Teachers’ perspectives of the school leadership strategies for a successful change initiative

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Abstract
This exploratory case study examined the role of leadership in the context of curriculum mapping implementation to determine leadership approaches and strategies needed for the initiative success. Twelve participants shared their experiences concerning the “phenomenon” of the study through semi-structured interviews. The study results confirmed findings from previous research about the critical role of leadership in the initiative success and provided leadership strategies for implementing sustainable educational initiatives.

Keywords: Case study; curriculum mapping initiative; implementation; leadership strategies; leadership types

Introduction
In the current era of constant demands for increased student performance and accountability, school systems launch numerous change initiatives to improve their curricula and instructional practices. Research and practice show that success of change efforts depends on the capabilities and motivations of local leaders (Harris, 2008; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). Leaders are needed to create the context of change, promote understanding of the importance of the initiative, and provide resources. Needless to say, most initiatives are resource intensive in terms of time, money, and knowledge. Besides, certain actions of leaders can serve as motivational factors that would inspire staff to embrace change, help people cope with doubts and uncertainties, and translate initiative intentions into practical realisation. Hall and Hord (2010) argued that differences in success of change efforts are concerned with how leaders lead, and no single type of leadership can ensure initiative success - different situations call for different leadership types and practices.

The focus of the current study is on the role of leadership in the curriculum mapping initiative implementation. Curriculum mapping as a model of curriculum planning emerged in the late 1980s in response to criticism of a top-down approach to curriculum development, which is dictated by academic rationality and theoretical logic rather than the unique nature of particular school situations, and excludes teachers from active participation in curriculum development processes (Carl, 2009). The term curriculum mapping was coined by Fenwick W. English in the 1980s and was further developed by Heidi Hayes Jacobs in the late 1990s. In recent years, curriculum mapping has been increasingly used by school districts to help teachers document their own curriculum, then collaborate with their colleagues “to examine each other’s curriculums for gaps, overlaps, redundancies and new learning, creating a coherent, consistent curriculum within and across schools that is ultimately aligned to standards” (Udelhofen, 2005, p. xviii).

In spite of increased use, the research on curriculum mapping is limited, and the relationship between leadership and initiative implementation has not been sufficiently addressed. The current study examines implementation of the curriculum mapping initiative in one particular school setting with a special emphasis on the role of leadership in the implementation process. This research has made use of Fullan’s (2007) theory of educational change as well as some concepts and principles from educational leadership literature pertinent to analysing leadership influences on the curriculum mapping implementation. Fullan’s theory suggests three phases in the change process: initiation, implementation, and institutionalisation. According to Fullan (2007),
specific activities and strategies should happen at each phase of the change process for success to be achieved. The following research questions guided the study: What leadership types and activities were utilised at the initiation and implementation phases of the curriculum mapping initiative? What leadership strategies are needed for initiative success and sustainability?

**Literature review**

The purpose of the literature review is to identify the leadership perspectives that can provide analytical tools for data collection and analysis. Combined with Fullan’s theory of educational change, such perspectives will serve as a theoretical framework for the study. There is consensus in educational change literature that the task of reforming schools lies with leadership, which is seen as an overriding force that provides the philosophical underpinnings and practical directions for school improvement efforts (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Fullan, 2007; Wells & Feun, 2013).

Until the mid-1990s, the prevalent model of leadership for school improvement included singular, heroic leaders predominantly in administrative positions who inspired a school community for reform efforts. Reconceptualisation of organisational culture as an entity comprised of numerous individuals who contribute to the vision, mission, and purpose of the organisation has led to the shift in the educational leadership discourse. The view of leadership that is not role-bound and is not equated with designated leadership positions has gained serious consideration in literature since the mid-1990s (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2008; Smylie, Conley & Marks, 2002). The emergent perspectives described school leadership as shared (Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003), distributed (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2012, 2014; Spillane, 2012), or collaborative (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). According to such perspectives, leadership is seen as “stretched over” individuals in different roles, including school administrators, teachers, external professionals, and community members, contributing to the shared purpose and goal of the organisation through multiple activities and interactions (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2012; Timperley, 2005).

Research on characteristics of improved school districts described effective leadership as “committed, persistent, proactive, and distributed through the system” (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004, p. 13). Hallinger and Heck (2010) reported a positive relationship between collaborative leadership and improvement in student academic performance through analysis of the dataset from the longitudinal studies in 198 U.S. elementary schools over the period of four years, identifying leadership shared among the principal, teachers, administrators and others as a driver for change and improvement.

Distributed leadership has received great endorsement in the educational policy and leadership discourses as a means to bring about school improvement and ensure sustainable change. Despite great attention and increased support, the empirical evidence on the viability and effectiveness of this model of leadership is still limited. The relevance of the model to different contextual situations has not been explored. The research has not sufficiently addressed how administrators and teachers understand their participation in leadership. The model itself has not become ubiquitous in the school settings despite systemic pressures to adopt a more collegial or collaborative style of managing schools. As Hartley (2010) suggested, a distributed leadership model does not easily coexist with the bureaucratic structure of school and therefore it remains a challenge.

The leadership discourse that emphasises collaborative and distributed forms of leadership does not undermine the role of formal leaders in the change process. Individuals in formal leadership positions are often presented as gatekeepers to organisational change who can encourage or prevent others from taking an active part or leading change and innovation (Bush, 2011). For instance, principals are presented as “change agents” in literature because they are situated “in the middle of the relationship between teachers and external ideas and people” (Fullan, 2007, p. 155), and principals’ actions can promote or impede change. The principal plays a prominent role in initiating change and making sure that change efforts come to fruition (Fullan, 2007). Several
studies have pointed out a positive relationship between the quality of a principal’s leadership and the extent of the whole-school initiative implementation. A broader level of implementation is observed in the school settings in which teachers perceive their principals as strong leaders (Berends, Bodilly & Kirby, 2002; Fullan, 2007).

The distributed leadership theorists see the role of principals in creating conditions and opportunities for successful operation of distributed leadership because sustainable change in schools is possible when principals create space for other people to participate in decision-making processes and develop their leadership capacities (Harris, 2008, 2012). Popular rhetoric suggests that all teachers have leadership potential, and, given the right conditions, they can become leaders. Because of the ways in which schools operate, teachers often focus on their own practice and stay in their own classrooms without sharing with their colleagues their experiences, practices, and concerns. The implementation of initiatives provides teachers with opportunities to step out of their classroom and exercise their leadership potential. However, teacher leadership potential is not fully realised because of the number of restrictions in the educational system, such as mandated curriculum, a pervasive “teach to the test” approach, the increasing scrutiny from different stakeholders, and a growing public disrespect for the teaching profession (Nieto, 2007).

Steel and Craig (2006) provided seven recommendations for supporting and fostering teacher leadership: trust teachers’ professional judgement; welcome teachers’ input into administrative decisions; recognise and acknowledge contributions from all levels of the organisation; provide constant feedback on new classroom practices; support teachers as learners; create conditions for teacher collaboration; and empower all teachers to take actions beyond their classrooms.

Literature on curriculum mapping stresses the importance of teachers assuming leadership roles during the initiative implementation. Some of these roles are formalised, such as mapping coaches, subject area coaches, data miners, and data-informed facilitators; this serves as leverage for transforming the organisational culture and making distributed leadership a reality (Kallick & Colosimo, 2009). The leadership potential of teachers engaged in the curriculum mapping process is geared towards the major goal of expanding and improving educational opportunities for all students. Efforts of change leaders to nurture teacher leadership and stimulate collaborative relationships within the school settings can result in sustainable change.

To sum up, the reviewed literature suggests that success of change initiatives depends on the people in both formal and informal leadership positions. The ideal environment for implementing and sustaining change can be created when leadership is distributed among numerous people within and beyond the organisation.

Methodology

Research design
The research utilised a case study approach within an interpretive paradigm to get an insight into a phenomenon of interest through the exploration of a specific case (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). The defining characteristics of case study research are an in-depth exploration of a bounded context and a rich, thick description of the activities, processes, and interactions occurring in that context (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). The case study approach has enabled the researcher to capture the particular experiences of educators with the curriculum mapping initiative and their perceptions of the role of leadership in the change process, in order to identify leadership strategies that promote or impede initiative implementation.

Research site and participants
A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select the site and participants. The following criteria were used for site selection: the school’s engagement with the curriculum mapping initiative, accessibility of the site, and likelihood that goodwill and cooperation of potential participants of the study would be achieved. A medium-
sized high school in the lower Midwest of the United States was selected for the study because of its four-year history with curriculum mapping. Westlake High School (pseudonym) served the community of 48,000 people at the time of research. The school had a high reputation for its high academic standards and collegial culture with collective focus on student learning and school improvement, which was a good fit for curriculum mapping due to the collegial nature of the curriculum mapping process. At the time of research, the school had 988 students enrolled in grades 10 through 12. The ethnic composition was distributed as follows: 76% White/Caucasian, 8% Black/African American, 8% American Indian, 4% Hispanic, and 4% Asian. Among the school’s 68 certified teachers, 52.8% had a bachelor’s degree, 39.6% had a master’s degree, and 7.5% had doctorate degrees.

The criteria for potential informants were as follows: participants should have at least three years of teaching experience at the research site, participate in curriculum mapping, and be willing to share their perspectives on the topic of interest with the researcher. Prior to participant recruitment and data collection, the researcher had to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), an administrative body associated with the university that reviews and oversees research involving human subjects in order to protect the rights of research participants and ensure ethical conduct of research (Byerly, 2009). After getting IRB approval, the researcher sent an invitation to all teachers in the core subject areas that participated in curriculum mapping. The email explained the purpose of the study, asked for teachers’ voluntary input into the research, and discussed confidentiality issues.

Twelve educators (11 teachers and one school administrator) agreed to contribute to the research project. Initially, all members of the administrative staff received an invitation to participate in the study. Only one of them agreed to be interviewed; two others declined the request explaining that they could not be valuable informants because of their minimal involvement with curriculum mapping. The sample size of 12 participants was appropriate to the methodology and sufficient to provide an insight into the phenomenon of interest.

There were seven females and five males among the study participants. The participants had a range of teaching experience from less than five years to more than 35 years and a variety of subject areas. Nine participants taught in the core subject areas: English, Maths, Sciences, and Social Studies. Two participating teachers were from the Foreign Language department. Two of the participants were department heads. The participating school administrator had 12 years of administrative experience at the time of research. That was his fifth year in the researched school.

Data collection and data analysis
Data sources for the current study included semi-structured interviews, school documents related to curriculum mapping, and field notes from the site visits. Utilising several data sources allowed the researcher to triangulate findings. All of the interviews except one took place on campus either during or after school, lasted between 45-60 minutes and were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions asked participants to identify important aspects of the curriculum mapping initiative implementation and describe the actions of leaders throughout the change process.

The documents that supplemented data from the interviews included diary maps created by individual teachers, departmental curriculum maps, and minutes from the curriculum mapping committee meetings. Informal observations during site visits enabled the researcher to obtain a sense of the school’s culture, customs, values, and rituals. These observations were entered into the field journal and allowed the researcher to obtain an accurate understanding of the school context and to support data obtained from interviews and documents. The field journal was also used for recording researcher’s feelings, concerns, and ideas that were worth pursuing further in the research process.

Data analysis began during the process of transcribing audiotaped interviews and consisted of coding, categorisation, and theme identification. The initial, line-by-line coding helped identify segments in the data
that could possibly answer the research questions. After initial coding, the researcher conducted a more focused coding to explore relationships between codes and develop categories that were constantly compared across participants. Categories were further refined and then reduced to a manageable number to generate themes. Early in the data analysis, the researcher worked with 32 categories, then combined and reduced them to three themes that were used in the end for data interpretation.

**Findings and discussion**

The findings of the study are presented as a thematic analysis of the participants’ perspectives and experiences related to the topic of research, which is laced with the interpretive and analytical commentaries to help the reader make connections between the details and particulars of the case being reported and the more abstract arguments being made.

**Laying the foundations**

According to the interviews, curriculum mapping started as a district-wide initiative advocated and inspired by the school district curriculum coordinator who wanted to ensure consistency and continuity of the district curriculum and make student learning more equitable and consistent. The initiative got immediate support from the recently hired principal of Westlake High School who had a positive experience with curriculum mapping during his previous employment.

To set the stage for curriculum mapping and mobilising people and resources, the district curriculum mapping committee was formed. The school district documents revealed that the members of the committee were several elementary school teachers, some middle school teachers, some junior high and high school teachers, some building principals, and two school district administrative staff members. In the beginning, the committee met every month to discuss different issues related to planning and coordinating the initiative: identifying curricular areas to map, sending groups of teachers to the national conferences to learn about curriculum mapping, selecting the mapping software that fitted the district, and planning different activities of the curriculum mapping process. The curriculum mapping committee lasted for two or two and a half years and then was discontinued, and the curriculum mapping process became a building-directed initiative. One interviewed teacher noted, “It is still district mandate. It’s just overseen by the building administration now… just sort of monitored by the district.” No evidence has been provided on how the building administration oversees and monitors the change process.

Jacobs (1997) argued that curriculum mapping should start with establishing a leadership cadre at each building. The Westlake High School principal encouraged and organised the group of teachers to provide the leadership and training throughout the process of initiation and implementation of the curriculum mapping initiative. At least one teacher from each core subject area went to the training at the national level first and then shared their knowledge and skills with their colleagues during the on-site training for mapping. Moreover, teacher leaders have continued to play an important role in the curriculum mapping process beyond the initiation phase, as evidenced in the following quote, “Our department heads and some enthusiastic teachers still try to get our departments to do what they are supposed to do with curriculum mapping.”

There was some critique of the actions of leaders at the initiation phase from the participants of the study. Some critical comments concerned the failure to properly explain the value of the initiative, include the teaching staff more in the decision-making process, and gain support from the majority of the staff before launching curriculum mapping. One participant commented:

_We were not given any discussion about whether or not to participate in the curriculum mapping process. We were just instructed to do it. In some projects that I’ve done around the school, there has been some flexibility. You know, that if you are interested in doing this, we are going to do a study, you can participate, but this one was not._
The change literature indicated “teachers who have no input into the educational initiative will have no sense of ownership of it and, consequently, little commitment to it” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 74). It is evident therefore that leaders should not neglect the importance of teacher ownership in the initiative and involve the majority of staff in the decision-making processes concerning curriculum mapping.

The interviews revealed a significant difference in the levels of response to the curriculum mapping initiative among the teachers, which is captured in the following quote from one teacher’s interview: “We are sort of split. Some really like it. There were others that did it because we were told to do it. And there were some that just tolerated it, and they don’t really form a very strong opinion.”

In spite of criticism, many positive things happened at the initiation phase: a district curriculum mapping committee was established, curriculum mapping software was selected and purchased, a core group of teachers was sent to the national level training for mapping, and on-site training sessions were planned to be provided to the teaching staff. At this stage, planning and leadership were consistent, and the elements of distributed leadership were visible at both district and school building levels. The school district personnel and school principal were seeking to share responsibility for introducing the initiative with some of the staff members. Inspired by the school principal, some faculty members became actively involved in the initiative, sharing leadership responsibilities with school administrators. However, as some participants suggested, it would have been good to include more faculty members in the decision-making processes concerning school’s involvement and participation in the curriculum mapping of the initiative to increase widespread acceptance of initiative by the teaching staff.

Leadership at the implementation phase

The implementation phase included providing on-site training for mapping, creating curriculum maps at the departmental and grade levels, and utilising curriculum maps by individual teachers for instructional purposes. Most participants criticised the on-site training as a one-time event that only addressed the technical aspects of the mapping process without explaining the philosophical and theoretical foundations of mapping, taking into account the unique characteristics of different subject areas, and addressing the benefits of the initiative to students and teachers. One interviewee noted, “The training we received as a faculty was more of, here’s how you fill out the chart. Not necessarily, here’s what the purpose of it is, here’s how it functions.” Another interviewee pointed out, “It is so different for every subject; you almost need someone in your subject area that has done it well to work with you.” Some departments offered coaching sessions for their faculty where they provided a lot of examples of maps from other schools, which participants found very beneficial.

After the introduction of mapping and on-site training, the school faculty started creating curriculum maps. Teachers conducted mapping by subject areas and grade levels. Several planning and professional development days were scheduled for curriculum mapping in the summer before the school started. During the school year, teachers had to use lunchtime or planning time to do mapping, which is not only unproductive, but also against their contract.

The process of creating maps was not smooth for all departments. The literature on curriculum mapping recommends starting with diary maps and then creating consensus maps based on diary maps. However, the departments started with consensus maps, which made coming to consensus without prior work on maps difficult. One teacher revealed, “If we had started with diary maps and done that for even a semester and mapped what we were doing and then to have something to compare, then that does work towards becoming consensus.”

The teachers started mapping using paper and pencil templates and then entered the maps into the computer programme. Originally, 35 teachers had access to the curriculum mapping website, all those who were involved in the curriculum mapping process. During the third year of curriculum mapping, only a small number of teachers had access to the curriculum mapping website because of significant budget cuts in the school
district, which was a big disadvantage especially for those teachers who were still working on their maps, not just modifying the existing maps. One participant shared the following:

Now we have to go through somebody else. When I type on a document and they go and put it into the curriculum map site. It’s one more step because you can’t just go in, fiddle with it, and come back to it later. Not having needed resources definitely slows down the curriculum mapping process.

Participation in the curriculum mapping process does not only mean designing maps, but also using maps on a regular basis and constantly modifying and refining them (Hale & Dunlap, 2010). Only English teachers reported that curriculum mapping had become a cultural norm in their department. One teacher from the English department mentioned, “We discuss curriculum and the maps, and we refer to our maps. We refer to them constantly.” The participants from other departments admitted that they were not even sure if their colleagues followed the maps.

At the time of research, the curriculum mapping initiative was in its fourth year of implementation; however, as most participants recognised, curriculum mapping had not been fully implemented and the initiative’s sustainability was uncertain. Moreover, different school departments were at different stages of curriculum mapping, as suggested in the following quote, “There are some who have achieved and have done all this work and there are some of us who are still in the process and there are some people who are still at the ground level and really haven’t done much.” There is a relationship between how the people in the leadership positions at the departmental level view mapping and the extent of the initiative, as shown in the following quote, “… different departments have different department heads that see things differently… If the department head sees the value in it, they will push their department to do that.”

Most of the respondents indicated that mapping was intense for two years and then the interest in the initiative diminished. One participant said, “We are not talking about curriculum mapping very much. It was the latest thing to do last year and now that’s it. It’s already put aside.” Another participant conveyed similar concerns, “This year we had only one mention of it. And then last year we had several mentions of it. And then the year before when it was started that was when we had the most.” Most participants have admitted that they do not know who does mapping and who does not in their building, to say nothing about the teachers in other schools across the district.

The idea of inconsistent support and leadership as the main obstacles for curriculum mapping full implementation and institutionalisation has echoed throughout almost all interviews. Some interviewees expressed concerns that curriculum mapping might have lost its significance over time, as evidenced in the following quote:

It’s very similar to many other initiatives in the school district and it’s really important for about two years and then other things come up and they kind of push it back and push it back because it’s not as important right now.

To become truly implemented, curriculum mapping should go beyond departmental and individual school level and become the project in which all school buildings are involved, and the school district administration should play a significant role in that process. One participant commented, “It just won’t last because you cannot do it on your own. I can do curriculum mapping all day long. If I am the only guy doing it, this is not good at all. You have to have everybody involved.” All the participants pointed out that the school district personnel involvement in the initiative has waned as the initiative evolved, explaining this fact by change of administration at the district level over the last two years. Some participants suggested that the new superintendent and the new curriculum coordinator might not be as supportive of curriculum mapping as the previous ones. It has been mentioned in the interviews that the district and school administrators stopped
monitoring the progress of initiative implementation after two years. When the change leaders do not routinely check the process of implementation, the change efforts might be diminished or completely lost (Hall & Hord, 2010). Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) noted that if the initiative implementation fails, one of the reasons for failure could be inability of change leaders to adequately supervise the implementation process.

Most participants think that the school administration and especially the principal are still behind the initiative, but the principal cannot provide teachers with additional time to work on their maps because of the district financial hardships. Some of the interviewees indicated that although the district administration backed off from the initiative, there will be a time when the administrators put the emphasis back on curriculum mapping and there would be a mandated date-due or die. The recent education literature has added some positive aspects to the notion of mandates often criticised for being ineffective because of their top-down orientation. Hall and Hord (2010) argued that mandates could work well if they are “accompanied by continuing communication, ongoing learning, on-site coaching, and time for implementation” (p. 15). In other words, if mandates are supported with the needed resources and guidance, they can be helpful in the change process.

The data suggested that at the implementation phase leadership became less distributed among the participants of the curriculum mapping process and came mostly from some particular individuals - department heads and the school principal. Moreover, half of the study participants gave exclusive credit for leadership to the principal, while the other half also acknowledged the principal, but included department heads and some teachers as well. The leadership from the school district administration was short-term and hardly ever went beyond initiation phase. The participating teachers indicated that without support and assistance from the central office administration, it would be difficult to fully implement and institutionalise the curriculum mapping initiative. Any educational change needs as much support and leadership at the implementation phase as at the initiation phase. As previous research has indicated, many change efforts have not reached their potential because the school district administration did not actively participate in the implementation process (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Marsh, 2002).

**Leadership strategies for success**

The participants offered a number of strategies to be applied by leaders at different levels to fully implement and institutionalise the curriculum mapping initiative. All the study participants expressed the idea that good guidance from the very beginning and continuous support throughout the process would be very beneficial. To ensure high level teacher buy-in, the leaders should provide sufficient information about the benefits of mapping and “the statistics of other schools that have gone with curriculum mapping and how that has helped them. First accounts of other teachers, other schools that have implemented this would help,” as one of the participants suggested. According to Kallick and Colosimo (2009), “change leaders have to ensure that all involved have a clear idea of how the process will work and why it is being done” (p. 44). The implementers need to know the direction of the change, the expected outcomes, and the ways of achieving these outcomes. If there is no clear guidance from the beginning, the intended change might be only modestly implemented (Hall & Hord, 2010).

Consistency of leadership was mentioned as one of the most important factors in the initiative success. One interviewee asserted, “There has to be consistency, otherwise people forget about it. The leadership has to have a constant voice, even if it is a little nagging.” The majority of participants stated that most leadership should come from the administration. One respondent noted, “That can’t be departmental. Otherwise you pit colleagues against colleagues.” Moreover, the leaders need to do everything possible to get everybody on board with curriculum mapping. “Everybody has to be on board. It can be where some people are trying to do it and other people are not really contributing or not made to contribute - that sort of things creates problems,” one participant pointed out. Another participant shared the following, “A lot in curriculum mapping depends on where you fit on the chain. If you are a doer, you are going to be bogged down with a lot more responsibility
and things to do along with your regular workload.” That is why school administrators should think of some mechanisms to get everyone to pull their weight and do their part in the mapping process.

Researchers studying change efforts argue that it is unrealistic to expect non-problematic and smooth implementation processes, and the leaders of change should provide support and put pressure for significant results if the desired outcomes are to be achieved in the conceivable future (Fullan, 1992, 2007). The literature suggests pressure should not be viewed as a negative thing; it can play a positive role in the change process. Fullan (1992) stated, “Successful change projects always include elements of both pressure and support. Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources” (p. 25).

Everyone interviewed expressed the idea that the school district administration should put emphasis back on curriculum mapping. One participant argued, “Any decisions that educators make should be made for the students. If it truly benefits students, then there should be commitment at the district level, and the time for the teachers to do these things should be provided.” The suggestions for building in enough time for mapping included providing a common planning period for the teachers of the same grade level and subject area and using early release days or part of the professional development days for curriculum mapping.

No matter how well planned an educational initiative is, the leaders of change should expect concerns and problems that people may experience while being engaged in the change process. Miles and Louis (1990) recommended constant monitoring of the change process to identify the problems when they first appear in order to act accordingly. However, monitoring of the initiative should not be for punitive purposes, but should focus on identifying the teachers who need additional help with the implementation and provide that help in a timely manner. The methods of monitoring can be surveys administered to the staff from time to time or informal conversations with teachers about their progress in the initiative implementation. Monitoring and checking on the progress of the initiative by the leaders will indicate to the implementers a continuous interest of the leaders in the initiative and that the efforts of implementers are “worthy of notice and support” (Hall & Hord, 2010, p. 150).

Constant communication about the initiative will also help get everyone engaged in the implementation and institutionalisation of curriculum mapping. This is consistent with Truesdale, Thompson and Lucas’s (2004) recommendation to use frequent updates at faculty meetings and seek “ways to use maps as the hub of all discussions about teaching and learning will help to institutionalise mapping as a daily tool” (p. 23). Teachers need to get constant and consistent signals that the initiative has not been pushed back, but rather is being incorporated in numerous aspects of the school culture, and the interest and support of change leaders are unwavering.

Conclusions
The findings from the current study confirm the previous research findings about the critical role of leadership for the educational initiative success. Leadership should be present at all phases of the change process – from initiation to institutionalisation. Moreover, leadership might come from different sources and take different forms. As for this particular research setting, some features of the distributed leadership were evident at the initiation and implementation phases; a “hybrid” type of leadership, which combined solo and distributed elements, became more prevalent as the initiative progressed. Spillane and Coldren (2011) suggest a view of leadership as “a fluid practice that changes with the situation” (p. 32). Based on the findings from the current study, it can be concluded that the initiative success not only depends on the type of leadership used, but most importantly on the strategies applied by leaders to bring sustainable change and improvement.

Implications for policy and practice
The data from this study indicate that implementation of the curriculum mapping initiative requires the joint efforts of district and school administrators as well as the involvement of emergent leaders throughout the
organisation. Hale and Dunlap (2010) argued, “For curriculum mapping to be systematically sustainable, district and school-site administrators must work harmoniously” (p. 14). To ensure successful curriculum mapping implementation, the leaders should utilise an ongoing, systematic approach with clear guidelines and expectations. Change will not happen unless the majority of the staff members understand its necessity. Each staff member should have a voice in decision-making concerning curriculum mapping adoption and implementation. Developing implementation plans collaboratively with staff members will increase teacher buy-in and decrease resistance to change.

Change can be achieved in three sequential phases and specific activities should happen at each stage of the change process for success to be achieved. The leadership activities and strategies that will lead to successful initiation of curriculum mapping are as follows: developing a common vision and a clear action plan for curriculum mapping in the district and in the school to declare long-term goals for the initiative; establishing a district curriculum mapping committee that will oversee the process of implementation; sending a core group of teachers to be formally trained for curriculum mapping; establishing a leadership cadre in each school building, and selecting curriculum mapping software that fits the needs of the district.

The key activities that can lead to successful curriculum mapping implementation are the following: providing subject-specific initial and ongoing training that focuses on the processes and procedures involved in curriculum mapping and is embedded in the theory and philosophy about mapping; allocating the time and resources needed for developing and reviewing curriculum maps; monitoring and checking on the progress of curriculum mapping to identify emergent problems and challenges and developing strategies to cope with them; and keeping constant the communication about the initiative among all stakeholders. To move from implementation to institutionalisation of curriculum mapping, it is necessary to ensure that curriculum mapping has become part of the school culture, curriculum maps are widely used across the school and the district, and there is assurance that the curriculum mapping will be sustained regardless of the change in leadership at any level.

If fully implemented and used to its full potential, curriculum mapping can be a worthwhile process for any school setting, providing numerous opportunities for teacher collaboration and collegiality, serving as an effective curriculum planning and alignment tool, and positively influencing student academic achievement. The findings from this research may be useful to schools that are launching curriculum mapping or are at some stage of the curriculum mapping process in terms of highlighting the major challenges and problems they may encounter while implementing this initiative. Lessons learned from this case study can help leaders and practitioners who have adopted curriculum mapping as a school-wide initiative bring this curriculum reform to practical fruition.

References


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