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AUTHOR Daresh, John C.; LaPlant, James C.
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ABSTRACT

In response to ongoing needs for improved preservice field experiences for prospective administrators, more stringent state certification standards, and technical support for practitioners, mutually beneficial alliances are being formed between universities and local schools. This paper describes part of a continuing University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) research project to collect and disseminate university field relations data. Specifically, this paper studies how universities interact with field practitioners in the design and conduct of administrator training programs. During the study's first phase, UCEA institutions in the United States and Canada were asked to provide descriptive information about field experiences, internships, and other learning activities associated with their administrator training programs. Thirty-five of the universities or 78% provided program descriptions. Findings showed that most field relations programs are (1) designed to meet external mandates or standards; (2) the responsibility of an adjunct or clinical instructor; (3) "add-on" features of universities' training programs; (4) presented as not totally satisfactory; and (5) remarkably similar as to structure and requirements. These findings have several implications. While states will expect future administrators to gain more field experience, frustration arises as to implementation approaches and inadequate conceptual or material support for these expectations. Another issue concerns the extent of universities' commitment to effective field-based programs. At present, these programs are not central features, but afterthoughts. Solid programs require enormous faculty commitment, legislative support, and true joint-sponsorship by universities and school districts. (MLH)

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FIELD RELATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
TRAINING PROGRAMS

by

John C. Daresh
Assistant Professor of Educational Administration
Department of Educational Policy and Leadership
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

and

James C. LaPlant
Professor of Educational Administration
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio

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Educational Research Association
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FIELD RELATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
TRAINING PROGRAMS

In the autumn of 1984, the Executive Committee of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) approved the creation of a Center on Field Relations in Educational Administration Training Programs. The official host institution for the Center is the University of Cincinnati, and faculty from Cincinnati and The Ohio State University serve as the Center Co-Directors. The overall objectives of the Center have been to examine the status of administrative training programs at UCEA institutions in three distinct areas:

1. Strategies utilized in the development and maintenance of relationships between universities and practitioners in the area of preservice training and preparation programs for school administrators.
2. The ways in which relationships have been developed around the issue of universities' needs for research, development, dissemination, and implementation sites for their projects.
3. Situations where universities and other educational agencies are called upon by the field to provide service.

This paper is designed to provide a review of what has been determined over the past year relative to the first issue, namely the ways in which universities interact with practitioners in the field in the design and conduct of preservice school administrator training programs.

Background and Rationale

An issue of considerable interest and continuing concern to those responsible for the preparation and training of educational administrators is the development of mutually beneficial and supportive relationships between university programs and practitioners in the field. As evidence of this, a common element in recent movements in a number of states designed to establish more stringent administrative certification standards is to mandate increasing contact with practicing school administrators through more preservice field experiences. As a result, universities have been expected to pay more attention to their relations with the field as a way to maintain training sites for students, among other reasons. On the other hand, recent calls for reform and more effective practices in local schools have tended to serve as encouragement for practitioners to look to universities and other educational agencies as sources of technical support. Alliances thus formed between universities and local schools will no doubt continue to play an important role in the preservice preparation and inservice training of school administrators in the future.

Because of the rather obvious need to ensure that relationships between academic programs and the field are consistently positive experiences for all parties, the proposal was made for the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), a network of large, doctoral-granting universities interested in the improvement of school administrator training, to sponsor a continuing research effort aimed at collecting and disseminating data concerned with university-field relations on an ongoing basis so that UCEA and other institutions might be able to examine their activities in light of what trends are seen across the country.

The first major activity of the Center has involved the collection of information relating to the ways in which universities work in the field to provide

planned field experiences, internships, and other practica for their students. The findings from this examination and review of the field are described in this paper.

Methodology

This first phase of the study of field-based training programs in administrator preparation made use of a simple descriptive survey technique wherein representatives of each of the 45 UCEA institutions in the United States and Canada were contacted by letter and asked to provide descriptive information about field experiences, internships, and other types of learning activities used as regular features of their administrative preparation programs. Thirty-five of the universities (78%) had provided program descriptions by the time this paper was being prepared. Follow-up telephone calls were made to some university representatives to gain additional information about programs that was not necessarily clear from the written descriptions.

Findings

Based on the review of program descriptions, the following observations could be made concerning the status of field-based training programs:

1. In every case where such programs exist and are described at UCEA institutions, the field relations programs are described as activities designed primarily to meet the mandates and standards of some agency external to the university, such as the state department of education. In other words, the field-based training components are not viewed as integral parts of the academic programs in institutions; they are generally described as "requirements" of agencies external to the university (i.e., state departments of education).

2. In most cases, a single faculty member is given the responsibility of coordinating and directing the field-based training program. Other than initial academic advising processes for some students, the majority of the academic program faculty is not involved with supervising practica. In fact, in several institutions, the person responsible for supervising internships and planned field experiences was not a regular member of the faculty but, rather, an adjunct or clinical instructor or lecturer.
3. The field-based programs are generally referred to in the university descriptions as "linkages between the world of practice and the world of theory." Upon further examination of descriptive material, however, the ways in which this linkage is maintained are rarely specified. There seems to be little consistency in the development of this theme in the overall operation of university programs. Field-based training programs, regardless of the words used in descriptions, appear to be largely "add-on" features of universities' approaches to training.
4. There was almost an apologetic tone to the responses provided by representatives of the universities as they forwarded material for review. Respondents to the request for descriptive information frequently indicated that their field-based programs were not totally satisfactory, that they were in need of significant improvement, or that they were not adequate for their intended purposes. There is a clear feeling that there are problems with programs as presently defined. Despite this observation, however, few university representatives indicated that their institutions were actively engaged in systematic reviews of present practices, or were planning modifications in activities in the immediate future.

5. There are more similarities than dissimilarities in the ways in which programs of field-based training operate. The procedures and structures which serve to organize the programs in the various universities are remarkably alike. For example,
- a) Most field-based programs are required of students near the end of their academic programs;
 - b) most programs require students to spend approximately 25% of their time during a quarter or semester observing a practitioner and then carrying out a project under the direct supervision of that practitioner;
 - c) most programs provided academic credit, but are operated on a Pass/Fail basis;
 - d) the duration of most field-based experiences is normally dictated by the length of time of the university's academic semester or quarter, and not on the time required to complete the field project or experience.

Additional direct contact with responding universities will be carried out as part of the continuing activities planned by the UCEA Center of Field Relations. This contact should provide additional insights into and clarification of a number of these initial findings. Nevertheless, the statements made here concerning this first round of data collection would appear to be a fairly accurate representation of the current status of field-based programs in one set of large universities.

Practical Implications and Discussion

Based on this early review of the ways in which field-based training is carried out, a number of practical implications related to the preservice training of school administrators may be derived. For one thing, it is clear that a large part of the ways in which states will likely redefine their expectations regarding the training of educational administrators will be related to and based on the perspective which holds that more time in the field is a proper way to ensure that future principals, superintendents, and other administrators will learn about leadership. On the other hand, it is not always as clear as to the ways in which this general type of value statement, as supported through legislative policy and mandate, will be carried out by universities as training institutions. Few might argue with the perspective that holds that future leaders need to have contact with the field. Frustration arises, however, when little conceptual or material support is provided to enhance the opportunities for such perspectives to become realities.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed concerns the extent to which universities are truly committed to the enhancement of effective field-based programs. The evidence provided through this early review suggests that the predominant view of field-based programs is that they are not central features of most institutions' programs. To the contrary, one might easily conclude that many universities view their practica as "afterthoughts." No doubt there are many legitimate reasons for this condition to exist. For one thing, the amount of time required of faculty to monitor and supervise students in the field is enormous. As a result, serving as the professor-in-charge of planned field experiences is often something viewed negatively by faculty who guard their time for writing, research, student advising, and classroom teaching. Under present

circumstances where faculty productivity and value is measured to an inordinate degree by one's publication record, it is quite unlikely that faculty members, particularly those who are untenured, will actively seek to spend their time with field-based programs. Perceptions must be changed, therefore, both on the part of institutions and also by individual faculty members regarding the role of practica. Maintaining positive, symbiotic relationships between the university and the practitioners in the field must be viewed as an important activity that provides sufficient positive benefits to the institution to warrant respect in the promotion and tenure-granting process. In addition, individual professors need to examine field-based training programs as research opportunities in themselves, and not solely as something that takes away time for writing.

Yet another implication derived from these preliminary findings relates to the role that might be played by state education agencies, relative to the implementation of field experiences. There is no doubt tremendous value in the call for universities to make use of field settings for the training of administrators. There is also some reason to expect that, in addition to this basic notion, however, state departments might further support the principle of field programs by providing additional resources for implementation. One example of how this might occur is in the area of assisting local school districts to provide short-term class coverage for teachers who might profit from field-based experiences away from their "home" schools: A major problem now existing in the arrangement of field experiences is the fact that the majority of aspiring administrators are also practicing teachers. Planned field experiences for such individuals, without additional support, often consists of little more than doing some type of "busy work" task indirectly related to administrative practice in addition to a normal teaching load. The student gets to "play at" doing

some administrative tasks, but rarely has the opportunity to sit at the administrator's desk. To do so would require released time, the opportunity to spend time in another school, and other opportunities not usually afforded to most classroom teachers seeking administrative credentials and degrees.

This last observation is tied very directly to yet another issue, namely that there is a definite assumption found in most field-based training programs that mere participation in "field work" is something that is good in and of itself. Rarely is there much evidence, for example, that universities engage in any type of quality control to ensure that practitioners selected as field supervisors necessarily possess the type of knowledge, skills, or attitudes which would necessarily make them the types of role models that should be followed by entrants to the world of administration. Rather, the prevailing practice seems to be that students enrolled in practice find someone at hand in their local schools or districts who, at least, "doesn't mind" serving as a contact person. Even when that individual is a potentially positive role model, there is rarely any attempt to make sure that he or she is an active, participating member of the team that helps to guide the career path of an aspiring administrator. In a more negative perspective, there are also too many cases where the field supervisor is exactly the type of administrator that one hopes the new school leader will not be like. The only way to increase the probability that this situation will be remedied in the foreseeable future is for universities to become considerably more aggressive and assertive regarding the approval of individuals who are to serve as field supervisors. Most educational administration faculties have some idea of who are and who are not reasonable role models in the field. These ideas must become part of the operational procedures of the training programs.

The final concern that is derived from this early review of field-based preservice training programs may be the most perplexing problem, and the most difficult one to solve. One cannot help but realize that, despite the fact that some universities may appear to have more sophisticated programs than others, or that some universities have invested more resources in their programs, the inescapable fact is that all existing training programs are still university programs alone. They are not jointly-sponsored, jointly-conducted, or jointly-planned programs which make use of input and expertise from other agencies. Universities simply do not seem to work with local school districts as equal partners in the development of leadership talent. Until the preparation of quality administrators is viewed as an activity which may be addressed by all parties who will be affected, program components, such as the field-based practica reviewed here, will continue to be little more than academic hoops that lie between a student and an administrative license.

Summary

This first round of data collection related to university-field relations has provided a considerable amount of useful information related to the operation of but one small aspect of the issue, namely the ways in which universities provide for field-based preservice training programs for those who are pursuing careers in educational administration. In the future, the UCEA Center on Field Relations will continue to explore this and other issues related to the improvement of relationships between institutions of higher education and practitioners in the field. The information provided in this paper may offer

some important insights into the general state of the art as it currently exists in the area of field-based training. It may be that such insights will suggest important future directions for improvement.