

## **Breaking News: Utilizing Video Simulations to Improve Educational Leaders' Public Speaking Skills**

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*This article examines specific uses of video simulations in one educational leadership preparation program to advance future school and district leaders' skills related to public speaking and participation in televised news interviews. One faculty member and two advanced educational leadership candidates share their perspectives of several applications of advanced technologies, including one-on-one video simulations with the instructor and collaborative peer review of video portfolios. Finally, the authors provide links to multimedia examples of these digital artifacts from an advanced educational leadership course, titled *Effective Practices: Media, Government & Public Communications*, offered at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.*

School and district administrators may unexpectedly find themselves in front of a television news camera with only a few moments notice prior to a live or videotaped interview session. A breaking news story could be anything from a crisis situation to a human interest segment celebrating a school event, and educational leaders need to be prepared to effectively represent their school and district communities through this medium. In addition to these situations, many school districts now produce their own cable television programs, broadcasting talk shows hosted by superintendents, town hall meetings, or formal speeches made by administrators. This article will explore ways in which educational leadership programs may utilize video simulations and video portfolios to prepare future school and district leaders for both live and televised public speaking events.

### **Effective Features of Effective Leadership Preparatory Programs**

Technology has advanced at a rapid pace, including the development of multimedia technologies with the capacity to enhance educational leadership preparatory programs through real-world case studies and simulations. These activities require

candidates to demonstrate competencies and skills, and they provide instructors with authentic ways to evaluate candidates' achievement of learning outcomes. There are signs that professional preparation programs are making necessary, research-based changes to facilitate new learning experiences that go beyond assessment of candidates' knowledge. Through harnessing advanced technologies, instructors can design and implement learning experiences aligned with performance standards for leaders that measure candidates' skills and applications of knowledge (Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009).

The U.S. Department of Education (2005) published a case study of six innovative programs, identifying effective program components such as: (a) beginning and operating the program guided by a distinct vision of effective school leaders, (b) exacting criteria for selecting and recruiting candidates, (c) defining a rigorous curriculum, (d) including field-based experiences with project-based learning, and (e) administering an accelerated timeline for program completion (p. 9, 12).

The majority of educational leadership candidates are engaged in full-time work as teachers or other educational professionals, which limits the length and nature of field experiences during preparatory programs. According to Edmonson (2002), "Many administrative interns receive no real administrative practice at all through their internship, and yet upon completion of the internship, they are expected to be competent administrators" (p. 1). This logistical reality creates a situation where the classroom instructional environment may be the only forum for candidates to encounter certain elements of educational leadership.

This article highlights video simulations and video portfolios used in one leadership preparation course at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) titled, *Effective Practices: Media, Government & Public Communications*. The description for this required doctoral course for advanced educational leadership candidates involved role plays to move beyond theory and content knowledge to effective application of learning outcomes. The instructor redesigned the course to integrate video simulations in order to strengthen the fourth element of the aforementioned Department of Education's 2005 case study of innovative programs: field-based experiences and project-based learning. Prior to the redesign efforts, this required course centered on analysis of readings on issues related to school-community relations and the governmental and legal aspects of education. Candidates completed writing assignments and participated in class dialogues intended to relate new learning to educational leadership practices.

### **Course Components**

The redesigned course included two textbooks that were required readings for all candidates, one focused on school law, and one on community relations. Each candidate also chose one of three texts to study in literature circles, small groups of six individuals who discussed one of the following selections: (a) Pearce's (2003) *Leading Out Loud: Inspiring Change through Authentic Communication*, (b) Tate and Dunklee's (2005) *Strategic Listening for School Leaders*, and (c) Entman and Rojecki's (2001) *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. Class members wrote individual

reflection papers related to their chosen books, and each literature circle group planned and facilitated an activity for the class that shared the key concepts from the book.

Another component of the course involved each class member reviewing a school or district crisis management plan, including communication strategies with community members and the media. Class members also worked in small groups to create a school-level or district-level public relations and marketing plan with elements directly related to school and district improvement goals. Each group prepared a poster and participated in a Museum Walk to present their plans to the class, as well as to other graduate students, faculty, and staff who were invited to the open class session.

In addition to these classroom-based learning activities, video simulations provided real-world application of learning through the use of video recording in a one-on-one setting with the instructor. Candidates each created a video portfolio comprised of a public address on the topic of creating a more inclusive culture in the school or district and a television news interview pertaining to a crisis scenario. At the end of the semester the class members met in groups of three to review and critique one another's videos. Two of the candidates from this course, one who was an associate principal in a high school and one who was an associate superintendent, are co-authors of this paper. Since their completion of the Ed.D. program at UMKC, Dr. Adams has become a high school principal and Dr. Curry has become a superintendent. Their unique perspectives as both members of the course and educational leaders enhance the reflection on course innovations utilizing technology. These video-based innovations and candidate reflections are sources of qualitative data explored in this article. Finally, links to multimedia examples of these digital artifacts of learning are provided.

### **Advanced Technologies in Course Redesign**

McDougall and Jones (2006) conducted an inquiry into the theory behind current investigations in the field of information and communications technology in educational settings and concluded that "since the most important role for this research is to contribute to understanding of the processes of learning and teaching, the theoretical frameworks used in mainstream education research are appropriate underpinnings for research in the sub-discipline as well" (p. 359). Based upon this premise, the instructor applied constructivist learning theory to e-learning and technology (Zhu, 2008), whereby the instructor provided resources for course-related knowledge and skills, and the candidates had opportunities to "construct meaning from personal values, beliefs, and experiences" (Walker & Lambert, 1995, p. 9). Candidates applied knowledge and skills to their professional settings, such as in the review of crisis management and communication plans designed for their school and district sites. As part of the course development process, differentiated instruction was selected as a strategy for achieving the constructivist learning approach for the adults enrolled in the educational leadership course.

Differentiated instruction "calls for teachers to have clear learning goals that are rooted in content standards but crafted to ensure student engagement and understanding" (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 27). In order to address the diverse learning progressions of the candidates in the educational leadership preparatory programs

(some were classroom teachers, some building administrators, and others district administrators), differentiated instruction enabled all candidates to have options for assignments and assessments in order for the learning to occur in a nonlinear model. Examples of differentiation included the opportunity for candidates to select literature circle texts according to topics of personal interest, and to review a school- or district-level crisis management plan according to each candidate's current work setting and future career goals. These activities also served as a model for differentiated instruction as a pedagogical technique that these instructional leaders could take back to their diverse school and district contexts. Tomlinson (2005) reinforced the need for differentiated instruction by stating that in schools today, "There are increased categories of special education identification, a rapidly growing second language population, more students carrying the weight of fragmented home lives, and advanced learners languishing in under-challenging classrooms" (p. 28).

### **Setting**

The course described in this study took place at UMKC, an urban university in the Midwestern United States, as part of a cohort-based doctoral program for school and district leaders. The School of Education includes a department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations (ELPF), which contains a higher education administration program, social foundations faculty, and a program for administrators that is designed to prepare and professionally advance educational leaders in the field of preK-12 schools. The Master of Arts (M.A.) and Education Specialist (Ed.S.) in Educational Administration programs graduate approximately 40 candidates per calendar year, and faculty in the ELPF division also work with doctoral students through the Ed.D. cohort course of study and individual dissertation research, and the interdisciplinary Ph.D. program. The School of Education has a strong commitment to serving the surrounding urban community, and faculty demographics reflect the diversity within the student population of the city school district in which the university is located.

### **Participants in Course Redesign**

This required doctoral-level course contributed to the ELPF division and the preparation of school and district leaders through promotion of understanding that educational leaders must be effective in their interactions with the media, government policy and the legislative process, and in their use of communication strategies with all educational stakeholders. This course was redesigned with support from a Teaching Enhancement Grant through the university's Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching. The course was offered in the Summer 2007 semester with 18 enrolled students who were participants in an Ed.D. cohort program in ELPF. Candidates were provided with the option of sharing their video artifacts and written course work as part of this redesign effort through completion of a consent form ([see Student Consent Form PDF](#)).

### **Course Outcomes and Innovations**

The course addressed key leadership challenges and decision making in today's complex work world through readings on selected issues, case discussions, and role plays to move beyond theory and understanding to application and effectiveness. The

redesign of the course was completed by the instructor as part of a grant-funded project to enhance teaching that was awarded to the instructor by UMKC's Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching. The balance between face-to-face class sessions and online learning experiences was an important consideration in the redesign of this course. Because this course was required as part of the cohort experience for doctoral students, providing adequate time for dialogue and interaction among the candidates was important. Therefore, candidates met on campus 60% of class sessions with the remaining 40% of class sessions taking place online or during individual video simulation sessions in a conference room on campus. Rovai (2002) conducted research related to online courses and preserving a "sense of community," and defines "classroom community as consisting of two components: feelings of connectedness among community members and commonality of learning expectations and goals" (p. 320). The instructor of the Effective Practices: Media, Government & Public Communications course created a schedule intended to balance in-class sessions with online learning experiences.

The syllabus included a list of common learning outcomes for the course based on national standards for school and district leaders, and the instructor consistently communicated high expectations for the performance of every candidate. The formation of collaborative learning groups through literature circles, presentations, and the video portfolio reflective activities were intended to promote positive relationships and learning among class members. In addition to the impact on a sense of community within the class, this collaborative learning design embodied a pedagogical practice in addition to differentiated instruction supported by adult learning theory (Garmston, 1997).

One of the unique elements of the course included videotaped sessions involving role-playing simulations for public speaking and for television media interviews. Each student ended the course with a DVD containing an individual video portfolio for the course. The video portfolio concept in this course was based upon the traditional portfolio process in educational leadership preparatory programs. As described by Redish, Webb, and Jiang (2005-2006), who collaborated at Kennesaw State University to move from a paper portfolio to a web-based portfolio aligned with national standards for educational leaders, "candidate portfolios must demonstrate theory-to-practice connections. Reflective practice and personal growth are integral components" (p. 284). In this case, rather than a collection of the candidates' work artifacts over the course of the semester, each student generated a portfolio that included the videotaped delivery of a formal speech and a television news interview simulation.

Whitaker, King, and Vogel (2004) conducted a study of instructional techniques that leadership candidates perceived as useful and found that "role playing, simulations, assignments directly connected to the field, and guest speakers in roles as administrators" were identified as most effective (p. 218). The use of video technology in this course redesign created the opportunity to address three of these four instructional elements as each candidate participated in practice activities designed to imitate as closely as possible the public relations experiences that would occur as a

school- or district-level administrator. The videotaped sessions involved role playing simulations for interpersonal communication (dialogue) and for public communication (public speaking and media interviews).

The teaching methodology involved a variety of techniques, including dialogue on topics related to course readings and professional practice, small group work/cooperative learning, case studies, problem-based learning modules, simulations, guest speakers, online learning activities, and digital video recording. The use of online learning to engage in case studies, reflective writing, and interactive discussions was one innovation, and capturing and peer-reviewing digital videotaped simulations and formal speeches was the second innovation. Three specific innovations will be described in the following examples: (a) a videotaped formal speech to an audience of the candidate's choice, (b) a videotaped television interview related to a crisis simulation, and (c) a video portfolio collaborative review process.

#### **Example No. 1: Formal Speech**

Each student prepared a five- to ten-minute speech for a targeted audience of school or district stakeholders chosen by the candidate. Some candidates chose to direct their prepared speech to an audience of students and teachers during a school assembly, while others prepared a Back to School-themed speech intended for faculty members during a staff meeting. District-focused speeches included audiences of school board members and central office administrators during a leadership retreat, or parents and community members during a town hall meeting. The topic of the speech focused on promoting a more inclusive culture in the school or district. According to the course syllabus,

The speech will address the unique needs of the school or district, in addition to following:

- Plans to identify and eliminate practices that reflect cultural biases that interfere with the success of all students.
- The importance of education in a democratic society. (Friend, 2007)

These speeches were videotaped and provided as part of each candidate's video portfolio. Dr. Adams reflected on the speech activity and the applications to her school leadership position ([see Adams Speech Video Clip](#)):

The course learning goal of identifying a need within our school and then providing a 10 minute presentation for our targeted audience was an activity that I wanted to make valuable and relevant to the needs within my school. At the time that I was enrolled in this course, I was an assistant principal in a suburban high school which was ailing in the area of school culture that addresses the issues of diversity and inclusion for all students. After much thought and discussion with the lead administrator, I proposed the initiation of the following goal: Building Goal 5: Reinforce an inclusive climate/culture that promotes diversity and supports empathy.

The purpose of the goal was to provide a forum for all teachers to embrace the identified need that all children had value and placed a shared responsibility to which through a focused intent all participants work together to make sure that we were helping establish the importance, acceptance, and belonging of all students within our school. Embracing the process of having to present this goal within the class and then being able to reflect on the video-taped outcome was very beneficial for me because it allowed me to see how others may view me. I noted facial expressions, inflections in my voice, presentation stature, and overall pacing within the delivery that may have been interpreted as confusing within the context of the message I was intending to deliver.

From this videotaped experience, I was prepared to then share the goal with the teachers in our building. I provided them with a well-articulated presentation of the goal that identified the need to address a true anti-bullying campaign, which we had a collective responsibility to implement. As a result of the videotaped speech activity, I felt I had a higher degree of confidence in my message and a greater degree of fidelity in my presentation. I have progressed in my career and am now holding a lead position within a large high school setting. I am constantly required to deliver speeches for a variety of different occasions, the biggest culminating public speaking experience being graduation with an audience of over 9000 people that is video-taped and replayed on the syndicated cable channel. I constantly reflect on how my message is delivered and have practiced major speeches on tape prior to the event to ensure that the message, delivery, and coinciding target audience are aligned.

Dr. Adams' reflection demonstrates that the videotaped speech, collaborative critique exercise, and personal reflection led to new skills and techniques in communication with a large audience. The skills practiced in the video simulation setting led to delivery of the new school goal in a speech for a teacher audience. Over time, Dr. Adams has continued the practice of reviewing video footage of speaking engagements, both as a preparation exercise and as a reflective exercise.

Dr. Curry, who was a district-level administrator at the time of the course, shared these reflections related to the videotaped speech in the course ([see Curry Speech Video Clip](#)):

I found this activity beneficial for several reasons. First it gave me the opportunity to reflect on our district's practices that impact culture and acceptance. Second, it afforded me the experience of creating a speech that expressed my thoughts on cultural biases and laid the groundwork for a new direction for our district. Third, it allowed me to gain experience with video technology as a means for communicating to the public. In this particular case, my target audience was the district staff. The great thing about this assignment was I was able to use several portions of this speech at the District Convocation the next year.

This activity spurred my interest in working with technology to enhance my communication delivery method and skills. As a superintendent, it is necessary for me to use a multitude of media alternatives inside and outside the district. I have since started using audio and video podcasts to the community, as well as internally to staff. Adding podcasts to my written communication (community newsletters, staff newsletter, newspaper editorials), has helped me reach a stakeholder population well versed in technology and eager to receive information in this format.

The reflections of these two advanced leadership candidates demonstrate the effects of the use of advanced technologies as a result of the speech activity that became a part of their individual video portfolios for the course. Each candidate shared real world applications in their leadership roles at the time of their enrollment in the course, including use of parts of the speeches prepared for the video simulation with audiences in their school and district communities. Another common element is their effective present-day use of technologies such as videotaping and podcasting as communication tools.

From the instructor's perspective, this activity provided an opportunity to observe each candidate and assess knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of educational leaders. The content of the speech enabled the instructor to evaluate and provide feedback related to the candidate's understanding of organizational culture and improvement strategies, as well as dispositions toward diversity and inclusivity. By videotaping delivery of the speech, candidates also received feedback from the instructor and peers on skills related to performance indicators, such as the ability to communicate a vision and to promote community understanding and involvement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2007). The majority of candidates performed at advanced levels, many with a realistic delivery of a speech that was later adapted for presentation at their school or district sites. To make the activity better, the written speeches could have been reviewed by the instructor and through peer review during class, to improve the content of the speeches prior to videotaping. Candidates could have rehearsed delivery of the speeches in pairs or small groups during a class session. Also, a scoring rubric incorporating elements from national leadership standards could have been used by the instructor and during the collaborative critique of the videotaped speeches to provide more specific feedback to each candidate.

### **Example No. 2: Television Interview**

Students were videotaped in one-on-one settings with the instructor as a simulation of a television news reporter interviewing an administrator regarding a bomb threat at school. Prior to the recording of this activity, each candidate completed an assignment to create or review a school-level or district-level crisis management plan based within their professional contexts using the following criteria:



- Work as an individual or in a small group to create or evaluate a school-level or district-level plan to address safety concerns that may arise due to internal or external factors.
- Conduct a needs assessment for a comprehensive crisis management plan through a review of existing policies and plans, available data, and other pertinent information for the school or district.
- Include a review of current research, legislation, and available literature regarding crisis management in schools, as well as information from primary sources such as law enforcement officials and key stakeholders in the school(s).
- Include components that address each of the following:
  - Communication with students, staff members, parents, and other stakeholders regarding the crisis management plan (proactive communication) and procedures for communicating during a crisis.
  - Which elements of the plan will be practiced or rehearsed by staff members, students, and other participants? (such as monthly fire drills, “code red” drills, tornado drills, “lockdown” procedures, etc.) What are the strategies for practicing crisis management response to the selected elements of the plan?
  - How will the crisis management plan be evaluated to determine effectiveness of each component of the plan?
- Include in the final presentation highlights of the innovations in the plan, or questions / strategies that are posed to the class for feedback. An alternative to the presentation would be to turn in a copy of the crisis management plan, with a cover paper that includes the changes that were made. (Friend, 2007)

The instructor designed two simulation scenarios for the television news interview which were provided to each candidate based on their level of experience in the role of principal (building-level scenario) or superintendent (district-level scenario). Learning outcomes for the activity related to Educational Leadership Constituents Council Standards (ELCC, 2002) 3 (Management and Safety) and 4 (Parent and Community Involvement), and specific sub-elements such as, “Candidates...demonstrate the ability to work with the media” (p. 10). Each scenario involved a bomb threat, with details of the situation provided in the narrative ([See Video Simulation Scenarios](#)). Candidates were expected to apply the details from the scenario to their unique school or district contexts and crisis management plans, and each candidate had ten minutes to prepare for the simulated television reporter’s interview. Dr. Adams reflected on the television interview simulation ([See Adams Interview Clip](#)):

I can assert that I was incredibly nervous to engage in this activity for I was fearful that my responses would not be aligned to our crisis plan. This activity pushed me to have a high degree of familiarity with our crisis plan but also to

establish an understanding of how I was going to react in a video-taped interview structure where I was not in control of the questions. I was intent on making sure that I would not breach protocol, violate students' rights to privacy, nor impede an ongoing criminal investigation, yet provide enough information to satisfy the media. This was a great deal of pressure but one that is realistic to our roles as school leaders. In my district, all media relations go through our Director of Communications but there are times that we are asked to answer questions in stories that are highlighting different experiences within our schools.

Dr. Curry also shared his experiences with the television interview simulation conducted during the course ([see Curry Interview Clip](#)):

This exercise allowed me to gain additional experience and practice working with the media. The activity gave me a better understanding of my role and the role of the media. I was able to practice bridging and blocking techniques which allowed me to stay on-point. The great thing about this activity, it allowed me to view and critique my simulation. In addition, watching others gave me some great ideas to implement in my own experiences.

This exercise gave me another opportunity to work on my camera presence which has helped in my podcast presentations. Additionally, I invested time in reviewing our district crisis management plan.

From the instructor's perspective, the television interview video simulation required candidates to demonstrate communication skills, dispositions aligned with ethical and legal considerations, and content knowledge related to providing a safe environment for all school and district community members. The semester's design of a learning progression that started with review of the crisis management plans and ended with a series of unknown questions pertaining to the plans provided an assessment of the candidates' knowledge and skills that closely paralleled real world experiences of school and district leaders. Evaluative feedback was provided by the instructor through the collaborative critique session conducted in groups of three candidates, and through individual reflection of the candidates while reviewing their videotaped interviews. As with the videotaped speeches, the activity would be improved by creating a scoring rubric that includes the specific national leadership standards and indicators that are demonstrated by the candidates.

### **Example No. 3: Video Portfolios**

Each candidate ended the course with an individual video portfolio DVD that included the candidate's speech and television news interview. Candidates' videotaped sessions during one-on-one settings with the instructor on campus, scheduled outside of the class meetings, which involved role playing simulations for interpersonal communication (dialogue during a media interview) and for public communication (public speaking for stakeholder audience). Video portfolios were analyzed for both

content and process in relation to the course objectives, which included the ability to: (a) articulate a vision, (b) promote a positive school or district culture, (c) manage operations and safety, (d) communicate with family and community members, (e) explain decisions based upon ethical and legal principles, and (f) respond to the larger context for schooling (ELCC, 2002).

Upon completion of their video portfolios, candidates engaged in collaborative reflective practice by viewing the footage to identify areas of strength and areas for growth. This was accomplished in groups of three candidates during one class session, with a laptop computer designated for each group to screen their DVDs. Through this and other learning activities, the participants in the class had the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and performance activities that are expected of school and district leaders with regard to media, government, and communications. The video portfolios were archived by the instructor, and six candidates provided permission for their portfolios to be analyzed and shared as part of a qualitative research study (Friend, 2009).

Throughout the course, the instructor maintained a teaching journal to record observations during each class session. These field notes were reviewed in accordance with the identified instructional objectives and course outcomes. At the end of the semester, candidates completed an evaluation of the course. This included responses to questions using a Likert scale, and open-ended responses to solicit feedback. These data were used as part of a reflective analysis on teaching educational leaders using media technology. Dr. Adams reflected on the course video simulation experience, and the post-graduation applications of these activities when she became an adjunct instructor:

One truly does not know the extent of one's impact, for I now also teach graduate level courses in an educational leadership advanced degree program. One of the courses that I teach is School and Community Relations which embraces the importance of public speaking within a leadership role. I also embraced the speech concept in my course and I found that the fear of public speaking and the gripping impact that this fear can impose on leaders is not an isolated phenomenon. Many adults struggle with the idea of public speaking and the best intervention to address this fear is practice, practice, and more practice. The infusion of the video-taping of public speaking is a vulnerable but valuable practice.

I also integrated the television news interview experience into the School and Community Relations course that I taught. I took my students through a very similar scenario and then debriefed the interview with them. It was interesting how many of the students choked or shared confidential information about the perpetrators or the crime. Each interview concluded with students reflecting on their strengths within the interview and areas that they could continue to grow and develop as school leaders. Again, to be placed in a situation where each response, move, gesture, and interaction is captured for others to view caused significant anxiety that was similarly reflected by each

participant. These fears were alleviated upon the completion of the taping when I would hand them their DVD and provide them with a written response of their performance. The students felt the rewarded from having taken a positive risk that will resonate in the future as a productive experience.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this article was to provide a detailed account of how video simulations were utilized in this doctoral course at UMKC. Additionally, the authors offered reflective feedback from both the instructor's and candidates' perspectives. The candidates in this course demonstrated the knowledge, dispositions, and skills that are expected of school and district leaders with regard to the identified learning outcomes for the course. Candidate feedback and evaluations of the course using a nationally-normed end-of-course evaluation instrument designed by the Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA Center, 2007) clearly recognized the instructional planning for "hands-on practical learning". The video simulations were identified as an effective activity by several candidates.

One student stated, "The interview and speeches provided a great experience that I can use in my position as a principal" (IDEA, 2007). A more in-depth analysis of the video simulation activity was shared by one student who stated:

The video simulation provided me with a unique opportunity to evaluate how I present myself to others. I've never had the experience of talking into a camera so this was very helpful. Body language and tone are so important in establishing credibility as an administrator so this was an invaluable tool. You also set the tone for use of the internet in class activities and being creative with our group presentations. (IDEA, 2007)

Another common theme expressed in the candidates' course evaluations was that the design of this course was more closely related to the real world than other graduate courses: "I like the fact that Dr. Friend applies concepts to real life rather than providing a bunch of busy work" (IDEA, 2007).

During the fall semester that followed the media communications course at UMKC, the instructor was contacted by several of the students from the Ed.D. cohort who shared that there had been a bomb threat in the school where one of the candidates was working. This candidate and several of his peers in the program stated that during the interview by the television news reporter, the questions and school crisis scenario were almost exactly what had been practiced during the video simulation. As a result, the interview segment demonstrated that the school leader was caring, confident, and competent to handle the crisis situation in the school community.

Dr. Curry further reflected on the course activities and the pedagogical techniques that are effective in educational leadership preparatory programs:

I believe role playing, simulations, and or “In Basket Exercises” are vital to the preparation and development of prospective educational leaders. As school or district leaders, we face many challenges and experiences that are unique to our profession. The more opportunities we have to simulate potential dilemmas the better prepared we are to respond effectively, efficiently, and appropriately.

Dr. Adams also shared an overall synthesis of the applications of advanced technologies and videotaping exercises from her experiences in the course and as an instructor in an educational leadership program:

Constructively analyzing candidates’ strengths and giving the participants an opportunity to assess how they can be received based upon their delivery cannot be taught in a lecture. People must experience this for themselves and then engage in the reflection of the matching of delivery and intended message. This self-reflection is the greatest teaching mechanism that can be instilled in a leadership class for it supports the growth of a leader to be self-actualized and to be able to discern how messages should be delivered within the context of the audience, topic, and intended or unintended consequences.

One of the candidates from my own course in School and Community Relations is now an assistant principal in my school. When I was unable to be interviewed by a local TV station for a story on the impact of snow days on curriculum delivery, I called my assistant and asked him to take the interview. I provided him with some guiding points to infuse into the interview. He later shared with me that because of his experience with a videotaped interview in the graduate course, he felt prepared to be interviewed by the local media. These filmed experiences during safe times where we can provide guidance and constructive feedback for leaders to grow are invaluable.

### **Recommendations for Program Redesign**

In the end, the videotaped formal speech, television news interview simulation, and video portfolio collaborative critique advanced the three tenets previously highlighted: pedagogy, understanding self-as-learner, and integration of technology. Based on the implementation of these innovations within this course, the following recommendations are applicable to educational leadership preparatory program coursework:

- Continue to seek ways in which advanced technologies can be utilized to facilitate real-world or field-based simulations in educational leadership courses to provide opportunities for candidates to apply learning through performance-based activities. For candidates who aspire to the principalship or to district-level administration, it is difficult to provide practice and assessment activities for the skills required by the standards for educational leaders outside of a formal practicum or internship experience. Planning and implementing

scenarios based in the candidate's unique school or district context could be conducted through a video recording exercise, or through other media technology such as online journaling, digital storytelling, or posting responses to an online case study.

- Seek opportunities to differentiate instruction based on the unique learning preferences, readiness levels, and career goals of each educational leadership candidate. The participants in the redesigned class expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to engage in meaningful course activities that were directly applicable to their professional settings. Some of the differentiated learning activities that candidates could apply to their unique contexts included: (a) participating in literature circles related to a book of their choice, (b) planning a crisis management activity that included the choice to work independently or collaboratively at a school or district site of their choice, (c) designing a public relations and marketing plan at a school or a district level, (d) writing and delivering a speech on promoting an "inclusive culture" that reflected their unique vision and plans for a school or district site of their choice, intended for an audience of their choice, and (e) preparing for a video simulation conducted at a time chosen by the candidate and based on their preferences of the school or district level.
- Promote the development of a strong "sense of community," and engage candidates in educational leadership preparatory programs in collaborative learning activities. Program design elements such as a cohort-based model, and course design choices to include long-term collaborative projects, online discussion groups, and in-class group activities were effective means to develop a culture of support and high levels of performance among the candidates enrolled in this course.

• In conclusion, in order for candidates to connect and apply knowledge presented within educational leadership coursework to the skills and performance indicators identified by national leadership standards, instructors must connect course content with field-based or real-world experiences. In this redesigned course, video simulations and video portfolios contributed to educational leaders who were ready to communicate "breaking news" when opportunities arose in their diverse professional settings. These advanced learning technologies serve as one methodology for providing candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate performances expected of educational leaders, and to independently and collaboratively engage in reflective practice regarding their performances.

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