

Hope Replenished: Exceptional Scholarship Strides in Educational Administration

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Summary



This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of the Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

For decades now, critics have viewed educational leadership and administration as sorely lacking in many respects—including as a field of scholarly inquiry. Murphy, Hawley, and Young (2005) cite numerous studies that have “assessed the profession and judged it to be in poor health” (p. 49). Thomas Sergiovanni, another leading scholar, has recognized that “one shortcoming of ours in educational administration is that we’re still working on becoming a rigorous science. We need to produce inquiry and people who can commit to a set of ideas over the long haul” (as cited in Author, 2005, p. 41).

The Joint Research Taskforce on Educational Leadership Preparation (2005)—sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA); American Educational Research Association / Administration, Organization, and Leadership (AERA, Division A); AERA Teaching in Educational Administration Special Interest Group (SIG); and National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA)—acknowledges that, despite its shortcomings, the educational leadership profession made “important strides” (para. 1). Notably, faculty throughout the United States have been aligning “program content with national leadership standards, providing practical experiences, researching their practice, and building a base of knowledge on leadership education” (Joint Research Taskforce on Educational Leadership Preparation, para. 1). Accordingly, this article takes a modest step.

The purpose of this discussion is to highlight some of the best scholarly practices in our field as determined by empirically developed themes and peer-based feedback. I hope that the structure provided for grouping best practice exemplars will stimulate readers to add others that similarly follow rigorous standards for selection, enabling a comprehensive resource of current developments of some magnitude to result.

Before continuing, I wish to acknowledge the critical insight I received after having solicited the exemplars, nation-wide, from faculty. A professor from a premier research institution briefly addressed the absolutism implied in “best practice”:

I’m not a believer in “best practice” because it implies there is one best way, which takes us right back to Frederick Taylor. There is no one “best” way to do anything. Most of what we think are best practices have not really been empirically validated. They just seem to work.

My request for a single best practice produced, from many faculty, not one but rather numerous examples that function in conjunction with one another. Further, some survey respondents indicated that the best practice they wished to highlight resided upon the pioneering efforts of others. Faculty also asserted that not only research publication but also teaching and program redesign initiatives that support student development and success constitute an important aspect of scholarship. Honoring these perspectives, I have folded them into the “best practice” scholarship typology presented here.

Background and Methods

For this discussion, I used the established scholarly criteria to identify outstanding scholarship (best practices) through such venues as publishing outlets and manuscripts and national-level professional associations and councils, as well as major or award-winning publications, programs, and innovations (national and state, institutional and individual). Additionally, in a survey taking the form of a letter of inquiry, 76 educational leadership professors working at major research institutions throughout North America were contacted to provide examples; approximately 50% (38) responded between December 2005 and February 2006. (See Table 1.)

Table 1

Survey-Based Letter to Faculty Eliciting Best Practices in Educational Leadership

(Author, 2005)

Dear X

For a forthcoming publication, I will be describing “best practices” in educational leadership and administration. The best practices I identify should be scholarly, impact the field in some way, and illustrate relevant exemplary work in research, teaching, or service.

There is a lot of good work in progress around the country. Perhaps you can give an example that might help to broaden or deepen the sample I plan to represent.

Can you identify *one* best practice in the field, as you see it, and provide reasons for your selection? Also supply documentation (e.g., report, article, website, reflection) along the lines of evidence (empirical or narrative) for substantiating the claim that this is a best practice.

So that I can consider your nomination, please email me three specific contributions:

1. Identification of a best practice
2. Reasons for your selection
3. Support/documentation

Thank you for your time and assistance with this project.

As an educational leadership professor intent on studying the scholarly life and aspects of our profession, herein I reveal promising scholarly trends anchored in peer criteria and examples denoting excellence. The best practices I describe were determined by using communitywide, validated scholarly criteria recently established through a national survey of leadership professors (Author, 2004). These feature significant and broad impact on scholarship and the field, national and multiple spheres of influence, and mentoring and multiauthoring systems. Exceptional scholarship also connects administrative leadership and the improvement of teaching/learning to its policy and practice. These norms, generated from 2002 to 2003 and published in 2004, were validated in 2005 through interviews with leading scholars, their referral document analysis (Author, 2005).

The professors were selected on the basis of their national leadership as directors and presidents of professional associations and councils, as well as their reputations as established journal editors and highly productive scholars. I generated the list of names by consulting the same sources (e.g., professional associations) as those used in identifying best practices. Unless otherwise identified, the personal communications shared are attributable to the faculty respondents.

Best Practice Typology and Exemplars

Upon examining the exemplars submitted by the educational leadership professors, I soon realized that these best practices represented various stages of development: some highly established, others emergent but promising. In addition to fulfilling at least one of the broad scholarly criteria previously mentioned, each example is supported by peer-based evidence, whether empirical or narrative. To clarify, while I have knowledge of some of the best practices documented, this is not the case for the majority. However, the examples I illustrate were all “backed” by established leaders who attested to their credibility and significance. Those that follow have all been classified; however, many fit more than one theme.

Significant and Broad Impact on Scholarship and the Field

Leadership program redesign and delivery. Sets of standards for educational leadership, often generated through collaboration between professional associations and universities, are in use by many American states and institutions to restructure and assess preparation programs (UCEA, AERA, and NCEPA leaders, n.d.). In 1996 the influential Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium / Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ISLLC/ELCC), headed by Joseph Murphy, created “Standards for School Leaders,” birthing what supporters would consider a “best practice.” These national standards were designed for compatibility with and adopted by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (Murphy, 2005). The changing role of administrative curriculum leadership is a central premise, specifically focusing on “curriculum design, implementation, evaluation, and refinement” as related to student outcomes (EAD [Educational Administration] Assessment, ISLLC Cognitive Matrix, 1998–2003, p. 1). Among other related activities, departmental faculty are working with others to align the standards with stakeholders’ expectations: primarily school districts, in order to produce workforce-ready leaders.

One such example is the Delaware Department of Education’s Aspiring School Leader Internship Program, funded by the Wallace Foundation as part of the State Academic Education Leadership Project (SAELP). The partners involved in this educational enterprise are Delaware’s school districts, Wilmington College, University of Delaware, and Delaware State University. The SAELP project offers a comprehensive approach to best practice that incorporates the mentorship of administrator interns by exemplary leaders; theory–practice integration with emphasis on “real school problems”; and succession planning for developing a more diversified pool of qualified candidates for Delaware schools (Wilson, 2005, p. 1).

A seminar, an important component of the program (scheduled at the beginning and again at the end of the internship experience) focuses on “school culture; the collaborative nature of schools/districts; and decision-making,” in addition to the principal–intern teams and their resolution of problems (Wilson, 2005, p. 8). Consistent

the policy aspects of this initiative, it is expected that "recommendations will be made to the Faculty Senate of each university to make the internship experience a mandatory requirement as part of the practicum experience" (Wilson, p. 2). Once teacher leaders are identified, they receive "professional development and clinical experiences that will give them the experience and knowledge to move into school leadership positions" (Wilson, p. 1).

Another model of practice that is grounded in the ISLLC/ELCC Standards is "comprehensive professional development programs for assistant principals" (Oliver, 2009). Based on a study of the principalship and, more broadly, standards-led best practice, Oliver found that practicing assistant principals at all grade levels in Orange County, California, were involved in "district-sponsored professional development activities" (p. 93). However, deviation from the ideal practice became apparent, as opportunities mostly favored a managerial approach to professional development over a learning focus.

Additionally, Southeastern Louisiana University has partnered with six school districts to form the Southeastern Partnership, a collaborative devoted to "implementing systemic change in school leadership preparation," and to fulfilling such specific goals as "meeting the need for highly qualified leaders," "preparing leaders for low-performing schools," and increasing student achievement (Wallace Foundation Grant, 2005, pp. 1, 4). Toward this end, the Partnership has developed an "innovative educational leadership model" (p. 2). It spearheads university-district collaboration, best practices (e.g., district-based professional libraries that foster learning for staff), professional development delivered by outside consultants, and an academy for the preparation of prospective school leaders.

The Louisiana Leadership Excellence through Administrator Development (LaLEAD) academy is a master's degree program that the Wallace Foundation not only fur also deems "a model that should be adopted by departments of educational leadership" (faculty respondent). The LaLEAD cohort program "was created to recruit an select candidates for the program" by way of "tapping" teachers for leadership via teacher leader workshops that focus on the role of site-based leadership in improving schools (Wallace Foundation Grant, 2005, p. 4). Workshop courses (e.g., Research Methods, Technology for Leadership) are matched to the Louisiana Principal Standards and the ISLLC/ELCC Standards. Candidates' leadership skills are assessed through such means as self-assessments and portfolios. The two major strategies employed in reaching the goals of the Partnership and academy are "improv[ing] the conditions for recruiting, preparing, and supporting school leaders" and "[fostering] leader development," each of which is supported by a complex series of actions similar to those mentioned here (Wallace Foundation Grant, pp. 12, 20).

Continued planning efforts utilize the redesigned leadership preparation program (e.g., leadership academy) and its implementation plan. These include the involvement of teachers in cohorts each semester, with the pilot program occurring in fall 2005. It is expected that leadership aspirants will, for example, fully engage in "job-embedded leadership activities and professional development that lead toward improved student achievement in the targeted school" (Wallace Foundation Grant, p. 24).

Studying the principalship and superintendency. A well-developed best practice cited was the UCEA Voices Project, which continues the work that Frances Kochan of Auburn University and colleagues began years earlier (see Kochan, Jackson, & Duke, 1999). Several respondents noted that this scholarly work has had an impact on the field by sharing perspectives of superintendents and principals, by engaging researchers in making bare their philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, and by focusing findings on the implications for improving preparation programs in multiple contexts and regions.

The initial study phase, known as "a thousand voices from the firing line" (Kochan et al., 1999) (later renamed Voices 1), "investigated vexing problems of practice that principals and superintendents discussed in one-on-one interviews" (Acker-Hocevar & Ivory, 2005, p. 11). Acker-Hocevar and Ivory (2005) further explain that Voices "consisted of focus groups with principals and superintendents" and used question protocols dealing with preparation, expectations, and challenges. Voices 3, a large qualitative study currently under way, explores educational leaders' "conceptions of school improvement (doing what's best for students), democratic community (voice in decision making), and social justice (overcoming obstacles to do what is best for kids)" (p. 11).

Voices 3 of the project was commended for bringing together faculty to collaborate on learning how practitioners think about reform, community, and justice. The Voices project in its entirety was nominated as a best practice, largely because "it assists new professors to make connections to a larger scholarly community in order to investigate problems of interest to educational leadership and administration." Additionally, the data from the Voices project have accumulated into "a longitudinal data set permitting many scholars to examine perspectives over time and to use their own "interpretive frameworks."

The Voices project was also recognized for the "partnership learning and collaboration" it encourages "across institutions of higher learning with different missions and types of programs." It was believed that faculty who work together to create research that is publicly shared open their work to the critical gaze that promotes genuine dialogue, critique, and improvement: "One of the ways to impact our field is to conduct more of these broad-based studies that support more inclusiveness and openness." The respondents concluded by asserting that this type of collaborative research, integral to the health of our profession, will become more prevalent in the face of decreasing funding for institutions.

Moral leadership modeled and practiced. Intertwining moral leadership and social organization, Sergiovanni has spearheaded the notion of purposes and ideas as "covenant," not "contract," to school communities. A goal is for constituent groups become a source of authority. Fewer people will be telling others what to do, and more will be focused on ideas. While this is truer in families, in schools norms and traditions can also emerge that have a sacred quality, binding people in moral ways. (p. 51) "We work together to figure out what it is that they need to do in order to embody their promises" (as cited in Author, 2005, p. 51). Sergiovanni (1992) has turned the covenant idea into a best practice within schools, engaging constituent groups in the development of their own promises. In one exercise, people create posters listing promises they have developed and display them. One poster might outline five promises made to the children, while another might list five promises the children have made to the community and so forth. Through this grassroots but comprehensive decision-making process, "people gather and make promises. If you don't want to be a fink, you're morally committed to keep those" (as cited in Author, 2005, p. 50). Once a group has empowered itself to function according to its own covenants, it can transcend the authoritarian role of principals (and others) as enforcers of rules and expectations. Hence, according to Sergiovanni (as cited in Author, 2005), the ideas themselves and the collective promises become a source of authority. Fewer people will be telling others what to do, and more will be focused on ideas. While this is truer in families, in schools norms and traditions can also emerge that have a sacred quality, binding people in moral ways. (p. 51)

Adapted from the League of Professional Schools and grounded in the work of Thomas Sergiovanni, Carl Glickman, and Lew Allen, Pounder, Reitzug, and Young (2005) underscore covenant development as a worthwhile practice in educating students about the value of fostering "supportable beliefs" (p. 264) for continually examining and refining practice. The writing of a "covenant of beliefs," especially collaboratively, assists aspiring leaders in connecting their beliefs and daily practices and in studying the "congruency" between these (p. 265).

One faculty respondent shared that he and his colleagues use the covenant assignment, approached as a group-based project, in their educational leadership program. The master's students' covenants are expected to address the following three components:

Knowledge statements (what we know from research and other professional literature about good classrooms, good schools, and teaching and learning); evidence summary (a literature-supported summary that provides the argument and evidence for the knowledge statement); and "sacred" commitments (the values, beliefs, or practices that are sacred in your fictional school, that is, that guide and drive practice).

Students make sacred commitments, for example, by using the template provided through their courses to develop statements about their values, beliefs, and practices. The covenant assignment, as used by this professor respondent, honors both what we know from research (knowledge statements and evidence summary) as well as what student practitioners believe is most important of all the things we know. Used in this way, the covenant neither legitimates knowledge in the absence of values, nor values in the absence of knowledge, but rather requires beliefs and values to be grounded in knowledge.

National and Multiple Spheres of Influence

Leadership preparation knowledge base. The Joint Research Taskforce on Educational Leadership Preparation (2005) supports “mak[ing] widely available the conce and research base on leadership education” (p. 1). Toward this end, the taskforce has conceptualized 10 flexible domains for reflecting research in the field:

- leadership education as a field of study
- the context of leadership education
- models and theories of leadership education
- recruitment, selection, and development of leadership candidates
- providers of leadership education
- curriculum and pedagogy in leadership education
- the delivery of leadership preparation
- student assessment and program evaluation
- professional learning
- leadership education around the globe

Domain leaders work with taskforce researchers to determine what is known about each domain, as well as to identify gaps in leadership preparation.

The NCEPA / Knowledge Base Connexions Project, a recent initiative, also received support via the survey responses. Leadership professors included documentation described the various aspects of the program and explained its impact on the field. The aim of this project is “to add to the knowledge base of the educational admini profession” and “aid in the improvement of administrative theory and practice, as well as administrative preparation programs” (NCEPA Project Executive Editorial Bo 8; also NCEPA website, 2005). A unique organizational structure (i.e., project executive editorial board, NCEPA board of directors, executive director of NCEPA, dom coordinators, and board of reviewers) supports a publishing network drawing together professors from different institutions. The module submission and review proce involves these basic steps: after an author submits a “module”—that is, an article, case study, annotated literature review, or other—the appropriate domain coordina “establishes a panel to review the module according to the NCEPA standards”; once reviewers complete the review, the module may receive endorsement or require changes (NCEPA Project Executive Editorial Board, 2005, p. 3).

Project leaders are currently building, cost-free, a library of easily searchable refereed modules (professional materials) made available at the NCEPA website. Autho juried “modules” are expected to shape more than 18 specific knowledge domains that include educational leadership preparation, organizational change, research methods, and site-based leadership (NCEPA Project Executive Editorial Board, 2005).

Organizational leadership and change. Also viewed as best practice was the development of charter districts, sometimes called virtual districts. The Knowledge is Pow Program (KIPP) and Aspire schools were the two outstanding examples named. While supportive of this educational trend, the respondent who identified it cautioned “These organizations are moving beyond the single charter school and establishing central organizations for many charters. It is not yet obvious whether these schoc better than regular schools, but there is clearly a very different ethos among those leading them, especially the ability to develop a uniform vision and approach.”

For example, Aspire Schools open and operate “K–12 public charter schools in California, with emphasis on low-income communities” and serve five California count where students “receive a high-quality education to prepare them for college.” These small schools have a college-preparatory focus, and results apparently “demon the positive impact that Aspire has on students, parents and the community: Established Aspire schools exceeded the state’s academic growth target by almost four t (Aspire Public Schools, 2005).

The Knowledge is Power Program, a national nonprofit organization, recruits outstanding school leaders to found and operate middle schools in educationally unders neighborhoods across America. KIPP academies are free open enrollment college-preparatory public schools where ... students develop the knowledge, skills, and character needed to succeed in top quality schools [and the workplace]. Ninety percent of KIPP students are African American or Latino. ... Students are accepted regardless of prior academic record, conduct, or socioeconomic background. (KIPP Schools in Action: Overview, 2005).

It is reported that these schools balance rigorous college preparatory instruction and extracurricular activities, such as music. Furthermore, KIPP Schools begin from with just one grade-level, starting with the fifth grade. This gradual growth helps develop an enduring culture of high expectations among students, parents, and staff. Schools add one grade each year until they reach full capacity (KIPP Schools in Action: Overview, 2005).

University–district partnerships. Faculty respondents who asserted that neither universities nor districts can effectively bridge the theory–practice gap unless they wor interdependently nominated outstanding university–district partnerships. Notably, the Principals Excellence Program (PEP), sponsored by the University of Kentucky ; Pike County Public Schools (a rural district), is a federally funded, postcertification leadership development program for principals, assistant principals, and teachers € to assume administrative positions. The PEP curriculum is built upon the ISLLC standards. PEP was featured by the U.S. Department of Education as one of six unqi initiatives, giving it national recognition as a leader in school leadership development. Its program goals focus on “transforming the principalship and expanding the candidate pool” (Browne-Ferrigno, 2005, p. 7). Thee-Lead website (2005b) adds that, from 2003 to 2004, “the partnership delivered intensive yearlong leadership development for two cohorts of practicing principals and prospective candidates holding administrator certification.” Moreover, “program objectives and accompanyin strategies addressed recruitment, development, and retention as means to reculture the principalship” (e-Lead, 2005).

Browne-Ferrigno and Knoeppel (2005) also explain that a closed-cohort model, one favoring stability in membership, was used to serve both practicing and aspiring principals in Kentucky through “an interconnected series of seminar-workshops, clinical experiences guided by trained mentors, comprehensive school-based resear structured reflections” (p. 6). The program supports role-identity transformation and socialization into the community of administrative practice, the placement of PEP trained individuals (succession planning), and the impact of program development on specific goals. Cohort members’ survey feedback indicated that the program he aided in their preparation as future school leaders through such means as research-based decision making and, importantly, “equitable learning opportunities for all students” (Browne-Ferrigno & Knoeppel, p. 13).

A compounded best practice exemplar came from several faculty who referenced a list of promising, nationwide professional development programs available via e-l (2005b), a Washington-based collaborative that links institutes for student success and educational leadership. The curricula of these programs are “driven by author standards for what principals need to know and be able to do.” The following programs have apparently fulfilled these criteria, representing best practices in institutio collaborative forms of school-based practical scholarship. (I have paraphrased the original information provided.)

- The University of Michigan’s Flint-Based Urban Principals Academy provides urban principal preparation and professional development that enhances the learni practicing principals of high-needs urban schools and identifies teachers and others with high potential for urban school leadership and stimulates their interest educational administration.
- Coaching Leaders to Attain Student Success (CLASS) and New Administrators Project (NAP) / New Teacher Center (NTC), University of California, Santa Cruz professional leadership coaches to work with novice and veteran principals. This training is available nationally. NTC also supports networks of school leadersh coaches. NAP is a regional project that provides direct induction services to beginning principals.
- First Ring Leadership Academy, Cleveland State University in Partnership with the First Ring, School Superintendents Collaborative—has created a one-of-a-k collaboration. The 13 First Ring School Districts surrounding Cleveland joined Cleveland State University’s College of Education and Human Services to create leadership academy for aspiring and current school leaders. The First Ring Leadership Academy is an alternative route to principal licensure and recertificatio members benefit from state-of-the-art licensure, career networking, and renewal opportunities.

- Illinois Technology and Leadership for Change (ITLC), Illinois State University, focuses on effective leadership by providing frameworks, dialogue, and practical applications of continuous improvement strategies for educational leaders. ITLC advocates data-driven decision making as the basis of effective continuous improvement for individuals and schools. This is a “trainer of trainers” model, as each participant is a staff developer nurturing capacity for leadership and improved student achievement.
- LEAD Fairfax, Fairfax County Public Schools, Fairfax, Virginia, promotes systemic reform of educational leadership. This program is designed to better enable education leaders to impact student achievement, especially for the economically disadvantaged. Critical attributes of LEAD Fairfax include individual leadership development plans; cohort learning experiences; national partnership with such organizations as the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP); intern placement (administrative and preservice) in selected schools with mentor principals.
- National Institute for School Leadership, Inc. (NISL) / National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) sponsors NISL’s executive leadership program, grounded in research and practice. Focused on improved instruction leading to higher student achievement, it is cohort-based. NISL tailors its executive development to the needs of local school districts. The program builds capacity within school districts by training district leadership teams that in turn train school leaders to effectively communicate their visions and strategies for improving student achievement.
- New School Leadership Program (NSLP) / University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, is composed of metropolitan and rural school districts and has the support of university partners. The program strives to improve how school districts develop leaders for high-needs schools, so that these schools influence student learning, parent satisfaction, and staffing stability. The program is designed to address the need for career-long leadership development and, in doing so, supports prospective principals, beginning principals, and experienced principals.
- Principal Leadership Program for Rural Multicultural Schools Across Northern New Mexico (LeadNM), University of New Mexico, offers professional learning communities in which to hone skills in instructional leadership and systems management. Through face-to-face and online interactions, the program provides support in instructional leadership, data-driven decision making, and leadership teams.
- Leadership Curriculum Module Training, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) provides, via the SREB Leadership Curriculum Module Training, a resource for state academies, university preparation programs, and school-based professional development or improvement teams. The framework for the curriculum is a set of critical success factors for school leaders leading change. Each module makes explicit the knowledge and skills leaders must use for improving school practice to increase student achievement.
- The Tuscaloosa School Leadership Program, Tuscaloosa City School System and University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, recruits and mentors individuals to acquire necessary knowledge and skills for obtaining principalship positions in the district. The program targets high-need schools. Participants are carefully selected, and a strategy used for increasing the pool of highly-qualified administrators.

In order to align theory with practice, university/district teams were created through another project. The learner-centered leadership program is, as Arnold Danzig and colleagues (as cited in Kiltz, Danzig, & Szecsy, 2004) of Arizona State University describe, “a new initiative that provides professional development opportunities to school administrators through a mentoring model” (p. 135). Teaching and learning are the focal points within this model, melded to the commitment to develop school leader expertise through cohorts. Learner-centered leadership, identified as a best practice, can be traced to the life’s work of Joseph Murphy (as cited in Author, 2005) and colleagues, which involves having “repositioned our understanding of school leadership away from simply organization and management, governance, and politics to what we have called instructional leadership and learner-centered leadership” (p. 41).

Grant-funded and assessed, Arizona’s learner-centered leadership program brings together aspiring and practicing school administrators from across four high-need districts. The various stages of the mentoring process highlight relationship building through such means as communications technology, formal and informal session team-building using problem-solving strategies. A subsequent mentoring stage focuses on action and mentor planning. Appraisal of the pilot program drew attention to strengths (e.g., establishing a strong foundation for developing interdistrict relationships) and weaknesses (e.g., creating the capacity for mentoring and for viewing oneself whether a mentor or mentee, as a learner). For more information about this program, including goals and results, see e-Lead (2005a).

Another best practice highlights Temple University’s Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), a nationally funded collaborative serving the Mid-Atlantic region that the U.S. Department of Education designated “as the lead laboratory in the specialty area of educational leadership” (LSS, 2005). Its primary goals are “to revitalize and reform educational practices in the service of student success” and “to enact and sustain lasting systemic educational reform through collaborative programs of applied research and development and services to the field.”

Mentoring and Multiauthoring Systems

Junior faculty outreach. (See UCEA Voices Project, described earlier.)

Leadership studies cohorts. (See LaLEAD and PEP, previously covered.) Faculty respondents highlighted scholarly examples of best practice in the form of constructivist teaching approaches to program redesign and cultural change. Outstanding master’s and doctoral cohorts demonstrate study of the realities of leadership and engaged in inquiry. These also reflect the importance of forging collaborative relationships with schools and districts and merging theory and practice, in addition to valuing learner-centered leadership focused on reform, community, and justice.

In one such example, while taking a synthesis course together, 16 doctoral cohort members prepared essays on their own learning and transformation (Harris, 2005), reflected on what they believed at the outset and toward the end of their doctoral programs, and within the context of their own professional practice. Mentoring is a theme that appears throughout the essays, sometimes explicitly but usually implicitly. Cited as instances were the readings studied in their classes and the dialogue that ensued about theory/practice integration and specifically school improvement, democratic community, and social justice.

One student noted that the doctoral program had helped him find “the words, knowledge, and concepts” for better addressing how to cope in complex educational environments (Harris, 2005, p. 44). Another commented that while he had long been interested in having his school change significantly, it was through this process that he finally had the “vocabulary to identify” (p. 31) what was needed to begin this task.

The 16 student writers identified mentorship as best practice and associated it with continued learning and an improved world. According to them, being encouraged to make meaningful connections through active reading and authentic dialogue supported their personal and professional growth and enhanced their capacity for learning. Reflection was viewed as a related best practice: Through reflective inquiry in the form of thinking and writing about experience, the students’ conceptualization of learning deepened; in fact, they became “more understanding of the richness inherent in learning itself” (p. 164).

A long-standing mentoring cohort, the Writers in Training (WIT) doctoral program, received a state award for excellence in instructional supervision in 2005. This initiative has also been recognized by higher education journals as a leading exemplar of adult cohort mentoring that supports women and minorities, in particular, in achieving scholastic goals (School Leadership News, 2005). Led by an educational studies professor from the University of South Florida, the WIT cohort has the dual agenda of preparing doctoral students as both dissertation researchers and scholar-practitioners who connect theory and practice and who reflect on issues of reform, community, and justice. The WITs participate in research projects, copresent at conferences, coauthor articles (in, e.g., *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly* and *Teacher Education and Practice*), and serve as assistant editors for an international journal.

The WIT program combines the best attributes of informal mentoring with structured components (e.g., bimonthly meetings, turn taking, and guidelines for producing work found in formal heuristics). Because the university calendar does not dictate when and where the protégés meet—one draw of a noninstitutionalized cohort structure—

sessions are flexibly arranged over the duration of a student's program. Each meeting has a student-driven agenda to which individuals add their work (e.g., literature reviews, research instruments, dissertation proposals and chapters) as needed and on a rotational basis.

Assisted learning in doctoral education. Several respondents saw "assisted learning" as a "fundamental best practice" of their doctoral programs. It is also an underlying principle of the mentoring cohort model. Assisted learning, they explained, is grounded in behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, and constructivist psychological theory. Furthermore, someone explained that in assisted learning the professor provides all of the support that students need to learn how to effectively perform a task. As the students acquire the knowledge, skill, and disposition to perform the task, the teacher's assistance is gradually withdrawn. The result is that the students can eventually perform the task by themselves.

This faculty member's references to doctoral education and reform contextualized the process of assisted learning, drawing attention to the fact that "doctoral students learn how to write effectively within the field's protocols." Using the direct instruction format that guides professional writing, his classes "deconstruct assigned readings and, using assessment rubrics, write papers on the course content. The students learn about professional writing and the publication process itself. In this phase, "the practices employed are assisted learning, mastery learning, faculty mentoring, scaffolding, incrementally shaping behavior, and facilitating the development of professional self-worth and self-efficacy."

After completing individual papers, the students write collaboratively, "facilitating their ability to effectively synthesize previous scholarly references in the construction argument." This process prepares them for developing such "tight scholarly documents" as the dissertation proposal, leading "to higher quality dissertations and scholarly writing." This "professional development opportunity" also benefits faculty in the program who "fine-tune their own writing" and "become better teachers and mentors.

Based on the teaching exemplars received that support mentoring and multiauthoring systems, it appears that these are all grounded in or supported by the following processes.

For students

- Reflecting on changing leadership practices.
- Developing a sense of identity and belonging.
- Supporting the learning and attainment of dreams.
- Experiencing a vibrant faculty–student support model.
- Engaging in peer and faculty mentoring.

For teachers

- Breaking a complex task into smaller increments to ensure mastery and success (through a form of continuous progress and appropriate scaffolding, prompting modeling).
- Shaping students' behavior from a generalized understanding to the specific ability to write professionally.
- Helping students find their "voice" through writing, inquiry, and student-driven agendas.
- Approaching learning from a social-constructivist philosophy (with attention to developing students' self-concept and self-efficacy in relation to scholarly writing the conventions of professionalism as defined by the field).
- Engaging in student and faculty mentoring.

Reflection and Concluding Note

This chapter provides a sample of best practices that help strengthen the educational leadership profession, along with a template that readers can use for further identifying what is known about our field. Perspectives on best scholarly practices regarding the blended realities of teaching, research, and service were illustrated. Self-improvement, democratic community, and social justice emerged as a theme structuring and authenticating most of the models presented, just as these serve as being guiding critical approaches to inquiry and the reculturing of our profession (Murphy, 2002).

Hope may have been replenished in the process of uncovering exemplars that build upon what has come before and that are useful and cutting edge. Based on what faculty have reported earlier (Author, 2004), in our profession we are concerned with impacting scholarship and the field, with contributing to national and multiple spheres of influence, and with developing mentoring and multiauthoring systems. The feedback provided by leading professors confirms these criteria of excellence and our collective focus on two overarching agendas: adding to the knowledge base of educational administration and improving administrative theory and practice.

Notably, we are busy channeling energy into reculturing our university preparation programs and school systems by, for instance, providing for the mentoring of administrator interns, as well as pursuing theory–practice integration. In addition, we seek to learn, through action and survey research, the perspectives of superintendents and principals on critical issues. We are also expecting one another, as researchers, to be forthcoming about our philosophical and theoretical underpinnings. Another—just as we know that our preparation programs must emphasize learning and learning-centered leadership over managerial and outdated models, we recognize that district-led professional development for leadership aspirants should sponsor more of a learning focus rooted in a nonauthoritarian ideology. Toward this end, team-belief exercises (e.g., covenant development conducted within groups) offer a tested strategy for guiding school persons as well as leadership students.

Furthermore, there is ample support among us for innovative approaches to organizational school development, particularly the new types of schools devoted to serving educationally underserved students and marginalized populations. We are developing grant-funded university–district partnerships aimed at transforming the principles and expanding the candidate pool for addressing nation-wide administrator shortages. Learner-centered leadership programs are predicated upon the collaboration of aspiring and practicing school administrators on challenging professional agendas. Faculty are experimenting with other kinds of cohort formats as well for teaching master's and doctoral students, the former in their identity development as future school leaders, and the latter as dissertation writers, and both groups as scholar-practitioners. Writing/inquiry scaffolds, assisted-and-reciprocal strategies, and collaborative projects pedagogically support cohort practices, as do "problem-based learning case method, [and] administrative simulation teaching" (Pounder et al., p. 281).

While some criticisms of our profession are sound (see, e.g., UCEA, AERA, and NCEA leaders, n.d), the prolific number and quality of exceptional scholarship practitioners around us signal that important work is in progress. The chronic depiction of the state of scholarship in our profession as impoverished, then, is not a completely accurate assessment. By having presented current best practices not previously categorized or integrated, I have attempted to demonstrate where scholarly growth is occurring in what forms. This conversation-starter acts on the directions that professional associations provide for guiding our work as university faculty.

Finally, I am not proposing that professors, students, school districts, or any other constituent group adopt, "off the shelf," the developments included. Rather, benefit is expected from dialoguing about the foundational ideas and program descriptions outlined; where appropriate, these can be utilized to address one's own context and leadership challenges. The typology of best practices—an idea-generating resource—could serve us, then, in our scholarly development and commitment to research and improving the leadership profession.

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