

Redesigning Leadership-Education Programs: A Call to Action

~ by Frank Hernandez

Instead of enhancing their expertise in staffing and improving the schools, many Ed[ucation] Schools have sought academic respectability by emphasizing the preparation of researchers and by promoting discipline-based research that has little to do directly with the improvement of practice.

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The Iowa Council of Professors of Educational Administration (ICPEA), a voluntary association that operates among Iowa's public and private universities and that awards endorsements to aspiring principals and superintendents, consists of representatives from Drake University, Iowa State University, Loras/St. Ambrose University, the University of Northern Iowa, and the University of Iowa. This group has been engaged in professional development, program revision, and research on leadership preparation. While this association has developed a common framework for the superintendent endorsement, each individual program is required to submit a separate application to the Iowa Department of Education for program accreditation review of its superintendent program. This important work of the ICPEA coincides with a special edited issue of Phi Delta Kappan (March 2006) entitled "Educating Leaders for Tomorrow's Schools." The authors in this edited issue present

(1) research and opinions on the need to redesign programs that educate school administrators and

(2) promising practices for current administrative programs.

In particular, Murphy (2006), in his article entitled "Elephants or Dinosaurs? A Call to Action for Ed Schools," suggests several components that should be found in new leadership programs.

Overall, Murphy (2006) recommends that these new programs identify a cadre of outstanding leaders for schools. These new administrative programs would educate leaders who would then both organize others and cultivate the leadership of colleagues in a collaborative setting. In addition, these programs would have high expectations for all students and would emphasize learning, school-based instruction improvement, and links between, on the one hand, this learning and this instruction improvement and, on the other, the wider school community. Murphy (2006) argues that these new leadership-preparation programs would include several other characteristics:

- a group of both mid-career participants from inside the field of education and mid-career participants from outside the field of education;

- a two-year executive-education program that is included in campus classes, distance learning, and on site visits to schools in the United States and abroad;
- a newly created master's degree, rather than a doctorate;
- a diverse group of faculty from schools of education, business, public policy, and practice;
- a problem-centered curriculum that draws from private, non-profit, and public sectors and from the best practices in education;
- a research and development component designed to keep pace with education's best practices;
- a focus on the establishment of a network of graduates.

The following is a summary of the key components that Murphy (2006) asserts should be found in these newly formed programs.

Participants

These newly redesigned programs would attract talented, creative, and committed participants whose own experiences would not only contribute to the program but also enhance the program experience for all participants. Murphy (2006) suggests that students who participate in these new administrative programs:

- (1) would have common characteristics that consist of a commitment to the values, beliefs, and purposes of the newly redesigned program and
- (2) would enter the program with significant leadership accomplishments.

Students in these programs would be from the field of education, while others would come from the non-educational private sector but would have mid-career changes in mind. Moreover, Murphy (2006) asserts that these students may aspire to a new position in education, such as a superintendent, while others may aspire to a nontraditional position like starting a charter school.

The staff of these newly redesigned leadership programs would make a conscious effort to attract participants who are diverse in terms of sex, gender identity, ethnicity, race, culture, language, and national origin. According to Murphy (2006) and other researchers (Orr, 2006), a diverse group of aspiring administrators should increase the number of potential school leaders: such an increase might, in turn, increase the likelihood that new programs will find exceptional leaders. Diverse participants would also attract others from non-traditional occupations into administration. In sum, Murphy (2006) suggests that the increase in learning that occurs with diverse populations is far greater than the increase in learning that characterizes traditional leadership-preparation programs.

Curriculum and Classroom

Newly redesigned leadership programs must adhere to new curriculum and classroom activities. Murphy (2006) stresses the assertion that at the core of these activities would be three domains of instruction:

- (1) Instructional practice and learning theory that is focused on high achievement for all students;
- (2) the education sector with an emphasis on schooling in context; and
- (3) issues of leadership and management.

Murphy (2006) explains that this last domain concerns chiefly instruction improvement and requires participants to focus on self-management, relationship management, organization management, context management, and change management. The design of classes would help students do four things:

- enhance their understating of what it takes to be a successful leader in today's results-driven environment;
- think and act like generalists who concentrate on the health and performance of a whole organizational unit, rather than like specialists who oversee a single function;
- add to their repertoire of insights, abilities, and dispositions for dealing with the basic tasks of management and build their character, courage, and skills to carry them out;
- add to their understanding of themselves examining their strengths and weaknesses, their values and beliefs, their worldviews, and their professional identities.

The author goes on to say that classroom activities would be problem-driven and case-driven so that participants could experience first-hand the challenges of leadership. This first-hand experience, also advocated by Stein (2006) in this same issue, would occur via two approaches. First, participants would focus on problems of practice by bringing real-life administrative challenges to class. They would present cases and seek advice from their colleagues in class. Second, class activities would use the case-study approach by using simulations and role-plays which help participants experience relevant challenges in multiple contexts.

Murphy (2006) recommends that faculty members who want to support these classroom methods and activities be not only from schools of education, but also from business, government, and the non-profit sector. This multi-disciplinary approach is attractive to Murphy because:

- (1) the work of educational leaders spans all these sectors,
- (2) some of the best curricula and professors can be found outside education,
- (3) administrative issues are similar across sectors, and

(4) the best insights into solving administrative challenges may be found outside the education field. Ultimately, in these newly redesigned leadership programs, learning would be active and would focus on instruction improvement.

Structure and Degrees

In order for these newly redesigned leadership programs to be successful, Murphy (2006) asserts that collaboration efforts must occur between university programs such as education, business, and public policy. Also, the author suggests that the structure of these new programs would require two years of training with regular on-campus activities. Summer activities would supplement the academic year, and students would stay connected via web-based activities and site visits.

Murphy (2006) contends that schools of education would design a new master's degree for these new programs and that this master's degree would replace the doctorate of education (see Levine, 2005). While research is an important part of this new degree, Murphy (2006) explains that problems of practice must be at the core of this new degree and of this new program. Finally, Murphy (2006) argues that, in these new leadership programs, faculty must address both the selection process and the events that unfold after participants graduate. Administrative programs must look for participants who have demonstrated leadership capacity, values and beliefs, and other qualities that support the participants' potential to strengthen the achievements of today's school children. The structures of these programs create leadership networks that, in turn, serve as on-going support systems for graduates and that, in some cases, help recruit a new cadre of participants.

Conclusion

Can Iowa universities pull off such a drastic change in how they train their aspiring school leaders and school-district leaders? Phi Delta Kappan's special issue on school-leader preparation is both timely and fitting, as the ICPEA works to uncover new ways to train leaders who can meet the changing demands of schools and of school districts in Iowa. Murphy (2006) has suggested a template of potential changes that might suit newly redesigned leadership programs. In this time of change in Iowa's schools and school communities, will Iowa be on the cutting edge of how its school leaders are trained, or will we not take advantage of this opportunity to deliver a new and exciting program to our aspiring superintendents? Time will tell.

References

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