Catalysts for Redesigning Principal Preparation: A Courageous Journey

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Summary
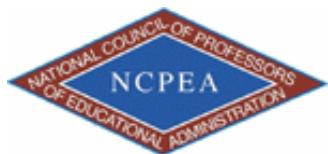
Introduction

A review of the research, state legislative mandates, and education department requirements (Levin, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005; N.C. House Bill 536, 2007) shows different demands for the re-design of principal licensure

programs. Program redesign always has some sort of catalyst. However, just because there is a catalyst does not guarantee that a re-design effort will yield the kind of product that either external or internal forces desired or foresaw. This case study addresses three questions:

What forces served as catalysts for program redesign?

How were those forces perceived by the faculty involved?

What insights can be gained from studying the catalysts for the redesign efforts of a particular faculty?

The Conceptual Framework for this case study and the redesign is presented.

Conceptual Framework for Program Redesign
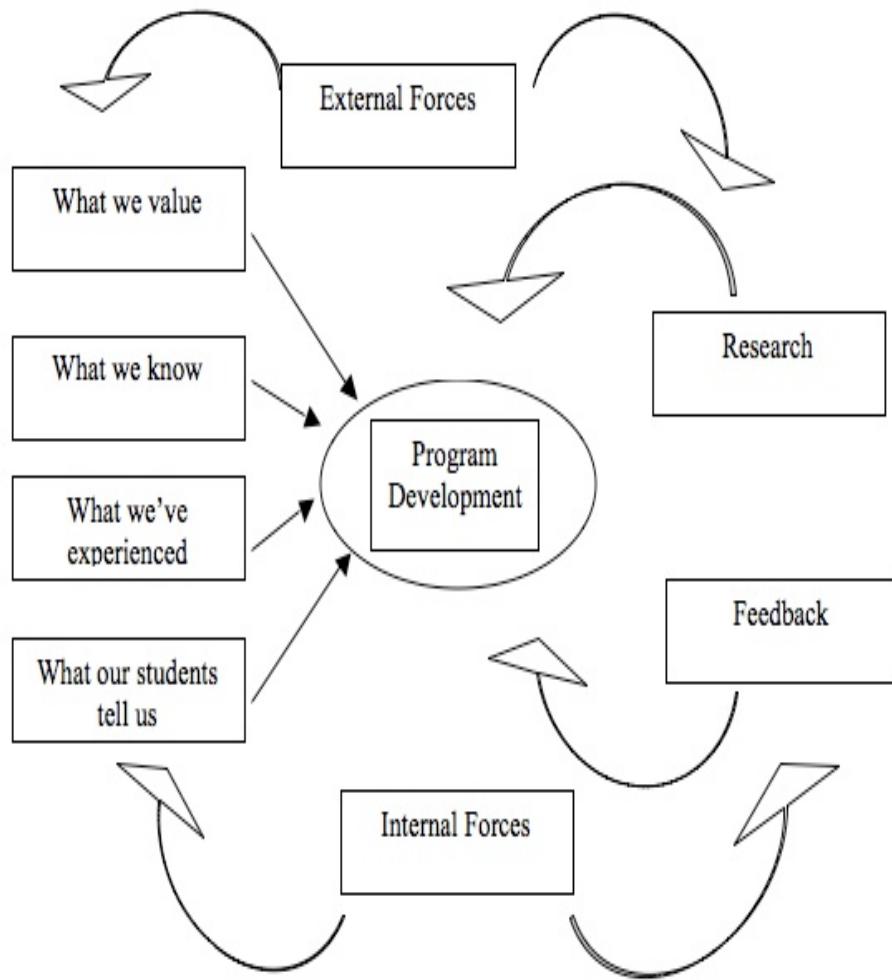
Conceptual Framework for Program Redesign

Examining Change

External, Internal, and Bridge Forces: What are they?

Principal licensure programs have been under scrutiny by external agents for some

time. A brief history of licensure requirements in the state of North Carolina reflects a continuing effort to generate change.

In the early 1990s all school administration programs were eliminated by the N.C. state legislature and faculty in universities had to redesign and apply for permission to offer the Masters in School Administration (MSA). At the same time if a candidate had an existing graduate degree, the ability to add a principal license was eliminated. So the only avenue was the MSA or an extended Education Specialist (Ed.S.) degree. In 2006, the State Board of Education approved an add-on license for principals and left it to the universities to define the programs with the following required elements: (1) Candidate has a graduate degree, (2) there would be an internship over a year and (3) the program would be 18-24 graduate hours. In a department where only one person was specifically identified with the MSA (a number of faculty taught in the MSA, but had duties across a number of programs) those faculty working in the area of educational leadership met to define the add-on license and determine the best way to make it work within the available resources while ensuring that candidates would leave with the same level of preparation of the MSA candidates.

In a small department (13 faculty in 2004) with 10 degree programs several of which have more than one concentration (e.g. the Ed.D. with three), in addition to being a service department for foundations including research, the time of the faculty to address change was limited.

It becomes clear in such a history how external forces can influence and even mandate program redesign. However, listening to the most recent calls for redesign (Levin, 2005); one wonders whether earlier attempts at redesign for the sake of compliance might actually have been more an effort to "show" change than to support efforts to create systemic, sustainable change.

The catalysts for the redesign process described herein are the result of external, internal, and bridge forces. External catalysts, as noted above, included the research, a new set of state standards for principals, an NCATE/DPI re-accreditation visit, and House Bill 536. The initial internal catalyst involved a new faculty member in 2004 who assumed responsibility for the MSA and who questioned many aspects of the existing program, the age and construction of the core of the MSA program and who was aware of the discussions around a possible principal add-on license being reinstated in the state. It also involved the, then department head, who responded to the request of local superintendents to provide courses online so that district personnel were prepared at our university rather than going across state lines to bordering state institutions. By 2006, the interaction between the content of the MSA program, a new Add-On licensure program, and the pressures of increased enrollment and the addition of MSA program specific faculty (positions reassigned through retirements) a dialogue began in earnest. The catalyst that touched all of these other forces and consistently infused the redesign effort from beginning to end has been the bridge catalyst – our students.

Examining the Catalysts

The three catalysts that have emerged in the redesign of one Masters in School Administration may serve others in considering the forces that contribute to the work, the importance of each, and the end product: a new program design. These three catalysts are identified as: *external, internal* and *bridge.*

External Catalysts

For the purposes of this paper, external forces are those things outside of the people at the university (i.e. faculty and students) involved in a program. This includes research in the field, legislation, mandates from state agencies, and expectations from practitioners in the field.

The research of Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) provides a seminal work in the analysis of what school leaders need to know and be able to do. Multiple researchers (McCarthy, 2004; Sanders, 2005) have documented the failings and weaknesses of traditional school administration programs. While the current programs at WCU have received positive reviews from both accrediting bodies and students, there is also evidence that many students are not fully prepared to lead in less than ideal environments or to deal with issues of compliance and accountability while at the same time leading positive change focused on student growth and development.

There is also evidence in the literature that suggests that external catalysts have consistently failed to substantively alter the majority of programs that redesign. Reflecting on the reforms of the 1990's, Young, Peterson, and Short (2002) identified eight barriers to reform: (1) lack of institutional support for educational administration programs, (2) lack of collaborative faculty professional development, (3) increased number of programs driving a race to the bottom of rigor, (4) poor applicant pool, (5) lack of support for collaborating on program redesign and instruction, (6) program content, (7) licensure and accreditation barriers, and (8) failure of the profession to focus on children. SREB (2006) pointed to insufficient resources supporting redesign efforts within universities, a lack of administrative support, departmental resistance, complicated institutional hurdles, and state policies that encourage people to get degrees in educational leadership even if the degree-holder has no intention of becoming a principal. Young, Fuller, Brewer, Carpenter and Mansfield (2007) suggested that programs require better evaluation systems, technical assistance, and a way to measure evidence over time.

In contrast, Hale and Moorman (2003) concluded that well crafted state policies,

bolstered by technical assistance and monitoring were needed. They also suggested state involvement in promoting university collaboration. Legislation such as H.B. 536 in North Carolina (2007) or the requirement of the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to submit redesigned programs for approval by June 30, 2009, in order to continue programs that lead to licensure and new standards (ISLLC, 1996; N.C. Standards for School Executives, 2006) can also serve as external catalysts. The level of specificity related to program redesign, as is the case in North Carolina, may place restraints or provide opportunity.

Last, but certainly not least, input from practitioners in the field can be an external catalyst for program change. Such was the case with the request of a superintendent in a rural region to put the Masters in School Administration on line. The superintendent was concerned that her faculty were going across state lines to get degrees and she valued the quality of the program at the in state institution and wanted her leaders prepared there, but the course offerings more than 2 hours from the district prohibited their participation.

In examining the impact of external forces on the program redesign, faculty responses (See Table 1) to the following "source of motivation for change" were:

"New Standards for principals" - rated from "Somewhat" to "Not at all" with no one rating it "very" important.

"House Bill 536" – rated from "somewhat" to "Not at all" (with 3/6 of the faculty rating it "not at all") and no one rating it "very" important.

Source of motivation to change					
	Perceived importance				
	Very	Somewhat	Marginal	Not at all	No Response
External					
New Standards	0	2	2	2	
House Bill 536	0	1	2	3	

Other:

Table 1: Perceived importance of external catalysts by faculty

Comments on external forces included statements which address the faculty belief about mandates, "This is a reality factor for us, but we were on the road to examining our programs before the standards were in place," "Do not need legislation to dictate to us to do what is right!" "The call for redesign just provides an expectation that we already had for ourselves." As much as the preceding comments really focus on internal catalysts, the following comments under the external catalysts make it even more evident that internal catalysts are more important than external. "I am not motivated by state standards, our standards are higher," "We had already decided to redesign."

Overall, the faculty viewed the external mandates as "somewhat" to "not at all" important as the reasons for the program redesign. The House Bill that mandated the redesign was the least of the reasons for redesign from the perspective of the faculty. The state standards and mandate from the Department of Public Instruction were seen as an opportunity to leverage the momentum of the internal catalysts. Additionally, the importance of the knowledge acquired from the research, the needs of our constituents (i.e. those affected by being distant from the offered course site), and the internal, as evidenced in the personal expectations cited in the responses of faculty to the external catalysts, as well as the bridge catalysts were far more influential in the program redesign.

This is not to suggest a non-compliance view or a rejection of the requirements for licensure and accreditation, but rather that the external forces, while catalysts, were not viewed by faculty as the most important reason for implementing change to the existing programs.

Internal Catalysts

Internal forces are defined as the forces existing within the college of education, the department, and, primarily, the unique motivations of the individual faculty. Faculty were presented with a list of five internal motivations and asked to rate each as being "very important", "somewhat important", "marginally important" or "not at all important" to his/her motivation to engage in the redesign (See Table 2). Faculty also had the opportunity to note additional sources of motivation.

Source of
motivation
to change

Perceived importance

	Very	Somewhat	Marginal	Not at all	No Response
Internal					
Age of MSA program	0	2	1	3	0
Personal priorities and beliefs	5	1	0	0	0
Pressures of increased enrollment	1	2	0	3	0
Support of colleagues	3	3	0	0	0
Program assessment and student feedback	2	2	0	1	1
Other:	• Support of department head (2) • Stories from the field • Take advantage of online environment • New faculty				

Table 2: Perceived importance of Internal Catalysts

The single strongest motivation for engaging in the redesign was the personal priorities and beliefs of the faculty. An analysis of faculty comments shows that these beliefs were closely related to a common core purpose – preparing highly competent school leaders. Jacque said, "I believe we can and should refocus our thinking on how SA [school administrators] can support and develop teachers to serve students." Frederick expressed a belief that the faculty shared values, noting that, "We are all emphasizing personal growth, but we can do so much more if we work together coherently." Casey described his core belief that, "Both the ability to create beauty, and the ability to stand

for what is beautiful, instead of what is ugly (effective) emerge from a person's human nature. The development of that nature is our purpose." Lucian emphasized, "…getting practicing and prospective school administrators fully engaged with 'quality' leadership is critical if schools are going to 'truly' improve the quality of teaching and education students get."

In addition to personal beliefs, faculty all identified the support of colleagues as being either "very" or "somewhat" important. Specifically, faculty said they had confidence in each other to work together to achieve something unique. Frederick said, "I could see we had the people that could come up with something different and great." Similarly, Chris identified a "…unique situation with colleagues who can make synergy work magic." Jacque said, "Being part of a group that is willing to challenge the *status quo* is a real plus for me."

The faculty shared three characteristics that would play off of each other and be key components in supporting the difficult work of redesigning the program from scratch. The faculty were motivated by personal beliefs, but those personal beliefs had a common element of meeting the needs of aspiring school leaders. Faculty exhibited a high degree of trust in each other's competency and had complementary strengths. Finally, faculty believed that they could work together and achieve something special. These internal catalysts not only spurred the faculty to act, but to act with high expectations.

Bridge Catalysts

While the majority of reported redesigns rely on external mandates, the redesign was motivated in large part by faculty sensitivities to student needs. Faculty received continuous input from students in multiple ways. Each student completing the program filled out a program evaluation that included questions about the weakest and strongest elements of the program. Faculty routinely gathered information in their courses about the challenges that students faced in leading their schools. Frederick, Lucian, and Kathleen actively explored issues in their research (Buskey, 2007; Buskey, 2009; Salazar & Jorissen, 2007), and faculty were often intimately involved in student leadership concerns as part of the faculty's commitment to student mentoring.

Students were the bridge catalyst that helped refine the work of the internal catalysts in the redesign. There were three elements to the bridge catalysts, general concern for helping students become skilled school leaders, specific concerns about meeting the needs of a changing student population, and addressing the unique challenges and possibilities of the online environment.

Source of

motivation to change	Perceived importance				
	Very	Somewhat	Marginal	Not at all	No Response
Bridge					
Student demographics (including being distance students)	0	4	1	1	0
Student needs	5	1	0	0	0
Online structure	1	3	1	1	0

Table 3: Perceived importance of Bridge Catalysts

Four of the faculty *strongly agreed* and one *agreed* that student needs were important factors in the decision to redesign. The general concern for students showed in different ways. Jacque felt a reciprocal pressure, noting that, "Students in general in our program want to be well prepared. I think they hold us to a high standard as we do them." Lucian linked the faculty care for K-12 students to care for our students. He linked faculty efforts to school success saying, "If we are going to make a difference in schools we must focus on helping administrators know what good education and teaching is as well as helping them improve their own professional practice." Frederick elaborated on Lucian's theme saying, "I fear for what will happen to our students. So many of them are idealistic and seem powerful – I don't want them to get beaten down. Others are rigid and inflexible – how can we help them?"

As the online program has grown, the diversity of participants has increased. The student population has become a mix of very different rural populations (the mountainous west and the flat northeast), suburban and urban participants, and increased religious and racial diversity. Four faculty agreed that changing demographics was a factor in deciding to redesign. Jacque and Frederick specifically noted that there was an opportunity to capitalize on the new diversity in the program.

Faculty had similar feelings about the influence of the online environment with one *strongly agree* and three in *agree*ment that online environment was an important

factor in redesigning. As with diversity, faculty discussed the unique strengths of the medium. Jacque said, "Moving to an online program provided a 'new' way to think about our work and it is a helpful catalyst." Faculty also acknowledged limitations. Frederick said, "There are great things we can do online that we can't do f-t-f [face to face], but there are also limitations. I wanted to address those by incorporating some f-t-f component."

Faculty commitment to student success, reflected in motivation to address general needs, and to capitalize on the increased diversity and online environment, played a prominent role in the decision to redesign. While faculty values focusing on K-12 students were extremely important catalysts, the personal connections between faculty and students in the program provided additional motivation and a sense of personalized accountability to be better.

Considering the Catalysts

With three different catalysts: *internal, external* and *bridge*, the redesign of our program was inevitable. All too often the catalysts are external, as evidenced by the passage of House Bill 536 in North Carolina. As members of an internal group who had already begun to consider the possibilities for a redesigned program, we have been able to see the external forces as an *opportunity*. We have become acutely aware that creating change is about the people who are at a given place at a given point in time. We absolutely know that the group working on this redesign is willing to challenge the *status quo,* work together collaboratively, and capitalize on their strong public school partnerships (which have been recognized through two national awards, AACTE and AASCU, for the College of Education and Allied Professions in the 2006 and 2007.)

Strategies that Matter

We are convinced that the ability to create this redesign has come from our collective willingness to: (1) examine the *visible:* e.g. state mandates, research, our own knowledge and experience, (2) examine the *hidden:* e.g. allowing the current program to constrain our thinking; (3) examine the *possible:* that is to dream about the possibilities that could come from creating a program that would address what we have learned from the research, our students and school partners, and our own observations, leading to a meaningful program designed through long hours of debate, concession and design. This perspective has led to a critical element in our new program which involves ensuring that our students learn to examine the *visible, hidden* and *possible* in each challenge/decision that they make in their roles as teacher and administrative leaders.

We believe that one of the most important things we did was to spend several very long days/evenings together, away from campus, over the period of 5 months. We started

with defining what each of us think is important about our work and the resulting outcome of well prepared school leaders. We started by having each person write 3-5 words that s/he believed about our work. We planned to compile these and see what we individually believed and what we might collectively agree to have represent our thinking. Initially, based on our experiences in K-12 and higher education, we thought this would lead to a defined mission statement but then one of our colleagues said, "We really need to watch Guy Kawasaki on mantras" (Kawasaki, 2006). After viewing this inspiring video as a group on a small laptop computer, we turned to our board of post-it notes on what we each said we believe about our work and the importance of preparation of school leaders. All of us had participated in the mission statement development discussed by Kawasaki and the "aha" feeling that we all had was reinforced as we looked at those post-it notes and in the matter of less than 3 minutes we were able to pull 5 words that created a mantra we could celebrate: *Lead your leadership journey courageously©* (WCU Faculty, 2007.)

The mantra itself (See Table 4) and the experience of working together over the ensuing months assures us that it is the variety of beliefs, the willingness to work at letting go of the current models and dreaming that has allowed us to come to the design we have.

Another strategy that has been critical has been the willingness to let go of the sacred three semester hour model and to talk, argue, struggle through how we might actually be able to define load for faculty and how we would be able to reach our high expectations in a model that would look nothing like what we had. Individual faculty have identified their ability to practice with each other the skills that they used in their former administrative roles. For example, being willing to say, "I understood you to say…" "Could you please expand on that so that I can understand further the implications of that recommendation?" We realized that in the K-12 arena we practiced good listening skills and redirecting, but in higher education we are affected by a history of individual faculty autonomy and course assignments based on areas of "expertise." We wanted to bring our K-12 experience to our higher education work. So not only have we thought deeply and seriously about our roles as professors of educational leadership, but about our own development in the change process.

Moving the Redesign Forward

We are now at the exciting and challenging stage of fleshing out courses through piloting with three cohorts who are integral in the examination of this work. We have designed opportunities to ensure feedback, from the individuals and groups who are affected; employers, former graduates and current students. This feedback on the

design from our bridge catalyst (candidates) has been incorporated and then reviewed by a focus group of our partners and then will be submitted for approval from the state department of public instruction and the university curriculum committees. The following posting from one of the candidates in our redesigned program suggests that our efforts are paying off:

About 10 days ago, I think I was looking at going back to school simply as that – I was going to take the classes necessary to add on principal licensure. Now I see that I have embarked upon a journey. I believe it will be a life changing experience. I will be a different person a year from now, a better person and a stronger person and one that is ready to truly be a leader in every sense of the word. J.Taylor (student post EDL 685, Fall 2008)

Summary

Insert paragraph text here.

The influence of the various catalysts will be best assessed over time as the redesign becomes reality and we are able to examine the influence and impact of each.

Only time will show whether our graduates who lead schools, regardless of their roles have benefitted the students they serve as a result of our preparation model. But our program designed around our mantra promises to provide a framework to that end.

The Mantra	What it means…		
Live	Integrated		
Your	Personal Responsibility	Personalized development	
Leadership	Caring	Serving	Inspiring
Journey	Continual action		
Courageously	Risk-Taking	Creativity	

Table 4: Our mantra *Live your Leadership Journey Courageoulsy©*as it directs student learning

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