

Chapter Five

Quality of Leadership Components of LSC Projects

Each LSC project must provide a minimum number of hours of professional development (100 hours for grade K–8 and 130 hours for grade 7–12 projects) to all teachers in the targeted grades in their targeted districts. As noted earlier, most of the projects have chosen to develop teacher leaders as part of their strategy for reaching large numbers of teachers.

LSC projects vary in how they are addressing the challenge of building the capacity of teacher leaders, in the roles that are designated for teacher leaders, and in the types and level of support provided for these leaders. Some projects have focused heavily on the development of leadership capacity prior to working with the broader population of teachers, others work with lead teachers and the broader population of teachers simultaneously, with variations among projects in the extent to which teacher leaders-in-training are actively involved in providing professional development to their peers.

Data about the leadership component of the LSC projects came primarily from observations of professional development sessions that targeted teacher leaders and, to a limited extent, from interviews with teachers who had participated in the professional development.

Evaluators were asked to assess the quality of the leadership content, rating that component area of the professional development program and commenting on strengths and areas in need of attention.

Leadership Content in Observed Professional Development Sessions

Observers indicated that while about half of the observed sessions included teacher leaders as participants, only 43 of the 276 sessions focused specifically on leadership content, such as planning and implementing effective professional development sessions. As can be seen in Figure 21, 67 percent of the sessions that included a focus in leadership content were given an overall rating of 4 or 5 in this area.

Sessions focusing on leadership content were most likely to receive high ratings for:

- The extent to which the facilitators displayed an understanding of leadership concepts (75 percent);
- Whether the leadership content was sound and appropriately presented (75 percent);
and

- The extent to which the leadership content was appropriate for the purposes of the session and the backgrounds of the participants (71 percent).

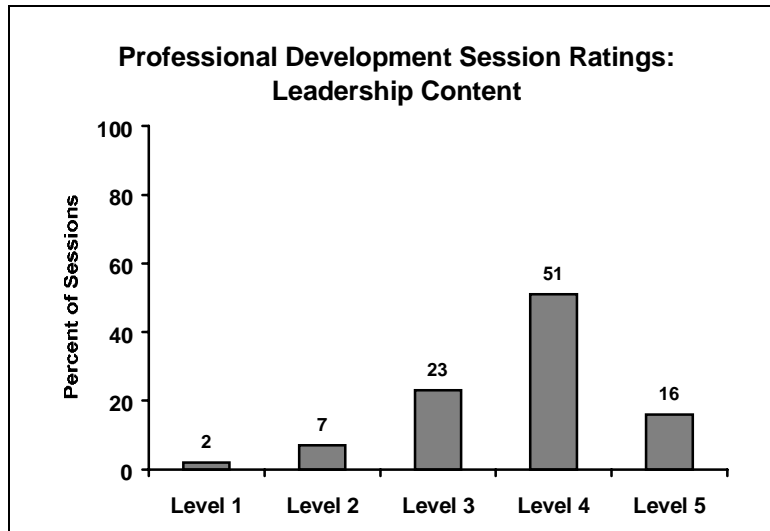


Figure 21

As was the case for both disciplinary and pedagogical content, the degree of closure or resolution of conceptual understanding in leadership content received relatively low ratings, with only 55 percent of the sessions that focused on leadership content receiving ratings of 4 or 5 on this indicator.

Observers were then asked to consider the likely impact of these and other sessions that involved teacher leaders on participants' leadership capacity. Most observers indicated that the professional development session was likely to have had a positive effect on participants':

- Ability to convey to others a vision of effective mathematics/science classrooms (81 percent) and
- Confidence in their ability to be leaders of reform (81 percent).

In contrast, only 42 percent of the sessions focusing on leadership content were considered likely to have increased participants' understanding of adult learners.

Evaluators' Overall Assessment of Leadership Content

It is interesting to note that while observers typically gave high ratings to the quality and likely impact of individual leadership development sessions, they were less impressed with the overall quality of the project's handling of leadership content. As seen in Figure 22, only 40 percent of the projects were rated highly (4 or 5 on a five-point scale) with regard to leadership content, compared to more than 70 percent of projects receiving high ratings in each of the other component areas.

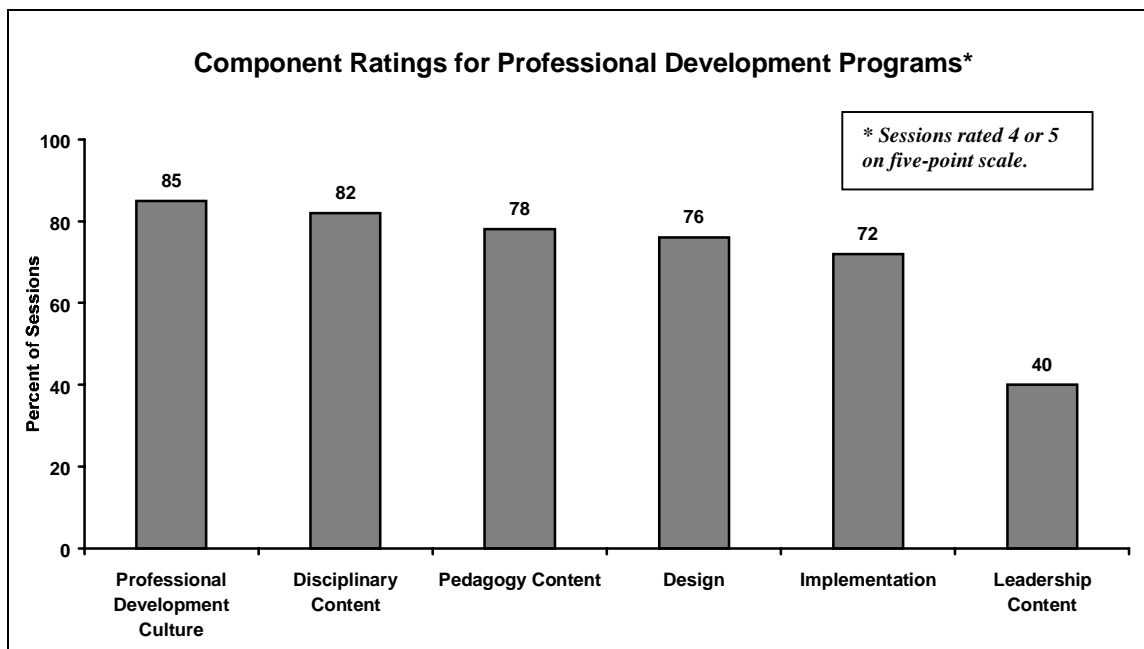


Figure 22

Key Leadership Features

Evaluators were asked to describe aspects of the professional development design and/or implementation that had been particularly effective in improving the capacity of teachers to be effective leaders of mathematics/science education. The majority of evaluators of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 projects and about one-third of the Cohort 3 evaluators commented on the likely impact of the professional development on teacher leaders; most of the other Cohort 3 evaluators indicated that it was too early to assess the project's impact on leadership development. Across projects, evaluators identified a variety of elements that had contributed toward building the capacity of teacher leaders; some evaluators also described areas in need of further attention.

The key features most often identified by evaluators as critical to effective leadership development are described in the remainder of this chapter.

1. Providing a supportive culture

Several evaluators commented on the importance of creating a culture characterized by sharing, respect, collegiality and collaboration between project staff and teacher leaders. For example, one evaluator described the opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues as “the strongest component of the project that is likely to improve the capacity of the teachers to be effective leaders in science education” and noted that, through group discussions about school change, teacher leaders were able to “see their opportunity to effect school change, not as an individual, but as a member of a profession acting together in concert.”

In some cases, evaluators attributed teachers’ growing confidence and comfort with their roles as leaders to the culture of sharing, respect, and collegiality that characterized the projects they were evaluating.

2. Clearly communicating expectations of teacher leaders

Evaluators were not likely to focus directly on the clarity of expectations of teacher leaders as a strength of professional development for that group; however, they expressed strong criticism of projects in which clear expectations were absent. Criticisms such as these were most likely to occur in more recently funded projects, such as the following example:

The goals and activities of the leadership component of the project do not seem as clearly defined as the disciplinary and pedagogical content...At all three [professional development] meetings, there were people who did not know why they were attending or what was expected of them. By the conclusion of the last event, however, most seemed to have some idea of their role and were beginning to ask questions about how they were going to operate in their school or district. The understanding, however, was a long time in coming. It is both risky and unfair to ask people to take on a major responsibility without having some idea of what they are to do, especially in a large systems intervention. Clarity about the goals and activities of leadership, and how it fits into the project, is an area that needs attention.

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The summer professional development activities intentionally did not include leadership training. The current plan is to begin this training in spring 1998. Several [lead teachers] expressed concerns during the summer professional development sessions that they were unclear about what was going to be expected of them as teacher trainers. It might be prudent to begin discussions with [teacher leaders] about their leadership roles prior to spring 1998, so their concerns and perceived leadership concerns may be fully addressed in the spring leadership training. While many of the teachers are also department chairs in their schools, the leadership roles anticipated in this project are likely to differ in substantive ways from their typical leadership roles in their schools.

3. Balancing attention to disciplinary, pedagogical, and leadership content

Generally, evaluators noted that the professional development programs offered a variety of experiences to enhance teacher leaders' understanding of disciplinary, pedagogical, and leadership content. Most projects addressed disciplinary and pedagogical content with leaders around the designated instructional materials. A few projects focused particular attention on inquiry-based mathematics/science by engaging teachers as learners in investigative sessions.

Some projects also included sessions for leaders that explored various pedagogical topics in more depth. For example, evaluators described targeted sessions on assessment of student learning, strategies to enhance the success of all students, effective questioning strategies, and understanding how students learn.

Evaluators tended to be fairly critical of the way projects dealt with leadership content, as noted in the following excerpts from evaluators' reports:

[The project] is less about leadership training than it is about curriculum and instructional training. In fact, even with "lead" teacher training, the focus is on imparting content and pedagogical knowledge, rather than leadership content. Nevertheless, because of the instructor role, it has increased the number of teachers who are more confident about doing presentations and preparing to do them. Being instructors has also improved many teachers' presentation skills. For [the project] to have a greater impact on both teacher' ability to provide high-quality mathematics education and to serve as teacher leaders, it should provide teachers more opportunities for direct discussion about curricular materials and pedagogy including teachers' understanding of how students learn. [The project] must also encourage and facilitate more discussions about the reform or change process in order to engender change. Teachers need to understand the process of making change or reforming in order to better understand how they can improve teaching and learning within their own classrooms and how they can be leaders in promoting reforms.

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Surprisingly, none of the sessions included leadership content. Discussions and activities focused exclusively on building capacity for science instruction, and, aside from acknowledging that participants would one day be facilitating such sessions, there was no effort to build capacity for leadership. One of the interviewed teachers, a lead teacher and conference participant, repeatedly described how she, herself, had benefited from the conference, but it did not seem to occur to her that she was expected to convey those benefits to others in her school. The leadership roles of conference participants must be clearly emphasized throughout the conference. All [leadership] sessions could be improved by incorporating and integrating pedagogical, disciplinary, and leadership content.

4. Giving teachers opportunities to practice leadership roles

Many evaluators recognized the importance of providing lead teachers with opportunities to practice serving in leadership roles. These opportunities took many forms—teacher leaders were involved in setting goals and planning professional development sessions; some conducted professional development sessions district-wide or within their schools; others participated in committee meetings on decisions that would impact the districts.

The quote and box below describe some ways teacher leaders were involved in leadership activities, and the value these activities had for enhancing leadership capacity:

By including teachers on [a project] advisory committee, recruiting them to serve as leaders of professional development, and involving them in other leadership activities, the [project] has enabled leader teachers to assume roles they reported were not part of their previous professional experience. Teachers reported this has broadened their understanding of district policies, practices, and context; these experiences have provided them with new perspectives about how change can be realized.

Strategies for Leadership Development

Teachers played a crucial role in the planing, implementation, and facilitation of the [project's] professional development seminars. During the summer preceding the start of Year One, two lead teachers, called liaison teachers, from each of the schools in [the district], participated in planning meetings with project staff. Out of these meetings, project staff gathered information about the needs of teachers that helped them shape the professional development seminars for Year One. 'The liaison teachers helped us understand the content knowledge that teachers would respond to, so that we could rethink the mathematics we planned, to make it more appropriate for their years,' said the lead facilitator. 'They told us they needed the mathematics to be more accessible, and more useful for the teachers. They also let us know that teachers need to talk to their colleagues from other grade levels.

During the year, the liaison teachers continued to meet every two months with project staff to discuss teachers' responses to the professional development seminars—what worked and what didn't work—and to give other suggestions to shape the second half of the professional development seminars....By the end of the year, many of the liaison teachers had bought into the project and the role they played in it.

On the other hand, evaluators voiced concerns about teacher leaders taking on major professional development responsibilities before they were adequately prepared to do so. One evaluator noted a “fundamental clash” that the LSC projects face as they work to develop teacher leaders who are prepared to offer high-quality professional development to their peers, but at the same time must meet timelines for scaling up.

There is much work to be done and this project, like many others, must create and foster the development of the very leadership it needs to carry out the district-wide professional development it has planned. Thus, the battle is always being fought on two fronts—one is the scaling up of the institutes and classroom support activities until they serve the whole district; the other is the constant need to

develop and expand the group of people who are capable of carrying out that work.

5. Providing teacher leaders with ongoing support

A number of evaluators noted the importance of adequately supporting teachers throughout the process of leadership development, and highlighted a variety of mechanisms for providing the support teachers needed. In some cases, the timing of professional development activities and taking on leadership responsibilities was identified as an important feature, as described by this evaluator:

A major aspect of the professional development design and implementation that has been extremely effective in improving the capacity of teachers to be effective leaders is the long-term design of the project. It has allowed time for [teachers] to gradually assume the role of leader teacher, with the needed support along the way to do so well. As they have gained a greater understanding of the process of change over the three years of the project and have begun interacting with peers more regularly, they appreciate how long it took for them to change—first, their beliefs and then, their actions. Consequently, they are more empathetic and effective leaders. One 4th grade teacher in the [district] commented that her most significant learning thus far is “change takes lots of time.”

In some cases, evaluators highlighted specific strategies, such as the mentoring and monthly meetings described below, that provided support as teachers developed leadership skills and broadened their vision of their role beyond that of classroom teachers.

Monthly lead teacher meetings, held from August through May, are vital for building the leadership capacity of the lead teachers. Two of the meetings are full-day sessions and the other 7 are two-hour, after-school sessions. Each meeting generally consists of three segments: (1) a business/announcements segment, (2) an instruction/learning segment, and (3) a reflection/networking segment. The business/announcements segment facilitates operation of the project across numerous districts. Assignments, such as questionnaire distribution, and workshop calendars are discussed. The learning/instruction segment serves to enhance leadership skills. The lead teachers discuss problems they may have in their districts. The reflection/networking segment serves to build communication across the county. The lead teachers know each other and are beginning to contact each other, rather than the project management team, to work through difficulties.

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Mentoring in this project occurs at several levels. The first and most successful level at this point in time, is the mentoring that occurs between each school facilitator and the lead teacher(s) in the facilitator’s assigned school. It is through this close one-to-one or one-to-two relationship that the knowledge base gained by the lead teacher(s) in the Summer Institutes, Leadership Seminar, and

Mini-Series Coursework, is brought back into the schools. While these lead teachers are very comfortable with the idea of bringing project ideas into their classrooms for their children, it is much more difficult for them to move into a leadership role within their own school and be successful working with adults. Being mentored by the school facilitator as they move into this leadership role for their peers is crucial to each lead teacher.

6. Broadening teacher leaders' professional experiences

A number of projects encouraged emerging teacher leaders to be involved in professional development experiences that were available outside the LSC projects themselves. In some projects, teacher leaders participated in state or national conferences; in others, leaders became involved with district curriculum committees; occasionally, connections of project staff within the national science or mathematics education community fostered awareness and strategic use of outside resources.

7. Fostering administrative support for teacher leaders

Finally, a few evaluators commented on the importance of projects' work with district and school administrators to enhance their capacity to provide support and instructional leadership. One evaluator noted, "...principals must be fully apprised of the project's expectations for the [lead teachers]. Much of the potential effectiveness of the [teachers] as teacher trainers and leaders will depend on the support and endorsement they receive from their principals."

Those evaluators who described specific strategies designed to enhance administrative support of teacher leaders mentioned special sessions to inform administrators about reforms in mathematics/science and to enhance their understanding of the elements of sound instruction.

Summary

- ❑ Most LSC projects include a leadership development component in their design, and a substantial portion of professional development sessions included teacher leaders as participants. Yet, very few of the observed sessions actually targeted leadership content.
- ❑ Evaluators identified a number of components that were important for effective professional development for teacher leaders, including:
 - Providing a supportive culture;
 - Clearly communicating expectations of teacher leaders;
 - Balancing attention to disciplinary, pedagogical, and leadership content;
 - Giving teachers opportunities to practice leadership roles;
 - Providing teacher leaders with ongoing support;
 - Broadening teacher leaders' professional experiences; and
 - Fostering administrative support for teacher leaders.
- ❑ Although leadership content was rated fairly high when it was included in observed professional development sessions, relatively few of the evaluators gave leadership content

high marks in the overall LSC programs. It appears that this rating was more reflective of the lack of attention to leadership content than the quality of the content when it was addressed. Leadership content is an area of the LSC professional development that clearly needs additional attention, including providing opportunities for PIs to share ideas and discuss strategies with each other.

