Chapter 9

In One Voice: Aspiring and Practicing School Leaders Embrace the Need for a More Integrated Approach to Leadership Preparation and Development

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the views of graduate students who are aspiring or practicing school leaders and faculty from two university degree granting leadership preparation programs. Drawn from a larger mixed methods study, the authors focus here on survey results that show how these groups rated the effectiveness of 14 potential curricular dimensions drawn from traditional leadership content (e.g., budget/finance, legal compliance) and more recent (contemporary) additions to leadership curricula (e.g., reflective practice, adult learning and development, social-emotional capacity). Both traditional and contemporary areas received high ratings for effectiveness and importance to professional growth and development. Implications of this research point to the joint importance and feasibility of a more integrated approach to leadership education that includes contemporary and traditional dimensions. These findings may have important implications for other settings as well.

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INTRODUCTION

Today’s ever-changing educational world calls for new and more complex cognitive, affective (emotional), interpersonal (self to others), and intrapersonal (self to self) capacities as well as new ways of working and leading together (Ackerman & Drago-Severson, 2004; Donaldson, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson, 2012b). The multi-faceted demands of twenty-first century leadership require both pre-K-12 school leaders and the professors who prepare them for leadership positions to think more complexly about how university programs can best prepare their adult learners (i.e., aspiring and practicing school leaders in this case) (Drago-Severson, 2013). In this article, the authors’ goal is to focus on how educational leadership faculty and their students (i.e., practicing and aspiring school administrators) reported on their perspectives as to the place of adult learning principles and the social-emotional dimensions of leadership in their preparation programs.

Effective 21st century school leadership relies upon helping leaders-in-practice to best care for their own and other adults’ development while enduring challenging conditions of increased accountability, high-stakes testing, new evaluation systems for principals and their teachers, and other pressing internal and external forces (Byrne-Jiménez & Orr, 2007; Donaldson, 2008; Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hoffman, 2013; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Peterson, 2002). Educational leadership faculty and practitioners around the world are examining crucial questions related to how curricula, teaching and learning models, and professional development can be enhanced to best prepare educational leaders for the work that lies before them (Grogan et al., 2009; Hoff, Yoder, & Hoff, 2006; Young, Mountford, & Skria, 2006; Wallace, 2012). With rising pressure to strengthen leadership programs, it is useful to know how aspiring and practicing leaders view the effectiveness and importance of what is taught in their preparation programs and in what ways this aligns with the views of faculty who are responsible for the curriculum. In this article, the authors explore both faculty and graduate student perspectives in order to inform future curriculum development.

Scholars and practitioners alike are searching for more effective ways to improve programs to help aspiring and practicing leaders learn how to support their own and other adults’ learning and development by attending to the social-emotional dimensions of leadership in schools (Boyatzis, & McKee, 2005; Donaldson, 2008; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Mizell, 2007). Doing so, they argue, is of crucial importance. How are these contemporary dimensions incorporated into leadership programs today? This is at the heart of the authors’ inquiry.

The authors know that universities need more comprehensive leadership preparation programs and that faculty are searching to improve them so that they can better support their adult learner students (Donaldson, 2008; Lugg & Shoho, 2006). University leadership programs have traditionally focused on management skills (e.g., planning, budget, and school law), which are necessary but insufficient, given today’s educational and often adaptive challenges—challenges about which both the problem and the solution are unknown (Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Heifetz, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Wagner et al., 2006). As mentioned earlier and noted by scholars, programs must also focus on helping leaders to understand the nature of adult learning, the social-emotional dimensions of leading adults, and how to support growth and increased capacity building among the adults who serve in their schools—and within themselves (Ackerman & Drago-Severson, 2004; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2009, 2012; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Stoll & Seashore-Lewis, 2007). Put simply, educational leadership programs need to support their students in their own ongoing development, and in understanding how to support the development of others in terms of these essential aspects of leadership in schools (Byrne-Jiménez &