Teacher leadership and organizational structure
The implications of restructured leadership in an Edison school

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Abstract  Traditional models of school organization favor peaked hierarchies that concentrate power and leadership responsibility on the office of the principal. As these models struggle to effectively meet the needs of education in the new millennium, leadership structures that distribute leadership influence and empower teachers to play a greater role in the leadership of the school, are slowly being implemented. This study examines the restructuring of school leadership at a school making the transition from a traditional elementary school to an Edison charter school and investigates the impact the new organizational structure had on teacher leadership. Qualitative data were collected over a four-year period during annual visits to conduct over 50 interviews with district administrators, school administrators, teachers, and the school support staff. The research findings indicate that the structure implemented at the Edison school differed greatly from traditional school leadership structures, as it successfully distributed leadership influence and enhanced the nature and scope of teacher leadership.

Introduction

Time and time again, researchers have cited the importance of school leadership to the success of individual schools (Copland, 2001; Fullan, 1999; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Murphy, 1991; Murphy & Datnow, 2003; Short & Greer, 1997). All too often this refers primarily to the role of the school principal and minimizes the presence of other leaders who may assist with the school improvement process. Adding to the administrative demands of leading a school to excellence, the role of the principal is continually expanding, making it difficult for many principals to successfully fulfill all of their obligations. In addition to administrating the daily operations of

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a complex organization, principals must also serve as instructional leaders and community leaders, while being visionaries who inspire and motivate others (Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000). These demands may have created shoes too large for any one person to fill (Copland, 2001; Elmore, 1977, 1990; Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000). Thus, as the function of education becomes too complex for one individual to oversee, it is time to begin looking for new leadership structures that can effectively meet the complex demands of education in the new millennium.

The designers of the Edison whole-school reform model have concluded that the traditional organization of schools is ineffective and inefficient, thus they attempt to replace the traditional organization and management of schools with a leadership team that empower a variety of stakeholders and include them in the decision-making process (Edison Schools, 2003). The purpose of this article is to examine the restructuring of school leadership at a school making the transition from a traditional public school to an Edison charter school and to investigate the impact the Edison organizational structure had on teacher leadership. This study was guided by the following overarching research question: Can changes in the structure of school leadership affect teacher leadership?

While the nature of the relationship between organizational structure and teaching has yet to be clearly defined, inherent in this interaction is the notion that changes in organizational structure will foster teacher professionalism and leadership (Smylie & Perry, 1998). An assumption that serves as the foundation of this inquiry is that organizational structure matters. Organizational structure contributes to organizational effectiveness by ensuring that roles are in place that will allow organizational goals to be met (Fidler, 1997). Changes in organizational structure that alter the decision-making process can have a direct impact on the existence of teacher leadership within the school (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1997). Restructuring efforts can readily impact teacher leadership by influencing the frequency and nature of teacher interactions (Day & Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1997). Structural changes can also influence opportunities for professional development and ongoing learning (Berends, Kirby, Naftel, & McKelvey, 2001; Bodilly, 1998; Elmore, 1995; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Smylie & Perry, 1998) that foster teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

On the contrary, traditional models of school organization are built on peaked hierarchies that concentrate power and authority in the hands of one or two administrators (Sallis, 1996). In an attempt to overcome the inadequacies of traditional models of school organization, it has been suggested that the notion of leadership as an individual enterprise be replaced by a broader conception of leadership that focuses on groups working together to lead (Murphy & Beck, 1995). Decentralizing management and decision-making allows leadership to become distributed throughout an organization. Consequently, leadership can be exercised by individuals in formal positions of authority as well as by individuals outside of these positions (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002). A more resilient organization can be created when leadership is embedded throughout the entire institution, as improvements can be sustained regardless of personnel changes (Wang & Manning, 2000). As models of distributed leadership shift the focus away from individual leadership and toward organizational leadership, leadership is then exercised by a wide range of organizational participants (Smylie et al., 2002). Smylie et al. (2002) consider distributed leadership to be an inevitable replacement to traditional school leadership structures because to put it simply “the principal cannot do it all”.

Distributed leadership and teacher leadership are concepts that are entangled in a co-dependent relationship. Leadership structures that distribute leadership function throughout
the school rely heavily on the leadership skill of teachers. Harris (2003) notes that regardless of how one defines teacher leadership, it is important to acknowledge that its foundation is rooted in notions of distributed leadership (Harris, 2003). Therefore, the success of organizational models that distribute leadership in schools is dependent on the growth and development of teacher leaders (Smylie et al., 2002). While it is important to realize that the formal designation of specific roles and responsibilities will always have a place in educational environments, the future of school leadership resides in a distributed framework that permits teachers to be collectively involved in the leadership of the school (Gronn, 2000; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) conclude that the difficult task of meeting the challenges that schools currently face cannot be met unless teachers begin to assume some of the roles and responsibilities that were previously the sole domain of the principal.

The importance of teacher leadership

Despite the fact that teachers are at the centre of the educational process, the call to have teachers formally assume a leadership role has often been overlooked. Prior to the 1980’s, the principal was seen as the sole source of formal school leadership, while teachers were relegated to a limited role as leaders of department and union activity, or informal leaders to their colleagues (Smylie, 1997). The principals’ monopoly on leadership was a direct result of the organizational structures of schools remaining virtually unchanged for the past century (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Throughout the 1990’s and into the new millennium, principal leadership was lauded as being essential to school success (Copland, 2001; Fullan, 1999; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood et al., 1999). As the epicenter of everything that took place within the school, the principalship became saddled with an overwhelming list of responsibilities and duties, making the role increasingly difficult for one person to fulfill (Copland, 2001; Elmore, 1977, 1990; Kimball & Sirotnik, 2000). Consequently, the need to distribute leadership responsibility throughout the school became apparent as many schools repeatedly failed to meet even their basic requirements (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). If academic achievement is to improve, teachers must be able to exercise authority and leadership over the areas that directly affect teaching practice and student learning (Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002). Assuming a leadership role within the school permits teachers the opportunity to take on this challenge.

Before one can obtain a clear picture of how teachers are to exercise authority and leadership in the school, one must come to an understanding about what teacher leadership is. This is not as simple as one would think as numerous definitions abound and the literature reveals overlapping and competing constructs (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Many of these definitions are built on the notion of leadership as a social influence. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) describe leadership as being “the exercise of influence over beliefs, actions and values of others” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999, p. 116). However, Spillane (2006) argues that to surmise that leadership is simply the exercise of influence and then to conclude that leadership has been exercised any time someone has been influenced, would be simplistic and erroneous (Spillane, 2006). Harris (2004) narrows the scope of influence by suggesting that it is only when influence facilitates the personal growth of individuals or groups that it can be considered leadership. Inherent in this definition of leadership is the
development of “new understandings” (Harris, 2004). This construct more accurately portrays leadership as an interaction that results in learning or knowledge development.

When applying this concept of leadership to an organizational framework we can consider leadership to be those activities that attempt to influence the knowledge, practice and motivation of other organizational members in the service of the organization’s core work (Spillane, 2006). This knowledge-building component is essential to our understanding of leadership as it is the fundamental element that distinguishes leadership from administrative or managerial tasks. Initiatives that attempt to simply distribute administrative tasks merely result in the division of managerial labor if these activities lack a transfer of knowledge (Little, 2003). While perfunctory tasks, such as completing paperwork or delegating resources, may influence the realization of organizational goals, they in and of themselves do not directly influence individual or organizational capacity and thus cannot be considered leadership.

While these previous definitions have enriched our understanding of leadership they do not readily contribute to our comprehension of school leadership. In their review of what is currently known about school leadership, Leithwood and Riehl (2003, p. 9) describe school leaders as “those persons, occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school’s goal.” While this definition broadly acknowledges the contributions of all school leaders, other scholars have narrowed their scope to specifically address the concept of teacher leadership. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) consider teacher leaders to be, “teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice” (p. 5). Central to this notion of teacher leadership is using influence to provide guidance. The helping nature of Katzenmeyer and Moller’s (2001) portrayal of teacher leaders resonates with how teachers describe teacher leadership. Smylie and Denny (1990, p. 244) determined that teachers often describe the role of teacher leaders as “primarily around functions of helping and supporting colleagues to fulfill classroom responsibilities and improved practice.”

Building on the earlier definitions of leadership that emphasize the influential nature of leadership and the acquisition of knowledge that comes with this influence Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) and Smylie and Denny’s (1990) definitions go one step further and acknowledge the direction and intent of teacher leadership practice. By merging all of these definitions we are left with an understanding that teacher leadership is when teachers intentionally transfer knowledge that influences one’s ability to meet educational objectives.

**The relationship between structure & leadership**

As discussed earlier, structure plays an important role in shaping organizational processes (Fidler, 1997) by dictating the pattern of communication and information flow and the presence or absence of leadership opportunities (Owens, 2001). Consequently, structure can directly influence the nature of school leadership by “activating” leadership capacity (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003). Activation refers to the social processes that encourage leaders to consistently engage in specific leadership practices (Camburn et al, 2003). Structural changes that facilitate greater participation in the decision-making process (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smylie, 1997), support opportunities for professional growth (Camburn et al, 2003; Copland,
2003; Elmore, 1999; Smylie, 1997) and stimulate teacher interaction (Camburn et al., 2003; Smylie, 1997) can be considered to be factors that activate leadership capacity.

Structure can also activate leadership by creating opportunities for teachers to interact (Camburn et al., 2003). In traditional structures, leaders often work in isolation from another, with little or no time to meet, work, or acknowledge the interdependence of their work (Camburn et al., 2003). By creating systematic and predictable opportunities for teachers to cooperate and collaborate with their colleagues, collective learning is enhanced and teacher leaders are better able to contribute to the professional development of their colleagues (Smylie & Perry, 1998). Elmore (1999) emphatically claims that improvements in teaching and learning will not occur until there is an expectation that in addition to taking responsibility for their own learning and the learning of their students, teachers must take responsibility for their colleagues’ learning as well. Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) suggest that supporting the development of others is another one of the key leadership functions that school leaders can engage in that will impact student learning.

Using this literature review as a conceptual framework, this article will address how structural change, by virtue of implementation of the Edison reform model, impacted teacher leadership in one school. The methods of this study are described in the next section.

**Methodology**

Located in the southwestern U.S., Thomas Edison is an elementary school populated by over 1000 students from low socio-economic status households. The staff and students at the school have struggled for years with poor parental relations, an unsavory reputation and low standardized test scores. The majority of the students at Thomas Edison are of Hispanic heritage (76.6%), while the rest of the student population is made up of 12.6% White students, 6.4% African American students and 4.3% of students from other ethnic backgrounds. With eighty percent of the students qualifying for free lunch the school is considered a Title I school and receives extra funding directed at disadvantaged students. A large percentage of students are from non-English speaking households. Between the 1999 and 2003 school years the percentage of English Language Learners (ELL) at the school increased from 48% to 54% (Edison Schools, 2003).

According to a reading tutor, who has had a long-term relationship with the school, prior to becoming an Edison school, Thomas Edison was considered the “armpit” of the district, where few teachers willingly choose to work. Those sent to the school did so because it was the end of the line for them. Either no other school would employ them or they were counting the days to retirement. The superintendent noted that, “expectations were so low that nobody held the teachers accountable for anything. Parents won’t be on your back because they don’t care. Principals don’t care.” The superintendent recalled that in the 1990’s the district had great difficulty finding principals willing to be assigned to the school. Even the promise of financial incentives, a form of combat pay, was not enough to attract administrators willing to make a long-term commitment to the school. One principal who had agreed to being posted at the school later declined after visiting the school.

In addition to being the absolute lowest performing school in the district in regards to academic performance, Thomas Edison was also noted as having the highest student mobility rate. As a result of the school’s close proximity to the U.S./Mexico border, many students are the children of seasonal or undocumented workers, who routinely move back
and forth across the border. The transient nature of the school population is further exaggerated by the presence of a number of homeless shelters in the neighborhood.

The combination of at-risk students and an apathetic staff created a volatile environment, which led to Thomas Edison being distinguished as having the highest number of disciplinary problems and highest student suspension rate in the district. A veteran teacher noted that prior to becoming an Edison school, Thomas Edison "was the worst rated school in the district; it was 33 out of 33, it had the worst scores, and just the worst reputation in general, and I know that nobody wanted to teach here, nobody wanted to sub here, and no bus drivers wanted to drive any of the kids anywhere."

The decision to become an Edison school in 1997 was instigated by the reform-minded superintendent who strongly encouraged struggling schools to participate in comprehensive school reform as a means to foster improved student achievement. Following a presentation from Edison founder, Chris Whittle, and some supplemental research, the school elected to become an Edison charter school.

During the period of 1999–2004, a research team (of which I was a part) made four annual visits to the school to conduct interviews with the school staff as well as district administrators. Interviews were based on semi-structured protocols that queried participants about the initiation and implementation process, as well as the impact the reform model had on student achievement, school culture and teachers' lives. Interview protocols were modified each year to reflect comments made during the previous site visit. The interviewees included district administrators, school administrators, teachers and members of the support staff. Some participants were interviewed on more than one occasion, creating a sample of over 50 transcripts for analysis.

All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Contributing to a vivid contextual picture, observations of the research team were also documented in field notes. The large number of interviews conducted created an extensive repository of data from which triangulating facts could be extracted. The data were then coded to note the changes in the school leadership structure; the impact these changes had on the decision-making process at the school; the amount of available professional development; and the level of teacher cooperation and collaboration. For the purposes of confidentiality, and to protect the anonymity of the participants, all names included the school name have been converted to pseudonyms.

Findings

Overview of Edison model

Before delving into the findings of the study, it is important to first discuss the basics of the Edison model. The Edison Schools' model, based in New York, was created by entrepreneur Chris Whittle and the Edison design team in 1991. Edison manages approximately 136 schools in 19 states. Most of these schools are located in urban areas and had histories of very low performance, leading them to partner with Edison. Edison operates as a for-profit company and borrows many of its leadership and management principles from the world of business. Unlike in traditional public schools, principals and teachers in Edison schools (which have to convert to charter schools when they adopt the Edison model) must negotiate their own salaries, which are directly tied to student performance. Teachers in Edison schools work longer school days and school years than the typical public school teacher.
Edison Schools purport to create a professional environment that emphasizes collegial interaction and ongoing professional development. Edison’s leadership structure empowers teachers to play a greater role in the administration of the school through the creation of lead and senior teacher positions (Edison Schools, 2003). These positions act as professional and organizational leaders for their academic teams, while assisting the principal in administrative, evaluation, assessment, curriculum design, and hiring duties (Edison Schools, 2003). In addition to changes in the leadership structure, Edison Schools recommend schools change the nature of their relationship with the school board, parents and the surrounding community.

In addition to these organizational structures, the Edison model is hallmarked by its prescriptions for teaching and learning. The model relies on research-based innovations, such as aligned assessment, and rigorous, relatively scripted curricula in Math and Reading, and the integrated use of technology. Through these approaches to improving classroom learning, Edison Schools believe they can significantly raise student achievement (Edison Schools, 2003).

Despite their attempts to empower and engage stakeholders and improve the educational fate of many of the country’s neediest children, the extended work requirements, performance-driven salaries and the profit-driven design of the model, have led to substantial criticism in a number of communities. Indeed, the school in this particular study is one of the shining stars of the Edison Schools network.

Organizational and leadership structure

The Edison model prescribes a differentiated organizational structure. The school of over 1000 students is divided into three academies. The Primary Academy serves the school’s youngest students in junior kindergarten to grade one. The Elementary Academy houses students in grades two to four, and the Junior Academy caters to students in grade five and six. Within each academy, students are organized into houses of 120 to 150 children. Each house is headed by a lead teacher and five to ten other teachers. Students remain in the same house throughout their academy experience. The intent of the academy and house structure is to allow teachers to build stronger relationships with students and their families because they are together for years, not months (Thomas Edison website, 2004).

Each academy is led by an academy director. The role of the academy director is multifaceted, as it has many functions that range from managing student discipline to supervising teachers and assisting the principal in the general administration of the school. These administrative tasks include assessing curriculum implementation, data assessment and test analysis. While this position operates in a role similar to an assistant-principal, the academy director also has supervisory responsibilities. One of the academy directors gave the following statement when asked to describe the role.

We typically do walk-throughs. I try to get through six to eight walk-throughs a day, five or six minutes worth. We have a procedure we go through there. A little note saying here’s what I saw. We’re looking for specific things. We’re looking for main ideas in the reading program. For example, we are looking for particular things up on the wall. If we see a good lesson plan covering the entire week and is specific to standards and things like that. We’re just looking for that type of thing. Keeping the constant press for performance on the teachers’ backs to put it one way. But also to keep them alert to what they need to do with their students.
As the leadership structure at the school evolved, the role of the academy director was also given the responsibility of directly supervising the senior teachers that act as math and science curriculum coordinators. This function had previously been the domain of the school principal. The intent of this delegation was to ensure that the math and science curriculum was being implemented as prescribed. What may seem like a complicated organizational structure is concisely described by a 3rd grade teacher, who began her teaching career just as the Edison model was first implemented at the school:

We have one administrator, and then an academy director, who work very well together...But they also have other teachers that they have as part of the administrative type role. We have lead teachers at this school, so we have nine lead teachers, and each lead teacher is responsible for a certain number of teachers, so that way they can evaluate and help, assist and observe these other teachers. We’re broken into primary and elementary level houses, so there’s a kindergarten house that has one lead for all eight teachers, four primary houses that have a lead with six teachers working with them, and the upper grade houses all have a lead with five teachers under them. Also we have our senior teachers that organize the curriculum and they do a really good job, and the senior teachers have to work with the lead teachers collaboratively, the lead teachers pass on the information to the houses, and the administration overlooks all of it. I really like our leadership program that we have here because it gives a lot of different people an opportunity to be in a leading position.

In addition to the positions just noted, other teachers verified that there was also evidence of empowerment opportunities for all teachers and parents through their participation on any of the school’s numerous committees related to the writing of the school charter, PTA, hiring, school calendar, and daily scheduling.

Teacher leadership roles

Edison Schools purport to create a professional environment that emphasizes collegial interaction and ongoing professional development. Edison’s leadership structure empowers teachers to play a greater role in the administration of the school through a greater distribution of leadership roles. The model advocates the creation of a stratified leadership hierarchy (Edison Schools, 2003). At all Edison schools the teaching ranks are divided into resident, senior and lead teachers. First year teachers are given the title of resident teacher. Similar to the medical profession, a teaching resident is someone who has recently graduated from a teacher preparation program and works under the supervision of a lead teacher. Resident teachers retain this title until they have successfully completed two years of teaching and are then considered a full teacher. The title of Lead Teacher is given to teachers who have at least three years of experience and have obtained or are pursuing a master’s degree. The lead teacher is a multi-faceted position that allows teachers to straddle the boundary between teaching and administration. One of the lead teachers at Thomas Edison describes her role as giving moral support and mentoring for young, new teachers. She explained, “We try to pair teachers and repair teachers.”
A key responsibility of the lead teachers is to represent their house on the school’s leadership team. The leadership team serves as the primary decision-making body for the school. As disseminators of the information covered during leadership team meetings, lead teachers act as a critical link in the school’s communication chain. In addition to their role on the leadership team and teaching in the classroom, the nine lead teachers at Thomas Edison also support the training and professional development of their fellow teachers. Within the school, lead teachers frequently visit the classrooms within their house to ensure that their house is operating in an effective manner. One of the lead teachers stated, “Ultimately I’m responsible for my house. You know if I’m not performing my functions or if my house is not operating, as they should, then the axe falls on me.”

One junior teacher at Thomas Edison Elementary described the house system at the school as “little schools within the big school.” She goes on to explain that the house system creates a “group of teachers that work together to coordinate curriculum, to talk about student concerns, help each other with ideas on dealing with student concerns, and work on parent involvement, parent nights, and parent education.”

Teachers within the same house are in constant contact as house meetings occur on a daily basis. While the students of a specific house are partaking in their specialty courses that include Art, Gym or World Languages, their core teachers are engaged in house meetings. By all accounts, most houses have a prescribed schedule as to what is to be discussed in each of the daily meetings that are held four days a week. House meetings are not held on the school’s minimum day. The early dismissal of students on these days allows teachers to get together for school-wide professional development. Teachers note that one of the daily meetings is dedicated to discussing student concerns, which can be behavioral or academic in nature. Another day is set aside for the lead teacher to share, with their house, the topics covered in the weekly leadership team meeting. Discussions about the implementation of curriculum also occur during one of the daily meetings while another day can be set aside for technological issues.

The principal noted that for the added responsibility of maintaining an orderly house and supporting the teachers they supervise, lead teachers receive extra compensation of approximately four thousand dollars. A number of teachers commented that this additional benefit in no way fully compensated lead teachers for all the work they do. Consequently, several teachers commented that they had no desire to become lead teachers, because of the extra time commitments. A novice teacher added, “It’s a big responsibility, and it’s a very time consuming ... I can’t see me having the time or the energy to put that many people in my responsibility”.

Not to be confused with the role of lead teachers, senior teachers are also veteran teachers that have demonstrated their mastery in a specific teaching area. As curriculum coordinators they administer assessment, model instruction, and monitor curriculum implementation. At Thomas Edison, over a dozen senior teachers coordinate the school’s curriculum in a number of areas including, literary, math, science, technology, bilingual education and world languages. In addition to delivering workshops and ongoing professional development to the rest of the faculty, senior teachers often visit classrooms to model lessons, monitor the implementation of the curriculum and provide teachers with feedback regarding their observations.

For the professional development and curriculum coordinating services that senior teachers provide to the school they receive an additional $1,000. The Academy Director admits that the services the senior teachers provide are worth much more than what they are compensated. He states that they attempt to make up for the shortfall by
sending them to conferences and by using grant money to pay for presentations delivered to parents.

Faculty members who wish to become senior or lead teachers must participate in a thorough interview process. In addition to the principal and academy director, all of the teachers that will be eventually supervised by the senior or lead teacher serve as the interview panel. In an attempt to prevent leadership stagnation senior and lead teachers must re-apply and go through the interview process each year.

Shared decision making

Key to the distribution of leadership and the empowerment of teachers on the Thomas Edison campus is the school leadership team. A member of the team acknowledged that “the most important aspect of our school is the leadership team and how the power is distributed throughout. Not just one person but a whole group.” In addition to the nine lead teachers that represent their respective houses, the principal, the school’s business manager, and the reading curriculum coordinator are all members of the leadership team.

The scope of the leadership team is quite comprehensive. A number of teachers noted that the team made all the decisions that affect the overall operation of the school. One veteran teacher aptly noted:

They make budget decisions, like where the money is going to be spent, where the money is going to be cut. They also make decisions on what kind of data we’re going to analyze, how we’re going to analyze it. What kind of PD’s we’re going to be offering, professional development. They’re in charge of training the houses, ensuring implementation of programs. They discuss whatever important topics with the principal every single week.

With such pervasive decision-making abilities, it is important to note that the staff at the school considers the operation of the leadership team to be democratic in nature rather than an oligarchy. Teachers commented that they felt that their voices were well represented by the leadership team, as the decisions made by the team were greatly influenced by the interests of the faculty. A non-leadership team member describes the relationship between the administration and the leadership team,

Most of the time when administration makes a decision they take it to the lead team. The lead team takes it back down to the house. They hear from the house and the lead teacher takes it back to the lead team, which you know, and they take it to administration. If it’s something that has been difficult to decide on or you know it’s a fifty-fifty kind of vote then we open it up to forum during staff meetings. And we try to, you can’t make everybody happy. So we try to do the best that we can so that everybody is in agreement with the decisions that we make.

Comments made by several teachers and administrators reveal that the Leadership Team met on a weekly basis to discuss issues and make decisions regarding the school budget, staffing, curriculum, testing, professional development and other topics related to the administration of the school. The decisions the Leadership Team came to were rarely made
autonomously. Numerous teachers noted that final decisions were not adjudicated until the faculty had the opportunity to give their input and express concerns via the house or committee system. Controversial topics were discussed in an open forum at staff meetings and then later put to a staff vote.

Professional development

The transfer of knowledge is an essential element of teacher leadership. If capacity is to be enhanced, skill or expertise must be transferred from key leaders to others in the school. Participation in professional development increases the knowledge base of teachers, thus increasing their capacity to provide leadership to others in the future. As well, delivering professional development sessions provides teachers with the opportunity to intentionally influence the capacity of their colleagues to meet educational objectives. Consequently, structural changes that foster opportunities for professional development and ongoing learning can have a direct impact on teacher leadership.

At the Thomas Edison site, the school schedule included opportunities for daily and weekly professional development sessions. These sessions differed greatly from traditional forms of professional development that are frequently narrow in focus and fleeting in duration (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The professional development sessions at Thomas Edison adhered to the recommendations of researchers that claim that growth opportunities that are ongoing, broad in the focus, and locally developed are more effective (Klingner, 2004; Nord Petzko, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The interview data revealed that many of these training sessions were delivered by ‘internal experts’ during daily house meetings, weekly staff meetings or special in-service days.

The academy director described the teacher leaders who delivered these sessions as ‘professionals and experts in their field.’ It is unlikely that these teachers would have been able to develop this expertise if Edison had not provided them with opportunities to deliver workshops and ongoing professional development to their colleagues and to other teachers at the Edison regional and national conferences. The Thomas Edison example highlights that involving teacher leaders in professional development efforts enhances effectiveness, as well as fosters the creation of a support network where guidance and assistance was always close at hand (Klingner, 2004). This support network at Thomas Edison directly contributed to the growth of a community of practice where teachers could learn and grow collectively (Klingner, 2004; Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002).

Discussion

It should now be evident that the leadership structure that was implemented at Thomas Edison bore little resemblance to that of a traditional school. The stratification of leadership roles and inclusive decision-making system at Thomas Edison created an environment where leadership was justly distributed throughout the school and teachers were empowered to act as leaders. This is substantiated by the comments of a teacher who declared that ‘the power is distributed throughout. Not just one person but a whole group.’ Instead of decisions being made solely in a top-down fashion, Edison’s distributed leadership structure provided teachers with a decision-making process that permitted concerns and judgments to flow upward. This claim is supported by a comparison made by a veteran teacher who stated that Thomas Edison differed from ‘other schools where it’s pretty much the principal making the decisions and delegating them down.’ These statements
and others like them support the claim that with help from the Edison design team, the staff at Thomas Edison were able to restructure the leadership of the school to create an organizational structure that differs from the traditional organization of school leadership. The structure implemented at Thomas Edison resembles the ‘‘new structures’’ that Smylie (1997) suggests will allow teachers to ‘‘play a greater role in school decision-making and provide them with new opportunities to develop programs and policies that support staff development and classroom involvement’’ (Smylie, 1997).

When teachers are participants in the decision-making process, they can influence the collective knowledge and practice of their school. At Thomas Edison, teachers repeatedly declared that they were empowered to participate in a wide range of decisions made at the school. Whether via the Leadership Team or through the multitude of committees on campus, teachers at Thomas Edison participated in most administrative decisions including financial, curricular and staffing issues. The structural arrangements prescribed by the Edison model created new roles and processes that allowed teachers to work alongside the principal in the performance of numerous administrative and leadership tasks. Restructuring the interaction between the role of the principal and teachers can be seen as an attempt to tighten the previously loosely coupled relationship between these two roles.

The large number of people involved in the decision-making process and broad spectrum of the decisions made, highlights the distribution of leadership function at the school and reinforces Spillane et al.’s (2001) notion of distributed leadership where leadership is ‘‘stretched over the work of a number of individuals’’ (p. 24). Even though some of the administrative tasks distributed to teacher leaders cannot be considered leadership, many of the fiscal, hiring and scheduling decisions did facilitate the realization of organizational goals. For the most part the curricular, training, and professional development decisions that teachers participated in, directly influenced the practice of ‘‘other organizational members in the service of the organizations goals’’ (Spillane, 2006). These activities that help set the direction of the organization and support organizational goals can also be seen as critical leadership functions that can contribute to improved student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004).

On an individual basis, participating in the decision-making process increased the nature and scope of influence for each teacher. Collectively, the Edison leadership structure successfully capitalized on the leadership potential of the faculty by distributing decision-making and increasing the number of teachers who were able to influence the knowledge and practice of their colleagues. Consequently, this structure served to increase the total sum of leadership expertise available at the school. The changes in organizational structure that took place at Thomas Edison highlight that making the decision-making process more inclusive can have a direct impact on the existence and scope of teacher leadership within the school.

Previous research suggests that although teacher participation in decision-making can foster teacher leadership, there may be some negative consequences. Due to time constraints, teachers report that involvement in shared decision-making can divert their energy away from teaching and contribute to teacher burnout (Chapman, 1991; Duignan, 1990; Smylie, 1997; Smylie & Perry, 1998). While only one teacher at Thomas Edison noted that an unintended outcome of the inclusive decision-making process was teacher burnout, it is not difficult to believe that over the course of time other teachers may come to agree. Fortunately, the negative repercussions of shared decision-making may have been curtailed at Thomas Edison because the faculty benefited from a number of the resources that Murphy and Hallinger (1993) claim will reduce the teacher burnout. These resources, which include release time from classroom duties, ongoing training in the area of site-
based management, and shared decision-making and principal support for teacher participation in the decision making process, were all present, in varying degrees, at Thomas Edison (Murphy & Hallinger, 1993).

To be successful in the task of educating students, a school must create a collaborative environment where the knowledge and skills of individual staff members is distributed throughout the school (Elmore, 2002). As the level of faculty interaction increases so does the influence of teacher leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). The findings reveal that restructuring efforts can readily impact teacher leadership by influencing the frequency and nature of teacher interactions, but the degree to which this increase is apparent is dependent on the frequency and purpose of structured opportunities to interact. The Edison model, as implemented at Thomas Edison Elementary, significantly increased the opportunities teachers had to cooperate and collaborate with their colleagues.

Teachers reported that the Edison house system required teachers to be in constant contact with each other as they ‘work together as teams to try and make sure that we are meeting those needs for the kids,’’ as one teacher described. Daily and weekly meetings, as well as common planning times, ensured that all the teachers within a house frequently and purposefully interact with each other. As supported by the work of Leithwood and Jantzi (1999), the creation of common planning times, autonomous work teams, schools-within-schools, and collaborative faculty meetings greatly increased the frequency and nature of teacher interactions at Thomas Edison. These structural arrangements that increase teacher interaction can be seen as tightening the previously loose coupling that connects the activities that take place in individual classrooms with the rest of the school (Elmore, 1999). Greater interrelatedness among classrooms and faculty members may serve to strengthen the connection between the technical and the organizational structure of school (Meyer & Rowan, 1978).

Smylie et al. (2002) suggest that increasing the level of teacher interaction not only reduces teacher isolation, it also creates leadership roles for teachers. This increase in leadership is apparent at Thomas Edison as teachers report that ‘‘everybody helps each other.’’ The influence of the Edison’s leadership structure on fostering teacher leadership was commented on by the teachers.

Each time teachers ‘help each other’ they exercise leadership when they influence the practice of their colleagues. This is highlighted each time a novice teachers seeks assistance from a teacher leader. The exercise of leadership influence is intensified in cooperative environments as struggling teachers are more apt to seek help when they work in a cooperative environment and feel surrounded by supportive leaders (Rosenholtz, 1989). In addition to fostering teacher leadership, schools that work cooperatively have a solid ‘team ethic’ (Rosenholtz, 1989). The interview data reveal that this team approach was apparent at Thomas Edison. Rosenholtz (1989) considers this team approach to be hallmark of a successful organization where members have a shared sense of what they are trying to accomplish.

Conclusion and implications

This study began with the assumption that structures matter. What was once theoretical conjecture, when the study began, has been substantiated in practice with the success of the Edison model in transforming a school, once plagued by severe problems, into a flagship for the Edison fleet. With the help of the Edison structure and design team, a school that was at one time under threat of closure due to low-enrollment has become a popular,
overflowing school with a waiting list. This success reinforces the notion that the organization of school leadership can influence how schools operate (Elmore, 1990). A great deal of the success at Thomas Edison can be attributed to the creation of new leadership roles for teachers. The findings are peppered with references of how the organizational structure implemented permitted teachers to become involved in the decision-making process, reduced feelings of isolation, increased collaboration and fostered leadership by giving “a lot of different people and opportunity to be in a leading position.” This reference highlights the ability of structure to contribute to organizational effectiveness by ensuring that roles are in place to support organizational goals (Fidler, 1997).

The findings of this study suggest that specific structural elements are required if teacher leadership is to flourish. While teacher leaders may be found in any school, the benefits of teacher leadership may not be fully realized without the following structural elements. These elements are comprised of procedures that allow teachers to play a greater role in the decision-making process; programs that supply teachers with frequent and ongoing opportunities to participate in, produce and deliver professional development training; and systems that create scheduled opportunities for teachers to cooperate and collaborate with their colleagues.

In addition to having a direct impact on teacher leadership, structural changes that support the development of teacher leadership may have also contributed to improved organizational efficiency. Previous research suggests that organizations can operate more effectively when organizational structures are aligned and interconnected to the demands of the environment and the core technology (Meyer, 1977; Mintzberg, 1979). There is evidence to suggest that this occurred at the Edison site as the relationship between the leadership structure and the core technology of teaching practice became more connected when teachers were included on the leadership team and became instructional leaders as they began to influence and adjudicate staffing and curricular decisions.

The creation of multiple lead teacher and senior teacher roles created leadership redundancies that have also been shown to contribute to organizational effectiveness, by ensuring that all leadership functions are fulfilled repeatedly and systematically (Camburn et al., 2003). These organizational improvements may have also influenced teaching and learning at the school. Spillane and Seashore-Louis (2002) note that when teachers have the opportunity to exercise authority and leadership over areas that directly affect teaching practice, student learning will also improve. The restructuring process that took place at Thomas Edison reinforces the belief that this is possible. There is evidence to suggest that when the teachers at Thomas Edison became intimately involved in curricular decision-making, instructional leadership, and professional development, teaching improved, as did student learning. Although the relationship between teacher leadership and student learning was not investigated in this study, there is evidence to document that student achievement did improve in concert with increases in teacher leadership. This finding is supported by previous research that indicates that development of teacher leadership roles can enhance teacher learning, teaching practice, contribute to school productivity and improve student learning (Day & Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Rosenhotlz, 1989). The improved student learning that occurred at Thomas Edison, that may have been a result of enhanced teacher leadership, highlights the need for further study into the academic repercussions of teacher leadership and comprehensive school reform.

More important than simply documenting the relationship between structural changes and teacher leadership, this research highlights the impact structural changes can have on the nature and scope of teacher leadership practice. While the nature of leadership influence is closely tied to the level of expertise teachers possess (Olsen & Kirtman, 2002), the
scope of teacher leadership is a consequence of the number of people directly or indirectly influenced (Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002).

Spillane and Seashore Louis (2002) noted that teachers view expertise as an important factor when determining who they consider to be a leader. Participation in professional development and opportunities to collaborate with colleagues can greatly enhance the level of expertise that teachers possess (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Smylie & Perry, 1998). The structures implemented at the Edison site facilitated the creation of an abundance of professional development and collaboration opportunities, which provided teachers with numerous opportunities to increase and expand their expertise. Structural arrangements that increase participation in the decision-making process can also expand teachers’ knowledge (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) while increasing the pool of available expertise and diversifying the work of teachers (Smylie, 1997). As the teachers at Thomas Edison began to increase their expertise of pedagogy and curriculum and expand their knowledge into the areas of mentoring/coaching, adult education, and leadership, their level of expertise increased and expanded to include a wider range of topics on which they were knowledgeable. The expansion of teacher expertise can be seen as fundamentally changing the nature of leadership that teachers exude as it permits teachers to become influential on a wider range of topics. If one considers leadership to be a result of the intentional exercise of influence, teachers with an expanded area of expertise have the potential to exercise influence within and beyond the classroom (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001), consequently changing the nature of teacher leadership.

The scope of teacher leadership can be considered a consequence of the number of people whom teachers directly or indirectly influence (Spillane and Seashore Louis, 2002). In traditional schools, the scope of influence is often limited to direct face-to-face peer interactions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Smylie, 1997; Spillane & Seashore Louis, 2002). The scope of influence that leaders elicit increases when teachers have opportunity to directly influence their colleagues through collaboration and professional development, and when they indirectly influence the school as a whole through their participation in the decision-making process. Structures that facilitate the development of teacher leadership provide greater opportunities to increase the scope of leadership influence (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). This study found that teachers were provided with the opportunity to increase the scope of their influence by cooperating and collaborating with their colleagues, delivering professional development sessions and participating in the decision-making process. Whereas the scope of face-to-face influence increases only when the frequency of these interactions is raised, when teachers have the opportunity to organize and deliver professional development sessions as they did at the Edison school, teacher leaders have the opportunity to influence the practice of a much larger group of teachers. Thus, the scope of influence a single teacher can exude can become faculty-wide without the need to increase the number of interactions. The scope of influence can be expanded once again when teachers deliver professional development sessions that include teachers from other schools (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Leading professional development sessions at Edison regional and national conferences allowed the teachers at Thomas Edison to influence the practice of hundreds of educators.

The scope of teacher leadership is also closely linked to the degree of teacher empowerment. When teachers are empowered to be active agents in school governance, the degree to which they influence the collective practice of their colleagues is greatly enhanced (Rosenholtz, 1989; Short & Greer, 1997). Without the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, the influence of teacher leadership is limited to
situations when these leaders have direct contact with followers. At the Edison site, decisions made as a result of leadership team or committee adjudications indirectly influenced organizational capacity and individual practice without the need for these leaders to have direct contact with each individual stakeholder. As well, decisions that contribute to the realization of broad-based educational objectives can affect a wide spectrum of stakeholders including teachers, administrators, student, parents and the surrounding community. The impact of decisions made by the Leadership Team at Thomas Edison was felt beyond the school site and even the district. The improved academic success of Thomas Edison students resulted in the school being considered an Edison exemplar where the benefits of Edison’s instructional practices were enthusiastically highlighted. As a result, when the success of Thomas Edison Elementary is used as a regional and national marketing tool for the Edison Corporation, the teachers at the school have the potential to influence the growth of the Edison model and charter school policy nationwide.

The results of this study indicate that changes in leadership structure and the creation of new leadership roles for teachers may have far-reaching implications for teacher training and collective bargaining agreements. Leadership models that advocate the distribution of leadership and require teachers to assume a larger leadership role may require all teachers to acquire a greater understanding of administrative policies and procedures. As well, traditional pay schedules and collective agreements may conflict with the stratification of leadership roles. Consequently, measures that successfully address training and contractual issues may significantly improve the results of future attempts to enhance teacher leadership through restructuring school organization.

When the issues of teacher training and compensation have been addressed so that they are aligned with the reform effort, organizational structures that support the development of teacher leadership have the potential to significantly alter the nature and scope of teacher leadership as well as the profession of teaching as a whole. Teacher leadership has traditionally been centered in the classroom, as this has been the epicenter of their expertise (Harris, 2003). Thus, efforts to change the nature and scope of teacher leadership often meant leaving the classroom. One of the implications of this study is that it may be possible to change the nature and scope of teacher leadership without removing teachers from the classroom (Raywid, 1990). The teacher leaders at Thomas Edison increased and expanded their areas of expertise and influenced a larger constituency without having to permanently sever their contact with the classroom.

Some of the most notable scholars of educational administration strongly suggest that wide-scale educational improvement will not take place until all teachers become leaders (Day & Harris, 2003) and become more engaged with all the facets of the educational process. This includes being accountable for their own and their students’ learning, as well as assuming responsibility for their colleagues’ learning and the profession as a whole (Elmore, 1999; Fullan, 2001). The teacher leaders at Thomas Edison Elementary may have provided us with a glimpse of what this new type of teacher might look like.

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