
Introduction

We are three veteran educators who have taken separate paths to arrive at a common position: The greatest challenge facing education today is preparing quality educational leaders for our schools—leaders who can thrive in the high-stakes-accountability environment that exists today. Our vision of leadership has become more inclusive in its scope, and we acknowledge that school leadership preparation programs of past years will not produce the results needed for the future. We see the preparation of school leaders as a responsibility extending far beyond the university and state credentialing bodies. This responsibility extends to all educators, those in the university, within schools, and within each state. We hope our collaborative efforts to share our thoughts and experiences here will help others who have similar concerns and a willingness to explore new ventures to address them.

Each of us began our careers in education as teachers in public school settings. Together, we have served at all levels: elementary, middle, and high school. As administrators, we have been assistant principals, principals at various levels, school improvement leaders, and superintendents. We bring a variety of school experiences to this topic of preparing leaders—those of a superintendent of a very diverse, mobile, high-poverty district with high student academic performance; a K–12 principal actively involved in professional development school partnerships; and a cofounder of a rapidly expanding program of leadership studies, who is also a recognized expert in guiding school personnel in school law and risk management. Our experiences in “the real world” are fresh in our minds. Presently, all three of us are members of the Department of Educational Leadership at a major university, preparing administrators for schools in our state and beyond. Graduates of our programs are currently serving in a variety of leadership positions, within and outside our state. This book is written from our personal perspectives, but we hope the reader will keep in mind that these opinions are founded in the collection of firsthand, reality-based experiences we have shared with our current and past school partners for the last 15 years.

University preparation programs for educational leaders are not infrequently criticized for lack of connectedness to the real world—creating an alleged gap between theory and practice. We readily admit that the traditional approach to preparing educational leaders no longer produces the results we are looking for in our own university program. However, we are excited about the great potential we have encountered when school and university leaders combine their talents to design better ways of developing leaders. Partnerships focusing on organizational and program redesign and restructuring have the potential to create a renaissance in the preparation of educational leaders that renews and revitalizes both organizational systems.

We believe there is a need to move from thinking about preparation as the sole responsibility of those charged with discovering and preserving research and theory (universities) to a vision of preparation as a shared partnership between theorists and those who must make things work in the real world (current practitioners in the field). The philosophical foundation of our view on educational leadership is this: No matter what position you hold—teacher, principal, superintendent, university professor, support staff, or community leader—preparing school leaders is YOUR responsibility. It will take all of us, working together, to best prepare those who must lead our schools tomorrow—and, literally, the need begins tomorrow! The challenges are before our schools now. As an unexpected bonus, we discovered that this professional growth in leadership happens not only for the students in the program but also for the current leaders who become directly involved in planning and delivering the partnership model.

We know we are not the only ones who have these concerns or are engaged in efforts to make meaningful changes to preparation programs. Indeed, we have learned much from conference presentations and published accounts describing efforts under way in other locations. Across the country, many university faculties have been working to improve preparation programs for years. We are indebted to those who have shared their personal experiences with professional colleagues. Publications and conferences sponsored by the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) and recent well-publicized analyses of current programs provide pertinent information for those directly charged with responsibility for preparing educational leaders at the building and district levels. Our purpose here is not to argue the need for change, nor is it our intent to imply that our programs are the only examples of successful change under way. Readers who wish to delve further into various approaches to change will not find it difficult to locate the information.

Our purpose here is to share what we have learned from the opportunities we have had working in a university environment where leaders are

open to new ideas for improving service and are willing to adjust operational structures to allow for change. Our good fortune included finding public school leaders and building-level practitioners willing to work with us as partners in making substantial changes in practice. We share our experiences, offering them as another source of information that might be helpful to all who share responsibility for and care about preparing effective, quality leaders for our schools.

This book offers a challenge to educators such as the following:

- University leaders currently involved in administrator preparation programs who want to develop and strengthen program connections to real schools and increase their ability to blend theory with real-world practices. Our message is that it can be done.
- School leaders who desire to build the leadership capacity of their organizations by developing both practicing and prospective leaders with a strong foundation in both theory and practice. Our message is that by working together, we can build that leadership capacity.
- Practitioners looking for something beyond preservice preparation, who want to grow professionally and continue to develop leadership skills that can contribute to success in a high-stakes-accountability world. Our message is that through a partnership model, we can prepare exemplary leaders for that world.

We begin by describing how our vision of educational leadership has evolved, briefly touching on some of the information that contributed to the change. Our goal is to offer a program based on an effective blend of theory and practice; a program designed by collaborative partnerships; and a program that produces an integrated, spiraling curriculum emphasizing ethical leadership performance. We include insights from university professors, public school leaders, and leaders-in-training who support the importance of and need for this approach to leadership development. Because the positive impact of leadership upon student achievement and the strength of public school–university partnerships have been documented by other researchers, we identify those key components we have chosen to include in our partnership experiences. The book concludes with a detailed description of a successful university–district partnership, complete with planning tools that can be used by others interested in similar partnership models. We know it can work—we have experienced it firsthand and are continuing to develop new partnerships.

We have organized our message in the following manner:

- *Chapter 1* provides reasons for changing the way we think about leadership. We recognize that university and public school partners must

play active roles in the preparation process if we are to develop leaders who can build the leadership capacity of their own stakeholders and thrive as knowledgeable, ethical, caring leaders for schools, for all students, and for themselves.

- *Chapter 2* provides a new vision of leadership, beginning with a new look at practice and a reanalysis of our expectations of school leadership today. We live in a time of rapid change. Successful leaders must be able to apply leadership theory to what is happening in schools today. Traditional programs must be updated to reflect the radical changes in practice and the present challenges facing school leaders.

- *Chapter 3* delineates the theoretical basis for producing collaborative, caring, inclusive leaders. Important dimensions of leadership theory are identified and described that continue to be necessary components for any leadership preparation program.

- *Chapter 4* defines why traditional preparation programs for leaders that emphasize theory over practice no longer work. Collaborative partnerships between universities and school districts must become the new model for preparing successful future leaders: programs where practice guides theory and theory informs practice.

- *Chapter 5* describes the rethinking and redesigning process for the curriculum to prepare educational leaders. In a collaboratively designed, integrated, spiraling curriculum, university staff and public school leaders jointly participate as teachers for and learners with leaders-in-training.

- *Chapter 6* specifies ethics as a core dimension of leadership. Community expectations continue to hold educational leaders to a high standard. This chapter defines and describes the emphasis on ethical leadership included in our preparation programs as a response to today's global environment and emerging reports of corporate and government corruption.

- *Chapter 7* relates the story of a collaborative university–public school partnership, based on the authors' own experiences of developing nontraditional preparation programs, in partnership with public schools, to more effectively prepare school leaders. Examples of tools used in our partnerships are included in the "Resources" section.