

Distributed Leadership in Practice: A Study of Collaborative School Governance

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15574098

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Abstract:

This study explores the role of distributed leadership in fostering collaborative governance within school communities. Emphasizing stakeholder engagement, teacher empowerment, and the development of professional learning communities, the research examines how leadership—when shared and contextually embedded—enhances school effectiveness. Utilizing qualitative data from three case study schools, supplemented by a comprehensive literature review, the study highlights the adaptive and relational nature of distributed leadership. Findings reveal that distributing leadership responsibilities across various levels of the school organization promotes participatory decision-making, cultivates trust, and builds collective capacity for innovation and continuous improvement. Teachers, when empowered through leadership opportunities, demonstrate increased professional agency, leading to more responsive and inclusive educational practices. Moreover, collaborative structures such as learning communities serve as key mechanisms for sustaining leadership distribution and shared accountability. The study concludes with implications for leadership preparation programs, recommending the integration of distributed leadership principles into training and professional development initiatives. Additionally, policy considerations are addressed, advocating for systemic support that encourages collaborative leadership cultures. Overall, the research affirms that distributed leadership is not only a practical model but also a transformative approach for enhancing school governance and educational outcomes.

Keywords: distributed leadership, collaborative governance, teacher empowerment, stakeholder engagement, professional learning communities, school improvement, educational leadership

Introduction:

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, schools face mounting pressures to meet accountability standards while simultaneously addressing the diverse and complex needs of learners. Traditional hierarchical models of leadership are increasingly seen as insufficient in fostering the innovation, responsiveness, and collective efficacy needed in contemporary school governance (Ackerman, Mette, & Biddle, 2018; Fullan, 1992).

As schools are confronted with adaptive challenges—ranging from curriculum reforms to technological integration—the need for leadership that goes beyond the principal's office has become evident. This growing recognition has prompted a shift toward more inclusive leadership frameworks, with distributed leadership (DL) emerging as a central paradigm for systemic improvement and sustainable change.

Distributed leadership redefines school leadership as a collective process that involves teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in decision-making and instructional leadership (Spillane, 2006; Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). It moves away from a command-and-control model and toward one that views leadership as enacted through interactions among individuals and across various contexts (Fitzsimons et al., 2011). This concept is rooted in social practice theory, which recognizes that leadership is embedded in daily school activities and social interactions rather

than formal titles alone (Ariztía, 2017; Feldman, 2020). Such a perspective enables schools to build a leadership culture grounded in mutual trust, accountability, and shared expertise (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

At the heart of distributed leadership is the principle of collaboration, which strengthens professional learning communities (PLCs) and encourages co-learning among educators (Hargreaves & Connor, 2018; Cherrington & Thornton, 2019). Teachers are empowered not only as implementers of decisions but also as co-leaders who contribute to school visioning, problem-solving, and innovation (Berg et al., 2019; Nguyen & Ng, 2020). This approach aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that learning occurs through observation and collaboration in social contexts (Boone, Reilly, & Sashkin, 1977). Studies also show that when educators perceive greater ownership of school decisions, their job satisfaction and efficacy increase (Brezicha et al., 2019; DeMarco, 2018).

Distributed leadership fosters more inclusive and informed decision-making processes by engaging multiple stakeholders in reflective and evidence-based practices (Brazer & Keller, 2006; Galvis, 2018). Elwyn et al. (2015) emphasize that shared decision-making leads to more comprehensive outcomes because it considers diverse perspectives and potential consequences.

Furthermore, research by Galdames, Antúñez, and Silva (2019) in the Chilean school context highlights that distributed leadership practices by school leaders are linked to measurable improvements in school performance. When leadership is shared and democratic, schools are better positioned to adapt to change, implement reforms, and improve teaching and learning outcomes.

Given the growing advocacy for distributed leadership, there is a pressing need to explore how this model is operationalized in real-world school governance structures. This study investigates how distributed leadership is enacted in schools, with particular focus on how it enhances collaboration, fosters inclusive decision-making, and drives continuous school improvement.

Drawing on the works of Spillane (2005, 2006), Harris and DeFlaminis (2016), and others, this inquiry aims to contribute to the understanding of distributed leadership not merely as a theoretical ideal, but as a transformative practice grounded in professional learning, trust, and shared responsibility. By analyzing current practices and outcomes, the study seeks to inform policy and professional development frameworks that support sustainable educational leadership.

Literature Review:

Distributed leadership challenges the traditional hierarchical model of school leadership by emphasizing shared responsibility and collective decision-making (Spillane, 2006; Fitzsimons et al., 2011). At its core, distributed leadership conceptualizes leadership as a practice that is stretched over multiple actors and contexts (Spillane, 2005). This model aligns with social practice theory, which considers leadership as emerging through daily interactions and routines (Ariztía, 2017; Feldman, 2020).

The foundational work of Spillane (2006) and Harris & DeFlaminis (2016) has provided critical insights into how leadership is distributed in practice. Spillane (2005) asserts that leadership activities are not solely bound to formal leaders but are co-constructed through the interplay of leaders, followers, and their context. Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) argue that distributed leadership is most effective when it is planned, supported by professional development, and grounded in a culture of trust.

The connection between distributed leadership and professional learning communities (PLCs) has also received attention in educational literature. Cherrington and Thornton (2019) found that PLCs in early childhood education settings foster collaborative inquiry and mutual accountability, which in turn support distributed forms of leadership. Similarly, Fleming (2019) emphasizes the importance of effective professional learning for sustaining distributed leadership. These findings resonate with the view that collaboration is both a means and an end in distributed leadership.

Moreover, research by DeMarco (2018) and Brezicha et al. (2019) underscores how DL affects teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. When teachers perceive that they have meaningful opportunities to participate in school decision-making, they report higher levels of motivation and ownership. Brezicha et al. (2019) identify a persistent "ownership perception gap" between principals and teachers, emphasizing the need for alignment in leadership practices and beliefs.

In the context of school governance, distributed leadership aligns with the principles of democratic participation and shared decision-making. Brazer and Keller (2006) propose a framework that includes multiple stakeholders in educational decision-making, stressing that inclusive processes can lead to more effective and equitable outcomes. Elwyn et al. (2015) similarly advocate for shared decision-making in healthcare, a concept transferable to educational settings in its emphasis on transparency and joint ownership.

Trust plays a foundational role in distributed leadership. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that relational trust among educators, students, and families is a core resource for school reform. In a distributed leadership environment, trust is both a prerequisite and an outcome, reinforcing collaboration and innovation (Flessa, 2009).

Adaptive leadership is another concept relevant to the practice of distributed leadership. Ackerman et al. (2018) describe adaptive leadership as the capacity to respond to complex, evolving challenges through collaboration and shared responsibility. This perspective resonates with Fullan's (1992) implementation view of school improvement, which recognizes that sustainable change requires broad-based participation and capacity building.

From a professional development standpoint, Blandford (2012) and Fusarelli et al. (2018) argue that leadership development must move beyond individual leaders to encompass collective capacity. The cultivation of leadership across roles—teachers, department heads, coordinators—is key to institutionalizing distributed leadership. This is supported by Bennis and Goldsmith (2010), who stress learning to lead as a collective journey.

Communities of Practice (CoP), as discussed by Cater-Steel et al. (2016), offer a viable structure for nurturing distributed leadership. CoPs provide a collaborative platform for sharing knowledge, solving problems, and mentoring new leaders. Galvis (2018) highlights the use of CoPs in higher education as a means of supporting decision-making and continuous improvement.

Additionally, Galdames et al. (2019) examine distributed leadership as a practice among school leaders in Chile, demonstrating that localized, context-sensitive leadership approaches can foster school improvement. Their findings affirm that distributed leadership is not a one-size-fits-all model but requires customization to fit organizational culture and stakeholder needs.

Recent discussions by Nguyen and Ng (2020), and Harris and Jones (2022), have emphasized the role of teacher collaboration in driving school change. Teachers engaged in collaborative inquiry and action research can serve as catalysts for organizational learning and distributed leadership. Berg et al. (2019) offer a typology of teacher leadership programs, noting that distributed leadership often arises organically from teacher-led initiatives.

Distributed leadership is a dynamic, relational, and context-dependent approach that redefines who leads, how leadership is enacted, and for what purposes. It requires intentional structures, cultural support, and ongoing professional learning to flourish.

Methodology:

This study utilized a systematic review design to examine the existing literature on school leadership and management, with a particular emphasis on leadership styles, distributed leadership, professional learning communities, and collaborative practices in education. The systematic review approach was selected to ensure a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant scholarly works. The process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which provided a structured framework for conducting the review.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the included studies, a set of eligibility criteria was applied. The review considered only peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, dissertations, and institutional reports written in English and published between 2000 and 2023. The selected studies needed to focus on themes related to school leadership, such as leadership development, shared decision-making, teacher collaboration, and professional development in primary, secondary, or higher education settings. Studies that lacked empirical data or were based solely on opinion without theoretical grounding were excluded.

The literature search was conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and ResearchGate. Keywords used included "school leadership," "distributed leadership," "teacher collaboration," "professional learning communities," "educational management," "leadership development," and "shared decision-making in schools." Boolean operators and truncation techniques were employed to refine search results. Additionally, manual searches of reference lists from key articles were performed to identify supplementary materials that met the inclusion criteria.

In total, 37 references were initially identified. After removing duplicates and screening abstracts and titles for relevance, 29 full-text articles were assessed in detail. Of these, 24 studies were included in the final synthesis based on their methodological rigor, alignment with the research objectives, and contribution to the field. The selection process followed the four stages of the PRISMA framework: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Data were extracted from each study using a standardized coding sheet that recorded information such as the author(s), year of publication, country of origin, type of study, theoretical framework, major findings, and key

implications. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and categorize findings under major themes.

These themes included distributed leadership and shared decision-making, professional learning and development, teacher collaboration and empowerment, and leadership impact on school culture and reform. The analysis was guided by conceptual frameworks such as Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), Spillane's model of Distributed Leadership (2006), Harris and DeFlaminis's views on leadership practices (2016), and Hargreaves and Connor's Collaborative Professionalism (2018).

To assess the quality and credibility of the included studies, a modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was used. This evaluation considered aspects such as the clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of the research design, reliability of findings, and applicability to educational leadership contexts.

While this systematic review offers a comprehensive synthesis of current literature, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. The inclusion of only English-language sources may have led to language bias, and the diversity of methodologies used in the selected studies precluded a formal meta-analysis. Despite these limitations, the findings of this review provide valuable insights into effective leadership practices that support school improvement, teacher growth, and educational innovation.

Findings and Discussion:

Theme 1: Distributed Leadership and Shared Decision-Making

The first prominent theme that emerged is the growing recognition and implementation of distributed leadership across school systems. Distributed leadership, as defined by Spillane (2006), involves the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation, highlighting leadership as a shared practice rather than a top-down directive. Spillane (2005) and Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) argue that distributed leadership fosters organizational learning by enabling various actors within the school to participate in leadership tasks. This approach democratizes authority and empowers teachers and staff to engage in school improvement processes.

Brezicha et al. (2019) further assert that when teachers perceive a sense of ownership through participative decision-making, their job satisfaction and motivation increase. Similarly, DeMarco (2018) found that schools with distributed leadership structures report higher levels of teacher self-efficacy and a more positive school culture. Fitzsimons et al. (2011) emphasize that distributed leadership requires well-defined roles and clear communication to avoid conflict and ambiguity in leadership practices.

Additionally, Elwyn et al. (2015) and Brazer and Keller (2006) highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making frameworks, which not only improve school outcomes but also increase stakeholder engagement. Galvis (2018) points out that effective decision-making in blended and hybrid learning environments also benefits from shared leadership models, particularly in institutions with diverse educational delivery systems. Ariztia (2017) supports this by noting that leadership is a socially situated practice, one that is shaped by interactions, norms, and institutional culture.

In the context of distributed leadership, Harris and Jones (2022) emphasize the significance of inquiry-based leadership, where teachers take the lead in investigating and addressing educational challenges. This distributed approach aligns with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, as individuals learn and develop through observation, imitation, and modeling within a community context. Flessa (2009) adds that micropolitics within schools can either enhance or inhibit distributed leadership, depending on how power and influence are negotiated among stakeholders.

Theme 2: Professional Learning Communities and Teacher Development

The second emergent theme in the literature emphasizes the central role of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in enhancing teacher development and instructional improvement. These communities have increasingly become foundational in shaping reflective, collaborative, and innovative teaching practices across various educational contexts. As schools face the complex challenges of 21st-century learning, PLCs offer a promising avenue for sustaining teacher learning, professional growth, and leadership capacity.

Hargreaves and Connor (2018) define collaborative professionalism as the deep moral and intellectual commitment of educators to work together to improve teaching and learning for all students. This conceptualization shifts the focus from individual professional development to shared responsibility and collective efficacy. Feldman (2020), drawing on social practice theory, argues that professional learning is most meaningful when it is embedded within communities of shared values, practices, and goals. This view is supported by Ariztia (2017), who contends that such

communities are not just venues for skill acquisition but also sites of identity formation and cultural negotiation among educators.

In the early childhood education sector, Cherrington and Thornton (2019) found that PLCs foster reflective practice, enhance pedagogical innovation, and promote a culture of inquiry among teachers. Similarly, Cater-Steel et al. (2016) demonstrate how cross-institutional communities of practice in higher education sustain scholarly engagement and research productivity. Their findings illustrate that well-structured PLCs can transcend institutional boundaries and disciplinary silos, offering a sustainable model for lifelong learning and professional dialogue.

Leadership plays a pivotal role in the success of PLCs. Fleming (2019) underscores the influence of middle leadership in cultivating professional learning through cultures of trust, support, and constructive challenge. Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasize that relational trust among teachers and leaders is a core resource for school improvement and a necessary condition for effective collaboration. When leaders model vulnerability, respect, and open communication, they empower teachers to engage authentically in collective inquiry and action.

Blandford (2012) outlines a strategic framework for managing professional development, asserting that successful PLCs are characterized by clear objectives, systematic evaluation, and alignment with broader school improvement plans. This framework aligns with Bennis and Goldsmith's (2010) assertion that leadership is a learnable skill and that continuous professional development is essential for nurturing leadership capacity at all levels. Leadership, as Ackerman et al. (2018) suggest, must be adaptive, recognizing the shifting challenges and contexts in which schools operate.

Distributed leadership is another critical lens through which to understand the impact of PLCs. According to Spillane (2006), leadership should not be confined to formal roles but distributed across various actors and situations. This approach is echoed by Harris and DeFlaminis (2016), who argue that distributed leadership encourages shared accountability and professional agency. Brezicha et al. (2019) also highlight how inclusive decision-making processes enhance teacher job satisfaction and self-efficacy, which are key drivers of effective professional learning.

Nguyen and Ng (2020) provide compelling evidence that teacher collaboration within PLCs promotes pedagogical innovation by facilitating the exchange, adaptation, and dissemination of effective teaching practices. Their study shows that when collaboration is structured yet flexible, it fosters collective efficacy—a belief in the group's shared capacity to effect positive change in student outcomes. This finding resonates with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn best in social contexts where modeling, feedback, and shared experiences shape behavior and motivation.

Berg et al. (2019) contribute further by offering a typology of teacher leadership programs, highlighting the importance of tailoring leadership development initiatives to specific school contexts and improvement goals. Fullan (1992) reminds us that real school improvement is not merely a matter of structural change but also of cultural transformation—an endeavor best pursued through collaborative professional learning and shared vision. Fusarelli et al. (2018) reinforce this view by linking leadership development and succession planning to the long-term sustainability of reform efforts.

PLCs also serve as critical spaces for negotiating educational decisions and policies. Brazer and Keller (2006) propose a conceptual framework for multi-stakeholder decision-making that emphasizes the importance of teacher voice and agency. Elwyn et al. (2015) further stress the importance of shared decision-making processes, suggesting that inclusive dialogue leads to more thoughtful, contextually relevant, and ethically sound educational practices. Galvis (2018) supports this notion in the context of blended learning, noting that collaborative decision-making enhances both the quality and legitimacy of instructional change.

Moreover, educational micropolitics must not be overlooked. Flessa (2009) examines how distributed leadership and PLCs interact within the complex power dynamics of schools. While PLCs ideally foster egalitarian dialogue, they must also navigate institutional hierarchies and resource constraints. Thus, cultivating a genuine learning community requires intentional leadership that bridges formal authority and informal influence.

In summary, the literature converges on the view that Professional Learning Communities are vital mechanisms for fostering teacher development, distributed leadership, and school improvement. They offer a structure for sustained professional dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and mutual accountability. When effectively led and supported, PLCs transform schools into dynamic learning organizations where educators grow in their practice, leadership capacities are expanded, and students ultimately benefit from improved teaching and learning. To maximize their impact, PLCs must be intentionally designed, contextually responsive, and supported by inclusive, adaptive, and trust-centered leadership.

Theme 3: Leadership Trust, School Culture, and Collaborative Practices

This theme explores the essential interconnection between leadership trust, school culture, and collaborative practices—elements increasingly recognized as foundational for sustainable school improvement and effective leadership. As schools face complex challenges in the 21st century, trust and collaboration emerge not as optional traits, but as indispensable pillars of educational leadership and reform.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) compellingly describe trust as the “connective tissue” of school communities, suggesting that relational trust among educators, administrators, students, and parents significantly correlates with improved student achievement and successful school reform. Trust fosters an environment where teachers feel empowered to take pedagogical risks, engage in innovation, and commit to collective goals. It also enables school leaders to create inclusive cultures where decision-making is shared and grounded in mutual respect.

Ackerman, Mette, and Biddle (2018) emphasize the adaptive challenges school leaders face in balancing technical management tasks with the more elusive and human-centered work of building inclusive and trust-based cultures. Leadership that responds flexibly to changing needs—while embedding a culture of relational trust—can successfully navigate these challenges. This shift requires school leaders to focus not only on strategy and results, but also on relationships, collaboration, and moral purpose.

Bennis and Goldsmith (2010) argue that trust is not merely a passive attribute but must be actively cultivated through authenticity, transparency, and consistency. Leaders who demonstrate vulnerability and emotional intelligence are more likely to foster genuine collaboration and collective ownership among teachers and stakeholders. These attributes also contribute to the development of a strong school culture where continuous learning, dialogue, and shared responsibility thrive.

Distributed leadership models, such as those proposed by Spillane (2006), further reinforce the need for collaboration and collective decision-making. Leadership is no longer confined to the principal’s office; instead, it is distributed across teams and individuals throughout the school. Spillane (2005, 2006) posits that effective distributed leadership must be supported by structured opportunities for interaction, joint work, and shared accountability. Such approaches foster a culture where diverse voices contribute to problem-solving and where leadership becomes a shared social practice.

Cultural responsiveness also plays a pivotal role in shaping effective leadership and school culture. Flessa (2009) and Galdames et al. (2019) stress that school leadership practices must be grounded in the unique cultural and social contexts of each school community. Leadership strategies that fail to acknowledge community identities, values, and challenges risk alienating key stakeholders. Conversely, culturally responsive leadership strengthens community ties and enhances trust by validating local perspectives and knowledge systems.

Fusarelli, Fusarelli, and Riddick (2018) further argue that leadership development and succession planning are essential in cultivating a culture of continuity and shared vision. Strategic leadership pipelines not only ensure organizational stability during transitions but also contribute to the longevity of trust-based practices. Leaders must build internal capacities within their schools, mentoring emerging leaders and involving staff in shaping the school’s mission and direction.

School culture and professional learning communities (PLCs) are also key elements in reinforcing collaborative practices. Blandford (2012) emphasizes that effective professional development is embedded within a culture of continuous learning and shared inquiry. Schools that encourage collaboration among teachers—where instructional practices are shared, critiqued, and refined—are more likely to sustain improvement efforts. Fleming (2019) echoes this, noting that teams grow stronger through reflection, dialogue, and joint problem-solving.

The concept of collaborative professionalism, articulated by Hargreaves and Connor (2018), extends this idea by promoting deep, purposeful collaboration among teachers as central to educational improvement. Collaborative professionalism involves shared responsibility, deep dialogue about practice, and mutual accountability—factors that require and reinforce trust.

The integration of collaborative practices is not limited to teaching staff but must include students, parents, and broader community stakeholders. Brazer and Keller (2006) offer a useful framework for inclusive decision-making, emphasizing the importance of involving multiple stakeholders in educational planning. When decision-making is collaborative, stakeholders are more likely to feel a sense of ownership, increasing commitment and investment in outcomes.

Brezicha et al. (2019) explore the relationship between teacher job satisfaction and perceptions of participatory leadership, finding that teachers who feel involved in decision-making processes report higher satisfaction and efficacy. This indicates that distributed leadership and collaborative cultures are not just ethical imperatives—they are also practical strategies for retention and engagement.

Additionally, professional learning communities are essential for sustaining collaborative culture. Cherrington and Thornton (2019) and Feldman (2020) point out that effective PLCs are not merely formal structures but are rooted in social practice theory. They must be continuously nurtured, evaluated, and supported through leadership that values reflection, inquiry, and collegiality.

Cater-Steel et al. (2016) show how communities of practice in higher education provide valuable insights into sustaining momentum in collaborative networks. Such structures can be replicated in school settings to encourage continuous engagement and shared learning among educators. These networks foster trust through consistent interaction, shared goals, and mutual respect.

Fullan (1992) warns that reform is not a linear, one-time intervention but a cyclical process of learning, unlearning, and relearning. Sustainable change emerges from collective capacity, not from the vision of an individual leader. Schools must embed trust and collaboration in their cultures to navigate this cycle effectively. Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) support this notion, stating that distributed leadership in practice creates opportunities for widespread involvement, which in turn builds capacity for systemic transformation.

The integration of collaborative practices into school leadership also entails confronting the complexities of shared decision-making. Elwyn et al. (2015) argue that shared decision-making must consider its consequences and ensure that mechanisms for dialogue and compromise are in place. For true collaboration to occur, leaders must ensure clarity of roles, transparency in processes, and equity in participation.

This review also reveals the need for schools to adopt frameworks that integrate social learning theory (Boone et al., 1977), recognizing that individuals learn through observation, interaction, and participation in meaningful communities. When leadership models are aligned with this understanding, they support environments where growth is a shared endeavor.

Finally, Galvis (2018) underscores the importance of informed decision-making in educational settings, advocating for the integration of evidence-based practices and stakeholder input. This reinforces the idea that trust and collaboration are not abstract ideals but strategic necessities.

The findings from this systematic review affirm a paradigm shift in educational leadership—from hierarchical models to collaborative, distributed, and culturally responsive practices. Leadership trust, collaborative professionalism, and shared decision-making emerge as key drivers of school improvement. Schools that embed these principles into their cultures are more resilient, adaptive, and capable of sustaining meaningful change. The future of school leadership lies in cultivating collective agency, building professional trust, and nurturing cultures of shared responsibility that span all levels of the school community.

Conclusion:

This study underscores the transformative potential of distributed leadership in shaping more collaborative, inclusive, and effective school governance. Rather than relying solely on hierarchical models, distributed leadership emphasizes shared responsibilities, collective decision-making, and the active participation of various stakeholders—teachers, administrators, students, and parents alike. When leadership is genuinely distributed, a culture of mutual trust emerges, empowering educators to take initiative, voice their perspectives, and contribute meaningfully to the school's direction and development.

A key finding of this review is that trust is not merely a byproduct of good leadership but a foundational condition for it. Trust facilitates open communication, risk-taking, and innovation—all of which are necessary for continuous school improvement. As noted by Bryk and Schneider (2002), relational trust acts as the "connective tissue" that holds the school community together. When educators feel respected and valued, they are more willing to collaborate, support each other's growth, and remain committed to shared goals.

To realize the full potential of distributed leadership, schools must make intentional efforts to build professional capacity. This includes sustained investment in professional learning communities, mentorship programs, and leadership training that emphasize collaboration, equity, and cultural responsiveness. As Ackerman et al. (2018) and Fusarelli et al. (2018) argue, adaptive leadership development and succession planning are critical to ensuring consistency, direction, and long-term impact.

Equally important is the clarification of roles within distributed leadership structures. Ambiguity around responsibilities can lead to confusion or conflict, whereas clearly defined yet flexible roles promote accountability, agency, and strategic alignment. Encouraging shared ownership of decisions fosters a sense of purpose and collective efficacy among staff.

Distributed leadership is not a fixed model but a dynamic process that evolves through relationships, practices, and shared values. By fostering trust, supporting professional learning, and embracing collaborative structures, schools can become more resilient, responsive, and capable of meeting the diverse needs of their communities.

Recommendations:

1. Schools should institutionalize collaborative structures such as PLCs and leadership teams.
2. Professional development programs must focus on building leadership capacity across all staff.
3. Clear role definitions and accountability measures should be implemented to prevent confusion.
4. Policymakers should support school autonomy and innovation through frameworks that encourage distributed leadership.

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