

Developing Leadership for Equity:

What Is the Role of Leadership Preparation Programs?

José A. López

California State University, East Bay

Kenneth R. Magdaleno

California State University, Fresno

Noni Mendoza Reis

San José State University

Abstract: Historically, educational administration programs have prepared graduates in a “universal, one-size-fits-all” approach. As the K-12 student population becomes increasingly diverse, this approach is no longer viable since it seldom takes into account the urgency implied by the achievement gap. This article reports on a “transformative colloquium” comprised of educational leadership faculty from CSU East Bay, San José State, and Fresno State who studied a “leading for equity” approach. Responses were gathered from the Spring 2006 CAPEA conference attendees regarding ways that administrator preparation programs can promote and emphasize leading for equity.

Introduction

“We are closing the achievement gap! We are working at closing the achievement gap!” Such is the daily rhetoric across the State of California from educational leaders who are working diligently to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, a population who continues to exhibit less than mastery on statewide assessments. The intent of this

Developing Leadership for Equity

paper is to stimulate discussion and action on the part of CAPEA members and institutions and to examine closely their leadership preparation programs in light of the continuing inequity of achievement in California schools.

The demographic and socioeconomic make up of California schools is rapidly undergoing profound changes as the number of students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, second-language learners, and students of color continue to increase, the very subgroups that are least likely to meet standards on various state measures (Smith, 2005). Educational leaders are being called upon to improve learning opportunities and academic achievement for minority children whose lives and cultures California educators too often do not understand. Under the directives of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2001), educational leaders are implementing various intervention programs and educational partnerships in attempts to improve the learning and teaching that takes place in schools; however, the same groups of students continue to underachieve.

The question then remains, why is it that in spite of these best efforts the achievement gap stubbornly persists? What more can professors of educational administration do to develop new leaders who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to close the achievement gap and who are capable of leading successful efforts to meet the challenges in today's schools?

Who Are the Students in California's Schools?

California schools are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse. In 2004-2005, students who were identified as White made up less than one-third of the state's students.

Yet, White students are much more likely to be successful in school as demonstrated in standardized test scores and high school graduation rates. Stated another way, the large majority of California's students—

Table 1
Ethnic Diversity in California Schools (2004-05)

Ethnicity of Students	Number in School	Percentage of School Population
White	1,981,432	31.3%
Other than White	4,231,437	67.0 %
Declined to state	109,214	1.7%
Total student population	6,322,083	100%

California Legislative Analysts Office (2005)

about two-thirds of them—identified as other than White, are not experiencing the successes of their White counterparts (Smith, 2005). In the 2005 volume of this same journal, Smith's article, *School Factors that Contribute to the Underachievement of Students of Color and What Culturally Competent School Leaders Can Do* (p. 21-32) chronicled a variety of factors that may impact the achievement of students of color. Two of the tables from her article are reproduced here to demonstrate the underachievement of students of color in California Schools. While there are many explanations for these disparities, the fact remains that the current school system does not work well for the majority of California's students.

According to the California Legislative Analysts Office (2005), of all students entering ninth grade, 30% will not graduate from high school. While White students make up only 31.3% of the school population, 41.2% of White students graduate from high school. In 2003-2004 the number of Hispanic dropouts alone totaled 32,925. The California Legislative Analysts Office estimated that a minimum of 17.5 % of all Hispanic

Table 2
California Standards Test (CST) 2004
English/Language Arts (ELA) Score Results

Student groups grades 2-11	Number of students tested	Number of students below Proficient Level	Percentage of students below Proficient Level
African American	389,000	298,000	76%
Asian	395,000	172,000	43%
Hispanic	2,200,000	1,700,000	79%
White	1,600,000	714,000	46%
Economically disadvantaged	2,300,000	1,900,000	79%

Table 3
California Standards Test (CST) 2004 Mathematics Score Results

Student groups grades 2-9	Number of students tested	Number of students below Proficient Level	Percentage of students below Proficient Level
African American	274,000	216,000	78%
Asian	253,000	82,000	32%
Hispanic	1,619,000	1,176,000	72%
White	1,038,000	484,000	46%
Economically disadvantaged	1,800,000	1,321,000	72%

Developing Leadership for Equity

students will drop out of school over a four-year period. Though educational leaders work hard to meet the needs of all children, Latino, African-American, and other non-White subgroups remain at the bottom of the academic achievement echelon.

The National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, a group organized by the College Board, issued a report entitled *Reaching the Top* (1999) which indicated that, “until many more...minority students from disadvantaged, middle class, and upper middle class circumstances are very successful academically, it will be virtually impossible to integrate our society’s institutions completely, especially at the leadership levels” (p. 2). Students who face the additional barriers of poverty, learning English as a second-language, and institutional racism must rely on the support and leadership of district and site administrators who are not only capable of understanding their plight, but also of being able to boldly step forward to address the policies and practices that disadvantage certain groups of students. A new kind of leadership is urgently needed to address the issues of inequitable student learning and student diversity in California schools (Barbara & Krovetz, 2005; Smith, 2005).

Who Are our Educational Leaders?

The identification and preparation of school leaders from under-represented racial/ethnic groups is recognized as a critical issue in successful educational reform. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) reported that school leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers’ instruction. A Rand study (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross, & Chung, 2003) reported that only 17.8% of all school leaders in the U.S. represent culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

As professors of educational leadership, we pose questions regarding the impact that recruiting and training school leaders of color may have on closing the achievement gap. What do students in more diverse communities experience in relation to ethnic and racial leadership, diversity, and equity? How might leadership preparation programs address leadership issues involved in challenging the inequities in schools including narrowing the achievement gap and reducing the drop rates of students of color?

Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

In spite of best efforts and good intentions, the authors believe that school leaders are not unequivocally addressing the problem of student achievement from positions of equity and social justice. If we improve our leadership programs by infusing “leadership for equity,” will we see the achievement gap narrow or disappear?

Leadership for equity refers to bold, courageous actions and behaviors on the part of school leaders to ensure that inequities are addressed openly and directly. The focus of these leadership actions is the elimination of inequities that include, or result in, the achievement gap, disparities in disciplinary practices, inappropriate referrals and placements in special education, and school practices that hinder the success of groups of students. Leadership for equity examines results of all students, but particularly those students who have not, traditionally, been successful in schools.

Herrity and Glassman's research (as cited in Rusch, 2004) suggested that educational administration faculty have limited knowledge about (a) how to prepare educational leaders for work with culturally and linguistically diverse populations and (b) how to develop the trusting relationships critical to minority student success in public schools. The social-psychological literature points to a clear message that feelings of trust in the institution, and those who are seen to represent the interests of those institutions (e.g., teachers, professors, administrators), are a fundamental building block in the affirmative development of high minority achievement (Bandura, 1986; Smylie & Hart, 1999). A recent review of coursework in UCEA-affiliated institutions showed cultural diversity as one of the lowest ranked content categories in leadership preparation programs (Pohland & Carlson, 1993). In a study of leadership preparation programs, Jackson (2001) described the characteristics of exceptional and innovative programs that included strong admissions systems and systemic coherence with program structures, curriculum focus, instructional strategies, and external partnerships. However, Jackson (2001) found that incorporating diversity—racial, ethnic and gender—were issues not addressed specifically in programs.

Gosetti and Rusch (1994) posited that understanding of leadership in leadership preparation programs comes from an embedded, privileged perspective that has largely ignored issues of status, gender, and race. They argued that course materials, readings, activities, and classroom conversations in leadership programs are constructed from that same understanding of leadership.

The issue of *how we prepare* school leaders must be given serious attention. We suggest that schools of education move beyond the "universal-one size fits all" approach to administrator preparation to a "leading for equity" approach for developing leaders. Issues as complex as educational equity require careful thought and planning and will require more than a "one-size-fits-all" approach to administrator preparation (Mendoza-Reis, Ritchie, & Lindstrom, 2005; Szabo, Storms, Rodriguez, & Gonzales, 2003).

Developing Leadership for Equity

The “universal” approach places assessment focus on program outcomes and asks, what have leadership candidates learned in our classes? The focus of Leading for Equity is on the eventual outcomes for K-12 students and asks, how has participation in our university preparation programs impacted the inequity of achievement of students in California schools? In other words, the determination of success of leadership preparation programs must include an examination of the extent to which graduates of our programs reduce inequities in K-12 student achievement.

The Challenge of Leadership Preparation in California

At the conference of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration (CAPEA) held in March 2006, attendees were asked to examine the issue of developing Leadership for Equity through their preparation programs. Members of CAPEA represent a majority of the institutions of higher education authorized to offer programs leading to the credentials required for most administrative positions in California schools.

CAPEA conference participants were asked to respond to the following questions. Responses to these questions are presented here.

1. What can I as an individual faculty member do to reverse the trends of achievement inequity in California schools? The leading responses to this question included:

- Establish one-on-one connections with students of color and support them
- Push the equity lens
- Advocate for policy changes to address inequity of achievement
- Learn to access K-12 decision makers to exert influence

CAPEA members described internal and external influences they can exert individually in affecting the achievement gap in California schools. They recognized how their roles and relationships with educational leadership students can impact the development of administrators in California schools. In addition, CAPEA members viewed themselves as forces to affect the broader socio-political environment. They cited the use of strategies to influence decision makers to support policies to address inequities in schools.

2. What can our Educational Leadership Departments and Programs start doing to change the way we prepare our administrators to serve in today's schools?

CAPEA members' responses provided a range of suggestions that indicated their programs of educational leadership preparation could create ways to address issues of inequity in schools. Of particular interest to the authors were suggestions for instructional strategies. The responses encouraged the confrontation of inequities in schools in leadership preparation programs. The use of the terms, "tough" and "courageous," acknowledged the challenge of this issue, but also the recognition that inequity must be addressed openly and directly by school leaders.

The responses provide thoughtful suggestions about the ways in which departments of educational leadership can examine and refocus their programs to address the urgent issues that underlie the achievement gaps in K-12 schools. Such an examination is essential in developing

Table 4
Leading for Equity Responses from Participants
at Spring 2006 CAPEA Conference

Programmatic Suggestions		
<p><i>Recruiting:</i></p> <p>Reach out to districts with greatest need</p> <p>Identify and recruit candidates of color</p>	<p><i>Design:</i></p> <p>Link program to eliminating the K-12 achievement gap</p> <p>Institute cohort models</p> <p>Create community in our programs for credibility</p>	<p><i>Program Assessment:</i></p> <p>Follow up on our program graduates</p> <p>Track achievement data of schools of our graduates</p>
Curricular and Instructional Suggestions		
<p><i>Content:</i></p> <p>Realize and support equity concept; Infuse curriculum with examinations of equity and social justice</p> <p>Push cultural competency: provide more "cultural knowledge" about students and communities</p>	<p><i>Strategies:</i></p> <p>Revise syllabi to include examinations of equity issues in each course</p> <p>Develop activities and approaches to examine the achievement gap, equity and social justice issues</p>	<p><i>Advocacy:</i></p> <p>Internships should challenge the status quo by consistently asking difficult questions</p> <p>Incorporate "tough" conversations about race</p> <p>Encourage courageous conversations by White teachers</p>

Developing Leadership for Equity

a sense of responsibility and urgency by schools of education, individual professors, and departments of educational leadership to develop programs that promote and emphasize Leading for Equity. For CAPEA these responses also provide a framework for continuing the work of the organization in this important area.

Conclusion

As student demographics of the State of California continue to dramatically change, we are called upon as professors of educational administration to assume responsibility to ensure that the graduates of our leadership development programs have the ability and commitment to lead schools that ensure equitable results for all students. In particular, our graduates must provide bold, socially responsible leadership in schools and districts that ensure successful results for the students that have been historically failed by leaders of schools prepared by our state's universities. A question that should be on the forefront of all organizations responsible for leadership development is, to what extent are we responsible for aggressively addressing inequities in California schools?

References

- Bandura, A. (1986) *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Prentice-Hall.
- Barbara, M. & Krovetz, M. (2005). Preparing principals to lead the equity agenda. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development*, 17, 11-19.
- Bennett, A. (2004). *All students reaching the top: Strategies for closing academic achievement gaps*. Naperville, IL: National Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- California Department of Education. (2006). *Enrollment of ethnicity in public schools*, (CBEDS). Retrieved June 6, 2006 from <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/StudentTrends.asp>.
- California Legislative Analyst's Office. (2005). *Improving high school: A strategic approach*. Sacramento, CA: Author.
- Gates, S.M., Ringel, J.S., Santibañez, L., Ross, K.E., & Chung, C.H. (2003). *Who is leading our schools?: An overview of school administrators and their careers*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.
- Gosetti, P.P., & Rusch, E.A. (1994). *Diversity and equity in educational administration: Missing in theory and in action*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Herrity, V. & Glasman, N. (1999). Training administrators for culturally and linguistically diverse school populations: Opinions of expert practitioners. *Journal of School Leadership*, 9(3), 235-253.
- Jackson, B.L. (2001). *Exceptional and innovative programs in educational leader-*

José A. López, Kenneth R. Magdaleno, & Noni Mendoza Reis

- ship*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation, Racine, WI.
- Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2003) *What do we already know about successful school leadership?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Chicago.
- Mendoza-Reis, N., Ritchie, J., & Lindstrom, P. (2004). *Mentoring the principals: How will school administrator licensure changes in California impact the quality of school leadership?* Paper presented at the biannual conference of the California Association of School Administrator, Burlingame, CA.
- The National Task Force on Minority High Achievement. (1999). *Reaching the Top*. New York: College Board.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425.
- Pohland, P., & Carlson, L.T. (1993). Program reform in educational administration. *University Council for Educational Administration, 34*(3), 4-9.
- Rusch, E.A., (2004). Gender and race in leadership preparation: A constrained discourse. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*, 14-46.
- Smith, C.A. (2005). School factors that contribute to the underachievement of students of color and what culturally competent school leaders can do. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 17*, 21-32.
- Smylie, M.A., & Hart, Ann W. (1999). School leadership for teacher learning change: A human and social capital development perspective. *Handbook of research on educational administration*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Szabo, M. A., Storms, B.A., Rodriguez, G.M., & Gonzales, S.A. (2003). From soloists to ensemble: Shared accountability for leadership preparation. *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development, 15*, 73-84.