
A New Slant on Leadership Preparation

The University of Northern Colorado is doing more than certifying administrators: it is transforming the focus of preparation from managerial skills to leadership development.

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The study of educational leadership has undergone a metamorphosis at the University of Northern Colorado. In 1987, when the Colorado Commission on Higher Education designated the university as the state's primary institution for teacher preparation, the president and board of trustees eagerly accepted this charge. As the first step in the rebirth of the College of Education, we decided to restructure the Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, recognizing that the behavior of educational leaders is one of the most critical factors supporting high-quality school programs (Edmonds 1980, Goodlad 1985, Lipham 1981). In recruiting a division director and an instructional team, we looked for people committed to transforming the focus of preparation from managerial skills to leadership development.

To better serve schools and their students in a rapidly changing society, today's educational leaders require knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are different from those reflected in educational administration curriculums of the past (NAESP 1991, NPBEA 1989, UCEA 1989). One

reason most existing university-based programs have been less than effective is because they are not differentiated by levels of administration or degree levels in any particularly thoughtful sequence. Few are designed with a conceptual framework, are developed with attention to adult learning theory, are closely aligned with desired outcomes, or are related to rigorous evaluation (Achilles 1987).

Using insights gleaned from researchers, reformers, and professional associations, division faculty and graduate students began redesigning our program. We formed a statewide advisory committee to involve key school district and business leaders in reshaping our curriculum. Four questions drove our efforts: Why should we emphasize programs in educational leadership preparation? What course content and other learning experiences are important? How can we best organize and deliver this information? How well are students learning and performing?

Beliefs and Values

To guide the new division's programs, the faculty, students, and advisory

committee created a philosophy that espouses our vision for effective leaders:

Educational leaders possess knowledge of self, others, organizations, and society necessary to perform creatively and effectively in diverse environments. They engage people in identifying and working toward the accomplishment of a shared vision for the organization. Leaders incorporate the ideas, values, and experiences reflective of a pluralistic society and promote continual learning.

Ultimately, we agreed upon seven non-negotiable core values to guide the development of curriculum and activities.

1. Human growth and development are lifelong pursuits.
2. Organizations are artifacts of a larger society.
3. Learning, teaching, and collegiality are fundamental activities of educational organizations.
4. Validated knowledge and active inquiry form the basis of practice.
5. Moral and ethical imperatives drive leadership behavior.
6. Leadership encompasses a learned set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.
7. Leaders effect positive change in individuals and organizations.

A number of these values respond to criticisms of traditional administrator preparation programs. For example, whereas most programs make sparse use of principles of adult learning (Hallinger and Murphy 1991), our program consistently emphasizes the importance of lifelong

growth and development. Further, some programs omit the importance of moral and ethical responsibilities (NPBEA 1989). Our program is grounded in the belief that unless leaders develop moral and ethical consciousness, they will find it difficult to make decisions and will lose a sense of purpose. Finally, we believe that collaboration and collegiality are crucial to the growth of all individuals in an organization and that leaders are more likely to model these concepts in their schools if preparation programs emphasize them.

A Knowledge Base for New Leaders

We next identified the learning experiences important to school leaders. Several questions guided our discussion: "What subject content and field experiences are important sources of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for beginning principals and middle managers in education?" "How do these understandings contribute to students' formation of their own beliefs?" Moving away from an emphasis on traditional courses (school law, supervision, finance, school-community relations, and personnel), we developed the following five core learning experiences. Together, they provide a knowledge base that integrates understandings from diverse disciplines with closely linked field experiences to bridge theory and practice.

1. *Understanding Self: Developing a Personal Vision for Educational Leadership* enables students to develop an appreciation of their fundamental values and attitudes and how they relate to governance, administration and leadership, and curriculum development issues.

2. *Using Inquiry: Framing Problems and Making Decisions in Educa-*

tional Leadership helps students understand alternative ways of knowing that are frequently used by school leaders and how they relate to leadership in organizations.

3. *Shaping Organizations: Management and Leadership in Education* helps students understand structural components of educational

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organizations and theoretical frameworks that describe organizational behavior.

4. *Understanding People: Professional Development and Educational Leadership* explores issues related to personnel development within educational organizations, adult learning and development, and staff appraisal.

5. *Understanding Environments: Social, Political, Economic, and Legal Influences* introduces concepts of demography, cultural diversity, governance, politics, law, and finance that influence policies and operations and explores how educators in turn influence external environments.

Once students develop an understanding of leadership through study in these five domains and associated field experiences, they select advanced seminars on such topics as leadership,

supervision, law, finance, policy, curriculum and instruction, learning, and evaluation. Finally, through a formal internship, students study the actual functions and duties of practicing supervisors and administrators, while applying concepts gained from university-based coursework.

Delivering the Program

Next we undertook the important task of determining how to structure these experiences. We agreed on the importance of modeling our beliefs and of utilizing what we knew about adult learning.

To model our philosophy, we incorporated into all courses the seven belief and value statements. Those statements that were to guide course content were incorporated into the formal course objectives. For example, the belief that "organizations are artifacts of a larger society" is embedded in specific objectives for three of the five core learning experiences. An objective of *Understanding Environments*, for instance, is to increase knowledge of government agencies and various groups in society that directly and indirectly influence educational policies and the allocation of resources.

In addition to content, we also wanted our teaching processes to reflect our belief and value statements. For example, "Learning, teaching, and collegiality are fundamental activities of educational organizations" is demonstrated in team teaching and group learning activities. By offering three of the core learning experiences (*Shaping Organizations*, *Understanding People*, and *Understanding Environments*) for five semester hours, the program permits greater integration of content and field experiences and provides time for intensive

group exploration of issues and team teaching by faculty and practitioners.

To match our delivery modes to what we knew about learning in adulthood, we drew upon the importance of accumulated life experiences, adult developmental issues, and the socio-cultural context in which learners work and live (Knowles 1980, Merriam and Caffarella 1991).

In addressing experiential learning, our goal is to assist students to both critically examine and reflect on past and present life experiences as they relate to their roles as educational leaders (Brookfield 1987, Mezirow et al. 1990, Schon 1983). For example, we encourage students to share their experiences as an integral part of classroom activities, involve them in simulations and problem-solving exercises, and weave practical experiences throughout our coursework (Galbraith 1990).

Learning experiences in the program also reflect adult developmental issues. For example, students continually refine individual educational platforms (statements of educational philosophy) and interview educational leaders about their own career development. Adult development themes also serve as major content areas of two core courses, *Understanding Self and Understanding People*, and are an integral part of our student advisement process.

Given the varying sociocultural contexts of schools today, we structure experiences to challenge students' stereotypical beliefs about other individuals and groups. Students might examine, both individually and in groups, their own values and beliefs about cultural diversity. In addition, all learning resources represent a wide variety of populations and educational settings (from public schools to training programs in business and industry).

Alternative Assessment Measures

Another criticism of administrator preparation programs is their fragmented curriculums, with students receiving little assistance in integrating their learning (Achilles 1987, Murphy 1990). Although there are many ways to provide a more cohe-

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sive program of studies, we advocate the use of both educational platforms and portfolios as integrating program activities.

Educational platforms. Platforms were first suggested by Sergiovanni and Starratt (1983) as a way for people to articulate their educational beliefs, values, and philosophies. They recommend that platforms focus on such issues as how children and youth develop, the purposes of schooling, and the nature of learning and teaching.

To be effective in integrating learning, platforms must be used throughout the program, not just sporadically. For instance, during the program's five core learning experiences, students complete platforms, revising earlier versions by describing

how each course's content, activities, and field experiences have validated or altered their previously stated beliefs. In addition, students may submit their platforms along with a written reflective analysis as part of their comprehensive examination. These written materials are critiqued by faculty and serve as the basis of an oral examination. (For more information about the use of platforms, see Barnett 1991, Kottkamp 1982.)

Portfolios. Students develop portfolios to demonstrate their ongoing developmental knowledge and to play an active role in their own learning. They have many options. For example, students might organize the “artifacts” in their portfolios according to programmatic goals or competencies identified by governing organizations (for example, certification boards). Or they might formulate “learning competence statements” (Forrest 1977) in which they show how they have gained some level of expertise. Another option for demonstrating their knowledge is to present their portfolios to one another and to teams of faculty members and educational practitioners.

With an Eye on the Future

The University of Northern Colorado is attempting to do more than merely certify people to manage schools for the 21st century. Through our program in educational leadership development, we want to focus on both the personal and the professional formation of future leaders (Daresh 1990). Although we have made a solid start, a considerable amount of work remains.

In refining the program, we need to reexamine our core learning experiences to ensure that there is a proper balance among the different dimen-

sions of leadership development. For example, do we continue to view field-based learning as only a part of the overall focus? How do we provide equal attention to strong academic preparation, field-based learning, and personal reflection and formation (Daresh and Playko 1991)?

Stabilizing the program is another challenge. To establish a vision of leadership development as "the way we do things" rather than the latest innovation, we need to renew our efforts to disseminate this vision. We must also collect evaluative data demonstrating our program's effects in the real world of practice.

But we are pleased with the results thus far. Faculty and students are confident that we are moving forward with a more effective vision for leadership preparation. □

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