

CALL FOR RESEARCH ON CANDIDATES IN LEADERSHIP PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Research on leadership preparation programs in our field typically focuses on program design and delivery mode (e.g., closed cohorts, internships, distance learning, partnerships), curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., learning theories, syllabi content, learning outcomes), and occasionally program faculty. A critically missing component of research is about those actively engaged in learning—the candidates—and their lived and learned experiences. This call for research on program participants emerged from a review of research literature conducted by the authors.

Our search to identify who participates in educational administration and leadership programs was framed by two propositions. First, the intent of leadership preparation is “to produce leaders” (Milstein, 1992, p. 10) able and willing to assume responsibilities as school administrators. Second, leadership preparation is a developmental process requiring not only professional training, but also personal transformation (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Lashway, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Ortiz, 1982; Young & McLeod, 2001). Viewed from these perspectives, information about characteristics and experiences of individuals actively engaged in formal leadership-development activities—prospective candidates for administrator positions—is critically important for assessing the effectiveness of leadership preparation (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2009).

We discovered, however, that our field’s research on program participants has been sparse—in truth, they “have been routinely overlooked” (McCarthy, 1999, p. 134). The “limited body of empirical knowledge” (Murphy, 2006, p. 73) about prospective administrators is evident in the results of an analysis of articles published in key journals between 1975 and 2002 by Murphy and Vriesenga (2004, 2006). Our review of studies reported by professors and doctoral students published between 2001 and 2007 likewise yielded evidence of few examinations of candidates in educational administration and leadership preparation program. Conversely, studies about career paths of program graduates were more common.

We begin our discussion about those who participate in school-leadership preparation with an overview of personal and professional characteristics of candidates gleaned from research published in articles, book chapters, and dissertations. We close our article with recommendations for closing the research gap and concerns about the future of university-based preparation programs.

Personal and Professional Characteristics

In the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* (Murphy & Louis, 1999), McCarthy cited the need for “a national database on the personal and professional characteristics of educational leadership graduates” (p. 134). Data collected nationally and maintained at a single location or by several cooperating institutions would allow the field to conduct trend analyses about candidates’ attitudes and characteristics, their assessments of changes in program design and delivery, their career paths following program completion, and perhaps their successes in their chosen positions. A national database would likewise “build the reputation of the educational leadership profession” by having data readily available to “publicize the performance of program completers” (Browne-Ferrigno, Barnett, & Muth, 2003, p. 283).

The Taskforce on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Programs, a grassroots initiative by professors and others co-sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and the Learning and Teaching in Educational Leadership Special Interest Group (LTEL SIG) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), has begun to collect such data through its survey of program graduates (Orr & Pounder, 2006). Results of statewide studies (Black, Bathon, & Poindexter, 2007; Pounder & Hafner, 2006; Waddle & Watson, 2005) and a study of exemplary leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007) based on the *School Leadership Preparation and Practice Survey* provides a promising first step toward developing a national database. Such a database would make feasible large-scale longitudinal studies about “who we are and what we are doing in the area of leadership preparation” (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006, p. 192). Further, such data might create foundations for needed longitudinal studies of program impact through effects on school outcomes (Barnett & Muth, 2003).

The few published empirical studies that mention candidates typically report the number of participants in the sample; only rarely do the researchers report demographic information about candidates (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004). Because recruitment and admission practices among programs vary considerably across the United States, the individuals enrolled may or may not “mirror the existing demographic composition of the local district and community” (Carr, Chenoweth, & Ruhl, 2003, p. 207). Thus, the location of a program does not necessarily predict characteristics of participants in it, an issue in a time when calls for diverse leadership, particularly in urban schools, are so prominent.

Further, research on program graduates typically target only those serving as administrators, whose contact information is supplied by state certification or licensure offices. Rarely is data collected about program graduates choosing to remain in teaching or pursue other career paths.

Findings gleaned from research published between 1975 and 2007 are presented in the next two sections.

Student Characteristics: 1975-2002 Article Analysis

Among the 2,038 articles published between 1975 and 2002 in the four leading journals in the field (*Educational Administration Quarterly*, *Journal of Educational Administration*, *Journal of School Leadership*, and *Planning and Changing*) reviewed by Murphy and Vriesenga (2004), only 162 (8%) were about preservice preparation of school leaders. Among those 162 articles, 56 (35%) reported findings from empirical studies, but only 7 (4%) reported demographic information about the program participants. For example, Parker and Shapiro (1992) used purposeful sampling to explore the extent to which diversity was integrated into three preparation programs across the United States; the authors reported that a total of 28 candidates participated in semi-structured interviews. To assess the effectiveness of a pilot program, Norris and Lebsack (1992) gathered data from all 18 participants. Using purposeful sampling, Cordeiro and Sloan (1996) selected 18 interns among the first four cohorts of a new program to investigate impact of the internship on participants' learning. To examine the quality of internship experiences at two other university-based programs, McKerrow (1998) analyzed internship logs prepared by 45 candidates.

Two other empirical articles among the seven reporting demographic data on principal participants were qualitative (Rapp, Silent X, & Silent Y, 2001; Shapiro, Briggs-Kenney, Robinson, & DeJarnette, 1997). One traced the rites of passage experienced by four women during two years of doctoral studies; the other article examined the extent to which patriarchy silenced the voices of four female candidates, each from a different program. The seventh article (Veir, 1993) presents results from content analysis of program application files; not reported is the time period spanned or the admission status of applicants. Table 1 displays candidate characteristics described in these studies.

TABLE 1
Students in Educational Leadership: 1975–2002

Gender		Race					Average age range	Years as educator	Source
F	M	A	C	H	O				
22	6	6	22	–	–	–	–	–	Parker & Shapiro (1992)
14	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	Norris & Lebsack (1992)
14	4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	Cordeiro & Sloan (1996)
30	15	6	39	–	–	–	–	–	McKerrow (1998)

(continued)

TABLE 1 (*continued*)

Gender		Race				Average age range	Years as educator	Source
F	M	A	C	H	O			
4	0	3	1	–	–	–	–	Shapiro, Briggs-Kenney, Robinson & DeJarnette (1997)
4	0	–	–	–	–	–	–	Rapp, Silent X, & Silent Y (2001)
94	49	17	94	32	–	–	–	Veir (1993) [Review of applications]

Note. F = Female, M = Male, A = African American, C = Caucasian, H = Hispanic, O = Other Minorities (Native American, Pacific Rim)

Six of the seven articles cited by Murphy and Vriesenga (2004) presented findings from data gathered or documents created while candidates were actively enrolled in programs; assuming that each participated in only one study, only 117 candidates were mentioned in research published between 1975 and 2002. Eighty-eight of the 117 (75%) participants were female: This skewed gender distribution may be due to purposeful sampling used by some researchers, or it may reflect that a significant gender shift has taken place in programs nationally. Only three articles mention race; among those 77 candidates 15 (19%) were identified as African American.

Student Characteristics: 2001–2007 Review

During the closing years of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, forces external to higher education generated new interest in leadership preparation. First, the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium introduced national standards for administrative practice (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Murphy, 2005), which forced universities and colleges to revise their preparation programs to meet changed accreditation standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989, 2002a, 2002b). That redesign effort, however, did not require programs to align admission requirements with the program-expected learning outcomes (Muth, 2002; Muth et al., 2001) inherent in the new standards.

Second, the federal government initiated accountability requirements for all P–12 schools receiving Title I funds (No Child Left Behind, 2001), which forced states to examine closely the learning performance of all students. Third, the principalship became a popular topic for criticism and scrutiny (Bottoms, O'Neill, Fry, & Hill, 2003; Educational Research Service [ERS], National Association of Elementary School Principals, & National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2000; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Ross, & Chung, 2003; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

When a projection of a nationwide principal shortage (ERS, 1998; NASSP, 2003) was proven to be unsubstantiated, criticism focused on the

quality of principals (Hess, 2003; Levine, 2005). Calls for reforms in leadership preparation were voiced by groups outside the academy (Fry, O’Neill, & Bottoms, 2006; Hale & Moorman, 2003) as well as by those inside (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Knapp, Copland, Plecki, Portin, & Wallace Foundation, 2006; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Despite these external forces, the field continues to eschew research on leadership preparation (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006), particularly those for whom the programs were designed—prospective school administrators.

Only a few studies published between 2001 and 2007 contain demographic information about program participants. Among the sources cited in Table 2, only one, an article which was based on a dissertation, was published in a leading journal identified by Murphy and Vriesenga (2004). Interestingly, this article was listed among the top 50 most read articles in that journal for several years following its publication. The only other empirically based article in the table was published in a journal on the periphery of educational administration. The remaining sources are book chapters—all but one published in yearbooks of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA)—or dissertations by doctoral candidates. The Kentucky statistics came from a study by professors, requested by the state department of education and supported by a grant from the Wallace Foundation (Rinehart, Winter, Keedy, & Björk, 2002).

TABLE 2

Students in Educational Leadership: 2000-2007

Gender		Race					Average age range	Years as educator	Source
F	M	A	C	H	O				
11	7	1	16	1	0	24–60	2–27		Browne-Ferrigno (2001, 2003)
76	24	–	–	–	–	30–50+	3–20+		Hung (2001)
25	18	7	49	0	1	25–57	1–24		Brooks (2002)
30	27	–	2	–	–	22–45+	3–20		Harris, Crocker, & Hopson (2002)
303	207	27	476	5	2	23–59	–		Rinehart et al. (2002)
524	336	68	524	62	42	–	–		Bass (2004)
93	61	9	–	19	1	23–52+	–		Border (2004)
30	40	2	52	1	0	23–59	–		Zimmerman, Bowman, Salazar-Valentine, & Barnes (2004)
12	9	9	6	5	1	–	4–27		Effinger (2005)
2	2	0	1	3	0	–	5–7		Ruiz (2005)
38	22	–	52	–	8	24–60	3–33		Browne-Ferrigno & Muth (2006)

(continued)

TABLE 2 (continued)

Gender		Race				Average age range	Years as educator	Source
F	M	A	C	H	O			
10	5	—	2	—	13	—	—	Durden (2006)
88	71	26	476	13	2	25–51	2–20	Franklin (2006)
—	—	5	—	5	0	—	—	Hines (2006)
3	3	3	1	2	0	—	—	Rockwood (2006)
62	35	17	49	29	2	—	—	Danzig, Blankson, & Kiltz (2007)
64	24	—	—	—	—	22–59	—	Israel & Maddocks (2007)
40	16	—	—	—	—	—	1–13	Sims, Sukowski, & Trybus (2007)

Note. F = Female, M = Male, A = African American, C = Caucasian, H = Hispanic, O = Other Minorities (Native American, Pacific Rim)

The only observations about data displayed in Table 2 are that (a) women outnumbered men and (b) the range of ages among program participants is quite wide. The table also shows that data reported are not standardized, which makes comparisons across studies difficult. If a national database of information about candidates and graduates is created, then standardized data types will need to be established to support comparative, longitudinal analyses.

Candidate Characteristics: Summary

Among the minority of professors who conduct disciplined inquiry and publish findings in leading journals of our field, few have selected candidates in educational leadership as the unit of study. When professors collect data from those participating in preparation programs, they typically intend to assess effectiveness of program design formats or learning activities. Only one published study was found that intentionally sought to capture participants' perspectives on their learning—at multiple intervals throughout their active engagement in preservice preparation—to assess professional growth attributed to program experiences (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Thus, it is troubling that “practically no empirical investigations of students inside preparation programs” (Murphy, 2006, p. 73) are found in our field's published research. Without evidence-based information collected regularly from candidates at multiple intervals from their entry to their exit of formal preparation, the field is without a foundation for understanding program influences on candidates' leadership development and their eventual career choices.

Recommendations for Research

In the late 1990s, a task force appointed by a past vice president of AERA Division A began exploring ways to “improve research and knowledge production in educational administration and leadership” (Pounder, 2000b, p. 336). After working two years on this project, the Task Force on Research and Inquiry recommended that research in our field “should be communicated effectively to its primary audience” and “subject to public evaluation” (Pounder, 2000a, p. 472). It is thus perplexing why research on candidates in our programs continues to be nearly nonexistent in refereed publications. The review of research discussed above clearly surfaces a significant gap in this critically important area of work in our field.

Every year, professors and students of educational administration and leadership present dozens of research-based papers at conferences sponsored by the AERA, NCPEA, and UCEA. Building a knowledge base about participants in our programs requires access to these studies. Hence, to expand our database of studies about program participants, those who present research about preparation programs, such as those in the leadership development strand of AERA Division A and the LTEL SIG program and those in the annual NCPEA conference program, need to submit their conference papers to ERIC. With open access to copies of refereed conference papers and other publications, such research would be more widely available for public scrutiny and evaluation and perhaps usable to address concerns about preparation and practice cited herein. Further, the identity of scholars in our field whose research agenda is leadership development would become public, perhaps generating a community of scholars whose purpose is to close the gap in research about candidates in educational administration and leadership.

A recent study estimates that 80 percent of the research concluded in the United States is reported in dissertations (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006). But dissertations do not contribute significantly to expanding the knowledge base in our field when findings are not published in refereed or practitioner journals. Unless a search for research is intentional, findings generated from dissertations rarely are cited in our literature, perhaps because such studies may be deemed less rigorous than those published in refereed journals. Unfortunately, this constitutes a tremendous waste of resources.

Dissertations thus need to be converted into papers presented at professional meetings and then submitted to ERIC, published as articles in refereed journals, and shared more broadly through appropriate practitioner journals. But evidence suggests that the task historically has not been completed by novice scholars working alone. Thus, senior faculty need to assist doctoral graduates with the important, and sometimes arduous, task of converting hundreds of pages in a dissertation into a manuscript of presentable or publishable length. Some professors do that, securing secondary authorship for their work. Likewise, journal editors need to be willing

to publish articles about leadership development. One alternative might be to develop an online, peer-reviewed journal that publishes only dissertation research on the various phases of leadership development for schools and school districts. This multi-pronged effort may be the only way that dissertations can contribute systematically to our knowledge base. Regardless how the task is accomplished, more research is needed about candidates in educational leadership-preparation programs, particularly if the field ever hopes to become fully professionalized.

Because research on candidates in leadership preparation programs is woefully underdeveloped, we have unique opportunities to develop and standardize methodologies that support cross-study comparisons. Two examples are the methodologies used to examine career paths of Texas teachers across a ten-year period (Fuller, Young, & Orr, 2007) and to analyze certification in New York (Papa, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2002). Both studies used existing personnel databases, and assuming that most states allow professors access to such sources for research purposes, these two studies could be replicated in other states.

Another important consideration is standardization of data collection and a national database. As evidenced by the entries in Table 2, data about candidates in our programs is not gathered or reported in any standard way. The UCEA/LTEL-SIG Taskforce has developed surveys—available now for broad use—that collect data intended for future use in national studies about the effectiveness of preparation programs. Professors and researchers in several states now are conducting studies using these instruments; survey results are being archived by the National Center for the Evaluation of Educational Leadership Preparation and Practice (<http://www.edleaderprep.org/slpps/>). A national database on our program candidates and graduates is becoming a reality.

Closing Thoughts

Conducting this literature review affirmed our concerns that professors of educational administration and leadership need to be actively—even aggressively—engaged in research about candidates and graduates in their programs and then need to disseminate those findings widely. Because our literature search within traditional venues yielded little information about candidates, we were forced to look elsewhere for information. In the process, we reviewed publications and Web sites sponsored by special-interest groups engaged in leadership preparation, discovering that in many cases institutions of higher education—particularly research universities—appear to be excluded. Whereas departments of educational administration once held a monopoly on the preparation of school administrators (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007; McCarthy, 1999), that is no longer the case.

We believe that we can avert the continuing charge that university-based preparation programs are irrelevant—but only if we face the

fact that we are becoming so—and that the current political agenda does not intend to help us change. It is thus entirely up to us to recognize the problems that we have and aggressively collaborate to attack them to ensure that our graduates produce fundamental change in learning for public-school students. Anything less presages our deepening irrelevance and eventual demise.

Authors' Note

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