The Role of Inquiry in Closing the Gap between University Experience and Assistant Principal Career Transition through Simulated Realistic Job Preview

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Educational administration is the weakest program that schools of education offer…most (principal preparation programs) vary in quality from inadequate to appalling. Their shortcomings include irrelevant and incoherent curricula, low admission and graduation standards, inadequate clinical instruction…(and) degrees that are irrelevant to the jobs students eventually hold" (Levine, 2005, B16). Arthur Levine, the president of Teachers College at Columbia University, was roundly lambasted for these comments by the educational leadership community. In particular, his report was criticized for ignoring the many positive aspects of leadership preparation programs (Young, 2005). While Levine (2005) contends that Universities are not connected enough with local district practices, Flessa (2007) counters that non-university based school leadership programs lack the ability to meaningfully critique substandard local district policies that may be in place. Perhaps it is not surprising to find that schools of education have vehemently defended their usefulness – but is there value in Levine's critique? Can educational administration programs improve their relevance to the jobs their graduates hold while continuing to provide them with a sound theoretical base?

PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION

This study was undertaken by two professors of educational leadership at a newly established public university in the Southwestern United States. Because the principal preparation program at this institution is nascent, the professors are particularly interested in exploring questions as to the relevance and usefulness of their program to the local educational community. In order to explore this question, the authors recently instituted the practice of conducting follow up interviews with program graduates who have been hired as school administrators. In its first iteration the purpose of these interviews was to ask two primary questions – what did the program do well to prepare graduates for their position as school administrators? And how could the program be improved? The result of the first series of interviews revealed a desire on the part of students to have a greater level of involvement with local school districts (Herrington & Kearney, 2012). Program enhancements were made

based on the feedback students provided. Perhaps the most interesting of these changes was the implementation of a pilot program in which core courses are now co-taught by a tenure-track faculty member and a veteran administrator from a local school district (Herrington & Kearney, 2012).

The purpose of this study (which was conducted exactly one year after the first investigation) is to report on the second set of interviews with program graduates who have been hired as school administrators. This study followed much the same protocol as the previous investigation, with the added benefit of being informed by lessons learned therein. As will be further discussed in the Findings section of this paper, many of the responses from program graduates centered on the desire to have a more realistic job preview. The authors now turn their attention to a review of the extant literature on effective educational leadership programs and realistic job previews.

What Makes an Educational Leadership Program Effective?

Most evaluations of educational leadership program quality are conducted on individual programs and are qualitative in nature. Each of these studies is useful in presenting innovative approaches to program refinement. While it is beyond the scope of this literature review to present all of the innovative strategies being utilized in educational programs today, what follows is a brief overview of a few program innovations that have been recently documented in the literature on effective school leadership programs. One such innovative approach is employed at the University of Louisville, in which applicants must be nominated by their principal before being accepted into the leadership program (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, La Pointe, & Orr, 2010), their logic being that principals are in the best position to assess the future leadership potential of current teachers. At East Tennessee State University, students must complete 540 hours of internship experiences (Klein, 2007), which is far greater than the national average. At Cal State University in Fresno, students are required to complete exit interviews at the end of each semester with program faculty and district supervisors to ensure that they are prepared to lead local schools (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Meanwhile, Wichita State University employs a field based curriculum with reduced class contact hours in order to maximize students experiences by having them work on action research projects with local school districts (Orr, 2006). Of course, there are many other effective innovations being employed in principal preparation programs across the United States.

Recently, a number of meta-analyses have emerged that have identified certain common characteristics shared by high quality school leadership programs (Davis, Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, & LaPointe, 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Orr, 2006; Young, Crow, Ogawa, & Murphy, 2009). These common traits include: a strong theoretical base in leadership for school improvement; a curriculum that emphasizes instructional leadership; integration of theory and practice; quality internships; knowledgeable faculty; social and professional support for students; and internal evaluation of program effectiveness (Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Perhaps just as importantly, research has been conducted as to what makes a school leadership program ineffective.

The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) sponsored an investigation into the quality of Educational Administration programs. The results of their research indicate a number of problem areas most commonly associated with ineffective

school leadership programs, including: underutilized recruitment collaborations with local K-12 schools; a lack of cooperation with local educational agencies; limited professional development for current school leaders; and preparation that is irrelevant to the actual work done by school leaders (Jackson & Kelley, 2002).

Realistic Job Preview: A Conceptual Framework for Consideration

Clearly there is a recognized need within the educational leadership professorate for school leadership programs to be more tightly coupled with and responsive to the needs of their local school districts. The authors looked into the literature of other leadership disciplines and have identified one vehicle that may hold promise for closing the gap between what is taught in our classes and what is expected of program graduates in the field. Realistic Job Preview (RJP) is an approach to training and development that was first used in the military during the 1980's as a way of inoculating recruits against the feelings of disillusionment and discouragement often experienced by inductees when facing very difficult, boring, or stressful assignments (Brooks & Evans, 1996). The underlying principle was that if the recruits knew in advance the adverse circumstances they might face on the job and had a made an informed and rational decision to accept their role, they might be more inclined to experience job satisfaction and would remain more committed to the organization than those who had been traditionally recruited. However boring, dangerous, or otherwise stressful the assignment might be, they were more inclined to continue in that role than those who had not been made previously aware.

Bohlander & Snell (2009) noted that what is unique about an RJP is that it strives to let candidates know about all aspects of a job (both desirable and undesirable job requirements) before hiring an employee. By way of contrast, a typical job preview presents only positive aspects of employment to potential employees as in a sales presentation. Individuals are often drawn to a job or career field because of assumptions they have made about that field of study. All too often these assumptions are inaccurate or incomplete, which leads to confusion, dissatisfaction, and a lack of fulfillment (Dubois, 2000). RJPs have been shown to enhance employee satisfaction and reduce employee turnover (Hom, Griffeth & Palich, 1999; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

The concept of RJP has also been applied in business and industrial settings as a potential vehicle for addressing the cost of high attrition rates. Duncan (1994) compared the retention rates of job recruits who experienced RJP during the recruitment and hiring process with those who entered the labor force in the customary fashion and noted that those who been provided with an accurate sense of the job and its requirements during the actual hiring process had a lower attrition rate in their respective positions than those who had not been provided an accurate picture. Specifically, after eighteen months 57% of RJP hires remained on the job compared with 35% of traditional hires. After 3 years the differential was 41 percent retention rates for RJP inductees, compared to a 21 percent retention rate for traditionally hired individuals (Duncan, 1994).

Health care professionals have also examined the use of RJPs. Crow, Hartman, & McLendon (2009) note that, "Health care organizations are better served by using realistic job previews (Flynn, Mathis, & Jackson, 2004) because they hold promise for reducing unrealistic expectations, disenchantment and dissatisfaction, and turnover by providing applicants a clear picture of the job" (2009, July, p. 322). Perhaps not surprisingly, Griffeth & Hom (2001)

found that many organizations that use RJPs have an established reputation for their commitment to good employee relations.

Applying the Concepts of a Realistic Job Preview to Educational Leadership Preparation

While there are many examples in the literature of Realistic Job Preview philosophies being applied to military, business, and the health care professions, there is unfortunately a paucity of research into the potential usefulness of RJPs in the preparation of future school leaders. The extant literature on RJPs would seem to suggest that these concepts can be applied to individuals seeking employment in any profession. This places Universities in a unique position to benefit from RJPs. To this end, Laker (2002) conducted research with over 1,000 college students in which participants received specific information and exposure to the expectations of the jobs they were currently studying to undertake. Perhaps not surprisingly, some participants determined they were in the wrong field of study. Naturally, this caused disappointment and anxiety, however, Laker (2002) contends that it is better for students to find that out early in their career pursuits than after they have completed coursework and find themselves stuck in a job they do not enjoy.

Induction year school administrators face social and political situations that are unfamiliar, along with unprecedented levels of disrespect and hostility, and ambiguous situations wherein they may have high levels of expectation for success without authority to complete a mission or task successfully. Finding ways to provide some realism in the preparation of future school administrators is an important challenge for educational leadership preparation programs to address.

How then can educational leadership preparation programs provide a more realistic job preview for their students? The first step toward creating a more realistic job preview may be to diagnose what is really going on within the campuses in which aspiring candidates hope to be employed. It may also be beneficial to identify situations that current administrators find challenging. Once these realistic job experiences are identified, professors of educational leadership can begin to determine what kinds of realistic job previews they can provide to program participants. Applying lessons learned from RJP in other fields, perhaps the most important factor is to provide this information to aspiring administrators as early in their graduate programs as possible (Wanous, 1989).

METHODOLOGY

This study is a follow-up study to a program evaluation of a relatively new principal preparation program. The coauthor/professors set out to interview the very first round of assistant principal graduates. They were contacted during their first few months on the job and again at the end of their first year to learn what had been most helpful and what had been lacking in their graduate education in educational leadership. Based on these interviews of these ten assistant principals, a number of key findings were recorded and reported with recommendations for program improvement (Herrington & Kearney, 2012). Recommendations in the previous article had focused upon the need for more realistic decision-making experiences and more concrete examples of what might be faced in their future administrative roles. The information provided by these informants led

coauthor/professors to examine other fields to find a conceptual framework that seemed to correspond with the identified needs. "Realistic Job Preview" was examined because it was both descriptive of a process that had been used in other fields to improve professional preparation and it incorporated the realism needed to provide an "eyes-wide-open" approach to the profession.

Because this would be a follow-up study, a semi-structured interview protocol was developed based not only on the extant literature on assistant principal career transition, but also on information gleaned from the first round of interviews (Herrington & Kearney, 2012). Respondents within the previous investigation had indicated that increased use of scenarios designed to provide a realistic job preview would have assisted them in their new positions as school administrators. Accordingly, the following questions were asked: 1) What did our principal preparation program do that prepared you well for your current position as a school administrator? 2) What could our principal preparation program have done to better prepare you for your current position as a school administrator? And 3) Can you give examples of interactions you have experienced on campus during your first year as a school administrator that may be useful as a teaching tool within our program?

The ten interviews were conducted over a two week period of time. Nine of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. One was conducted as a telephone interview. Coauthor/professors explored the range of responses and coded items based on common themes (Maxwell, 1996). Once interview responses were coded and developed into key themes, the coauthor/professors reflected on ways the principal preparation program may have been perceived of as useful and relevant. This juxtaposes areas where gaps between education and experiences were greatest. These reflections focused on the potential usefulness of scenarios in providing a more realistic job preview for aspiring administrators.

PARTICIPANTS

The ten assistant principals for this study were selected because they were among the second group of completers of this institution's nascent principal preparation program. Six of the assistant principals that participated in this study are male and four are female. Six are Latino, two are African American, and two are Anglo. Participants ranged in years of teaching experience prior to appointment as assistant principal from 2 to 8 years (R1 = 2; R2 = 6; R3 =3; R4 = 7; R5 = 8; R6 = 5; R7=2; R8 = 6; R9 = 2; R10 = 4). At the time of the interview, eight respondents were employed by public schools; one was employed by a private parochial school, and one was employed by a charter school. School levels at which participants were serving as administrators during the time of the interview are as follows (R1: Elementary School; R2: High School; R3 = Middle School; R4 = K-12 Alternative School; R5 = Intermediate 5th/6th grade campus; R6 = Elementary School; R7 = Elementary School; R8 = Middle School; R9 = Elementary School; R10 = Elementary School).

The coauthor/professors conducting the study are both male (N=2). Both are charter educational leadership faculty members who have previously taught the respondents within their principal preparation program.

FINDINGS

It is interesting to note that across all interviews (six in year 1, and ten in year 2), there was an overlap between what the university had done well to prepare program graduates and what could be done better. In response to what the program had done well, respondents mentioned how much they learned when professors brought in Public Information Officers (R1, R3, R6), Principal panels (R1, R3, R4, R5, R6, R8, R9, R10), superintendents (R2, R3, R5, R7) and other school administrators (R2, R6). In response to what the program could do better, all 10 respondents indicated a need to create an even stronger connection with what they would be expected to do on the job by the school district that hired them. The overarching concept that emerged from these interviews was the need to provide a more realistic job preview. Scenario responses fell into three categories or sub-themes: interactions with parents, safety/student discipline, and supervision.

One important difference that was inescapable is that the graduate students, while employed as school district teachers, could not be ethically placed in situations that they did not possess the authority to carry out in their roles as teachers. In some cases, family confidentiality or employee confidentiality might prevent them from serving in a bona fide administrative role. Former graduate students, one year into their administrative roles, were asked to provide scenarios that they had found difficult and for which they had no prior experience. The graciously provided the coauthor/professors with a wealth of scenarios which are presented below. These scenarios will be used to provide graduate students aspiring to become administrators with actual simple examples where their cursory understanding of school law, ethics, and organizational effectiveness can be applied. In this way, educational administration candidates can best be provided realistic experiences before actually being seated in the proverbial, "hot seat."

USING ADMINISTRATIVE SCENARIOS TO CREATE A MORE REALISTIC JOB PREVIEW

Once an understanding of what is really going on within the hiring organization(s) is ascertained, the onus falls upon the preparation program to provide a realistic job preview to its participants as early and as clearly as possible (Laker, 2002). What follows is a set of scenarios provided by program graduates in response to the question, "Can you give examples of interactions you have experienced on campus during your first year as a school administrator that may be useful as a teaching tool within our program?" It is the authors' intent to utilize these scenarios within their own courses in educational administration to create a more realistic job preview.

ADMINISTRATIVE SCENARIOS

Scenarios fell into three categories: 1) interactions with parents, 2) safety and student discipline, and 3) supervision. These scenarios are provided in groups below. After each scenario, we provide a brief series of questions designed to initiate face to face or online discussions with aspiring school leaders. Finally, a possible theme is provided in order to assist professors in identifying how they may wish to incorporate these scenarios into their own courses.

Interactions with Parents:

Parent Scenario #1: A parent comes to school and sits at the back of a classroom. They remain for the entire day. They return and repeat this process 3 days in a row (R9).
Questions: Do you intervene? If so, when? How?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school communication; parental involvement; school board policy; campus climate

Parent Scenario #2: A parent comes to school upset and uses foul language in the office in the presence of students (R1, R3, R8).
Questions: Do you ask the parent to leave the campus? Do you ban the parent from returning to campus if their behavior does not change? Do you involve the school police officer (if there is one)?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school safety; school board policy; campus norms; student handbook; parental involvement

Parent Scenario #3: A non-custodial parent picks up a child from school. According to your paperwork on file in the office, the parent has custodial rights, but now the mother is in the office, furious, telling you a judge had removed the father's custody rights, and you should never have released the child to him (R9, R10).
Questions: How do you respond to the mother? What are your next steps? Is there anything that could have been done to help prevent this issue?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: parental rights and responsibilities; school personnel; school safety plan

Parent Scenario #4: A parent is upset that a child who was involved in a fight with her son was not punished severely enough. She threatens a law suit and indicates she will go to the superintendent (R8).
Question: How do you respond? What is your rationale?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: family education right to privacy act (FERPA), student code of conduct; student discipline

Parent Scenario #5: While registering their child to enter your campus, the parents indicate that they feel their child is far advanced and should be enrolled at one grade level above their age group. They have a letter from the principal of the last school that supports this move (R7).
Question: How do you proceed?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school board policy; gifted and talented education; free and appropriate public education (FAPE); student assessment

Parent Scenario #6: Your campus policy is to allow students to carry cell phones but only if they keep the cell phone in their backpack. An incident occurs in which two students remove a cell phone from a class mate's backpack and download inappropriate content before placing the phone back in the child's backpack. The misbehavior is discovered, the students admit to their misdeeds, and they are punished accordingly. Subsequently, the father of the child whose cell phone was temporarily stolen instructs his son that he is to keep his cell phone in

his pocket from now on. You inform the parent that this is against school policy and if discovered, he (the child) will be punished. The father nods his head slightly, but does not respond. The next day, the cell phone falls out of the boy's pocket during class, and the teacher confiscates the phone (as per campus and district policy). The parent comes into your office screaming and irate (R7).

Questions: How would you respond? Do you feel the parent is justified in his frustration? Would you bend the policy in this instance? Why or why not?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: parental rights and responsibilities; school board policy; school community relations; grievance process; interpersonal trust

Parent Scenario #7: A parent calls upset about a grade their child received on a major assignment. You have attempted to direct the parent back to the teacher, but they continue to insist on speaking with you (R1, R5).

Question: What is your next step?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school law; chain of command; chain of communication

Parent Scenario #8: You are an assistant principal on a 5th/6th grade campus. In an effort to ease traffic congestion in your hallways, you inform parents that they are not allowed to escort students to class. One of the parents complains to the superintendent, and the next day you receive a memo indicating that district policy allows parents to visit their child's classroom at any time as long as they have first signed in at the office and are not specifically banned from that campus (R5).

Question: How do you respond to the superintendent? Would you follow up with the parent who complained about you? If so, how?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school board policy; parental rights and responsibilities; school safety; upward advocacy; school facilities

Safety and Student Discipline:

Student Scenario #1: Two children are involved in a fight. One of them is a repeat offender, the other you have never seen in your office before (R8, R9).

Questions: How do you discipline the two children? Identically? Differently? How do you justify your decision? How will you respond to the parents when they ask how the other child was disciplined?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: student code of conduct; cultural considerations; student behavior; progressive discipline; FERPA

Student Scenario #2 A teacher brings a child to you for "frequent and persistent misbehavior." She complains that the child is disrespectful and needs to be suspended for a poor attitude (R1, R9).

Questions: Are you inclined to suspend a child for this type of behavior? What other options might you have?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: behavior management; classroom management; student teacher relationships; role of trust; documentation; referral process

Student Scenario #3: As you are walking by a classroom, you overhear a child telling a teacher to "shut up" (R8).
Questions: Do you intervene? Do you allow the teacher to handle it? What is your rationale?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: classroom management; student teacher relationships; teacher authority; supervision; teacher rights

Student Scenario #4: It is your responsibility to enforce the dress code policy as it is written. During the playoffs, a local sports team has made the finals. A student on your campus gets a hair cut with his favorite player's jersey number shaved into the side of his head. This violates dress code. A teacher brings him to the office to bring the infraction to your attention (R8).
Questions: Do you follow the code of conduct? If not, how would you proceed? What is your rationale?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school board policy; dress code; grievance; school community relations

Student Scenario #5: A child is choking in the lunchroom as you walk by. You have never received training in how to conduct the Heimlich maneuver, but you have seen it done before. How do you proceed (R8)?
Questions: What are the implications if you act, save the child, but break one of the child's ribs? What are the implications if you act, but do not save the child? What are the implications if you do not act?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school safety; crisis management plan; professional development; parental rights and responsibilities

Student Scenario #6: A teacher sends a student to your office because the child has cut marks on their arms. Although the student denies it, you begin to sense that the student has self inflicted these wounds and that the child may be suicidal (R7).
Questions: What other personnel would you involve in this issue?   What legal requirements should you be aware of?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: role of counselor; duty to report; child protective services; special education; student assessment; behavioral response to intervention

Student Scenario #7: A high school student is kicking a locker in the hallway during a passing period. You approach the child and ask him to come speak with you. The child looks at you, stops kicking the locker, and begins to walk away. You raise your voice slightly and tell the child to stop. He does not (R7).
Questions: How do you proceed? What is the rationale for your decision?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: role of trust; character education; de-escalation tactics; conflict resolution; student code of conduct; parental involvement

Student Scenario #8: You have a student on your campus that is deaf. The child has punched another child on the playground who was making fun of him. The deaf child is now in your office. You do not know sign language. The child refuses to look at you (R6).
Question: How would you attempt to communicate with this child? What resources might you have at your disposal?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: bullying; individual education program (IEP); district support services; character education; parental involvement

Student Scenario #9: An elementary aged child is assaulted by a fellow student on a school bus on the way to your campus. The bus video provides clear evidence of the attack, and the aggressor receives an appropriate consequence in accordance with campus and district policy. Two weeks later, the mother of the assaulted child walks onto the bus to confront the offending child. Although the bus driver instructs her to get off the bus, the mother pushes past the bus driver and confronts/threatens the child who accosted her offspring (R6). Questions: What authority do you have in this situation? How would you respond?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: role of local law enforcement; school board policy; school transportation; conflict resolution; media relations

Student Scenario #10: You are the assistant principal at the District Alternative Education Program (DAEP). You are in a good mood because you feel as if you are truly helping students who have made bad choices begin to turn their lives around.   It is five minutes before school is supposed to begin when a student who has recently been showing great progress shows up on your campus appearing to be high on drugs. The student is currently on parole. A violation of parole will send this child back to the Juvenile Justice Center (R2). Questions: What do you do next? Provide a rationale.
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: discretionary placements; cultural competency; school board policy; state and federal law; education code; ethics

Supervision:

Supervision Scenario #1: As you pass by a classroom, you notice that one of your teachers is on his/her cell phone taking a personal call during class time (R9).
Questions: Do you write up the infraction? Provide a verbal warning? What is the rationale for your decision?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: supervision; personnel actions; school board policy; school safety; professional rights and responsibilities of teachers

Supervision Scenario #2: A student is sent to the nurse because he says he hit his head on the floor. The nurse is suspicious and sends the child to speak to you. The child tells you that he was pushed to the ground by another child while the class was left unattended by the teacher. You speak to the teacher, who admits to leaving the class unattended while going to the bathroom. This is not the first time you've spoken to this teacher about not leaving the class unattended (R3).
Questions: Do you write up the infraction? Provide a verbal warning? What is your rationale?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school safety; professional rights and responsibilities of teachers; supervision; teacher collegiality; ethics; negligence; school law

Supervision Scenario #3: A teacher brings a pet to work without consulting you. You have previously instructed all staff not to bring pets to work unless they have cleared it with administration first (R4).

Questions: Do you write up the infraction or provide a verbal warning? What is your rationale? What is the potential harm in allowing animals into the classroom?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: verbal/written directives; student health/safety; school board policy; teacher handbook; ADA compliance

Supervision Scenario #4: A veteran teacher is under your supervision. You have rated the teacher as proficient/average. The teacher comes into your office and begins to cry, indicating they have never received such low ratings. The teacher asks if you will reconsider (R7).
Questions: How do you proceed? Would you consider changing your assessment? If so, under what circumstances? If not, why not?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: clinical supervision; grievance; school board policy; high expectations; interpersonal trust

Supervision Scenario #5: A parent writes a formal letter to you requesting that their child be removed from their homeroom teacher's class. The parent gives no explanation for her request other than to remark that the child does not feel that this teacher likes her (the child) (R6).
Questions: How would you respond? What are the possible ramifications of granting/not granting the request?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: parent rights and responsibilities; school board policy; documentation; classroom climate; school community relations; chain of command

Supervision Scenario #6: You have just been promoted to assistant principal on the same campus where you used to teach. Your former teacher colleagues are now under your supervision. For years, you have been "friends" with many of them on Facebook and other social media sites (R6).
Questions: Would you choose to continue sharing online information with your former colleagues in this manner? Why or why not?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: professional roles; teacher code of ethics; social media awareness; teacher professionalism; moral turpitude; community standards

Supervision Scenario #7:   It is your district policy to provide teachers with advanced notice before they are scheduled to be observed for their annual evaluation. A teacher who is under your supervision has been absent each of the last three dates on which an observation was scheduled (R10).
Question: How would you proceed? Would it make a difference if the teacher had a poor performance evaluation the prior year?
Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school board policy; clinical supervision; contractual obligations; school law

Supervision Scenario #8: You have just been hired as the new assistant principal on a campus that has historically underperformed on state exams. As a classroom teacher you personally had great success in regard to student achievement on standardized tests. You attribute much of your success to the time you spent tutoring students individually. Accordingly, you have just announced at an after school faculty meeting that you will be implementing a more aggressive tutorial program on this campus. After school, three teachers approach you in the

parking lot to let you know that you can do what you want with your own time, but they will not be staying late to tutor students (R4).

Question: What would be your immediate response? If this proves to be the prevailing attitude among the entire staff, what would be your next course of action?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: school climate; community relations; communication of expectations; hiring protocol; grievances; professional rights and responsibilities; teacher contract; union contract

Supervision Scenario #9: While standing in front of the school to greet students, you notice a teacher pull into the parking lot late. This will be her third infraction. During her planning period, you speak with the teacher, informing her that an official letter of reprimand will be placed in her personnel file. She responds that 5 other teachers were also late that day (and she gives you their names). Although you did not personally see these teachers arrive late, you know it is possible that what the teacher said could be true (R3).

Questions: What would you say in response to this teacher? What action (if any) would you take based on this reported information?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: use of 3rd party information in supervision; union contracts; interpersonal trust; school safety

Supervision Scenario #10: At the beginning of the school year, teachers are sent a mass email indicating who everyone's supervisor will be. You receive emails from three separate teachers indicating they don't trust the other assistant principal, and they would rather have you as their supervisor (R2).

Questions: Do you respond? If so, what would you say to these teachers? What would you say (if anything) to the administrator about whom they are complaining?

Scenario is Rich for Analysis of: professionalism; school climate; interpersonal trust; communication skills; professional boundaries

IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The authors are utilizing these scenarios as a teaching tool within their own courses in educational administration. Because coursework within this program is offered in a hybrid format (a combination of online/face to face/ and field based delivery), the authors are utilizing the scenarios for both small group discussion during class time and in online discussion boards. Scenarios are introduced in class with discussions, interactions, and role-play. These scenarios are then posted online for reflection and response by each program participant. Additionally, we have invited current school administrators to attend educational leadership courses to allow for direct interaction between current administrators and program participants. The scenarios are useful as a vehicle for entering into discussions in which aspiring administrators are able to ask current practitioners if they have encountered similar issues as those raised in the scenarios, and if so – how they handled them. Similarly, the university hosts an annual principal panel in which program participants are able to query panelists both in regard to their success and current challenges.

This study was undertaken out of a desire on the part of two professors of educational administration to explore and enhance the relevance of their school leadership program to the needs of the local school districts who employ their graduates. Furthermore, through the

research and findings regarding the success with Realistic Job Preview, it seems that this approach might also lead to a more cognizant, aware, and resilient future administrator. The inquiry and subsequent dissemination of realistic job expectations for aspiring school leaders is but one tool that can help educational administration programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The authors are aware that there exist many other innovative approaches and designs that are being implemented at many other Universities and wish to add to that body of knowledge.

This study is limited in scope to the experiences of recent graduates from one principal preparation program in south central Texas. It would be interesting to broaden this inquiry by including experiences of first year school administrators from other regions across the United States or internationally. The coauthor/professors invite the readers to use these scenarios and provide feedback on how applicable and realistic the experiences may be. This represents an attempt by the coauthor/professors to reduce the gap between university learning and real world learning where professors become the learners and former students become the teachers, all in an effort to " keep it real."

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