

**Title:** **Enhancing teaching and learning through distributed leadership**

**Presenter:** **Sarah Edwards**  
University College Birmingham

**Abstract:**

**Session Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

Identify key concepts that define Distributed Leadership.  
Consider how the leadership capacity of academic staff might be identified  
Discuss how this leadership capacity might be used to enhance teaching and learning in the Higher Education context

**Session Outline**

Firstly, I will introduce myself and describe the background to my doctoral study, which investigates the theoretical background and frameworks for the concept of “Distributed Leadership”. There are two major conceptual models of distributed leadership, from Spillane et al. (2001) and Gronn (2002). Spillane’s study presented a limited amount of data based on three research-based vignettes, whilst Gronn re-analysed a number of earlier studies to test the utility of his theorisation of the term.

There are three main elements which describe the term “distributed leadership “. Firstly, it can be seen as leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals. This contrasts with leadership as a phenomenon which arises from the individual. Gronn’s work is helpful in explicating and elaborating this, as he explores the ways in which people can work together in such a way that they pool their expertise and initiative . Secondly, distributed leadership suggests openness of the boundaries of leadership. In an institution, this means that it is predisposed to widen the conventional roles and responsibilities of leaders, thus raising the question of which individuals and groups might be involved in the processes of leadership. Lastly, distributed leadership entails the view that varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few, making it more possible to develop a concertive dynamic which represents more than the sum of the individual contributors. Initiatives may be inaugurated by those with relevant skills in a particular context, but others will then adopt, adapt and improve them within a mutually trusting and supportive culture (Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003).

We will also discuss the current emphasis on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in HE (and the implication for our own practice), and review what evidence there is for Distributed Leadership in our own institutions.

Finally, we will discuss how potential leadership capacity in staff might be developed.

### **Session Activities and Approximate Timings**

Powerpoint presentation for introduction	(10 minutes)
Group discussions and reflection on personal experiences	(15 minutes)
Group feedback	(15 minutes)
Summary and close	(5 minutes)

### **References**

Bennett, N; Wise, C; Woods, P & Harvey, J. (2003). Distributed Leadership: A Review of Literature. National College for School Leadership.

Bolden, R. Gosling, J., & Petrov, G. (2008) Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education Final Report. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter.

Gronn, P. (2000) Distributed properties: a new architecture for leadership, Educational Management and Administration, 28(3), 317-38.

Harris, A. (2003) Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: heresy, fantasy or possibility?, School Leadership and Management, 23 (3), 313-24.

Spillane, J.P., Halverson, R. & Diamond, J.B (2004) Towards a theory of leadership practice: a distributed perspective, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36(1), 3-34