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Representing *Phronesis*:
Supporting Instructional Leadership Practice in Schools

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ABSTRACT

Sharing the practical wisdom of successful instructional leadership should be a key component of learning to be a school leader. The Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* provides a powerful organizing idea for understanding how we can access, document and communicate the wisdom of school leadership practice. This dissertation explores how *phronesis* can serve as guide for communicating the successful practices of school leadership through the development of innovative multimedia learning technologies. As the basis for a research method, *phronesis* is best expressed through narratives of practice that relay how strategies, goals, constraints, affordances and resources unfold in the enactment of leadership work.

This dissertation argues that locally designed artifacts provide touchstones for researchers to access and communicate the wisdom of leadership practice. The research described here focuses on the case of Adams School, a Chicago Public elementary school whose sustained record of improved student achievement has been attributed, both within and outside the school, to outstanding leadership practice. Over the course of three years, a research team gathered observations, interviews and artifacts at Adams to document their practical wisdom. I present a Design Cycle Analysis Model to show how these data were organized into artifact-based narratives of practice. The data analysis section describes three narratives of practice organized around locally-designed artifacts:

- a professional development program (Breakfast Club);
- a formative assessment program (Five-Week Assessment);
- and a school-improvement planning process (SIP).

One of the narratives, Breakfast Club, was used as the basis for constructing a multimedia narrative of practice. The Breakfast Club case is then user-tested with Adams leaders and with interested practitioners from a variety of school settings to determine the fidelity and verisimilitude of the representation.

The conceptual framework and the methods discussed here contribute toward the development of principled research methods to make complex practices accessible to interested practitioners. Hopefully, this research will point toward fruitful ways for researchers to attend to the particulars of practice as their primary work, instead of as obstacles that must be overcome on the way to epistemic generalizations about practice. The *phronesis* is, after all, in the particulars.

DEDICATION

Practical wisdom, the central topic of this dissertation, has influenced my philosophical interests for as long as I remember. As I began to study philosophy as an undergraduate at Marquette University, I had the good fortune to learn from men such as James Robb, Walter Stohrer, and Michael Boylan, that philosophy was a matter of not only thinking well, but also of living well. In my graduate studies in philosophy, I turned from contemporary thinkers to reexamine the works of Plato and Aristotle. My guide and mentor in my graduate work, Reginald Allen, showed us the difference between the study of philosophy and of antiquity by bringing out what William James would call the “live options” implicit in the ethics and metaphysics of the Greeks. Reg’s low-key elicitation of the drama inherent in the Platonic dialogues, the live options not well-addressed by the modern and post-modern metaphysical presuppositions, led me to understand how new questions can be sparked by very old answers.

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REPRESENTING *PHRONESIS*: DOCUMENTING THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

0.0 Introduction¹

Successful work practices, in management, administration and teaching, are often inaccessible to researchers. We can recognize good practice when we see it, we can evaluate the outcomes of practices, and we can study the conditions of successful practices. But the practices themselves remain inaccessible to study. Practice is a complex phenomenon with at least three different aspects that come together in human activity. First, practice refers to the day-to-day activity in which people routinely engage. Second, practice retains its ordinary sense in the

¹ This work draws upon and extends the research of two funded projects: 1) the Living Curriculum project (PIs Louis Gomez, Daniel Edelson and James Spillane: NSF Grant # 9720423) an NSF funded effort to develop web-based multimedia systems to share the practice of project-based science teaching with the education community; and 2) the Distributed Leadership project (PI James Spillane: NSF Grant #9819252) an NSF and Spencer Foundation funded effort to examine how leadership practices are socially and situationally distributed in urban elementary schools around math and literacy instruction. Most of the field work data for this dissertation, including most of the interviews and observations, were collected under the auspices and supervision of the Distributed Leadership project. The collection of the video and construction of the multimedia narratives of practice described in Chapters 3 and 4 were conducted under the auspices of both the Living Curriculum and Distributed Leadership projects.

repetition of actions to increase proficiency. And third, the regularities of practice can emerge into chunked traditions of behavior that are passed down as legitimate cultural or organizational packages of behavior. Researchers have focused on each of these elements of practice: Taylor's (1911; 1998) early and Mintzberg's more recent (1989) time and motion studies attempt to catalog the regularities of the first form of practice; and the behavioral psychologists such as Skinner and Watson have concentrated on the second sense. Bourdieu (1990) led a sociological investigation of the third sense by addressing the autonomy of cultural practice as organizing rituals for society. However, neither of these approaches to practice address the comprehensive sense in which the three themes come together in human action. While most research is dedicated to the development, testing and replication of claims about practice that transcend a particular context, the study of how practice unfolds while rooted in specific context is often overlooked. In such cases, practice is lost.

This dissertation introduces a conceptual model and research methodology to access, document and communicate successful practice. The model proposed here takes a cognitive approach to practice. While practice is not solely a cognitive activity, it certainly does have a cognitive component. However, to get at the activity of practice, the theory of cognition proposed here must reach beyond what goes inside the individual mind. Aristotle's conception of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, offers a unique conceptual foundation for investigating the situated nature

of practical cognition. *Phronesis*, as we will see in Chapter 1, is the capacity for leaders to ascertain the appropriate ends for action and to successfully devise means to reach these ends. The key to understanding practical wisdom is to note the systemic interplay between context and practice, between intention and result, that characterizes many complex practices. This interplay of thinking, devising and action make *phronesis* an excellent candidate for developing coherent accounts of practice. Aristotle suggests that leadership forms a special case of *phronesis* as leaders act to secure the good for the community. This research focuses on a special case of leadership – instructional leadership in schools – to illustrate the wisdom of practice. Considering the practical wisdom of leadership suggests that *phronesis* can be located in a community, and points toward how current research programs in distributed cognition and activity theory can be used to show how practice constructs and is constructed by the situation. Uncovering *phronesis*, as constituted by the patterns of interaction with actors in their situations, is the initial goal of accessing, documenting and communicating practice

The research program described here assumes that complex work practices are situated in organizations. Organizational artifacts, such as policies, meetings and meeting agendas, and designed programs, mediate individual action in organizations. In other words, organizational artifacts give both direction and a sense of context for everyday activity. Practitioners often design artifacts as

solutions for emergent and long standing problems. In artifact design, practitioners often build their assumptions about how their practice into the structure of the artifact itself. Thus artifacts are “inscribed” with the ways in which practitioners understand their practice; their design and use indicates how they understand and negotiate their work worlds. This dissertation argues that these locally-designed artifacts open a window on practice, giving researchers access to the interplay between context and action that constitute practice.

Because practice unfolds over time, this research develops a framework and justification for using the construction and interpretation of narrative as an analytic tool. Narratives of practice, described in Chapter 2 and developed in Chapter 3, are the forms through which the unfolding stories of practice can be captured and analyzed. As a reality check to make sure that the narratives reflect the practice of the practitioners represented, Chapter 4 introduces the design and use of multimedia narratives of practice as a means to provide a reality check on the initial narratives, and outlines a method for how multimedia performance support technologies might support learning about exemplary instructional leadership practice in schools.

This study reviews three years of in-depth research at a single Chicago public elementary school with a well- documented record of student performance improvement that has been widely attributed to school leadership practice. Untangling how these leadership practices support instructional improvement, a

key outcome of this study, will provide a handle for how researchers can access, document and share the practical wisdom of school leadership with and for interested others. The research presented here contributes toward the goals of understanding how to untangle and to make sense of interconnected practices in context. The untangling of *phronesis* makes sense of complex work practices for aspiring practitioners to learn, and provides rich occasions for reflection on practice for the local practitioners themselves.

0.1 Why leadership practice?

The goal of this dissertation is to make some headway into understanding how we can access, document and communicate good instructional leadership practices in schools. Understanding how we can help practitioners access and engage in best practices has long been a goal of educational and leadership research. Because instructional leadership is so strongly connected with student performance, accessing and communicating leadership practice is an important issue for policymakers, schools of education and practitioners alike (Leithwood and Stager, 1989). Instructional leadership is defined here as establishing the conditions for the possibility of instructional innovation in schools. We know that changing instruction in schools depends largely on conditions that leaders establish in schools. Ensuring teachers and students access to innovative ideas in schools depends critically upon such leadership. In other words, school leadership matters for instructional innovation. But *how* does leadership matter in schools.

Researchers have mapped out much of the terrain of school leadership and have indicated elements crucial for leadership in successful schools, such as the provision and acquisition of resources, access and availability of professional development opportunities, maintenance of a school culture amenable to risking new practices, and the establishment of an instructional zone in the school safe from student disruption on the one hand and meddling by external communities on the other (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Blase and Blase, 1998, Bolman and Deal, 1984, Seashore-Louis and Kruse, 1995, Heller and Firestone, 1995).

As a result of this long tradition of research, we know quite a bit about *which* conditions promote leadership for innovative instruction in schools. At the same time, we know quite a bit less about *how* school leaders establish these conditions, *how* such activities are artfully integrated into rich, existing school cultures, and *how* they are communicated from those who know to those who want to know. For widespread instructional innovation to become the norm in schools, we must explore *how* effective school leaders understand and implement instructional leadership practices. Only by understanding this *how*, by documenting and communicating how colleagues have navigated similar situations, can we hope to help similarly minded leaders overcome the obstacles in their paths.

However, in addition to these broad concerns of policy and practice, I approach this study of leadership practice from a more personal angle. As an aspiring school leader, I wanted to find examples of practice that could not only

help me figure out what to do, but also to understand how to do it. As a high school teacher, I was approached by my principal with the opportunity to take on an administrative role as curriculum director. I had experienced some success as a classroom teacher in history, English and philosophy. In the classroom, I found that I could arrange the curriculum to guide students to whatever instructional goal I had in mind. Because I had access to student work, both in the form of artifacts and in observed interactions, I could assess student understanding to determine where they were having problems and to redirect the investigation in the direction of emergent interests. For example, if I wanted students to investigate the causes of the American Civil War, I could collect and distribute scholarly readings, develop discussion questions and conduct discussions, give quizzes, organize debates and grade student papers. Access to each of these artifacts helped give access to student practice.

The challenge of working with teachers as an administrator was more difficult than I had anticipated. I tried to apply the organizational techniques that I had developed as a classroom teacher, but it seemed as if each initiative I proposed seemed required more prerequisite prior steps in order to bring the project to fruition. It seemed like the more initiatives I suggested, the greater the resistance I incurred among the faculty. As a result, I began to try to implement fewer programs, and I was disappointed with my ability to effect change in the school in which I was a proud faculty member. As I struggled, I thought about what kinds

of course, advice or instruction would help to make a difference in my practice. My administrative colleagues were very supportive of these efforts, and while we were able to work together effectively, I was not able to successfully enact the programs I thought were needed at the school. My review of professional journals and scholarly research on leadership practice held another lesson – there seemed to be abundant research on *what* worked in classrooms and schools, but not nearly enough research on *how* successful program could be implemented in rich school contexts. The articles that did offer strategies for implementation seemed recipe-like, with little appreciation for the particulars of context. I also attended several University courses on leadership and administration. The courses tended to be heavily anecdotal, with experienced instructors that could tell stories about how they worked, but often absent any principled accounts of why their approach worked over other approaches. In sum, as I attempted to improve my professional practice, I found that the expensive and often frustrating methods of mentoring and trial and error seemed to offer the greatest effect in learning.

Several characteristics of my experience as an instructional leader now jump out at me. First, I realized that in my efforts to work with my colleagues, I had neglected to give proper credit to the importance of establishing a learning community in my efforts as an instructional leader. My classroom experience should have told me of the importance of establishing a climate where students can risk new ideas and critiques without fear of retribution. In my efforts to engage in

instructional leadership along the lines suggested by my classroom teaching, I had simply assumed that an analogous community existed among my colleagues on the faculty. However, realizing that I had not worked to develop such a community was one thing, and knowing what to do about it was quite another. I needed examples of how other school leaders worked to develop learning communities in their schools, focused on stories of how they faced (and overcame) obstacles and challenges.

Second, I had assumed that my ideas and my actions alone could act as the catalyst for systemic change. As a teacher, I was responsible for curriculum planning, and my teaching work was largely a matter of implementing (and redesigning on the fly) the plan I had developed. I had assumed that instructional leadership was also a matter of implementing a preconceived plan, instead of a matter of building up a sense of collective responsibility for both framing and solving instructional problems. Again I had underestimated the time and effort required to cultivate the conditions of successful learning with my colleagues, and I began to appreciate how successful leadership was a matter of guidance only in it was first a matter of establishing the conditions for successful change. Further, I came to realize that, unlike my traditional approach to teaching, school leadership seemed to be distributed across the people and the resources in the school (c.f. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001). My idea of implementing an instructional initiative would require interaction with my administrative team to

determine whether this was indeed the course we needed to pursue. It would require coordinated efforts to co-design the initiative with interested teachers who would in turn try out the ideas in their classrooms, and would help lead subsequent discussions about the initiatives. While I was able to determine, through discussion and through research, what some of these conditions would be, my linear, single agent model of change needed to give way to a more iterative, participatory model in which the school community together would come to realize the importance of the question before settling on the appropriate answers. However, while I began to develop a sense of which conditions were necessary to establish for instructional leadership, I was still at a loss about how these conditions might emerge in my school.

Third, in my teaching practice I had access to the artifacts that created the learning practices in my classrooms. One of my goals as a teacher was to help students disclose their existing practices through a consideration of the artifacts they had prepared. Student and curricular artifacts both organized the work in the classroom and helped to make class work visible for me and for other students. The determining character of these artifacts began to stand out as I reflected upon my experience as a leader. In the classroom, the curricular artifacts I designed and the artifacts developed by students *constituted* the work of the class. Examining these artifacts would allow an observer to understand the teaching and learning practices of the class. When I tried to follow this example as a leader, however,

the artifacts to which I had access described tasks that seemed to lie completely outside the practices of teaching and learning in teacher's classrooms. For example, the initiative to begin a research discussion group in the English department seemed to appear to my colleagues as altogether irrelevant to their classroom practice. My efforts to establish an analogical relation between teachers and teachers that existed between teachers and students seemed to founder on the oft-noted disconnect between instructional and administrative practices in schools (Weick, 1976; Rowan, 1988). While artifacts, such as teacher evaluation forms, are commonly recognized as legitimate means to regulate teaching and learning practices, artifacts to help frame teaching and learning practices among teachers and administrators did not seem to have equal legitimacy. Again, it seemed as though the work of instructional leadership was first to establish the conditions that would legitimate discussions about teaching and learning among the adults in the school. However, artifacts such as school-wide discussion programs or planning processes could play a vital role in helping to establish the conditions for such discussions in the school. These artifacts would be important tools for instructional leaders to establish a learning community among teachers and leaders that could subsequently address emergent problems in the community by drawing upon the social capital built among community members (c.f. Spillane, Hallett et al., 2000). Thus the kinds of artifacts used to construct classroom teaching seemed to depend upon prior artifacts that would establish the conditions for the

possibility of successful instruction. While these “foundational” artifacts, such as curricula, textbooks and daily instructional schedules, seemed built into the context of ordinary classroom practice, it seemed that a main task of instructional leadership was to build the analogue of these classroom foundational artifacts for an adult learning community in the school. And again, realizing *that* this was a key task for instructional leadership did not help to figure out what to *do* first. Cases of the how still needed to supplement examples of the what.

My early forays into administration, based on my experiences as a classroom teacher, did not seem to translate directly to my ability to engage in effective instructional leadership. A central goal of instructional leadership was to create the learning context that I had taken for granted in the classroom. I later realized that my knowledge of how to create a successful learning environment was largely tacit and expressed through the my assumptions of instructional artifact design and use. The first-order task of engaging in collaborative instructional evaluation and design was dependent on the second-order-task of establishing a learning community that would see instructional issues as open questions in need of collaborative solution. This struck me as a gradual and amorphous process that unfolded over time rather than the concrete result of specific actions. The inaccessibility of where this process begins and where it leads was frustrating to an interested, but inexperienced, administrator. Still, because there are schools that seem to have established learning communities

among the professionals in the school, it must be possible to access the artifacts and the patterns of use that lead to establishment of these professional communities.

0.2 Content outline

The central goal of the research presented in this dissertation is to understand and communicate what successful practitioners know by accessing and documenting examples of successful practice. The practice in question here is instructional leadership in schools. The first stage of the research consisted in identifying successful instructional leaders. Here I decided to follow a research path of depth rather than breadth by selecting to study a particular school with a well-established record of leadership success. Together with several colleagues, I spent over three years conducting interviews, gathering field notes, and establishing a video record of leadership practice at Adams School, a K-8 public school in Chicago. However, as we collected the data, I wondered about how we were going to make sense of the practical wisdom involved. In the fall of 1999, I developed the idea of a Design Cycle Analysis Model (DCAM) that used locally designed artifacts as a window into the consideration of the *phronesis* of leadership. Once identified, the artifacts serve as a window into leadership practice by acting as an occasion to investigate the network of problem-setting and problem-solving practices of school leadership.

The consequent examples of practice, or, as I term them below, *narratives of practice*, (Ch. 2-4) are developed around the artifacts that school leaders identified as important in building their instructional program. The end result of the research is a model for developing multimedia narratives of practice that can serve as occasions for learning and reflective practice for interested school leaders. Along the way, however, I have developed several conceptual tools that help to organize and make sense of the process of developing narratives of practice. This dissertation elaborates the nature of these tools and describes an initial foray into their application. The next several sections offer a brief outline for the chapters that follow

0.2.1 Chapter 1: Understanding *Phronesis*

There have been many efforts to capture what school leaders and teachers know about instructional leadership through survey methods (e.g. Leithwood and Steinbach, 1996; Blase and Blase 1995). While these studies have yielded many insights about the characteristics of school leadership practice across schools, they often overlook the very depth of context key to understand *how* leaders develop and implement their ideas. Generalizations across schools about leadership practice, by definition, overlook precisely the idiosyncratic particulars of a given situation that practitioners must negotiate in order to try out new practices. To understand what school leaders know in a form accessible to other leaders, I have

developed a theory of situated expertise grounded in Aristotle's conception of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom.

Chapter 1 outlines an theory of situated expertise grounded in Aristotle's initial insights about the nature of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is the root concept in a very long-standing intellectual current that aims to articulate the wisdom that guides everyday practice. The chapter opens (Section 1.1) with a consideration of the context in which Aristotle worked to establish *phronesis* as a kind of knowledge that bridged the contemporary, and contrary, Greek paradigms of wisdom as *episteme*, the Platonic disinterested contemplation of the eternal forms or, versus *metis*, the Homeric cunning personified by Odysseus. Aristotle's account of *phronesis* (1.1.2) names a human capacity that reconciles *episteme* and *metis* by showing how principled knowledge, embodied in character through the cultivation of virtuous habit, can guide everyday action. Section 1.1.3 shows how *phronesis* is exercised through the application of *techne*, or productive arts, to the emergent situations of daily life. Aristotle's discussion of *techne*, or productive art, brings out the executive functions of *phronesis* as the kind of wisdom that determines when it is appropriate to apply an art, when to change arts, and how to evaluate artifacts. An important aspect of *phronesis* is the ability to select and to apply the appropriate art to achieve the appropriate end, and the ability to judge which ends and means are appropriate. Since the matching of means to particular ends marks the exercise of practical wisdom, *phronesis* cannot be well understood

apart from the particular context in which it is exercised. Aristotle contends that in *phronesis*, particulars matter. Absent the relevant context, *phronesis* evaporates into aphorism.

What are the implications for a theory based on *phronesis* given this reliance upon particulars? In discussing the kinds of knowledge that correspond to the capacities of wisdom, Aristotle draws a sharp contrast between *phronesis* and theoretical knowledge. Whereas the virtue of theoretical knowledge is the ability to transcend particular time and place, *phronesis* is necessarily connected to particulars. This contrast makes it clear that a theoretical cataloging of *phronesis* would not be valuable considering the infinite number of particulars emergent in novel situations. Beginning in medieval canon law, the practice of casuistry was developed to show this selective application of principles to novel cases both to establish precedent and to form the basis for an instructional system in legal study. This use of relevant case as example and precedent continues to form the basis of our legal system. Thus, from the beginning, the study of practical wisdom has aimed less at cataloging instances than at establishing instructional examples as models and as guides for subsequent practice. Section 1.2 argues that the documentation of *phronesis* through case construction carries this implicit pedagogical slant – that the main reason for building cases of the application of practical wisdom is to teach interested practitioners about best practices. Cases of *phronesis* can refine the apprenticeship model where many aspiring leaders learn

their craft (1.2.2) by providing rich, appropriate examples that can serve as occasions for reflective practice (1.2.3).

The discussion continues (Section 1.3) with a consideration of the relation between *phronesis* and leadership. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes two different forms of *phronesis* – personal *phronesis* used to make decisions regarding the good of the self, and political *phronesis* used to make decisions for the good of the community (1.3). Although there is an interesting tradition that considers the relation between personal and political *phronesis*,² for the remainder of the dissertation I will use the term *phronesis* and the phrase practical wisdom to refer to Aristotle's category of political *phronesis*. Section 1.3.1 argues that the emphasis on the contingencies of particular situations allows *phronesis* to be considered as a form of distributed cognition. The distributed leadership framework (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001) helps us to think about the exercise of *phronesis* through a consideration of the how the tasks of leadership are socially and situationally distributed (1.3.1.3). Instructional leadership in schools indicates a special form of *phronesis*, as school leaders seek to improve the conditions of teaching and learning for teachers and students. Section 1.3.2 discusses the how the tension between managerial and transformational leadership can be resolved by taking a task-based, distributed approach to the *phronesis* of

leadership. Thus the *phronesis* of school leadership concerns the tasks and task-networks leaders establish to create the conditions for instructional improvement in schools.

Which features of leadership tasks best reveal the *phronesis* of school leadership? Section 1.4 shows how the research on expertise indicates that the exercise of *phronesis* consists largely in the activities of problem-setting and problem-solving. The key aspect of *phronesis*, and the most difficult to study, is the stage of apperception, or seeing-as, that forms each problem-setting action (1.4.2). Patterns of apperception, of the ways that practitioners see problems, are shaped by habit and experience. The development of the *phronesis* of leadership is the story of how habits of problem-setting and –solving are learned and emerge over time. Prior research on the expertise of school leadership (1.4.3) reveals that expert school leaders constrain problems and select relevant features of situations more adeptly than novices, but does not help to determine how these practices unfold in action. Understanding the *phronesis* of leadership involves tracing tasks backwards to disclose the relevant problem-setting-and –solving practices. Following this course of tracing the problem-setting and

² This distinction is anticipated by the consideration of whether virtue can be learned, grounded in several of the Platonic dialogues.

–solving practices of multiple tasks over time will give us some insight into the *phronesis* of school leadership.

The account of *phronesis* offered here attempts to make an old idea carry a modern, practical load. Practical tasks, such as the education of school leaders, require practical theories of knowledge for guidance. My exploration through topics related to practical wisdom has perhaps been more enlightening for me than it will be for my reader. As I began this project, I was uncertain of the relation between *phronesis* and school leadership. I felt that current research on school leadership was missing a vital, pedagogical component that could help turn best practice into live options for aspiring school leaders. I saw this pedagogical component in a *phronetic* approach to leadership, and I have attempted in Chapter 1 to operationalize Aristotle's idea into a viable conceptual framework for thinking about leadership. For readers more interested in the application rather than the development of this idea, this introduction may suffice to set up the application and testing of these ideas in Chapters 2-4.

0.2.2 Chapter 2: Accessing *Phronesis*

The relevant features of *phronesis* are the patterns of problem-setting and solving by school leaders over time. Chapter 2 outlines a methodology grounded in qualitative research methods, collaborative design, and distributed cognition designed to open a window on the practical wisdom of school leadership. Design

research builds on more traditional qualitative research by creating a context in which researchers and practitioners alike can put their assumptions on the table in the collaborative building of an artifact. The problem-setting and –solving aspects of design research seem especially well-suited to a consideration of *phronesis*. However, this form of researcher access to meaningful practice is rare – teachers, school leaders and researchers are often differently motivated to participate in design projects, and consequently their efforts may not reflect their authentic assumptions about the project at hand. Nevertheless, design research points toward three main contexts in which researchers can discuss problem-setting- and solving patterns with practitioners (section 2.1):

- *Researcher-practitioner cooperative design efforts*. This form of collaborative design involves both researchers and practitioners in helping to frame and solve problems. While excellent opportunities for research, researcher-practitioner cooperative design efforts often require significant advance planning, and may not surface the *ad hoc* nature of daily problem-setting and solving practices.
- *Observed practitioner-practitioner collaborative design efforts*. School leaders often engage in collaborative design efforts to solve both acute and chronic problems as they emerge in daily practice. Since they do not participate in the design process, researchers are not forced to make their assumptions about the nature and outcomes of the work public during the

process. Observation of collaborative design processes thus gives researchers access to a greater range of design practices important to the school community, but do not give a strong test of the researchers' own assumptions about the practice.

- *Recounted collaborative design efforts.* Programs that local leaders consider significant to the current instructional program as opportunities provides a powerful window to investigate previous problem-setting and -solving practices. Recounted collaborative design efforts help researchers focus in on the practices directly relevant to current instructional priorities, but the distance from the original problem-setting and -solving phases raises questions about the reliability of reconstructed accounts.

Once accessed, the resultant data must be organized in ways that make sense both to practitioners and researchers. Bruner's (1990) distinction between paradigmatic and narrative approaches to research, which nicely parallels Aristotle's distinction between *episteme* and *phronesis*, provides the theoretical foundation for the construction of phronetic cases of practice. While paradigmatic accounts try to get at what is true across situations, Bruner claims that narrative accounts set down how events, actors and settings fit together within situations. Paradigmatic and narrative accounts also have different criteria of evaluation.

Whereas paradigmatic claims rely on hypothesis verification by empirical proof, narratives rely upon a principle of *verisimilitude* for their truth.

The aim of conducting research through the analysis and reconstruction of narratives is to produce *narratives of practice* that will serve as occasions for reflective practice and as learning opportunities for interested practitioners. Polkinghorne's (1995) contrast between narrative analysis and the analysis of narrative points toward how the data can be analyzed and organized into meaningful narratives of practice. A key question becomes the selection of data are appropriate for analysis and narrative reconstruction. Section 2.3 proposes the Design Cycle Analysis Model (DCAM) as a analytic framework to organize data into narratives of practice. DCAM uses collaboratively designed artifacts that school leaders signal as central to their instructional practice as a means to collect data about the problem-setting and –solving practices of the school community. The DCAM suggests that since problem-setting and –solving activities often result in artifacts, we should be able to read the process backwards and use artifacts to disclose problem-setting and –solving practices. Asking practitioners which artifacts are important in their practice helps us follow the patterns of *phronesis* leaders regard as key. While this may not guarantee that we capture practical wisdom in the process, it may help our chance of discerning the prevailing problem-setting and –solving patterns in the school. Using several kinds of

artifacts as occasions for data collection and for constructing narratives of practice helps build a sense of triangulation in both the data analysis and reconstruction.

Chapter 2 continues with a description of how multimedia narratives of practice can be used to provide a test of verisimilitude for narratives of practice. Section 2.4 describes how prior work on the Living Curriculum project provides a design framework to guide both the construction and the user testing of multimedia narratives of practice. The chapter concludes (Section 2.5) with a justification for the selection of Adams school as an appropriate site for investigating *phronesis*.

0.2.3 Chapter 3: Representing *Phronesis*

Chapter 3 provides three examples of narratives of practice developed according to the DCAM framework. The chapter opens with a catalog of relevant artifacts uncovered through the data collection process at Adams. Three of the artifacts frequently cited as significant to instructional leadership at Adams were selected as suitable candidates for development into narratives of practice. These artifacts, as described below in sections 3.3-3.5, include:

- *Breakfast Club*. Breakfast Club was designed in 1995 as an opportunity for teachers to discuss research relevant to current instructional initiatives and practices in the school. Each month a teacher leads a discussion before the school day begins about a piece of research, usually about reading or

writing instruction, with group of K-3 teachers and administrators over a hot breakfast.

- *Five-Week Assessment.* The advent of high-stakes testing in Chicago holds schools accountable for student performance in language arts and math. However, the summative data resulting from the exams had not proven very helpful for the Adams community to guide instructional changes. Beginning in 1996, several administrators and teachers reverse-engineered the mandated district tests to discern the critical skills for students to develop during the course of the year. They then collaboratively developed a Five-Week Assessment program that would provide formative information for how well students were achieving their goals. The assessment program has been fine-tuned over the years in light of changes in the standardized testing needs, and is now an institutionalized part of the school culture.
- *School-Improvement Planning Process.* The school district requires the development of an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP)³ to guide funding initiatives within the school around district-mandated instructional

³ The SIP implemented in Chicago is a generic planning process that specifies the goals for school improvement while leaving the process itself relatively unspecified. The Chicago SIP should not be confused with the Keefe and Howard (1997) SIP, which helps organizations develop based on a plan of shared norms and values, personal mastery, critical reflection and collaboration.

goals in language-arts and math achievement as well as community involvement in instruction. The Adams community takes the SIP as an opportunity for collaborative design and refinement of the instructional program, with sub-committees meeting throughout the year and whole-faculty meetings in the spring to contribute to and refine the final plan.

The narratives of practice resulting from DCAM analysis showed not only the problem-setting and -solving practices that led to the artifact, but also revealed the interconnected network of previously designed artifacts and institutional resources relied upon by school leaders in their work. Pulling on the threads of artifact construction leads to a deeper understanding of how this leadership resources system functions at Adams. While not necessarily generalizable to other school situations, an articulation of the features of this systemic interaction would be evocative for aspiring leaders interested in how programs and initiatives “fit together” in successful schools. Using the sense made by these narratives of practice points toward where we can find the practical wisdom of school leadership in the sense-making and resource-allocation activities of school leaders.

0.2.4 Chapter 4: Sharing *Phronesis*

Chapter 4 discusses the construction and user-testing of a prototype multimedia narrative of practice based on the Breakfast Club case.⁴ Building artifact-based narratives of practice, as described in Chapter 3, can help to disclose patterns of how leaders set and solve problems in the school. However, without a check on narrative verisimilitude, designers have little idea of whether they got the story right. Chapter 4 opens with a discussion of how user-testing of multimedia narratives can help to provide a measure of verisimilitude for narratives of practice. Section 4.2 describes the design and research program of the Living Curriculum project's effort to build a performance support system for teaching technology rich project-based science curricula. Greg Shrader's research (2000) pioneered the development of the teacher version of the Living Curriculum. Shrader used the structure of the project-based science curriculum as an template to organize and present multimedia examples of teacher practice. The Living Curriculum was intended to address school leaders, parents, and students as well as teachers. The Living Curriculum for School Leaders (LSCL) presented in Chapter 4 relies heavily on the Shrader's design prototype with several key exceptions. First, as mentioned earlier in this introduction, the lack of a clear

⁴ I am deeply grateful to Baylen Linnekin for designing and implementing the prototype LCSL system and for co-conducting and co-analyzing the subsequent user-testing study.

analogue to curriculum for organizing the practice of school leaders problematizes the mapping made by Shrader. One of the intended outcomes of the LCSL design is to use a preliminary stab at a task model for organizing the work of school leaders to begin to understand what the analogue of curriculum for school leaders might be. Second, the performance support system for project-based science is different for teachers than it is for administrators. Whereas curriculum is what teachers do, curriculum is what leaders support -- and the activity of supporting is different from doing. Determining and documenting the conditions for the possibility of engaging, project-based instruction is different from teaching science, and requires a different organizational framework.

Section 4.3 summarizes a user-testing process with 11 school leaders both within and outside the Adams school community. Each leader spent about an hour going through the system and commenting on aspects of interest. While Adams leaders commented the several mistakes they saw in the system, many of their comments were directed toward observations for how Breakfast Club came about and how it subsequently generated related professional development efforts in the school. Leaders external to the Adams community commented most frequently on the feasibility of the program, and often reminisced about programs similar to Breakfast Club in their own schools. The chapter concludes with several general observations (and questions still to be resolved) about the problem-setting and

problem-solving practices that emerged in the analysis, reconstruction and sharing of the narratives of practice.

0.5 Conclusion

The study contributes toward the goals of the Distributed Leadership project by developing more coherent and focused means to understand improvement planning efforts in schools, and toward the aims of the Living Curriculum project through developing means to represent the complex practice of supporting instructional leadership through multimedia web-based systems. In the quest for a useful means to access, document and share the *phronesis* of school leadership, this research project spans a considerable range of disciplines and interests to establish a viable methodology and rationale. Like all such efforts, the present study risks skating across the surface of too many ideas in pursuit of an overarching goal. I have tried to achieve a balance between depth and breadth in the argument each step of the way, providing the background information appropriate to make sense of each phase of the argument. As I stated in the opening section, I have keenly felt, in my own career as an instructional leader, the absence of the kinds of expertise I seek to document here. The pursuit of viable means to access and use the practical wisdom of successful school leaders has, for me, a personal as well as a scholarly motivation. I hope that my passion to find workable answers to the challenge of helping practitioners learn complex

questions has not gotten in the way of the argument, and that it lends more light than heat to the search for ways to understand practice.