

Chapter 3

Systems of Practice and Professional Community: The Adams Caseⁱ

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Principal Therese Williams began her principalship in 1989 in a troubled school. Adams School, an urban, public, 1200-student, K-8 school, ranked among the lowest performing Chicago public schools in student achievement. Adams faculty members, spread across two aging brick buildings, were dominated by social cliques and were unaccustomed to talking about instruction. The declining socio-economic status of the community contributed to falling expectations about student learning at the school. Williams was unsure about where to start, but after 10 years of determined effort, she and her leadership team had begun to turn around the student-learning story. When asked about how the change happened, Williams replied,

We set the expectation that our school will make progress, and we try to provide the structure, the professional development, the monitoring of instructional program, so that we can reach our goals. We expect to meet our goals, and we set goals that we expect to meet, and excellence has been the standard. We don't accept mediocrity. As an instructional leader

here, I would not be comfortable, I would not be satisfied, if our school did not make continual progress. If we don't make the progress we expect to make over a given time, then we are looking at answers and at issues that would probably help us to improve. So we don't just sit back with the status quo and say, "That's okay, the staff is happy, the kids are happy." Well I'm not happy, because we are not making progress.

Our research at Adams showed that these expectations were not only shared by the leaders and teachers, but were also "built in" to the school in the form of a powerful professional community among the staff. Dr. Williams stated, "It was only when teachers began to talk with one another about their teaching that the test scores started to rise." Professional community is widely recognized as a valuable quality of schools (Lee & Smith, 1996; Little, 1982; Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). A professional community is shaped around the goals that define teachers as members of a profession dedicated to promoting student learning (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2000). Professional communities develop internal practices and expectations to coordinate the non-routine nature of teaching practice through self-regulation and the development of information feedback systems (Argyris, 1990; Huberman, 1995;

Little & Bird, 1987; Louis, Kruse & Bryk, 1995). In professional communities, teachers have opportunities to break down the isolation of classrooms in collaborative, problem-setting and problem-solving activities with colleagues (Halverson, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; Huberman, 1995; Miller, Lord, & Dorney, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989). These activities could include collaborative curriculum design, instructional evaluation, interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum development, textbook and course material review, or school improvement planning (Bryk, Sebring, et. al., 1996). Networks of such activities help to create and sustain the conditions for strong professional communities in schools.

A Consortium for Chicago School Research (1998) report indicated that the component aspects of professional community improved over the years of Williams' tenure at Adams. By the late 1990s, the Adams community scored high on measures such as a shared focus on student learning, peer collaboration among teachers and leaders, public classroom practices, reflective dialogue among teachers, willingness for teachers to engage in innovation, and school-wide support for change.

While we know that a change took place to transform the Adams community, we began our study uncertain of what was responsible for the change. Strong leadership, a determined effort by some faculty, external resources and high-stakes accountability all seemed to play their part. In our effort to

understand the practice responsible for the Adams transformation, we turned to the distributed leadership framework to identify the tools, structures and organizational routines the Adams' staff developed and used. This chapter emphasizes the situational distribution of leadership framework to trace how Williams and her staff developed and linked a series of programs, or artifacts, to reshape the local professional culture to improve student learning. The term artifact is used here to describe the programs, policies or procedures leaders use to influence the practice of others. If artifacts, such as faculty meeting agendas, academic calendars or professional development plans, are effectively designed and sheparded by leaders in schools, they can give rise to new routines of practice that can reshape the professional culture of a school. Artifacts, then, are the primary tools school leaders use to shape new practices. One mark of successful artifact implementation is the emergence of new routines that can become powerful constituents of a school culture (Halverson, 2004).

Here we will consider how Adams' leaders used artifacts to establish powerful organizational routines that reshaped professional discourse at Adams, resulting in the strong sense of professional community that school leaders credited with the improvements in student learning (Halverson, 2002, 2004). The

chapter will focus on the stories of the development, use, and networking of three key Adams artifacts: *Breakfast Club*, a faculty discussion forum; the *Five-Week Assessment*, a school-wide formative assessment tool; and the *School Improvement Plan*, a district-wide annual planning tool. Adams staff used these artifacts to create multiple opportunities for interaction around the key instructional issues of the school. These interactions, over time, helped to create the trust necessary for a powerful professional community focused specifically on literacy instruction in the early grades. Here we tell the story of how these artifacts came to establish a powerful “system of practice” (Halverson, 2004) that created the organizational routines necessary for developing the capacity to improve student learning.

Adams School

The Adams School had a long history of service to its neighborhood. An all-white school as recently as the mid-1950s, by 1990 the school consisted of entirely African American students. The academic quality of the school and the socioeconomic status of the students had declined during this demographic transition. By the early 1990s, the local press labeled Adams as one of the 10 poorest, and poorest performing, schools in the city. In terms of the local standardized tests, 78% of students were below national norms in math, and only 16%

of students could read at the national norm. After 10 years, Principal Therese Williams and her staff had, by 2000, increased the proportion of students testing at or above the national norms from 22% to 50% in math and from 15% to 33% in reading comprehension on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)(Figure 3.1). These improvements occurred in the face of annual student mobility rates of 30-40% and a 97% low-income student population. While these gains might look modest by comparison with current NCLB-fueled test score gains, in 2000, these improvements were enough to propel principal Therese Williams and her staff into prominent roles within the district as highly regarded experts on turning around low-performing schools.

INSERT FIGURE 3.1

The path from leadership to results is often difficult to trace. The Adams staff and school culture underwent a significant change during Williams' tenure – but which features made the difference in improving student learning? Initially, Williams felt that integrating research-proven curricula, teaching, and assessment techniques in everyday classroom practice would make the difference. As she explained, "There was a time when we were working very hard, but not working very smart...we were not using research to inform our practice, we just kept on reinventing the wheel." Williams soon found that sharing the research was insufficient to make change.

Reinventing the wheel, ironically, turned out to be valuable work because the process of reading and acting together helped to create a strong professional community. Through structured opportunities to review and reflect on research and practice, teachers had to become willing to try out new ideas in their classrooms, and more importantly, give and receive critical feedback as a staff in order for the instructional changes to take hold. Williams and her staff began to realize that a strong professional community based on instruction was a necessary condition for using research-driven practices well.

The development of professional community at Adams provides an interesting story in how leaders use artifacts to create new organizational routines. In the initial years of her tenure, Williams struggled to bring together faculty cliques that fragmented instructional discussions in the school. Several staff members decided to retire or transfer when Williams arrived. However, Williams recognized that staff changes were not the answer for improving student learning:

You can't go in with the idea that you have to get rid of everybody, because you are going to bring in the same kind of problems that are out there. The key is if you have a group of committed people, try to work with them and arm them with the knowledge that they need to become

professionals, and I think that is what we try to do also.

To initiate staff interaction, Williams created frequent school-sponsored opportunities for faculty to interact with one another across peer groups and developed a committee system that helped teachers interact around instructional issues. Once staff grew accustomed to these interactions, Williams began to focus discussions around the chronic issues of instruction in the school.

Breakfast Club

Breakfast Club became the cornerstone artifact for the emergent professional community at Adams. Principal Williams and Gwen Tracy, the Adams Literacy Coordinator, designed the Breakfast Club in 1995 as an opportunity for teachers to discuss research relevant to current instructional initiatives and practices among PreK-3 language arts teachers. High-stakes district accountability measures had pressured the Adams staff to develop more effective professional training. After several years of mixed results with external interventions to teach best practices, Williams and her staff began to revise their assumptions about quality professional development. Williams noted, "We began to believe in the importance of professional community when we realized that, it wasn't taking classes, but

that it was when teachers started talking about their teaching that the scores started improving."

Breakfast Club involved monthly meetings in which a teacher led a discussion before the school day about a piece of research, usually concerning reading or writing instruction, with groups of PreK-3 teachers and administrators. During the years 1998-2001, there were an average of eight Breakfast Club meetings per year, with an average of 14 of the 18 PreK-3 faculty and staff members in attendance. Principal Williams attended about three-quarters of the Breakfast Club meetings during this time period. Hard-learned experience about the perils of imposed professional development opportunities prompted Williams and Tracy to build the following features into the Breakfast Club routine:

- The program should not be mandatory to avoid the stultifying atmosphere of many faculty meetings;
- The substance of the discussions themselves should sell the program -- if valued information was exchanged at the meeting, word would get around and people would want to come;
- Meetings should take place in the mornings, so that teachers would be fresh and ready to entertain new ideas;

- Readings should be kept short, so that teachers would have a greater chance of reading them before coming to the session; and
- Teachers should be able to select the readings and lead the discussions.

Williams thought that a hot breakfast, paid for from her own pocket, would clearly indicate to faculty members that she was willing to sacrifice to get the program off the ground.

Sample Breakfast Club topics from the 1998-2000 school years included a review of a multiple methods approach to language arts instruction, a conversation about the value and viability of learning centers in primary classrooms, discussions of the components of an ideal language arts classroom, and presentations on how various components of a new school-wide language arts initiative worked out in teachers classrooms. The conversations and interactions that started during Breakfast Club have become a significant organizing framework for the kinds of activities that characterize the local professional community. As one first grade teacher commented after four years of participating in Breakfast Club,

We have had it for such a long time that we think it has always been this way, but it hasn't been. It probably started when we started respecting each other and the work that we were doing.... Once we started

[Breakfast Club] with Mrs. Tracy, that was the catalyst. Because teachers presented on different topics, and it's very professional. Our presentations that we put together... I mean, not all of them, are better than the ones you go out and pay for.

Although Breakfast Club began as an opportunity for teachers to talk about research and practice, it subsequently evolved into more complex routines to support teachers' brainstorming, experimentation, and design of curricular initiatives.

Breakfast Club and Professional Community

Williams and Tracy originally designed Breakfast Club to involve faculty in discussions of relevant instructional research. However, over time, increased staff participation in Breakfast Club helped to create some of the key characteristics of professional community at Adams, including the establishment of teacher collaboration and curriculum design as cornerstones of the professional development program, the deprivatization of practice, the cultivation and use of in-house expertise among faculty and staff, and the creation of a sense of ownership among staff about the instructional program.

Breakfast Club represented both a change in degree and a change in kind for prior professional development at Adams. Many externally designed professional development efforts, intended

to bring new ideas into the school, were perceived as too intermittent and variable in quality to provide much long-lasting impact on student achievement scores. As one teacher described,

A lot of times people come in with a set program, ... but it did not really help us. It got teachers involved in knowing that you have to use [for example] manipulatives and knowing that quantitatively you could add something to your curriculum. It was fun, and we did it for a while, but it did not help us.

Early in her tenure, Principal Williams organized curriculum review teams, first within grade levels (1990-91) and then across grade levels (1992-93), to get teachers talking about the school's instructional program. Breakfast Club built on and focused this history of teacher collaboration into a routine that supported regular staff discussion of new instructional ideas in relation to current instructional practices within the school. The Breakfast Club routine created systemic opportunities for teachers to reflect on their instructional practices in light of new ideas. Breakfast Club changed the way Adams leaders and teachers thought about professional development in the school; it framed the interactions among teachers and leaders about teacher development differently. Specifically, the Breakfast Club encouraged attention to both

insider and outsider knowledge. Further, the Breakfast Club avoided casting teachers exclusively as learners and afforded them an active, creative position in their own professional development.

The Breakfast Club discussions also helped to deprivatize practice and create in-house instructional expertise. While initial meetings provided opportunities for interested teachers to become familiar with and discuss new ideas, in later meetings teachers would report on their efforts to try out these ideas in their classrooms. Creating a loop within the teacher community from discussing to experimenting and reporting on their experience with new ideas helped to create a system of reflective practice in the school. This was particularly true of the teachers who initially took leadership roles in the discussion and experimentation with new language arts ideas and techniques. The reflective loop created by the implementation of Breakfast Club encouraged many teachers to openly discuss language arts instruction with one another. As one teacher articulated,

Before this, I might have been too nervous to do this [present about my teaching]. But now, when I get in front of the classroom ... it didn't bother me anymore. Throughout the years, it really makes a difference. Because when you are presenting, when you

are talking about that article with your colleagues and they are all accepting you, you realize that this isn't such a bad thing. Before that, when you are closing your doors and nobody is saying anything -- you just did your good job and closed your door.

Deprivatizing practice allowed teachers and school leaders to recognize and exploit the considerable local instructional expertise in the design of subsequent professional development opportunities. For example, spin-off routines such as Teacher Leader (established in 1998) provided a half-day professional development meeting to allow teachers to conduct workshops about the ideas developed and shared during Breakfast Club, while Teacher Talk (established in 1997) applied the format of Breakfast Club to the grade 6-8 faculty meetings. The cultivation of in-house expertise, through Breakfast Club and other initiatives, was an important source for developing internal leadership opportunities for teachers within the school. Williams helped develop organizational routines with artifacts like Breakfast Club, in part, to provide avenues for developing both local leadership and instructional expertise, thus helping to enrich the human capital available for subsequent problem-solving opportunities.

A sample Breakfast Club meeting illustrates faculty and staff interaction. During this meeting, a first grade teacher

lead a discussion on how to use learning centers to engage some students while others receive instruction directly from the teacher. The tone of the discussion was collegial with lots of laughter and side conversations as teachers talked with one another about the value of learning centers. The discussion leader commented, "You can't teach the class as a whole. A method won't work if some can read and others are working on the alphabet.... I can't be in two places at one time." A younger teacher expressed her struggle with how to organize a classroom into separate learning areas. Several of the veteran teachers spoke from their experience about developing learning centers. One teacher commented that teachers had to train the students to work separately in learning centers. She explained, "You have to train [the students] to use the learning centers.... You can't do it in the first month of school. It may take three to four months, but eventually you can send them off." The teacher discussion leader commented that her experience had helped her simplify the process, and she wondered, "Am I getting lazy or am I getting smart?" In previous years she had developed control systems and lots of instructions, forms, and files that generated a lot of paperwork. Now, she was able use a simple system that worked for her. The discussion leader agreed and added, "We as adults have trouble learning to cooperate." Principal Williams quietly observed the discussion and made a

point of agreeing with the discussion leaders' point that "we should have a half day where we can learn what we are doing in each other's classrooms."

Breakfast Club served as an organizing artifact for developing a shared sense of an instructional vision for the school. Instead of mandating a direction for the language arts program, Williams and Tracy used Breakfast Club to allow for the collaborative consideration and experimentation of alternative programs. As teachers explored and reflected upon alternative practices, they came to realize how the proposed practices might remedy the shortcomings of the existing instructional program. In 1999, after several years of discussion and experimentation, the teachers and school leaders selected Pat Cunningham's Four Blocks of Literacy (see Cunningham, Hall, & Defee, 1998) for the cornerstone of their new language arts program. Breakfast Club served as a foundation for teachers to come together on the needs and merits of instructional initiatives, and it provided a structure to support inquiry and collaborative design. The value of Breakfast Club as a forum for reflection on practice was evident as the school community reflected upon their experiences for the purpose of supplementing the initial Four Blocks program. Breakfast Club provided a legitimate, on-going forum to discuss and vet proposed directions for the instructional

program, helping to continuously test and revamp the plan for language arts instruction in the school.

Five-Week Assessment

The Adams leaders developed Breakfast Club to create an organizational routine for incorporating research into faculty discussions. The successful establishment of Breakfast Club gave rise to a new question: How could Adams teachers see whether the new practices discussed at Breakfast Club worked in their classrooms? The Five-Week Assessment artifact was designed to establish a routine for providing meaningful formative data to teachers and leaders about whether the program initiatives discussed in Breakfast Club improved student achievement on district standardized tests. The culture of professional community and collaborative design, resulting in part from innovations such as Breakfast Club, led Adams school leaders to frame the problem of reshaping the school instructional program in terms of collaborative artifact development -- the design and continuous redesign of routines and tools to enable instructional improvement.

The Five-Week Assessment offers insight into how the Adams community drew on the capacity developed through Breakfast Club to meet the demands of standardized testing. Faculty discussions of curricular interventions, combined with high-stakes testing

expectations, helped create a collective need for a new assessment artifact:

We realized that the [state] tests themselves didn't give us much information about what we could do to improve our scores – mainly because we received the results well after we could do anything about it. We thought about a more frequent assessment program, say every nine weeks that would help us tell where the children were.

The Five-Week Assessment artifact design began as an effort to retrofit the specific, learning outcome demands of the standardized test, particularly in language arts, to the school curriculum. Prior collaborative design efforts suggested that this effort too should provide an occasion for staff collaboration. In 1998, Tracy and a team of teachers met to design the Five-Week Assessment by undertaking an item analysis of the ITBS exam focusing on reading comprehension. The design team drew on their experience with reading assessments to assemble a suite of tools teachers could use for a school-wide assessment of student reading progress. Every five weeks, teachers throughout the school conducted the resulting 1-2 hour assessment with their students. The design team collected and graded the assessments, and then discussed the results to plan intervention strategies for under-performing classrooms. The

team also developed a plan to move the assessments from reading to other subject areas over subsequent years. Initially designed to prepare students for the ITBS exam, the assessment program shifted toward testing children for the kinds of narrative, expository and persuasive writing and open-ended questions required by the new forms of testing developed by the state. Each year, Tracy presented a monthly schedule for the school-wide Five-Week Assessments. By 2001, the Five-Week Assessment became a widely used and discussed diagnostic tool as teachers and leaders anticipated student achievement scores and analyzed their data, through artifacts such as Breakfast Club and Teacher Leader, to shape the existing instructional program for teachers to check school-wide student progress.

Five-Week Assessment and Professional Community

While high-stakes accountability policies can provide an occasion to share feedback about the effectiveness of the instructional program, they can also serve to threaten professional community in a school. School leaders who use accountability systems to pit teachers, grade levels and schools against one another can erode this sense of trust, resulting in a further insulation of practice (see discussion in Chapter Five). At Adams, school leaders realized that using test scores at the classroom level could create competition and resentment among teachers and discourage the formation of professional

community. The Language Arts Coordinator commented on the need for grade-level reporting of scores to turn accountability data into a positive force:

I think ... when the [standardized test] was first started it did something very interesting that almost forced us to work as a team.... [Reporting at the classroom level led us to think] this one teacher over here could be a shining star, but if the other two or three were not getting the same kinds of results then that one teacher didn't look good anymore because my score was not enough to pull up the entire grade level. So, if I want my grade level to get a good score, then I need to help these other teachers pull up to where I am.

The Five-Week Assessment helped to mitigate the summative effect of standardized test scores by providing intermittent benchmarks to gauge the projected results. Although the results of the Five-Week Assessment did not accurately predict the standardized test results at first, over time, as the curriculum became more aligned with the assessments, the Five-Week Assessment proved an effective means to point out teachers who were doing particularly well and served as a warning flag for problem classrooms. For example, in 2000, the Five-Week Assessment revealed that fifth grade students in a particular

classroom were falling behind in science. One teacher commented, "Looking at the Five-Week Assessment saved our butts because we could focus in on helping the students learn the science content they needed to do well on the test." In this case, teachers worked to enhance the existing language arts program with more science-related readings in order to supplement the existing science program. Here, the Five-Week Assessment sounded an alarm to bring Adams resources to bear in addressing instructional issues before they emerged as accountability problems.

While professional community can emerge from the expression and sharing of common interests around instruction, the long-term viability of professional community may well depend upon the development of feedback systems to provide information about how collaboratively designed initiatives are working. The Five-Week Assessment routine deepened the professional community by bringing the resources of the community to bear on emergent instructional issues.

School Improvement Planning Process

Unlike Breakfast Club or the Five-Week Assessment, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) was introduced to Adams as a district-wide artifact. In many schools, such district-designed instructional planning artifacts can serve as mandated hoops through which school leaders must jump, completed for the sake of compliance and never consulted until the next round of

submission is due, leaving core instructional practices untouched. However, savvy leaders can use artifacts such as the SIP as opportunities to both satisfy district requirements and to create organizational routines that facilitate collective reflection that is shared across the instructional program.

Adams school leaders took the SIP as an opportunity to extend the collaborative design routines established in the Breakfast Club and Five-Week Assessment to develop a comprehensive grasp of the school instructional program. The district-developed SIP artifact provided a series of forms and suggested activities designed to help school leaders coordinate budgetary and instructional priorities with the Local School Councils, a school based decision-making body, and the central office. School improvement planning is intertwined with many of the leadership practices at Adams, reaching back to the arrival of Principal Williams at Adams in the late 1980s. She reported that instructional planning was one of her initial tasks:

We began school improvement immediately. I believe it was 1988 when the first legislation passed that created School Improvement Plan, and we started from the beginning having everybody who wanted to be involved involved.

Instructional planning, for Williams, was a way to get faculty and staff involved in conversations around instruction

and its improvement. By the late 1990s, the SIP came to serve as an umbrella artifact to structure school professional development and planning routines. Each fall, Williams opened the school year with a review of the student achievement goals as specified in the current SIP. She used the pre-service meeting to relate school goals to district goals ("We are not alone.... There is a system-wide emphasis on reading instruction.") and displayed an impressive grasp of the details of the Adams instructional plan. For example, in 1999-2000, Williams described how teachers needed to recommit to teaching phonemic awareness:

Without direct instructional support, phonemic awareness eludes 25% of in-class first graders ... imagine the effects it had for our children. As we learned through several Breakfast Club discussions last year, the literature is clear -- we can't superficially teach the basics; we must be clear that all students have a firm background.

During the fall semester, teachers would participate in the in-service programs through routines such as Breakfast Club, and leaders would assess the progress of instructional innovations through the Five-Week Assessment. During the spring semester, the community would revisit the SIP goals and outline a new plan during a series of formal meetings that made up the school

improvement routine. In March, subject-matter specific meetings were called to hammer out program priorities and student achievement goals for the upcoming school year. Thus, the final plan submitted in May to satisfy district requirements reflected a school-level adaptation of the SIP routine to cultivate the local development of professional community.

A 2000 SIP meeting on math instruction illustrated how the Adams collaborative planning process worked. Language arts coordinator Gwen Tracy took the lead by instructing teachers to review the 1999-2000 math plan. After about five minutes of buzzing conversation, a first-grade teacher began a discussion of the adequacy of the current textbook series. Tracy later explained,

The teachers have to own the meeting process because the SIP depends upon their commitment to the changes we propose.... If the teachers don't take charge, the meetings don't work.... There were a couple of times during the meeting today where [First-Grade Teacher Mrs.] Brown looked over at me [for some help at getting the meeting going].

Tracy related that after many of the early SIP meetings, people would come up to her and request programs or resources they wanted but had not brought up at the meeting. She noted,

At first, the teachers didn't see it this way, then they realized that all of the resources are passed out through the SIP. If they weren't involved in the process, they didn't get any of the resources.

As the math discussion unfolded, the five members of the Math Team (teachers from grades 1, 3, 5, 6, & 8) coordinated the brainstorming session. One Math Team member noted, "We need to work on the more open-ended, problem-solving aspect of math in anticipation of the new accountability challenges proposed by the ISAT." The eighth grade Math Committee member added, "Next year's [text] book has a lot of practice with open-ended questions.... The middle school lessons will have an open-ended question every day ... consistent with the NCTM1 standards." Teachers' perceptions seemed to be that the while the ITBS focused more on testing skills, the new ISAT would focus more on problem-setting and problem-solving issues. The Math Team recognized that the current instructional program was well tailored to the math problems of the ITBS, but was not as well suited to the ISAT.

The meeting served as an opportunity to review previous SIP math plans with respect to other program initiatives. One teacher proposed that the Five-Week Assessment program in math be expanded to provide the information generated by the language arts assessments: "I think we should make the assessments

similar to how they are planned for language arts. I would like to see us plan for the testing in math the same way." This lack of coordination between math and language arts pointed to how the school had chosen to allocate subject-matter leadership resources. Tracy's role in coordinating the Five-Week Assessment in language arts had no analogue in math -- the math exams were developed and conducted by full-time teachers and apparently had not received the same attention and review as the language arts exams. This lack of resources was now being felt as teachers faced the new instructional demands of the ISAT. As one teacher commented, "When you look at last years ISATs, [you can see] what we are doing now [for the Five-Week Assessments] is not working."

This SIP review and design meeting provided a glimpse into the collaborative design practices at Adams. The meetings were held to provide faculty with an opportunity to shape the school instructional program. The design meetings relied upon considerable resources in developing problem-solutions. Prior experiences with the Five-Week Assessment program, Breakfast Club and collaborative program design meant that teachers and administrators could focus on program refinement rather than novel redesign; experience with group collaboration practices meant that much of the process could be simply assumed so that participants could focus on how programs can be coordinated into

a coherent instructional program rather than on the process of collaboration. As one school leader noted,

Most of the programs we bring up in the SIP are seeded discussions over lunch and at grade-level meetings.

For example, we talked about the Four Blocks program a full year before we introduced it into the SIP. [One first-grade] teacher who reads a lot presented the basic ideas of the Four Blocks at a Breakfast Club, and there were several Teacher Leader meetings about the Four Blocks program. I know that the program was discussed at grade-level meetings. By the time we talked about putting it into the SIP, everyone was on board.

The School Improvement Plan itself was a district-designed program that afforded certain forms of school-level planning, coordination with student achievement outcomes, and discretion over resource allocation. In the hands of Adams school leaders, the SIP became an occasion for collaborative design of the school instructional program, and while these practices were not new to the Adams community, the SIP process created a powerful and legitimate routine for school leaders to deepen and extend the collaborative practices that already existed in the school.

The School Improvement Plan and Professional Community

Collaborative inquiry and design are the keys for how the SIP artifact established a routine that extended professional community at Adams. While the SIP was itself the outcome of a collaborative design effort, it also served as an "umbrella" artifact to coordinate specific instructional planning opportunities throughout the year and as a tool to focus instructional leadership practice across various organizational routines. As an organizing artifact, the SIP worked as a powerful hub for focusing professional community in the school.

SIP provided an on-going, organizing occasion for collaborative design and assessment of the instructional program rather than an isolated task to be completed and shelved. Comprehensive instructional planning, for Williams and her co-leaders, was a way to get faculty and staff involved in conversations around instruction. The SIP played a central role in organizing multiple collaborative efforts. As described by one school leader, "Everything is tied into the SIP somehow. That's what gives it credibility in the school." Early on, when the SIP meetings were poorly attended, people would complain about not having the resources to get good work done, and the administrators would reply that the teachers needed to come to the meetings to plan for the things they wanted. "The budget,

and the initiatives are all tied in. If you want to participate, you have to come early and stay late [at these meetings].”

Adams leaders set the problem of school improvement planning as a school-level process that addressed the key instructional goals of the school and customized those goals to satisfy the requirements of the SIP. The local emphasis on planning also helped focus the shared instructional vision in the school. The annual Adams collaborative development cycle of the SIP helped insure that the community at large was involved in both understanding and reviewing the instructional mission of the school.

Systems of Practice and Professional Community

Although the value of professional community in schools is widely recognized, knowledge about how to create and sustain professional communities is not as widely understood. Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth’s experience with developing professional community in a high school led them to comment:

We have little sense of how teachers forge the bonds of community, struggle to maintain them, work through the inevitable conflicts of social relationships, and form structures for social relationships over time. Without such understanding, we have little to guide us as we create community (2000, p. 6).

We do have some understanding, however, of what leaders do in schools with strong professional communities. Louis, Kruse and Bryk (1995) conclude that the most important task for school leaders is to create meaningful opportunities for teachers across the school to work together on pressing issues of common interest. Other key behaviors include being physically present in the school, creating networks of conversation among faculty, making resources available to support individual teacher development, building bridges and networks to practice and knowledge outside the local school, and fostering a school community in which instruction is viewed as problematic.

In many cases, these behaviors both lead to and require structural supports for successful results. Making successful leadership practice accessible means, in part, creating representations of practice that go beyond how leaders create structures to get at how these structures “hang together” in practice. If we assume that professional community is an effect of how these practices together shape a school culture, then we are faced with the need to develop both conceptual tools and practical examples that simultaneously demonstrate how practices support one another and how aspiring leaders can fashion similar systems in their schools. The knowledge garnered needs to integrate what is known about the what of professional community

with frameworks to show how networks of practice can be developed to support such practices.

A distributed perspective on leadership helps to identify and understand the practices that establish the conditions of professional community in schools (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). A distributed perspective defines instructional leadership as the establishment and maintenance of the conditions for improving teaching and learning in schools (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). Taking a distributed leadership perspective means focusing on leadership activities and the tasks that make up these activities. These tasks are distributed across two primary dimensions in schools: the social distribution refers to the network of people engaged in leadership tasks, while situational distribution refers to those aspects of the situation that frame the interactions among these people; it concerns how activities are enabled and constrained by the context within which people work.

The Adams case suggests that professional community is an outcome of certain configurations of social networks in a school. Leaders influence the development of social networks not only through direct participation, but also indirectly through the formation of routines shaped by the design and implementation of artifacts. The Breakfast Club, for example, was an artifact that was designed to allow for faculty

interaction around literacy research. When taken together, the artifacts at a given school composed a system of practice that coordinated the practices and routines of the school's instructional program. A system of practice describes how the local network of artifacts facilitates the flow of the instructional practices of the school. Teachers and school leaders not only work within the constraints of the network of artifacts in their given situation, but they think about the limits and possibilities of their practice in terms of this network. Changing the range of available instructional artifacts not only changes the context of learning, but it can also influence the ways that teachers understand learning in their classrooms. At Adams, the Five-Week Assessment is best seen as a consequence of Breakfast Club that amplified the professional community already established and focused faculty collaboration into new areas of assessment. A system of practice perspective suggests that, in order to understand the function of any given artifact, it is best to view how the artifact both relies upon and enables other artifacts in the system. Organizational routines, then, result from behaviors guided and constrained by other artifacts over time. A large part of leadership agency involves coordinating and maintaining artifacts in order to create desired organizational routines.

Professional community, I suggest, is an outcome of certain systems of practice in schools organized around sharing and developing instructional expertise and practice. Researchers have understood the development of strong professional community in a school as an enhancement of the school capacity to engage in instructional improvement (Youngs & Kings, 2000). One way to understand professional community as a form of capacity is to treat it as a special kind of social capital. Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital refers to resources available to an actor or an organization by virtue of participation in certain interpersonal or institutional structures. While material and human capital are possessed by the actor personally, social capital "inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" (p. 98). Social capital is developed through social interactions that build trust (Wehlage, 1993). Coleman describes trust as accumulated through participation in networks of obligation and commitment, which offer opportunities for participants to rely upon one another for the pursuit of common interests or for the completion of tasks. At Adams, Williams' work developing the Breakfast Club aimed to create a new form of professional interaction around literacy practices. Networks of reciprocal obligations and commitment develop trust and reputation in an organization (Fowler, 1999).

Professional trust is developed as actors realize they can share ideas with colleagues, and reputation accrues when actors develop opinions about the trustworthiness of other actors. Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest that a high level of trust among adults in schools is a critical resource for school leaders engaging in program reform. In their examination of Chicago Public School data from 1990 to 1996, they found that schools with high levels of trust at the beginning of reform efforts have a 1 in 2 chance of improving student achievement scores in math and reading, while schools with low levels of trust instead faced a 1 in 7 chance of making significant gains (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). While the cause and effect relationship of trust and change is difficult to trace, this research points toward how trust can be used as a key resource for school leaders in making organizational change.

Professional community, then, is a kind of social capital that emerges in certain systems of practice. To create professional community, school leaders either shape existing artifacts or design new artifacts to create the structures that foster social capital. Coleman (1988) describes how social capital develops through the closure of social or information structures in organizations. Closure happens when actors have opportunities to interact, create trust and develop reputations around selected practices. Closure involves completing feedback

loops for information and social interaction in organizations. Social capital is developed in organizations and interactions that present redundant opportunities for closure. Open systems, on the other hand, have few structured opportunities for closure. In open systems, actors diverge from the source of information or directive without structured opportunities for subsequent reconvergence. Trust around core practices does not develop because actors have little opportunity to enter into relations that create obligations or commitments. Many school instructional systems or practice are open in this fashion (Figure 3.2). In order to promote professional communities in schools, leaders must create legitimate structures that give rise to the occasions in which teachers can share and reflect upon their hard-won instructional expertise, question their own practices, and accept the suggestions of peers. Closing a system means establishing routines that close feedback loops in which actors can receive information about the degree to which obligations have been entered into and fulfilled.

INSERT FIGURE 3.2

Professional Community and the Closure of Open Systems at Adams

The artifacts used at Adams helped establish routines that give teachers opportunities to discuss practice, develop programs, and understand assessment information. These routines helped to create the kind of trust within the organization that

in turn fosters the possibility for professional community. To highlight features of how local leaders influenced the system of practice, I consider how Adams leaders and staff implemented the three artifacts discussed above to shape the professional interaction in the school to form routines that resulted in a strong professional community.

School leaders at Adams used artifacts to help teachers engage in organizational routines to improve teaching practice. As artifacts such as Breakfast Club and Five-Week Assessment began to give rise to routines that were beginning to reshape professional interaction at Adams, the emerging sense of professional community in turn led to the inspiration and design of new types of artifacts. In other words, professional community became a form of organizational capacity that served as a condition for emergent artifact design efforts. This next section will outline how each artifact created the social capital of professional community within the school, and it will discuss how the artifacts together helped to form the backbone of a reformed system of practice at Adams.

Each of the artifacts described above provided closure at a different level of the social system at Adams. Breakfast Club, for example, provided a forum for teachers to reflect with each other both on research and on each other's practice (Figure 3.3). As it grew to maturity, Breakfast Club added a

collaborative design dimension as a platform for the development and customization of the school language arts program. The communication network among teachers sparked by Breakfast Club created multiple opportunities for interaction around instruction, planning and assessment among teachers and school leaders. Much of the social capital developed during Breakfast Club stemmed from the conscious effort of school leaders to encourage teachers to take leadership roles in conducting and participating in meetings.

INSERT FIGURE 3.3

Still, the status of Breakfast Club within the school community gave leaders a forum within which to shape the school's instructional improvement agenda.

While administrators conducted informal and formal assessments of classroom teaching, the school system of practice included no legitimate structures (other than personal invitation or relationship) for teacher observation of other classrooms. Interaction in Breakfast Club consisted of self-reports of what teachers did in their classrooms. The Five-Week Assessment helped to close a loop in the instructional system by providing measures for how well teachers were implementing the innovations discussed during Breakfast Club (Figure 3.4). The Five-Week Assessment provided another chance for professional interaction as teachers collaboratively developed and analyzed

measures of classroom-level student achievement. The production and discussion of customized quantitative feedback helped to create professional obligations among staff. The collaborative development and implementation of the Five-Week Assessment provided needed closure among teachers about whether instructional innovations were working. The Five-Week Assessment also gave school leaders feedback on how instruction fared in classrooms. Incorporating Five-Week Assessment data into Breakfast Club discussions helped to preserve the tipping point (Gladwell, 2000) at which the professional community could sustain self-reflective assessment practices without imploding or becoming irrelevant.

INSERT FIGURE 3.4

Finally, the School Improvement Planning process augmented Adams' professional community by establishing routines for teachers and school leaders to articulate what they had done and to build this into the school-wide instructional plan. Since the school was accountable to the district and to the Local School Council for achieving the SIP goals, the collaborative planning process provided sanctioned space for staff interaction to determine the direction for the instructional program. Adams' leaders and staff created committees, meeting schedules and agendas, and stipends to establish the SIP activities as predictable organizational routines for staff interactions

(Figure 3.5). These meetings created obligations among community members to draft and implement viable plans; the successful completion and execution of the plan created trust among members that their work was not in vain.

INSERT FIGURE 3.5

Separately, the Adams artifacts described here provided structures for interaction that supported the creation of certain kinds of obligations around instructional issues. Analyzing the function of each artifact in isolation, however, misses the systemic nature of the way professional community has evolved at Adams. A school improvement plan, for example, creates neither an atmosphere of innovation nor the means for formative assessment and periodic assessment of practice. Similarly, a five-week assessment that attempts to measure teacher instructional performance progress alone can splinter professional communities because of the threat that comparing teachers to one another makes them less likely to collaborate on instructional matters. Together, however, these artifacts help to create a coherent system of practice that brings closure for several different opportunities for faculty interaction (Figure 3.6). The Adams professional community is the product of these aggregated organizational routines. Considered as a system of practice, the artifacts described here relied upon one another

as conditions for design and as resources for subsequent design and problem-solving efforts.

INSERT FIGURE 3.6

Several interesting issues arose in this analysis of leadership, artifacts, routines, and professional community. Did the Adams artifacts rely on or create professional community? It might be argued that there was a strong pre-existing sense of professional community at the school upon which these artifacts depended for their subsequent success in framing instructional practice. Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest that existing high levels of trust provide a key resource for leaders in facilitating school change. There seems to have been a strong sense of community and shared vision among a tight group of leaders at the school who perceived their responsibility to improve student learning in the school. Perhaps there was an already existing strong sense of professional community among these teachers that, when tapped by designed artifacts, blossomed into school-wide professional community. If professional community can be measured in terms of student learning, however, the effects of the pre-existent professional community were not supported by increases in student test scores. Indeed, in the early 1990s, Adams ranked among the poorest performing schools in the district. One administrator recalled that, before Principal Williams, there were strong

teachers in the school and a strong sense of social community among teachers and leaders, but that teachers who initiated discussions about instructional issues felt stigmatized and silenced.

While the model provided here cannot conclusively demonstrate causality between artifacts and professional community, it does suggest that the artifacts developed by Williams and her leadership team were key instruments to create trust and open discussions of instructional practice among teachers. The artifacts themselves, however, do not seem to be easily separable from the context in which they were created. Anecdotal evidence about how other schools that experimented with Breakfast Club-like artifacts felt little impact on the development of professional community suggests that the artifacts themselves are not the answer. Rather, it is how the artifacts interacted with each other by creating routines that afforded redundant opportunities for professional interaction that seemed to account for Adams' strong professional community. Further investigation is required into schools just embarking on the creation of professional community as an avowed outcome to explore the relation between artifact construction and the underlying forms of human and social capital that make professional community possible.

Does reliance upon the analysis of artifacts as the path to professional community give short shrift to the importance of interpersonal and spiritual leadership practices in schools? This analysis is certainly not intended as a comprehensive approach to understanding school leadership practice. Artifacts merely establish the conditions for practice in organizations -- the actual practices of teaching and learning involve levels of agency well beyond the determining structures of artifacts. The moral leadership and interpersonal skills required to build consensus, establish vision and give hope in schools transcend the structural components of the instructional context. Still, artifacts provide powerful tools and symbols to convey moral and interpersonal leadership, and the system of practice established the organizational routines for interaction that shape the school's culture. The ability of leaders to create artifacts that alter the existing system of practice in schools is a powerful capacity not only to shape the traditions of teaching and learning but also to provide inspiration through symbolic leadership. The analysis of the artifacts that compose the system of practice by itself may not tell the whole story of instructional leadership, but it does point to a valuable place to start making successful leadership practices accessible to interested others.

Discussion and Conclusion

This case of how a system of designed and implemented artifacts helped to create a vibrant professional community at Adams provides a vantage point for understanding the nature of professional community in the school. The case shows how Adams leaders exercised agency in designing and adapting organizational routines to shape professional community. Leadership practice is in part constituted by the ways leaders seek to redesign and manipulate artifacts to create routines. Taken together, these artifacts help to enable leadership practice around particular tasks, which create and sustain the occasion for directed and purposeful interactions among staff.

While many schools offer ample opportunities for interaction, not all of these interactions help create professional community. Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth (2000) suggest that when conversations around instruction occur in schools with high levels of social capital but no significant history of professional community, a sense of "pseudocommunity" is created in which actors may interact but do not engage in difficult discussions about instruction. In such schools, there are few structured opportunities for interaction about the quality or the process of instruction, and thus little social capital is developed around instruction. The Adams case demonstrates how leaders created artifacts to address what they

perceived to be the chronic instructional issues of the school, and then they leveraged the capacity developed by prior artifacts to create organizational routines that deepened and enriched the school's professional community. Mapping the artifacts that local leaders created and adapted to shape instruction provides an important way to understand the development of professional community. Identifying what the key artifacts are and understanding the ways they fit together in practice offers insight into the kinds of situational constructs local leaders build and rely upon in developing local professional communities in their schools.

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FIGURE 3.1

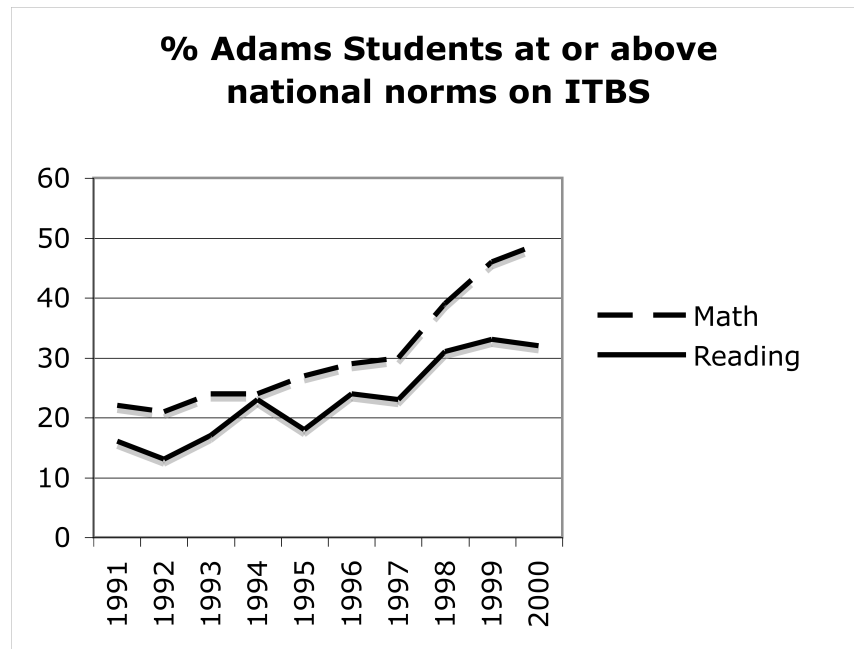


FIGURE 3.2 – Generic Open School Model

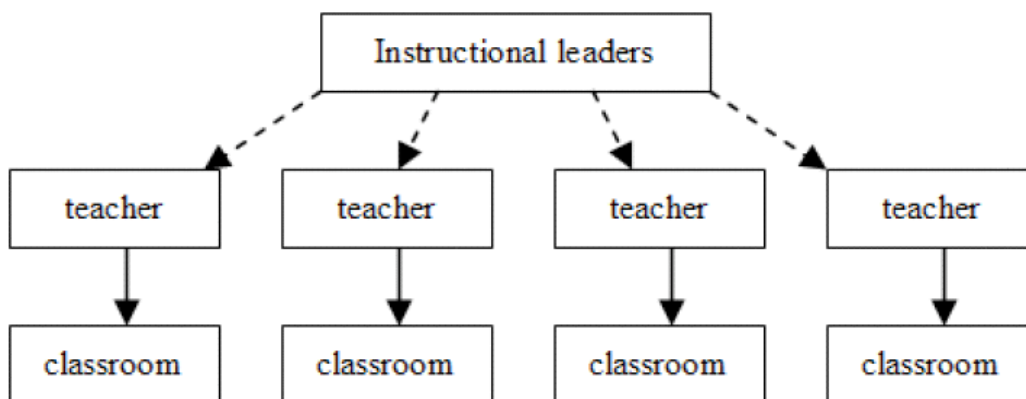


FIGURE 3.3 – How Breakfast Club closes the system of practice.

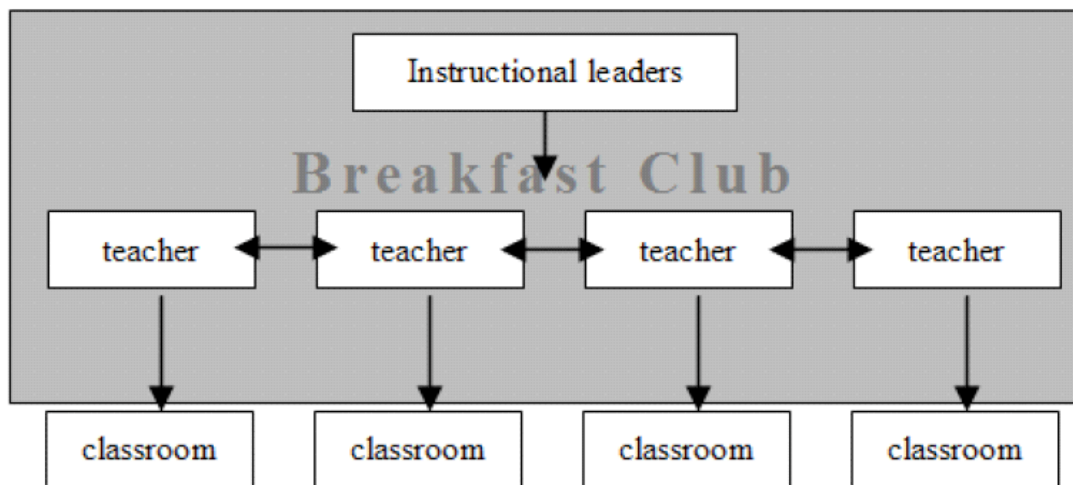


FIGURE 3.4 – How the Five-Week Assessment closes the system of practice.

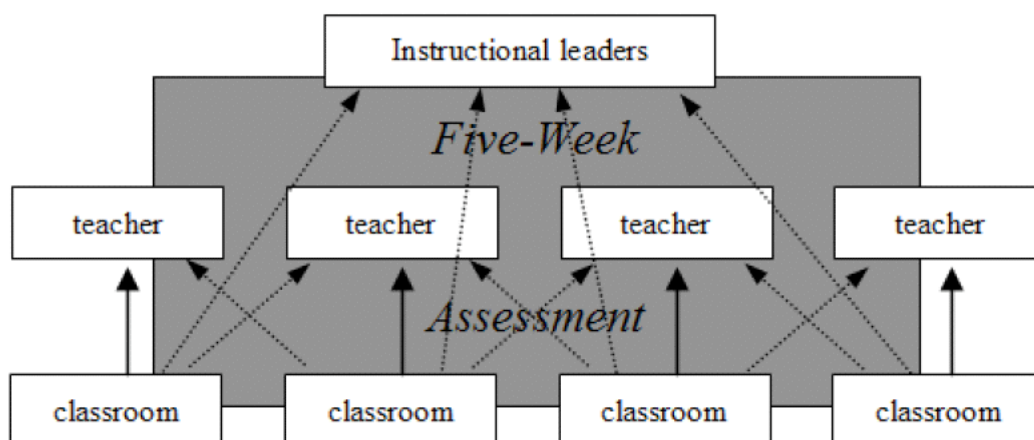


FIGURE 3.5 – How the School Improvement Plan closes the system of practice.

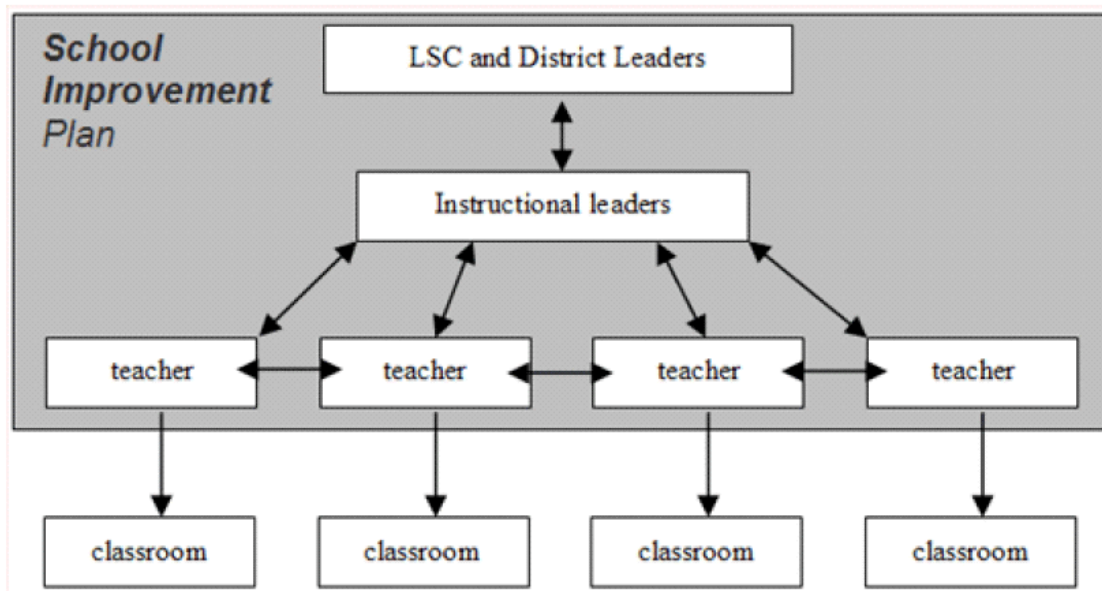
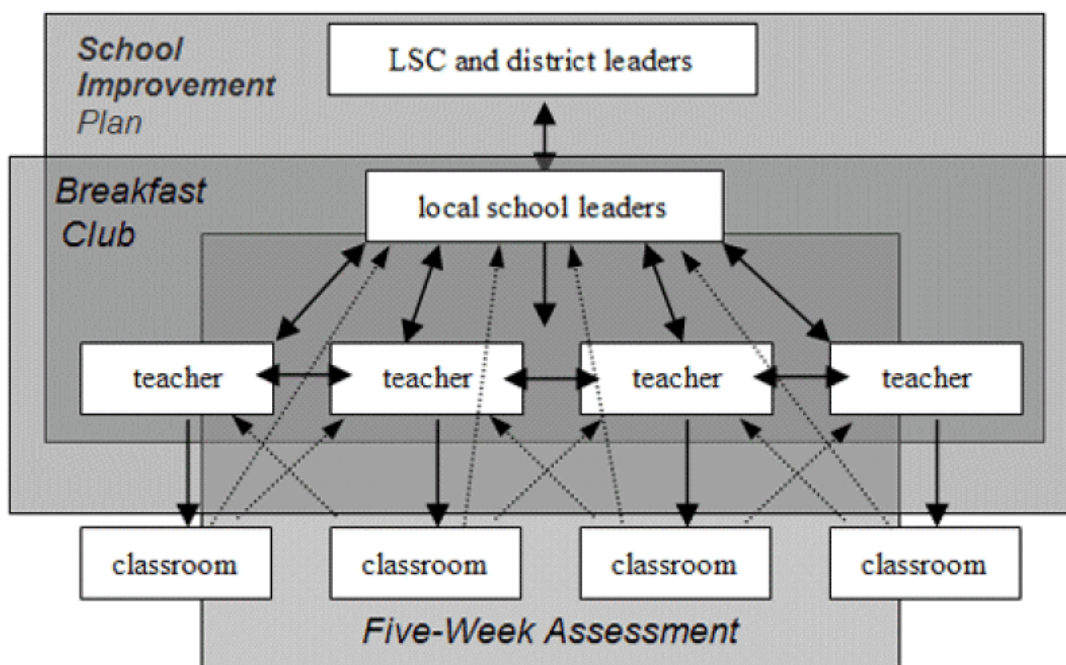


FIGURE 3.6 – How the artifacts taken together close the system of practice



Appendices

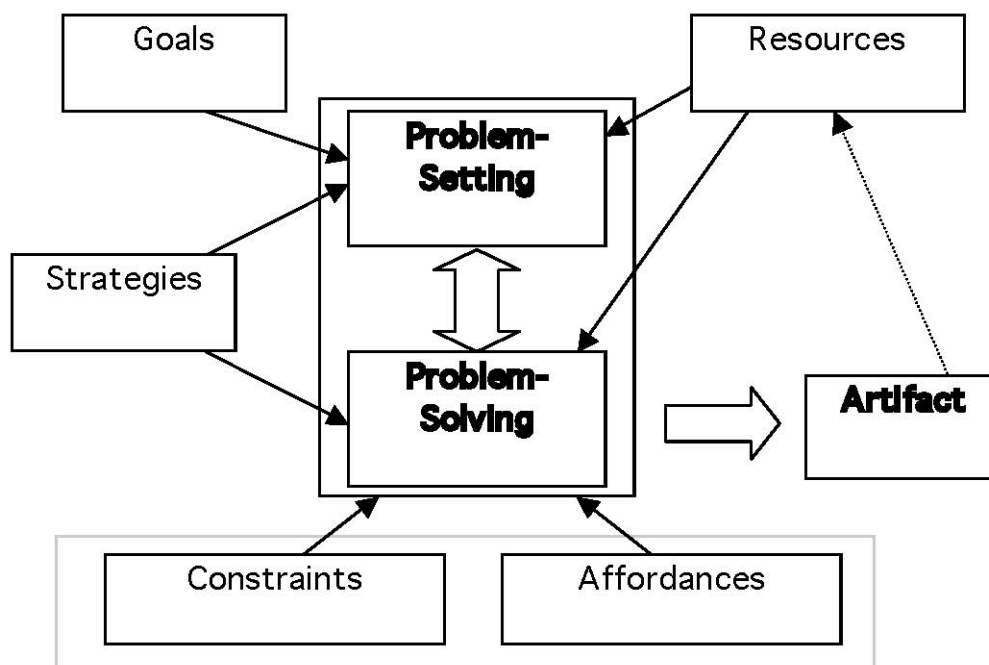
Appendix 3.1: Adams Artifacts

Artifact	Purpose	Description	Designers	Duration of Service
1. Breakfast Club	To provide in-house professional development for and by Adams faculty	Monthly meetings before school at which faculty members make and discuss presentations on research relevant to current instructional programs	Language Arts Coordinator, Principal, Teachers	1995-current
2. School Improvement Plan (SIP)	To create annual local school plan to align instructional and budgeting priorities for the upcoming school year	District-designed artifact that acts as a catalyst for local planning efforts as leaders and teachers develop instructional program to meet mandated student test performance targets	District, Principal, Administration, Teachers (approved by Local School Council)	1989-current
3. Five-Week Assessment	Locally-designed testing program to provide formative data to complement summative standardized testing data	Testing program based on reverse engineering summative tests to give teachers and leaders a sense of progress toward improved standardized test achievement	Language Arts Coordinator, Assistant Principal, Principal, Teachers	1995-current

4. Teacher Observation Process	Process to provide formative and summative evaluation of teachers according to union guidelines and district policies	District and locally designed forms used to make sense of principal-teacher observation session; Evaluations based on district and guidelines local instructional program priorities	District, Principal, Assistant Principal	1989-current
5. Real Men Read	Annual event designed to bring male African American role models into the school to read to the students	An annual breakfast and school wide program in which African-American men gather to eat and read to children throughout the school	Language Arts Coordinator, Assistant Principal, Principal	1998-current
6. Career Day	Annual event designed to offer Adams students an opportunity to survey career possibilities	A two-part annual assembly for middle school students to listen to African-American speakers, then meet with African-American professionals in a variety of career fields	Guidance counselor, principal, teachers	1999-current
7. Chicago Annenberg Challenge Curriculum Planning Process (CAC)	Year-long curriculum planning process to document collaborative design efforts in building multidisciplinary curricula	Collaborative curriculum design effort using LeTUS project-based science curricula as a seed for building middle-school cross-disciplinary curriculum	Science coordinator, Teachers, Northwestern and Roosevelt University Researchers	2000-2001

8. Science Coordinator Position	Position established to design science program for Adams' designation as Math-Science Academy	Promotion of 6th grade teacher Tim Zacharias to renovate science program and to design and teach middle school science curriculum in collaboration with classroom teachers	Science coordinator, Principal, Assistant Principal	1999-2000
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Appendix 3.2: Design Cycle Analysis Model (Halverson 2002)



ⁱ This chapter was adapted from an previously published article: Halverson, R. "Systems of practice: How leaders use artifacts to create professional community in schools." *Educational Policy and Analysis Archives*. v11, n37. Accessible on-line at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n37/>