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Preface

Contemporary educational reform places a great premium upon the relationship between leadership and school improvement. Research findings from diverse countries and different school contexts have revealed the powerful impact of leadership in securing school development and change. The evidence from the international research base is unequivocal—effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students. The research shows that although the quality of teaching has a powerful influence upon pupil motivation and achievement, the quality of leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom. In summary, the contribution of leadership to school effectiveness and school improvement is significant.

—Alma Harris (2002)

PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

Distributed leadership is a method for engaging educational practitioners in meaningful and timely dialogue about the effectiveness of their leadership practices as they relate to enhancing and changing classroom practices. This, in turn, enhances student learning. A distributed perspective on leadership is best thought of as a framework for thinking about and analyzing leadership (Spillane, 2006a; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001, 2004). It proposes an ideology that predicts success in the purposeful creation of leadership and classroom practices on the basis of situationally interdependent interactions between leaders and followers.

The Distributed Leadership Toolbox provides routines and tools for a school's formal leaders and building-level teams that allow them to *diagnose* and *design* leadership practices. These tools help leaders to stop leading by default. Leadership practice is defined as the interactions among the

leader(s), followers, and the situation stretched over time (Spillane, 2004a, 2006a). The most important task is to help leaders perfect their performance of these routines and use tools in practice on the basis of observation and reflection. The intent is to give school teams a new way of thinking about the relationship between leadership practice, classroom practice, and student performance.

This book tackles present-day leadership research, which is often on distributed leadership, and transforms it into a precision leadership toolbox for practitioners. Converting research to application has historically been difficult for practicing educators, and the research associated with distributed leadership isn't any different. For most leaders, viewing leadership from a distributed perspective has been, up until now, like trying to read a foreign textbook. Deciphering this research and putting it into practice is a challenge. Therefore, I have worked extensively with several leadership researchers in an effort to translate their research into practical applications for school leaders. It has become clear, as a result of facilitating several leadership teams focused on distributed leadership, that there is a need to have a toolbox of leadership practice diagnosis and design tools.

ADOPTING AND CREATING A REPERTOIRE OF PRACTICES

By no means should this set of tools be perceived as the fix-all for school improvement. Use the tools in this book to begin the process of diagnosing your present practice and to design effective ways to enhance and change teachers' classroom practice. It is important that the tools within this book *don't* become the sole source for evaluation and design of leadership practices. That would be a mistake and I would not have met my objectives of establishing the uniqueness of each school. Leaders must become skilled designers of their own routines and tools. This toolbox was designed to cultivate a "distributed mind-set" in school leaders to move them

beyond an exclusive reliance on school leader superheroes and shared leadership.

Many schools that have adopted the use of these tools have reported to me that they have necessitated redesigning some tools to fit their situation. In other words, they have used the tools in different ways than their original intention and have redesigned them to meet their

unique needs. I celebrate this, because this means they get it. They are

Different forms of leadership are needed in different stages of a project or an organization's development. No one person can be a leader in every situation. Effective organizations allow the natural leader to emerge as needs require.

—Kathy Kolbe (2004b)

adapting and creating their own tools to meet their needs and situations. Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) say we must develop leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed. Without fail, schools who have adopted these tools have said the toolbox gave them a framework to work from. They used the tools from the toolbox and created new ones to meet the objectives outlined in the distributed leadership school improvement framework. The toolbox has provided them with a starting point, and they have adapted their use to fit their particular situation.

DO NOT FEAR

As many of you reading this preface can testify, teachers and administrators already have so many federally mandated programs to adhere to, not to even mention the testing that is required, that it is a major challenge to find the time to plan challenging diversified curriculum that the students deserve. Readers who have read this book mostly agree with the philosophy of distributed leadership; however, a normal reaction is a hesitation to implement the underpinnings. Practitioners do not want another program, and even more so, one that would require so much time. The tools within this book lay out a framework and a foundation for your work within distributed leadership; it is not meant to be the composition of reform. In fact, the framework I offer within this toolbox is a complement to your present practices and reform efforts. Use the tools as needed, when needed. Use the tools once or twice and then adopt the theories and philosophies that shape the very purpose of the tools and discard the tool. Although I have a plethora of tools on which to draw, I use only one or two of them when I facilitate individuals and teams. Instead, I use a series of critical questions to identify the issue and then choose a few tools to use as mediating devices, enabling the individual and teams to reflect on their own practice and to help them design new practices.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Given the current conditions of most schools and my experience in working closely with school leaders struggling to make sense of the collective demands put on them in an era of high leadership accountability, I present this book as a leadership practice toolbox used to focus and guide practitioners through a leadership team's collaboration inquiry, diagnosis, and design.