

Transforming Teaching and Learning Through Social Movement in Mexican Public Middle Schools

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This article by Santiago Rincón-Gallardo and Richard F. Elmore explores the question of how and under what conditions a countercultural educational practice can be brought to scale as a reform initiative. Highlighting the evolution of the Learning Community Project (LCP) in Mexico, the authors present a practice that runs counter to the traditional culture and power relations of schooling. The authors examine how the LCP succeeded in expanding to hundreds of schools and was recently adopted as part of a national strategy to transform teaching and learning in nine thousand schools across Mexico. The authors connect knowledge on bringing instructional improvement to scale with social movement theory to advance the idea of educational change as a social movement. Rincón-Gallardo and Elmore explore the implications of the work of the LCP for theory, practice, and policy—calling for an alternative approach that challenges the traditional top-down view of educational practice and policy, and instead conceptualizes the teacher-student and policy-practice pairs as dialectical and horizontal relationships of mutual influence.

The Professor Becomes a Student

On a sunny morning in November 2010, Harvard professor Richard Elmore found himself sitting at a simple table on the dusty front steps of a two-room rural school being taught geometry by Maricruz, a thirteen-year-old student from the small community of Santa Rosa, one hundred kilometers or so from the nearest city, Zacatecas, in central Mexico. Elmore was visiting the country to learn about the Program for the Improvement of Educational Achievement (PEMLE, by its initials in Spanish), a nationwide strategy recently launched by Mexico's Ministry of Education to promote the transformation of instructional

practice in thousands of public schools across the country. He was wandering around to observe the work of students and teachers in Santa Rosa when Maricruz approached him and offered to be his tutor in solving a geometry problem. “An easy one,” he remembers Maricruz telling him, because she did not know how much he remembered of the geometry he had learned in school. She presented him with a circle that had four smaller circles inscribed in it and asked him how he would compute the area inside the larger circle that was not included in the four smaller circles, given the radii of the circles. She required him to both “explain the steps” in solving the problem and explain his work at each step. As Richard offered his path through the problem, Maricruz asked him to defend his decisions and discuss alternatives. Eventually, after much discussion, he solved the problem and proudly offered his answer. Maricruz gave him a cautious nod and then said, “But we are not quite finished.” She pointed to the pi symbol in the formula he had been using to calculate area of the circles and asked Richard, “Can you explain what that symbol means and where it comes from?” In a report he wrote shortly after his visit to Mexico, he recalls:

A long pause ensued, while I scrambled through my geometry. I said weakly, “It stands for a number . . . something like 3.14.” “No,” she said with a more insistent tone, “I want you to tell me where it *comes* from.” For the next ten minutes or so, she led me through a detailed discussion of the derivation of pi, including a proof of why it has a constant value for all circles. Maricruz had managed, with the wit and wile of an experienced teacher, to find a place in my learning where recall had replaced understanding (if the understanding was ever there in the first place). (Elmore, 2011, p. 2)

He continues:

As a learner, with Maricruz as my tutor, I found myself in an unusual situation. It was clear that I was engaged with someone who had mastered a practice. She was not bashful about stopping me when I moved from one step of the problem to another to ask for a clarification of why I made the decision I had made. Her manner was polite, respectful, but not overly impressed by my knowledge of geometry and ever-vigilant for weak logic and ambiguous terminology. Her questions were clear and highly-focused. She did not share my enthusiasm for having gotten the “right” answer. She was more interested in what I didn’t know, or couldn’t readily recover from my prior knowledge. More importantly, she didn’t “teach” me a method for solving the problem, she coached me through a process of thinking about the problem, and diagnosed a critical weakness in my background knowledge. I felt that I was in the hands of an expert. (p. 3)

While Richard and Maricruz were working on the problem, students and teachers from Santa Rosa and two other neighboring communities who were visiting the school that day were working in pairs and small groups, sometimes the adults playing the role of teachers, sometimes students working as

tutors of other students, and sometimes students playing—as in the case of Maricruz with Richard—the role of tutors to adults. The practice and tutorial networks described in this vignette are typical of schools involved in PEMLE. Students like Maricruz can now be counted in the thousands. And what Richard Elmore experienced as a student of a young girl has been experienced by hundreds of teachers, school supervisors, educational authorities, researchers, and organized members of the civil society who have visited schools involved in PEMLE, a program that has its origins in a grassroots initiative called the Learning Community Project (LCP).

LCP and PEMLE present a unique opportunity to explore how and under what conditions a countercultural practice—that is, a practice that runs counter to the traditional instructional culture and power relations of schooling—can be expanded to a large number of schools and across an educational system. This is the major focus of our essay. Drawing on current knowledge about improving instructional practice on a large-scale, social movement theory, and firsthand experience and knowledge of the contexts and historical development of PEMLE,¹ we advance the notion of educational change as a social movement and discuss some implications of this reconceptualization for practice, policy, and theory.

Our essay begins with a presentation of the distinctive features of LCP, its history and its evolution into PEMLE. Next we summarize some major challenges for large-scale instructional improvement, argue that social movements may provide key insights to solve such challenges, and introduce major conceptual tools used by social movement theory to explain how marginal actors can create social, institutional, cultural, or political change. We then use these conceptual tools to examine the conditions and the ways in which PEMLE actors have been able to expand a countercultural instructional practice to thousands of schools across Mexico. Next we discuss some of the latent risks and challenges of LCP's large-scale rollout. We conclude by discussing some implications of understanding and promoting educational change as a social movement for practice, policy, and theory.

The Learning Community Project and the Program for the Improvement of Educational Achievement in Mexico

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of LCP and PEMLE is the countercultural nature of the core practice promoted by and expanded through these projects across the country. Here we use the term *countercultural* to describe a practice that is qualitatively distinct from the established instructional culture and institutional structure of schooling—what we will call the *default culture* (Sarason, 1982). Some features of this default culture include a top-down definition of teaching and learning, with authority and control highly concentrated in the hands of teachers; a focus on large-group instruction where every stu-

dent is expected to cover the same content at the same time and pace as the whole group; and a prioritization of covering the content over ensuring student understanding.

The pedagogy of LCP is, in its basic theory and practice, completely at odds with traditional teaching and learning practices, not only in Mexico but in the vast majority of schools serving children and adolescents. The core practice promoted by LCP is founded on a basic axiom that states that powerful learning occurs when the interest of the learner is matched with the capacity of the teacher. The basic agreement among those who join LCP is that the teacher will only offer her students the topics and themes she masters well, and each student will choose among those topics the one he is most interested in. Students are presented with a catalog of topics by a tutor. Although topics are mostly taken from the official curriculum, they can also include other topics of interest, such as farming, migration, and so on. The particular content is not as relevant as the demonstrated mastery of the topic by the tutor and the interest of the student to learn it. Thus, some diversity in the collection of available topics can be found in different LCP groups.

Once students choose their topics, they begin individual lines of inquiry with the support of the tutor, who builds on the pupil's previous knowledge and asks questions to guide the student to find his own answers. Once a student masters a topic, he prepares a public demonstration to present what he learned and his learning process to his peers, his tutors, and often to other members of the community. The student is then expected to become a tutor to other students (and even to adults) interested in learning the topic he has mastered. This way, students learn the content they study, develop independent learning skills, and learn the instructional practice of being tutors. The knowledge generated through this process becomes the common property of all the parties to the work and is made available to tutors and students in other schools. Over time, students and tutors participate in the construction of a broad fund of knowledge that is made available, through networked relationships, to everyone who participates. This model disrupts the familiar patterns of school; knowledge ceases to be the sole preserve of teachers, learning becomes a collaborative practice among tutors and students, and students become active agents not only in deciding what they will learn but also in bringing their learning into their relationships with adults and other students. Students become creators of knowledge as well as consumers of it.

Adults learn the practice of tutorials the same way students do: by becoming students to tutors who master topics they seek to learn and then practicing as tutors of others interested in learning the topics they have now mastered. In a similar fashion to what one would observe in an artisanal workshop, where the expert practice of the master artisan is made visible all the time to apprentices, in a tutorial network, apprentices have permanent access to the expert practice of independent learning and tutoring, which are continuously modeled by tutors with higher degrees of expertise (López & Rincón-Gallardo, 2003).

This pedagogical model has its origins in the work that a small nongovernmental organization (NGO) called *Convivencia Educativa, A.C.* (CEAC; now *Redes de Tutoría, S.C.*), had been promoting for over a decade in schools located primarily in historically marginalized Mexican communities—communities with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants and with no access to “formal” educational services due to their small size and long distance from urban centers. The founder and leader of the group, Gabriel Cámara, whose educational philosophy was deeply influenced by his close connection to and collaboration with Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire, spent several decades developing grassroots educational projects to help youth and communities take control over their learning (Cámara, 1972; CEG, 1977, 1994; Lavín de Arrivé, 1986). The group that would later create CEAC first came together around the Post-Primary Project, an initiative launched in 1996 by the National Council for the Promotion of Education (CONAFE, by its initials in Spanish) to help students and young instructors develop the ability to learn independently (Cámara, 1999, 2003). The Post-Primary Project reached 350 rural communities in twenty-seven Mexican states and was praised in national and international evaluations (Cámara, 2003; Turner, 2000; Turner & González, 2001; Universidad Veracruzana, 2003). In 2003, after a new administration arrived in CONAFE with an agenda that was at odds with the Post-Primary Project, the group decided to leave the institution and create CEAC, working to introduce the learning community model first developed in the Post-Primary Project into the public educational system through various small-scale instructional improvement projects (Cámara, 2006, 2008).

In 2004 CEAC was awarded international funding to launch an educational change initiative in a handful of Mexican public middle schools in historically marginalized communities. The main focus of the project was transforming instructional practice from the inside out: first by directly transforming teaching and learning in classrooms; then by identifying those institutional practices, norms, and structures that facilitated or constrained the transformation of practice; and finally by promoting their necessary adaptations. In 2004 volunteer teachers from eight schools in two states received the support of a coach from CEAC who spent one week every month in their classrooms to model the practice of tutorials for teachers and students and to coach them in the development of skills to learn independently and to serve as tutors to others. Visits from educational authorities to LCP schools were encouraged, and periodical meetings were held among participating teachers, local educational authorities, and teacher coaches from CEAC to discuss progress, identify institutional constraints to teachers’ efforts to transform their practice, and make necessary adaptations (Rincón-Gallardo, Domínguez, Santos, Cámara, & López, 2009).

Between 2004 and 2008 the core practice promoted by LCP expanded to about sixty schools through outreach and networking undertaken by participating teachers, local educational authorities, and LCP leaders. The project

was then adopted as a pilot by the Mexican Ministry of Education, and in the next two years it reached about four hundred schools across the country. Recently PEMLE was launched with the aim of expanding LCP's core practice to the nine thousand lowest-performing schools across Mexico through the creation of a social network model whereby this practice is showcased, learned, refined, and disseminated (DGDGIE, 2010).

The strategy of PEMLE involves the creation and development of capacity at the school, district, state, and federal levels to improve instructional practice in classrooms. Nodes (collegial teams) are created in schools, districts, and at the state and national levels that engage in consolidating and disseminating LCP's core practice. Tutorial relationships are established within and throughout the nodes, so the instructional practice that is expected from teachers in their classrooms is constantly modeled and practiced across the network—from the central node to the classroom. As capacity is developed in the nodes at different levels, new links are created among nodes, sometimes facilitated by the Ministry of Education, other times by initiative of local and state-level actors (DGDGIE, 2010).

At the time of this publication, six thousand schools have joined PEMLE. A preliminary analysis shows that the four thousand schools participating in PEMLE from the sixteen states with available data have increased the proportion of students scoring at “good” and “excellent” levels in the national standardized test, ENLACE. These increases are significantly larger than those in the schools not in the program (DGDGIE, 2012). Other outcomes reported by LCP actors include: increased student engagement, as indicated by students voluntarily spending more time in school; increased percentages of graduates from LCP schools enrolling in high school; increased student confidence presenting their learning in public and acting as tutors; improved classroom discipline; and better and more frequent use of materials in school libraries (Rincón-Gallardo, 2009, 2011).

Instructional Improvement and Social Movement Theory

For the past four decades, a growing body of research in the field of educational change has shed light on some of the most difficult challenges involved in improving teaching and learning on a large scale. Three major lessons have come out of this research.

First, most large-scale educational reform efforts have promoted modifications that are only weakly related—if at all—to the “instructional core,” defined as the relationship between teachers and students in the presence of content (Elmore, 1996). The relative failure of most educational reforms to substantially transform the instructional core on a large scale suggests some major limitations inherent to the dominant logic under which educational policy has been understood and promoted, a logic that has been referred to as the “technical-rational perspective on policy development” (Datnow & Park,

2009, pp. 348–349). The limitations of policies designed and conducted under a technical-rational paradigm signal the need to develop alternative frameworks to understand and develop policy for instructional improvement.

A second lesson from the educational change field is that innovations that have attempted to directly affect the instructional core rarely penetrate more than a small fraction of schools and classrooms and seldom last long when they do (Elmore, 1996; Hargreaves & Fink, 2000). Although spaces such as communities of practice (DuFour, 2004; Little, 2002; Wenger, 1998) and professional networks (Elmore, 2007; Huberman, 1995; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992) can create opportunities for teachers and/or administrators to share resources, discuss problems of practice related to their own classrooms, and develop new understandings of teaching and learning, they face the challenge of maintaining the level of commitment and capacity of their original promoters when expanded to larger numbers of schools (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992) and struggle to survive in the wider institutional environment where—and often against which—they operate (Datnow et al., 2002; Elmore, 2004).

A third major lesson comes from policy implementation studies that have yielded abundant evidence of how actors at the ground level make meaning of and mediate educational reform initiatives (Coburn, 2001; Jennings, 1996; Spillane, 1999, 2004) and on the fundamental role of context and the default culture of schooling in determining whether and how teachers decide to ignore, resist, adapt, or adopt policy recommendations and mandates (Coburn, 2004; Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; McLaughlin, Talbert, & Bascia, 1990). This research illustrates the contested nature of educational reform and points to the need for incorporating the cultural and political dimensions of educational change into the realms of educational research and policy.

In a way, the characteristics of successful social movements are precisely what large-scale educational reform and small-scale initiatives to transform instructional practice often lack. When successful, social movements are able to maintain high levels of commitment among their actors, develop structures of mobilization that allow them to sustain their struggles in the long run, and construct strategies to transform the institutional environments where—and often against which—they operate (Ganz, 2009; Tarrow, 2011; Thompson & Tapscott, 2010). Social movements act as forces for social innovation because they operate in fundamentally different ways from public agencies and work against certain fundamental patterns of culture and practice in mainstream, established organizations (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; Rochon, 1998).

In the field of education, social movements have emerged and been studied mainly on the grounds of contentious politics (Grindle, 2004; Stein, Tommasi, Echebarría, Lora, & Payne, 2005). Focused on political struggles at the macro level—mainly as collective action that is reactive to large-scale policies that are perceived to promote inequality in access to education or to threaten teach-

ers' working conditions—social movements in education, and the research that documents them, have given little, if any, direct attention to the problem of transforming instructional practice. Social movements aimed at and sustained through the radical transformation of teaching and learning can provide a new logic and strategy to understand and promote educational change.

Social movement theory, a rich theoretical perspective drawn from sociology and political science, provides a useful framework to understand how marginal actors are sometimes able to create social, institutional, cultural, or political change (Grossman, 2010; Tarrow, 2011). Research on contemporary social movements identifies three broad sets of factors that help us understand the emergence and development of social movements: motivations, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities.² *Motivations* refer to the shared meanings constructed by social movement actors and the reasons behind their decisions to participate. Mobilizing structures are “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, McCarthey, & Zald, 1996, p. 3). *Political opportunities* refer to the broader set of political constraints and enabling circumstances that shape social movements (McAdam, McCarthey, & Zald, 1996; Tarrow, 2011). Motivations, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities are useful analytical blocks to explain how and under what circumstances actors in the margins of an educational system may spur the transformation of practice in a large number of schools and across the educational system.

Expanding a Countercultural Practice Through Social Movement

The question at the center of this essay is how and under what conditions a countercultural instructional practice can be expanded to a large number of schools. As we will discuss in this section, the expansion of LCP's core practice to thousands of schools across Mexico can be explained in part as the result of a combination of factors that include the contexts where LCP developed and some features of LCP's model itself. Perhaps more importantly, this expansion is explained by the ability of its actors to spur a social movement that has created and capitalized on personal and collective motivations, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities to consolidate a countercultural practice in classrooms and expand it across the educational system.

Context: The Margins as a Space of Possibility

It is in the margins of the public educational system—schools located in small, scattered communities—that LCP found a fertile ground to inject a simple yet profoundly countercultural innovation. Mexico is one of the most unequal countries in the world. It is home to the richest man on the planet and yet has a large proportion of people living in extreme poverty. Disparities can also be seen in the geographic distribution of the Mexican population. While one-third of the total population is concentrated in the three largest cities, over 90

percent of the communities that constitute the country are small (with fewer than twenty-five hundred inhabitants) and geographically isolated. The Mexican public educational system is highly segregated, with public middle schools in historically marginalized communities assigned many fewer resources and less experienced teachers than their more privileged counterparts. Schools in these rural margins have greater teacher mobility and consistently lower levels of student achievement.

Telesecundaria is a modality of lower-secondary education (grades 7–9) that was created to expand middle schools to small, scattered communities across the country. Telesecundarias constitute two-thirds of Mexican public middle schools and attract one-fifth of the lower-secondary school-age population (Martínez, 2005). They have fewer resources and less experienced teachers than the other middle school modalities in Mexico (Noriega & Santos, 2004; Santos & Carvajal, 2001), and their students have consistently shown significantly lower levels of achievement by both national and international standards (Backhoff et al., 2005; INEE, 2006, 2007, 2009). Unlike regular middle schools, where each class is taught by a subject matter specialist, Telesecundarias have only one teacher per grade (Martínez, 2005). Furthermore, over the past two decades, the expansion of Telesecundarias to remote areas in the country has been accompanied by a relative proliferation of schools with only one or two teachers in charge of the three grades (Santos, 2001). Classroom practice in a Telesecundaria is organized in fifty-minute sessions for each subject matter. During the first fifteen minutes, students watch a TV lesson; for the remaining thirty-five minutes, they complete textbook exercises. Teachers function mainly as administrators of time and organizers of prescribed textbook activities (Carvajal, 2003; Rincón-Gallardo et al., 2009). It is precisely in Telesecundarias that LCP was able to plant its first roots.

Since the year 2000, international and national evaluations started presenting a rather disappointing picture of the Mexican lower-secondary education system. Large percentages of students score below basic levels of proficiency in math, Spanish, and sciences, with particularly pronounced low performance in Telesecundarias (INEE, 2007, 2009). The low levels of student achievement led various sectors of society to exert pressure on the Ministry of Education to improve its educational services. Although several federal programs were launched under President Vicente Fox (Reimers, 2006), by the end of his administration none of these had demonstrated impact in the improvement of student learning, which heightened the sense of urgency to transform the public educational system in Mexico.

When the new presidential administration came to power in 2006, there was already a broad public consensus on the need to improve student achievement in Telesecundarias but not a clear sense of how to go about it. It was in this context that LCP found its way into the Mexican public educational system. The margins were spaces that Mexican institutions desperately needed to serve yet struggled most to influence; this situation allowed more room for radical

innovation. At the same time, Telesecundarias in marginalized communities offered enabling conditions for radical departure from conventional practice. The low student-to-teacher ratio in rural Telesecundarias and the presence of only one teacher per group facilitated the development of personalized tutorial relationships and the adaptation of the school schedule to allow students to choose their topics of study and follow their own pace. Furthermore, the relative leeway that school supervisors in Mexico have to mediate between federal policy and school activities,³ together with a relatively weak presence of institutional controls over the everyday activities of teachers working in far-off communities, facilitated the adoption of LCP's countercultural practice.

Some Distinctive Features of LCP: An Inside-Out Model, a Simple Practice, and Ample Opportunities to Learn It

LCP can be conceptualized as an inside-out policy with the following characteristics: (1) a focus on directly influencing instructional practice and aligning the surrounding institutional structures, norms, and practices accordingly (Elmore, 2004); and (2) a close link between design and implementation. These features make LCP qualitatively distinct from most educational reform policies and, as we argue, are important factors of its relatively rapid expansion across the Mexican educational system.

The instructional practice of tutorial relationships in LCP works simultaneously as the starting point and the major strategy of the model. Unlike many innovations, the practice here is blessedly simple.⁴ It involves teaching people inquiry skills, exposing them to a body of knowledge they can use to shape their practice, and providing them with ample opportunities to practice in the presence of people who are, however minimally, more masterful of the practice than they are. Teachers are first exposed to LCP by participating as students of tutors with more experience with and mastery of the core practice of tutorials. They then have access to several instances where they can continue observing, learning, consolidating, refining, and disseminating LCP's core practices, which include classroom-based coaching, school interchanges, and intensive and periodic training sessions.

As may be expected, the introduction of LCP's countercultural practice in regular classrooms tends to create tensions with surrounding institutional environments, most prominently in the form of opposition and resistance from other teachers, excessive administrative and nonacademic requirements, and tight bureaucratic controls from some local authorities (Rincón-Gallardo, 2009, 2011). A close link between design and execution has allowed LCP actors to navigate these tensions. The leaders of LCP, and more recently the leadership of PEMLE, have committed to maintaining such a close link in three major ways. First, every actor in the program, regardless of her formal hierarchical role in the institution, is expected to master and model the practice and the instructional culture promoted through LCP. Ongoing face-to-face encounters between program leaders and local actors where LCP's

core practice is constantly modeled—and not simply talked about, encouraged, or imposed—help dissolve resistance among skeptics or opponents. Second, the creation of “bargaining arenas” (Elmore, 1979) is encouraged, where teachers, teacher coaches, and local authorities get together to discuss progress, identify institutional constraints, and make necessary adaptations to facilitate the consolidation and expansion of the practice. Such adaptations may involve, for example, release of administrative and other extracurricular requirements for teachers, changes in the school visit protocols used by supervisors, or new arrangements to give teachers more time for LCP-related professional development. And third, the LCP model itself remains under constant revision and adaptation. Through their constant presence in schools and professional development sessions, LCP leaders gain firsthand knowledge of aspects of the model that need adaptation. Some important changes the original model has undergone include a decision to use the official curriculum as the major source of topics for tutoring (when LCP started, the texts and problems offered to teachers were taken from external sources) and the inclusion of all subject matters in the catalogs of topics (in the beginning, the focus was just on math, literature, and English) (Rincón-Gallardo et al., 2009).

LCP as a Social Movement: Motivations, Mobilizing Structures, and Political Opportunities

A clear focus on a simple yet radical transformation of instructional practice has allowed LCP actors to develop a common instructional practice, a shared discourse anchored on the instructional core, and a fund of shared content knowledge. The expansion of LCP’s core practice from a handful to thousands of schools has surprised many educational authorities as well as the original leaders of the project themselves (Cámara, in press). Teachers in LCP do not receive any extra money or any career advancement privilege for participating in the project. Many of them pay out of their own pockets to organize public presentations and develop networks with other teachers and schools or to create new spaces and time for professional development. Some even get in trouble with their immediate educational authorities for engaging in a practice that is at odds with conventional schooling practices. All they receive is access to a network of support with more experienced coaches. Yet teachers are moving, mobilizing beyond what the initiators of the project could have imagined. What moves them is a relevant and important question to consider.

LCP participants have constructed a collective identity and discourse that finds its core motivation in learning and helping others learn through tutorial relationships. The major source of motivation of LCP actors, regardless of formal institutional role, comes from experiencing a profound transformation at the level of the instructional core: LCP participants have discovered gaps in their own knowledge, opened themselves up to receive the support of their coaches and peers to learn new topics, and developed insight and confidence to learn and teach. They have developed closer pedagogic and affective rela-

tionships with their students. And, maybe more importantly, they have noticed tangible improvements in their students' confidence, engagement, and skills to learn and teach. They see their students taking books to their homes; showing up in schools in the afternoons and on weekends; losing track of time and missing lunch breaks; gaining visible confidence to learn on their own, to present their work in public, and to help others learn (Rincón-Gallardo, 2011). These transformations in the instructional core inspire LCP actors to continue consolidating and expanding their countercultural practice beyond their immediate institutional settings (Rincón-Gallardo, 2012).

While they face several tensions with institutional norms, practices, and structures surrounding their practice, LCP actors have been able to use and create formal and informal mobilizing structures to expand LCP's core practice to a larger number of schools and to influence the development of PEMLE. Such mobilizing structures include communities of practice, school visits, school interchanges, and public demonstrations to outsiders, where the core practice of tutorials is showcased, consolidated, and disseminated.⁵ The activities in these events are remarkably consistent. Every participant, be it a visitor or an LCP actor, is expected to engage in the practice of tutorials. Students work in small groups or individually with topics of their choice while tutors support their learning process. The roles of "student" and "tutor" are determined by who has knowledge that someone else might not have and who wants access to that knowledge, rather than by formal position; in this way, adults may be observed taking the role of student, and young people can be seen acting as tutors. Informal networking and outreach are other mobilizing structures developed by several LCP teachers and local educational authorities to attract new members and supporters to the project. In regular meetings or in informal talks with other teachers and authorities, LCP actors often talk about the impact of the new practice in their classrooms and encourage them to visit LCP schools or attend LCP-related events.

LCP actors have also capitalized on and created political opportunities to expand LCP's core practice to schools across the country. One prominent political opportunity was the unexpected embrace of LCP in 2007 by Fernando González, deputy minister of basic education at that time, after visiting an LCP school in search of effective alternatives to public education in marginalized communities. After observing the outstanding work of students and their single teacher in the small community of San Ramón (Zacatecas), he publicly asked his team of advisers and the deputy minister of education in the state to help him expand LCP to many more schools across the country (Cámara, in press). This visit inspired the creation of a pilot program that expanded the core practice of LCP to about four hundred schools in the following two years and, more recently, the launch of PEMLE. This broader national initiative has, to this date, facilitated the expansion of LCP's practice to six thousand schools across the country through the creation of social networks whereby the core practice of tutorials is showcased, consolidated, and disseminated.

Another important political opportunity was created when Dalila López, a leading member of CEAC, the NGO that first developed the LCP model, was invited to join the Department of Innovation at the Ministry of Basic Education in 2006. Dalila was able to gradually include several other members of CEAC on her team and to bring LCP to the attention of influential policy makers at the Ministry of Education. The incorporation of LCP leaders into the Department of Innovation granted the group access to resources and political influence to create state-level teams with existing staff, to develop their capacity to initiate tutorial networks in classrooms, and to promote school visits and interchanges within and among states to disseminate the new practice to a much larger number of schools than a small NGO could ever have reached. The incorporation of LCP leaders into the Ministry of Education occurring simultaneously with the grassroots mobilization of teachers and local leaders turned out to be a pivotal event for the large-scale rollout of this model.

A Latent Risk: From Social Movement to New Bureaucracy

Thus far, PEMLE has reached six thousand schools through the creation of network nodes in participating schools, regions, and states whereby LCP's core practice is showcased, refined, and disseminated. Furthermore, the practice of tutorials has started permeating the wider educational system in diverse ways, which include: the integration of several programs into a nationwide strategy that uses LCP's core practice as its unifying principle (DGDGIE, 2011); a recently approved nationwide agreement that explicitly presents tutorial networks as a desirable practice across the K–9 system (SEP, 2011); and the incorporation of the tutorial network model as the core practice for introductory courses for all incoming grade 7 students and their teachers across Mexican public schools. The current administration has plans to further expand PEMLE to nine thousand schools and, with varying degrees of intensity, more than thirty thousand low-performing schools in Mexico. In the process, LCP's core practice has started to move outward from the familiar territory of Telesecundaria into a more diverse portfolio of urban and rural schools at different grade levels. More importantly, with PEMLE the practice is moving out of a network of schools that voluntarily opted into the practice and into a collection of schools being required to adopt the practice by virtue of their status as low-performing schools. PEMLE faces the challenge of accomplishing a dramatic shift in scale while at the same time ensuring the integrity of the model. Through its rapid expansion, PEMLE runs the risk of turning a social movement into a new bureaucracy.

LCP has grown as a practice largely because it has engaged an ever-growing number of people in a common learning project connected through a social network. The fundamental conditions that enable learning in this network are twofold. First, people work in face-to-face relationships with others who are, on some dimension, more knowledgeable than they are about the work

at hand. They do this with the expectation that they themselves will assume the same role vis-à-vis others. Second, knowledge moves through the network through a reliance on public discourse about the learning, which, in turn, reinforces accountability for quality among members of the network. The challenge here is to continue building the social network model out, through successive stages, into self-reproducing networks based on face-to-face relationships and public discourse.

LCP's tutorial system is still heavily dependent on the curricular materials from the original *Telesecundarias*, which were built for an entirely different purpose in an entirely different era. The network leaders and tutors are beginning to bring new knowledge and materials into the network from their own practices and their own learning, but that process needs infrastructure and support to meet not only the challenges of scale but also the challenges of keeping up with the demands of increasingly ambitious learners. PEMLE would be an ideal setting to experiment with various open-access models for sharing curriculum materials and inquiry tasks through the network of schools, tutors, and students. In the absence of serious attention to the quantity, quality, and accessibility of high-quality curriculum materials, PEMLE could slide into mediocrity.

The pressure to vastly increase the scale of LCP through PEMLE comes from a growing realization in the national government that Mexico faces a crisis of quality in its schools. The introduction of a national testing system has focused public debate on issues of teacher quality and student performance. PEMLE currently has high visibility in Mexico as a promising path toward significant improvements in the quality of learning for students and teachers. But the growing focus on national testing can also bring irreparable harm to the work of PEMLE.⁶ Mexico has launched its national testing program (SEP, 2012) without deep consideration of what the tests actually measure and whether rewarding and punishing schools based on their test performance is actually a defensible theory of school improvement. The success of PEMLE as an improvement strategy will require a thoughtful approach to assessment that considers measures of quality as well as measures of performance, attention to the social and cultural purposes of learning as well as the instrumental purposes, and a willingness to subject the test-and-punish theory of accountability to the same standards of effectiveness as alternative theories of accountability and improvement.

Without the most salient features of LCP as a social movement, PEMLE would quickly devolve into just another bureaucratic "project." In its initial stages, LCP was given a sheltered status within the government as a pilot project that granted participating teachers and local authorities leeway to depart from conventional structures and practices, thus protecting it from being incorporated into the mainstream bureaucratic structure. As the visibility of the work has increased, the pressure to incorporate the practice into mainstream institutions is increasing too. The remedy for this pressure will not

be popular with mainstream institutions: part of the narrative of the social movement will have to become a deliberate statement of the reasons why the work has to continue through social networks rather than through hierarchical structures. The political power of social movements ultimately depends on their ability to use their broad base to mobilize support for their mission and to deflect opposition.

Understanding and Promoting Educational Change as a Social Movement: Implications for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Transforming the pervasive and resilient culture of schooling, being able to inspire educators to take ownership of and participate in educational change initiatives, and creating institutional alignment to support instructional improvement have proven to be some of the most difficult challenges to large-scale instructional improvement. Social movements provide some important keys to solving the puzzle because they bring to the forefront human agency and the cultural and political dimensions of change, dimensions often overlooked in attempts to transform teaching and learning at a large scale.

With its features as a social movement, LCP provides empirical evidence that helps broaden current understandings of educational practice and policy. Underlying dominant views of educational practice and policy is a logic of top-down separation between “experts” and “implementers.” Under this logic, teaching and learning are understood as two clearly distinct and separate activities in the hands of two very different groups of actors: teachers as the authority in charge of teaching and students as the followers of teachers’ instructions. In a similar fashion, policy and practice are too often separated hierarchically, in such a way that the authority to develop reform mandates and designs belongs exclusively to policy makers at the top, while educators at the bottom are simply expected to implement mandated changes.

Our examination of LCP suggests one possible alternative to this logic. Under this alternative logic, the distinctions between teacher and student and between policy and practice are blurred. Instead, teaching and learning and policy and practice are conceptualized and performed as dialectical and horizontal relationships of mutual influence. As a practice, LCP blurs the boundaries between teacher and student. Anyone can teach and everyone is expected to learn, as long as the tutor masters the topic and the student is interested in learning it. Teachers are expected to continue learning and making their own learning visible to students. Students are expected to become tutors once they master a topic. In this way, teachers become learners and students become teachers.

As policy, LCP blurs the borders between policy and practice by keeping a strong link between design and implementation, whereby any participant in the program, regardless of his formal role in the educational institution, is expected to master and model the practice of tutorials. This fundamental shift

in the relationship between policy leaders and educators also creates opportunities to open bargaining arenas to adapt institutional norms, structures, and practices to facilitate the consolidation and expansion of this countercultural practice and to make adaptations to the tutorial model itself.

Social movements have been major actors in shaping new cultural, social, political, and institutional realities in the struggle for a more just, equitable, and democratic world (Tarrow, 2011; Thompson & Tapscott, 2010). In the motivations and modes of operation of social movements lie key insights about why most large-scale educational reform efforts of the past five decades have failed to transform in any depth teaching and learning in classrooms. But, perhaps more importantly, they shed light on what can be done differently to radically transform instructional practice on a large scale.

LCP demonstrates that the distinguishing features of social movements—collective motivations, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities—can be put to good use to transform teaching and learning on a large scale in ways that disrupt the dominant practices and power relations of schooling. Seen from the perspective of social movements, the endeavor of large-scale instructional improvement is to consolidate and expand an effective, countercultural practice by triggering and capitalizing on the individual and collective motivations of teachers to make a tangible difference in their students' learning. In addition, it requires creating and taking advantage of mobilizing structures and political opportunities to disseminate the practice and create spaces to struggle toward transforming the institutional environments where—and often against which—this countercultural practice operates.

Notes

1. Since 2008, Santiago Rincón-Gallardo has conducted interviews and focus groups with more than seventy LCP and PEMLE teachers, teacher coaches, and program leaders; observed activities in fifteen classrooms and five leadership meetings; and reviewed more than two hundred documents, including reports, minutes, field notes, e-mail communications, and official reports. Richard Elmore uses as his major input PEMLE classroom observations, focus groups, and interviews with teachers, teacher coaches, supervisors, state-level officers, program leaders, and the deputy minister of basic education conducted during a three-day visit to Mexico in 2010.
2. Here we depart slightly from the concept of framing processes most widely used in the social movement literature. The term *framing processes* refers to the ways in which social movement actors create narratives and shape discourse to attract supporters and deflect opposition (Tarrow, 2011). While framing processes are a fundamental aspect of social movements in the context of protest and contentious politics, they do not seem adequate to examine a movement mostly engaged in a nonconfrontational process of consolidating and expanding a countercultural practice, such as LCP. Motivation, however, provides a useful concept to explore why actors decide to engage in creating and expanding counterculture.
3. Mexican public schools are located in a nested system of authority where schools belong to school zones, school zones to regions, regions to sectors, and sectors to state ministries of education, which, in turn, respond to the Mexican Ministry of Education.

Most educational policies are developed at the federal level, but since decentralization of educational services in the late 1980s, state ministries of education are allocated resources to implement federal policy and have some power to develop their own programs. As mediators between federal/state policy and classrooms, supervisors and regional and sector leaders have relative flexibility to select federal/state programs for their schools and regions.

4. We choose to call LCP's core practice simple quite deliberately. While taking for granted that learning is a complex phenomenon, LCP offers a relatively simple model: encouraging one-on-one encounters between people who master the practice and those who are in the process of learning it. LCP's practice is also simple when compared to the highly prescriptive, multilayered, and material-heavy practices encouraged by most large-scale educational reforms. LCP actors have deliberately chosen not to produce new materials, formats, or manuals and have instead focused on providing ample opportunities to gain exposure to and try out the practice of tutorials. The qualifier "simple" does not have for us a negative connotation and, as we further explain in this essay, we strongly believe the simplicity of the practice is a critical factor in its relatively rapid expansion.
5. We treat the terms showcasing, consolidating and disseminating separately because they indicate different—although sometimes overlapping—intentions of the practice of tutorials. People who don't know or know little about LCP may attend workshops or visit schools to observe and learn about the practice. In this case, the visits serve to "showcase" the practice. In other instances, PEMLE actors who have gained mastery of the practice get together to refine their skills to learn and teach—that is, to "consolidate" the practice. Finally, people who have an interest in introducing the practice in new schools visit LCP spaces, and in this way the practice is "disseminated."
6. All schools in Mexico participate in the National Standardized Test, ENLACE. In addition, the Institute for the Assessment of Education in Mexico (INEE) conducts periodic assessments of student achievement through an internally developed standardized test (EXCALE) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) by delivering these tests to representative samples of schools. No penalties to schools or districts are attached to poor performance, in part because test results have been mostly utilized to assess the performance of the educational system in the areas of quality and equity rather than individual students and schools. However, recently ENLACE scores were incorporated as criteria to determine the participation of individual teachers in the performance-based economic incentive program of Carrera Magisterial. Previously, additional pay to teachers was based on seniority and number of professional development courses taken.

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