Redesigning a Leadership Preparation Program:
Lessons Learned from the Performance-based Leadership Preparation Model in England

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Abstract

This study examined the school leadership preparation model used in England. The study was a qualitative case study conducted with data collected through interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts concerning the English performance-based leadership preparation model. Leadership preparation programs in Georgia are under a mandate from the state to redesign preparation programs in partnership with local school districts to be performance-based, standards-driven programs. The findings of this inquiry indicated how a similar program is functioning in England where candidates are placed in schools to perform and observe specific leadership activities directly linked to their national standards and assessments. Students are assigned to “tutor groups” with tutors who are responsible for seeing that the activities are completed and students are ready for final assessments. The findings suggest ways to restructure the university preparation programs in Georgia based on the English preparation model.
Over the last several years, there has been both concern and criticism of educational leadership preparation programs in the United States. In 1987, the education administration profession itself identified key trouble spots in *Leaders for America’s Schools*, prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration sponsored by University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA, 1987). The report identified several problem areas, including an absence of collaboration between school districts and colleges and universities in the preparation of aspiring leaders, and the lack of sequence, modern content and clinical experiences in these preparation programs.

In response to changes mandated by state agencies, leadership preparation in Georgia is about to undergo significant changes. Beginning in January 2009, the present leadership preparation model in University System of Georgia universities will be obsolete. The changes include moving to a system where initial leadership certification at the master’s degree (L-5) level will no longer be renewable and where the specialist degree will be required for a clear, renewable (L-6) certificate. Furthermore, the internship element of leadership preparation, which was previously concentrated at the L-5 level with a less rigorous component for L-6 certification, has been shifted to a model where the program for L-6 certification will be primarily performance-based with experiences and assessments embedded into each of the core course requirements. The majority of the leadership certification at the specialist level will be practical application of the core knowledge, which will be the focus of the master’s certification program. Universities and school districts are to create partnerships that will support students in the leadership preparation programs as they engage in these performance-based assignments. Leaders in schools and school districts
in Georgia will be more involved and will have more prominent roles in determining these experiences and assessments for students in the programs.

While this change represents a significant shift in how leadership preparation is approached in the state of Georgia, one of the major goals of this restructuring is to provide a stronger linkage between course content and practical application. A major element of this change is that all leadership preparation programs are required to provide a performance-based program in partnership with local school districts, and all candidates are to have a coach. Because the English model of leadership preparation is already completely performance-based and because aspiring leaders in England are engaged in all of their preparation experiences in their schools, it stands to reason that the English model would hold valuable lessons to the restructuring in Georgia.

The purpose of this research is to identify and examine best practices in the performance-based model in England that can be applied in the new Georgia model or other university leadership preparation programs in the process of redesigning their programs. This paper is especially relevant to the 2008 UCEA theme, “Preparing Democratic Educational Leaders to Foster Quality Teaching and Student Success: A Time for Action,” because it examines practice-based leadership training from a global perspective.

**Rationale**

This study examined what leadership preparation in Georgia could look like over the next decade and how program faculty can work to foster quality teaching. In considering the literature about leadership preparation, it is evident that a great deal of attention has been paid to what is lacking in preparation programs. The release of *Leaders for America’s*
*Schools* by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (UCEA, 1987) began what Jacobson (1990) refers to as the third wave of education reform: reforming administrator preparation programs (Fusarelli, 2001). As a part of this reform movement, the dissatisfaction with preparation programs has encompassed everything from the role and function of programs (Haller, Brent & McNamara, 1997; Levine, 2005); to the effectiveness of programs (Kempner, 1991; Wallace Foundation, 2003); to the skills being taught to aspiring leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Daresh, 2002); to the appropriateness of universities in delivering instruction to aspiring leaders (Haller, Brent & McNamara, 1997; Broad Foundation, 2003).

Since the beginning of the reform movement, mandates by the U.S. Department of Education, studies funded by the Annenberg Foundation, the Broad Foundation, the Fordham Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, and reports by scholars such as Murphy (2002) and Levine (2005), have all been highly critical of the content and delivery models of leadership preparation programs (Young, Petersen & Short, 2002). While criticism of preparation programs is not new, it has become increasingly negative (Young, 2001). Even principals across the nation have weighed in and agreed that leadership preparation programs are out of touch with what it takes to run today’s schools (Farkas 2001).

Murphy (2002) has characterized the current situation in the United States as “bankrupt” and argues that putting academic knowledge at the center of programs is self-defeating. He contends that the current model of attempting to fuse knowledge with practice often builds a bridge to nowhere (2002). According to Levine (2005), educational administration preparatory programs are “the weakest of all the programs at the nation’s education schools” (p. 12). His recommendations include that the current “grab bag” of
course offerings give way to a more relevant and challenging curriculum designed to better prepare leaders (pp. 66). In considering these criticisms, it stands to reason that lessons about how to improve leadership preparation practices could be learned from successful models outside of the United States.

**Methods and Data Collection**

The method used for this research was qualitative inquiry. A qualitative inquiry is descriptive in nature, emphasizing description and interpretation within a bounded context (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative inquiry relies heavily upon qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts (Merriam, 1988). The study was conducted in conjunction with the Georgia State University Educational Leadership Study Abroad experience in England. This study provides an in-depth account of the leadership training model used in England through direct quotes from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts. Data in the form of interviews was collected throughout the two-week study abroad experience. Documents describing the national standards and the leadership preparation model in England were used to determine the phases, steps, and actions that are required of candidates.

The primary data source in this analysis centered upon in-depth, on-site interviews with personnel involved in the English leadership model including aspiring leaders (teachers), tutors, and head teachers. The interviews for this study were semi-structured and open-ended. In semi-structured interviews the questions are a mix of structured predetermined questions that are flexibly worded. This format allowed new ideas about the topics studied to emerge (Merriam, 1988).
Findings

The Performance-based Model

An analysis of the documents pertaining to leadership preparation in England reveals that there are formal programs for those seeking leadership positions. Headteachers are required to have the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which is a professional qualification of preparation for aspiring headteachers in England and Wales. It is a required credential in order to be a headteacher in England. The standards for attaining the NPQH are developed by, managed by, and assessed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), established by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998. One of the major goals of the NCSL is to bind research and practice about school leadership. NCSL is an organization and is actually not a college or university at all, but is responsible for the credentialing of school leaders. Aspiring Headteachers in England are in schools pursuing effective leadership experiences that will help them attain the NPQH. Participants in this program learn about effective leadership roles and practices by doing and observing these practices in the schools in which they work. Assessments, as well as the learning activities, are performance-based, and the program is predominately on-the-job-learning with a mentor in the school and a tutor as the candidate’s personal coach.

The Department for Education and Skills in the UK states that the training is based on the National Standards for Headteachers. The website for the standards (2004) states that these standards embody three key principles, “namely that the work of headteachers should be: learning-centered, focused on leadership and reflect the highest possible professional standards” (p. 2). The standards, when taken together, are to represent the role of the headteacher. The basic standards listed by the Department for Education and Skills are:
Shaping the Future, Leading Learning and Teaching, Developing Self and Working with Others, Managing the Organization, Securing Accountability, and Strengthening Community. Within each of these areas, there are knowledge requirements, professional qualities (skills, dispositions and personal capabilities headteachers bring to the role), and actions needed to meet these standards.

This qualification, given for completion and mastery of the requirements of the NPQH, have been open to any teacher in the past; however, the authors of this paper learned as part of this research that this will no longer be the case as of 2009. This qualification is still required to be named a headteacher, but beginning in 2009, applicants may begin pursuing this qualification only when they have had enough experience to be considered for the position of headteacher.

The Fast Track

One model of leadership preparation used in England has been the Fast Track Teacher model. Under the Fast Track Program, which began in 2001, headteachers identify teachers in their early years of teaching (less than 5 years) to make application to the NPQH training and work toward becoming a deputy head or headteacher. Teachers in the Fast Track Program are usually released from their teaching assignments but continue to be paid as they participate in the leadership training.

A retired headteacher who is a trainer and tutor in the Fast Track program explained, “This program is an attempt to move teachers who have leadership potential more quickly through the program since England is experiencing severe shortages in people who are qualified or who want to become headteachers,” (Interviewee A, personal communication, June 2008).
According to one of the Fast Track teachers interviewed, the application to the program is quite comprehensive. He stated, “There was an application form that was fairly meaty, a bunch of computer-based tests, and a one-day selection process that included interviews and role plays. The year I was accepted into the Fast Track, about 30% of people who applied were accepted,” (Interviewee B, personal communication, June 2008).

The interviewee went on to highlight some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Fast Track Program, including those related to time constraints and networking opportunities. He stated, “Obviously, one of the huge benefits is having a mentor the caliber of those with whom we work—former heads—people who know and have trained everyone around you. Also, the training opportunities are very strong. Other teachers who work with me never have the opportunity to leave the school for training because staff development is typically done in school by heads,” (Interviewee B, personal communication, June 2008).

While the aforementioned elements were positive, a second Fast Track interviewee highlighted the negative aspects of the program, and in so doing, helped the authors to better understand why the program was being phased out. “One can be on the Fast Track for five years, but the program’s written objective is to be in a leadership position (such as an assistant headship) within those five years. The problem with the system is that those opportunities simply don’t exist for the majority of people. Even if they did, school systems often don’t allow teachers to jump from classroom to assistant head in such a short period of time,” (Interviewee C, personal communication, June 2008).

Further, there were a number of teachers participating in the Fast Track, obtaining the leadership credential and then leaving the profession to work in the business sphere. A headteacher discussed this problem stating, “There were lots of people getting NPQH and
then going back into business. As a result, schools were wasting time mentoring leaders who never continued to lead and heads (headteachers) were using their time to bring along candidates who left after a few years. With the new restructuring, one must be an assistant head before even applying for the credential. The hope is that potential leaders who are in it for the long haul will be the ones who are mentored and that; because they will already be in middle leadership positions, they’ll be more likely to move into the headship,” (Interviewee D, personal communication, June 2008).

The Fast Track model will no longer be financed beginning in 2009 for two reasons: one, the new Managing from the Middle (MfM) Program will provide more opportunities for more teachers who want to gain leadership experiences, and two, the cost of the program to select teachers early in their teaching careers and take them through the experiences needed has been excessively high. One of the Fast Track teachers said it best in stating, “The Fast Track is being replaced next year because it has come to be thought of as a five-year gravy train where once you get in, you draw a stipend. Even though the ride has been nice and my experience has been positive, I know from networking with other Fast Trackers that everyone’s experience isn’t as positive as mine has been,” (Interviewee B, personal communication, June 2008).

*Middle Management*

Middle management in England is similar to the leadership team in schools in the state of Georgia. The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) began a new leadership development program in 2003 called Leading from the Middle (LftM). The term “middle management” is used to distinguish this level from the Senior Management, which consists of the headteacher and deputy headteachers. This program was designed to help
improve leadership at the middle level in schools and to make an impact on the effectiveness of teams of teachers to improve student progress (NCSL, 2003). Teachers who are interested in this program have an opportunity to develop their leadership skills working under the supervision of a leadership coach, the headteacher and deputy headteachers. The headteacher may identify the middle leaders of his/her school who may benefit from the program. The leadership coach serves as a facilitator to the participants’ in-school learning by supporting them and challenging them to extend their practice in leading teams, and managing change (NCSL, 2003). There are five areas of leadership development the program supports, which are becoming a leader of change, leaders knowing and understanding their role in teaching and learning, being a self-confident and skillful team leader, using staff and other resources to build team capacity, and actively engaging in self-directed change in a blended learning environment (NCSL, 2003). Headteachers interviewed in this study see the Leading from the Middle program as the stepping stone to senior management positions and spend time coaching and mentoring these young teachers.

One of the headteachers interviewed discussed the idea of securing the best educators for his school. He stated, “You don’t accept less than good. There is a strong leadership focus on middle leadership (department heads) here. If a teacher is weak and can be improved, we find a way to improve him. If he can’t be improved, we remove him,” (Interviewee E, personal communication, June 2008).

He continued by discussing his philosophy on retaining the best people, “If you are doing things for the right reasons and in the right way, you are going to foster growth, but that doesn’t mean that you won’t sack some people along the way. I had to let a few people go, and some people left on their own. Now there is outstanding middle leadership with
strong teams of people. When we do have positions, they are advertised in national and local papers and on our website, and we literally get hundreds of applicants for each position. All of our interviewees have one or two formal interviews with head of subject, someone from the board of governors, and me. Everyone must do a guest teaching stint. If you are employed here, you are good,” (Interviewee E, personal communication, June 2008).

His belief in the quality of his staff was reiterated in discussions with his teachers. When asked what made his school so highly regarded, one of his middle leaders shared, “He doesn’t just work to hire the best people. He works to make them want to stay here, too. For starters, he has a very open-door policy. He may not agree with everything you say, but you know that his ear is always available. He trusts his people and shows this by delegating everything. For every task, there is someone who is in charge of it – there is somebody sitting between ‘him and it’ in every instance,” (Interviewee B, personal communication, June 2008).

Another middle leader discussed how their school differed from others in the area. He stated, “The staff is very young because they promote and move up quickly here. We are known for it. He appoints good people, creates steps, and then lets them go,” (Interviewee F, personal communication, June 2008). The theme of fostering leaders, growing them from within, and helping them succeed resonated throughout all of the interviews at this school.

Applications for Preparation Programs in Georgia

One of the most striking findings of this inquiry was that performance-based leadership preparation is incomplete without students assessing themselves on how well they meet standards. The self-assessment element of the English training model leads students to
develop personal learning goals and continuously revisit and revise their plans for meeting those goals.

Another finding of the inquiry was that a student’s understanding of the linkages between standards and practice is extremely important. In the English training model, students link their work to each of the National Standards for Headteachers. The standards, when taken together, are to represent the role of the headteacher. There are knowledge requirements, professional qualities (skills, dispositions and personal capabilities headteachers bring to the role), and actions needed to meet each of these standards. Furthermore, in assessing their own performance, candidates are required to document how they meet each standard and then identify areas for continued growth. Structuring the experience in this way ensures that the standards guide the experiences and that the experiences continue to build upon one another. This structure is in keeping with the literature-based stance that internship activities should increase in complexity as the site-based experience progresses (Hackman, Russell & Elliott, 1999, Cordeiro and Sloan 1996).

What the authors of this study found was that school leaders need to have a clear understanding of what is involved in the partnership with universities for leadership preparation. Our observations led to a summary of characteristics of schools that can develop good leaders. Schools that develop leaders have a culture that values staff, are risk takers, have strong leadership development opportunities in the school, promote a climate which affords opportunities for growth, and don’t have a bias against the youth of the applicants.

As Georgia begins to implement the new performance-based leadership program, several lessons can be learned from the observations of the English model. One of the most striking findings of this inquiry was that the performance-based leadership preparation required that
the headteacher and aspiring leaders work closely together. The Fast Track Program, while a valuable experience for some, was ultimately discontinued in part because it did not foster this mentorship at the school level to a high enough degree. When aspiring leaders are “grown” in an environment where they are given the opportunity to lead under the direction of a mentor who has a stake in the success of their projects, the ultimate outcome is positive for everyone involved. Secondly, schools that develop leaders have a culture that values the staff and have strong development programs. In the English model, teachers in middle management were given actual responsibilities for which they were responsible, but they worked under the guidance of their headteacher and mentor.

Conclusion

This study examined the school leadership preparation model used in England in order to inform the redesign of preparation programs in Georgia. The study was a qualitative case study conducted with data collected through interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts concerning the English performance-based leadership preparation model. The findings of this inquiry indicated how a similar program is functioning in England where candidates are placed in schools to perform and observe specific leadership activities directly linked to their national standards and assessments. Lessons learned from this study are that schools have to have a culture of supporting young teachers who aspire to school leadership positions. This includes trusting these teachers with responsibilities that are important to the school and giving the appropriate amount of guidance. The new leadership preparation programs in Georgia will need to be aware of the fact that the work given to students cannot be “busy work” or insignificant work to those in their leadership preparation programs.
A final lesson learned is that when experiences are linked to standards and when school-level leaders work closely with aspiring leaders, experiences for everyone involved tend to be much more positive.
References


