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Leadership Notes Editorial – Distributed Leadership for Distributed Learning

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Leadership Notes Editorial

Distributed Leadership for Distributed Learning

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Embedded in common notions of leadership practice are perceptions of power, authority, and responsibility. Questions about who does what and under whose authority are the underpinnings of much debate about the everyday workings and activities of organizational leaders and the projects that make up the work of such organizations.

This focus on leader activities in organizations provides a view of leadership as a phenomenon embodied in the actions of those who are identified in a particular role, assigned by the organization, and provided the appropriate power and authority to lead. More recently, discussions on leadership broaden this perspective beyond individuals in legitimate roles to the more pervasive and variable distribution of power, authority, and responsibility in the network of people who carry out the everyday activities of organizational life.

For Graetz (2000), distributed leadership involves "a group of experienced and trusted individuals operating at different levels of the organization [who lead using] integrated thinking and acting at all levels" (p. 566). The roles of leader and follower become less distinctive and work proceeds with extensive communication and collaboration. This model provides the opportunity to consider leadership as a post-modern discourse in the process of the social construction of multi-local context and appropriate distributed action (Hosking, 2007).

Distributed learning environments can be considered as tangential to, but more concrete than, distributed leadership. At least two ideas can be shared across these two contexts, where something is 'distributed.' First, in both the case of distributed learning and distributed leadership, assumptions about the boundaries between commonly held significant roles are less fixed and more negotiable. Power and authority then are considered to be a shared resource. Second, these roles are defined more by the

processes that constitute their activities rather than outcomes with which they are charged.

Jalovcic, McCloud-Bondoc, and Ralston describe a case of a mobile, distributed learning program where leadership appears to have diminished before the need for the program did. They discuss the context in detail and argue in favor of distributed leadership models as a remedy for what could be seen as a failure of leadership. We share this presentation to consider the following overarching question: Can a model of distributed leadership be of valuable use in distributed, open, and distance models of education delivery?

References

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