

On Being a Cohort Leader:

Curriculum Integration, Program Coherence,
and Shared Responsibility

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Abstract: Cohorts are increasingly popular management tools for recruiting students into professional education programs, for organizing their learning experiences, for promoting performance-based outcomes, and for developing and using innovative teaching-learning practices. This article explores the role of a cohort leader in ensuring that the curriculum is integrated throughout the life of the cohort, that program coherence is developed and maintained, and that students, faculty, and the program assume appropriate responsibilities for learning. Reviews of literature about learning in cohorts and designing programs serve as the basis for defining three cohort leader responsibilities: curriculum integration, program coherence, and shared responsibility. The article closes with recommendations from the authors who are experienced cohort instructors and cohort leaders.

Delivery of administrator preparation programs has undergone much change over the past decade (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Murphy, 1993; Peterson, 2002). Leadership preparation programs are now con-

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ducted on university campuses, at school district training centers, in local school buildings, and through cyberspace (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Kelly & Peterson, 2000; Milstein, 1992; Muth, 2000b). Universities and local educational agencies sometimes form partnerships to address specific district priorities, such as the need to develop leadership talent at the secondary level or among under-represented groups. Hence, educators from universities and practitioners from districts may work together to develop leadership curricula, deliver instruction, and oversee the clinical practice of aspiring educational administrators (Martin, Ford, Murphy, Rehm, & Muth, 1997; Martin, Ford, Murphy, & Muth, 1998). Collaboration between professors and practitioners is seen as a way to enhance theory-to-practice linkages (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004b; Martin et al., 1998; Milstein, 1992; Schmuck, 1992).

Program changes also often require specific accommodations in instructional delivery. For example, when great distances separate students and instructors, professors may develop web-based courses or use other electronic delivery modes that are supplemented by occasional face-to-face group meetings. Even when students and instructors meet regularly in typical classroom settings, learning opportunities may be expanded through use of electronic communication (Browne-Ferrigno, Muth, & Choi, 2000; Muth, 2000b). Further, some programs focus more on authentic clinical applications of knowledge (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004a; Fulmer, Muth, & Reiter, 2003) to meet state and national standards (Muth, 2002a) than on simple content coverage. Thus, graduate programs in administrative leadership can demonstrate diverse instructional models (Nesbit, 2001).

Program developers also have learned that keeping students together as a uniquely identified group throughout a program creates a convenient method of scheduling instructor assignments and organizing learning activities (Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001). These *cohorts* of students are now predominate in educational preparation programs (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Milstein, 1992; Reynolds & Hebert, 1998; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). Current estimates suggest that over 50% of the graduate educational leadership preparation programs in the United States use a cohort delivery model (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; McCarthy, 1999), often as *closed cohorts* (Norris & Barnett, 1994; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Such cohorts are comprised of 15 to 25 students who progress through a program together. Changes in closed-cohort membership come only through attrition: While students may drop out, new students generally do not join in-progress closed cohorts. Thus, students in a closed cohort form an intact group of learners who study and work together for a set period of time, usually from one to three years.

The cohort structure is perceived to have the potential to strengthen curriculum integration, team teaching, and course scheduling (Martin et al., 1997; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, et al., 1995). Cohort members' learning also can be positively affected, including their scholarship and reflective abilities (Burnett, 1989; Hill, 1995; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Coffin, 1995; Norton, 1995), interpersonal relationships (Horn, 2001), professional networks (Muth & Barnett, 2001), and persistence in program completion (Dorn, Papalewis, & Brown, 1995; Norton, 1995). Despite instances of increased academic competition (Hill, 1995), power struggles (Teitel, 1995), and faculty workload (Burnett, 1999), the many benefits afforded by cohort delivery appear to counter perceived disadvantages. Consequently, the use of cohorts in educational leadership preparation programs often is recommended highly (Milstein & Krueger, 1993; Murphy, 1993, 2001).

While cohorts in educational administration preparation programs are widely discussed (Barnett et al., 2000) and their efficacy touted (Barnett & Muse, 1993; Horn, 2001; Norton, 1995), the roles of faculty seldom receive attention, except in terms of issues and adjustments that they need to make when working with cohort groups. Yet, in many university-based preparation programs, one faculty member often is designated as the *cohort leader* and charged with oversight responsibilities from inception to completion. A cohort leader's responsibilities may include: (a) integrating the curriculum across the life of the cohort, (b) delivering the program and maintaining program coherence, and (c) ensuring that the students, instructors, and program developers assume appropriate responsibilities for shared learning and goal achievement. Throughout a cohort's duration, the cohort leader may facilitate the instructional responsibilities of university faculty and educational practitioners, help faculty and students take advantage of learning opportunities, and collaboratively develop and use appropriate performance-assessment measures (Barnett & Muth, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2003; Dick & Carey, 1990; Muth, 2002b; Muth et al., 2001; Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

A cohort leader thus becomes instrumental to the success, or failure, of a closed cohort because curriculum integration across a cohort's lifetime requires a holistic overview not generally required in a course-by-course program. Such integration can lead to program coherence (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004a; Muth, 2000a, 2000b), the clear direct and indirect connection of assessments, standards of practice, and participant responsibilities for learning outcomes and future performance. Hence, the cohort leader's role in assuring integration and coherence is essential. Without such leadership, confusion can reign and learning experiences can become disconnected from practice standards and as-

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assessments, integration across semesters and instructors can be compromised, and a program's reputation can be damaged when the learning and instructional experiences are viewed as haphazard.

On Being a Cohort Leader: Ensuring Program Integrity

Both authors of this paper are experienced cohort instructors and cohort leaders who work in vastly different settings. The lead author is an assistant professor in the college of education at a land-grant research university in a rural southern state where tradition is carefully guarded and diversity based upon race or culture is negligible. The second author is a full professor in the graduate school of education at an urban university in a large metropolitan area where innovation and entrepreneurialism are encouraged and population diversity is significant. Despite the differences in universities, settings, and client populations, the challenges of work as a cohort leader are strikingly similar in ensuring program integrity.

Serving as a cohort leader to ensure curriculum integration, program coherence, and shared responsibility requires *time* and *patience*. In fact, faculty say that cohorts increase faculty workload (Barnett et al., 2000; Muth & Barnett, 2001; Norton, 1995). Most often, the additional work stems from needed coordination among professors and clinical faculty as well as increased student advisement. Other work evolves from the use of developmental assignments that lead to multiple readings of papers and field reports and travel time for faculty driving to and from off-campus cohort sites. Faculty perceive these as disadvantages, despite cited benefits of using the cohort model such as: predictable course scheduling, easy student enrollment and greater retention, as well as opportunities for creativity and flexibility in instructional and assessment strategies (Barnett et al., 2000). This increased workload often grows from critical interactions with district partners and field-based mentors.

Working with District Partners

The cohort leader generally assumes responsibility for building strong relationships with district partners. University-district partnerships created to prepare school leaders adept at meeting changing demands in their districts require systematic outreach efforts to make connections with appropriate district personnel who will support the effort. When preparation programs are delivered off-campus, locations for training sessions must be determined, visited, and reserved. Appropriately skilled educational practitioners to assist in program delivery and organizational support must be identified and included in pre-

program planning discussions. Potential cohort candidates must be recruited, screened, and selected.

These partnership activities depend on clear, concisely articulated program goals and objectives. Developing a workable foundation for a university-district cohort program requires vision, strategic planning, nurturance, and continuous collaboration between the cohort leader and key district personnel. Careful attention to the distribution of responsibilities among partnership stakeholders and occasional appraisal to monitor completion of responsibilities help ensure that cohort program goals, objectives, and tasks are accomplished on a timely basis.

Working with Faculty Colleagues

In addition to strengthening district partnerships, the cohort leader must coordinate faculty activities. If using the closed-cohort model is new to a university, the dean needs to be engaged in the conceptualization of the partnership and apprised of faculty commitments. A cohort leader must also identify prospective university faculty with whom to work collaboratively. Faculty colleagues who serve as instructors in the same cohort program must share a common vision about desired outcomes. All must be willing to discuss openly with fellow cohort instructors what is working and what is not working, and make in-progress curricular changes.

Members of a cohort's instructional team need to relinquish notions of individualistic academic freedom, so ingrained in delivering traditional courses, and develop collaborative skills. Such teamwork is necessary to integrate instructional pieces into a mosaic of learning opportunities throughout the program. To deliver a coherent program, cohort instructors must agree to use best practices in adult learning theory, conduct ongoing assessments of cohort progress, and modify instruction to meet the learning needs of cohort participants. Thus, *course syllabi* often transform into a broad *program syllabus* that covers the goals and objectives of the entire program and a series of detailed *meeting agenda* that identify activities, changes, and other needed modifications as the program progresses. The cohort leader often is responsible for articulating needed curriculum changes with the instructional team and for disseminating changes to all cohort participants; hence, regular communication with all cohort participants is essential and ongoing.

Working with Field-Based Mentors

The cohort leader also must help students plan and implement their field-based learning experiences (e.g., clinical-practice activities, practica, and internships). Coordinating and monitoring these experiences usu-

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ally require that a cohort leader make site visits to discuss learner progress with students and their mentors. Depending upon the distribution of effort between district and university partners, a cohort leader also may design and implement mentor-training sessions or develop clinical-practice handbooks that clarify for all involved the minimum expectations and procedures. If more than one university-based supervisor is involved, then the cohort leader ensures that effort is fairly allocated and consistency maintained.

Other Work Required by Cohort Leader

Reflective practice is foundational to a cohort leader's success in bringing together district expectations, student needs, and instructor responsiveness within a program developed and implemented through a broad-based partnership. Multiple skills, such as vision, organization, collaboration, and advocacy, are required from a cohort leader, but the most necessary attribute is adaptability. A university faculty member who assumes responsibility for the coordination of a cohort program must know from the outset that cohort-program plans serve as guidelines; change is an omnipresent partner.

Program development and coordination comprise only one set of demands on a cohort leader's time. Continuously collaborating with other instructors, advising and assisting students, and openly communicating with all involved parties are parallel tasks required throughout a cohort program. Additionally, a cohort leader often serves as the liaison between the university and cohort students, providing services such as admissions advice, course planning, and on-site registration. When a cohort program is underwritten by external funds, a cohort leader usually is the person responsible for budget accounting and performance reporting to the funding agency. Formative and summative evaluations generally are required, so preparing Institutional Review Board documents also is a cohort leader's responsibility.

Many of these tasks can, and should, be distributed among university faculty, graduate assistants, and district personnel. Nonetheless, a cohort leader must keep track of the responsibilities distributed to others in order to maintain program integrity and to keep accurate records of what has been accomplished. Accountability for a cohort's success rests squarely upon the cohort leader.

How Cohort Leadership Can Affect Learning in a Cohort

The role of cohort leadership links directly to the original purpose for creating cohorts; efficient program delivery (Basom & Yerkes, 2001;

Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Early studies of closed cohorts support the premise that keeping administrator-preparation students together as discrete groups enhances professional learning and skill development (Barnett et al., 2000; Kraus & Cordeiro, 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Peel, Wallace, Buckner, Wrenn, & Evans, 1998). Although research on what occurs in cohort programs is sparse in proportion to research on the widespread use of cohorts, a few empirical investigations have examined their use and effects (Barnett et al., 2000; Hebert & Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds & Hebert, 1998; Witte & James, 1998). These studies generally have found that outcomes are positive; cohorts have a salutary impact on learning and performance. In the sections that follow, these studies are connected to the role of the cohort leader.

Academic Support: Enhanced Participant Learning

Investigations of preparation programs delivered as carefully sequenced curricula for unique cohort groups suggest increased student completion rates (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998) and enhanced learning achievements (Hebert & Reynolds, 1998) when compared to programs delivered as a series of traditional, separate courses taken by individual students whenever desired or available. In addition to claims that academic performance improves (Hill, 1995; Murphy, 1993; Norton, 1995), important leadership skills are acquired (Barnett et al., 2000) and rates of program completion increase (Burnett, 1989; Hill, 1995; Norton, 1995) for students participating in closed-cohort programs. In addition, the cohort structure provides excellent opportunities for aspiring school leaders to learn and practice skills in group goal setting, community building, conflict resolution, and culture management (Geltner, 1994; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Saltiel & Russo, 2001). A deft cohort leader works with her or his instructional team to ensure that such opportunities to learn are structured into the program (Muth, 2000a, 2000b). Thus, the cohort leader must guide the instructional team as it implements curricula to ensure the likelihood of such outcomes.

A cohort leader can also pave the way for creating effective learning outcomes. Anecdotal evidence, usually provided by students and faculty at the close of programs, suggests that the long-term association of cohort participants creates caring learning climates that support students' competence and sense of well-being (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Peel et al., 1998). Students in cohorts that function well report greater feelings of inclusiveness, more opportunities for collaboration and professional networking, and stronger academic performance than they had in their previous higher educational experiences (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004b; Kraus & Cordeiro, 1995; Lang, 2000; Yerkes, Basom,

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Barnett, & Norris, 1995). Studies of group dynamics, group affiliation, participant interaction, and personal relationships within cohorts also show that the culture of well-functioning cohorts increases the level of learning for all participants (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994). So, the benefits from cohort participation may be substantial though not always directly related to academic gains (Lang, 2000; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, et al., 1995).

Professional Relationships: Enhanced Communal Learning

Besides staging and reinforcing supportive group interactions, the cohort leader must also be alert to difficulties with group dynamics. Because using a closed-cohort model “does not ensure a true cohort will develop” (Basom et al., 1995, p. 19), the cohort leader must ensure that careful attention be given to group-development activities at the beginning and throughout a cohort program (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Basom & Yerkes, 2001). While developing a sense of trust among all cohort members is critically important, achieving a true community is not always easy (Wesson, Holman, Holman, & Cox, 1996), and a cohort leader must encourage culture building and group development, first among the instructional team and then among students and the team.

Cohorts generally move through predictable stages of group development and establish unique personalities (Maher, 2001; Misanchuk, Anderson, Craner, Eddy, & Smith, 2000; Wesson et al., 1996). Group-development theory suggests that conflict or a period of *storming* follows the initial *forming* stage and is necessary in order for a group to progress to cohesion, called the *norming* or *transforming* stage, before functioning at a full performance level or *performing* stage (Maher, 2001; Siccone, 1997; Weber, 1982). Through these stages, group dynamics can result in collusion and cliquishness, exclusionary group behavior and norms, breakdowns in communication, and conflicting problem-solving and work styles, and assumed or assigned roles can impede learning (Browne-Ferrigno, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1995). Additionally, multiple in-progress assessments may be required to measure group development and elicit candid discussions about what is happening within a cohort (Tipping, Freeman, & Rachlis, 1995) and what needs changing.

Another source of potential cohort conflict can be the diversity represented by students. Differing student characteristics potentially provide cohort members with rich opportunities to learn new perspectives from peers representing diverse age groups, races, ethnic backgrounds, professional experiences, and career aspirations (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992). However, diverse student populations within a cohort

can foster group disintegration (Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001), particularly if conflict is not anticipated openly and addressed promptly (Barnett et al., 2000; Teitel, 1995).

Initial and continuing group-development activities within cohorts are needed to enhance group processing, cohesion, and learning and address real or imagined group conflict. These activities may appear to diminish time spent on content-oriented learning activities (Barnett et al., 2000). However, experienced cohort leaders and instructors understand the critical importance of addressing group needs in order to achieve learning success (Muth, 2000b; Smith & Associates, 1990; Tosteson, Adelstein, & Carver, 1994). An alert cohort leader can nurture cohort strengths while acting swiftly to acknowledge and resolve conflicts.

Both students and faculty offer anecdotal evidence that the long-term association of learners in a well-functioning cohort creates risk-safe learning environments through peer camaraderie and caring (Browne-Ferrigno, in press; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2003). Because friendships are developed through long-term association, students are willing to share their frustrations, doubts, challenges, and concerns (Lang, 2000). Even while many faculty contend that interpersonal relationships flourish in cohorts (Barnett et al., 2000), some conflicting reports have surfaced. On the one hand, cohorts afford students the opportunity to become a cohesive community of learners who bond with one another, reducing their professional isolation (Kasten, 1992; Leithwood et al., 1995; Milstein & Krueger, 1993; Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 1996; Norton, 1995). On the other hand, interpersonal tension and conflict may result from personal traumas (Barnett & Muse, 1993), academic competition (Hill, 1995), domination of the learning environment by a few vocal students (Norris et al., 1996; Norton, 1995), group divisiveness (Browne-Ferrigno, 2001), and groupthink (Barnett et al., 2000). Again, the cohort leader, in concert with team members, must maintain cohort *balance* to ensure that students take responsibility for their own learning but do not suffer too much from problems of group dynamics.

Creating Curriculum Integration, Program Coherence, and Shared Responsibilities

A distinctive difference between cohort programs and course-based programs is the needed emphasis on community building (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992). Cohort leaders and instructors within a well-integrated cohort program often spend considerable time on group-development and peer-interaction activities. The purpose of attending to group dynamics is to assist the cohort's progress through the important and

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predictable stages of group building (Maher, 2001; Siccone, 1997; Weber, 1982). Group-development activities may need to be repeated each time a cohort experiences a change in instructors because the introduction of new faculty members creates a different group dynamic and potentially threatens the cohort's learning culture. Creation of a well-functioning professional learning community is critical to a cohort's success (Yerkes, Basom, Norris, et al., 1995).

The following sections briefly analyze how cohort leadership can positively affect cohort-learning outcomes and achieve three objectives: (a) *curriculum integration*, the continuous focus on instructional components to ensure that they are developed and combined into an integrated whole; (b) *program coherence*, the ongoing assessment of cohort progress to ensure that program parts are logically interconnected and delivered congruently and harmoniously; and (c) *shared responsibility*, the collaboration of all cohort participants, including students, instructors, and program partners, to ensure that learning goals and program objectives are achieved.

Curriculum Integration: Seamless Interconnections

The cohort leader guides the group, instructors and students alike, as they incorporate various instructional strategies, including integrated course content, team teaching, problem-based learning, reflective strategies, and case studies (Hill, 1995; Martin et al., 1997; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, et al., 1995). Cohort programs also appear to follow some of the current trends in assessment by incorporating diagnostic inventories and individual learning plans (Yerkes, Basom, Norris, et al., 1995). However, a challenge in designing an effective cohort program, based upon learning through experience, is the selection of the kind of "present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). Here, the program syllabus, developed collaboratively by the instructional team, revisited regularly, can guide curriculum decisions. The cohort leader must facilitate these processes.

By developing expectations about problem-based learning activities linked to real problems of practice in K-12 schools (Muth, 2000b), the cohort leader and other faculty enable students to begin early to apply theories and to develop skills needed in their future roles as school leaders (Pounder, 1994). By integrating group action-research projects (Geltner, 1994; Stringer, 1996) and appreciative inquiry activities (Srivastva, Cooperrider, & Associates, 1990) into the curriculum, students learn the power of collaborative inquiry (Churchill, 1996) and the importance of careful use of data and reflection (Nadler, 1977; Schön, 1991). By developing small-group and whole-class activities, a cohort

leader can help students learn the challenges of group dynamics when membership changes (Muth et al., 2001). Further, the intact learning environment of closed cohorts supports long-term developmental activities that are more difficult to integrate into individual courses where student-learning groups are reconstituted each semester. For example, such activities might connect fundamental learning to field applications that mirror the annual school agenda (Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, & Muth, 2003; Muth, Bellamy, Fulmer, & Murphy, 2004).

Such longitudinal learning activities typically include individual and small-group projects and presentations, reflective journals, field-based inquiries, and school projects usually evaluated in portfolios (Milstein & Associates, 1993), all of which must be designed, coordinated, and monitored. In addition, real-world, authentic assessments (Ford, Muth, Martin, & Murphy, 1996) require students to develop collaborative products by sharing resources and responsibilities, gaining peer support and feedback, working through conflict, and seeking agreement through consensus. Authentic assessments help attune learning to professional practice (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999) and require cohort leaders and instructional team members to match assessments to practice expectations as well as state and national standards.

Program Coherence: Learning Objectives

Using the cohort model effectively requires the cohort leader to promote program coherence (Dick & Carey, 1990; Muth, 2002b; Saltiel & Russo, 2001) and to engage faculty in identifying and implementing critical elements that generate optimum learning experiences for students and faculty (Barnett et al., 2000; Kelley & Peterson, 2000). Faculty often need to reshape their notions about content coverage within individual courses to focus on learning gained through appropriate scope and sequence across the total program. Collaborative program development means that the “onus of responsibility is upon all faculty to contribute and explain why their content and ideas need to be included” (Cordiero, Boutiler, Panicek, & Salamone-Consoli, 1993, p. 27) and to substantiate how they support program goals and make connections to practice (Muth, 2000a, 2000b; Muth et al., 2001). Thus, determination of desired cohort outcomes requires extensive deliberation during program development to ensure that cohort activities are aligned with what is to be learned, how it is to be learned, what process is to be used, and what teachers and students should do (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004b; Muth, 2000a, 2000b). A cohort leader needs both formative and summative evaluations to ensure that goals are met, keeping evaluations timely, nonintrusive but instructive, and readily available for program adjustments.

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Shared Responsibility: New Roles for Cohort Success

The effective cohort leader also cultivates shared responsibility, juggling the possible dissolution of traditional *instructor* and *student* roles along with the expansion of roles to include school practitioners (Cordiero et al., 1993). Over time, cohort participants assume greater responsibility for their learning, both as individuals and as members of groups, and regularly make known their requests for changes in instructional delivery or learning assessments (Barnett et al., 2000). Hence, cohort leaders and instructors often assume roles as facilitators, mentors, and occasionally mediators during cohort meetings that more closely resemble professional-development seminars and workshops than traditional higher-education lecture classes. However, the cohort instructional delivery model occasionally affects faculty teaching adversely because students are more likely to challenge instructors' authority (Barnett et al., 2000; Barnett & Muse, 1993) due to the strong social bonding of cohort groups (Norton, 1995). An important role for a cohort leader, then, is dispute resolution.

Team learning within a cohort does not emerge simply by grouping students together (Basom et al., 1995). The cohort leader plays a significant role in ensuring that it does emerge. Research suggests that learning in a cohort is enhanced when environmental influences are addressed and learner-centered instructional strategies are implemented (Barnett et al., 2000; Hannafin & Land, 1997; Muth et al., 2001). Thus, cohort leaders need to create inviting, risk-safe conditions and address stages of cohort transformation, marked by cycles of conflict and cohesion, so that transformative learning can occur (Geltner, 1994; Lumsden, 1992; Maher, 2001). Important in this regard is working with the instructional team to develop strategies and feedback mechanisms to assess the presence, or absence, of effective team processes. Linking cohort learning activities to professional practice also can be strengthened through clinical practice experiences, monitored internships, mentoring, and networking opportunities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Lumsden, 1992; Milstein & Krueger, 1997), and each of these can involve teamwork.

Becoming a Cohort Leader: Why Do It?

Assuming responsibilities as a cohort leader may seem overwhelming. At times, even for the most experienced cohort leaders, the demands seem too many. The most difficult task for a cohort leader is time management: A cohort leader seldom is relieved from other teaching, research and publishing, or service obligations. The challenge becomes

finding a workable balance between teaching and other responsibilities, ideally creating opportunities to overlap tasks.

Four significant benefits from serving as a cohort leader can emerge and provide professional growth and new insights for a professor contemplating the role. One benefit is the opportunity to work closely with colleagues, both at one's university and at others, in examining and sharing experiences with cohorts. Working in and studying about the effectiveness of cohorts and cohort leadership creates unique *cohorts* of cohort leaders within academe. Further, when professors work together to create and implement a new cohort program, they collaborate in ways that can change the culture of a department into one based upon collegiality and upon shared conceptions of, and responsibilities for, program outcomes.

Such working coalitions, within or across programs, can produce significant research opportunities. Funding proposals, research papers, and publications can help faculty address a primary expectation in university life. When cohort leaders promote reflective research on cohort practices and outcomes, the program, the students, and the field prosper.

Another benefit of being a cohort leader is working closely with district- and school-level leadership practitioners. Through these professional field-based connections, professors have ready ways to learn about how policy, the economy, changing demographics, and other factors influence educational leadership. Working relationships with district partners can develop trust that often clarify the challenges in the field, making those challenges part of the learning experiences of cohort members. Barriers between leadership educators and leadership practitioners seem to disintegrate through mutually rewarding work.

Finally, perhaps the most significant gain from serving as a cohort leader is getting to work closely with aspiring educational leaders and helping them to develop the knowledge, dispositions, and skills needed to be effective change agents and responsive school leaders. The regular interactions between cohort participants and a cohort leader can develop into trusting, collegial relationships that enhance professional practice for both. When students feel safe to share honestly without repercussions on performance measures, they often disclose what works effectively to enhance their professional growth and what does not. A cohort leader can use these insights to improve program delivery. Further, many former cohort participants can become involved as mentors or instructors in future cohorts.

Becoming a cohort leader requires organizational skills, a clear understanding of the responsibilities necessary to coordinate long-term learning and partnership endeavors, and a strong commitment to mak-

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ing a cohort program a success. A cohort's success was measured by curriculum integration, program coherence, and shared responsibility, which rest squarely upon the shoulders of its cohort leader. Although this work can be demanding, frustrating, and at times disappointing, the benefits far outweigh any disadvantages.

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