As we explore teacher leadership in Year 5, we encourage Fellows to begin by looking closely at their professional communities, and to consider community as a *system* using the activity system framework. By exploring professional community in this way, Fellows can look beyond simple characterizations such as "weak" or "strong" community, but instead identify parts of the system where they can make changes to improve the overall outcomes.

Adapted from Engeström, Y. (1999). Activity theory and individual and social transformation. In Y. Engeström, R. Miettinen & R. Punamäki (Eds.) Perspectives on activity theory, (pp. 19-38). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

We introduced this activity system framework at a two-day meeting last fall with 30 fifth-year Teaching Fellows, and together we used the framework as a data analysis tool to unpack a KSTF Senior Fellow's story about working with other teachers in her school in two different examples of teacher communities. Using the framework, we identified key differences in how these different teacher communities functioned, and therefore the different outcomes that those systems might produce. Once we did this kind of analysis, we brainstormed together how a teacher leader can find leverage points to make changes, strengthen that system, and therefore improve the system's outcomes.

Once Fellows gain familiarity with the activity system framework, they then use it to explore their own contexts by considering their teacher community as the

"subject" of inquiry, which they work on collaboratively with two to four other Fellows in what we call an inquiry group. Fellows usually begin by generating data on their collaborations with school colleagues. We think of this data expansively, including things like meeting agendas, observation notes, transcripts, or work that was jointly developed while working with other teachers. Using this system perspective, Fellows can look at particular elements in their communities to analyze that data with their inquiry group, and start to notice new things that they had previously overlooked.

Even more importantly, once Fellows look analytically at their professional communities and notice new things, they can also take an experimental stance as a teacher leader by asking: How might I influence this system? What would happen if…? Once teachers identify an area of concern within their community, they are often unsure how to have influence in improving that part of the system. This may be because it feels too risky to try to influence their community in this way, or because they are having trouble getting traction with that issue. This is precisely the reason we support teachers to identify **multiple leverage points** within a system, to ask: given what I know about the system, what are multiple ways in which I might act on it in order to exert influence?

For example, one Fellow, Jake (a pseudonym), has been exploring his math professional learning community (PLC) at his school, where he feels that morale has been low. He took careful notes during one PLC meeting, capturing who was speaking and what they were talking about, and shared these notes as data with his inquiry group. Using the activity system framework to analyze this data, the inquiry group noticed a few things in these meeting notes: teachers in the PLC talked about "figuring out what the administrators want" and getting done what they are "required" to do, but there was little discussion about actual math teaching and learning. From the data that Jake presented, his inquiry group interpreted that this PLC lacked a clear **focus** for what it wants to accomplish together. They also noticed some things about **roles**: teachers in Jake's PLC did not feel empowered to set their own focus, but instead tried to interpret what administrators expected of them. And since the PLC did not have a clear facilitator, they made few decisions and accomplished little.

All of this led to the low morale, so Jake looked for leverage points (places in the system where he could make changes) to improve the outcome of his PLC.

Looking at Jake's data, he and his inquiry group suggested leverage points about *focus*: Jake could encourage his PLC to discuss its purpose or goals more explicitly, or try to sustain discussions around teaching and learning. But, when we think about a community as a system, we also start to see that these are all interacting elements—one part of the system affects the others. Therefore we might see room for improvement in one part of the system, but actually find a leverage point in another part of the system. He brainstormed with his inquiry group and wondered if bringing in a new *tool* to his PLC (such as looking together at student work) might facilitate richer teacher-to-teacher discussions, therefore sustaining focus of the PLC on discussions of teaching and learning. They might also shift the *roles* people play in the community, so that there could be shared responsibility for setting the group's focus. Or, they might consider creating a new *norm* in their PLC that would allow for shared input into upcoming meeting agendas. After unpacking his data and brainstorming with his inquiry group, Jake left the fall meeting with specific steps he planned to take at upcoming PLC meetings, as well as plans to capture more data to continue exploring this teacher community.

One way to think about teacher leadership is as teachers working together to build capacity for improvement within communities and among teachers. The place for teachers to begin developing that capacity is with a better understanding the systems in which we work. Beyond that, we also find that teacher leaders need to find ways into those communities to have influence and improve their outcomes. We think that looking at communities as systems helps us in both of these ways. It supports Fellows to be descriptive, analytic, and experimental in how they view their professional communities. And more importantly, it helps Fellows to view their communities not as a given, final state, but as something that can change, develop, and strengthen, and that they, as teacher leaders can find ways to support that improvement.