

Reading 2.2

Distributed leadership:
conceptual confusion and
empirical reticence.

*International Journal of
Leadership in Education,
10(3), 315-325*

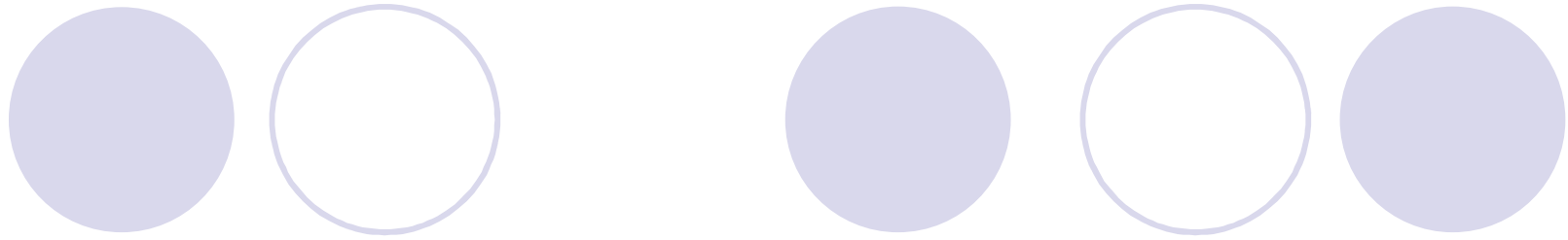
Harris, A. (2007)




Distributed leadership: the theoretical frame

“Theory on distributed leadership (Spillane (2001,2004) and Gronn (2000))

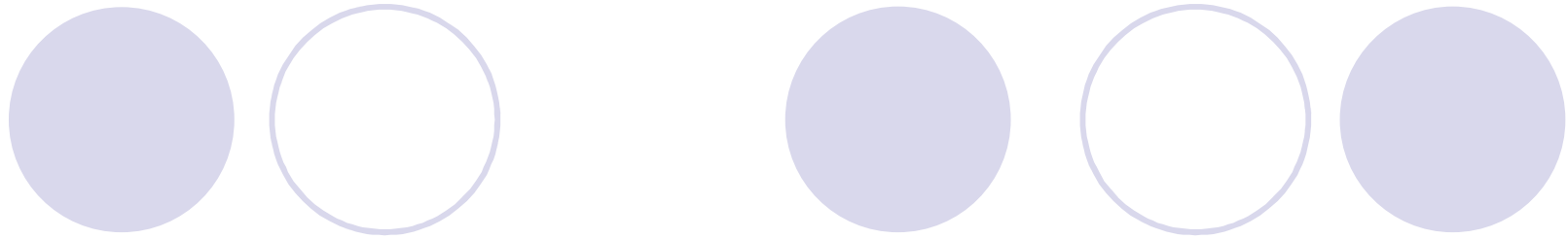
Although orientation differ both are at the forefront
(*Spillane drawn heavily upon distributed cognition to generate a theory – Gronn used activity theory mainly to guide his theory on leadership*)



- *The goal of Distributed Cognition is to describe how distributed units are coordinated by analyzing the interactions between individuals, the representational media used, and the environment within which the activity takes place. (Hutchins. E)*

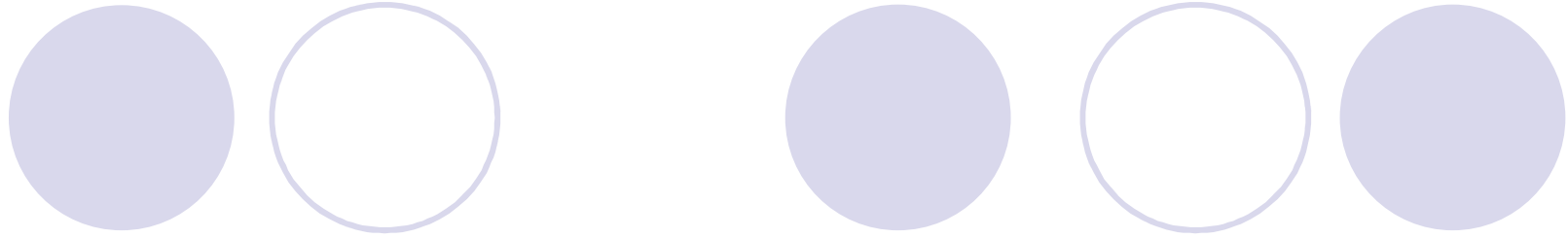
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- This work implies that cognition is distributed situational and socially through other people and situations in the effort to complete complex tasks.

Distributed Cognition relies upon certain material, social and cultural artefacts for understanding rather than on as a matter of mental capacity alone



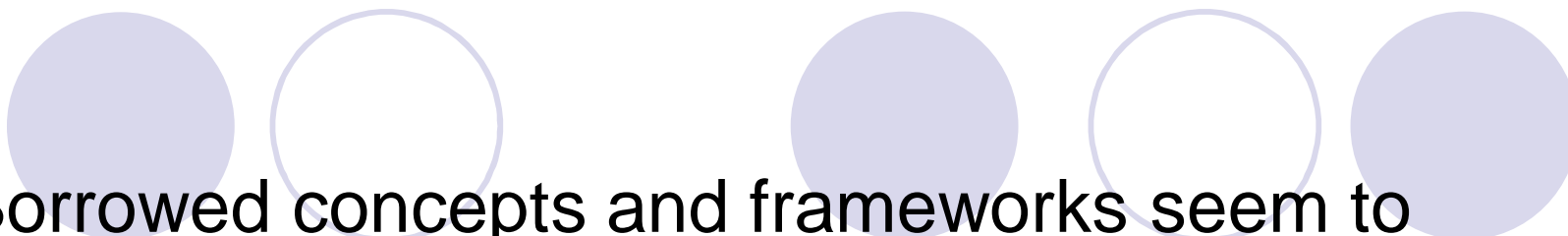
- Distributed cognition leadership in schools constitutes ~~an~~ interaction amongst its leaders.

(A social distribution of leadership . work load stretched out within the leaders)



- Spillane (2006) sees distributed leadership theory primarily as an analytical tool for understanding the world of school leadership differently.


(A conceptual basis for understanding leadership)

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- Borrowed concepts and frameworks seem to move from discipline to another easy enough however some concerning flaws in this form of leadership.

Firstly: *Transfer of theory from one discipline to another may result in limitations of appreciation and understanding*

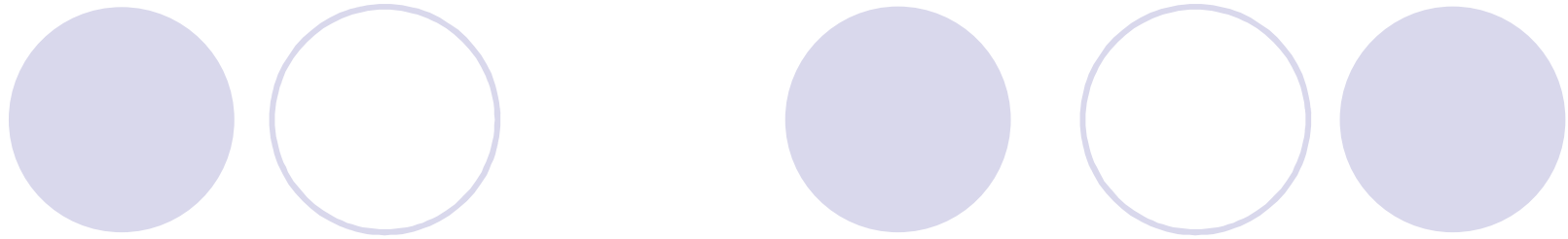
Secondly: *Distributed cognition is a descriptive rather than a prescriptive theory*

*(descriptive theories tells us the ways things are, but not what we ought to do
prescriptive theories are typically guidelines or rules to be followed in design)*

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- Education is a discipline where the practical application and testing of ideas is fundamental and, therefore, the discipline itself presses even the most abstract theory for application.

Therefore move into the Normative and predictive spheres

Spillane's research clearly states that distributed leadership theory does not have predictive power and is not a guide to practice.



Therefore:


Educational leadership has a two fold component.

- Distributed leadership comfortably co exists in a pool of multiple theories
- Distributed leadership developed through empirical enquiry and exploration.



Distributed leadership: the empirical frame

- Camburn (2004) surveyed 100 schools and concluded that those with no formal leadership designations take responsibility for leadership activities and also that teachers perform key leadership functions and routines.
- Spillane and Camburn (2006) concluded that the performance of leading and managing activities is not unusual in schools.
- Leithwood (2000) and colleagues noted that teacher leadership has a significant effect on student engagement that far outweighs principal leadership effects.

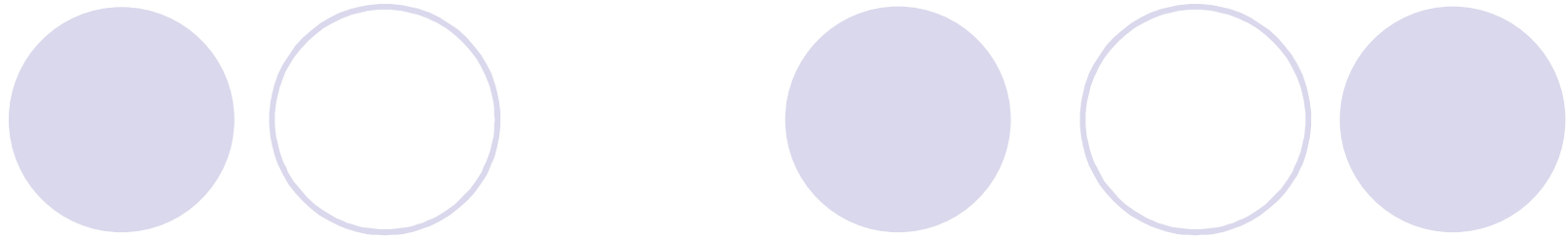


Student outcomes more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them.

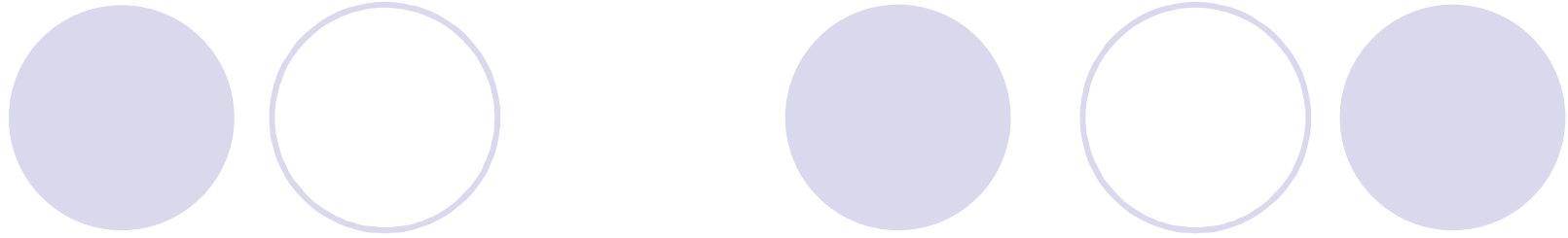
Student and teacher morale levels improved where teachers felt more included and involved in decision-making related to the school development and change

Distributed leadership: the normative frame


- A normative lens on distributed leadership is primarily concerned with how leadership is distributed in schools and by whom.
 - *The descriptive and prescriptive dimensions (how do we understand distributed leadership and how might we produce better forms of distributed leadership?)*



- Expansion of leadership tasks has required leadership to be actively shared.
- *Single leaders are eroding amongst schools as the demands upon one individual are too great*



- Many schools are actively trying to create distributed leadership by reallocating responsibility and authority more broadly within the workforce of the school.
 - *That decision making processes were widely shared and that school development was the responsibility of teams rather than the senior management.*

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- Although distributed leadership initiatives are meant to flatten hierarchies and empower teachers by having them engage in high impact and enriched work by virtue of their optional and symbolic authority principals still matter a great deal to these reforms.
 - Furthermore distributing leadership to others does not result in fewer demands on those in formal leadership positions.