Expertise, Credibility, and Influence: How Teachers Can Influence Policy, Advance Research, and Improve Performance

THOMAS HATCH
Teachers College

MELISSA EILER WHITE
DEBORAH FAIGENBAUM
Stanford University

While many efforts to foster teacher leadership focus on the power, authority, and control that can come with teachers’ formal positions in organizational hierarchies, case studies of 4 teachers document how expertise, credibility, and influence can come together in teachers’ activities regardless of the formal positions they hold. These teachers’ expertise emerged from investigations of issues that were of concern to them in their own classrooms and schools. Through these investigations, they developed representations that both helped them to articulate their own ideas and facilitated the sharing of their work in a variety of different contexts. The connections these teachers made provided them with new perspectives, helped them to build their credibility, and enabled them to gain access to individuals who served as translators, advocates, and amplifiers for their work. Despite conditions that provided little support for—and often significant discouragement from—sharing their work and ideas, their experiences suggest some of the ways that schools, school systems, and reform networks can build on the ideas, energy, and influence of teachers both in the classroom and out.

Renee Moore, Tim Boerst, Joan Cone, and Emily Wolk show that there is no single formula or prototype that defines what kinds of teachers have an impact on others. Boerst, a fifth-grade teacher in what he refers to as an “urban suburban”1 elementary school in Michigan, has helped to launch a teacher research group (TRG) that engages teachers from across his district; Cone, a high school English teacher in a diverse suburban community in the San Francisco Bay area, has played a leading role in abolishing tracking in English courses at her school and carried out a variety of research projects that have contributed to both local and national discussions.
of detracking; Moore, a Shelby, Mississippi, teacher of the year and a Milken Teaching Award winner, speaks to a wide range of audiences even as she continues her work as a part-time high school English and journalism teacher and a “lead” teacher who assists with professional development; Wolk, a kindergarten teacher originally, works with colleagues in her school as a mentor and “resource teacher” in a large, urban district outside Los Angeles.

These 4 teachers teach different subjects and different grade levels. They come from different parts of the country. Some have been in the classroom for 10 years or less and some have been there for almost 30 years. Their personalities are strikingly different. Some are quiet thinkers; others are forceful crusaders. Cone and Moore have garnered extensive recognition for their work; the others carry out their work in what often appears to be quiet isolation. Some work in formal leadership positions outside the classroom, whereas others share their work and ideas with others while continuing to teach. But taken together, their work demonstrates the many different ways that teachers can affect the people, structures, and ideas that shape educational activities (see Table 1).

The passion and ingenuity these teachers bring to their work may seem to spring from innate abilities and force of will, but case studies of these 4 individuals reveal a number of factors that cut across their experiences and their different contexts. In contrast to traditional leaders whose impact on others often relies on the power, authority, and control that can come with their formal positions in organizational hierarchies, the impact these teachers have comes from the expertise, credibility, and influence they bring to their activities, regardless of the formal positions they hold. These teachers face conditions that provide little support for— and often significant discouragement from— sharing their work and ideas, but their experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Position and school context</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Main sphere of influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renee Moore</td>
<td>English and journalism teacher in rural Mississippi high school</td>
<td>Culturally engaged instruction</td>
<td>State and regional audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Cone</td>
<td>English teacher in suburban San Francisco Bay area high school</td>
<td>Tracking</td>
<td>School policies and national audiences of researchers and educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Wolk</td>
<td>Mentor and elementary resource teacher in urban southern California</td>
<td>Participatory action research</td>
<td>Teachers at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Boerst</td>
<td>Fifth-grade teacher in “urban suburban” Michigan</td>
<td>Student ownership of learning</td>
<td>District policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
suggest some of the ways that schools, school systems, and reform networks could build on the ideas, energy, and influence of teachers like them. But building on teachers’ work may require a fundamental rethinking of the assumptions that lie behind conventional approaches to teacher leadership. Instead of relying on formal roles and explicit organizational authority, building on the power of teachers may depend on recognizing and supporting the informal networks through which ideas and influence can travel.

Although these teachers may seem unusual, they are not alone. They reflect the kinds of contributions to practice, policy, and research that teachers around the country can make every day (Nieto, 2003; Smylie, 1995). While many different teachers could have served as the participants for this case study, Moore, Boerst, Cone, and Wolk were selected because they reflect a range of different contexts (urban, suburban, rural) and levels of teaching (elementary and secondary); they participate in different kinds of teacher networks, including the National Writing Project, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and The Breadloaf Rural Teachers Network; they all have somewhat different spheres of influence (ranging from teachers at their own schools to researchers and policymakers far beyond their local communities); and they are all members of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL).²

CASTL was designed by members of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in order to bring to teaching the support, recognition, and rewards that benefits scholars in so many other disciplines. The scholarship of teaching refers to efforts by teachers to make the ideas and practice of teaching public, to subject their expertise to critical examination, and to exchange the resulting products so that others can build upon them (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Shulman, 1993). CASTL supports the development of the scholarship of teaching through the establishment of several fellowship programs for both higher education and K–12 faculty. CASTL, launched in 1998 with a first cohort of 15 higher education scholars, provides 1- or 2-year fellowships in which faculty investigate a key issue in their teaching and develop articles, books, Web sites, and other products to share the results with others.³ Although the CASTL participants represent a select group, their experiences illustrate the kinds of influence that some teachers can have and allow us to explore the conditions and support that might enable teachers to contribute more effectively to the development of their peers and their profession.

In this article, we first describe some of the formal and informal roles these teachers take on and the different kinds of influence they have on others. Drawing on literature on teacher leadership, situated learning, and organizational learning, we then explore how these teachers’ efforts
to examine their own practice, to articulate their ideas in a variety of representations, and to develop connections with individuals and groups inside and outside their schools may have contributed to their influence and impact on others.

THE VARIETIES OF INFLUENCE

In some cases, it is possible to trace how a particular action, idea or strategy Boerst, Cone, Moore, and Wolk pursued affected other people, practices, or policies. For the most part, however, like the widespread repercussions that emanate from a single impact, the activities of the 4 teachers in this study have a variety of different influences at once. These teachers achieve those influences by sharing specific ideas about classroom practice, by serving as models and examples for others, by providing their advice and expertise in formal leadership roles, and by serving as a voice for teachers in arenas in which teachers are often unrepresented. In the process, their influence rests on what they do and say, what they present in written products and other forms of representation, and what they stand for.

Their experiences demonstrate the kinds of contributions teachers can make to their profession that go far beyond the learning of their students. All reach a number of different audiences inside and outside their schools, and it is impossible to pin down their influence to a single group, but they represent at least three different kinds of contributions that teachers can make to the learning and development of other educators: Wolk’s experiences show the kinds of influence that teachers can have on the classroom practices of their peers; Boerst’s activities demonstrate how teachers can have an impact on policies in their districts; and Cone’s and Moore’s work demonstrates the state and national impact that teachers can have through their presentations and publications.

“LIVING ELBOW TO ELBOW”: SUPPORT FOR PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

As a resource teacher at a large elementary school in Santa Ana, California, Wolk has formal responsibility for helping her teaching colleagues to improve their classroom practice. But rather than using her authority to show or tell her colleagues what to do, she takes advantage of opportunities to work together with them. When people ask her to come into their classrooms, she always tells them, “Listen, I’m not an expert. I only pretend to be.” As she explains, “So if I work with somebody, I don’t come and do this thing and walk away. I usually try to live with them elbow to elbow.” Even when her colleagues invite her into their rooms to assist them, Wolk tries to transform the usual dynamic to subvert her role as “expert.” “They are
used to having someone come in and do a fancy lesson and give them with a packet of stuff and then leave,” she told us, but she tells her colleagues, “That is not who I am. That is not what I am about. Frankly, I am not an expert and maybe somebody else would be better at that but what I provide is a colleague to bounce ideas off of.”

In many instances, Wolk invites the teachers to watch her and help her deal with a problem she is having, only gradually moving to examine jointly the practice of her colleague. “I need your help, but I also will offer help,” she told one colleague, and then invited the colleague to tape her doing a math lesson. “‘Okay, watch me,’ ” Wolk told her. “‘I’m telling you, this is going to be rough because I don’t know your kids, I’m trying to figure them out and displaying myself.’ Then we watched her tapes. So she taped me first and then I talked through the conversation so she could see me doing it. God, that wasn’t very pretty whatever was going on there. And then I said, ‘Would you mind if I taped you?’ ”

Through these kinds of interactions, Wolk has helped a number of colleagues to deal with particular problems and issues with their practice. In one instance, Wolk worked with a relatively new teacher to help her engage her students in more productive discussions. In another instance, a veteran colleague told Wolk that she had run out of ideas for teaching reading and literature. They worked on lessons together, attended relevant trainings, and developed a new set of teaching strategies particularly suited to the needs of her weakest readers. In turn, these new strategies helped the veteran to regain her passion for teaching. “I think the thing that struck me the most,” Wolk explained, “was that other people would say, ‘Wow,’ she is energized again!”

As with this veteran, beyond her influence on classroom practice, Wolk’s work helps to provide her colleagues with inspiration and support in other aspects of their lives. After Wolk received her National Board certification, 13 other teachers at her school began the process (only 7 teachers in the entire district and none in her school had been certified in the previous 10 years). “I want to watch you first,” a colleague told Wolk, and then, as Wolk put it, “they watched me go through it and struggle through it.”

Wolk, Boerst, Cone, and Moore have all participated in groups or worked directly with other teachers to share and reflect on their practice. Their impact on peers in their local communities, however, extends beyond their schools. Many of them have led or participated in courses in local teacher education programs. Wolk herself has taught classes on classroom management and discipline and other issues through both Chatman University and the Orange County Department of Education; Boerst holds a position at the University of Michigan; and all 4 have organized or led groups in which they have helped other teachers to develop inquiries into their own practice.
“OOZING” THROUGH THE DISTRICT: CREATING MORE RESPONSIVE POLICIES

As Boerst describes it, the ideas and activities of the TRG that he helped to launch have “oozed” through the district. Boerst and a colleague started the group primarily as a way of continuing the conversations with colleagues they began when going through certification for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. However, as the group has evolved into a regular source of professional development for a number of teachers in the district, the district has steadily increased its support for the group, and some district decisions and policies have begun to reflect the influence of the group’s work and approach.

Although initially the district provided little more than a place to meet, in subsequent years, it provided video cameras in all the schools so that the TRG members (and others) could tape their teaching. “We just gave them another reason to think about why those kinds of materials are useful,” Boerst explained. “I think maybe their conception in the beginning was that those are useful for taping students when they do something. . . . But I don’t think they had thought a whole lot about the use of videotaping in learning about teaching in professional development.” The following year, the district provided funds to secure substitute teachers so that the teachers could observe in one another’s classrooms, and the year after that the district provided release time for half-day meetings during the school day on a quarterly basis.

Hand in hand with the changes in their support for the TRG, the district also shifted its approach to district-wide professional development. When the TRG first began, the district was in the midst of developing a new approach to professional development that involved monthly “late-starts.” Initially, however, the approach consisted of what Boerst referred to as a typical “potpourri” in which the teachers were briefly introduced to a variety of topics and issues over the course of a year. “Whatever was the hot button issue that we needed to worry about for that particular week, that’s what was in the training,” Boerst explained, and many of the members of the TRG were “vocal” in saying, “This doesn’t make sense, we’re not learning anything.” When Boerst and a colleague met with district administrators at the end of the year, they “talked about how that compared with what we were doing in-group and how we felt that group was helping us learn things about teaching, whereas these in-services, this hodge-podge of whatever, didn’t seem to be doing the trick.” The following year, however, as part of the implementation of a “total quality management” approach, the district instituted a more practice-centered approach with a full-year focus on “understanding by design” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998), and at the end of the year, they met with Boerst and members of the TRG again and
asked specifically, “What are you learning from teacher reflection group that would help us to think about late-starts?” In subsequent years, professional development activities during the late-starts have continued to reflect a year-long focus, and district administrators have continued to solicit the feedback of members of the TRG in refining their approach.

The work of the TRG has also served as a means of “pushing the envelope” on district policy in several other arenas. Once the group had established a process for drafting and completing narrative cases describing key issues in their practice, for example, they could show administrators a concrete and effective alternative to the conventional evaluation procedure. Boerst told us that TRG members felt that principals should be able to read about our cases and know how we’re thinking, that we’ve been rigorous about trying to improve something in our teaching. They can come and observe us based on that. They can look at our case, and see that is a nontrivial attempt to improve ourselves.

Eventually, after reviewing the cases and seeing the work of the group, administrators in the district decided to accept the cases as a viable alternative to the usual district evaluation process. Today, as Boerst puts it, “We don’t have to go through the whole district rigmarole.”

In addition, Boerst is able to have an impact on district policy and practice by taking advantage of new opportunities and pushing the district to develop the ability to implement new policies. “When I got National Board certification,” Boerst explained,

one of the first things I had to do was reapply for my teaching certificate, like renew it. I have 60 credits of university credit, that I could use to renew it, but I refused to do it that way. And I made them take my National Board to do it, because they claimed that you could do that but they didn’t know how to do it because nobody ever had them go through the paces to do it. So it’s stuff like that, it’s like I’m using my National Board, you say I can, I should be able to; how are we going to make this happen? It took three months to get them to figure out how to do it, but I did get a letter in the mail that they’d mass mailed to everybody who had National Board that said—“Oh, you’re now renewed.”

As a member of a small district, Boerst has unusual opportunities to talk directly with his principal, the superintendent, and the assistant superintendents in order to influence their thinking and policies. However, even in larger, more bureaucratic schools and districts, Wolk has found ways to exert an influence on policy through the opportunities and responsibilities
that her formal position and growing relationship with her superiors. Moore and Cone, on the other hand, have had to be more overtly political, organizing teachers and others to advocate for a role for teachers in curriculum development, changing school structures (through de-tracking), and other aspects of school and district decision making.

USING THE TEACHER’S VOICE: CONNECTING PRACTICE, POLICY, AND RESEARCH

When she began work on detracking, Cone found herself drawn to the work of Jeannie Oakes and Glynda Hull. “I wanted to be part of that. . . . I identified with the people who inspired me from the writing. And I wanted to have my voice—my writing voice—join theirs.”

Since that time, Cone has continued to share her research on tracking in a variety of venues including Newsday (2002), Harvard Educational Review (1994), the College Board Review (1993), Phi Delta Kappan (1992), and the Harvard Education Letter (2003), and she has presented her work at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, in teacher education courses, and in public discussions. On one radio show, Cone’s influence on others was apparent when the moderator brought in a professor from the University of Virginia to respond to Cone’s comments. The moderator described the professor as someone “who has actually been on the national side of this, the opposite of Joan Cone,” but the professor corrected him, replying that she was a “great fan” of Cone and that she had “read and used” Cone’s work for a “long time.”

Beyond getting across specific information and ideas she has gained through her own teaching and research, however, in her writing and presentations Cone strives to demonstrate that teachers can be passionate and committed intellectuals with ideas and points of view that are worth paying attention to. In her view, more teachers should be out in public acting as “bridges” between research and practice and more venues are needed in which teachers can have a real voice, not just a pat on the back. As she puts it, “I think lots of times that we go places they invite us—‘Oh, let’s hear from the teachers.’ And they wine us and dine us and put us up in nice hotels and silence us.” In response, she shares her writing, talks about the research she has read, and describes the political battles she has fought so that people “get used to knowing that teachers are political, we’re thinkers, we’re leaders, we’re reformers.”

As an award-winning teacher, Moore has had her share of “wining and dining,” but the honors she has received have also expanded her audiences and extended her sphere of influence so that she, like Cone, can share her experiences with a wide range of teachers and policymakers far beyond her own school in Shelby, Mississippi. In addition to invitations to speak at a
variety of staff development sessions around Mississippi, Moore has been asked to speak at the state conferences of organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the State Staff Development Council and Future Educators Advisors.

In her writings and her presentations, Moore draws on her experiences as a high school English and journalism teacher and her own research on cultural engagement as a frame for what she has to say. At the same time, Moore has taken advantage of the opportunities that have come her way to make sure that audiences hear not only her voice, but the voices of her colleagues. As she puts it:

There’s this pattern, and I’ve seen it in a lot of places. You like to pat teachers on the back and say, “Oh, isn’t this wonderful. You do a good job. Here’s your apple.” But you don’t want to talk to me about the things that really matter as if I have no professional opinion that’s worth hearing when it comes to policy.

In response, Moore uses her research as an example of the fact that “teachers actually know more and do more than people in policy positions generally give us credit for,” and like a latter-day Johnny Appleseed, she gathers ideas and innovations in her visits to towns like Hot Coffee and spreads them across them state.

Although Boerst’s and Wolk’s energies and influence are often directed toward their peers and colleagues in their districts, they too participate in a variety of national venues in which they can communicate their ideas and those of their colleagues to a wider audience. Boerst serves as a chair and panel member of one of the review boards of Teaching Children Mathematics, a journal associated with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, in which he has also published commentaries and articles (Boerst, 2001, 2003b; Boerst & Schielack, 2003). In addition, both Boerst and Wolk have made presentations at conferences like that of the American Educational Research Association (Wolk, 1997, 1998, 2004; Boerst, 2003a). Although it is difficult to judge the impact that Boerst, Wolk, Moore, and Cone may have in these venues, all serve as examples of the ways that teachers, even under current conditions, can extend their reach beyond their own classrooms and communities.

THE MEANS OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE GROWTH OF EXPERTISE, CREDIBILITY, AND INFLUENCE

What might enable teachers like these to have an impact on others? In what Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) term the “first” and “second” wave of
work on teacher leadership, efforts to increase teachers’ influence focused primarily on giving them formal organizational roles within their schools. The first wave of research accompanied bureaucratic reforms of the 1970s and early 1980s and addressed the value of promoting teachers to “managerial roles” such as department chair, head teacher, and master teacher (Rowan, 1990; Smylie, 1994). Critics of the first wave sought to take a new approach that was less bureaucratic and more likely to distribute control in schools (Fay, 1992; Wasley, 1991). These second-wave reforms included several initiatives to create positions for teachers that built on teachers’ expertise such as team leader, curriculum developer, and staff developer (Lieberman & Miller, 1999, 2001). For the most part, these approaches took a “unidirectional” view of influence by focusing on the influence that those in higher levels in the organizational hierarchy could have on those below them. Studies that accompanied the first and second waves found that giving teachers formal positions of authority like these can contribute to positive developments for the teacher leaders themselves and some changes among their peers and their schools, but that simply putting teachers into what often become “quasi-administrative” positions does not necessarily promote teacher leadership, improvements in instructional practice, or wider school changes (Smylie, 1994; Smylie & Denny, 1990).

At the same time, a small but growing body of research began to shift from the focus on teachers’ formal roles to look directly at the consequences of efforts to redesign the daily work and relationships of classroom teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1992; Firestone & Bader, 1992; Rowan, 1990). Building on these findings, the “third wave” of work on teacher leadership suggests that teacher leadership should be connected to the classroom work and expertise of teachers and focuses on developing the professional support that teachers can provide for their colleagues through mentoring, joint problem solving, and teacher-led professional development activities, with or without taking on new organizational roles (Rowan, 1990; Shulman, 1987; Smylie, 1996; Wasley, 1991). In concert with recent efforts to look at ways in which leadership can be “distributed” across individuals, can extend beyond hierarchical positions (Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), and can be exerted by communities of teachers (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), third-wave efforts open the door to looking at the networks of influence that operate throughout schools and districts, not simply the influence that flows from “top” to “bottom.”

Consistent with these developments, the cases presented here focus on the nature of the activities and relationships that enable teachers to make significant contributions to the work and development of peers, policymakers, researchers, and others who may or may not be “below” them in the organizational hierarchy. Correspondingly, looking across the experi-
ences of the 4 teachers in these case studies suggests that their influence on others derives from the expertise and credibility they have developed as classroom teachers rather than the formal organizational authority they may have. Beyond a simple linear sequence—in which teachers gain expertise, develop credibility, and then start to have an influence on others—the experiences of the 4 teachers we studied suggest that expertise, credibility, and influence are mutually reinforcing. In fact, as these teachers share ideas with others outside their schools, they gain a better understanding of what is and is not working in their schools, and as they learn and share what they are learning with others, they develop credibility as people who are willing to make both the struggles and successes in their practice public.

In order to examine the activities and characteristics that contribute to the expertise, credibility, and influence that these teachers can develop, these case studies draw on literature on situated and organizational learning and institutional theory. In particular, research from these traditions suggests that an individual’s influence on the learning of his peers and the development of his organizations rests on the sharing of tacit knowledge in joint and parallel activities, the creation of explicit representations of knowledge that can be shared across contexts, the value or “warrant” of the representations and the individuals who produce them, and the receptiveness of the individuals and audiences who may benefit from the representations.

Even with what are often limited occasions to work together with colleagues (Little, 1990, 1999; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989), teachers can share tacit knowledge by serving as models for their peers, acting as resources and guides in joint activities, and providing explicit instruction in professional development and preservice settings (Hatch, Eiler White, & Capitelli, 2003). They can also make tacit concerns and ideas explicit by reflecting on and examining their practice alone or with others (Nonaka, 1994). Developing representations that document what they learn from their reflections and examinations can also make a teacher’s experiences and insights available for others to examine and build upon. These representations—ranging from metaphors and stories to classroom artifacts, videos, and research articles—“disemb” knowledge from its particular context and act as “boundary objects” that can travel through time and space carrying information and ideas from one situation to another (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996; Wenger, 1998). As a result, teachers who produce these kinds of representations have the potential to have an influence on people in many different contexts, not only on those individuals who see or interact with them in their schools or other venues.

The extent to which representations of practice travel through schools and districts and influence others depends on the nature of teachers’ activities and representations, the connections they develop, and the norms, values, and culture in their schools: if an individual is perceived to have
relatively little useful expertise, others may pay little attention to any representations that individual produces; however, if that individual or others establish the value of the representations—if those representations are “warranted”—then those representations are regarded as credible and may be more likely to be shared widely (Seely Brown & Duguid, 2002).6

Even when individuals or the ideas they develop are considered credible, however, many people those individuals could influence may not be prepared to receive or understand their representations. As a result, in order to have an impact on others, teachers’ work and their representations have to fit the implicit and explicit norms and rules that govern the flow of knowledge and information among different audiences (Mishler, 1990; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001). In particular, to influence administrators and researchers as well as their peers, teachers have to be able to shape their conversations, presentations, and documents to conform to the different standards and constraints across classrooms and schools, research traditions, and political contexts. When teachers are able to reach and influence individuals beyond their immediate school contexts, however, those individuals can act as “brokers” who can extend and expand the teachers’ influence in other settings (Wenger, 1998).

The teachers we studied have produced ideas and representations that have allowed them to have an impact in a variety of different kinds of settings, but for the most part, exercising leadership or having an impact on others was not their primary motivation, nor have they systematically endeavored to build and increase their influence. Rather, their influence has its roots in their efforts to think deeply about questions and problems in their practice, to articulate what they were learning for themselves and for others, and to build and maintain their credibility with and relationships with their colleagues.

LEARNING THAT LEADS TO LEADERSHIP

Teacher research is not about looking for some great new way to teach: It is the prima ballerina at the bar; it is the concert pianist playing scales; it is the basketball star practicing lay-ups; it is digging for treasure deep in one’s own backyard. (Moore, 2002, p. 2)

Boerst, Cone, Moore, and Wolk have all been inquiring into their practice for a number of years. For each of them, those inquiries serve as a source of data, resources, and ideas that they can share with others. For the most part, these teachers begin these examinations in order to address their own questions and concerns. For many of them, inquiries grow out of particular frustrations or moments of “disequilibrium” when they realize that things are going on that they do not quite understand. The distress or unease they
feel in these situations brings critical issues to their attention. Rather than brushing these issues off, the teachers dive into them and seek to learn as much as possible about them.

The Sources of Lifelong Learning

“A frustrated outburst” in Moore’s teaching journal in her 2nd year of teaching began her quest to understand why she was experiencing so much difficulty trying to teach Standard English to classes made up entirely of African American students:

I’ve only made it about halfway through the scoring [of a grammar diagnostic], but the results so far are depressing; most of the students’ scores improved only slightly, several stayed the same, and some dropped! This is after a solid semester—two grading periods—of intense grammar instruction! So what now? (Moore, 2002, p. 1)

“What now?” for Moore turned into extensive reading of literature on teaching English to African American students, participation in a master’s program and teachers’ network through Breadloaf at Middlebury College, the collection of “boxes and bags” of data from her own classes, and continuing efforts to identify the elements of what Moore has come to call “culturally engaged teaching.”

Years of inquiry for Cone also began with frustrations and concerns about her practice. For Cone, participation in a graduate class that focused on the problems of tracking created considerable concern and anxiety as she began to examine her own efforts to work with low-achieving students in courses specifically designed to meet their needs, but in isolation from their more successful peers. In fact, before the graduate class, Cone had advocated for creating more tracks at her school in order to meet the needs of the lowest-performing students. “I wouldn’t say anything in [the graduate] class,” Cone told us:

People would all talk, “Isn’t it horrible these people track?” and I’d say, “Yeah, a lot you guys know. You’re not in these classes” . . . and I thought, “Well, I’m teaching this class, and I’m a good teacher.” But the more I read, I really could feel a visceral change.

After the class, Cone invited the faculty member to teach a version of the same course for her English department colleagues at her school that launched their collective detracking efforts: “My thinking had really changed and so I didn’t want to be by myself. There were other really
caring teachers at my school. So I thought, ‘They can learn what I learned.’”

Wolk’s inquiries were not always accompanied with the same sense of frustration as her colleagues’, but they were fueled by moments of disequilibrium that brought critical issues to her attention. “Okay this is weird,” Wolk thought when she realized that there were some times when she couldn’t go to the bathroom because [the students] would come early, they would stay late, they would be in there at lunch, they wanted to be in during recess. “No, teacher we’re learning. We’re doing this. We’re doing that. Can you not go to the bathroom? Because that means that we’re going to have to leave the classroom.” . . . There were other times where it was like you opened the door and they were out faster than lightning. “Goodbye.” And I thought, “Wait a minute. What’s going on here?”

Wolk’s ensuing efforts to document what was happening at those times enabled her to recognize that her students were most engaged when they were involved in “action-based” projects in which they pursued issues—like traffic safety—that mattered in their community.

Engaging Colleagues and Reading the Literature: Situating Work in a Wider Context

Following these moments of disequilibrium, the teachers we studied embark on extended documentation efforts to conduct interviews, hold focus groups, collect student work, or develop reflections and cases to help them make sense of these issues. Wolk and Moore describe their inquiries as independent pursuits that they choose not to discuss with school colleagues, but all 4 teachers share their inquiries with other teachers and in teacher networks beyond their own schools. Cone regularly discusses her work and research as part of her involvement in the National Writing Project. Many of the issues and questions that Boerst pursues grew out of the TRG, which includes teachers from his school as well as others in the district. Wolk regularly examines her inquiries with colleagues in a local teacher education program in which she was a student and now, at times, serves as an instructor; and Moore participates in the Breadloaf Rural Teachers Network and has discussed her research with a network of lead teachers associated with the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE). These conversations and activities with peers inside and outside their schools provide the teachers with new perspectives, create opportunities for them to develop their inquiry skills, and give them access to critical resources and ideas they might not encounter on their own.
Gaining New Perspectives

The new perspectives and ideas that came from conversations with colleagues help these teachers to understand how their experiences relate to those of others. Thus, although they are all focused on addressing “local” issues of particular concern to their students and their school context, they pursue these issues with an eye to what is known and understood in other schools and in academic research. Finding that other teachers have similar issues and concerns helps to give the teachers confidence that they are not alone and that they are facing problems and issues that are not simply a function of their own inadequacies or limited skills. Talking with other teachers outside of her school and having others express interest in what she was doing helped Wolk to recognize that what she had to say might have relevance for other teachers. She was particularly struck when Cone, whose work she had read prior to becoming a Carnegie scholar, mentioned reading Wolk’s work. “I didn’t know her—but she said she had read my work—read my work? Good Lord, what does that mean?—but it means I had something to say and she appreciated it.”

With recognition that they are facing problems that go beyond their own classrooms, they can then get new perspectives and ideas from teachers in different contexts. As Cone puts it, she wants to have somebody read her work and see if it “rings true”: “It’s just neat to have somebody say, ‘no, that’s not true. You better go back and think that over again.’” For Moore, the perspective of colleagues from a different geographic region made all the difference. Moore explained that visitors to her school, who lived in the North, commented repeatedly on the distinctive “Southerness” of the school. They pointed out that her context was “Southern” in the sense of the traditions of the African American communities of the old rural South, which were evident throughout the school (for example, having teenage students call them “Ma’am,” and having a parent volunteer hang elaborate Christmas decorations on each classroom door; Moore, 2002, p. 4). By pointing out that these things were part of Moore’s cultural context, Moore’s colleagues encouraged her to define carefully the different elements of culture that she had to take into account in order to develop her own model of “culturally engaged teaching.”

Gaining Access to Resources

In addition to the specific ideas and feedback these teachers get from others, colleagues also lend them books and articles, point to relevant research, and provide introductions to ideas and people they might not normally encounter. For example, the literature reviews that many of these teachers
carry out often begin with references from their colleagues who help to
steer them to useful articles and authors. For the most part, however, these
teachers do not read the research literature simply to find strategies or
approaches that they can implement in their classes. They read the research
to gain information and ground their thinking; to check their assumptions
and see if others have found similar problems or already found some an-
swers. As Moore (2002) put it: “I was both thrilled and dismayed to find the
questions I was raising had in fact been asked many times by an array of
experts” (p. 6).

Most of the time, however, reading the literature does not solve their
problems. Moore (2002) continued:

The review was helpful, but it was not enough to answer the questions
my classroom situation presented. I found it difficult during class time
or even after school trying to make connections between all the read-
ing I had done of the academic research and what I was dealing with
daily in the classroom. One important lesson I did take away from the
research was that there was not any one particularly effective method
of grammar instruction with Black students. (p. 5)

Instead of resolving issues, talking with colleagues and reading the liter-
ature helps these teachers to frame their questions, inform their practice,
and deepen their inquiries. In Moore’s case, reading the literature allowed
her to see that no research adequately addressed the particular issues she
faced and enabled her to develop an approach to “culturally engaged in-
struction” that reflected the geographic and cultural context in which she
teaches.

By working with colleagues and reading the literature, teachers like these
begin to recognize the intellectual history of their work and ideas. They
can see the problems they are addressing and what they are learning
as connected and contributing to ongoing lines of work and inquiry purs-
sued by others in both research and practice. “I now know who has influ-
enced me,” Cone explains, “and I can almost stand outside and look at
my thinking.” Although these teachers are developing ideas and informa-
tion firmly grounded in their local practice, “expanding their circle” (as
Moore describes it) allows them to place that local experience in a much
wider context.

REPRESENTING LEARNING: ARTICULATING AND SHARING LESSONS FROM
PRACTICE

Although the moments of frustration and disequilibrium that prompt their
inquiries could have passed, in many cases, Boerst, Cone, Moore, and Wolk
capture these moments in journals, conversations with peers, or audio- or videotapes that make their experiences hard to ignore and easy to remember. By collecting data, recording their impressions, and reflecting on their experiences, these teachers develop representations that help them to articulate what they are learning. Representations crystallize thinking by clarifying insights in tangible and memorable forms, and the drafting and revision of representations can produce a depth of understanding that makes it possible for the teachers to communicate and apply their ideas in different contexts.

The teachers’ efforts to represent their practice encompass both the process of developing labels, categories, graphics, and other forms that capture particular ideas and observations and the creation of cases, articles, presentations, and other products that organize and present the results of their inquiries. While all 4 of the teachers we studied rely on linguistic representations to develop their ideas, several also take advantage of charts, illustrations, graphs, and other spatial forms to help crystallize their ideas; as part of their CASTL projects, all 4 also explored the use of multimedia to document their classroom experiences and to convey their experiences and ideas to others.

Using Language to Articulate Experience and Represent Classroom Practice

All 4 of the teachers we studied take advantage of both informal and formal opportunities to share their work with others to develop and get feedback on their representations of their practice. For example, Boerst and the members of his TRG regularly share their emerging ideas in their meetings, and they articulate what they are learning in meetings with administrators and other teachers “in the hallway.” These informal occasions to “go public” allow them to test out what they are thinking, to see if they can explain their ideas clearly, and to develop new terms and representations to advance and share their ideas.

Through their discussions, for example, the members of the TRG developed and refined the language they use to discuss the way they teach writing. As they reviewed the writing process used in different classes, they recognized that many teachers used the term “revising and editing” as if it were a single step in the writing process. Subsequently, they developed cases that examined whether students were able to distinguish between revising (substantially rewriting or reorganizing their work) and editing (making corrections in grammar and spelling). Based on what they found, the teachers who produced the cases as well as many of their other colleagues in the group have changed the way they talk about and teach writing by making a clear distinction between revising and editing and teaching each one in a separate lesson.
For her part, Cone believes that “it’s only in writing” that she begins to “work things out.” As a long-time member of the Bay Area Writing Project and author of a number of articles, it is not surprising that Cone thinks of herself as a writer. But the writing goes hand in hand with the development of concepts, terms, and language that she can use whether she is writing an article, talking with a group, or simply reflecting on her own. Cone (2003) described the evolution of her use of the term “co-construction” in a study she conducted of a “difficult class” that she eventually titled “The Co-construction of Low-Achievement”:

The idea was floating in my head. But I think it was only when—and it’s been floating around in my head for a long time, so I’ve been aware of how students are constructed—but only when I did that piece of research on the co-construction, and gave it a name, that was really helpful to me, to give it a name. And I didn’t have a name for it until last summer I think. When I gave it a name that helped me a great deal. But it was only in studying that one class and saw what a low work ethic they had and all the shenanigans that they would pull so they didn't have to do any work that I began to see, “Yeah, they are actively participating in this.”

Similarly, Moore develops metaphors that allow her to convey the complexity of culturally engaged teaching in succinct ways. Thus, she compares her approach to teaching to the “jam sessions” and improvisations of jazz. Far from “on the spot” invention, she argues that her ability to improvise in the classroom and respond to and build on the strengths and backgrounds of her students reflects years of practice and the ability to draw on a host of themes and instructional strategies when opportunities arise. In turn, her colleagues can take the “jazz” metaphor and apply it to their own teaching or share it with others.

_Beyond Writing: Searching for Different Means to Represent Practice_

All 4 of the teachers rely on writing in some ways to help them to articulate and examine their experiences in the classroom. Cone writes articles, Moore writes in her journal, Wolk produces classroom narratives, and Boerst drafts cases that focus on one aspect of his practice over the course of a year. But like many of their CASTL colleagues, these teachers also experiment with different modes of representation that can provide different perspectives on their practice that can lead to unexpected developments and outcomes.
Despite the importance that Cone ascribes to writing, the many other acts of representation entailed in the collection and analysis of data are also crucial in helping Cone to articulate what is going on in her classroom. For example, in order get a better understanding of the relationship between the previous high school courses her students had taken and their performance in her “untracked” Advanced Senior English class, Cone produced a chart that compared the courses taken in 9th and 10th grade by the highest- and lowest-achieving students in her 12th-grade class. When Cone looked at the chart, in what Cone described as a “chilling” moment, she quickly recognized what she had long suspected. The schools’ course assignments and the students’ own course selections resulted in a clear pattern. Even though all of these students had participated in untracked English classes throughout high school, the highest-achieving students enrolled in large numbers of advanced courses in other subjects, whereas the schedules of her lowest achievers revealed a preponderance of electives and low-level courses. From Cone’s perspective, what was particularly shocking was not that the lowest-achieving students in her English class were also in lower-level math and science courses; what she had not realized until she looked at the chart was that many of these students were also actively choosing (and were allowed to choose) to take frivolous electives (including serving as teaching assistants who make copies and perform other minor administrative duties) and low-level courses in no sensible sequence. Cone was immediately able to take that chart and share it with other colleagues to help make her argument that the school—and the teachers themselves—were “co-constructing” low achievement with the students by allowing them and in some cases encouraging them to take unproductive courses.

For Boerst, the need to select video clips of his work in the classroom for discussion in the TRG led him to rethink his assumptions about when students were and were not engaged in his work. In one instance, he watched as he effectively ignored and shut down what he assumed to be a student’s distracting behavior only to recognize that the student was engaged in pursuing a series of questions that could have led to valuable learning. That episode, unseen until captured and reviewed on videotape, helped to launch Boerst’s expanding inquiry into student ownership.

In part, audiences find the work and representations of these 4 teachers credible and valuable because they are grounded in real practice and presented in forms that others can understand. In addition, however, like Boerst’s videos, which are sometimes painful to watch, the representations that these teachers develop capture both their strengths and the weaknesses, the successes, and the failures in their practice. Cone has over 35 years of experience in the classroom, yet her work on the co-construction of low achievement focuses directly on some of the ways that she has contributed to problematic student behaviors like failure to complete assignments and
attend classes. Such realistic portrayals often resonate with the experiences of others and lend credibility to these teachers’ representations.

MAKING CONNECTIONS AND BUILDING NETWORKS OF INFLUENCE

Despite the isolation that many teachers feel, the 4 teachers we studied have forged numerous connections with people inside and outside their schools. In part, their ability to develop “something to say” and to shape their representations to fit the demands of different audiences helps to build those connections. These connections then provide them with further opportunities to share their ideas and reach larger audiences. In turn, their growing network of connections gives them access to more resources and expertise that they can bring back to their schools and share with others.

Connections Make Connections

In Cone’s words, researching and writing gets teachers’ voices “out there and so they begin to have contacts that other teachers don’t have.” In her own experience, when she began to write, “people began to hear about me,” and she began to get requests for speaking engagements and articles. Those contacts, in turn, led to more writing and speaking opportunities and a rapidly growing network of connections. The connections of the teachers we studied are also facilitated by the fact that many are involved in established networks through which their work and news of their work can travel. Thus, by participating in the activities of the National Writing Project and the Breadloaf Rural Teacher’s Network, teachers from around the country can hear about the work of Cone and Moore. These connections, in turn, give these teachers a set of colleagues ready to respond to their work as well as associated presentation and publication opportunities to encourage them to share their work with others. In essence, these affiliations help to provide some of the institutional infrastructure and incentives and the community support that facilitate the research and scholarly work of researchers who work in university settings.

In addition to giving the teachers access to other opportunities, audiences, and resources, involvement with these kinds of national networks and organizations can also help to justify and legitimize their activities. In the eyes of district administrators, Boerst’s TRG gained credibility because it grew out of the teachers’ efforts to support one another through National Board certification process. By affiliating its work with the National Board and raising the possibility that more district teachers will attain that distinction, the TRG seems less idiosyncratic and more justifiable as part of a nationally recognized and valued enterprise.
Although some of the connections teachers make primarily give them access to other people and audiences for their work, some individuals and organizations act as “bridges,” “amplifiers,” “translators,” and “advocates” who can extend the value and influence of the teachers’ contributions. For Moore, SERVE not only provides her with opportunities to meet with teachers of the year from other states in the Southeast, it also publishes and publicizes the results of the proceedings and creates opportunities for her to meet with groups of administrators and policymakers. Furthermore, like a referral from a friend or a trusted colleague, SERVE’s endorsement gives Moore both visibility and credibility with audiences and individuals who might not otherwise pay much attention to her. Organizations like SERVE also can extend and refine the messages and ideas that Moore and colleagues develop. As Moore explains it,

through SERVE, those of us who are teachers of the year have a chance to impact policymakers because they listen to SERVE. They don’t necessarily listen to us, but they listen to SERVE. And because SERVE listens to us, they’ll take our idea sort of second-hand.

In the process, organizations like SERVE can draw on their own expertise and connections to translate the input from teachers into forms (such as policy briefs and briefings) that fit the demands of different audiences. As a consequence, the work of influencing others is not left entirely up to these teachers themselves; it is distributed and shared with key individuals and organizations.

*Trying to Stay Connected: Working Against Status and Position*

“Going public” with their work and building these kinds of connections brings numerous benefits to the teachers we studied; nonetheless, the notoriety, status, and rewards they may gain also can create perceived and real inequities and alienate them from school colleagues who also work hard in the classroom or see themselves as equally deserving of recognition and reward. As a result, all the teachers we studied actively pursue a variety of strategies to downplay their accomplishments and, essentially, to maintain the diminished status common to most teachers. These teachers work to maintain their relationships and credibility with other teachers by making themselves open and vulnerable to examination and critique by others. For example, when Cone gives workshops and makes presentations, she insists she is not “an outside expert” or “another little act” who has all the answers. Instead, she presents herself as a researcher who has been studying particular issues or making
particular observations about her students. As she puts it when she makes presentations, “I am somebody who is thinking about the same things you are thinking about.” In this manner, Cone and the other teachers present their experiences and invite others to explore the implications, rather than assuming that their strategies or approaches can or should be replicated.

Even in instances in which the teachers we studied might have formal authority over other teachers, they often choose to rely on the credibility that comes from their shared experience in order to have an influence. In fact, in their roles as lead teachers, Moore and Wolk frequently “work against position” to undercut the authority that might give artificial weight or power to what they say and write. Although Wolk has the authority to critique the practice of other teachers, she rarely does so. Instead, she tries to create situations where they can exchange ideas as peers. As a lead teacher, Moore has a similar position of authority at her own school, and she helps to plan, coordinate, and carry out a variety of initiatives. Furthermore, with all of her teaching awards, Moore stands out among her colleagues. Yet Moore rarely talks about her research at her school. “I have to be very careful,” she explained, “because I worked very hard to develop this working relationship with my faculty and if I talk too much about my own work, then that is taken as bragging. That is part of the culture of our community.” Similarly, Moore demonstrated her concern for her credibility with her colleagues by redesigning her position and turning it into one for to which teachers had to be elected by their peers. That meant that in order to keep her position (and the increased salary associated with it), Moore had to apply for the job like any other teacher in the district:

So I essentially gave up my position as lead teacher and reapplied to become a part of the teacher leadership program. And they thought I was crazy. My principal told me I was crazy, she’d tell it to my face: “You’re nuts. You’re going to take a cut in pay and you’re going to reapply? What if they decide not to give it to you, just out of meanness or something like that.” I said, “That’s not the point. I think I should walk into the room just like everybody else that wants to be part of the [committee], lay my credentials on the table, explain why I deserve to be on this committee.”

In this manner, Moore, like Wolk, refuses to bank on the power and authority that could come with her formal position and chooses instead to align herself with other classroom teachers.10
Tightening the Connections: Getting Ideas Out and Bringing Resources and Expertise “Home”

At the same time that key individuals and organizations enhance the influence of the teachers we studied, the teachers themselves can act as “bridges” between their colleagues and individuals and organizations outside their schools. Because of the connections they have built, the credibility they have established, and the expertise they have gained in getting ideas across to different audiences, they can amplify and translate the ideas of their colleagues, reach appropriate audiences, and bring back ideas and resources that benefit their colleagues. Both activities help them to demonstrate their value and their credibility, which, in turn, can help to deepen their relationships with colleagues and reduce the problems that any real or perceived inequities may cause.

Boerst, for example, meets with district administrators on a yearly basis, but those discussions focus on the work of the TRG, not his own research. In the process, he can share ideas and perspectives from other group members with the administrators and gain valuable information about policies, resources, and future directions for the district that he can bring back to share with his peers. Thanks to his work with the journal *Teaching Children Mathematics*, Boerst can also act as a “translator” by providing feedback that will help teachers who submit manuscripts to meet the demands of reviewers. By serving as an editor for a new journal department—“From the Classroom”—that he helped to create, Boerst also works as an advocate for teacher research, and he can facilitate the publication process for teachers who write about their knowledge of mathematics instruction.

Similarly, when Moore meets with administrators, policymakers, and others, she sees it as part of her responsibility to make sure that the voices of teachers get “out there.” As a result, she spends as much time in her meetings (if not more) talking about the work of other teachers and championing the importance of listening to teachers in general as she does in discussing her own research. In particular, Moore has engaged in numerous discussions in her own district in order to persuade administrators to give the teachers more control over curriculum, professional development, and other areas. “I’m leveraging my awards and stuff as much as possible in this argument,” Moore told us:

I said, “Look: Within a year’s time I have received every possible recognition that you can get that’s available that says I’m some kind of decent teacher. I passed my National Boards. I won Teacher of the Year. You gave me another contract. I must be some good at what I do.” But it’s hard to fight this fight. They’ll acknowledge the fact that you’re a good teacher in the classroom with your students. But they’re
hard-pressed to take that to the next level and say therefore, you must really know about education.

Moore also tries to reinforce her arguments about the value of teachers’ experiences and expertise by drawing on the work of other teachers that she has met through CASTL, Breadloaf, SERVE, and other connections she has established:

I love gathering information from one place and then spreading it in another. So when I do speak with teachers, a lot of times I’m bringing information about what’s going on in other places that I’ve been in to them. . . . I very often mention my colleagues from Breadloaf, Breadnet, and things that I know they’re doing. I talk about other schools I visited in the state. I like to do that kind of cross-fertilizing because it’s important I think for teachers to get that information across the boundaries of—you’re not the only one who’s going through this. You’re not the only one—there’s success [in other places], and other people having the problems you’re having. It’s important to share that kind of stuff, and for a lot of teachers they don’t hear that often enough.

Beyond simply sharing information, Moore also brings information and ideas home to her own district and tries to put them to work. She drew on what she learned about another district’s approach to professional development, for example, in order to inform and argue for the changes in the teacher leadership program that she and her colleagues were eventually able to institute.

In addition to bringing ideas and information back to their colleagues, the connections that the teachers we studied established also provided them with allies that they could call upon when they and their colleagues needed them. Cone, in particular, has established connections with a number of the most well-known local and national experts on tracking and related issues. These connections enabled her to marshal evidence and resources to help launch and maintain detracking efforts in her high school. When administrators or other groups have questioned the value of detracking, for example, she can call researchers like Jeannie Oakes, Pedro Noguera, and Rhona Weinstein who “call right back” with references and resources she can use to support her claims. In one instance, Oakes provided Cone with information about instruction for “gifted and talented” students that Cone could use to demonstrate that their detracked English classes could meet these students’ needs. Furthermore, while Cone has visited the classes of Weinstein, Noguera, and others at the University of California at Berkeley, they, in turn, have been willing to “come right down” to the school to speak
directly to the school board or others on behalf of Cone and her colleagues. As a consequence, all of these connections, many of which grow out of these teachers’ initial inquiries, expand their influence outside their schools while helping them to support the work of their closest colleagues as well.

CONCLUSION

Conventional approaches to teacher leadership that focus on putting teachers in positions of authority imply that teachers’ primary influence is on other teachers with whom they come in direct contact and those over whom they have some authority. In contrast, Boerst, Cone, Moore, and Wolk provide demonstration cases of the ways in which teachers can influence people they know well as well as individuals they may never meet, whether or not they occupy formal leadership positions. In this view, teachers like Cone can have an influence on research audiences through their own articles and the citations and advocacy of researchers who become knowledgeable about their work, Moore and Boerst can have an impact on state and district policymakers by meeting with administrators and translating their ideas and experiences and those of their colleagues into terms familiar to those audiences, and Wolk can share her work and ideas with peers, teacher educators, and researchers who find new people and new settings for her to display, present, or publish what she’s learning.

Instead of the power, authority, and control that can come with formal positions, the teachers in this study rely on the expertise and credibility they develop as classroom teachers in order to make a difference. They build their expertise, credibility, and influence by engaging in personal and public inquiries, deepening their understanding, and gaining the confidence that they have something worthwhile to say. They refine their insights in representations that give those insights a “life of their own” that can affect individuals and audiences they might never meet in person. The connections these teachers develop inside and outside their schools enable them to get new perspectives, to shape their ideas for different audiences, and give them access to individuals who can provide new ideas, information, and resources and serve as translators, advocates, and amplifiers for their work.

Although the teachers in this study were selected because they were participants in the CASTL program and involved in inquiry projects of their own design, many teachers who do not carry out these kinds of inquiries also have an impact on others and take on leadership roles in their schools and their profession. But it is worth noting that at some point in their teaching careers, each of the 4 teachers we studied had opportunities to learn how to inquire into their practice through some form of collaborative activity or guided instruction. Boerst’s work with the TRG began
with his participation with a colleague in the certification process for the National Board. Moore learned about teacher inquiry when she got involved with Breadloaf. Cone learned how to look systematically at her practice when she became involved with a teacher research program through the Bay Area Writing Project. Wolk examined her practice and developed her research skills when she went back to school to get her master’s degree.

Although it is dangerous to generalize broadly from the experiences of these 4 teachers, the implications of their cases are consistent with the conclusions drawn and pursued by researchers and teacher educators like Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1999), Anna Richert (1999), Sarah Freedman (Freedman et al., 1999), groups and organizations like the National Writing Project, the Southern Maine Partnership, and teacher researchers like Boerst, Cone, Moore, and Wolk. Taken together, these findings point to the value of enabling teachers to develop inquiry skills, of involving them in activities in which they can create explicit representations of their ideas and insights, and of establishing opportunities for them to share those representations with immediate and distant audiences. The experiences of these 4 teachers also suggest several key issues for teachers’ daily work and professional development that may be worthy of special emphasis:

- **Fostering reflection and representation.** While calls for providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice have grown more common in recent years, the work of these 4 teachers suggests that teachers need opportunities to reflect on and represent their practice. They need time and encouragement to develop new categories, terms, labels, charts, narratives, Web sites, or other artifacts that capture what they are thinking and make it easier to share their thoughts across contexts.

- **Building on and building up networks of practice.** In addition to finding ways to ensure that teachers’ perspectives are represented in organizational decision making and finding ways to place teachers in meaningful positions within the educational hierarchy, the next “wave” for teacher leadership could involve building on and building up the connections and networks through which teachers’ work and influence can travel. For example, creating opportunities for teachers to share and critique the work they are doing to meet established curriculum standards and to see and hear what teachers in other schools and districts are doing can begin to create the common language, sophisticated representations, and connections that foster the development and sharing of new ideas and improvements in practice. Some of the efforts to create coaches, to focus discussions among administrators and teachers on issues of teaching and learning, and to free up teachers to visit and meet with their colleagues
are steps in this direction (see, for example, Elmore & Burney, 1997). But unless these improvements are accompanied by opportunities for teachers to develop representations of what they are learning in the process and opportunities to share those representations with “superiors” as well as peers, the positive influences that teachers can have on one another and the system as a whole may remain idiosyncratic and haphazard.

- **Connecting groups and crossing boundaries:** Organizations like the National Writing Project have existing networks that can support teacher learning in many different settings and facilitate the sharing of ideas and practices among teachers. In many cases, these networks and many teacher education programs also foster the sharing of information, resources, and ideas among researchers and practitioners. Often, however, these connections remain personal and local. Researchers visit classes of local teachers or help to support local groups of teachers; teachers visit local teacher education classes or serve as mentors for aspiring teachers. There are very limited opportunities for teachers to participate in national network meetings or to publish and disseminate what they are learning so that their ideas can reach people and audiences that they may never come in contact with directly. At the moment, the best way to tap into the existing connections and networks among teachers is to join one, but joining one does not necessarily provide access to the meetings and publications of others. New ways to connect the programs and groups that do support teacher inquiry need to be established. Those connections may involve explicit structures like joint publications, meetings, and Web-based communities. But those connections can also be made by individuals themselves (particularly teachers, researchers, and policymakers who already have some credibility and influence) who read and cite the work of teachers and who are willing to take on the role of translators, advocates, and amplifiers to ensure that worthwhile work makes its way to appropriate audiences and across the usual boundaries.

While these actions may help to build and amplify the influence and impact that teachers can have, as long as the value of teachers’ work depends almost entirely on measures that try to gauge the direct effects of teaching on a narrow set of student outcomes, the wide range of activities that enable teachers like those in this study to have an impact on others will continue to be ignored and undervalued. The teachers in this study have to carry out their inquiries in spite of, rather than because of, the conditions in their schools, the criteria used to judge most research, and the norms and values associated with teachers and their activities. As a consequence, in order to have a positive impact on their students and an influence on their peers, on policies, and on the profession as a whole, teachers have to em-
brace the contradictions of learning and leadership. They have to engage in work that is both intensely personal and widely public, ground their ideas in the specifics of their local situations and make general connections across contexts, and demonstrate both confidence in the value of their experiences and humility in sharing those experiences with others.

We would like to thank the members of the CASTL program and our colleagues at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for their support and assistance with this research. We owe a special debt of gratitude to Ann Lieberman and Ruba Ahmed for their contributions to the discussions of these cases and for their feedback on earlier drafts. We would also like to thank Lee Shulman, Pat Hutchings, Rose Asera, Anna Richert, Miriam Ben-Pertz, and Karen Hammerness for their reading and advice and the editors and two anonymous reviewers from Teachers College Record for their helpful comments on an earlier draft. The work described here has also been supported by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and Hewlett Packard. The conclusions are solely those of the authors.

Notes

1 Boerst explained his use of the term urban suburb, stating, “I would call where I teach an urban suburb. What I mean by this is that the district is in the very inner ring of ‘old’ suburbs of Detroit. You cross one road to go from Detroit to being in the district, but there are few differences between one side of that road and the other as far as development/housing/populations (the two have been growing more similar as they years have passed).”

2 As part of our work on CASTL, we collected data on all participants and developed more detailed case studies of 5 teachers from the first cohort and 7 teachers from the second cohort. In developing these case studies, we carried out two or more interviews with each of the teachers and collected a variety of data while the teachers were participants in the CASTL program. In the interviews, we asked the teachers to provide additional information about their background and contexts as well as about the development of their involvement with inquiry and teacher research, how and what they were learning through their research and inquiry, with whom they were sharing their ideas and work, and finally, the responses they were getting to their ideas and work. These interviews were conducted over the course of the 2001–2002 school year and summer of 2002, mostly by phone.

In addition, during the CASTL meetings that these teachers attended generally two times a year during that time, we recorded all small-group discussions in which they participated. These conversations with their colleagues at CASTL mostly provided information about the development of inquiries, but they also captured other information about their contexts, attempts to “go public” with their work, and information about the response to their work. Additionally, the CASTL workshops provided us with an opportunity to see and collect the representations they were producing as part of their inquiry projects. These representations included project reports, as well as posters, overheads, and illustrations used in discussions and presentations. We also asked the teachers to give us additional representations that they developed for other purposes. These representations included narratives produced for other teacher inquiry groups, papers produced for graduate study, and articles written for publication.

Based on this information, we developed written case studies that focused on the type of influence that each teacher was having, how the teachers’ ideas reached their audiences, and the role that their inquiries played in their influence. During the fall of 2002, staff members of
the CASTL project met over the course of several months to compare the cases, identifying themes related to the teachers’ learning and influence, and to examine the relationship between these findings and those in other literature on teacher leadership. We modified and refined the case studies based on these discussions and then conducted additional interviews to fill in areas in which follow-up information was needed. In some cases we did one additional interview, and in others we did three additional interviews. During the summer of 2003, we shared a draft of this article with the case study teachers to elicit feedback and suggestions. The suggestions that the teachers made were primarily minor factual corrections, and we made modifications to the final draft accordingly.

3 During the fellowships, faculty meet with other members of their cohort and often other returning CASTL scholars for a 1 or 2-week summer “residency” at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Over the course of the academic year, scholars remain connected through a virtual network and meet periodically to share their developing work with one another and with outside audiences. By the end of 2003, the CASTL program had supported the work of over 120 faculty in higher education and over 50 faculty members from K–12 or teacher education.

4 Boerst attributes this term to Judith Warren Little’s descriptions of the ways in which professional learning in one setting has a tendency to creep into the many other settings in which teachers participate.


6 The value of the representations the teachers in this study produce may reflect what Eisner (1998) refers to as referential adequacy or the ability to provide guidance in making sense of experience: “If the guide is useful, we are likely to experience what we otherwise might have missed, and we may understand more than we would have without benefit of the guide. The good guide deepens and broadens our experience and helps us understand what we are looking at” (p. 59).

7 For a related point about the use of different forms of representation in the development and discussion of the data used for decision making in schools, see Supovitz and Klein (2003).

8 To view the Web sites developed by Boerst, Cone, Moore, and Wolk with the assistance of members of the Carnegie Knowledge Media Lab, visit http://kml2.carnegiefoundation.org/html/gallery.php

9 See Honig and Hatch (2003) for a related discussion of the role that principals and others can play as “bridges” between schools and districts.

10 Subsequently, Moore’s colleagues did select her to continue in her role as lead teacher.

References


Cone, J. K. (1993). The key to untracking: Learning to teach an untracked class. _College Board Review_, 169(Fall), 20–27.


THOMAS HATCH is codirector of the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching (NCREST) and faculty member at Teachers College, Columbia University. His research focuses on teacher learning as well as issues of large-scale school reform. He is also involved in a variety of efforts to use multimedia and the Internet to document teaching and share teachers’ expertise. He previously served as a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, where he codirected the K–12 Program of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) and the Knowledge Media Laboratory.

MELISSA EILER WHITE is a fiscal and policy analyst for K–12 Education in the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) in Sacramento, California. Prior to joining the LAO, she completed her doctoral studies in Administration and Policy Analysis at the Stanford University School of Education. Her research focused on the representation, translation, and use of practice-based knowledge. While completing her doctoral studies, she worked as a research assistant in the K–12 Program of the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL).

DEBORAH FAIGENBAUM is the director of the Center for Professional Development Research and Policy at the Noyce Foundation. She is overseeing the center’s work studying professional development programs that have influenced student achievement. Her work has also focused on teacher communities, literacy, and teacher learning.