Special Issue Introduction
Preparing Educational Leaders: A Conceptual and Empirical Exploration of a Preparation Program’s Redesign

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Alabama, along with many other states and educational organizations, has called for substantive changes in the ways principals are prepared (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1998; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Scheurich & Laible, 1995; SREB, 2006; 2007). Henceforth, this special issue of the Journal of Research on Leadership Education explores processes and outcomes associated with the redesign of the Auburn University educational leadership preparation program. This redesign, completed in 2008, was developed and implemented in partnership with seven school systems and served as a pilot redesign site and model for such reform in Alabama.

As a whole, university principal preparation programs are being called on to teach both the structure and knowledge base of the discipline and the applied field-based components of educational leadership (Pounder, Young, & Reitzug, 2002). Moreover, these aspects of preparation must be balanced with taking on the responsibility of linking traditional scholarly priorities such as formal knowledge production with improvement of professional practice, which is often addressed through experiential learning (Pounder, 2006). Henceforth, debates within the field of educational leadership are common and issues such as appropriate content (Dantley; 2003; Gale & Densmore, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Kottkamp & Silverberg, 2003; Murphy, 2002), standards (Anderson, 2001; English, 2003, 2006; Murphy, 2002, 2005), delivery styles (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Cicchelli, Marcus, & Weiner, 2002; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Murphy, 2002; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002), and assessment (Orr, 2006) abound. As university programs respond to calls to redesign their principal preparation programs, faculty and partners must interrogate and
ultimately reconcile these competing demands while responding to state-issued mandates and other political agendas. As we ourselves engaged in the redesign of the principal preparation program at Auburn University, we wrestled with these various agendas and determined that our context called for a collaborative redesign of the program.

Our resolve resulted in the collection of eight papers reflecting key issues, challenges, and diverse viewpoints found in the special issue of The Journal of Research in Leadership Education. It is important to note that this is not a sugar-coated account of higher education reform—while the redesign process yielded many positive lessons and outcomes, it was not without flaws. Therefore, we purposefully discuss shortcomings and areas that need improvement alongside the areas that succeeded. Our hope is that by presenting multiple aspects of our process and program, and by presenting them with transparency as to the difficulties and imperfections that still exist that others can learn from our work.

This special issue begins with a foreword written by the Deputy State Superintendent of Alabama, Dr. Tommy Bice, who formerly served as superintendent in one of our partner districts as we began the redesign process. Dr. Bice has keen insights about our program’s original intent and current practice as well as the state’s intent to reform educational leadership preparation policies and practice. The first article provides a macro view of the state’s mandate to redesign principal preparation programs and offers an analysis of Auburn University’s efforts to address this challenge. Other articles offer a closer look at the various aspects of the redesigned program and processes used to implement those changes, often providing unique perspectives on the redesign work.

The first article, Raising Standards for Tomorrow’s Principals: Negotiating State Requirements, Faculty Interests, District Needs, and Best Practices, written by Cynthia J. Reed and Jose’ R. Llanes, Auburn University, describes Auburn University’s work as a pilot principal preparation redesign site for the state. This article interrogates the issues, challenges, and successes occurring throughout the redesign process. The authors offer insights and lessons learned about the redesign of Auburn’s program that should be useful to others undertaking similar endeavors.

The second article, It Takes More than a Village: Inviting Complexity and Community into Educational Leadership Reform, by Jeffrey S. Brooks, University of Missouri-Columbia, Timothy Havard of Auburn City Schools, and Lynne Patrick of Auburn University, explores the development of our partnership by situating our work within current literature on the development of partnerships. This article discusses the process program faculty used as they sought to reconcile extremely different advice and criticism from many perspectives in an effort to improve the program.

Shifting Paradigms: Redesigning a Principal Preparation Program’s Curriculum, written by Ellen H. Reames of Auburn University, centers on a
novel approach to curriculum redesign. Rather than revising current courses used in the pre-redesign program, Auburn University’s goal was to develop an innovative, field-based curriculum and internship aligned with state and other accrediting agency standards, best practices research, faculty expertise and interests, and LEA partner input. This article provides an overview of the processes that we used, the themes that emerged, and the challenges that we faced while collaboratively developing the curriculum for our program.

Providing Authentic Leadership Opportunities Through Collaboratively Developed Internships: A University-School District Partnership Initiative, by Timothy Havard and Joyce Morgan of the Auburn City School District, one of the partner districts, claims that programs designed to develop future educational leaders must include practical learning experiences connecting the theoretical content of university coursework with the realities of the K-12 workplace (SREB, 2006; 2007).

Designing and Using Program Evaluation as a Tool for Reform, written by Margaret E. Ross, an associate professor of research and measurement at Auburn University, provides an overview of evaluation considerations for educational leadership programs in general and our program specifically. She reminds us that Patton (1996) argues evaluation should be broadly conceptualized as a knowledge-generating activity. Our program faculty and partners’ belief that evaluation could shape our understanding of every aspect of our program underscored our work throughout the development and implementation of the redesign efforts. Administrative Leadership in Educational Leadership Program Redesign, by Frances K. Kochan, Dean of the College of Education at Auburn University, offers the unique perspectives of a dean about the redesign process, adding an important view to the literature on educational leadership preparation.

The Gender Dynamics of Educational Leadership Preparation: A Feminist Postmodern Critique of the Cohort Experience, by Christy T. Cabezas, Molly F. Killingsworth, and Lisa A. W. Kensler of Auburn University and Jeffrey S. Brooks of the University of Missouri-Columbia, examines gender dynamics in educational leadership doctoral cohorts and explores the propensity for educational leadership programs to unintentionally perpetuate inequity through continued silence and unawareness of issues related to gender.

Creating a New System: Transcending Traditions to Create New Cultures by Cynthia J. Reed and Lisa A. W. Kensler of Auburn University, summarizes key aspects of one program’s redesign work, including a critique of the processes we used, the challenges we faced, and examples of how this work has changed relationships internally and externally.

Following these eight articles is a reflection authored by Leslie Hazle Bussey and Kathy O’Neil of the Southern Regional Education Board that provides a perspective on the reform work completed at Auburn University. The Southern Regional Education Board played an instrumental role in the
redefinition of preparation programs in Alabama and numerous other states in this region. Their perspective represents an important viewpoint on university-based educational leadership preparation reform. It is rare to find a collection of articles in one place that presents both a description and critique of the various aspects of programmatic redesign from various theoretical and positional perspectives. While we recognize this work is a beginning rather than an end to the process, we have learned powerful lessons from the experience and hope other programs and their partners find useful lessons on these pages.

References


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Young, M. D., Petersen, G. J. Short, P. M. (2002). The Complexity of substantive reform: A call for interdependence among key stakeholders. Educational Administration Quarterly (38)2, 137-1