

GRADUATE STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CLASSES

School leaders are expected to demonstrate competencies related to democratic processes such as fostering shared decision-making, modeling site-based management, (Rost, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1995) creating a shared vision, collaborating with a variety of stakeholders, and developing learning communities (Fullan, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1995; Smith, 1996). While the content of many leadership preparation programs is being revised to address these competencies, in some cases traditional practices pertaining to instruction, the roles of students and faculty members, and assessment remain unchanged (Baiocco & DeWaters, 1998). Such practices, including a reliance on instructor-driven assessment methods in which students have no voice in making decisions related to their level of success in meeting learning goals, may limit students in meeting necessary competencies to become great leaders (Loacker, Cromwell, & O'Brien, 1986).

Facilitating participatory processes in graduate leadership classrooms appears to be a natural precursor to students modeling the development of democratic environments in their future work (Ashby, 2000). Doing so, however, might require the involvement of students in a variety of activities heretofore the domain of professors. One example of such a democratic activity is the involvement of students in the establishment of course assessment criteria. This study was designed to gain perspectives from students and faculty members who were involved in collaboratively determining performance criteria by which students were to be graded. In this paper, we first take a look at several theoretical perspectives that influenced the study and then report on the study, delineate findings, and discuss implications.

Theoretical Foundation

Theories of critical pedagogy (Friere, 1972, 1985; Giroux, 1983, 1985a, 1985b, 1986), adult education (Mezirow, 1995; Merriam & Cafferella, 1991), and learner-centered education (McCombs & Whisler, 1997) serve as the theoretical framework for this study. As a critical pedagogist, Giroux (1988) challenged the assumption that schools functioned as one of the major mechanisms for the development of a democratic social order. His work attempted to formulate a critical pedagogy committed to empowering students and changing the social order toward a more just and equitable democracy. As noted by McLaren (1988), "the major objective of critical pedagogy is to empower students to intervene in their own self-formation and to transform the oppres-

sive features of the wider society that make such an intervention necessary” (p. xi). Welton (1995) noted that the literature related to critical pedagogy and that of adult education share much common ground: “Educational theory exists in two solitudes as those who write about children and schools remain oblivious to important discussion on the learning of adults” (p. 2). Adult education theory supports the idea that adults want to be involved in determining their success. Literature in adult education informs us that adults learn best when they can direct their own learning, influence decision-making, focus on problems relevant to practice, tap their rich experiential backgrounds, and build strong relationships with peers (Merriam & Cafferella, 1991).

In addition to critical pedagogy and adult learning theories, McCombs and Whisler (1997) inform our study by offering a “learner-centered” perspective. They emphasize:

“When teachers function from an understanding of the knowledge base represented by learner-centered principles, they (a) include learners in decisions about how and what they learn and how that learning is assessed; (b) take each learner’s unique perspectives seriously and consider these perspectives part of the learning process; (c) respect and accommodate individual differences in learners’ backgrounds, interests, abilities, and experiences; and (d) treat learners as co-creators in the teaching and learning process.” (p. 27)

The idea that schools ought to be learner-centered has its roots in the work of Dewey (1916, 1938). Dewey questioned how educators could believe in democracy, and want students to be prepared to live in a democratic world, yet not practice it in schools. He saw democracy as a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experiences. Dewey held that “students’ involvement in the choice of topics, projects, and objectives for their own learning was essential” (as cited in Noddings, p. 580). Building on the work of Dewey (1916), Apple and Beane (1995) posit that democracy in our schools rarely exists. They suggest that creating democratic schools will require creating democratic structures and processes along with a curriculum that provides democratic experiences. Those structures might include expanding involvement in decision-making to those not traditionally represented (including students). According to Apple and Beane, “those involved in democratic schools see themselves as participants in communities of learning” (p.10). We believe that in order to move toward democratic schools or learning communities, democracy must be modeled in principal preparation programs.

Educational leaders are increasingly expected to develop their schools into learning communities that provide students and staff with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose to their work (Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 2002). This concept of community challenges school leaders to serve as cata-

lysts for individual and organizational transformations. Theories of adult learning and constructivist teaching approaches, as well as the teachings of Dewey, play an integral part in developing students, parents, and teachers into a democratic learning community. If Educational Leadership professors need to be modeling for students the work we are preparing them to do at their workplace (Ashby, 2000), then we must address instructional methodologies encouraged in public schools such as “student voice, authentic assessment, and a focus on reflection” (Norris et al., 2002, p. 102). This paper will concentrate on just one piece of this challenge by looking at the idea of involving students in the development of assessment criteria as a means of effective assessment processes.

In reference to modeling effective assessment of student performance, Baiocco and DeWaters (1998) refer to excellent professors who find countless methods to assess student performance. Their methods include non-graded assignments and a developmental approach from lower to greater professor expectations of quality from students, but there is no mention of engaging students in the establishment of assessment criteria. In fact, for some of these instructors, syllabi contained rigid frameworks of expectations within which the professor may have provided some latitude for completion of the requirements. Furthermore, instructors might provide for some variance in student performance, but requirements and criteria used to assess growth were always held within the purview and created by the instructor.

Prior to the work of Baiocco and DeWaters (1998), Loacker, Cromwell and O’Brien (1986) addressed the question of who should develop student performance criteria by stating that, “Assessment is a responsibility shared by the individual teachers and a college or university as a whole” (p. 54). According to Barr and Tagg (1995), there is scant mention of authentic assessment in institutions of higher education, and even when it is addressed, there is no mention of student involvement in the process (Montgomery, 2002). To the contrary, in K-12 schools sharing responsibility for evaluation with students is practiced to a much greater degree. Work by Stiggins (1997) encourages teachers to open the assessment process and “welcome students into the process as full partners” (p. 18). He believes that involving students in the development of performance targets is an effective way for students to analyze quality work and become better performers of that work. There is ample evidence that Stiggins’ suggestions for involving students are being used successfully in public schools (Anderson & Woods, 2002; Eppink, 2002; Skillings & Ferrell, 2000).

The literature reveals that, although innovations such as flexibility within strict academic requirements, portfolio assessment including peer feedback, and student self-evaluation processes are sometimes utilized in higher

education classrooms (Courts & McInerney, 1993), traditional methods of establishing assessment criteria prevail. Little research exists about programs or professors who do indeed provide students with some voice in the selection or development of performance assessment criteria. This study is an attempt to help fill that research void.

The Research Study

This study was designed to examine methods being used to engage student involvement in the development of performance criteria in graduate courses in the area of educational administration. The purpose of the study was to identify perceptions of students and faculty members about issues surrounding use of these methods.

Learning more about the interplay between student and faculty member roles in assessing student learning has the potential to inform future practice in the field of educational administration. Specific research questions investigated were: (a) How were students involved in the decision-making process related to performance criteria? and (b) What were perceptions of students and instructors regarding the process of involving students in collaboratively determining performance criteria?

Participants

Participants in the study included 24 graduate students and four faculty members from educational administration programs at three selected sites in different states. At all three university sites, faculty members were engaged in efforts to re-conceptualize program content, to advocate for students having a more active role in their learning, and in particular to encourage student involvement in assessing their own learning. Students were participants in educational leadership programs that ranged from more traditional programs that included an array of discrete three-hour classes with little articulation and integration among courses to cohort based programs in which students were encouraged to become partners with faculty in developing learning experiences.

Five doctoral students and 19 students who were either in master's programs or working toward initial principal licensure were interviewed. All of the doctoral students were practicing K-12 school administrators with prior K-12 teaching experience ranging from five to over 20 years. These participants had all completed master's programs and most had also completed education specialist programs. The master's level and initial licensure participants included some who had not yet begun teaching, as well as some who had

taught for many years. This group's years of teaching experience ranged from zero to over 20 years.

As both primary investigators and program participants, the faculty members involved considered themselves "full participants" along the participant-observer continuum (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The four faculty member participants held the rank of associate professor and had worked in K-12 settings both as teachers and administrators prior to their higher education faculty experiences. While all had over 20 years of total professional experience in education, their experience as faculty members in educational administration preparation programs ranged from five to 10 years.

Procedures

Qualitative data from participating students and faculty were gathered at the three selected sites through oral interviews using the Student and Faculty Interview Protocol (see Appendix). The interviews included both broad questions related to the objectives of the study and open-ended items that encouraged participants to provide direction to the interview. Data were collected in two stages. Faculty members conducted interviews with student participants and subsequently were interviewed by students who were not involved in the study. The interviewers asked the same questions and also encouraged participants to share perceptions not addressed by interview questions. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed and participants were asked to review and verify the interview transcripts. In one case, students were asked to answer the questions via a questionnaire due to the distance nature of the program. In addition, several forms of documentary evidence such as course syllabi, department-planning documents, and other course materials were examined. Data were organized and analyzed by the identification of key themes that related to the broad questions being investigated.

Findings

Faculty and students chosen for this study agreed that they had participated and engaged in activities related to the development of performance criteria. However, the specific processes used and the perceived results varied across sites. Several issues and themes emerged from the data and are discussed in the following sections. While these issues are each addressed somewhat independently, it should be noted that many are closely related and interdependent.

Student Involvement in Determining Evaluation Criteria

Data analysis suggested that while some similarities existed, the processes used to involve students in the development of performance criteria varied across the three sites. Typically, faculty members (either individually or in collaboration with other faculty) began the process with the development of a course syllabus that outlined learning objectives, required readings, learning activities, assignments, projects, and methods of evaluation.

An important step in the process of student involvement was the development of performance criteria. This required students to identify clear descriptions of performance on assignments, projects, and other requirements such as attendance and participation. In two of the three sites, students were given a course requirement such as: "Students will develop a portfolio that demonstrates student competency in meeting course outcomes." Students would then form small groups and work on developing language they felt would represent this requirement. Each group would post their suggestion and then a student facilitator would proceed to get the group to come to consensus on language that spelled out requirements the group felt they could accept. Faculty members were part of the group and had a say but no more so than the students. It is important to note that faculty members were cognizant that the group might easily be swayed by their opinion, and thus they proceeded carefully in their involvement. A common approach among programs involved the establishment of performance level criteria, such as exemplary, proficient and underdeveloped. Other groups, however, kept the old standard A, B, C, grading or used a 4-point scale. Once categories had been established, students were asked to identify characteristics of each assignment, project, or requirement that would meet the appropriate category. In one such instance, students developed the rubric shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Rubric for a Class Specific Portfolio

Assessment score	Description
4 (A):	Portfolio includes components that address ALL course outcomes and is presented in a manner consistent with quality written work in ALL of the following areas (correct grammar, punctuation, capitalization, sentence/paragraph structure, organization of ideas, inclusion of major concepts/ideas from readings and personal thoughts/applications, presented in a professional manner with high quality paper/print).
3 (B):	Portfolio includes components that address MOST of the course outcomes and is presented in a manner consistent with quality written work in MOST of the following areas (correct grammar, punctuation, capitalization, sentence/paragraph structure, organization of ideas, inclusion of major concepts/ideas from readings and personal thoughts/applications, presented in a professional manner with high quality paper/print).

This process could take several class periods to work through all of the course requirements. In this scenario, faculty perceived that students at times would become frustrated with the consensus building process and complain about the time it was taking.

Some faculty members made use of exemplars (examples of assignments completed by students in prior classes) and asked students to classify each according to established categories, along with rationale. In yet another instance, the professor gave the students the requirement and a 'straw man' rubric. So, unlike in the first instance where students worked to develop the rubric, in this case, they had an example of one and were asked to accept, adapt or re-write it all together. Very seldom did students opt to rewrite. They often, however, adapted the examples.

Differences in faculty members' beliefs related to establishing parameters for student assignments, projects, and methods of assessment were apparent and probably led to many of the perceived differences in how faculty

felt students should be involved in this process. While some faculty emphasized the importance of clearly stating “non-negotiable” parameters before involving students in dialogue, others held the view that such parameters have the negative result of limiting students’ thinking and creativity and undermining the process of students becoming committed to and responsible for their learning.

Participants’ Perceptions of Benefits

Participants’ perceptions denoted many benefits of allowing student voice in the development of performance assessment criteria. Those benefits included the students’ increased understanding of faculty expectations, a sense of student ownership, and positive changes in terms of the learning environment (climate) and perceptions of what was valued (culture). Each of these benefits will be discussed separately.

Increased understanding of expectations. The most frequently cited benefit of involving students in developing assessment criteria was related to students’ increased understanding of expectations. Two-thirds of the students mentioned that the process served to clarify what was expected. Additional benefits in this area included students’ ability to address specific performance criteria as they constructed assignments and projects and to have clear knowledge of their progress as they proceeded through the course. One master’s level student commented:

I felt that I had a tremendous responsibility to create a quality product, because of my participation in developing the standards themselves. Knowing exactly and precisely what I had to do to meet the standards allowed me to focus on creating a product that met and exceeded the standards. Being involved in the development of the standards gave me a feeling of wanting to do well or I would let myself down. The standards had become a part of my self-expectations and it encouraged me to do better than if I was just turning something in to meet requirements.

The above comment also reflects a belief among students that increased motivation and improved performance also resulted, which was another idea commonly mentioned by students. A doctoral student’s remarks further reinforce this theme: “Entering into that dialogue (of developing rubrics) and having the opportunity for that input, in reflection, led me to believe that in some ways we were capable of doing more and achieving more than we may have originally thought was possible.”

Sense of ownership. Data revealed that a sense of ownership in assessment resulted from student involvement in the process of developing per-

formance criteria. Over sixty percent of student participants identified ownership as an important benefit. Many comments also reflected the important connection of this concept with that of student responsibility for learning. One master's student suggested, "it makes you, as the student responsible; you knew what you had to do and you were in charge of what happened with your grade." Another master's student remarked, "you definitely became involved as a partner and bought into the grading scale." A student in the cohort-based doctoral program noted, "we felt we were more part and parcel of our own education, a product of our own education, that we held more responsibility for it than just to sit there and read a book and take a test."

Interview data from both students and faculty members revealed an apparent connection among the concepts of ownership, relevancy, meeting students' needs, and perceived validity. A doctoral student noted, "It [the process of participation] lends itself [to] the opportunity of exploring the purpose of study...Our examination reinforces for the student that the time, energy, investment in the exercise is worthwhile; it underscores the value of the activity." A master's level student offered insights into this connection:

Benefits of student input include more personal investment from students who see the standards as reflecting their educational goals. This encourages participation and increases levels of effort. Standards of performance might be more authentic in preparing students to connect what they are learning to real situations and experiences and knowledge in the field. This results in classes gaining personal and professional relevance.

Climate and culture. Another advantage to involving students in assessment related to the perception of improved classroom climate and the development of a culture of collegiality and trust. One student observed, "I think it [participation] helped the whole class; everybody felt more comfortable speaking out and discussing things, which I think helped the overall atmosphere and learning in the class." Another student stated, "I believe it brought the class together as one. We were able to see why people believed the way they did and their justification for that. It was just a democratic process and very beneficial to everyone." And another commented, "You got an idea of where everybody else stood—what their beliefs were, what they were good at, bad at, and what they wanted to get out of the class."

Several of the students, at both master's and doctoral levels, emphasized the importance of allowing for student input into assessment criteria as one way of building positive relationships among students and between faculty and students. Responses from some of the cohort-based doctoral students indicated that prior involvement in the development of a positive learning environment and learning to work collaboratively with other students on projects

and assignments had provided a necessary foundation for being involved in the development of performance standards. One student related, "We have nine people and trust each other and know each other and we know that if we say something about the way we feel about something like a grading system or teaching style, none of us is going to get mad at the other." A doctoral student remarked:

I see the paradigm as a combination of rules and relationships and it is the broadening of the relationships and the narrowing of the rule which creates the energy that boosts ingenuity and imagination, and fuels the rigor... It was the relationship that the instructional team developed with the students during our summer term (previous semester) that was just or more important than what in our minds we thought was important... What we have done has reinforced for me the principle of the development of the relationship.

This comment also supports the importance of other factors such as developing trust over time and the power of modeling desired behaviors.

Some evidence suggested that implementing a process for involving students in the development of performance criteria prior to establishing a positive instructor-student relationship based on trust might have had negative consequences. A doctoral student summed this up, "I think you may have those [students] who say 'I don't know why the instructor is giving us this, that's his job, he should be the one coming in here and telling us how it is going to be. Why is he taking up my time asking my opinion?'" This comment also speaks to the traditional control that exists with traditional evaluation practices. This student's comments also suggested that students might interpret the process as the instructor abdicating authority or not really caring about the class, students, or standards.

Participants' Perceptions of Challenges

Issues related to the amount of time necessary to involve students in this process and the conflict that was uncovered through the process were mentioned as challenges that need to be considered. Student and faculty members' readiness for such inclusionary methods in higher education classes was also mentioned as potential derailers to the process. Each of these challenges will be discussed separately.

The issue of time. The most commonly identified challenge to the process of student involvement had to do with the amount of time required to engage students in this process. Analysis of interview data and documents revealed that the process of involving students in the development of performance criteria required between three and five hours of instructional time and

most frequently occurred over the course of several class sessions. Even though most students perceived the process to be beneficial, many expressed some concern about the amount of time required given the need to view all class time as a scarce and finite commodity.

Several students suggested that an important feature of the process was providing students time between class sessions to carefully consider alternatives and prepare meaningful input. One master's student related, "I like the idea of giving students time (a week) to think and give feedback because you are going to get a much different answer than if you have to answer immediately. When you do that you usually give the professor what you think he/she wants versus what your beliefs are." Another master's level student reacted similarly, "Giving them [students] time to go home and think about it and providing class time to discuss it with other people to get their views and ideas was helpful."

Conflict. Another by-product of the discussion of assessment criteria among students and faculty was the issue of conflict. Several specific factors were identified as sources of conflict and frustration for students in the process of developing performance criteria. These included unfamiliarity with the process, lack of trust, and individual differences related to student needs and expectations.

Several students reported that they experienced considerable frustration and group conflict because of some students' suggestions that they believed lacked rigor. As one student aptly described, "There was a certain level of frustration within the group... As a group, there was a great deal of tension created when members suggested an 'easy way out.' No one wanted to be responsible for creating substandard standards." Another student remarked, "Sometimes differing levels of need for specifics caused conflict within the group." It was interesting to note that one student perceived that an "awareness of how to function in turmoil" was a positive benefit from being involved in the process. One student remarked, "I guess there are those that are hard and fast about things... and aren't flexible. It could rub people the wrong way and I could see how somebody might say 'the syllabus said this and now that's not the way it is and I'm not happy.'" Yet another said:

I suspect a potential negative could be if there was one student or a group of students who lobbied for one particular aspect to be changed and didn't get [things] the way they wanted, they may go away feeling they were defeated or it was a win-lose situation. I think the potential is there the way we refined (the scoring guide) throughout the semester for those that are very structured, very organized to feel very uncomfortable, ill at ease not knowing exactly what was expected from the first day.

Several students suggested that training in group process skills, conflict management, and methods for developing performance standards prior to actually being involved in what they perceived to be “high stakes” decision-making would have been beneficial.

Faculty member readiness. Many would argue that rather than being the purveyors of knowledge (their expected role in the past) instructors need to be facilitators of learning in others (Merriam & Cafferella, 1991; Murphy, 1990, 1992; Yerkes, Norris, Basom, & Barnett, 1994). The question is whether they feel ready to make the changes needed to have this happen. Characteristics of faculty members play an important role in the process of involving students in the development of performance criteria. Student and faculty members’ interview data revealed perceptions related to faculty members’ values, beliefs, personalities, and reputations that may be significant factors related to whether faculty want to or are ready to make this important leap in pedagogy. One of the doctoral level students explained:

Perhaps it could go back to McGregor’s Theory X. If the instructor comes in and believes that the students are there only to squeak by and to lower the standards, then they are not going to offer that. If, on the other hand, they see the students are there because they are motivated to be there, care about the educational process, and are willing to buy into the educational process, then I think the professor might have more success using this kind of approach.

Another master’s level student related, “A lot of times a professor will give you the guidelines, but it is so rigidly structured that all of the comments are going to fall into what he/she wants. The professor must be open-minded and if it doesn’t come out exactly how he/she wants it, go ahead with what the students say versus saying, ‘I want you to have input, but that’s not what I want.’”

One faculty member expressed the difficulty inherent in involving students in this process and the dramatic shift from traditional faculty and student roles that such a process requires. This participant noted, “Getting them [the students] to trust that they have expertise and should be willing to share is tough. Questioning the professor is not something that comes naturally and I guess it depends a whole lot on the personality of the professor and whether or not they feel that’s acceptable.” Another faculty member spoke of the belief in the benefits of involving students coupled with the difficulty and vulnerability perceived: “The time that it takes and the courage for facilitators to provide students with this ‘voice’ carries the potential for facilitators to be in a vulnerable position.”

The reputation of the faculty member (as perceived by students) also may shade students’ views as they begin their involvement in the process, as

suggested in these remarks:

If an instructor became known as being the empowering type and students came into the class knowing that (being involved in the process of developing performance standards) is what they would be doing and that the instructor was genuine, then it would work well... You get your reputation and people would know that... and they would not see it as being a weakness.

Interestingly, this same student indicated that prior to involving students in the process of developing performance standards, faculty members must first address issues related to understanding one another's values and beliefs. Otherwise, students may view such behavior on the part of the faculty member as a sign of weakness and lack of caring (about students, the course, and maintaining rigorous standards). This view reiterates the importance of relationship building and the development of trust prior to involving students in the development of performance criteria.

Readiness level of students. Responses from faculty participants indicated a perceived unevenness in student readiness to participate in the process of developing performance criteria. One faculty member noted, "Quality levels and definitions are related to students' respective readiness level to construct their own learning and get out of the learning paradigm of 'just tell me what to do.'" This comment also speaks to the issues of dependency and control. Another faculty respondent put it this way, "There are students who, for whatever reason, don't have the time, energy, or inclination to set standards high enough to satisfy the instructor."

One faculty respondent suggested that the time taken to provide rationale for the process, as well as different student personalities might be factors that affect student readiness.

I think it's developmental. You have to start helping them understand the reason for doing this. If they have had some success and they know you are not out to get them and we have built some trust... If they know they have spoken up before and it has not killed them, then they think they can buy into this. There is also an element of just personality. Some people take to this a lot easier. Some people are not as stressed about grades. Some people are in it for the learning.

These comments suggest a need for faculty members to explain the rationale for involving students in the development of performance standards prior to actually engaging in the process.

Discussion

“Minor modification in current teaching practices will not solve the current problems with college instruction. Teaching success in today’s world requires a new approach to instruction” (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991, p. 1:29). The research on critical pedagogy, adult education, and learner-centered instruction led us to question how the process of allowing students a voice in developing assessment criteria in an educational leadership class—one small attempt at a new approach to college instruction—was perceived by both students and faculty members in those classes. A dedication to adult learning theory and learner-centered instruction would dictate that students be more involved in the learning than is typically expected in a didactic presentation. This study involved faculty members and students at three sites involved in a process of allowing student participation in the development of performance criteria (Montgomery 2002; Stiggins 1997; Wiggins, 1989). Similarities in processes at each site included professor and student reliance on a set of learning objectives and the development of syllabi that served as an initial starting point for a discussion on assessment procedures. This is consistent with the literature which recommends that, in developing learning communities within the higher education classroom, professors set guidelines or parameters for student involvement and learning standards and then allow students to determine the most appropriate strategies or activities to use in achieving those standards (Norris et al., 2002). One major difference among the sites centered on the issue of whether or not the professor should establish and clearly communicate non-negotiable parameters prior to involving students in dialogue.

Upon reflection, this difference in faculty expectations might be an indication of the need of some faculty members to maintain rigorous standards and control. Since some data from both student and faculty members indicated that all students might not be ready or able to establish high quality performance standards, some faculty members might be wary of allowing students too much control of the assessment piece. And while one might expect that students would be eager to seize the opportunity to be involved in the development of performance standards, there was some indication that students felt it was the faculty member’s responsibility to set criteria.

A strong argument can be made that the views and practices centered on control over knowledge that are reportedly practiced in public schools (Giroux, 1988; McCombs & Whisler, 1997) are evident in the arena of graduate programs in educational administration as well. The organizational culture of institutions of higher education has changed over the last twenty years from bureaucratic, hierarchical models to more open organizations that pro-

vide for participation of members in decision-making and a sense of teamwork among faculty (Bergquist, 1992; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988). However, organizations usually stop short of including students in important decisions related to the classroom. The readiness issues expressed by both students and faculty in this study underscore the need to understand that changing a culture, defined as what we collectively believe and value, will result in conflict but may hold promise for improvement of the work.

Involving students in setting performance criteria can serve to assist students and faculty members in identifying clear performance targets, yet respondent perceptions reflected that a certain level of subjectivity was inherent in any evaluation system and was not necessarily undesirable. Several students suggested that, in their view, faculty members have the legitimate authority for the class and student evaluation decisions and should have the ultimate decision-making power in finalizing performance standards. This notion in itself reinforces the need to help students to understand the culture of learning communities, the issues of commitment and teamwork, and the concept of distributed leadership that professors should be modeling.

Prior student involvement in the development of a positive learning environment and learning to work collaboratively with other students on projects and assignments were thought, by some, to provide a necessary foundation for being involved in the development of performance criteria. Such instructional strategies are typically seen as part of the curriculum when preparation programs use a cohort approach (Norris et al., 2002).

An important feature of some cohort-based programs involves the allocation of considerable time and energy to building a collaborative, trusting, learning environment. It is common in these settings to find cooperative, team-based approaches to major projects and assignments, as opposed to sole reliance on individual work. Although this study did not attempt to compare responses from students in cohort based versus non-cohort based programs, it is possible that if students are in a cohort setting for more than a semester, they may be more inclined to accept a role in developing performance assessments. As one student noted, "What comes through is the attitude and the feelings of the individuals in the cohort. It is one of nurturing, of sincere caring for the welfare and the success of all the members of the group. For whatever reason, and I can't tell you when that moment came to be, this group has seemingly crossed that line from competition to nurturing." This sense of team cooperation is often times a bi-product of cohort settings (Norris et al., 2002) and more conducive to risk-taking behaviors of individuals (such as the development of rubrics) within the learning community.

Developing classes or cohorts into learning environments becomes the role of the faculty member. Group interaction can be stifled by as little as

an authoritarian faculty member's tone of voice, while a supportive climate of respect, openness, and acceptance can facilitate quality interaction among all participants (Forsyth, 1990). Merriam and Cafferella (1991) believe that an important part of a faculty member's role is to allow group members to feel important and worthwhile in addition to having a sense of belonging and being accepted by other group members. This sense of belonging and caring leads to a trusting environment. One student related, "We have nine people and trust each other and know each other, and we know that if we say something about the way we feel about something like a grading system or teaching style, none of us is going to get mad at the other." This might be one way to address the issue of conflict discussed earlier.

While some participants found the conflict was not necessarily productive, others reported that involvement in this process had a positive effect on the climate and culture of the class. The process of involving students in the development of performance standards may be more productive if preceded by activities designed to promote the development of a trusting, collaborative climate and to assist students in acquiring or refining skills in the area of group dynamics (including conflict management). Norris et al. (2002) suggest many ways to accomplish this through the development of a learning community within the higher education classroom.

A paradox appeared to exist concerning the development of students individually and as a group and the time required to achieve such development. Many students considered the amount of time needed to become genuinely involved in the development of performance criteria as an important limitation. Yet they perceived the investment of time needed in providing readiness activities prior to involving students as worthwhile. Data from students and faculty members also revealed that including students in the decision-making process of assessment criteria provided students with a sense of ownership in their learning as well as caused them to spend time and energy on an issue that had heretofore been the purview of the professor. These findings support the adult learning theories of Merriam and Cafferella (1991), the democratic schools movement (Noddings, 1999; Apple & Beane, 1995), as well as the literature on using student perspectives to enhance the development of learning communities (Norris et al., 2002).

The implementation of such practices may prove beneficial for students and faculty members involved in graduate programs in educational administration and other fields. Involving students in such democratic processes may provide those who aspire to provide leadership in schools with some of the competencies, dispositions, and skills required for democratic organizations to become vital learning communities.

The findings of this study should be considered preliminary. Due to the limited number of sites and participants in the present study, it is not possible to generalize the findings to other settings. However, the findings do represent the logical extension from involvement of students in their own professional growth and learner-centered principles to instructional and assessment practices in graduate programs in the field of educational administration. The present study enables those who teach students of educational leadership to identify, model, and provide experience in the same democratic, collaborative practices expected of future leaders by boards of education and professional organizations.

References

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Appendix

Student and Faculty Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol – Students

1. Please describe how you have been involved in the process of developing performance criteria for your classes in the program you are pursuing.
2. What do you perceive to be the outcomes of this involvement?
3. Do you perceive any specific benefits or negative consequences from this type of involvement?
4. What else can you tell me that would help us understand the nature of student involvement in developing performance criteria?

Interview Protocol – Faculty Members

1. Please describe how you have involved students in the process of developing performance criteria for your classes.
2. What do you perceive to be the outcomes of such involvement?
3. Do you perceive any specific benefits or negative consequences from such student involvement?
4. What else can you tell me that would help us understand the nature of student involvement in developing performance criteria?

Written questionnaire to students (Done in one instance in which interviews were not possible because of the distance nature of the program)

1. Please describe how you have been involved in the process of developing performance criteria for your classes in the program you are pursuing.
2. What do you perceive to be the outcomes of this involvement?
3. Do you perceive any specific benefits or negative consequences from this type of involvement?
4. What else can you tell me that would help us understand the nature of student involvement in developing performance criteria?