruction should be publically derived in collaboration with the LLC, reading coach, consultants, principals, and central office administrators; principals should publically uphold expectations for instruction in literacy that are articulated as a result. Staff meetings, intranet sites, principal announcements, and district communications are all possible vehicles for communication.

• The new system for educator evaluation adopted in Massachusetts emphasizes greater professionalization of teaching and educational leadership, which
directly relates to the initiative goals of increasing leadership and voice among stakeholder groups. The district should leverage the collaborative goal setting and emphasis on capacity building as opportunities to strengthen the initiative, connecting the two explicitly. Within the system, teachers should design professional practice goals for meeting the communicated instructional expectations of the literacy initiative.

- The new evaluation system also emphasizes goal setting with principals. As part of their growth plans developed in conjunction with the superintendent, principals should focus on instructional leadership and creating the necessary conditions for teachers in their buildings to meet the collaboratively identified objectives for instruction. Support should be offered to assist principals in this work, potentially through a principal coaching model, a critical friends group, or an alternate structure that will provide support while building capacity to manage the many demanding facets of their jobs.

**Shared Meaning**

According to Fullan (2007), the reculturing of schools that constitutes deep and lasting school reform requires changes in behaviors and conceptions founded on shared intellectual and moral meaning. From this perspective, shared meaning is one indication of a successful change process. In Feltonboro, there is a lack of a shared definition of leadership among and between stakeholder groups. The lack of this shared meaning and vision for leadership impedes the distribution of leadership across the initiative. This results in teachers not seeing leadership as their role and looking to positional authorities
to assume that role, and to principals perceiving leadership for this initiative as an expectation they cannot meet given the demands of their work. Feltonboro should undertake the activities described below in order to hone the leadership behaviors of actors across the district and continually connect their collective actions more closely to the prioritized aims of the initiative.

- Continue to collaboratively refine a collective, compelling, and shared vision for the literacy initiative and leadership within the initiative. Senge (1990) identifies vision as compelling people to act towards meeting the goals of an organization. A shared vision will allow teachers and administrators to become deeply committed to the work involved in this initiative, mitigating feelings that this is just one more requirement in an already full day. This should include deepening the understanding of all community members regarding the substantial student achievement problems that the district is facing and the role of the literacy initiative in addressing those problems.

- The power of a vision comes when it is shared and truly reflects the personal visions of all stakeholders. The district should ensure that the vision for the initiative is over-communicated to all members of the organization through a variety of mechanisms, including but not limited to staff meetings, district professional days, and principal newsletters.

**Leadership**

The superintendent of Feltonboro Public Schools sought to increase teacher and principal leadership in order to realize the essential aims of the literacy initiative. This
endeavor proved challenging due to a variety of technical and adaptive challenges. Our research data revealed that teachers were enthusiastic about changes in instructional practice that would benefit their students, but they rejected the idea that they should act as leaders within the organization. Principals supported the initiative but deferred to hired consultants and the literacy coach. The extent to which these professionals had the capacity to exercise leadership in relation to the initiative was unclear. In order to promote the deep and lasting reform of literacy instruction in Feltonboro, it is important that leadership continue to be developed and enacted by principals, teachers, and other key professionals across the district. The following steps are recommended to augment and disperse leadership in the context of this literacy initiative.

- Feltonboro should work collaboratively with stakeholders to clearly define their “hybrid” leadership model based on the work of Leithwood et al. (2007) and Gronn (2008), in which traditional, hierarchal forms of leadership are combined with elements of distributed leadership. The Feltonboro leadership should make thoughtful decisions about where a hierarchical structure would benefit the district initiative and where a greater distribution of leadership would be more beneficial. Instances of proposed distributions of leadership should be purposeful and aimed at furthering larger goals of instructional improvement and capacity building (Hargreaves, 2008; Hartley, 2007). Furthermore, leadership must provide transparency around these decisions so that shared understanding can be built among all stakeholder groups in the district, so that, as Leithwood et al. note, “Staff will be motivated to
participate more fully in distributed approaches to leadership…when [formal] leaders provide full explanations…for their decisions” (2007, p. 61).

- The district should begin explicit work to support development of leadership capacity and skills in those whom they expect to take up leadership in the initiative, applying the concept of reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2000) to changes in leadership expectations just as it does to changes in instructional expectations.

- The work of all leadership teams (SAT, Elementary Leadership Team, Principal Meetings, LLC, CAC) in Feltonboro should be clearly focused on instruction and student achievement. The district has identified continuous improvement of student achievement as its primary goal and literacy as the first pathway that the district has elected to take towards this goal. Likewise, each formal plan produced in the district (District Improvement Plan, School Improvement Plans, and Individual Growth Plans) should include a specific goal that is aligned with the shared vision for literacy instruction in the district.

- Principals should work with teacher members of the LLC and members of the Curriculum Advisory Council to set portions of the agendas for school staff meetings, ensuring that issues related to the initiative are addressed and plan staff meetings to actively involve teachers in collaborative work directly related to the initiative.
Sustainability

Concerns about the long-term sustainability of this literacy initiative surfaced in our research data. Despite the many successes of the initiative to date, principals expressed concern regarding the future of the initiative if there were turnover in the senior administration. A high level of deference to outside consultants, contracted for a substantial but finite amount of time, has created uncertainty regarding the future of the initiative once the consultants have completed their work. Given the importance of this initiative in terms of student achievement and the substantial resources that have been allocated to ensure its success, it is essential that the district take assertive steps to ensure that the improvements in literacy instruction prompted through the initiative are sustained over time.

- Develop a five-year, district-wide, professional development plan that aligns with and supports the strategic goals of the school district and school improvement plans. Outline how the instructional leadership capacity of teachers and administrators will be built internally. Include how newly hired teachers and administrators receive opportunities and mentoring to build their capacity in culturally ingrained literacy practices. Communicate this plan to district and community stakeholders.

- Consider establishment of district-level data teams to focus on continuous improvement of teaching and learning and student outcomes. The work of and communication from these teams must reflect evaluating and sustaining the
instructional change as the priority, not performance on mandated assessments (Hargreaves 2008; Hartley 2007).

**Trust**

Relational trust has been conceptualized (Louis, 2006) as “the inevitable result of repeated interactions with others” (p. 274) in school systems. This type of trust, while essential to the development of professional learning culture (Cranston, 2011) and the creation of “a compelling vision” (Chhuon et al., 2008) for school improvement is the “hidden variable” (Covey, 2006) that can be a major obstacle to carefully devised reform efforts. Research (e.g. Louis, 2006) has identified that integrity, competence, concern, and reliability are critical to trusting relationships. Underlying trust issues have surfaced in the context of this literacy reform initiative to the point where the superintendent has publicly acknowledged and our research has confirmed that Feltonboro is a “low-trust district.” In fact, trust is a component of each of the challenges identified and holds the key to improvement and success within the initiative.

While the current research on relational trust does not identify specific steps needed to establish and maintain trust within school systems (Cranston, 2011; Louis, 2006) the actions described here are recommended to address trust issues that may impede the progress of the initiative.

- Enhance teacher and principal voice by creating new structures as needed and using existing routines or structures (monthly principals’ meetings with superintendent, the superintendent’s Advisory Team, the Elementary Leadership Team, and Curriculum Advisory Council) to schedule and
facilitate open discussion regarding the obstacles, challenges, and successes of the initiative. Include in these discussions issues related to school culture, leadership, and trust, as well as building shared meaning for the vision, mission, and core values of the district. These venues should be used to develop *conjoint agency*, where central office leaders, principals, and teachers synchronize their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of their peers, and their sense of group membership (Gronn, 2002).

- Promote relational trust between administrators and teachers by ensuring that repeated interactions in relation to the initiative are consistent and reliable and that administrators ensure reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2000) by making transparency, capacity building, and clear communication priorities.

**Interrelationships between Recommendation Areas**

Each of the areas of recommendation described above impacts and interacts with the others – the Feltonboro school system and the initiative studied here are dynamic systems. It is important to monitor and reflect on these interactions, described in Table 1 below, in order to maximize their beneficial impacts.
### Table 1

*Interrelationships between Recommendation Areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Area</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
<th>Means</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity Building Trust</td>
<td>Explicitly communicating collaborative expectations; no hidden agendas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Building accountability and capacity for recognizing good instruction; providing support for leaders as needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Continuing in-district coaching after the consultants leave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Meaning</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Promoting consistency and reliability in relation to the initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity Building Trust</td>
<td>Increasing understanding of goals and objectives for literacy instruction thus increasing their capacity to attain them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Collaboratively defining and consistently understanding roles, responsibilities and goals allows for more consistent leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Collective understanding of the vision and the meaning of leadership so they become embedded into the school cultures; progress toward vision is reinforced; participants see that the district is ‘staying the course’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>LLC members and teachers have a voice in the initiative and collaborate to address issues or challenges; transparency regarding the distribution of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation Area</td>
<td>Impacts</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership, cont’d.</td>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>Clearly defining roles and expectations and aligning plans will allow for educators to focus their activities and growth towards meeting the district goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Transferring facilitation from outside consultants to district professionals and staying focused on instructional reform; professional goals and district plans are aligned with the vision of the initiative; less centralized leadership builds capacity of many professionals throughout the district to lead in the event of future turnover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Soliciting teacher voice and conjoint agency build relationships and interdependence towards the achievement of goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Clear and reliable communication regarding the shared meaning of vision, mission and values of the district as related to the initiative will build collective support and constancy over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>The existence of relational trust will allow the district to build a professional learning culture and increase capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>5 Year PD plan promoting instructional and leadership capacity over the long term; new elementary teachers are provided with instructional leadership for literacy as part of induction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Educators realizing that this is not the “next new thing” and will continue to focus their efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Transparent communication and enacting of plans with district and community stakeholders sustains the initiative.</td>
</tr>
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Conclusion

Our study revealed that the literacy initiative currently underway in Feltonboro has led to instructional change and to reported changes in student academic behaviors. The initiative has also experienced challenges in how leadership has been perceived and enacted. Recommendations in the areas of professional capacity building, development of shared meaning, leadership, sustainability, and trust are provided here to support further development of these instructional changes as well as effective and sustainable leadership growth at all levels of the district.
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of our committee and the members of the Boston College Professional School Administrator Program faculty for your inspiration and support. We would also like to thank the administration and teachers of the Feltonboro Public Schools for allowing us to be guests in your district. Finally, we would like to offer our deepest appreciation for the support and encouragement each of us received from our family and friends, especially our spouses and children – we could not have completed this journey without you.
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CHAPTER 1

The focus of this study was the role of leadership in a small suburban school district’s professional development literacy initiative from spring 2011 to fall 2011. In an effort to improve student achievement in Feltonboro, the district decided to make significant changes in literacy instruction. Feltonboro has faced significant leadership turnover during the last five years; this is exemplified by the fact that the district has had three superintendents in four years, with the longest tenured principal in her position for only eight years. The district's goal for this literacy initiative is to build teacher capacity in the instruction and assessment of language arts through professional development. The leadership necessary to bring about these changes, particularly how leadership might influence reform-oriented professional development, was examined. The empirical research related to school leadership behaviors in the context of local and district level school reform initiatives is sparse. Employing qualitative analysis, this research examined the leadership behaviors in a literacy professional development initiative in the Feltonboro Public School District. Given the current educational climate, characterized by accountability measures and widespread pressure for school reform, the relevance of this study is particularly salient. In order to meet the challenges presented in this era of school reform, school and district administrators must enhance their understanding of how leadership behaviors can support targeted instructional improvements, as well as cultural and leadership changes that make those improvements sustainable. Therefore,

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1 All place names and the names of school district personnel in the study are pseudonyms.
this study can provide useful data to the target district as they enact professional development initiatives, as well as add to the research literature on leadership for district level instructional improvement.

District Context

Feltonboro is a small, suburban community located west of Boston, Massachusetts. The population of this former mill town is approximately 14,500. The Feltonboro Public School District serves approximately 3,000 students with an approximate annual budget of $37.6 million (www.doe.mass.edu).\(^2\) The district is comprised of one kindergarten center, three Grade 1-5 elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The town strongly supports the schools, which is evidenced by positive and stable financial support that the schools continue to receive each year at town meetings. Evidence of this support is the wide margin of voters that passed the town meeting article allowing for a debt exclusion to fund the town appropriation of $20 million to build a new middle school. The final vote to approve this expenditure was 635 voters in favor and 12 opposed (Malachowski, 2010).

Leadership Changes and Achievement

The Feltonboro Public Schools were led by superintendent Dr. Aleman, described as a strong leader (M. General, personal communication, January 2011), for fifteen years up until 2007. Dr. Aleman’s vision was that social-emotional learning was a critical

\(^2\) Figures are from fiscal year 2010 (school year 2009-2010), the latest publicly available.
component for academic success. Throughout Dr. Aleman’s fourteen-year tenure, much of the district’s human and financial resources were devoted to developing the social-emotional learning of students. An example of this investment was a full-time district level administrator dedicated to character education and community service learning. The majority of district and building administrators who worked under Dr. Aleman endorsed his belief that if a child’s social emotional needs were fostered, academic learning would naturally follow (M. General, personal communication, January 2011).

Dr. Aleman was succeeded by Dr. Pinta, who left after one year, and then by Dr. Abuelo, a highly experienced interim superintendent. During Dr. Abuelo’s tenure, the central office engaged in an examination of the district’s internal structures and achievement data. Examination of the 2009 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data revealed low performance patterns in the aggregate at the elementary and middle school levels in English Language Arts and mathematics. These issues led to multiple schools in the district failing to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Dr. Abuelo began to change the administrative structure in the district in an effort to provide a greater and more cohesive focus on academic achievement (S. Abuelo, personal communication, May 2009). The full-time position in community service learning and character education was reduced to a half-time district level position and half–time kindergarten principal. Right before his departure, Dr. Abuelo created the Director of Elementary Education position at the district level to provide coherence and academic focus.
Following Dr. Abuelo’s departure, during the 2009-2010 school year the district hired Dr. French as the superintendent. Dr. French came to the district with an extensive curriculum background including his doctoral work in literacy. During his first year as superintendent, Dr. French scrutinized district data, surveyed a wide variety of stakeholders, and observed in classrooms to develop a sense of the instructional practices in the district. Subsequent 2010 MCAS data continued to show slow progress in literacy achievement in the district. Based on this assessment, Dr. French characterized the district as being in the midst of a “curriculum crisis,” with “no guaranteed and viable curriculum for students” (M. K. French, personal communication, November 6, 2010).

**The Literacy Initiative**

Dr. French identified literacy in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve as one entry point to improve instruction. His stated priority was to "emphasize the provision of a guaranteed and viable curriculum with best practices in literacy" (M.K. French, personal communication, November 6, 2010). Dr. French also described his expectation that all leaders will move towards the attainment of district priorities in a manner that is collaborative while honoring the leadership styles of individuals (M. K. French, personal communication, November 2010). As a result, the district leadership team in Feltonboro initiated curriculum mapping and began to examine literacy practices at all levels.

The Feltonboro district made a multi-year commitment to work with consultants to change literacy instruction in its elementary schools. As a core element of this work, a
Literacy Leadership Team\(^3\) was established which included general and special educators, reading specialists, the four elementary principals, the Director of Elementary Education, and Dr. French. The 40-member committee’s initial purpose was to develop goals and set priorities for the new literacy initiative.

The Feltonboro district also created the position of literacy coach. The coach spends one day each week in each of the four elementary schools and has a floating day to complete projects in each building. Prior to being hired for this position, the literacy coach was an experienced reading specialist in one of the district’s elementary schools. She also taught graduate level courses on literacy topics for all teachers in Feltonboro.

The Director of Elementary Education and the elementary principals, with the support of the superintendent, collectively decided to realign financial and human resources in order to create the current coaching position. This realignment included a significant reduction of Reading Recovery services for first grade students. The administrative leadership team’s rationale for this reduction was that the district’s financial resources would be better spent on improving core literacy instruction in the classroom for all students. The

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\(^3\) In district documents, this group is called the \textit{Literacy Leadership Team}. In observed conversations the group was referred to in this way, but also occasionally as the \textit{Literacy Leadership Committee}. It is typically referred to as the \textit{LLC} in abbreviated form, including in district documentation. While incongruous, we have retained the official and more commonly used conventions of \textit{Literacy Leadership Team} and \textit{LLC} throughout this document.
Feltonboro elementary schools initially committed $46,000 of their professional development resources to this literacy initiative. By the end of our research study the district had made a four-year commitment to the initiative at a total projected cost of nearly $200,000.

**Problem Statement**

In an effort to improve literacy achievement, the Superintendent of Feltonboro initiated professional development facilitated by outside consultants and a coaching model. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of leadership and professional development strategies in supporting and building the capacity of Feltonboro's principals and teachers in this literacy initiative. This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of leadership in an initiative to change literacy instruction in a small suburban district? a) How is leadership distributed, if at all, in this initiative? b) What leadership behaviors, if any, do teachers and administrators view as contributing to or limiting to positive instructional change in the literacy initiative? Who is exercising that leadership? c) What leadership behaviors support or limit engagement in the initiative?

2. How, if at all, do the professional development strategies utilized in this literacy initiative build capacity for teacher and administrator growth and further change?
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Schools face significant challenges as they seek to prepare students for the 21st century and as they meet the increasing demands of standards-based reform (Elmore, 2000). These challenges often call for contradictory goals and measures, such as standardized curriculum, assessments, and outcomes on the one hand, and increased flexibility and responsiveness to shifting needs on the other.

This qualitative research study examined the leadership actions ensuing during the initial phases of a professional development initiative. This study also questioned whether or not leadership was distributed and whether or not administrators and teachers perceived a growth in capacity for further reform as a result of this initiative. In order to investigate these questions in an informed manner, a literature review addressing the areas of change, trust, professional development, coaching, and distributed leadership was conducted.

Change is at the heart of this study. Administrators, Literacy Leadership Team members, and teachers were and continue to be challenged to enact sustained and fecundative change in the form of the literacy initiative. This change influences leadership styles, professional development, and coaching. While there is an overwhelming amount of literature on change in schools, this research focuses on Fullan’s understanding of sustainable change (1985, 1998, 2007) and its stages and Heifetz’s theory (1994) of adaptive and technical change.
As much as change is at the heart of this study, trust is essential and critical to successful change. Ergo, the literature review drew on the definitions of trust proposed by both Bryk and Schneider (2006) and Louis (2006). We also looked to Gordon (2008); Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly, and Chrispeels (2008); and Cranston (2011) in order to clarify the impact of trust in a school initiative.

Moreover, as professional development is the vehicle for this change, the literature review draws heavily on the description of reform-oriented professional development provided by Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001). Among others, Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, Gallagher and Lawrence (2007); and Guskey (2002) provide insight into the characteristics of effective reform-oriented professional development. In an attempt to identify a connection between coaching and high-quality reform-oriented professional development and to explore the connection between coaching and leadership, the literature review then examines the research of Barkley (2005); Knight (2007); Mangin (2005); and Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, and Garnier (2009). Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), Emihovich and Battaglia (2000), and Tschannen-Moran (2009) address the juncture of leadership and professional development, while Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001, 2004); Elmore (2000); and Gronn (2002, 2003, 2008) discuss how leadership might be distributed in a school system.

These researchers provide the scholarly framework for our exploration of the nexus between the change process, reform-oriented professional development, and distributed leadership, with coaching as a concrete example of such leadership distributed outside the traditional hierarchy.
Change

As public policy initiatives and new legislation continue to press for reform in public education, clarity about the meaning of reform and the manner in which change processes must occur if schools are to implement and sustain instructional improvements is essential. Reform is “not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of classrooms, schools, districts, universities, and so on” (Fullan, 2007, p. 7). According to Fullan (2007), educational reforms typically fall short of their objectives when school restructuring occurs in lieu of deeper reculturing. Innovations that are quickly and easily adopted are often superficial. Structures and terms may be altered, but teaching practices remain fundamentally unchanged. Fullan asserts that it is quite possible for surface changes to occur even in the absence of individual or collective understanding. However, minor adjustments in school practice that give the appearance of reform do not constitute real change. School reform requires deeper change that involves “changes in conceptions and behavior” (p. 32) that have shared moral and intellectual meaning at their core. Shared meaning is essential because it fuels the motivation of teachers and crystallizes new beliefs, knowledge and skills, and concepts of outcomes and is an indicator of a quality change process rather than a prerequisite for successful reform (Fullan, 2007).

Change is not an event or an occurrence but a process (Fullan, 2007) with essential components and steps. In order to bring about successful reform, school leaders must understand not only the change or initiative proposed, but also the process of change itself. Fullan articulates the basic components of educational change as (a) revised
or new materials; (b) possible implementation of new teaching strategies; and (c) potential alteration of beliefs. He describes three phases of successful change in education: Phase I: initiation or adoption; Phase II: implementation or initial use; and Phase III: institutionalization or continuation. These components and phases interact to influence “the degree of school improvement in relation to a given criteria” (p. 66), and the organization's capacity to effectively deal with additional, subsequent changes. Throughout the stages of reform, “it matters less where the innovation comes from than it does what happens during the process of change” (p. 68).

School leaders, in their roles as change agents, must help participants see problems and solutions in ways that influence thoughts and emotions, while simultaneously illustrating that there is a means of moving forward and reducing the distance between planning and action in order to build the capacity for change (Fullan, 2007). When school reform is examined in this context, it becomes apparent that in order to achieve sustained school improvement, leadership must focus on actively developing schools by creating shared contexts for professional learning (West, Jackson, Harris, & Hopkins, 2000) and organizations that embrace the change process. One way that leaders initiate and support change in schools is through professional development. Indeed, leadership in professional development is necessary to lay the groundwork for reform and to move targeted changes forward until they evolve into institutionalized practices.

Recognizing that change is often nuanced, particularly in systems, Heifetz (1994) observes that change is either technical or adaptive. Technical changes are simple, prescriptive changes which organizations already have the capacity to solve. For
example, a school establishing a new lunch schedule is a technical change. Conversely, adaptive change involves complex challenges, the answers to which are not immediately known and require new learning. A school system changing curricula would be an adaptive change, as the district would have to arrive at an understanding of appropriate implementation and expected results. Heifetz observes that trust and consensus building are critical and essential to alleviating anxiety and allowing the change to take hold.

**Trust**

In the past decade, educational research has begun to focus on trust in relation to the success or failure of educational reforms (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Chhuon et al., 2008; Cranston, 2011; Gordon, 2008; Louis 2006). Researchers identify four behaviors as being essential to trusting relationships: integrity, concern, competence, and reliability (Louis, 2006).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Louis (2006) offer definitions of trust. Bryk and Schneider conceptualize relational trust as the intersection of a person’s perceptions regarding the intentions of another and that person’s experiences of the behavior exhibited by the other. Complementing this earlier understanding, Louis (2006) considers trust as “a confidence in or reliance on the integrity, veracity, justice, friendship, or other sound principle, of another person or group” (p. 2). Building on this, Louis’ (2006) qualitative study of five schools examined how trust between administrators and teachers affected how teachers understood initiatives. In examining trust, she describes how trust in Western civilization is categorized into two groups: institutional and relational. Institutional trust revolves around expecting appropriate behavior and that “parents, for
example, generally trust that schools will do their utmost to try and educate and protect their child during school hours” while relational trust is “the inevitable result of repeated interactions with others in modern organizations. While personal relationships may be limited, individuals interact repeatedly with the same individuals, which leads to expectations specific to that individual or group” (p. 3).

In conclusion, teachers in high-trust districts find change initiatives as motivating (Louis, 2006, p. 8) while teachers in low-trust districts find these changes as having been developed “in a back room” (p. 9) and feel left out of the process. Louis also offers advice to leaders who see themselves as bringing about change in historically low-trust districts, observing that if trust is understood as a point on a continuum then the change process is unlikely to succeed. Building on Louis’ advice, Covey (2006) identifies trust as key in all change and states that although a leader may have good change strategies, without trust, the best executed change strategies and initiative will fail.

Louis’ (2006) study of trust and teacher engagement in top-down reforms found that teachers had minimal ownership of an initiative they perceived had been manipulated by the central office. Teachers in low-trust settings believed that their participation in these initiatives was disingenuous and their voices meaningless. Louis also found that teachers in low-trust districts felt less influential and saw themselves not part of a favored group. Chhuon et al. (2008) note that high-trust relationships are key to both the success of a school system’s initiatives and its potential “to create a compelling vision” (p. 229). They also note that follow-through, clearly communicated and transparent decision-making, and a paradigm where the central office serves “as a service hub that links
clusters of schools” (p. 274) are critical to success. A shift from a “hierarchical structure to a more fluid, dynamic structure” (p. 274) engenders trust and thus higher student achievement. Based on Bryk and Schneider’s work (2002), Cranston (2011) identifies relational trust as the “strongest facilitating factor for developing schools as professional learning communities” (p. 69). Overall, however, the current literature on relational trust lacks concrete, generalizable steps to create trust across all levels of a school system (Cranston, 2011; Louis, 2006).

While writing in a study not explicitly related to trust, Gordon (2008) notes, “educational reform is a complex cultural endeavor as opposed to an individual enterprise. Attributing a reform’s effectiveness to individual commitment is to underestimate the power of preexisting cultural values and norms” (p. 33). As such, Gordon concludes that the success of an initiative depends on a preexisting “culture of caring” (p. 33).

**Professional Development for Change**

Professional development is often used as the vehicle for school change. Two specific types of professional development pervade the literature: reform-oriented professional development and traditional professional development models. Research on reform-oriented professional development is strongly grounded in the belief that professional educators must improve their practice in job-embedded settings and with the mutual support, challenge, and accountability that collaboration involves. The literature consists of related, but varying theoretical perspectives on effective professional development. This part of the literature review focuses on reform-oriented professional
development rather than traditional forms of professional development.

There is a distinct difference between traditional models of professional development, which are more aligned with workshops and trainings, and reform-oriented professional development, which focuses on learning over time. The literature clearly and consistently differentiates these models. For example, Garet et al. (2001) describe activities such as “within-district workshops, courses for college credit, out-of-district workshops, and out-of-district conferences as traditional forms of activities,” while professional development including “teacher study groups, teacher collaborative or networks, committees, mentoring, internships, and resource centers as reform type activities” (p. 921). Butler, Lauscher, Selinger-Jarvis, & Beckingham (2004) note that “traditional models include one-stop workshops, with a top-down approach to disseminating knowledge, in which teachers are provided with information and resources that they are expected to translate into action (p. 453). The traditional models differ from reform-oriented models in that they are shorter and content focused, with content given to teachers. Reform-oriented models are learning centered and reflect the principles of sustainable change, as they focus on collaboration, accountability, and distributed leadership, with content developed and modified over time after first being presented.

**Characteristics of effective professional development.** Two prominent studies (Garet et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007) addressed the characteristics of reform-oriented professional development. Garet et al. (2001) surveyed and collected data from 1,027 teachers who participated in the Eisenhower Grant Professional Development for math and sciences. This research studied core features of professional development: type of
activity (reform or traditional), duration, collective participation, content focus, active learning, and coherence. Reinforcing the beliefs and assumptions contained in much of the professional development literature, these results suggest several ways for improving professional development. First, they empirically confirm on a national probability sample the assumptions in the literature on promising practices in professional development. For example “results indicate that sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact, as reported by teachers, than is shorter professional development” (p. 935). Duration and time span, therefore, are key factors to strengthening a professional learning opportunity. This study also found that active learning, content focus, and applicability of learning contributed significantly to teachers’ skill development. Traditional and reform types of professional development activities yielded different effects on teacher learning when duration varied:

[R]eform activities tend to produce better outcomes primarily because they tend to be of longer duration. Traditional and reform activities of the same duration tend to have the same effects on reported outcomes…Thus, to improve professional development, it is more important to focus on the duration, collective participation, and the core features (content, active learning and coherence) than type (p. 936).

This study, therefore, confirms much of what the experts in the field understand to be quality professional development for teachers: that which is sustained, job embedded, and collaborative. These last two attributes align with research on effective leadership and informed our research in Feltonboro.
Penuel et al. (2007) studied 454 teachers in the GLOBE Program, an international earth-science education program. One distinguishing factor of the GLOBE study is that it included an online database in addition to surveys as part of data collection, where teachers reported data on their work throughout professional development. This created a more objective measure of how teachers used the program, allowing researchers to examine aspects of professional development that effectively supported curriculum implementation such as the science education program. Findings are consistent with Garet et al. (2001), as the perceived coherence of teacher professional development had a positive impact on GLOBE program implementation. Teachers who had more reform-like professional development were also more likely to report feeling prepared for student inquiry (p. 947). Researchers conclude, however, that their study was limited by a focus in one curricular area and in one program. They suggest that, “multiple studies are necessary to determine what works in professional development, a view consistent with recent panels on scientifically based research in education” (p. 953).

Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, and Evans (2003) reviewed studies that examined how collaborative Continuing Professional Development (CPD) affected both teaching and learning. This review included studies that defined CPD “as teachers working with at least one other related professional on a sustained basis” (p. 1). A positive link was found regarding improvements in both teaching and learning. All of the studies featured the use of external expertise. “The use of an outside consultant was frequently cited in the studies as a source not only of technical expertise, but as an agent of change” (p. 2).
Cordingley et al. (2005) referenced a study by Saxe et al. that found that “the group of teachers that had input from an external ‘expert’ made significantly more changes and their pupils shared greater increases in attainment than the group which only used peer support” (p. 2). In addition, they noted that most of the studies included external specialists in combination with “internal, collaborative peer support” and emphasized the partnership between teachers and these outside experts (p. 2). They cited Kirkwood (2001) as reporting on “how the outside expert played the leading role at the beginning of the project, with the participants gradually taking on a more central role” (p. 2).

**Leading reform-oriented professional development for change.** The question remains as to how to lead and sustain reform-oriented professional development.

It is important to recognize that this consensus—although it has endured for more than a decade—lacks sufficient specificity to guide practice. For example, nearly everyone decries the ‘one shot’ workshop and affirms that PD should be ‘sustained’ and ‘intensive’ (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008, p. 470). School leaders can facilitate professional learning opportunities for teachers, but many may not know how to sustain and build teacher capacity through professional development.

Reform-oriented professional development emphasizes the need to build capacity for leadership and change. Penuel et al. (2007) assert, “the need for more in-depth engagement than is typically provided” (p.928) as teachers begin work in an initiative in order to sustain change and teacher learning. Reform-oriented professional development
activities include mentoring and coaching, participating in committees and study groups, and completing internships (Garet et al., 2001). This approach is aimed at moving beyond a one-workshop fix and toward a longer commitment to personal learning and learning with others. Contemporary educators often relate this reform-oriented professional development to what is currently understood in the body of literature as "best practices." It is also called developing professional communities of inquiry and practice. It has been suggested that “promising practices” better describe these practices, as it allows for greater variability and diversity (A. Friedman, personal communication, April 17, 2011).

Reform–oriented professional development requires opportunities for teachers to interact and collaborate with one another. To do this, leaders must build capacity in schools; thus, the principal and other school leaders are faced with the challenge of how to implement this type of ongoing, systematic and dynamic teacher and leader learning successfully, which requires purposeful and ongoing leadership efforts for sustainability. This leadership focuses on instructional leadership from both teacher and leaders alike, who work together to examine instructional approaches to best support student learning. This goal can be accomplished, but school leaders must assist teachers in practices that foster conversations about student work, essentially genuine communities of inquiry and practice. Teachers, teacher leaders, and formal leaders share responsibility.

Guskey (2002) speaks to a model of change that enhances the learning opportunities for students, allowing teachers to dialogue with and offer feedback and support to and from administrators, which is essential to successful change. Guskey describes typical efforts to change teacher practice by working to alter beliefs, assuming
that “such changes in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs will lead to specific changes in their classroom behaviors and practices, which in turn will result in improved student learning” (p. 382). Guskey instead suggests a model of teacher change predicated on the belief that change in practice must precede change in beliefs and when change in practice is demonstrated to improve student learning, a change in beliefs occurs observing that new practices and changes can only endure if individuals “receive regular feedback on the effects of their efforts…[as] successful actions are reinforcing and… repeated while those that are unsuccessful tend to be diminished” (p. 387).

In other words, to build teacher capacity, change efforts must be supported through leadership feedback and collaboration among those stakeholders who have expertise in instructional practice and must result in positive changes in student learning. Similarly, Fullan (1985) notes that “successful change processes consist of teachers interacting and learning about the underlying theoretical principles of an innovation, seeing it demonstrated, practicing it, and obtaining feedback and ongoing coaching or support” (p. 394). Professional development as change, therefore, builds capacity and must be led and supported through district leaders’ ongoing attention and feedback. District leaders, teacher leaders, and coaches must stoke the fires of change via productive dialogue that only happens when this collaboration and feedback are in place.

**A Reform Model: Coaching**

The next section of the literature examines the coaching literature (a) to identify the connection of coaching to high-quality reform-oriented professional development; and (b) to explore the connection of coaching to leadership. Though it will ultimately
speak to the need for additional research in all of these areas, more importantly it will highlight the interconnectedness of the three key elements in our study: leadership, professional development, and coaching, one possible example of distributed leadership.

The fact that coaching continues to grow in popularity throughout the nation’s schools speaks to the fact that educators recognize that the traditional forms of professional development have been ineffective in supporting the growth of teachers (Russo, 2004). As outlined in the previous section, reform-oriented professional development seeks to build capacity through collaborative, job-embedded professional learning. Coaching appears to be one structure for providing this research-based, ongoing professional development concurrently contributing to a distribution of leadership and the capacity building needed for sustained change (Elmore, 2004; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Joyce & Showers, 1981; Knight, 2006, 2007, 2009; Little, 1990; Neufold & Roper, 2003; Showers, 1984).

Knight (2007) describes instructional coaches as educators who act as full-time “professional developers” within schools. Their role is to assist teachers in understanding and implementing research-based practices into their classrooms. They collaborate, facilitate, model, observe, reflect, and ultimately partner with colleagues to implement these research-based practices, always maintaining the primary focus on student learning (Jones & Vreeman, 2008; Kise, 2006; Knight, 2007).

Literacy coaching, employed in Feltonboro, is an example of content coaching that became popular with the arrival of the Reading First Grants. The literacy coach typically engages in a varied set of tasks and responsibilities that are intended to support
teachers to more effectively meet the literacy needs of all students (Duncan, 2006; Knight, 2007). This support, by nature, is content-driven but also maintains a focus on pedagogy through sharing literacy instructional strategies; therefore, as much of the literature articulates, it is essential that the literacy coach possess a high level of expertise regarding promising literacy practices (Bean & DeFord, 2008; Casey, 2006; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Knight, 2007; Mangin, 2005, 2007; Matsumuro, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier, 2009; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Data are an integral component of this approach and it is essential that progress is continually monitored, shared and discussed regarding the effectiveness of specific interventions (Casey, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Knight, 2007; Shanklin, 2006).

Like all types of coaching, literacy coaching is a partnership and is grounded in relational trust (Barkley, 2005; Bean & DeFord, 2008; Casey, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Knight, 2007). This trust is developed through the repeated opportunities for collaborative work in pre-planning, modeling, observing, co-teaching, analyzing student work, and reflecting with fellow educators. Though there exists a variety of titles, it is not the label, but rather the features of coaching that contribute to understanding the relationship of coaching to high-quality, reform-oriented professional development. These include coaching’s focus on content and pedagogy, and the underpinnings of data, inquiry, reflection, and collaboration.

For the purpose of this review and the Feltonboro study, coaching refers to school or district based approaches that support teachers and schools in their efforts to improve
student outcomes by building educator capacity. In Feltonboro, both the outside literacy consultants and the in-district literacy coach satisfy this definition.

**Coaching and the professional development connection.** Coaching is first and foremost a relationship between and among educators with the goal of building the individual’s and the group’s capacity (Barkley, 2005; Casey, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Joyce & Showers, 1981; Kise, 2006; Knight, 2007, 2009; Neufeld & Roper, 2003). The coach employs a variety of strategies to achieve this including visiting classrooms, surfacing questions about instruction, modeling new instructional strategies, co-planning with the use of data, facilitating study groups, and being an ongoing support to change (Barkley, 2005; Casey, 2006; Duncan, 2006; Kise, 2006; Knight, 2007). Ultimately, each individual must take ownership of his or her own learning. “Whatever it is, the person being coached – the coachee - takes ownership of his or her own improvement. Therein lies its power” (Barkley, 2005, p. 5). Barkley also emphasizes that, “Coached teachers are fiercely self-aware about their practice. They reflect on how they achieve learning in their students; other professionals who desire that they succeed support them” (p. xiii).

Importantly, the enactment of these tasks are dependent on the development of a culture of trust and respect. The Feltonboro study provides insights into the types of leadership behaviors that foster the creation of this culture and ultimately the success of capacity building through coaching.

Other countries employ collegial work and coaching as a major focus of a teacher’s profession and daily work. In Finland for example, a typical middle school teacher devotes about half as much time to classroom teaching as middle school teachers
in the United States. This is because “part of Finnish teachers’ work is devoted to the improvement of classroom practice, the advancement of the school as a whole, and work with the community” (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011, p. 18). Canada’s direct teaching hours are also fewer than those in the United States, but again time spent on collaborating, coaching, and job-embedded support are believed to be as important, if not more important, for impacting student learning (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011, pp. 23-27). Japan also recognizes the value of teacher collaboration and professional growth, “Japanese teachers devote half their work time to joint planning, sharing their lessons with other educators, conferring about students, and learning from each other. They call this ‘polishing the stone’” (Urbanski, 2005, p. vi).

Much of the evidence that supports the benefits of coaching continues to be circumstantial in nature; however, although scarce, some empirically based reports and studies are surfacing that examine the impact of coaching on teacher practice and student outcomes as well as provide information regarding the supports needed to successfully implement a coaching model. For example, in 2005, Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis published a report that examined the impact of various components of professional development. There were over 3,000 teachers in these studies and together they participated in eighty different professional development activities. This study corroborates many of the findings from the Garet et al. (2001) study referenced earlier.

The report by Ingvarson et al. (2005) indicates that the most effective professional development programs provided opportunities for teachers to focus on (a) content or what students should learn; (b) how to address problems that arise while students are learning
the subject matter (result-driven); (c) and determining what research-based knowledge is most relevant. The effective programs provided opportunities for educators to collaboratively examine and discuss student work, reflect critically on their own practice, and engage in problem solving around their own learning needs. In addition, the study illuminates the positive role that follow-up coaching can play:

The role of follow-up was noteworthy. The level of follow-up was found to increase significantly the extent to which teachers reported a sense of increased knowledge; perhaps reflecting the critical role that ‘at the elbow’ coaching and support in classrooms plays in learning new skills and putting them into practice. This kind of support was built into the more effective programs in our study (p.17).

The successful programs in this study provided time for teachers to practice new instructional methods and to then receive follow-up coaching in their classrooms, thus corroborating the work of many in the field including Joyce and Showers (1981), Cohen and Hill (2000), and Barkley (2005).

Several smaller studies (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Landry, Anthony, Swank, & Bailey, 2009; Sugar, 2005) have found that, as a result of coaching, teachers engage in changing their practice and that feedback regarding positive student data resulted in sustaining those changes over time. In Landry, Anthony, Swank, and Bailey’s 2009 study, the group that received coaching in combination with detailed student progress data produced the greatest changes in teaching practices and children’s readiness skills

Though still small, coaching continues to build an evidentiary base. In light of this research and the examined literature surrounding coaching, a relationship to high-quality reform-oriented professional development seems evident (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. The Alignment of High-Quality, Reform-Oriented Professional Development and Coaching
Coaching meets many of the criteria previously reported as essential for high-quality, reform-oriented professional development. Coaching encourages a framework in which professional development is job-embedded and grounded in showing and not telling, where educators partner with others to improve their practice, and where coaches can serve as informal leaders and the bridge between research and practice (Barkley, 2005; Knight, 2007, 2009; Mangin, 2005; Russo, 2004).

Regardless of the type of coach, coaching also offers a lens for examining leadership practice, both formal and informal. The next section will examine the literature focused on the nexus between leadership and coaching, looking first at the behaviors of the coach as an informal leader and then at the behaviors of formal leaders in supporting coaching. Feltonboro recently initiated a coaching model at the elementary levels, which purportedly is focused directly on instruction and building teacher capacity. As Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) discuss, the examination of tasks and functions “offers a means of accessing leadership practice” (p.13). Understanding the role, challenges, and chosen behaviors of a coach is a significant piece of the current study because it is one concrete means by which to examine distributed leadership and an example of leadership being distributed outside the traditional, central hierarchy in the district. The potential impact of these “change agents” (Kral, 2007, p. 1) holds great promise for teaching, learning, and leading.

Coaches as leaders. Many assert that formal leadership alone will never be sufficient to improve teaching and learning within our schools and that informal leadership must also play a role (Gronn, 2008; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Leithwood et
Mangin (2005) elaborates, “As a component of school reform, teacher leaders are often viewed as a means of directly improving the quality of instruction and, consequently, increasing student achievement” (p. 24). It is apparent that coaches, as a result of the myriad of tasks and responsibilities they are assigned, are well situated to be viewed as informal leaders and thus, a viable means of distributing leadership.

Champions of distributed leadership (discussed below) view leadership as “stretched over” multiple leaders where the social interactions amongst school members and the enactment of tasks, “micro” and “macro,” create the catalyst for change (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Mangin (2005) contends that the coach as leader easily aligns with this concept of distributed leadership. It is a teacher leadership role which “aim[s] to promote collective, school-based, instruction-oriented leadership that can lead to improved teaching practice and, ultimately, increases in student learning” (Mangin, 2005, p. 3). Conversely, Ippolito (2010) found that coaches themselves described the alignment of goals and a sharing of leadership among coaches, teachers, and principals as an “ideal rather than a reality” (p.178). Though coaches appear to be in an ideal position to act as informal leaders, many researchers and practitioners emphasize the resistance that coaches encounter (Barkley, 2005; Ippolito, 2010; Knight, 2006, 2007; Mangin, 2005; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008).

Mangin (2005) stresses that teacher leaders face difficult, even “formidable” (p.3) challenges, and the behaviors they adopt as they negotiate those challenges can inform the distribution of leadership within a district such as Feltonboro. Mangin (2005)
examined how teacher leaders/coaches, often faced with resistance, gained access to classrooms in order to encourage and support instructional change. Results of that study suggest that teacher leaders often compromise their role by assuming the lesser role of instructional assistant. This ultimately reduced the level of change. In addition, the study identified three key strategies employed by coaches and/or teacher leaders to gain access to classrooms: “developing relationships; engaging in nonthreatening leadership; and targeting subsets of teachers” (p.7).

Bryk and Schneider (2002), as well as others, have begun to examine the role of trust in relation to successful change. In addition, almost all the research and field-based literature on coaching speaks to the prerequisite of developing relational trust (Bean & DeFord, 2008; Ertmer et al., 2005; Ippolito, 2010; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Knight, 2006, 2007; Mangin, 2005). Bean and DeFord (2008) emphasize, “Almost every coach with whom we have worked has made this statement in some form or another: ‘You have to develop a good relationship with teachers-otherwise you cannot be successful as a coach’” (p. 2). Building relationships is an indispensable leadership skill that informal leaders must use to gain access and impact learning. Critical to this relationship building is the recurring theme of support versus evaluation. Coaches, and most would argue any teacher leader, will ultimately find more success when they act in a supportive, as opposed to an evaluative role (Knight, 2007; Shanklin, 2006; Toll, 2006).

Others in the field provide additional insights into the coach as leader. Shanklin (2006) advocates that coaches must be available to, and engage with, all members of a school in order to effectively cultivate a learning culture. Furthermore, he and Toll (2006)
emphasize that coaches, as leaders, must play an integral role in facilitating the development of a school’s vision around literacy while ensuring that it is tethered to district goals. Finally, Shanklin (2006) and others such as Killion and Harrison (2006) and Knight (2009) emphasize that coaches should focus on building capacity by designing and leading job-embedded structures such as study groups.

**Leadership support for coaches.** The practice of leaders, both formal and informal, is about more than simply what they know about content, pedagogy or leadership; it is about recognizing how one’s position, power (perceived or real), and chosen behaviors impact the unique individuals within a community of learners (Kise, 2006; Rainville & Jones, 2007). Very little theoretical and empirical research exists regarding the supports and formal leadership behaviors needed for coaching’s success; however, field-based literature and a few studies have begun to emerge (Borman & Feger, 2006; Burkins, 2007; Casey, 2006; Kral, 2007; Mangin, 2005; Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier, 2009; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008).

In 2009, Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, and Garnier, studied the relationship between principal leadership and teachers’ varied participation in a literacy-coaching program. They found that principal leadership is significantly associated with teachers’ participation with the coach, both in terms of conferring with and being observed by the coach. Principals’ behaviors that were most associated with teachers’ engagement with a coach included public endorsement of the coach as an expert and active participation in the initiative.
In 2008, Mraz, Algozzine, and Watson found that a lack of understanding existed regarding the work of the coach; therefore, a clearly articulated role or job description by the administrator enhances and supports teachers’ understanding and utilization of a coach. Other implications articulated in this study include the need for clear communication from the principal regarding the coach’s time and schedule as well as the provision of ongoing professional development for coaches. As a result of their findings, these researchers emphasized that administrators, or those with positional authority, have the “potential to play a pivotal role in actualizing the role of the literacy coach in ways that will support the advancement of teachers and, in turn, the quality of educational opportunities offered to students” (p. 153).

These previous studies support findings by Mangin (2005), who examined twelve teacher leaders (coaches and department leaders) across five school districts as they worked to encourage instructional change. Mangin found that the degree of administrative support for the position including explicit introductions and descriptions of the coach’s role, guidance and support for teacher leaders, and expectation setting regarding instructional change impacted the degree to which teacher leaders gained access to classrooms. The study specifically noted that the failure by administrators to explicitly introduce the teacher leader to staff, “exacerbated resistance” (p.9), and significantly impacted teacher leaders’ access. This often neglected leadership behavior was described as “an important symbolic gesture of support for teacher leadership” (p. 9). As will be described further in the leadership section of this literature review, any initiative aimed at change or reform benefits from support and direction by the formal
leaders, but, as was also highlighted above, teacher, or informal, leadership and collaboration must also be present.

**Role of Leadership in Professional Development**

Mutual support and collaboration are cornerstones of reform-oriented professional development models that yield significant change for schools and practitioners. Yet, what type of leadership supports change in professional development, particularly professional development that aims to change instruction? Various leadership model solutions have been proposed over time, that emphasize the educational leader as a strong instructional leader to educational leader as transformational leader whose focus is to change the culture of schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Hallinger, 1992). The literature on transformational leadership provides a number of useful points, such as the need for authenticity in leaders (Emihovich & Battaglia, 2000) and the critical role of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2009), but another leadership theory may provide a more useful theoretical framework for investigating district-level instructional change and our work in Feltonboro.

Distributed leadership theory observes that a leader must foster leadership throughout an organization, in individuals, and in teams, in order to meet public policy demands. Such leadership calls for continuous improvement. Central to distributed leadership is the capacity to work together to provide leadership directed at continuous improvement; collaboration is therefore prevalent in the research. Synonymous terms found throughout the literature include teacher empowerment and teacher leadership.
**Distributed leadership.** In a 1999 presentation later published (2001) and elaborated (2004), Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond sketch out the theoretical framework for distributed leadership. They argue, “that school leadership is best understood as a distributed practice, *stretched over* the school’s social and situational contexts” (2001, p. 23). This stretching over illustrated in much of the work that followed refers not only to other positional leaders but also to the idea that leadership is a part of organizations and exists in the social interactions between its members. The authors situate leadership in small or “micro,” tasks and interactions. They outline that:

> [U]nderstanding of leadership...involves understanding how school leaders define, present, and carry out these micro tasks, as well as exploring how school leaders interact with others in the process. It has to do with what school leaders do, the moves they make as they execute micro tasks in their daily work (p. 24).

Spillane et al. (2001) argue that leadership is both context-bound and situated in the social interactions between leaders and, in the distributed leadership language, followers. They explain:

> Attending to situation as something more than a container for leaders’ practice, we argue that sociocultural context is a constitutive element of leadership practice, fundamentally shaping its form. In our distributed view, leadership practice is constituted in the interaction of leaders and their social and material situations (p. 27).

Spillane et al. (2004) provide an explicit framework for the study of distributed leadership, noting at the outset that, “we know relatively little about the *how* of school
leadership, that is knowledge of the ways in which school leaders develop and sustain those conditions and processes believed necessary for innovation” (p. 4). They identify a “need to observe from within a conceptual framework if we are to understand the internal dynamics of leadership practice” (p. 4), saying that the “distributed leadership perspective developed here is designed to frame a program of research that will analyze leadership activity and generate evocative cases for practitioners to interpret and think about as part of their on-going leadership practice” (p. 4). Expanding upon their earlier ideas on micro-tasks, they emphasize that leadership involves connecting these micro-tasks to macro-functions. The authors describe four components of distributed leadership: “leadership tasks and functions, task-enactment, social distribution of task-enactment, and situational distribution of task-enactment” (p. 5).

The authors argue that studying tasks and functions is essential in any research, “Pursuing a task-centered approach, grounded in the functions of leadership within the schools, offers a means of accessing leadership practice” (p. 13). These tasks and functions extend over a number of areas, from vision setting, to cultural leadership, to resource management. The authors also identify “supporting teacher growth and development, both individually and collectively [and] providing both summative and formative monitoring of instruction and innovation” (p. 13) as important functions. They note that, “the research challenge in understanding leadership practice is to reconstruct, through observation and interview, whatever links exist between the macro-functions and the micro-tasks of school leadership” (p. 14).

Related to the enactment of these leadership tasks, Spillane et al. (2004) argue
that “when it comes to enacting tasks considered essential for instructional innovation, school leaders’ subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, coupled with their beliefs about teacher learning and change, may influence how they present and carry out these tasks” (p. 15). This, in turn, influences how teachers view and contribute to the success or failure of any innovation.

This distributed leadership framework imagines the enactment of leadership tasks as involving activities of the multiple individuals in a school who work at mobilizing and guiding a school’s staff…focuse[d] on how leadership practice is distributed among positional and informal leaders as well as their followers…[and] presses us to consider the enactment of leadership tasks as potentially stretched over [emphasis in original] the practice of two or more leaders or followers (p. 16).

This framework incorporates a critical element that informed how we analyzed leadership in this literacy initiative in that it not only addresses those with positional authority, but also leadership “stretched over” multiple types of leaders and followers, including instructional coaches and teacher leaders.

Finally, the authors assert that “leadership practice is situated” (p. 19) and that the context for leadership is an element of that leadership, not simply a setting or set of parameters. The authors note that, “the symbols, tools, and other designed artifacts that are part and parcel of day-to-day leadership practice, and mostly taken-for-granted, are integral to investigations of leadership activity” (p. 21). Focusing closely on the day-to-day leadership practice that involves myriad interactions and communications, they
“argue that structures, as meditational means, provide a basis for action from which people pick and choose in an effort to accomplish desired ends” (p. 22). The authors conclude with a powerful framework for research:

Studies of leadership expertise must investigate how, and the extent to which, the expertise essential for the execution of particular leadership tasks is stretched over different leaders as well as over the tools with which they work…Understanding the distributed practice of school leadership will help to build legitimate stories of practice…that will be recognizable to practitioners as evocative sounding boards for their own work. By providing a frame that helps researchers build cases for practitioners to interpret and think about in their on-going leadership practice, the distributed perspective offers a tool to help researchers and practitioners to change that activity (p. 28).

Elmore (2000) provides a clear rationale for distributed leadership, particularly in the age of standards-based reform. He first acknowledges the legacy of individuality and privacy in education (Lortie, 1976; Rosenholtz, Bassler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 1986; Little, 1990). His model of “loose-coupling” asserts “that the ‘technical core’ of education…resides in individual classrooms, not in the organizations that surround them…Administration in education, then, has come to mean not the management of instruction but the management of the structures and process around instruction” (pp. 5-6). Elmore describes how “loose-coupling” further impacts attempts at innovation in instruction:

It explains why, for example, most innovation in schools, and the most durable
innovations, occur in the *structures that surround* teaching and learning, and only weakly and idiosyncratically in the actual *processes of teaching and learning* [emphasis added]…Loose-coupling also explains why manifestly successful instructional practices that grow out of research or exemplary practice never take root in more than a small proportion of classrooms and schools (p. 6).

Standards-based reforms, however, call on states, districts, and schools to improve their results and “reach[es], at least in theory, directly into the instructional core of schools, making what actually gets taught, a matter of public policy and open political discourse” (p. 9). Elmore proposes two solutions to this conflict, the first of which is a distributed leadership framework for leading educational change and instructional innovation.

Elmore’s framework is composed of five elements:

- *The purpose of leadership is the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role.* If the purpose of leadership is the improvement of teaching practice and performance, then the skills and knowledge that matter are those that bear on the creation of settings for learning focused on clear expectations for instruction (p. 20).

- *Instructional improvement requires continuous learning:* Leadership must create conditions that value learning as both an individual and collective good. Leaders must create environments in which individuals expect to have their personal ideas and practices subjected to the scrutiny of their colleagues, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subjected to the scrutiny of individuals (p. 20).
Learning requires modeling: Leaders should be doing, and should be seen to be doing, that which they expect or require others to do. Likewise, leaders should expect to have their own practice subjected to the same scrutiny as they exercise toward others (p. 21).

The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise required for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution. Large-scale improvement requires a relatively complex kind of cooperation among people in diverse roles performing diverse functions. This kind of cooperation requires understanding that learning grows out of differences in expertise rather than differences in formal authority (p. 21).

The exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity: Distributed leadership makes the reciprocal nature of…accountability relationships explicit. My authority to require you to do something you might not otherwise do depends on my capacity to create the opportunity for you to learn how to do it (p. 21).

This framework provides a template for the actions of a leader interested in leading district-level instructional change. What these five principles look like in action (or not) as a leader or group of leaders attempts to implement instructional change helped frame our research.

Michael Copland (2003) examined the distribution of leadership across schools in a study involving a large-scale reform effort in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. While primarily focusing on the role of the principal, Copland discussed
three prerequisites for a distribution of leadership in schools. Distributed leadership implies:

- “the development of a culture within the school that embodies collaboration, trust, professional learning, and reciprocal accountability” (p. 379);
- “a need for a strong consensus regarding the important problems facing the organization” (p. 379); and
- “a need for rich expertise with approaches to improving teaching and learning among all those working in the school” (p. 380).

Copland further notes, “schools exhibiting the deepest and broadest leadership distribution generally had sustained histories of reform work” (p. 390). In order to overcome challenges to the distribution of leadership, Copland noted that “structural change is not sufficient to broaden leadership, and that structures require people with skills to carry out the work” (p. 392).

Australian researcher Peter Gronn (2002) has also investigated the idea of distributed leadership, positioning distributed leadership as something of an antidote to previous conceptions of leadership, asserting that “the paradigm of individual transformational, charismatic, and visionary leadership represents a retreat to discredited heroics” (p. 426). Gronn dealt with the historical conception of leadership as being at least partially defined by its relationship to followership, and contrasts with a distributed conception of leadership by stating that the “main difficulty created by orthodox formulations such as leader-followers and leadership-followership is that they prescribe, rather than describe, a division of labor” (p. 428).
Gronn describes distributed leadership primarily as two types of action: *concertive action* and *conjoint agency*. Concertive action means that distributed leadership is not simply allowing multiple actors in a given context to exercise leadership, but that leadership is viewed as “concertive action, rather than individual, aggregated acts” (p. 429). Within this concerted action, Gronn identifies three modes. The first, *spontaneous collaboration* is illustrated when multiple members of an organization “pool their expertise and regularize their conduct to solve a problem, after which they may disband” (p. 430). The second, *intuitive working relations*, occurs when “intuitive understandings are known to emerge over time when two or more organization members rely on each other and develop a close working relationship. In this instance, leadership is manifest in the shared role space encompassed by their partnership [emphasis added]” (p. 430). The third mode, *institutionalized practices* occurs when groups find ways of enhancing their work with one another or become dissatisfied with present methods, and formalize structures they have found to help or that they hypothesize will do so (pp. 430-1). “Regardless of how and why practices are institutionalized, concertively acting units can be the focus of colleagues’ attributions of leadership” (p. 431).

Gronn situates these modes of action within the context of what he calls *conjoint agency*, which “means that agents synchronize their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of their peers, and their sense of unit membership” (p. 431). In addition, Gronn asserts that two primary components of these synchronized actions are the “experience of synergy” and “reciprocal influence” (p. 431), and notes that these
components can take place formally and informally, including between and among formal and informal leaders. Also within this conjoint agency and framework, Gronn describes two general properties of distributed leadership: *interdependence* and *coordination* (pp. 423-3).

Gronn proposes that researchers move away from the individual as the unit of analysis, towards “a view of leadership as less the property of individuals and more as the contextualized outcome of the interactions, rather than an unidirectional causal, process” (p. 444). Gronn suggests that this leadership could be observed and studied, not only in interactions in the given environment, but also through “cognitively derived representational media and tools” (p. 446), such as organizational plans, and through the structures and “role-relations” of the organization itself (p. 446). In his conclusion, which directly informs our own research, he observes that “research should advance understanding of the circumstances and factors which facilitate or impede participants’ perceptions, acceptance, and expectations of distributed arrangements, and provide evidence of the nature and extent of workplace interdependence and reciprocities” (p. 447).

**Moving toward a hybrid model.** In their empirical study, Leithwood et al. (2007) propose another set of hypotheses related to distributed leadership. The authors investigated eight schools within a large Ontario school district of over 100,000 students. In the first phase of the study, teachers completed a questionnaire asking them to identify non-administrative leaders. Researchers then interviewed a sample of identified non-administrators and those who nominated them, as well as building principals and groups
of students. Interview data revealed “four broad categories of leadership functions – setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program” (p. 55). Within these categories, authors found that non-administrative leaders had greater influence in some areas more than others, including fostering high expectations, motivating others, providing support to individuals, building collaborative processes, and sharing information, while administrative leaders identified more with tasks such as establishing visions and delegating tasks. The authors conclude that, even in an environment where leadership is distributed, “some hierarchy is unavoidable and necessary” (p. 57) and that “for greatest impact some leadership functions need to be performed by those in particular positions or with special expertise, not just anyone in the organization” (p. 57). Taken together, these two findings (a) indicate a constraining factor on how much or to whom leadership is distributed; and (b) provide a potentially rich lens through which to investigate whether leadership for the Feltonboro literacy initiative is distributed, and if so, whether or not it is distributed to those in the organization with instructional expertise.

In explaining the influences on the development of distributed leadership, Leithwood et al. (2007) are careful to frame discussion in the context of distributed leadership that will actually further improvement gains and benefit the school. They identify a number of factors and organizational conditions that support distribution of leadership, including “when collaborative structures are established, when the numbers of people collaborating on an initiative is kept manageable, and when influence is exercised through expert rather than positional power” (p. 61). The authors also more explicitly
acknowledge the importance of those with positional authority noting:

Staff will be motivated to participate more fully in distributed approaches to leadership with visible support and tone-setting from their formal leaders, when those leaders provide full explanations…for their decisions and when they go out of their way to ensure staff are aware of new directions and activities. Finally, distributed leadership is more likely to develop when there are opportunities for staff to acquire the capacities they need to participate effectively, along with the autonomy and time to act in accord with their professional beliefs and values (p. 61).

While the first half of the decade in the 2000s saw the emergence of distributed leadership as an articulated theory, the second half saw its blossoming in public educational discourse and critical questioning of the concept in the research literature. In particular, David Hartley (2007) questioned the emergence of distributed leadership and the motivation of those who either promote or implement it. While Hartley initially says that his concern is not “about its efficacy as a form of leadership practice” (p. 203), he repeatedly points out that “attempts to show a causal relationship between leaders’ behavior (be it distributed or otherwise) and pupil’s achievement have yielded little that is definitive” (p. 204). Hartley proposes two main reasons why distributed leadership emerged: discarding the idea of the heroic leader and responding pragmatically to the increasing complexity of school leadership. Hartley also positions distributed leadership as part of a more cultural response “towards a general weakening of classifications” (p. 208).
Most germane to our own research are two of Hartley’s conclusions. The first is that “the concept itself admits no agreed definition, and its operationalization within empirical research accordingly is difficult” (p. 210); clearly it would be critical in any study to operationalize the concept clearly and to do so in a way that is grounded in theory. His other point of discussion is to question (as Hargreaves (2008) does later) what is being distributed and why: “But what is to be distributed remains very much within the strategic parameters and targets set by government. It is the tactics, not the strategy, which are available for distribution. Hierarchical forms of accountability remain” (p. 211). This is a question that Andy Hargreaves and Peter Gronn take up in the years that shortly follow.

More recently, Hargreaves (2008) has written about the use of distributed leadership, exploring “the nature and benefits of lateral approaches to educational change, especially in the form of distributed leadership, that treat schools…as ‘living systems’ interconnected by mutual influence” (p. 229), but also examining the theory and its practice critically, investigating whether, in practice, these lateral strategies are being used to extend democratic public and professional involvement in developing goals and purposes of education or whether they are being primarily used as motivational devices to re-energize a dispirited profession into producing more effective and enthusiastic delivery of imposed government performance targets (p. 230).

Hargreaves acknowledges that distributed leadership efforts have “increased professional engagement and even shown evidence of further gains in conventional
student achievement” (p. 238). However, Hargreaves asks a critical question that may call into question the potential effects in a change initiative, “Are such forms of leadership merely more subtle and clever ways to deliver standardized packages of government reforms and performance targets in easily measurable areas like literacy that have more to do with expedient politics than with sustainable educational change [emphasis added]?” (p. 238-239). While the scope of our current research cannot purport to measure the sustainability of a change, it is an important lens through which to reflect on the power of present actions.

In 2008, Gronn reexamined this theory of leadership in light of this critical commentary and recent empirical research. In this review, he describes the history of the concept of distributed leadership and notes that the ideas of distributed leadership can actually be found in the management literature to a greater extent than the name, and reaching much farther back. Gronn’s emphasis is that the phenomenon is not new; rather, he hypothesizes, perhaps the leader-as-hero literature of the late twentieth century was itself the anomaly in an otherwise consistent evolution: “[T]he heroic impulse may be the aberrant development, rather than distributed leadership” (p. 142). Gronn continues this discussion of the origin and labeling of these ideas by speculating that neither distributed leadership nor “focused” leadership, as he calls it, may accurately capture a realistic picture of effective leadership. “[T]hey may do less than full justice to patterns of divergent leadership practice increasingly manifest in schools. Source of influence…can for a time be concentrated and at others dispersed…What is required is a rubric of leadership that does justice to these kinds of possibilities” (p. 143).
Elaborating on what he refers to as a “hybrid” model, Gronn (2008) discusses the influence of leadership from individuals, noting:

[I]n a number of empirical investigations of distributed leadership situations, there is persistent evidence of the continuing influence of key individuals in parallel with evidence of partnering and teaming. Use of the label ‘distributed’ to try to encompass such eventualities may be a possible source of confusion. A more helpful designation, as was foreshadowed earlier, might be to subsume all of these variations under the rubric of hybrid leadership practice (p. 148).

In examining leadership practice in its context, Gronn observes that, “A sure sign of hybridity is the intermingling of both hierarchical and heterarchical modes of ordering responsibilities and relations” (p. 150). Referring to those whose roles overlap with formal and informal leaders and different contexts, he notes that a distributed leadership framework (or label) “may well underplay the significance of the contributions of highly influential individuals working in parallel with collectivities” (p. 152). He also observes that some of this confusion, at least in relationship to his own research, may have been prevented if he had narrowed the scope of distributed leadership to include only those activities he described in prior research as conjoint agency. This reflection aligns with the work of Leithwood et al. (2007) and provides another useful piece of the framework for our own inquiry.

Gronn concludes by suggesting that distributed leadership is equal to or a proxy for democratic forms of management. He also explains that distributed leadership does provide a vehicle for “voice” (p. 154), a necessity in democratic organizations, and
confronted those who had claimed that no organization with any hierarchy could also have democratic forms. He observes, however, that “the distinction between distributed and democratic leadership is real” (p. 155), in part because distributed leadership is “tethered” to larger school or organization goals; presumably democratic leadership can be used to take even those overarching goals in different directions. Fewer than three years ago, however, Gronn believed that “there is still much to do both conceptually and empirically with distributed leadership” (p. 155).

The literature, in relation to leadership in the context of educational reform, often focuses on building principals as facilitators of change through teachers’ professional development. However, a 2005 analysis of three urban school districts suggests that district-level offices and systems also influence teaching through coherent professional development programs (Firestone et al., 2005). These researchers suggest that, “it is important to better understand the role of second-level district leaders in district leadership” (p. 443). Gallucci (2008) indicates that there is an expanding body of literature that promotes further understanding of the potentially positive, mediating role of central office or district leaders in relation to instructional change.

Literature on teacher leadership is not scarce (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, in their comprehensive review of the research on teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke identify “the paths by which teachers positively influence student, instructional, professional, and organizational development” (2004, p. 292) as a direction for further scholarly inquiry. Robinson (2008), in her review of distributed leadership in relation to student outcomes, indicates that research in the field pays “little attention to
the influence processes that are at the heart of leadership” (p. 241). She recommends conducting more research pertaining to those conditions under which teachers without positional authority influence their colleagues in ways that are beneficial to students. While some have examined the implications of formally appointing the most skilled and experienced teachers to teacher leadership positions in schools that are in the throes of reform (Camburn, 2009), others have considered the importance of leadership and management as part of a more holistic model for professional development in education (Cardno, 2006). In 2007, Robinson and Timperley sought “to identify the role of leadership in promoting teacher learning that is demonstrably effective in improving student outcomes (p. 248). The current study seeks to expand on this notion by examining, from a variety of perspectives, the role of leadership in a reform-based, literacy initiative as implemented and sustained in a small, suburban school district in New England.

Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) discussed the relationship between culture, trust, and a distribution of leadership, particularly as it relates to the role of the principal. They found, having studied thousands of schools in nine states, that “changing a school’s culture requires shared or distributed leadership, which engages many stakeholders in major improvement roles, and instructional leadership, in which administrators take responsibility for shaping improvements at the classroom level” (p. 52). Louis and Wahlstrom asserted, “neither organizational learning nor professional community can endure without trust” (p. 55) and assert that distributing voice supports the development
of that trust: “[If] principals encourage teachers to step forward and have a voice, teachers are more likely to trust the principal” (p. 55).

**An investigation framework.** In summary, the literature on distributed leadership provides a theoretical framework that informed our examination of leadership practices for implementing reform-oriented, professional development. It is essential however, to distill the various frameworks into a clear and effective framework for examining the leadership for instructional change in Feltonboro. In our case study and in development of protocols for data collection, we utilized elements from a number of the frameworks that seem most applicable.

Elmore’s (2000) work is most closely related to instructional change at the district level, as it relates to the nexus of change and standards-based reforms and accountability policies. Thus three elements (of his five element framework) were used as a theoretical framework for our study. In Feltonboro, we examined our data for elements of leadership as described by Elmore in the following questions:

- Are “the skills and knowledge that matter....those that bear on the creation of settings for learning focused on clear expectations for instruction”? (p. 20).
- Are leaders “creat[ing] environments in which individuals expect to have their personal ideas and practices subjected to the scrutiny of their colleagues, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subjected to the scrutiny of individuals”? (p. 20).
- Are there conditions for “learning [that] grow out of differences in expertise rather than differences in formal authority,” and does “the value of direction,
guidance, and cooperation stem from acknowledging and making use of the differences in expertise”? (p. 21).

We examined this final point of Elmore’s framework through Gronn’s (2002, 2008) *conjoint agency*. Specifically, we looked for examples within the instructional improvement initiative of different actors “synchroniz[ing] their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of the peers, and their sense of unit membership” and also where they experience “synergy” and “reciprocal influence” (p. 431). This description, combined with Elmore’s emphasis on influence through expertise, provides a powerful tool for describing how collaborative efforts may appear in and support distributed leadership in action.

Based on the work of Leithwood et al. (2007) and Gronn (2008), we examined places where leadership may be exercised in a “hybrid” model and where hierarchical forms may be combined with the elements of distribution. Are these instances purposeful in order to further larger goals of instructional improvement and capacity building? Or are they simply vestiges of a leadership system that does not fit a distributed architecture?

Finally, from the critiques of Hartley (2007) and Hargreaves (2008), we explored the motivation for any distribution of leadership observed in Feltonboro. Do changes in leadership seem to be designed to produce instructional changes in order to meet outside mandates? Or do they appear to provide the initial basis for sustainable change in Feltonboro by potentially empowering people throughout the organization?
Research Gap and Significance

This literature review explored the nexus between the change process, reform-oriented professional development, and distributed leadership, with coaching as a potential example of both reform-oriented professional development and distributed leadership. Though empirically based research is limited, there has been a great deal written about leadership, professional development, and coaching as avenues of reform; however, research about the ways in which these three avenues of reform overlap, connect, and support each other is limited. More research is needed that examines the practices within a school district that explores the promise of each as part of an interconnected relationship to increase capacity across the organization with the goal of increasing student achievement.

Districts and schools must reform the way they build the capacity of their educators to improve in order to meet ever-increasing demands; these demands are faced by schools and districts of all sizes, geographic locations, and resources. These demands come with unfunded accountability mandates, such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top that challenge schools to improve the quality of learning for all students. With each passing legislative development, school leaders are left with scant fiscal and human resources to implement those mandates. Often, the most basic elements of building any new change in a school are time and leadership. The research and popular professional literature is ripe with suggestions about how to enact this professional development, yet lack how to lead this change, particularly in providing rich description of how this leadership develops (or not) and is received in and by a district. The literature provides a
context of public policy, reform, and what is happening in our schools today. The research base which might guide schools regarding professional development, collaborative learning, professional learning communities, capacity building, and distributed leadership is growing. What is unclear and under-examined in the literature is the role of leadership within the context of a professional development initiative. Throughout the preceding literature review, this missing element of leadership is significant and is important because a district’s professional development initiatives are most often led and sustained by its formal and informal educational leaders.

The question of how to build capacity for further change seems to be aligned closely with the actions of the leaders with regards to teacher professional development and school change. The following research design describes our qualitative examination of the role of a district’s leadership within a literacy professional development initiative. The two significant and intended outcomes for this research are to provide the Feltonboro district with feedback about teacher and administrator responses to this initiative and possible next steps that it may take to further its work and to add to and seed the research base on how leadership behaviors might influence professional development and instructional change.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Design of the Study

Our research employed a case study design using qualitative data. Qualitative research aims to develop an “understanding [of] the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). In qualitative research, the focus is on meaning and understanding. As researchers, we acted as the primary data collection instruments, gathering data through interviews, observations, and other methods described below. Once collected, data were analyzed through an inductive process.

Merriam (2009) describes a case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). The case in this study is bounded by the Feltonboro School District. Our aim is heuristic, as we hope to enrich our understanding of leadership in a change initiative through the perceptions and experiences of those involved in it. This methodology was selected in order to allow for the in-depth investigation of leadership that would allow us to understand more effectively the perceptions of individuals and groups that exist in the bounded case, and because our research questions primarily question how something is accomplished (Yin, 2009, p. 10).

Sample Selection

The sample for our study was purposive, “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The district in this
case was selected because the professional development initiative is still in its infancy and the initial phases of any initiative are often leadership intensive. The district’s superintendent was interested in this study as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of teachers’ perceptions regarding both formal and informal leadership structures and the impact of these structures on change in instructional practices (M.K. French, personal communication, May 4, 2011). Also, the insider status of one of the research team members within the district allowed for greater access to participants and data (see below for discussion of insider status and threats to reliability and validity).

Participants who could help us learn the most about the phenomenon we are studying – leadership – were determined to be those who are perceived to be or intended to be leaders in relation to the initiative under study. These participants included central office administrators, building principals, the district literacy coach, and teacher members of the Literacy Leadership Team. Some who were interviewed also participated as followers in the initiative. Details of the data collection are described in the following sections.

Data Collection

We began gathering data for our study in the spring of 2011. Data collection continued during the summer and fall of the 2011-2012 school year. Data were collected through four methods: interviews, a written questionnaire, observations, and document analysis. Our interview protocols for coaches, principals, and central office personnel were first piloted in two other suburban school districts of similar size and context as
Feltonboro, including one district with an established coaching program that focuses extensively on literacy.

**Individual interviews with leaders.** Individual semi-structured interviews using developed protocols were conducted with the superintendent, literacy coach, and all four elementary principals in the district. Semi-structured protocols not only allowed the interviewer to address a consistent set of questions, but also probe other lines of inquiry that emerged. “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to the new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Another team member interviewed the superintendent again after his first interview (that had been conducted by the insider member of the research team) resulted in very brief responses. In total, seven interviews were conducted involving six individuals in Feltonboro. Interview protocols are located in Appendix A.

**Teacher data from the Literacy Leadership Team.** The original research design called for focus group interviews with a stratified sampling of teacher members from the Literacy Leadership Team. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) describe focus groups as appropriate when “[A] program of some kind needs to be evaluated to help measure its success, strengths and weaknesses and also to help qualitatively explain the nature of what is and what is not working” (p. 164). Members of the Literacy Leadership Team assumed their membership on the team in a variety of ways: some were chosen by principals because of their status as informal leaders in their buildings; some joined the team because of their interest in literacy; and others were appointed by their principals
because of their contrary perspectives regarding the change. The LLC in its entirety consists of 40 individuals, including both teachers and administrators.

Once in the field collecting data, however, we encountered significant roadblocks to conducting focus groups and collecting data from teacher members of the LLC. When we first issued the invitation to participate in focus group interviews, none of the members of the LLC replied. The invitation was issued a second time, with the same result. Members of the research team invited teachers during LLC meetings to participate in the focus group interviews, but still none responded to the invitation. We speculated that the public nature of focus group interviews might be deterring participants and decided to offer the option of individual interviews. While a small number of teachers (less than 5) initially responded to participate in an individual interview, they withdrew their names after research team members made secondary contact. In the end, we constructed a five-item written questionnaire containing questions similar to those on the original focus group protocol. Members of the LLC were given the option of writing out their responses or responding via computer in a secure online environment. All members of the team were provided time to complete the questionnaire during one of their meetings. Under these revised procedures, six of the thirty-four teacher members of the team responded to the written questionnaire.

**Observations.** A total of seven observations were conducted during meetings of the Literacy Leadership Team, study groups, and initiative planning meetings between May and October of 2011, including a summer District Leadership Team meeting that was focused on the topic of literacy. The May observation was conducted as a pilot and
the data collected was not coded or used in further analysis. Observations were a critical part of the design of the study given the nature of leadership as enacted in the interactions between members of the initiative. We used a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix C) to help focus our observations on leadership behaviors and the interactions between participants. Observation data were used to inform the focus of individual interviews as data collection moved forward. They also allowed for first-hand observations of the interactions that may constitute leadership in this change initiative.

Observers were not participants in these meetings, but neither were they hidden from those participating in the meetings. Using Merriam’s (2009) framework, then, the research team members who observed these meetings acted in “observer as participant” roles. They gathered data but did not participate in the work of the group – in this case, the literacy change initiative. Observers took detailed field notes during the meetings and composed full notes immediately after the observations.

**Reflective journal.** Following a semi-structured protocol, the research team member who was an insider and full participant in the literacy initiative completed a reflective journal entry after each observed meeting (see Appendix D). Journal entries allowed us to examine more closely the perceptions and feelings of a central office administrator charged with a leadership role in the initiative, and served as a way this team member could reflect on her "insider" role.

**Document review.** Finally, data were collected through a systematic review of documents relative to this initiative, “guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 150), and were used to augment the methods
already described. Our research team member, who has full insider status in the
Feltonboro school system, accessed documents to be analyzed by other members of the
research team, including teacher reviews of professional development sessions, agenda
from those sessions, and artifacts resulting from LLC meetings. Document review was
used to help explain the emphasis that formal and informal leaders were affording to the
literacy initiative as well as teacher perceptions and engagement regarding the ongoing
professional development.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define qualitative data analysis as "working with data,
organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns,
discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell
others" (p. 145). Our data analysis was conducted both during and after collection phases,
with some analysis used to inform ongoing collection. Analysis was inductive and
comparative. Each member of the team used a common format for transcription of
observation notes; work was completed with word-processing software readily accessible
to all team members. We used the constant comparative approach to data analysis. The
researcher who first produced the transcription or field notes coded the raw data by
naming the categories observed in the data in conjunction with another member of the
team. As we worked together, we discussed areas of disagreement, taking advantage of
the team aspect of our work to better analyze the data. This allowed us to address aspects
of inter-rater agreement as we worked (Patton, 2001).
We began with one or two codes for each research question. As we collected and analyzed data and themes emerged, codes were added to reflect these patterns, each time with consultation of the research team to ensure shared understanding. Once each piece was coded, findings were shared across data sources in order to triangulate data and inform further collection. To further lend credibility to the process we utilized Patton’s (2001) process of triangulating analysts so that two or more investigators independently analyzed the same data and compared their conclusions for observations in which the sixth researcher was a full participant (p. 560). When the two researchers who were coding data could not reach consensus, a third member was consulted.

Reliability, Validity, and Potential Bias

It is important that information gathered and conclusions drawn from these data are accurate and trustworthy. One method of insuring this is the triangulation of data sources described above. The ability to have multiple members of our research team read and code the same raw data sources and, in some cases, double code data significantly strengthened dependability and credibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulating multiple data sources, including semi-structured/open-ended interviews, and acting as observers as participants strengthened internal validity (Merriam, 1998). This is a significant strength of the team model being employed, as noted above. Finally, because our study is confined to a single case or instance, it must be generalized with caution. In fact, as Merriam (2009) points out, “it is the reader, not the researcher, who determines what can apply to his or her context” (p. 51).

As with any qualitative research, the data in our study were filtered through our
assumptions and biases. As Rossman and Rallis (2003) note, “Because you construct the study and because you ask the questions, becoming aware of your perspective (your assumptions), with its built-in interests, biases, opinions, and prejudices, is an ongoing task. Data do not speak for themselves; they are interpreted through complex cognitive processes” (p. 36).

One member of the research team joined as a full participant in the initiative through her position within the Feltonboro Public Schools. This participant’s professional position is one where she has positional and relational authority for making decisions regarding the professional development initiative under study. Her position of authority in Feltonboro allowed her to have an intimate view of the initiative under study. While this proximity to the subject of the research provided valuable insights, the study design also included some explicit measures to acknowledge bias and maintain credibility. Although this researcher gathered data through document reviews and provided access to the district, its data, and personnel, she did not interview or observe participants over whom she has authority. In fact, her original interview of the superintendent was not used, as noted above, partly because we were uncertain of its credibility. To address potential bias this sixth researcher engaged in reflexivity, or “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). To examine reflexivity the researcher maintained a journal that recorded her experiences and reactions as an insider closely involved with the constructs under study in this research. This journal served as a means to surface some of her inherent biases that will have bearing on this case. This journal also served as a data source for the study, as the
team member reflected on her own leadership behaviors using a protocol designed by other members of the team (see Appendix D).
CHAPTER 4

Findings

The focus of this study is to determine the role of leadership in a small suburban school district’s professional development literacy initiative. We have pursued the following research questions:

1. What is the role of leadership in an initiative to change literacy instruction in a small suburban district? a) How is the leadership distributed, if at all, in this initiative? b) What leadership behaviors, if any, do teachers and administrators view as contributing to or limiting to positive instructional change in the literacy initiative? Who is exercising that leadership? c) What leadership behaviors support or limit engagement in the initiative?

2. How, if at all, do the professional development strategies utilized in this literacy initiative, build capacity for teacher and administrator growth and further change?

We define leadership operationally as a practice that involves influencing and guiding others toward achieving desired goals. A leader is an individual; leadership is the enacted behaviors this individual employs. We found, however, that the definitions and conceptions of leadership within the district varied widely, and that this influenced the progress of the initiative itself. Also, as we conducted our study and analyzed data, we became aware that many of these leadership behaviors and instructional changes were affected by issues of culture, change, and trust. In Feltonboro these issues interact in a
complex system. Our intention is that the following description and findings provide the district with feedback and possible next steps that it may take to further its work. Furthermore, we intend to add to the research base on how leadership behaviors might influence professional development and instructional change.

**Perceptions of Professional Development Strategies**

Although Feltonboro's literacy initiative is still in its infancy, research participants reported that teachers had engaged in change in their classroom instructional practice. They also identified specific professional development strategies utilized by the district that supported that instructional change. Themes that emerged from the coded data of administrator interviews, observations, professional development evaluation forms, and teacher questionnaires identified expertise, competency, modeling, classroom support, study groups and coaching as critical components of this literacy initiative.

**Expertise of the outside consultants.** All the principals interviewed viewed the two outside consultants as competent, engaging, and working to build a common understanding about literacy within the district. All four principals reported that the choice of these specific outside consultants was an excellent decision and that their effectiveness has been positive. One principal stated, “I know I have said this before, but I really think we hit a home run with our consultants. We really did.” Another described them as, “amazing literacy consultants.” Still other comments included: “We are very fortunate that the consultants that we are working with are outstanding”; “They are great”; and finally, “I have to say that the work that I see the outside consultants doing is
wonderful.” The competence of these consultants garnered positive accolades from all the principals. One principal explained it this way:

Then the consultants had to come true. I mean they had to be really good, too. Teachers chose them, but if they bombed and they weren’t authentic, in saying who they were and didn’t have the skills, and weren’t able to relate really well to every single grade that they are involved with…and they have done that. I mean one came here…and got right down with the [students] and with the teachers…That was a tremendous help, that was a big relief…Everybody who comes in, as a consultant, has to prove herself and they have done that, over and over, so that’s been very successful.

It was apparent that these consultants brought a level of expertise that enhanced their chances of success and fostered confidence and openness on the part of the Feltonboro teachers. One veteran principal contrasted the expertise of these literacy consultants with teachers’ responses to past professional development efforts:

They’ll [teachers] come to professional development on their own time. Now if it’s stupid, and they’ve had real stupid professional development in the past, then they get really resentful, I can’t blame them, but it’s just been so great, the quality that the consultants have been providing.

Another principal described how the consultants worked to develop ownership amongst the teachers by listening, recording observations and discussion, synthesizing understandings, and “coming back to the group, bringing ownership to the group that really has worked well.” Still another noted that the consultant working in her school
“just wins more and more every time with people saying, ‘Wow, look what she can do.’”

One principal linked this competency with changing instructional practice in the district:

They’ll [consultants] leave their legacy behind, they’re smart, and they just know what they’re doing and they are teachers for teachers. They’re not teachers for principals. They are teachers for students, but they know the way to get there, to change practice, to have what is best for students is to move through teachers, so that’s where they’re aimed and it’s authentic, and it’s good.

Although only six teachers responded to the written research questionnaire, they all depicted the outside consultants as competent. Asked to specify the successes of this initiative, one teacher noted, “Some great staff training in some very sound literacy programs/approaches.” Observations of study groups and teacher comments during staff development sessions also provided evidence that the outside consultants were respected for their skill level. Comments such as, “I am watching you, feeling like wow she just knows so much and does so much” and “I could watch you teach all day-the way you put the language in their heads,” were comments after each demonstration lesson. The follow-up professional development evaluation forms consistently rated these consultants as “excellent” or “good.” The expertise and competence of these consultants was overwhelmingly recognized throughout the district.

**Competency of the literacy coach.** Coaching was another area where all interviewees expressed favorable attitudes. This classroom support was welcomed and appreciated within the district and seen as enriching the consultants’ work. The competence of the coach and the job-embedded nature of her work were critical factors
mentioned and it appeared that there were expectations that the coaching model could be a means to develop teacher capacity within each building.

As in the case of outside consultants, the expertise of the coach proved critical to the positive perceptions and success of coaching as a professional development strategy. One principal described why the literacy coach is viewed so positively, “She’s outstanding at what she does. She is very well respected and she’s a wonderful person, so besides being the expert and incredibly hard working, she’s a wonderful person, so people really utilize her, which is great.” The coach also echoed the importance of establishing her expertise and competence, “You have to prove yourself… prove you know what you are doing, you know what you are talking about and that you are willing to help. That you’re not going to judge. All of that, I think that’s key.” In addition, central office administrators underscored the literacy coach's leadership abilities, “She is such a great leader… the teachers have such a great respect for her knowledge and who she is as a person and a professional.”

Although teachers did not speak directly about the competence of the coach, in her interview the coach shared a memory about an end of the year award that indirectly supported regard for her efforts, “They recognize people who are retiring and things like that but then they do an award called the unsung hero⁴ and each building nominates somebody, and I was nominated from one school last year.” The acknowledged expertise

⁴ This unsung hero is an individual from each school, recognized by colleagues, who go above and beyond to meet the needs of the school community.
of the coach supported the expertise of the consultants, all of which employed a job-embedded model.

**Modeling by outside consultants.** While the competency of the outside consultants was a critical factor in how they were viewed by teachers and principals, the modeling they provided for teachers was also mentioned as a way to change literacy instructional practices. One principal describes the embedded nature of the professional development they provided:

> It’s ongoing, it’s embedded in classrooms because they’re actually here, modeling lessons. We have a coach come and follow-up in each of the buildings and really help the teachers. So that’s been amazing and I would say that the professional development has been a complete change, complete change.

A colleague echoed the same noting that consultants “get right down on the ground and they show. When you see them do it, it’s like, I can do that, I do that! I already do that, but I learned from her.” Showing and not telling has introduced the teachers in Feltonboro to a new job-embedded staff development model. The coach elaborated:

> I think this has been a great way to kind of bring everybody together, because we all go to different schools to become teachers and everybody does different things and has different strengths. I feel like this is one area where we are all coming together, all hearing the same language, all really understanding how to teach kids and the model that we are using…[it is] a model I think that can work in any subject you’re teaching and that’s what I’m hoping teachers will start to see, that
if I can do this in reading, I can do this in writing, I can do this in math, I can do this in social studies, that’s what I’m hoping will happen.

This job-embedded staff development model may have the potential to influence student learning and ultimately the ongoing professional growth of teachers beyond the literacy initiative. As one teacher responded on the written questionnaire, “The classroom demo-lessons have been the best part. Seeing initiatives in action is crucial [emphasis in original]” Demonstration lessons and job-embedded professional development by outside consultants has set the stage for the coach to follow-up in classrooms.

**Classroom support by the literacy coach.** By its very nature coaching is a job-embedded model. This newly created position within Feltonboro appears to be a support that is appreciated by administrators and teachers alike. One principal stated, “We have a coach come and follow-up in each of the buildings and really help the teachers. So that’s been amazing.” Another principal supported this view, “our reading coach has been another one that has been instrumental in moving people along…the coach has really been a key player…having that coaching position is really important.” A third principal summarized, “So it feels as if we finally have the personnel to be able to do some of this.”

The coach described how she attempts to support the teachers and their work with the outside consultants, “I do a lot of lessons after the fact so if the outside consultants are introducing a lesson or showing people something, if people want more, I’m in there modeling or trying something out.” She went on to describe the expansion of her role and the increase in teachers’ willingness to invite her into classrooms:
I’ve noticed this year that teachers that didn’t ask me at all to come in classrooms [last year], where I would have to say, can I come in and observe, or can I come in and just play with your kids for a little while, or whatever and then they would reluctantly let me, now this year they are asking me to come in.

On the written questionnaires, teachers also mentioned the importance of ongoing, job-embedded support. One teacher noted, “coaches and specialists have been extremely important and strongly supportive.” Another responded that “time planning with the literacy coach” was a professional development strategy that supported her in this literacy initiative. Finally, when asked what they perceived as the successes of the initiative, one teacher noted that for her it was “learning the value of our Literacy coach.” The establishment of this role within Feltonboro has been a very positive strategy and could contribute to the sustainability of this initiative and teacher growth. As one principal stated:

The consultants talk a lot about the fact that their job is to do themselves out of a job. So it’s a question of how much time that’s going to take. They’re still going to be with us, we’ll have the practice, and that would be pretty much established practice, to get more routine. Then have our literacy coach, and maybe have more coaches, maybe have this literacy leadership team, maybe those would be people who would take over, so the model is not that it’s going to be the consultants forever.

In addition to outside consultants and the coach, other professional development structures were put in place in Feltonboro to support the capacity building of teachers.
Study groups were created as a vehicle for the consultants to share content and new literacy strategies; facilitate collegial discussions; conduct demonstration lessons with a follow-up debriefing; and support and foster the on-going reflection by these professionals of their practice.

**In-day study groups.** Attitudes expressed regarding the study groups held during the school day were mostly favorable. A critical component of the study group involves teachers viewing a modeled lesson with time afterwards to debrief. As one administrator explained, “The purpose of these study groups was to build capacity for using interactive read-alouds in [grades] 2-5. In addition, the teachers in grades 3-5 were to be introduced to Readers' Notebooks.” This structure was designed to support learning new content and pedagogy. According to a central office administrator, the focus areas of these study groups were decided by the Literacy Leadership Team, “The topic of professional development sessions was chosen by a committee of teachers and administrators at last May's Literacy Leadership Team meeting.”

This venue also provided a structure for sharing teachers’ voices and collaboration around instructional change. As one administrator stated, “We’ve got buy in. By including every single teacher in small group study groups they are getting a chance in small groups to speak up.” Another administrator recounted after one such study group:

The most effective conversations today were when teachers noticed something in the demonstration lesson, reflected it back to the presenter, and asked about
implications for their own teaching and shared the questions and implications with each other.

A teacher echoed that these conversations were an opportunity to “work with colleagues at the building based and district level.” One administrator on the other hand felt that, “To make it work you have to keep your mouth shut sometimes.” It was unclear whether this sentiment was related to her desire to allow for more teacher voice or her dissatisfaction with the study group process.

Each study group included a demonstration lesson that was viewed as a positive way to engage teachers in the initiative. One administrator summed it up well, “When they [teachers] come out of there they are really invigorated.” This professional development structure of study groups appears to be supporting the growth of teachers as they work to change literacy practices within Feltonboro.

**After-school voluntary study groups.** Only one principal reported engagement by teachers in voluntary study groups⁵ due to meetings scheduled after school. This acknowledgement appeared to be a result of her teachers choosing to participate where there was limited teacher participation at the other schools. This principal explained,

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⁵ These study groups were referred to as “professional learning communities.” In education research and discourse, however, this term typically refers to larger changes in culture and practice than a single structure (e.g. DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). We have avoided using “professional learning community” here in order to avoid confusion between this larger idea and the structure used in Feltonboro.
“The consultants offer an extra hour after, and my teachers have stayed, and at the other schools I guess they haven’t, so it’s one of those things.”

Some teachers did mention interest in this type of work with the consultants: yet, based strictly on attendance they seemed not to support the district efforts. Remaining interviewed participants did not volunteer opinions or attitudes regarding this professional development strategy; this was most likely because of the union undertones that arose within the district.

Based on principals’ interviews as well as central office data it became clear that there were teacher union issues around the use of teacher time after school and for common planning. These issues constrained the implementation of after school meetings and common planning time as specific strategies to build a professional learning culture. As a central office administrator noted, “The beginning of the school year in Feltonboro has been marked by tension between management and the Feltonboro Education Association.” One principal explained her frustration:

So I put in place common planning time for the teachers, because with the prep time we can’t dictate what they’re doing. So, you know there are some union issues here in this district… This year we don’t have it [common planning time] because the union feels that if everyone can’t do it…there’s nothing I can do.

The literacy coach also echoed the frustration with the lack of planning time, noting that two buildings that had this time built into their schedules last year no longer have it. As she stated, “It was a union thing…so they took it away from everybody.”
Although formal meetings after school and common planning time as strategies to build professional culture have met with resistance in the district due to time constraints, the underpinnings of this strategy for building instructional capacity were highlighted by an administrator’s reflection:

It is becoming clearer to me that teachers working together in teams on problems that they take ownership of solving is going to be the key to our success. Teachers need to be able to identify the issues and become instrumental in solving the problems using the knowledge of best practices that they have. The most effective conversations today were when teachers noticed something in the demonstration lesson, reflected it back to the presenter, and asked about implications for their own teaching and shared the questions and implications with each other.

Though the after school meeting structure designed by the district was not embraced as it was designed, the cultivation of a professional learning culture has been at the core of all the professional development strategies employed by Feltonboro.

Participants reported that professional development completely changed in the district over the last few years and these changes were very positive. As one principal shared, “There’s been an incredible change in the level of professional development that is being offered to classroom teachers.” These prevalent positive attitudes regarding professional development strategies within Feltonboro’s literacy initiative bode well for the continued professional growth of the staff and ultimately for capacity building across the district. However, the ultimate test is whether change has occurred. These strategies have been aimed at changing teacher behaviors around literacy instruction. The next
section examines the data surrounding this as well as reported student changes around literacy behaviors.

**Instructional Change**

Based on reports from the principals, the literacy coach, and the teachers themselves, we found that the majority of teachers throughout the Feltonboro District engaged in changing their classroom instructional practice despite low levels of teacher engagement in leadership roles and voluntary after school study groups. This suggests that the coach- and consultant-mediated Literacy Initiative is a vehicle that teachers believe can support positive instructional change in Feltonboro.

**Implementing new instructional strategies.** All principals, during individual interviews, reported that teachers implemented new instructional strategies within their classrooms. Even when teachers felt stressed by expectations and the change process, they appeared to work to change instructional practices. One principal shared the following insight, which was echoed by other principals:

In my building there is a lot of complaining, but it is never about what they are learning. You know, in other words, they buy completely what they are being given... We’ve never once had a staff member say that the hour and a half they spent with the consultant wasn’t worthwhile. People are leaving really engaged, really empowered, stressed about the change, but I think that what they’re being offered is so valuable, that people are really buying it.

Another principal reported seeing instructional change specifically related to a struggling teacher. Though she described her own frustration with a teacher who relies
solely on whole group lessons, she proudly shared the inroads being made by this teacher:

I have a teacher who does just whole group lessons, and no matter what, you can’t get her to do anything but that. So, when I went in today, the students had been reading and she had been modeling the same lesson as the literacy specialist. She didn’t do it in a small group or with buddies, she still was whole group, but they were scattered around the room, She was like ‘Okay, everyone! Stop and think…’ She was using the language! I’ll take it! I’ll take it! I was able to see it transfer directly into her instruction. So, as a professional, I feel like I can now sit down with her and say, I am really excited to see where you are. I know that when I go into classrooms, the language being used, I am seeing a change in instruction.

When discussing instructional change, principals remarked on a broadening “perception of reading as being positive for students.” The principals commented on how the teachers appeared to “love” the professional development. One principal elaborated on their enthusiasm:

They are excited because they see behavior management, they see professional language, they see examples of practices, and so when they come out of there, they are really invigorated. Teachers have already come to me saying, ‘We want to use exactly the notebook that she showed us, where can I get these tabs…Do we have the money?’ It’s so great that I am going out to Staples to buy them. I am that excited about them being willing to try it.
Behaviors demonstrating instructional change were reported at all the elementary schools, though to differing degrees. One principal shared the beginning steps of this change:

This initiative has impacted our core instruction, hopefully more positive, which is what you want, you want a better core, so that you don’t need the RTI. I wouldn’t say it’s starting to happen completely, we’re seeing that we’re doing things a little differently, we’re not having all these groupings that are so focused on one thing. We’re also carrying over the comprehension strategies that they’re learning in the classroom. So there’s those kind of differences.

Even at the school with the most union pressure the literacy experts reported that teachers were engaged in changing literacy instruction. One remarked, “They jumped into the units this time.” There were frequent urgings in group sessions to “thank the previous grade teacher; they started this work with the students last year.” One fifth-grade teacher remarked, “I’m still just so impressed with them [students], it amazes me.” The consultant responded, “They know a lot about books. Tell your fourth-grade colleagues that.” This certainly suggests that the Feltonboro teachers were learning and applying new literacy practices in their classroom instruction.

During study groups and committee meetings, teachers themselves reported that they were changing their classroom practice. One teacher commented: “Every day we just build a little skill and I’m loving it.” Another stated, “I’m seeing the spiral effect from third grade.” A colleague responded, “I’m also seeing the spiral at my grade level.” On workshop evaluation forms teachers reported increased personal knowledge of “parts of reading workshop.” One teacher reported that she now understood, “how to use
various types of assessment for various purposes.” The ultimate statement of engagement on the part of teachers in terms of changing their practice was, “We all want to do what’s best for kids...we want your help.” Reported changes in the literacy behaviors of students also indirectly document a change in instructional practice.

**Student literacy behaviors.** Instructional change was also evidenced through teachers’ and principals’ observations of students. Though we cannot draw conclusions regarding impact of the initiative on student achievement, we did notice that interviewees reported that students’ literacy behaviors were changing. One principal shared:

> When you go into classrooms you’ll see a lot of kids just buried in books. That’s like the biggest thing. Their heads are just buried in books. And not just at the upper grades, but in the first and the second grades... they’re building their stamina...they love to read.

Students’ change in attitude towards reading was echoed by another principal, “I think the biggest thing I’ve noticed is that a lot more of them [students] love to read. They’re excited about books and I don’t think that was the case even before last year.”

All participants commented on the theme of changed student behaviors. The literacy coach reported:

> Look what these kids are doing now, it’s just amazing to me. We just had a meeting at each building with each grade level with the consultants, just hearing from each grade level saying wow, the kids can really do this from last year, they are giving teachers credit from the year before, I’ve never seen that happen before.
Other changes in students’ literacy behavior that were reported included student use of taught strategies. The literacy coach reported that she now sees students having conversations with each other about books and that on written reflection pages they are evidencing higher levels of metacognition. She stated:

I’ve already seen kids having conversations with each other, like ‘I like this book because…’ and they’ll tell why. That didn’t happen before…It was very interesting to me that the metacognition page and the reflection page where kids are starting to talk about what they do as a reader …they’re starting to add what strategies they use and they’re talking about how they are changing their thinking. That was exciting to me, I'm really seeing impacts.

Teachers also reported seeing evidence of change in their students’ literacy behaviors. At one study group teachers excitedly shared, “Students are re-phrasing what they were thinking”; “Kids are now thinking about the problem and solving it”; and “They have that protocol going on, they weren’t doing that at this time last year.” A chart created by teachers at an LLC meeting contained the following changes observed in their students:

• students are transferring and applying skills to other areas of the curriculum and across content areas (especially science and soc studies [sic]);

• kids are seen using the strategies in different settings;

• now the ‘turn and talk’ is natural for them – they talk about text, etc. together;

• talking about text has helped students with their writing – it brings their ideas to the surface;
• talking about text has helped with language and vocabulary.

These reported changes in student literacy behaviors help to document the change in instructional practice and teacher capacity, which the participants attributed to the new professional development strategies employed by Feltonboro.

Though it appears that the professional development strategies employed within the Feltonboro School District’s Literacy Initiative have led to positive attitudes and changes in instructional practice, questions about the leadership of this change and the sustainability and future growth of the change remain. These questions will be examined more fully in following sections.

**Enactment of Leadership**

Our first research question asked, "What is the role of leadership in an initiative to change literacy instruction in a small suburban district?" In particular, we were interested in how leadership was distributed or not in Feltonboro and what leadership behaviors supported instructional change and engagement in this literacy initiative. Dr. French and the Director of Elementary Education believed that with the establishment of the Literacy Leadership Team, the teachers’ voices would be heard and that it would be an opportunity for teachers to take on leadership roles in their schools. His expectation was that principals and teachers, with facilitation and expertise provided by the outside consultants, would lead the initiative. Central office set out to distribute leadership among principals and teachers by first setting the direction and encouraging leadership in others, then by engaging them in activities that supported the implementation of the initiative.
Through our interviews we found that central office administrators, building principals, and teachers held different perspectives about leadership and leadership behaviors. There was not a common understanding of leadership among these groups, leading to inconsistent leadership behaviors and even resistance to leadership from teachers. Specifically, central office administrators viewed leadership for this initiative coming from principals and teachers. Building principals viewed leadership as coming from consultants who were experts that could lead the instructional change while they promoted teacher engagement in the initiative by attending to teacher morale and supporting technical changes. Teachers involved in the Literacy Leadership Team viewed leadership as coming from the positional authorities and expressed concern about being referred to as leaders. In short, each of these stakeholder groups expected others to provide more direct leadership in the district’s literacy initiative instead of viewing leadership as their responsibility.

**The role of central office administrators.** During the first year of his employment in the district, Dr. French focused on increasing student achievement in literacy as a district priority. This vision seemed to be embraced by at least one of the principals as reflected in the comment that, “the superintendent has identified that achievement is number one, which is great, because that’s really important and is our top goal.” A literacy teacher also agreed that Dr. French “has a great vision for where we're heading” and “he knows what steps must be taken in order for the district to achieve that vision.”
Central office administrators took three major steps to ensure the literacy initiative was a priority in Feltonboro. First, they reallocated funds from the district’s Reading Recovery program to hire an in-district literacy expert to coach classroom teachers. Second, central office administrators established the Literacy Leadership Team, a group of approximately forty district professionals, and authorized release time for group members to collaboratively plan the implementation of the literacy initiative over time. Third, they made a four-year commitment, at a total projected cost of $200,000, to contract two outside literacy experts to facilitate the work of the LLC including the professional development associated with the literacy initiative.

The superintendent also gave the Director of Elementary Education latitude to change district organizational structures. Dr. French elaborated by saying “I cut her a broad slab in which to operate, and my management style became more of a coaching style and a check-in of philosophy checks.” The Director of Elementary Education organized the Elementary Leadership Team, which includes all elementary level principals. When speaking about this team one principal remarked that the Director of Elementary Education “has set up a structure so that we actually meet with her. We have input. She asks us what we think, and what’s going on in our buildings.” These strategies were intended to encourage the distribution of leadership across district administrators. Central office administrators also established the LLC, which was intended as an ongoing venue to involve teachers in the planning of reform efforts.

One of the ways that central office enacted leadership was through hiring outside consultants. In a formal interview, Dr. French noted that a component of the “model has
been engaging external consultants that are highly skilled.” Central office administrators made attempts to put in place strategies and structures that dispersed leadership across the initiative through engaging a range of professionals in the change process.

**Developing teacher leadership.** Data reveal that district level administrators also focused on the development of teacher leadership. The superintendent acknowledged that, “teacher leadership has not been developed to much of an extent” within Feltonboro, and that this “must take place in order for the district to achieve to its potential.” The Literacy Leadership Team was intended as an avenue to develop teachers’ leadership in the literacy initiative.

Documents from the initial meetings of the LLC indicate that all members on the committee were expected to be involved in the vision development and leadership of the initiative. The Director of Elementary Education thought that the district expectations for teacher leadership by LLC members was widely understood and was surprised when this appeared to be a “bolt out of the blue.” Teachers seemed surprised and confused by this expectation.

**Encouraging principal instructional leadership.** In addition to teacher leadership, the superintendent and the Director Elementary Education set out to develop principal leadership in this initiative. Principals reported that in previous years in Feltonboro, they were less involved in decision-making, which originated more with central office curriculum staff. While this literacy initiative originated in the central office, it did so with the goal of sharing leadership and allowing others to take on leadership roles. The superintendent noted, “Part of that model has been engaging
external consultants that are highly skilled, and another part has been to have demonstrated leadership from principals behind it, on the ground visible that shows their support.” Recognizing this disconnect, the Director of Elementary Education expressed to the entire group at an LLC meeting the importance of building and district administrators being in attendance. She also reflected the following: “I spoke with the superintendent afterward about the issue and we came up with a plan to address the principal presence.” Rather than simply being directive, she found creative and engaging ways to involve the principals in the substance of the work. For example, she created a list of "look-fors" from the professional development for principals to use when conducting a monthly walkthrough. Through the observations and the reflective journal, it was clear that she was explicitly working to support the superintendent’s goal of shared leadership with the teachers and the principals.

**Principal technical leadership.** In order to understand their role, we began by asking each principal to talk about ways they have exercised leadership in the initiative. Despite the goal of the superintendent for principals to engage in instructional leadership, we found that principals were deferring the opportunity for instructional leadership and adaptive leadership to the central office staff and consultants. Principals were highly supportive of the ongoing initiative but mostly supported it through technical behaviors (management focused) as opposed to adaptive behaviors that targeted cultural change involving attitudes, beliefs, trust, and relationships.

Principals’ references to leadership focused on the central administration or the outside consultants, not the teachers or their own roles as school leaders. Some even
outwardly avoided adaptive leadership behaviors, and there were numerous data that pointed to principals as technical leaders in this phase of the initiative. In fact, each principal responded to questions about his or her role in the initiative by describing activities that were largely technical in nature. For example, during one interview, a principal cited the following as an example of leadership in the initiative: “Providing schedules, I mean there is some of the management piece as far as schedules, getting them subs, giving them the ability to, if they need to get out.” Another principal also referenced schedules to describe leadership in the initiative, referencing how, “we need to move this initiative forward, so sometimes that means tolerating a little more than you should,” referring to the fact that the teachers were using the schedule as a barrier to move forward. This principal responded to the needs of her staff by creating a new schedule in order to maintain the momentum. She believed that this would allow the teachers to continue successfully with the implementation of the instructional changes, even though teachers may have been able to accomplish this task on their own.

These technical moves demonstrate support of the teachers and their engagement in professional development and instructional change. Another principal echoed this technical support by describing how her leadership involved asking the teachers what materials they needed and by telling the teachers that she “will support, do whatever to support them to be successful at this.” All in all, the principals were largely engaged in technical leadership of this initiative.

**Principal presence.** All principals said their physical presence at the LLC meetings and study groups was important. They each understood that they needed to learn
with and be with their teachers to support the work of the instructional change. One principal, for example, shared the following during an interview:

Well, I think that my role has been to support the initiative and to be a spokesperson for the initiative. I need to be someone who is visibly involved. So, I did try to block as much as I could, barring being pulled out. I spent most of the day with the Literacy Consultant and being with every group. I would then go and see the lesson. I have to have the same language as the teachers.

Other principals also stated that they made a commitment to the initiative and wanted to learn each aspect of the literacy instructional change so that they could support the teachers who were implementing it. However, one principal did admit that she found it difficult to have so many meetings and to be “out of the building.” This difficulty was also consistently noted at the LLC meetings and study groups where principals were in partial attendance. All of the principals indicated that their presence was critical, but that this posed a challenge for each.

**Perceptions of consultants.** While the principals in this initiative provided more of the technical support for the overall change, the consultants were hired to facilitate the instructional change. Their role also included guiding discussions around adaptive change. In fact, they were so central to the work of the initiative that others ascribed significant leadership to them.

Principals deferred leadership to the outside consultants because of their level of expertise and professional credibility. For example, referring to the modeling of instruction by one of the consultants, a building principal stated: “It’s huge. I mean, even
as an administrator, I was like, wow, she’s good. So, that brought instant credibility. So when she goes back and she is telling them (teachers) to change instructionally, they’ve seen it.” In this initiative, it was the consultants, and not the principals, who asked the teachers to not only change instructionally, but also culturally. For example, during an LLC meeting, one consultant responded to the group concerns about their roles by saying: “We’re pushing back because you all said you want to help us with the cultural blocks and if we don’t address them, you won’t get the deep change you want.”

**Teacher voice.** Teacher voice was identified as a central office goal. From the very start of the initiative, teacher voice was solicited in the choice of the literacy consultants. A principal described this in an interview:

So the Director of Elementary Education came up with her master plan and solicited input from everyone. It’s definitely not perfect, but it’s moving. That’s how we hired the outside consultants and that was a really important step, letting the teachers choose. I think a lot of care was taken to make sure that this is what the group of teachers said they wanted. So, that was a success. The superintendent wanted to be sure that from the very beginning teachers understood that their voices were valued. In an interview, he stated, “One of the reasons this has been a very successful effort is that the model for the implementation of the training involved teachers in the selection of the model and the consultants.” The model carefully considered teacher voice and the LLC itself represents a structure to foster teacher voice. It appeared that this was the beginning of the cultural change in the district to distribute leadership. Nonetheless, the teacher members of the Literacy Leadership Team, like the
principals, expressed a more hierarchical view of leadership. They did not necessarily view their role and voice as that of guiding or leading.

Teachers did two things in the initiative: they took direction and provided feedback related to the implementation of instructional change. Teachers clearly did not want to be giving the direction, but were happy to problem-solve with the group around issues of the implementation of the initiative. They seemed invested in the instructional change, but most were resistant to the idea of teachers leading it. Tasks that they seemed most comfortable with were ones where they could serve as key communicators, but not leaders or decision-makers. For example, at one of the LLC meetings, teacher discussion led to communicating the next steps in the initiative to their peers. One teacher observed that it would be helpful to have consistent ‘bullet’ notes that the consultants develop after each meeting; another teacher suggested that the LLC members jointly develop a “key points document” at the end of each session that would be distributed to all teachers back in their schools. Teacher cooperation and participation was present on the LLC, but it stopped short of leadership.

There was a small minority of teachers who identified specific teacher leadership behaviors that furthered the initiative, but the inability to lead or direct colleagues remained. These teachers spoke up when the consultants asked them to discuss how the teachers could help communicate. This is when the issues of communication, trust, and culture came to the forefront in the dialogue. While most teachers were openly concerned about the expectation that they were to lead or direct others in this initiative, some seemed to voice openness about their roles on the LLC. They spoke about how teachers
could have a positive impact on the momentum of the initiative, but not in an authoritative manner. For example, one teacher saw leadership as a means to support one another. Another teacher affirmed this sentiment, “I just think it is important for us all to stay together and be cohesive. Part of our role as leadership is to make sure we keep the positive morale going as part of a cohesive group.” Still another teacher noted, “it has nothing to do with not being passionate about the changes…but we can’t direct teachers.” Such voices from the LLC meeting indicated teacher support for the instructional change, but did not affirm teachers leading and directing the initiative in the district and could not be triangulated with other data demonstrating explicit teacher leadership behaviors.

The principals viewed this committee as a model that would empower teachers and provide an avenue for teacher leadership, a stated goal of the superintendent. One principal believed that teachers also felt positively regarding this strategy, asserting that teachers would describe the committee as “a real driving force.” A central office administrator disagreed, “No leadership coming from this group. Teachers did not want to be perceived as leaders and any different than their peers.” This statement is consistent with observations of the committee and statements from teachers that indicated that their participation in the LLC did not equate them as leaders in the district.

Direct data gathered from LLC teachers was a research challenge in this study. We were able to secure six participants (out of the thirty-four teachers) on the LLC to respond to our survey. Of the six, two mentioned that this committee was a positive strategy to engage teachers. One other stated that the initiative began as a top-down led change, but that it is “increasingly shared by the teachers.” Although just one teacher out
of forty, this statement offers hope for the cultural change of distributed leadership in the future.

Overall, we found that the initiative began with central office and continued to be centrally driven. The goal of central office was to de-centralize or distribute leadership among the principals and teachers in the district. At this stage of the initiative, we found that perspectives and enactment of leadership varied across the groups involved. Central office was structuring the literacy initiative to encourage principal and teacher leadership. Principals and teachers continued to view leadership in a hierarchical manner. The principals were most comfortable with technical leadership and mostly deferred leadership to the consultants and to central office. Teachers resisted the label of leadership and associated behaviors. Consultants led the instructional change, but evolved into the voice of the cultural change by addressing issues of trust and communication.

The collocation between the teachers’ viewpoint that they were “just” teachers and not being heard, the principals’ perception that the teachers were avoiding leadership because it was “too hard,” and the central office stance that teacher leadership must be developed inform a pivotal issue. The data show crucial points during the initiative where teachers felt that their contributions were undervalued. Data also support that teachers avoided taking on the task of communicating this initiative to their colleagues despite verbal and written exchanges that this was an expectation of serving on the LLC. Teacher avoidance of leadership did not seem to arise from the perception that leadership was a difficult task. Instead these differing levels of leadership enactment were symptoms of challenges faced by Feltonboro in implementing this initiative.
Leadership Challenges

Our study examined three clear stakeholder groups – central office administrators, building principals, and LLC members – who provided varying degrees of leadership in this initiative. Each of these groups encountered challenges that affected engagement and enactment of leadership in this initiative. Some of these challenges were technical, such as concerns regarding communication and time. Others were largely adaptive, where new “learning is required both to define problems and implement solutions” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 75) including disconnects between administrators and teachers in relation to presence, vision, and expectations. Another adaptive challenge that emerged was the area of trust. In response to these challenges, teachers exhibited confusion about and reluctance to take on leadership roles. Administrators expressed surprise that teacher leaders did not readily assume the leadership opportunities available to them.

Technical challenges. Some of the challenges faced by leaders in the initiative were technical. While powerful and potentially calling for changes in practice, they presented issues that did not require new learning.

Communication. One of the goals for the initial Literacy Leadership Team meeting in October 2011 was to create a protocol for communication between the LLC and school faculties. Up until then, communication after LLC meetings was sporadic and varied in content. The superintendent lamented, “You know, we’ve discovered that everything isn’t perfect and often times with a leadership team of teachers, the communication isn’t great.” A central office administrator described the issue:
A game of telephone begins after each [LLC] meeting. If one school is getting the info early, by the time it gets to other schools, it could be different information. We need to be consistent so it’s not getting out in one [school] and not the other. A building principal also identified the inconsistency of communication between school sites: “[I]t sounds like there’s been an over communication at some levels and an under at others, so we need to understand everybody’s responsibilities.” During a professional development session a teacher voiced her frustration with the constant need to process new information, “If someone sends me something out of the blue, I don’t have background knowledge about it and I am not sure what it is and I am a busy person…that paper goes under a stack within three hours.” Still another teacher echoed this teacher’s statement in order to justify creating a consistent communication plan with responsibilities for both the delivery and receipt of information:

It will make our lives easier if we leave with the same plan for communication…there’s a lot to remember. There is a lot of communication on the other end of this room, we’ve sent out great communication out, but we can’t make something different for you and for you and for you…at the end of the day the people who are listening have to read the email…and we can’t beat ourselves up.

Accordingly, at the LLC meeting, central office administration and consultants decided that a common communication procedure needed to be developed. Building administrators acknowledged that consistent communication around implementation barriers and instructional language was essential. One principal offered:
I have to have the same language. I can speak to it: go in a classroom. I think that’s very important. I think I have to be a sounding board for the people who are sharing their concerns and almost be an intermediary, so they bring me a concern and then I may have to share it with the Literacy Specialist or with the Director of Curriculum.

A teacher member of the LLC also reinforced the necessity for effective communication observing that work around communication would help the team “continue to move forward and keep people on the same page.”

Consultants also acknowledged the difficulties that emerged as a result of inconsistent and inaccurate communication. They recognized that “change,” a constant theme in the content of numerous messages, served as a potential source of tension for teachers and therefore, observed that clear, consistent, and accurate communication was essential to alleviate already existing tension.

**Time.** Building-level administrators identified finding time to attend the professional development sessions as a challenge. One principal described the challenge:

The hardest thing to do as a building principal is to be at the training, be at the workshops, be visible, and be present, to learn with the teachers… I’m totally frazzled. I’m twenty minutes late and maybe I’m not even totally there, checked in. I want to be, I should be.

A colleague discussed how she blocks out time to attend all of the building-based sessions “barring” being pulled out for something. The building principals expressed the
importance of their presence at the professional development at the same time that they acknowledged finding the time to be present was a challenge.

Teachers described challenges related to time in a variety of ways. One expressed how lack of time impacted applying new skills: “The issue here is that I can’t fit everything. I’m being honest. I’m trying to cut my talking down…there’s multiple problems here.” Other teachers identified a lack of time to process new information as an obstacle to change. One teacher remarked:

We run into the meeting, listen, and then run back into the classroom, I think we could take fifteen minutes afterwards to process it, before we go back to the classroom. What did you get out of it? What did this mean? That would be, for me, a good starting point. I can say that the feedback I’ve been getting [from colleagues] is the same. That the hour is so jam-packed, but at the end the lesson is done, and the extra fifteen minutes to see what we got out of it would be really useful.

Her colleague supported these sentiments, noting, “I agree what I have been hearing…the hour we have in study groups is *so* jam packed that we don’t have time to process.” A district administrator validated the teachers’ feelings regarding lack of time to process, “We need time to process this as well. It’s a lot of information…trying to run a school or a classroom is challenging.”

A teacher member of the LLC connected previously discussed communication challenges with challenges of time, “We can’t do this over lunch. If it is an important enough thing, the time must be given to us. We need to work with our building principal
to create the time.” Her peers affirmed her observations with nonverbal approval. The teacher’s statement and its vigorous nonverbal reinforcement indicated that the teaching staff looked to the munificence of those with positional leadership to signal approval by providing resources, in this case time, in order to perform the expected tasks. As discussed earlier, a building administrator also recognized and reinforced the leadership challenge of time as it related to the development of a communication schedule. Her description of the process of creating the schedule demonstrated a willingness to assume a leadership role that would forward the agenda and success of the literacy initiative. Although the intention of the principal’s creation of a schedule was to support the initiative, the response missed involving teachers as part of the solution, or how involving teachers in it may support their leadership development. While teachers might insist that it was the sole responsibility of administrators to decide how time was allotted, at the same time they implied a willingness to work with the positional authority to figure out how to allot time.

Lack of time to interact with colleagues was an obstacle to the development of teacher leadership in the Feltonboro literacy initiative. Teachers felt that they did not have time to communicate with peers regarding the logistical and instructional aspects of the change or to process new learning with their colleagues and thus create a sense of shared meaning. Administrators acknowledged and shared these concerns about the difficulty of providing adequate time. In part this willingness of principals to step in and “solve” one facet of the time issue resulted in a lost opportunity to empower teachers to
have control over the resource of professional time and also demonstrated a “let’s get this done” attitude rather than a collaborative attitude.

**Adaptive challenges.** Other challenges to leadership that Feltonboro faced in the initiative were adaptive. These required new learning and potentially change in beliefs and values in order to effectively confront them.

**Instructional leadership capacity.** The superintendent expressed a clear expectation that building principals would provide “demonstrated leadership behind it [the literacy initiative], on the ground and visible [leadership] that shows their support.”

The principals were aware the superintendent’s expectation meant performing in the role of instructional leader. One principal framed this notion, “the view from the superintendent right now is that the principals are real instructional leaders. And that’s been communicated, which is great, but it puts on a lot of pressure.” The principals acknowledged that their role in instructional change was different in the past, “When there was an initiative that went forward, it was carried by the curriculum director and not by the principals.” A colleague elaborated:

It was a different hierarchy that was established by the past administration. The curriculum coordinators were viewed higher than principals, and so that drove and we [principals] just followed and did whatever they [directors] wanted to do.

The leadership expectations from the superintendent conflicted with the principals’ enactment of leadership. The principals’ references to their leadership were defined in terms of managerial tasks such as, “creating the schedule, getting the subs, making sure the teachers have what they need.” Despite the level of expertise implied in
the term instructional leader, one principal stated “any principal that tells you that they
are the expert in math, literacy, behavior support, well, that’s not my job.”

When discussing leadership roles, principals indicated that they felt strain from
the expectations placed on them. They implied this tension through the use of phrases
such as “it [the instructional leadership expectation] puts on a lot of pressure” and “it’s
[the managerial support tasks] a lot.” Principals defaulted to a hierarchical understanding
of leadership emanating from the central office when they expressed concerns about the
sustainability of the initiative. They were particularly concerned about what would
happen if there were changes in the central office administration, specifically the role of
Director of Elementary Education.

We can’t change things up. That worries me. When [if] she leaves, I am worried
because she has us on a track and it is really important that we stay on that track.
When someone new comes in, we are going to lose it all. Because that is what
happened for years. We are finally going, so it is really important that we stay the
course.

The principals' comments reveal a tension between the views of the
superintendent and the building principals in terms of what leadership at the building
level should look like in this initiative. There is also an issue of capacity in terms of the
principals' understanding of the change required to move from “keeping the halls quiet”
to instructional leader so they may accomplish the required leadership tasks.

**Teacher and administrator disconnect.** While communication difficulties and
lack of time clearly impeded the initiative, it was “structural and cultural obstacles” that
the majority of LLC members mentioned as the greatest impediment to change in Feltonboro during their October 2011 meeting. Several teacher members of the LLC identified teacher-administrator disconnect as a cultural obstacle to change. An illustration of this disconnect was the lack of principal attendance and participation in the LLC meeting. Teachers were cognizant of absent principals, despite the attendance of central office administrators. One teacher summarized:

[T]he more that we do work here and become a PLC, the more we need all leadership levels present…we understand the demands…we need their presence all day for the whole day…nobody knew this morning that we’d be here now…this is learning and we need all the parties here.

Another teacher framed the issue this way: “I think if this is important enough, our building principals need to support us in this.” During our observations of the meetings several other teachers affirmed these sentiments. The teachers in Feltonboro were looking for their principals to be present, learning alongside them and interpreted principal attendance at LLC meetings as a sign of commitment to the initiative.

In contrast, the principals already perceived themselves as learners alongside the teachers. In their individual interviews all of the principals described their role in the initiative as being visible supporters. Three of the four principals further identified their role as that of learner so that they could understand the teachers’ needs. “My role is to be at the workshops, be visible and present, to learn with the teachers.” A colleague described the role “I do have an instructional role in this, learning as much as I can.” This was the same principal who, despite the acknowledgement that being present and
learning was the role of the principal, acknowledged that she was often absent or late for sessions and that when she did arrive she was “totally frazzled” and “not even totally there.” While principals seemed to understand that leadership would be most effective stretched over both administrators and teachers, they also felt stretched in many other ways that complicated their involvement.

The principals expressed understanding of their role to be that of learner and problem-solver in collaboration with teachers. Teachers, however, felt that building level administrators were not present and learning with them in a true professional community. Teachers’ views of this disconnect between teachers and administrators appeared to be accurate on the surface. Principals said their role was to be learners, supporters and, problem solvers in the context of the initiative but their lack of presence at a major juncture in the initiative resulted in teachers’ feeling alone in the process. One principal went further and discussed the fact that even when she was physically present at a professional development session she may not be mentally present. Because this recognition was shared between teachers and principals, the disconnect in Feltonboro appears not to be disagreement about what is important; but about how leadership is enacted and by whom.

Vision. Another cultural impediment to the development of collaborative leadership was the lack of shared vision for all elements of the initiative. A central office administrator observed that, “the vision, where the goals are for the literacy initiative and where that came from was from the teachers. We spent a whole day, the LLC, spent a
whole day developing that [vision].” Some of the principals also asserted that the LLC
developed the vision. In the words of one principal:

A rough draft of that document [vision statement] was given to the people who
attended that meeting and they then brought it back to the teachers here, looked at
it, gave feedback, and then we kind of came back and said okay, is this what
everyone can agree on. So then that pretty much drove what we were doing.

Despite assertions from central office administrators and Feltonboro’s principals
that the vision for the initiative was clear and developed by consensus, not all teachers
agreed that there was clarity around the meaning of that vision. Many teacher members of
the LLC described the Feltonboro vision for literacy as embedded with “confusion” and
lacking an “anchoring [to] the big vision” in the schools. They expressed that teachers
generally did not know where the initiative is heading. This discord highlights the
teachers’ view of their limited impact on the development of the vision. One teacher
underscored this with the statement, “It took a while to form a clear vision…which got
frustrating and caused general distrust, cynicism, lack of motivation or buy in.” The
perception that they were not involved in the creation of the vision resulted in negative
consequences for teachers and further illuminated the challenges to the distribution of
leadership at all levels.

*Expectations for teacher leadership.* Most administrators described the literacy
initiative as beginning to bring about change in the district. The central office leadership
highlighted the development of teacher leadership as a necessary cultural change. The
superintendent described the establishment of the LLC as a key to teacher leadership:
The teacher leadership piece...[is] the cultural shift that is going to be necessary here. It isn’t going to be easy because within the culture, teachers are afraid to look good compared to their peers...there is a lack of [and a fear] that the leaders that emerge will somehow be favorites for the administrators. These are things that teachers have said. So we have to build that trust up, and I think the literacy leadership is the step. I think we’re at a critical juncture in really giving that team [the LLC] the power, the empowerment, and trust that it does have control over its destiny and is trusted by administration.

Administrators viewed the cultural change positively, though they also identified leadership challenges that emerged within this change. One principal reported:

It’s [the literacy initiative] starting to change the culture of the district, which they’re [teachers] rebelling against...because for the first time they have a lot of voice, they have a lot of input, and they’re doing a lot of the work, it’s not just a person talking at them.

When presented with leadership tasks, teachers on the LLC reacted with reluctance to engage in that work. The development of the communication protocol, on the surface a logistical challenge, provided a window into this cultural reluctance. Despite teachers’ requests for clear communication, many teachers reacted with confusion and reluctance to engage in the work of protocol development. This confusion was represented by a teacher who commented that “no one knows whose job it is to change that and to oversee this.” This statement suggests that some teachers were not averse to assuming a leadership role, but were unclear about what that role should be. Another
teacher referred back to the traditional hierarchy with one person in charge observing, “There has to be someone in our school system saying this is your job, this is what you are supposed to be doing.” Her colleagues also associated communication of literacy initiatives and goals with traditional functions of hierarchical leadership. A number of comments by teachers echoed the teacher who noted: “I’m a teacher. I can’t say to people that they have to meet. I’m in no position.” Another teacher sarcastically expressed reluctance to assume responsibility for communication, “I missed the communication vote last year. If that is part of my job, then I missed that when I joined this.” These comments, while providing resistance to the work of the initiative, also supported the tendency by the principals to fall back on a traditional, hierarchical view of leadership.

These statements, along with written documents produced by the LLC, supported one principal’s notion that “teachers are rebelling” against the initiative. Document review revealed that all three LLC meetings during the 2010-2011 school year included an action item for team members related to communication. For instance, the written action plan developed with teacher participation at the October 2010 meeting noted:

- Share the Role of Literacy Committee – Communicate with faculty. Committee members need to listen to teachers’ ideas. Explain the process of how decisions will be made.

- Ask which topics teachers feel would be important for future PD sessions. Committee ideas: Common language around comprehension strategies and/or gradual release in reader’s workshop.
• Share topics for Nov. 3rd meeting – Topics: Revise essentials of reader’s workshops, set literacy team goals, choose focus for PD, plan PD sessions, discuss schedules, discuss Fundations’ pilot, and discuss district assessment plan.

The expectation for LLC members to take a leadership role in communication had been expressed in writing at each LLC meeting for a year prior to the teacher who commented that she had “missed the communication vote.”

When teachers expressed confusion about their roles in the initiative and reluctance to assume leadership roles, a district administrator stated during a LLC meeting: “We in this district need to treat teachers as leaders. The expectation is that you are leaders in your building, to provide support for your colleagues with this initiative. Has that statement been understood by you or is it a lightning bolt out of the blue”? The nonverbal response by teachers was a look of surprise. One teacher responded that, “I saw my job as more to say – here’s what’s coming, but don’t worry about it. I saw it as bringing back my team’s concerns…” It was clear, that, despite participating in developing the vision and overarching goals for this initiative, and despite some references by teachers to leadership through the team, the LLC members did not feel like stewards and leaders of this initiative.

This confusion and reluctance to undertake leadership roles on the part of teachers surprised administrators. A central office administrator expressed:

After a year of working together I was shocked and I realized that the formal leaders have not done our job of clearly defining expectations. It was frustrating
because I am still left wondering how they [LLC members] thought they could be crafting a vision, goals, professional development, etc., yet not have a leadership role.

In their individual interviews, administrators commonly described a situation where teachers were offered the opportunity to provide input and shape the direction of the initiative, but either actively or passively did not “opt to be part of the process… They’ve been asked, but they won’t talk. It’s like we want you, but you aren’t participating.”

Administrators attributed one source of this reluctance to changes in expectations of teachers and ways of working in the district. One described the attempts to involve teachers’ voice in the initiative as a change that “some don’t like, because it’s harder.” Some teachers are “kicking their heels in” because “for the first time they have a lot of voice, they have a lot of input” and are struggling with how to reconcile this voice with how they see their work in the classroom and their relationships with colleagues.

**Trust.** While our study in Feltonboro focused on how leadership was enacted in this literacy initiative, the role of trust emerged as a key element influencing interactions between teacher and administrator stakeholder groups. The superintendent publicly identified the district as a “low-trust” district and noted that the issue of trust must be openly and clearly addressed in Feltonboro. As he observed during one of the LLC meetings:

This is a low-trust district. My initial feeling when I came in was that there was a lot of strange behavior. We can’t deal with a trust issue and leave it outside the
room. I am speaking to all of our staff soon. I am making notes about what to talk about. I want to explicitly talk about trust issues. We need more of a foundation for collegiality…we need more of it…we need to address trust. It will take time and resources and talk as a district about trust.

Central office administrators also acknowledged a lack of trust between administrators and teachers.

When we [central office administrators] spoke later, we discussed how it was not just the teachers who didn't trust the administrators and each other but that the administrators didn't trust the teachers and we had our own parking lot conversations. Just like the teachers had about us we had about them.

Several building principals described a lack of teacher-to-teacher trust in this initiative, particularly in relationships across buildings. One reported, “There are a few teachers who are just ruining it, just being so unprofessional. It’s just so aggravating. A few teachers are basically bullying other teachers.” Another principal described some teachers as “tough nut[s] to crack, and they’re just going to do their own thing, and that’s been hard, it’s been difficult.” These comments signaled the principals’ sense of diminished relational trust between teachers in different buildings.

Though there is no direct evidence of a lack of relational trust between teachers and administrators, possible indirect evidence emerged from the lack of teacher response to our multiple requests to interview teachers about the initiative. A member of our research team is a Feltonboro administrator and this may have influenced teachers’ reluctance to participate. We did finally receive six responses to our written
questionnaire, however, and three mentioned increased levels of trust as a successful aspect of the initiative.

In observations of LLC meetings teachers expressed skepticism that the voice they were being offered in decision-making was genuine. This was evident during one meeting when a teacher asked, “Do you already have a decision that you want us to make? Just let us know and we’ll make it,” which was met with nods of agreement by her peers. A grade level team at one school, for example, discussed with their building principal that, even though the consultant would ask what they would like to add to the agenda, they believed she would proceed to present the same material that she did at another school. This may indicate that the teachers did not trust that the consultant was truly modifying the professional development presentation to meet the unique needs of their school culture.

*Readiness for a professional learning culture.* The LLC identified the development of a professional learning community in Feltonboro as a necessary objective for the district to raise achievement, yet teacher comments in interviews and at LLC meetings highlighted the lack of readiness for teachers to take initiative in establishing those communities. As one teacher noted, “even though we do want professional learning communities, I’m a teacher. I can’t say to people that they have to meet. I’m in no position.” Teachers presented mixed messages when identifying themselves as leaders. During this LLC meeting, we observed several teachers stating that they did not want to be known as leaders. Such statements indicate that teachers may regard themselves as “just” teachers and feel powerless to create the professional culture that they want.
Teachers also disavowed wanting to be known as leaders because, “there has been some history of teachers as to who gets picked to be a teacher leader and other people view you as being up here and we all want to be next to each other because we don’t want to stand out.” This underscores a district history of low trust in Feltonboro, where teachers perceive the “in group” as being those with the title of leader and the “out” group being somehow below that group on the status scale.

This disavowal of the title of “leader” is juxtaposed against the anonymous teacher responses on the written questionnaire. When asked the question, “Who exercised leadership in the initiative?” The majority of respondents, five out of six, indicated that the teachers on the LLC viewed themselves as the leaders of the initiative. These responses are in direct contrast to the public statements and behaviors observed during the LLC meeting. Given the small sample of LLC members, approximately 16% of total membership, who responded to our questionnaire, we must be cautious in generalizing these responses to the whole LLC.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Our study examined how the professional development strategies in Feltonboro's literacy initiative might build capacity for teacher and administrator growth and change. According to central office administrators, the Feltonboro School District purposefully sought to provide its educators with high quality, reform-oriented professional development that was sustained over time, job embedded, and included supports such as coaching and study groups. Many researchers assert that this type of professional development is needed to sustain change and teacher learning, thereby building capacity (Cohen & Hill, 2000; Garet et al., 2001; Penuel et al., 2007). In examining our findings in light of the research literature, there are important implications for instructional change, cultural change, sustainability, principal presence, and consideration of future research, with trust being a key element running through all areas.

Instructional Change

Given the issues of trust, leadership challenges within the district, and the lack of willingness of teachers to participate in this study, we expected to find resistance to changing instructional practice. Instead, we found that all elementary schools reported change to instructional practice. This demonstrates a level of professionalism on the part of the Feltonboro teachers in that they worked to improve their practice in support of student literacy and provides a foundation for further change.

Feltonboro’s plan included hiring outside consultants to provide literacy expertise over a four year time period. According to Cordingley, Bell, Rundell, and Evans (2005),
“The use of an outside consultant was frequently cited in the studies as a source not only of technical expertise, but as an agent of change” (p. 2). To support the work of the outside consultants and to work towards sustainability, the district created a literacy coaching position to provide ongoing, job-embedded support. The district also formed teams such as the Literacy Leadership Team, study groups, and after school professional learning communities (see footnote 5). Cordingley at al. (2005) again reference the work of Saxe et al. and their finding that groups of teachers “that had had input from an external ‘expert’ made significantly more changes and their pupils shared greater increases in attainment than the group which only used peer support” (p. 2). The viability of the types of professional development strategies implemented in Feltonboro is well documented in the literature.

Our analysis of data suggests that teachers felt supported by the outside consultants and the literacy coach in implementing the new literacy teaching practices. This, in part, reflects Elmore’s (2000) notion of “reciprocal accountability” or, as he explains, “my authority to require you to do something you might not otherwise do depends on my capacity to create the opportunity for you to learn how to do it” (p. 21). Similarly, Fullan (1985) observes, “successful change processes consisted of teachers interacting and learning about the underlying theoretical principles of an innovation, seeing it demonstrated, practicing it, and obtaining feedback and ongoing coaching or support” (p. 394). The Feltonboro district provided reciprocal accountability and supported change as it relates to the specific teaching strategies by creating a professional development structure where consultants provided teachers with the research base for
literacy strategies, modeled those strategies with teachers, and then debriefed. These specific factors are common in the professional development and coaching literature (Firestone et al., 2005; Garet et al., 2001; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Ingvarson et al., 2005) and teachers and administrators alike in Feltonboro discussed the effectiveness of this professional development model.

This successful facilitation implies trust in and respect for the coach and consultants as well as an appreciation for their expertise, which is evidenced in our findings. Researchers such as Bryk and Schneider (2002), Louis (2006), Gordon (2008), and Cranston (2011) speak to the relationship of trust to the success or failure of educational reforms. One of the four behaviors that Louis (2006) identifies as being essential to trusting relationships is demonstrated competence. The outside consultants and in district coach in Feltonboro demonstrated high levels of competence, which resulted in teacher trust.

The Feltonboro literacy coach spoke candidly about her efforts over the last few years to build trust with faculty. She expressed a belief that her access to teachers and classrooms is greater than it was a year ago. This is consistent with the coaching literature that speaks to the need for relational trust in order to impact teacher practice (Bean & DeFord, 2008; Ertmer et al., 2005; Ippolito, 2010; Killion & Harrison, 2006; Knight, 2006, 2007). Bean and DeFord (2008) point out that the most essential behavior for coaches is to establish a relationship of trust. They emphasize that every coach in their study affirmed the need to “[D]evelop a good relationship with teachers-otherwise you cannot be successful as a coach” (p. 2). The strategy of combining outside consultants
and coaching was viewed positively in Feltonboro due to trust built over time through demonstrated competence. This small slice of established trust might enable further growth as the initiative proceeds and should assist in informing next steps.

The ultimate statement of engagement on the part of teachers in terms of changing their practice was, “We all want to do what’s best for kids…we want your help.” Based on Friedman, Galligan, Albano, and O’Connor’s (2009) work on teacher subcultures, this particular response seems to align most closely with a subculture of democratic inquiry and practice. As Friedman et al. note, “In this subculture, teachers practice democracy by conducting systematic and comparative inquiry into mandated and personal pedagogy” (p. 255). This teacher’s declaration that what is best for students should drive instructional practices and the admission that she alone does not have the answers exemplifies a desire to improve her practice and grow as a professional. Data from teachers on their personal changes to instruction was minimal, making it difficult to ascertain the perspective from which teachers are engaging in instructional change. Due to this lack of data, we are unable to determine to what degree teachers are being compliant, noncompliant, subversive or democratic, or inquiry driven (Friedman et al., 2009).

Cultural Change

Though changes were reported in teacher instructional practice by administrators across the district, the deeper collaborative elements of sharing practice, embracing leadership roles, engaging in inquiry, and reflecting within a professional learning culture continue to challenge the district. These potential changes reflect much more adaptive
challenges facing the Feltonboro teachers and administration (Heifetz, 1994) and speak to the need for an even deeper level of trust. Although the theme of teacher voice echoed across the interviews, involvement in choosing the literacy consultants, though empowering, is significantly different from the teacher leadership needed to support inquiry, reflection, and sharing their expertise – all critical to the success of the initiative and ultimately the capacity building needed for sustainability. Feltonboro has successfully begun attending to the technical challenges of instructional change. What is lacking is a systematic approach to the adaptive challenges inherent in the Feltonboro culture that will limit the growth and sustainability of the initiative.

Teachers’ engagement in changing their instructional practice while not assuming teacher leadership roles resembles the two faces of the Roman god Janus. One face, looking towards the future, is that of an engaged practitioner, as she works to implement new literacy practices within her own classroom. Another face, looking towards the past, is that of a distruster, fearful to lead peers and attend sessions aimed at developing professional learning communities. Fullan (1985) clearly indicates that it is possible for this split in personality to exist as a district works through the change process towards deeper reforms. Without deeper organizational change, reform will never truly be realized in Feltonboro. Similarly, Elmore (2000) believes that sustainable change requires “creat[ing] environments in which individuals expect to have their personal ideas and practices subjected to the scrutiny of their colleagues, and in which groups expect to have their shared conceptions of practice subjected to the scrutiny of individuals” (p. 20). All
of these factors depend on establishing a culture of respect and trust that spans stakeholder groups.

**Sustainability**

The initiative faces a question of sustainability. Elmore (2000), Emihovich and Battaglia (2000), Fullan (2007), and Little (1990) posit that sustainability will be minimal if the work of improving instructional practice is undertaken autonomously, as opposed to it being “tethered” to larger organizational goals (Gronn, 2008). Changes to instructional practice within individual classrooms will not be enough. Sharing practice, engaging in inquiry, and enacting leadership is needed and the foundation for all of this lies in the building of a culture of trust. Cranston identifies Bryk and Schnieder’s concept of relational trust as the “strongest facilitating factor for developing schools as professional learning communities” (2011, p. 69). In addition, Gordon’s (2008) longitudinal study observes that, “educational reform is a complex cultural endeavor as opposed to an individual enterprise. Attributing a reform’s effectiveness to individual commitment is to underestimate the power of preexisting cultural values and norms” (p. 33).

Guskey (2002) suggests a model of teacher change predicated on the belief that changes in practice must precede change in beliefs. This may help explain our finding of the “Janus effect” as well. As teachers become more comfortable with the new literacy practices and begin to see changes in their students’ performance, a change in their belief system may actually trigger more engagement in the professional learning culture and the enactment of leadership. Employing these same strategies of instructing, modeling, and
coaching around learning in professional learning communities and enacting leadership at all levels could help to support this engagement.

Lack of shared meaning around key elements of the initiative also threatens its sustainability. Fullan (2007) indicates that shared meaning is an indicator of a healthy change process and an essential component of deep, sustainable reform. He asserts that while it is entirely possible for changes to take place in schools even in the absence of a shared understanding among those implementing the changes, such surface changes do not constitute deep and meaningful reform. Despite concerted efforts at the LLC meetings, a lack of shared meaning or collective understanding of the literacy initiative persisted; the lack of collective understanding of the vision of the literacy initiative and inconsistent notions of leadership held back reform efforts. Administrators’ missed opportunities to build shared ownership, and teachers’ reluctance to take on leadership roles may be indicative not only of reluctance, but of confusion regarding vision, their professional role, and the meaning of leadership in relation to the literacy initiative.

While an expert might play a leading role at the beginning of the change process, as the consultants have done in Feltonboro, participants must gradually assume a more central role as the initiative progresses (see, e.g., Kirkwood, as reported in Cordingley et al., 2005). In order for that to occur, Feltonboro must now move in earnest to the next phase of its initiative. Building leadership capacity and a shared understanding of leadership across all levels of the organization must be a priority.
Leadership

Our study examined the role of leadership in this literacy initiative. In particular, we were interested in how leadership was distributed in Feltonboro and what leadership behaviors supported instructional change and engagement in the initiative. With an urgent message from the superintendent to improve student achievement, central office administrators invited teachers to interview potential candidates to lead literacy professional development in a multi-year initiative. Once hired, the consultants worked with staff in an effort to create systemic instructional change; yet, engagement in leadership activity varied considerably with teachers and principals, as did understanding of the vision for the initiative.

The change in this initiative, according to Fullan (2007), is Phase II - implementation or adoption. The teachers are entrenched in the instructional change. The administrators are supporting the instructional change through peripheral and technical support and the consultants are facilitating the instructional and cultural change. The Feltonboro School District is characterized by a disconnect between administrators and teachers about who should be the “leaders” of this instructional change.

The relationship between administrators and teachers during the initial phase of the initiative evidenced missed opportunities to share ownership of the initiative and build the leadership capacity of the teachers. This was exemplified when one administrator made a schedule for teachers to solve a problem they were having with time. Her colleagues told her that she instead could have “made them [teachers] do this,” to which she replied:
I know I don’t have to do it, but nobody wins if I take that stance, nobody wins. Let’s give them the schedule. It’s worth it. It’s worth the hour and half on a Saturday that I did it, to move it forward. I could say no, that’s your job, you do that.

This statement exposes some of the adaptive issues that lie below the surface in Feltonboro and, as Spillane et al. (2004) describe, how principals’ perceptions about the “tasks considered essential for instructional innovation” and their views on change “influence how they present and carry out” (p. 15) leadership tasks. Principals' encouragement of their colleague to “make” the teachers complete the schedule manifests a hierarchical view of leadership endowed with positional authority and signals that principals in Feltonboro may not be ready to distribute leadership to the teachers. The principal who made the schedule, while expressing support for teachers, nonetheless was also working under traditional, hierarchical assumptions about leadership. She missed an opportunity to distribute leadership, to open her practice to scrutiny, and to create reciprocal accountability.

Despite the reliance on technical solutions, these leadership actions of the principals can serve as stepping-stones to adaptive behaviors. Elmore, in his distributed leadership framework for leading educational change (2000), argues that principals should demonstrate the types of leadership behaviors that they would like to see in their teachers. Given, however, that the superintendent acknowledged and our findings confirm that Feltonboro is a “low-trust district,” principals may perceive that technical support is the safest dimension of their leadership. While technical leadership, according
to Heifetz (1994), is most effective when there is a simple or routine problem to solve, it will not address more complex issues of mistrust or deeply held values. As trust in the district grows, it may be that the district is able to address adaptive issues more directly.

In order to move past these technical issues and address more adaptive ones, Leithwood, Mascall, and Strauss (2009) assert a distribution of leadership may support cultural changes, arguing that, “the increased self-determination believed to arise from distributed leadership may improve members’ experience of their work. Such leadership might allow members to better anticipate and respond to the demands of the organization’s environment” (p. 2). Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) associate a distribution of leadership with “higher levels of professional community” and increasing leaders’ “ability to create a strong culture of change” (p. 54). In Feltonboro, on the contrary, we did not find these higher levels of professional community, but instead found confusion and reluctance.

Germaine to our findings and presenting the possibility that the lack of trust was an intervening factor in Feltonboro is Louis’ (2006) study of teacher engagement in top-down reforms, which found that teachers had minimal ownership of an initiative when they felt it was manipulated by the central office. Louis found that teachers in low-trust settings believed that their participation in these initiatives ultimately was disingenuous and their voice meaningless. It may be that the lack of trust in Feltonboro caused teachers to question the district's vision of teacher leadership and threatened their allegiance with their peers.
Daly and Chrispeels (2008) examined the predictive relationship between trust and adaptive and technical leadership behaviors and conclude their “findings do suggest some directional support for trust as an important component for further consideration as it relates to adaptive leadership and highlights as key facets of trust that may be most predictive” (p. 54). The technical leadership behaviors evidenced by Feltonboro's principals echoes what Daly and Chrispeels found in their study: the need to establish greater trust in order to address adaptive challenges. Principals must have a keen awareness of the significant impact that trust will have on the long-term success of the initiative and change process.

Trust takes time to establish, and this itself is an adaptive challenge. This literacy initiative asks teachers to both change their instructional practice as well as develop trust with one another and with the district administration. This work is emotional for teachers and district administrators, as they become vulnerable to the "undiscussables" around trust, mistrust, values, and leadership. “Values are shaped by rubbing against real problems—people interpret their problems against the values they hold” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 23-24). Heifetz speaks about a ‘holding environment’ where a leader paces the work of conflict or change and inherent tension in a way that those involved can slowly process and seek to resolve any values or preconceived beliefs. Adaptive leadership by the principals alongside the teachers may be a point of leverage in the district to begin to repair old relationships and build new ones. This adaptive work requires continuous learning and reflection about the meaning of leadership and presence in the initiative.
Presence

Looking more deeply at principals’ responses revealed that, despite their verbalization of being learners and supporters in the initiative, principals understood that they were not “fully present” during the activities because of the competing demands of the job. Starratt (2009) describes how presence “requires a certain self-displacement, letting another person enter our space, then actively engaging that person in authentic conversation” (p. 90). It is apparent that the teacher and principal stakeholder groups both recognized this lack of presence during activities, thus mitigating the breadth of the true disconnect but highlighting an area for potential growth.

Research Nexus

The discussion of different understandings of and capacity for leadership, of sustainability, cultural change, and trust combine to point to a nexus in the research base that requires further exploration. Administrators in Feltonboro were aware that this literacy initiative involved instructional change – change in instruction and student performance were at the center of the initiative – and prepared for that process. Thus they worked to build teacher capacity in literacy skills through professional development and emphasized urgency through examination of student learning data. The administration also worked to increase teacher voice and decision-making. The literature describes all these strategies as essential to distributed leadership and change. Yet the reluctance, resistance, and confusion of the teachers leads us to ask what happens when the distribution of leadership itself is a significant change, especially when that change is situated in a low-trust context?
Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) assert that a distribution of leadership is situated in and influenced by its context, and that it cannot be understood outside that context. In Feltonboro, the distribution of leadership is situated in an educational community where teachers have historically been openly skeptical of leadership, where a “disconnect” exists between positional leaders and teachers, and where an absence of trust influences interactions between them. This context appears to have created an urgent need to treat the distribution of leadership itself as change – which neither the research nor the leadership in Feltonboro initially anticipated. The lack of trust, along with other historical and cultural conceptions of leadership in the district, may prevent teachers on the whole from seeing a change in the form of more voice in the process as desirable. Rather than helping to build trust, the attempt to distribute leadership enhanced an existent culture of limited trust of leadership in the district.

Our findings support several of the findings from the Louis (2006) study, which found that there was little shared ownership of the vision in initiatives put forward by the central office, and that the central office manipulated the development of the vision. Louis found that teachers in low-trust settings believed that their participation in initiative was not genuine and that their voice was meaningless in the final equation of the work. In their own low-trust context, Feltonboro teachers reported that the vision was confusing and caused “general distrust” and were observed questioning their voice by asking, “Is there a decision you want us to make? Just let us know.”

Another element of the Feltonboro context is an absence of explicit focus on building capacity for leadership, particularly amongst teachers. The distributed leadership
literature acknowledges that the ability to distribute leadership effectively “depends, in part, on leaders’ knowledge of the ‘technical core’ of schooling – what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning – often invoked by the term ‘instructional leadership’” (Leithwood et al., 2007, p. 44). The logic of the inverse – that teachers to whom leadership is distributed should have knowledge of the technical core of leadership – is given little attention in the literature. In Feltonboro’s practice, there is no indication that teachers to whom leadership is distributed actually have expertise in leadership skills. While Elmore’s insistence on reciprocal accountability would seem to demand building leadership capacity, how to build this capacity is rarely explicitly addressed in the research on distributed leadership, and was not anticipated by the leadership in Feltonboro.

Contributing to this problem is that the research on distributed leadership has thus far largely described what distributed leadership may look like rather than how to develop or establish it. Leithwood et al. (2007) ask the question of how teachers can “become skillful in the exercise of those leadership functions which they assume or are expected to take on” (p. 61) and suggest supporting teachers through the challenge of taking on leadership: “The likelihood of teacher leadership is also increased when teachers have access to professional development aimed at developing the skills and knowledge they will require to effectively enact leadership roles” (p. 50). Copland (2003) notes that broadening leadership required not only skills but also structures. Yet the research does not adequately anticipate the resistance and confusion that resulted in Feltonboro as a result of insufficient attention to these leadership skills.
Figure 5.1 illustrates the contrast between what the research literature reports about the distribution of leadership and our own findings in Feltonboro. The sequence (a) typically demonstrated in the research on distributed leadership takes much for granted. Here, a distribution of leadership occurs in a context where there is desirability and/or urgency for distribution. Those to whom leadership is distributed trust the motives of positional authorities and have the skill to implement this leadership. In contrast, in Feltonboro (b) the distribution of leadership takes place in a context of low levels of trust for positional authorities. Furthermore, there is no urgency or even desirability for distribution of leadership, and those to whom it is distributed may not have the necessary capacity to implement it. Rather than the successful, sustainable change presented in (a), resistance, reluctance, and confusion characterize leadership within the initiative.
Figure 5.1. Two models of a distribution of leadership: A hypothetical model and the observed model.

a) Hypothetical

Distribution of leadership for instructional improvement requires:
- Establishing instruction as the focus
- Subjecting personal practice to scrutiny
- Modeling by leaders
- Distributing leadership based on expertise
- Creating reciprocal accountability

mediated by

Creating urgency;
Ongoing capacity building;
Engaging leadership involvement; and
Increasing teacher voice

Successful, sustainable change

Context and change mediation efforts are mutually reinforcing

Situated in a trusting context with desirability for the change

b) Observed

Distribution of leadership for instructional improvement requires:
- Establishing instruction as the focus
- Subjecting personal practice to scrutiny
- Modeling by leaders
- Distributing leadership based on expertise
- Creating reciprocal accountability

Subjecting practice to scrutiny exacerbates mistrust and reduces desirability of change

Situated in a context of mistrust of leadership and where a distribution of leadership itself represents significant change

mediated by

Inattention to urgency around leadership change;
Inattention to building efforts around leadership skills;
[Leading to] leadership not distributed by expertise; and increased teacher voice

Resistance, reluctance & confusion

Context and change mediation efforts exacerbate existing challenges

Resistance and confusion reinforce existing assumptions and tensions
In Feltonboro, there has been significant reported instructional change. Yet, we also saw resistance, reluctance and confusion, leading us to question the sustainability of that change. Research that addresses this relationship is minimal at best. Our research findings clearly indicate a need to examine both the practice in the district around distributing leadership, and the research literature in how it treats distribution of leadership in low-trust, low-urgency situations.

At the beginning of this study, we anticipated that leadership would be widely distributed from the central office to building principals and then among teachers. We did not find the expected distribution and uncovered a district that was beginning to recognize the need to engage in necessary cultural changes in order to gain wide support for the literacy instruction initiative. We found that leadership for this literacy initiative remained primarily at the district office level. Thus several cultural changes need to occur prior to distributing leadership effectively.

**Recommendations**

Many positive changes have occurred as a result of the literacy initiative in Feltonboro. Teachers and administrators report higher levels of student engagement with text and observations of classroom discussions related to text. All stakeholders shared and validated positive evaluations about the in-district coach and the literacy consultants due to their competence and expertise. The district and initiative also face challenges, particularly in the form of deeper, adaptive issues. As a result, recommendations for the Feltonboro School District focus on building professional capacity, shared meaning,
leadership, sustainability, and trust. Each of these areas is interdependent and thus a recommendation in one area may directly impact another.

**Professional Capacity**

The literacy coaching model is an example of high-quality, reform-oriented professional development that has been employed successfully in the district. Our research data indicated that attitudes toward this model were favorable across district stakeholder groups and that teachers have increasingly accessed the literacy coach for support and guidance. The district should continue to strengthen and expand the literacy coaching model as one component of a long-term plan to further promote and sustain literacy reform in the Feltonboro School District. At the same time, the role of building principal has undergone a shift in the past five years with the change in superintendents. Building the capacity of and supporting the principals to carry out this role is critical to the success of this initiative.

- The role description for the literacy coach should be clearly and publically articulated, and the workday of the coach being primarily allocated to direct interactions with teachers. Research on instructional coaching indicates that administrators must publically endorse the coach and demonstrate explicit support for the coaches in their schools (Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Garnier 2009; Mraz, Algozzine, & Watson, 2008).

- We found that two out of three critical components of successful literacy coaching (Mangin, 2005) in Feltonboro – developing relationships and engaging in non-threatening leadership were established, but that the third
component, an identified subset of teachers who would benefit from close work with the coach, has not been established. This should be established in a way that the coach and identified teachers will work within the boundaries of the coaching relationship, maintaining the non-evaluative role of the coach (e.g. Barkley, 2005; Knight 2007; Toll, 2006).

- The expectations for literacy instruction should be publically derived in collaboration with the LLC, reading coach, consultants, principals, and central office administrators; principals should publically uphold expectations for instruction in literacy that are articulated as a result. Staff meetings, intranet sites, principal announcements, and district communications are all possible vehicles for communication.

- The new system for educator evaluation adopted in Massachusetts emphasizes greater professionalization of teaching and educational leadership, which directly relates to the initiative goals of increasing leadership and voice among stakeholder groups. The district should leverage the collaborative goal setting and emphasis on capacity building as opportunities to strengthen the initiative, connecting the two explicitly. Within the system, teachers should design professional practice goals for meeting the communicated instructional expectations of the literacy initiative.

- The new evaluation system also emphasizes goal setting with principals. As part of their growth plans developed in conjunction with the superintendent, principals should focus on instructional leadership and creating the necessary
conditions for teachers in their buildings to meet the collaboratively identified objectives for instruction. Support should be offered to assist principals in this work, potentially through a principal coaching model, a critical friends group, or an alternate structure that will provide support while building capacity to manage the many demanding facets of their jobs.

**Shared Meaning**

According to Fullan (2007), the reculturing of schools that constitutes deep and lasting school reform requires changes in behaviors and conceptions founded on shared intellectual and moral meaning. From this perspective, shared meaning is one indication of a successful change process. In Feltonboro, there is a lack of a shared definition of leadership among and between stakeholder groups. The lack of this shared meaning and vision for leadership impedes the distribution of leadership across the initiative. This results in teachers not seeing leadership as their role and looking to positional authorities to assume that role, and to principals perceiving leadership for this initiative as an expectation they cannot meet given the demands of their work. Feltonboro should undertake the activities described below in order to hone the leadership behaviors of actors across the district and continually connect their collective actions more closely to the prioritized aims of the initiative.

- Continue to collaboratively refine a collective, compelling, and shared vision for the literacy initiative and leadership within the initiative. Senge (1990) identifies vision as compelling people to act towards meeting the goals of an organization. A shared vision will allow teachers and administrators to
become deeply committed to the work involved in this initiative, mitigating feelings that this is just one more requirement in an already full day. This should include deepening the understanding of all community members regarding the substantial student achievement problems that the district is facing and the role of the literacy initiative in addressing those problems.

- The power of a vision comes when it is shared and truly reflects the personal visions of all stakeholders. The district should ensure that the vision for the initiative is over-communicated to all members of the organization through a variety of mechanisms, including but not limited to staff meetings, district professional days, and principal newsletters.

**Leadership**

The superintendent of Feltonboro Public Schools sought to increase teacher and principal leadership in order to realize the essential aims of the literacy initiative. This endeavor proved challenging due to a variety of technical and adaptive challenges. Our research data revealed that teachers were enthusiastic about changes in instructional practice that would benefit their students, but they rejected the idea that they should act as leaders within the organization. Principals supported the initiative but deferred to hired consultants and the literacy coach. The extent to which these professionals had the capacity to exercise leadership in relation to the initiative was unclear. In order to promote the deep and lasting reform of literacy instruction in Feltonboro, it is important that leadership continue to be developed and enacted by principals, teachers, and other
key professionals across the district. The following steps are recommended to augment and disperse leadership in the context of this literacy initiative.

- Feltonboro should work collaboratively with stakeholders to clearly define their “hybrid” leadership model based on the work of Leithwood et al. (2007) and Gronn (2008), in which traditional, hierarchal forms of leadership are combined with elements of distributed leadership. The Feltonboro leadership should make thoughtful decisions about where a hierarchical structure would benefit the district initiative and where a greater distribution of leadership would be more beneficial. Instances of proposed distributions of leadership should be purposeful and aimed at furthering larger goals of instructional improvement and capacity building (Hargreaves, 2008; Hartley, 2007). Furthermore, leadership must provide transparency around these decisions so that shared understanding can be built among all stakeholder groups in the district, so that, as Leithwood et al. note, “Staff will be motivated to participate more fully in distributed approaches to leadership…when [formal] leaders provide full explanations…for their decisions” (2007, p. 61).

- The district should begin explicit work to support development of leadership capacity and skills in those whom they expect to take up leadership in the initiative, applying the concept of reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2000) to changes in leadership expectations just as it does to changes in instructional expectations.
• The work of all leadership teams (SAT, Elementary Leadership Team, Principal Meetings, LLC, CAC) in Feltonboro should be clearly focused on instruction and student achievement. The district has identified continuous improvement of student achievement as its primary goal and literacy as the first pathway that the district has elected to take towards this goal. Likewise, each formal plan produced in the district (District Improvement Plan, School Improvement Plans, and Individual Growth Plans) should include a specific goal that is aligned with the shared vision for literacy instruction in the district.

• Principals should work with teacher members of the LLC and members of the Curriculum Advisory Council to set portions of the agendas for school staff meetings, ensuring that issues related to the initiative are addressed and plan staff meetings to actively involve teachers in collaborative work directly related to the initiative.

Sustainability

Concerns about the long-term sustainability of this literacy initiative surfaced in our research data. Despite the many successes of the initiative to date, principals expressed concern regarding the future of the initiative if there were turnover in the senior administration. A high level of deference to outside consultants, contracted for a substantial but finite amount of time, has created uncertainty regarding the future of the initiative once the consultants have completed their work. Given the importance of this initiative in terms of student achievement and the substantial resources that have been
allocated to ensure its success, it is essential that the district take assertive steps to ensure that the improvements in literacy instruction prompted through the initiative are sustained over time.

- Develop a five-year, district-wide, professional development plan that aligns with and supports the strategic goals of the school district and school improvement plans. Outline how the instructional leadership capacity of teachers and administrators will be built internally. Include how newly hired teachers and administrators receive opportunities and mentoring to build their capacity in culturally ingrained literacy practices. Communicate this plan to district and community stakeholders.

- Consider establishment of district-level data teams to focus on continuous improvement of teaching and learning and student outcomes. The work of and communication from these teams must reflect evaluating and sustaining the instructional change as the priority, not performance on mandated assessments (Hargreaves 2008; Hartley 2007).

**Trust**

Relational trust has been conceptualized (Louis, 2006) as “the inevitable result of repeated interactions with others” (p. 274) in school systems. This type of trust, while essential to the development of professional learning culture (Cranston, 2011) and the creation of “a compelling vision” (Chhuon et al., 2008) for school improvement is the “hidden variable” (Covey, 2006) that can be a major obstacle to carefully devised reform efforts. Research (e.g. Louis, 2006) has identified that integrity, competence, concern,
and reliability are critical to trusting relationships. Underlying trust issues have surfaced in the context of this literacy reform initiative to the point where the superintendent has publicly acknowledged and our research has confirmed that Feltonboro is a “low-trust district.” In fact, trust is a component of each of the challenges identified and holds the key to improvement and success within the initiative.

While the current research on relational trust does not identify specific steps needed to establish and maintain trust within school systems (Cranston, 2011; Louis, 2006) the actions described here are recommended to address trust issues that may impede the progress of the initiative.

- Enhance teacher and principal voice by creating new structures as needed and using existing routines or structures (monthly principals’ meetings with superintendent, the superintendent’s Advisory Team, the Elementary Leadership Team, and Curriculum Advisory Council) to schedule and facilitate open discussion regarding the obstacles, challenges, and successes of the initiative. Include in these discussions issues related to school culture, leadership, and trust, as well as building shared meaning for the vision, mission, and core values of the district. These venues should be used to develop conjoint agency, where central office leaders, principals, and teachers synchronize their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of their peers, and their sense of group membership (Gronn, 2002).

- Promote relational trust between administrators and teachers by ensuring that repeated interactions in relation to the initiative are consistent and reliable and
that administrators ensure reciprocal accountability (Elmore, 2000) by making transparency, capacity building, and clear communication priorities.

**Interrelationships between Recommendation Areas**

Each of the areas of recommendation described above impacts and interacts with the others – the Feltonboro school system and the initiative studied here are dynamic systems. It is important to monitor and reflect on these interactions, described in Table 5.1 below, in order to maximize their beneficial impacts.
Table 5.1

*Interrelationships between Recommendation Areas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Area</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
<th>Means</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Capacity Building</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Explicitly communicating collaborative expectations; no hidden agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Building accountability and capacity for recognizing good instruction; providing support for leaders as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Continuing in-district coaching after the consultants leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Meaning</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Promoting consistency and reliability in relation to the initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Capacity Building</td>
<td>Increasing understanding of goals and objectives for literacy instruction thus increasing their capacity to attain them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Collaboratively defining and consistently understanding roles, responsibilities and goals allows for more consistent leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Collective understanding of the vision and the meaning of leadership so they become embedded into the school cultures; progress toward vision is reinforced; participants see that the district is ‘staying the course’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>LLC members and teachers have a voice in the initiative and collaborate to address issues or challenges; transparency regarding the distribution of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation Area</td>
<td>Impacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership, cont’d.</td>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>Clearly defining roles and expectations and aligning plans will allow for educators to focus their activities and growth towards meeting the district goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Transferring facilitation from outside consultants to district professionals and staying focused on instructional reform; professional goals and district plans are aligned with the vision of the initiative; less centralized leadership builds capacity of many professionals throughout the district to lead in the event of future turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Soliciting teacher voice and conjoint agency build relationships and interdependence towards the achievement of goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Clear and reliable communication regarding the shared meaning of vision, mission and values of the district as related to the initiative will build collective support and constancy over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>The existence of relational trust will allow the district to build a professional learning culture and increase capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>5 Year PD plan promoting instructional and leadership capacity over the long term; new elementary teachers are provided with instructional leadership for literacy as part of induction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Capacity</td>
<td>Educators realizing that this is not the “next new thing” and will continue to focus their efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Transparent communication and enacting of plans with district and community stakeholders sustains the initiative</td>
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</table>
Conclusion

This study examined the role of leadership in an initiative to change literacy instruction in a small suburban district and to determine how the leadership was distributed, if at all. Additionally, we examined the leadership behaviors that teachers and administrators viewed as contributing to or limiting positive instructional change. Questions of who was exercising that leadership and the leadership behaviors that support or limit engagement in the initiative were also examined in our study. We wanted to find out if the professional development strategies utilized in this literacy initiative built capacity for teacher and administrator growth and further change.

Three major findings emerged from the study in the areas of professional development, enactment of leadership, and leadership challenges. With regard to professional development, participants in the literacy initiative viewed expertise, competency, modeling, classroom support, study groups, and coaching favorably. Implementation of these strategies resulted in reported instructional change. Regarding the enactment of leadership, we found that the initiative began with central office and continued to be centrally driven throughout the study. Attempts to distribute leadership through the initiative met with varying levels of success and central office administrators, building principals, and teachers voiced and demonstrated different perspectives about leadership. The third finding relates to our research question of how leadership behaviors support or limit engagement in the initiative. We found that each stakeholder group encountered technical and adaptive challenges that affected their engagement and enactment of leadership.
Looking forward, a future research consideration is the nexus between trust, a distribution of leadership, and capacity building. Based on the findings of our study, when a school system engages in a district-wide instructional change, considerations of how to strategically develop conditions for capacity for teacher leadership, distribution of such leadership, and development of necessary trust is needed for sustainable change. Existing research literature treats these as distinct entities. We posit that, given the results of our study, further research is necessary to examine the interconnectedness of trust, distribution of leadership, and capacity building for leadership. Such research could provide districts with specific pathways to address ongoing challenges related to instructional improvement for increased student learning. Current reform efforts, such as the Massachusetts Educator Evaluation System, compel districts to recognize and nurture teacher leadership. In order to do so effectively, districts will require and rely on this type of knowledge base to inform their work.
Appendix A

Interview Protocols

Using the research questions, the framework and the literature review, the following interview questions were designed. The questions are coded as follows:

- Change - C
- Leadership Behaviors for Instruction – LBI
- Leadership Behaviors for Engagement – LBE
- Capacity Building – CB

Instructional Coach

1. Tell me about your educational and professional background.

2. What influenced your decision to become a literacy coach?

3. Describe some of the professional development activities that you have been involved in over the years, particularly the ones that were the most useful to you and how/why they were useful. How and why did you become involved? (CB & LBE)

4. How did your involvement in these professional development experiences impact your instructional practices? (CB & LBI)

5. Describe recent changes in the literacy program in the district. Who have been and currently are the stakeholders and how have they been involved in setting the vision and making decisions about this new initiative? (LD & C)
6. What do you perceive as your role in these changes/initiative and what expertise do you bring to this initiative? Please provide specific examples. (LD & C) Probe: Has your expertise been acknowledged by the district leadership? If so, how?

7. What changes, if any, have you observed in teachers’ instruction and overall practice as a result of this work? (C, LBI & CB)

8. What changes have you noticed in students? (C)

9. Has there been resistance to this initiative? If so, what form(s) has it taken? (C, CB & LD)

10. In what ways, if any, have you exercised leadership in this initiative? (CB, LBI & LD)

11. Please describe the capacity in which you work with classroom teachers? How did you gain access to staff? (LBI & LBE)

12. What relationships have you developed with teachers? How did they evolve? What personal and professional qualities are important for the development of these relationships? (LBE)

13. From your perspective, what is working well in the coaching model? What changes, if any, do you think should be made? (LD)

14. How has coaching affected the professional culture within the building? (CB & LBE)

15. What role has the principal played in the coaching model? The central office administration? The Leadership Team? (LBE & LD)
**Principals**

1. Tell me about your educational and professional background?

2. Describe some of the professional development activities that you have been involved in over the years, particularly the ones that were most useful to you and how/why they were useful. How and why did you become involved? (CB & LBE)

3. How did your involvement in these professional development experiences impact your practice? If not, why not? (CB & LBI)

4. Describe recent changes in the literacy program in the district. Who have been and currently are the stakeholders and how have they been involved in setting the vision and making decisions about this new initiative? (LD & C)

5. What do you perceive as your role in these changes/initiative and what expertise do you bring to this initiative? Please provide specific examples. (LD & C) Probe: Has your expertise been acknowledged by the district leadership? If so, how?

6. What changes, if any, have you seen in teachers’ practice as a result of this work? (C, LBI & CB)

7. What changes have you noticed in your students? (C)

8. Has there been resistance to this initiative? If so, what form(s) has it taken? (C, CB & LD)

9. In what ways, if any, have you exercised leadership in this initiative? (CB, LBI & LD)

10. Is there anything else that you could share with me that might help inform me regarding this initiative?
Central Office Administrators

1. Tell me about your educational and professional background?

2. Describe some of the professional development activities that you have been involved in over the years, particularly the ones that were the most useful to you and how they were useful. How and why did you become involved? (CB & LBE)

3. How did your involvement in these professional development experiences impact your practice or those that you supervise? If not, why not? (CB & LBI)

4. Describe recent changes in the literacy program in the district. Who have been and currently are the stakeholders and how have they been involved in setting the vision and making decisions about this new initiative? Who has provided support? Encouraged collaboration? (LD & C)

5. What do you perceive as your role in this initiative and what expertise do you bring to this initiative? Please provide specific examples. (LD & C) Probe: Has your expertise been acknowledged? If so, how?

6. What changes, if any, have you seen in the principals’ practice as a result of this work? (C, CB, LBI)

7. What changes, if any, have you seen in the teachers’ practice as a result of this work? (C, CB, LBI)

8. What changes have you noticed in your students? (C)

9. Has there been resistance to this initiative? If so, what form(s) has it taken? (CB, LBI & LD)
10. Is there anything else that you could share with me that might help inform me regarding this initiative?
Appendix B

Teacher Questionnaire

1. From your perspective, why is the district engaging in this literacy initiative?
2. From your perspective, who has enacted leadership in this literacy initiative, and how? What does that look like?
3. From your perspective, what are the successes of this initiative?
4. From your perspective, what are the challenges of this initiative?
5. From your perspective, how have the professional development strategies and activities utilized in this initiative helped or hindered your efforts in the area of literacy instruction?
Appendix C

Observation Protocol

1. How is this portion of the meeting structured?

2. What tools or strategies are used to convey information or accomplish tasks?

3. What symbols are present or used and to what possible ends?

4. Who seems to be setting the agenda or driving discussion?

5. Who appears to be making decisions and what is the basis for this determination?

6. Of those who appear to be demonstrating leadership during this meeting, what actions, words or behaviors are evident in their demonstration of leadership?

7. Of those who appear to influence or guide others, what actions, words or behaviors seemed to be used?

8. What other observations may be relevant/noteworthy in relation to leadership behaviors as applicable to this initiative? What surprises emerged?
Appendix D

Journal Reflections

The following framework was used to loosely guide thoughts and reflections included in the journal entries:

1. What were my biases about the issues/goals/problems to be addressed prior to this meeting? How did I negotiate or address these biases before, during, and after the meeting?

2. What human and/or material obstacles or barriers did I anticipate emerging during this meeting? What if any human and/or material obstacles and barriers emerged and how did others or I address them?

3. What are the issues/goals/problems that were being addressed?

4. Who took the lead on identification of the issue/goal/problem?

5. Of those who appear to be demonstrating leadership during this meeting, what did they do that may have made me interpret their actions, words or behaviors as leadership?

6. What solutions/actions were suggested?

7. Of those who appear to influence or guide others, what actions, words or behaviors seemed to be used?

8. How do the actions, words or behaviors observed make me feel and why?

9. What other thoughts and reactions including those related to structure, strategies/activities, symbols, decision-making, or any other relevant ideas/connections do I have?
10. How did I promote, temporize, and or limit movement toward change during this meeting? What are possible reasons for my actions?
Balancing the roles of researcher and practitioner with insider status compelled me to actively confront my own biases related to the work of the teachers and administrators in my district. Looking at my practice through the lenses of five outside observers, I was able to see significant yet subtle nuances in interactions and situations that my personal involvement would have caused me to miss. Prior to engaging in this research, my practice had a diminished level of profundity. My own reflexivity allowed me to create deeper meaning regarding my professional experiences. Immersing myself in the literature and considering less biased observations, I could more clearly see the challenges our district was facing.

The insight we developed led to my being able to more clearly articulate and define my professional practice. Without having had this experience I would have been much more likely to jump in and rescue our administrators and unconsciously devalue our teachers in an attempt to force forward momentum. My practice is much richer, increasingly focused, and more reflective than it had been prior to this experience. I now take time to search out and acknowledge where my bias may create blind spots and work through them.

The process we used to create meaning and mitigate the effects that my insider status had on reliability and validity was well executed. My journal was never allowed to stand on its own. Data that I produced was always triangulated with data from other sources. I found this reassuring from both a practice and research stance. In a practical
way I was not left to hang out to dry. A biased or off target assumption could not be triangulated and was thus excluded from the final product.

The more deeply we delved into the leadership for this initiative and surfaced the issues of trust in the district, I came to a realization. There is no way that I would have or could have undertaken this project and used my own district if I did not have a high degree of relational trust with my superintendent and elementary principals.

That trust was essential if I was going to open my practice and that of my leadership team to examination. I had to trust that the results of this would be used to strengthen my leadership and that of my colleagues. The superintendent and my colleagues had to trust that I would uphold the integrity of the district and work with my team to craft a product that would benefit the district going forward. It seems straightforward writing it here but the complexities of relational trust are not simple. There had to be a high degree of trust present to provide the level of transparency and access that was given to our research team.

The power of connecting this research directly to my daily practice was immense. I believe I am a stronger administrator for having done this as an insider. I am more reflective on how my bias affects my decision making and more able to seek guidance from the research when encountering complex decisions. I have a deeper and more authentic knowledge of my district culture than I did before we began. This knowledge leads to a stronger performance of my professional responsibilities. My insider status allowed me to further clarify my values regarding leadership and I was given the gift of seeing if my practice reflected my values through the eyes of our research team.
References


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