The Leadership Lens:
Perspectives on Leadership from School District Personnel and University Faculty

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This study examined the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for aspiring school leaders from the perspective of university faculty in educational administration programs and acting school administrators and teacher leaders. Additionally, I sought to understand the congruence and/or dissonance between university faculty in educational administration programs and acting school administrators and teacher leaders in their view of necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for aspiring school leaders. Using a qualitative research design, I interviewed both university professors in education administration programs and current administrators who serve as principal, assistant principal, curriculum supervisors, superintendents, department chairs, and other school leaders.

The Leadership Lens:

Administrators in K-12 education possess the ability to effectively model and ensure quality teaching for learning for students. In order to achieve this level of student success, educational leaders must be competent and visionary as well as display transformational leadership (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007). As high standards and stricter measures of accountability continue, it is critical that educational leadership programs provide experiences and skills that will prepare the leaders of tomorrow and assist in creating a qualified pool of applicants filled with trained professionals who know how to envision and implement the necessary functions of a school (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). The discrepancy and challenge will come in identifying what the essential skills, courses, and experiences for aspiring administrators should be and in maintaining a curriculum of such that is reflective of the ever-changing needs of school divisions (Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., & Orr, M., 2007).

Leadership in schools should serve as the bridge which connects the various reform efforts through specific plans and measures for assessment (DeVita et al., 2007). Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) concur that the main focus of leadership is using influence to direct the organization toward an established and shared vision. Though the vision of what a successful educational leader should be might be clear, the path toward assisting individuals develop this leadership capacity is murkier. Leithwood, et al. go on to state that not all individuals possess the same capacity for leadership potential and that there is an inherent need to identify those with this potential to recruit the highest level of educational leaders rather than settling for mediocrity. Once a program has recruited quality students, there may be an additional layer of dissonance between educational leadership university faculty and the school administrators who they work to shape in regard to what takes priority.

As faculty design leadership preparation programs, they often utilize common curriculum, internship and field-based experiences, and mentoring. The curriculum and projects, however, tend to lack grounding in research, according to a study that examined syllabi from exemplar programs (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2007). Conversely, in a 2007 study examining 200 recent graduates of principal preparation programs, participants identified an overuse of theory without practical application and irrelevant content as two critiques of their program (Edmonds, Waddle, Murphy, Ozturgut, & Caruthers, 2007). These two studies from two different perspectives assess preparation at opposite ends of a spectrum of theory and practice. As those who seek to improve leadership preparation programs strive for innovation, it is important to take the difficult first-step of acknowledging that we may need to improve and align to a new version of K-12 school leadership than what history required. Hess and Kelley (2005) reported that, "The evidence indicates that preparation has not kept pace with changes in the larger world of schooling, leaving graduates of principal preparation programs ill-equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability" (p. 35). This kind of investigation requires regular review as the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary will evolve over time. Work done since this 2005 study by organizations such as the University Council for Educational Administration Task Force on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Programs has provided a scaffold for programs to use to self-assess their program through short and long-term outcomes. These efforts have shown pockets of improvement that are reaching a larger scale (Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Orr, 2011).

The research questions addressed in this project and study included:

- What are the skills, knowledge, and attitudes seen as necessary for aspiring school leaders from the perspective of university faculty in educational administration programs and acting school administrators and teacher leaders?
- To what extent do congruence and/or dissonance exist between university faculty in educational administration programs and acting school administrators and teacher leaders in their view of necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes for aspiring school leaders?

Related Literature

Leadership and Leadership Preparation for Contemporary Schools

The importance of the school leader for contemporary schools is well understood within the literature and is embodied by the work of Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) who said, "…there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst" (p. 17). The nature of leadership in contemporary schools is fluid and is impacted by both internal and external influences within and around organizations.

The very definition of what constitutes an educational leader has changed and expanded over time to include not only building-based administrators, but also central office personnel and teacher leaders, such as department chairs and team leaders. When we think of contemporary leaders and their changing role, it is important that we work to develop leaders in the preparation phase that develop a capacity for contextual leadership. Leithwood, et. al, (2004) reported what today's principal needs to be prepared explained, "We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one "ideal" set of practices" (p. 10). Additionally, we need to prepare leaders who understand that their work cannot function unaccompanied, but rather has to focus on how to maximize the collective resources and energy of the staff around them. Kati Haycock, President of Education Trust is quoted in a 2008 Wallace Foundation report as saying,

> When you meet the leaders in the places that are really getting the job done, they are not the kind of leaders that just turn things around by the sheer force of their personality. They are regular people. They are totally focused. They are totally relentless. They are not big, outsized personalities and they are not the only leaders in their schools. Especially in the larger schools, the principals know that they can't get it all done themselves. Those are the places that improve. Leadership is not about one person; it's about building a shared commitment and building a leadership team. (p. 2)

The challenge lies in determining what skills, knowledge, and dispositions are necessary to achieve the kind of school leadership that can succeed in improving student achievement, ensuring equity and excellence for all children, and in maintaining learning environments conducive to a system and climate of support. Additionally, we must consider how to best prepare leaders who understand how to be aware of and respond to their context, as well as to ensure the opportunities and manage conditions to support diverse learners (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, et. al, 2004). Principals have identified areas where they felt less prepared after their administration preparation programs, such as needing additional assistance with

communicating interpersonally, leading teams and reducing conflict, cultural competency, and utilization of data to lead schools (Petzko, 2004; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003).

Standards for Leadership

One mechanism for examining consensus around the necessities of practice needed by school leaders is the through the examination of formalized bodies or sets of standards. International, national, and state organizations, such as departments of education and non-profit groups have convened groups to work toward defining what a school leader needs to know and be able to do. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium developed standards in 1996 and updated them in 2008 to work toward clarifying the dispositions, knowledge, and skills needed for successful school leadership. These standards were meant to inform preparation, licensure, induction, and professional development for school leaders. The standards include:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts (Educational Leadership Policy Standards, 2008).

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education adapted these standards to guide accreditation of administrative preparation programs, through the ELCC standards, used to prepare aspiring administrators for licensure and practice. We also see standards emerge for specific content strands within education administration, such as standards for instructional supervision and the use of technology (NETS).

In addition to these national standards, states have worked to develop their own standards for licensure and evaluation. Several states, such as California, Virginia, and Colorado are undergoing updates to their evaluation of teachers and administrators with intention of implementing student academic achievement into the model. As we look at comparisons between standards of various states, it is useful to determine where parallels and incongruence lie. In better framing this study, I examined the standards from three states, New Jersey, Virginia, and Florida to crosswalk their content, as shown in Figure 1. The underlying ISLLC standards can be found in the terminology and organization of each of the three states included. Each demonstrates an emphasis on visioning, instructional focus, organizational management, community collaboration, integrity and ethical behavior, and understanding the political and social context. Additionally, New Jersey and Florida have standards that address the need for leading the use of technology.

Table 1. Comparison and crosswalk of standards for administrators.

Theme	New Jersey	Virginia	Florida
Visioning	School administrators shall be educational leaders who promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.	The school leader collaboratively develops and implements a School Improvement Plan that focuses on improving student performance, communicates a clear vision of excellence and results in increased student learning. The school leader takes responsibility for and participates in a meaningful and continuous process of professional development that results in the enhancement of student learning.	High Performing leaders have a personal vision for their school and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to develop, articulate and implement a shared vision that is supported by the larger organization and the school community.
Instructional Focus	School administrators shall be educational leaders who promote the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.	The school leader effectively employs various processes for gathering, analyzing and using data for decision making. The school leader plans, implements, supports and assesses instructional programs that enhance teaching and improve student achievement in the Standards of Learning. The school leader supervises the alignment, coordination and delivery of instructional programs to promote student learning and oversees an accountability system to monitor student success. The school leader selects, inducts, supervises, supports, evaluates and retains quality instructional and support personnel. The school leader provides	High performing leaders promote a positive learning culture, provide an effective instructional program, and apply best practices to student learning, especially in the area of reading and other foundational skills. High Performing Leaders monitor the success of all students in the learning environment, align the curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes to promote effective student performance, and use a variety of benchmarks, learning expectations, and feedback measures to ensure accountability for all participants engaged in the educational process. High Performing Leaders plan effectively, use critical thinking and problem solving techniques, and collect and analyze data for continuous school

		professional development programs designed to improve instruction and student performance that are consistent with division initiatives and the School Improvement Plan. The school leader identifies, analyzes and resolves instructional problems using effective problem-solving techniques.	improvement. High Performing Leaders recruit, select, nurture and, where appropriate, retain effective personnel, develop mentor and partnership programs, and design and implement comprehensive professional growth plans for all staff – paid and volunteer.
Organizational Management	School administrators shall be educational leaders who promote the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment.	The school leader maintains effective discipline and fosters a safe, caring environment that is supportive of teaching and learning. The school leader effectively coordinates and monitors the daily operation of the school to ensure efficiency, protect instructional time and maintain the focus on successful student learning. The school leader effectively manages material and financial resources to ensure student learning and to comply with legal mandates. The school leader demonstrates effective organizational skills to achieve school, community and division goals.	High Performing Leaders manage the organization, operations, facilities and resources in ways that maximize the use of resources in an instructional organization and promote a safe, efficient, legal, and effective learning environment.
Community Collaboration	School administrators shall be educational leaders who promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.	The school leader communicates effectively and establishes positive interpersonal relations with students, teachers and other staff.	High Performing Leaders collaborate with families, business, and community members, respond to diverse community interests and needs, work effectively within the larger organization and mobilize community resources.
Integrity and Ethical Behavior	School administrators shall be educational leaders who	The school leader models professional, moral, and	High Performing Leaders act with integrity, fairness,

	promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner.	ethical standards as well as personal integrity in all interactions. The school leader works in a collegial and collaborative manner with other division personnel.	and honesty in an ethical manner.
Understanding the Political and Social Context	School administrators shall be educational leaders who promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context.	The school leader effectively communicates with and works collaboratively with families and community members to secure resources (e.g., cultural, social, intellectual) and support the success of a diverse student population. The school leader acts to influence decisions that affect student learning at the division, state, and/or national level.	High Performing Leaders understand, respond to, and influence the personal, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural relationships in the classroom, the school and the local community.
Technology	A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the effective use of technology to maximize student learning and efficiently manage school operations.		High Performing Leaders plan and implement the integration of technological and electronic tools in teaching, learning, management, research, and communication responsibilities.

(Florida Principal Leadership Standards, 2005; New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers, 2004; Advancing Virginia's Leadership Agenda, 2008).

University-District Collaboration

By understanding what school leaders need to know and be able to do to be successful, rather through research, or research-based standards, the next step is to consider who will work to prepare the school leaders in these leadership dimensions. Increasingly, there are calls for partnering between K-12 school divisions and institutions of higher education, or non-profit organizations. In some states, this partnership is mandated by state code. This type of partnering allows for the articulation of division needs, current research and theory, quality internship and field placements, and improved collaborative efforts to encourage P-16 educational alignment (Grogan, Bredeson, Sherman, Preis, & Beaty, 2009; Sherman, 2009). While these partnerships can be challenging to forge and sustain, the necessity for a pooling of resources toward this important preparation is key (Borthwick, Stirling, Nauman, & Cook, 2003). This study sought to provide a foundation that can be used to initiate conversations between university faculty and division administrators. The basic task of what competencies leaders need to be successful is wrought with complexity.

Conceptual Model

Leading an educational organization requires a complex set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes where leaders work with diverse groups to set direction and reach goals. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) sought to outline key categories under which competencies of school leadership fall. Namely, they identified setting direction, developing people, and developing the organization. Setting direction encompassed the notion of developing, fostering, and communicating a shared vision among stakeholders, and then monitoring the progress toward that vision. In doing such activities with the larger group, a leader is able to gain buy-in and community commitment. Second, developing people is critical to the ability to reach these goals and was defined to include offering a stimulating and supportive environment that would allow the teachers, students, and staff to evolve individually and as a group. Finally, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) emphasized developing the organization through examination of the school culture and climate, ensuring a quality environment for teaching for learning, and in focusing on reorganization to allow for collaborative efforts to reach the aforementioned goals. As I sought to understand how university faculty and current K-12 administrators understood leadership preparation priorities, this conceptual model of school leadership allowed a structure through which to establish the interview protocol and organize findings.

Methods and Participants

Guided by Leithwood & Riehl's work in successful school leadership (2005), I examined leadership through the three key factors of setting direction, developing people, and developing the organization through interviews with both university professors in education administration programs and current administrators who served as principal, assistant principal, curriculum supervisors, superintendents, department chairs, and other school leaders. Participants were asked to describe their current understanding of school leadership and the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to be successful in varying leadership roles through the lens of the three key factors. This study used a basic qualitative interpretive research design to determine the key elements of a program that seeks to prepare educational leaders who are strong both in practical and theoretical measures (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research was chosen to allow for full examination of the how and why for participants through their own experiences. Additionally, I sought to explore defining leadership beyond the manner a survey instrument would allow. To ensure trustworthiness of the data, I worked with a research partner in the early stages of coding to ensure that my perspective as a professor of educational leadership did not result in my missing or miscategorizing the words of my participants.

Snowball sampling was used to locate university faculty teaching in education administration programs, while attempting to ensure that different states were represented. Ultimately, eight different faculty, four men and four women participated. By using professional networks through the University Council for Educational Administration and the American Education Research Association, I was able to develop a starting set of participants that was ultimately augmented through snowball sampling. Additionally, I was able to speak with 16 school-based leaders at which point I reached saturation. The sample included 10 women and six men. The sample consisted of four principals, four assistant principals, four central office administrators, and four teacher leaders representing 10 different school divisions.

Each participant was interviewed for 60 minutes using a semi-structured interview protocol during which time the interview was recorded and then later transcribed. In conducting my analysis, I used qualitative data analysis by open coding in AtlasTI to determine key themes and trends from the perspective of varying roles of leadership. Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasize the need to use open coding to not target one issue too early and then to use constant comparison to continue to update the list of codes and possible eventual theories. In later iterations of coding, the transcripts were examined for any nuances related to the role held by the participant. This allowed findings regarding congruence and dissonance between practitioners and faculty to become evident in a qualitative manner.

Findings

The conversations with leaders in the field and professors who prepare them led to important findings about both common ground and dissonance. Clearly, the snowball sampling and perspective of the researcher serve as limitations that may limit transferability of findings to other groups. There were, however, findings, that might inform the work of leadership preparation, as well as induction and mentoring conducted by school districts.

Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes Needed for School Leaders

The first research question allowed an examination of the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for school leaders. Generally, there was consistency among the voice of faculty and school district personnel about key areas for development. Key findings included a need for leaders to be trained in instructional leadership, ethical decision making, cultural competency, and organizational management. Among school district personnel, there was a specific mention of the need to focus on training leaders to manage the organization with attention to federal and state mandates that are, in their view, increasing in complexity and number. A district leader indicated, "We just have to have people who can attend to the data and accountability requirements. It's no longer a nice addition to a resume; it's a critical component for success as a school leader." University faculty reported a need to prepare leaders to be systems thinkers and to provide experiences to help bridge the theory to practice gap. It was clear, however, that exactly what those experiences should entail is still somewhat of an enigma. One faculty member indicated, "We have so many things we know they need to have, and yet our ability to get them all of those experiences in a degree program with limited internship opportunities is a challenge." Central office personnel responded with more emphasis on instructional and curriculum leadership, whereas building personnel focused more on the need to not neglect organizational management and personnel for a sole focus on instructional leadership. One faculty member described her view of needed integration among coursework and practical experiences for aspiring leaders saying,

> I would have them do their coursework along with their internship activities. I think having them starting out as observers and then moving into active participants within the schools as they get more comfortable with it, I think that I would not have individual courses. I would find common themes within the courses, and then however you would do it – modules or themes or whatever – but you would have an integrated program. I think part of the problem is is that we teach concepts in isolation, and it makes students –

it makes it more difficult for students to transfer the knowledge from one course to the other that it seems like, "Oh, well this is a school law activity, so I'm gonna put on my school law cap. Oh, well this is an instructional activity. I'm going to put on my instructional hat. Oh, this is Special Ed. I'm gonna put on my Special Ed hat." They need to be able to see how all of those blend together and things aren't done in isolation.

The experiences identified by both faculty and administrators focused on the need to have authentic practice in managing in-box style activities in actual scenarios, either through case studies or internship opportunities. A faculty member echoed

So I think before you can become an effective school wide leader, you need to have the experience of either having led your colleagues at a grade level or across the department. So that you're comfortable having those conversations about looking at data, figuring out what we need to do differently next, figuring out how you're going to share information as to your results, and do research to determine what's the next thing that you need to do to improve outcomes for children. So you need to have some of that experience on a smaller scale first.

A principal agreed, saying, "They think they know from books, but they don't know until they are out there. They have to be in the shoes to get it."

One interesting aspect from participants who were teacher leaders emerged from their struggle to respond to how they reflected on their role as leaders and what prepared them for success. Teacher leaders showed that their ability to conceptualize and reflect upon their role was hampered by the fact that they did not see themselves as school leaders. They saw themselves more as either a volunteer for department tasks or as the one who had to take their turn running things. One teacher leader currently enrolled in an administrative licensure program, however, described the intersection of her work as a teacher leader with her coursework, saying

When we did the observations, like, I had been doing walk-throughs and doing observations, but I got to do on-the-job training that day and already got to get that experience of what we were learning in a classroom. So I think for me, it's been perfect timing because I'm still new to the leadership team, but I have enough experience on the leadership team where what I'm learning in my classes is like a direct fit.

While there was much shared regarding knowledge and skills, attitudes tended to be more challenging for the respondents to discuss. One faculty member indicated that she did not ascribe to the belief that there is a particular set of dispositions or attitudes necessary because the role is so diverse and accomplished well by so many different leaders. Several school leaders, however, indicated that the personality is a critical component. Each of the three who used the term "personality" in their responses indicated that they felt that leaders either have it or they do not. One clarified, "You can just see it in people. You know that one is going to be able to do it and lead this place, whereas that one just doesn't have the personality for it. That communication and people part." Through the discussion of the necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge, there was some congruence and dissonance that emerged through coding.

Congruence and Dissonance in Leadership Preparation

The second research question allowed exploration, through a qualitative lens, the congruence and dissonance expressed by the participants in their view of school leadership. In many ways, there was congruence between university faculty and school district leadership regarding the necessary knowledge and skills for school leaders, however, in some key areas, such as who is responsible for preparing leaders, there was some important dissonance. University faculty saw organized university systems as most equipped to prepare leaders who would challenge the status quo, whereas school district personnel saw an increasing need to provide induction and professional development for newly hired administrators at the district level. Both, therefore, saw themselves as playing the most important or primary necessary role in developing leaders. They did, however, find agreement that current preparation is leaving some administrators under-prepared for key functions.

One area of congruence was found in the necessary experiences and credentials faculty and school based leaders saw as necessary to prepare to take on building or central office leadership roles. Both groups saw a necessity for extended internships and quasi-administrative roles such as department chairs, grade level leads, and committee leadership, such as one assistant principal who said,

> I think they need to have led committees. I really think being a department chair is important - just having those kinds of roles wherein you start getting a sense of: "This is policy. This is what you have to do." It's a lot easier to be the quarterback the night after - you know the Monday night quarterback, and go, "Oh, I would have done it this way," when they've never walked in those shoes.

Another principal indicated, "I look for the people who have said yes. I look for the people who volunteered and did things long before they were officially licensed because they know what it takes to lead. If you don't have that commitment, then you are not ready to be a school leader."

As indicated previously, the dissonance found was primarily about who was better equipped to prepare school leaders for their role. University faculty all agreed that to allow districts to "grow your own" or prepare school leaders without any external involvement leads to a system of groupthink where norms that should be challenged are not. School leaders had more of a balanced approach. None of the participants who were school leaders indicated they thought a school district should prepare leaders in a vacuum from university influence, however, they all agreed that there is induction and preparation that must happen inside the district as each district has their own nuanced policies and approaches, as well as vision. There was universal agreement, as well, that even university professors who previously served in K-12 are often too distanced from that experience for it to be relevant. One principal indicated, "Look, I get that some of these folks were in K-12 and now they are professors and so they think that makes them understand our experiences. The reality though is that if you've been out of the field say more than 4-5 years, you don't get it. And I've been doing this a long time so I know how things have changed." The participants highlighted areas through their descriptions that can lead to future conversations in leadership preparation.

Findings Connected to Conceptual Model of School Leadership

The final stage of coding allowed for a reflection on the voices of participants through the conceptual model developed by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) of what works in school leadership.

The first component, setting direction, included a focus on collectively developing and maintaining a course toward a vision. As I reviewed the transcripts examining for various themes, I used a priori coding to examine for statements and codes that fit into the components of Leithwood and Riehl's framework. The research protocol was focused on specific competencies, rather than overall effective school leadership. This may explain why participants did not discuss the need for leaders to be prepared to lead and steward a school vision. This was, however, inherent in some participants' responses, such as one assistant principal who described her model for leadership, saying,

> Well I'll start with my philosophy. My philosophy of leadership is pretty much based on Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership. I believe that leadership regardless of where it is but especially in an educational setting should be approached from the standpoint of how can I help you be the better teacher, assistant principal, custodian, and I feel like it's my job as principal and leader of the school to support everyone who works and serves in the school so that they can be the best, do their job to the fullest, including the students. How can I help my students be eager, willing, ready learners? And I feel like my job entails work and being busy about supporting those and equipping them with the tools that they need, whether it's resources, whether it's time in the day to collaborate, whether it's a workshop or a seminar or bringing in someone.

Another central office administrator identified the lack of vision coming into her division due to both an ineffective superintendent and continuous overturn of the office of superintendent, describing,

> Our superintendent--he's brand new to our district. And before him, two superintendents before him, the superintendent, made a lot of strides in our district, did a lot. We gained a lot. We started doing more data-driven decision-making. He also made a lot of leadership changes in central admin. So we were very strong, we were very proud and we were on the track of just achieving and achieving. But then he retired and he left and we got a new superintendent, who was with us I think four or five years. He was a very nice person, but as far as understanding his vision as a leader where he was trying to take us, that wasn't transparent.

The second concept of developing people from Leithwood and Riehl (2005) was present in responses by both faculty and practicing administrators. Specifically, there was consistent mention among all participants of a notion of needing to keep the teaching for learning at the core. One university faculty member discussed,

> I think that school leaders need to be instructionally focused. They also at the same time have to keep the details of the management aspect of the building at the forefront while balancing that with instructional leadership. I think the majority of their time needs to be

spent with teachers during the academic day. It's tricky and it's difficult to do that, but I think at least 40 to 50 percent of their day needs to be in the classroom and needs to be working with teachers and meetings. I think there's a lack of participation by school leaders in content and grade level team meetings. I think that they need to be active participants. I think that school leaders need to also be incredibly active with their school data.

One component of developing people was pinpointed through the discussions about necessary attitudes and dispositions of school leaders. Primarily, participants listed similar qualities of leaders, and usually, they followed with an example of a particular leader who embodied those qualities. This may indicate that our concept of ideal leadership is truly an amalgamation of all the leaders we have deemed effective during our careers. One faculty member stated,

> You can design a program that may expose people to these particular attitudes, to these particular dispositions, but it's really up to the individual person to decide whether or not they want to incorporate that into their own particular schema. I think that you need to expose and help people understand what it means to be a visionary leader – someone who's able to think strategically who understands what it means to create a culture of positive academic learning; what it means – what it really means to believe that all students can learn, and maybe they don't necessarily learn in the same way; to understand that it's crucial to have a school where individuals are not just individuals.

The theme of teamwork within a learning organization was echoed by a central office administrator, who said,

> You have to have the type of personality that - I've said many times if you have to walk around all the time saying and letting everybody know you're the building principal, you're really not in charge. It's that you present yourself in a way that your staff knows I'm here for you and I'm working with you. I'm not here to dictate to you how the job has to be done and I'm on this ivory tower over here and I'm having you do all of my legwork and I'm never the two shall meet. The staff has to be able to view you as someone that is concerned about the operation as a whole, know that you're there to work with them, support them, back them up, and that's - I think that personality trait is something that any good leader has to have. You can't be successful if your staff views you as an outsider. You've got to be in there working with them.

Another central office administrator stated, "They need to know that they can come to you with anything and you're there for them. It's not a 'me and you' mentality. It's 'an us'. We're a team and I'm part of that team just as much as when I was a teacher." I also spoke with leaders who were newer to the administrative role and had some of their beliefs change early on, such as one new assistant principal who said,

> I must say that my philosophy of leadership has certainly changed. I once thought that it needed to be quite direct. I'm now thinking it's very much a collaborative effort of everyone in the school, and I do think it needs to be focused - very focused on what your

goals and your outcomes want to be for this school, and like I said, along with collaboration with the rest of your team members and faculty.

Finally, in looking at how participants responded in areas considered developing the organization, such as safety and security and overall management of the building logistics, I did see specific recommendations that aspiring leaders needed this experience during internship or practica. While the rhetoric around instructional leadership is present, several of the practicing principals commented that it is often the other items, such as special education logistics and budgeting that will get you into trouble. One central office administrator, who had previously served as a principal commented,

> Ultimately, your goal as the building principal when you're focusing on academics, you want the bulk of your day to be where you're physically in the classroom monitoring the instruction firsthand, seeing the good instruction that's occurring, and you've really got your finger on the pulse of the instructional program. In reality that doesn't happen every day. In reality the other pieces that we talked about, the budgetary issues, the policy issues, the other things that are required in many days keep and prevent that from happening. That's when you have to be very dependent upon your instructional resource staff, and that's where the delegation comes in. If you can't be there, you need to still make sure that you've got eyes and ears out there that are monitoring that number one goal.

One of the teacher leaders commented on how intricate the system was something she did not realize until she moved into a quasi-administrative position. She said,

> I think I've realized more of what's going on at the central office and some of the things behind the scenes that I didn't realize, and the complexities of all the different jobs and the positions, and how everything needs to be in sync, as where, before, I just really didn't even think much about it at all. But it's kind of eye-opening to see how complex the school system is and what all has to be done and how much knowledge had to be in each department for everything to function and flow correctly and properly.

These findings will be discussed in the final implications section collectively and individually.

Conclusions and Implications

There is much room in the arena of leadership preparation for the voice of all key stakeholders to come to the table. This study's findings, although not generalizable, reflect less dissonance than there may have been in previous years, but rather different areas of emphasis and expertise. As university programs continue to battle the reputation of the "ivory tower" that has been criticized for being out of touch with the realities facing contemporary school leaders (Elmore, 2006; Levine, 2005), it is important for university faculty to continue to demonstrate the practical ways their work and research can be used by those in the field. Methods such as translational research seek to disseminate information to those who would most benefit from the findings. According to Smith and Helfenbein (2009), in education research, the approach of translational research

provides an opportunity for connections between research and/or theory and the world of K-12 practitioners, and when enacted with fidelity provides a forum for ongoing dialogue.

Educational leadership program faculty working in concert with local school district leaders to jointly design programs that develop theoretically based and practical skills, knowledge, and attitudes will likely increase the potential for a quality and qualified pool of aspiring administrators prepared to lead schools in today's educational climate. The participants in this study echoed the findings of Grogan, Bredeson, Sherman, Preis, and Beaty (2009) and Sherman (2009) regarding the critical nature of P-16 alignment. It also provides the added benefit of providing opportunities for educational leadership faculty to stay grounded in the daily activities and priorities of school leaders, as well as challenging existing school leaders to remain current in their understanding of contemporary theories and research in school leadership. This study provided an important groundwork for such cooperation and collaboration among stakeholders in leadership preparation.

The participants also seemed to express a set of necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes that were generally consistent with the current state and national standards reported in the review of literature. There was a clear focus on instructional leadership from all participants that is aligned to the standard found in the ISLLC and the three reviewed states. One area that was less covered was political context. While all participants acknowledged the need for a leader to understand the community context, less focus was given to political context for school leaders. It does appear critical that similar voices be included in any revision of standards at the national or state level.

A final area expressed by all participants was the need to emphasize that context matters. Each participant echoed the idea that school leaders need to be prepared more acutely for the challenges faced within their own buildings or divisions. At the very least, there was a need expressed to understand how to "diagnose" the challenges faced by a division or school to best prepare with the proper "treatment." Similar to the work of Leithwood & Riehl (2003) who said, "…it is not only what you do, but how you do it that makes the difference in any given situation and environment" (p. 5). This raises the need for a focus on school climate and culture that in some cases is missing from leadership preparation programs. With our knowledge as a field of the impact that can be exerted by school leaders, both positive and negative, it is clear that ongoing discussion and research about the necessary competencies of school leaders is warranted.

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