DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 151 EA 032 214

AUTHOR	Browne-Ferrigno, Tricia; Barnett, Bruce; Muth, Rodney
TITLE	Performance Outcomes and Accreditation: A National Research Agenda.
PUB DATE	2002-11-00
NOTE	39p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration (Pittsburgh, PA, November 1-3, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Standards; *Administrator Education; Cohort Analysis; Data Collection; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Leadership Training; *Management Development; *Outcomes of Education; *Program Effectiveness; Research Design

ABSTRACT

This paper examines leadership preparation by focusing on existing research and unaddressed questions about what happens inside and outside cohorts, a model for program delivery used in many universities. It seeks to stimulate dialogue on the impact of cohort participation on learning outcomes, professional roles, and practice. The objectives are (1) to design a nationwide research agenda about the influence of cohort delivery models on the professional practice of school leaders and (2) to develop a knowledge base of effective strategies for designing and implementing programs for school leadership. The paper's primary point is that faculty in educational administration need to do more research in preparing people for positions of administrative leadership. The paper poses questions and offers suggestions about what research is necessary and which strategies might be most effective in pursuing that research. It concludes with suggestions to project designers for overcoming major stumbling blocks to a nationwide collaborative research agenda: (1) Maintain an invitational stance that encourages many to join the inquiry; (2) research design must include strategies to ensure continuing participation and financing; and (3) designers must overcome the duality of innovation and conservation common to many universities and colleges. (Contains 109 references.) (WFA)

Performance Outcomes and Accreditation: A National Research Agenda

Tricia Browne-Ferrigno
Department of Administration and Supervision
College of Education
111 Dickey Hall
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40506-0017
(859) 257-5504
(859) 257-1015 (fax)
ferrign@uky.edu

Bruce Barnett
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
College of Education and Human Development
University of Texas at San Antonio
6900 North Loop 1604 West
San Antonio, TX 78249
210-458-5413
210-458-5848 (fax)
bbarnett@utsa.edu

Rodney Muth
Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies
School of Education, CB 106
University of Colorado at Denver
PO Box 173364
Denver, CO 80217-3364
303-556-4657
303-556-4479 (fax)
rod_muth@ceo.cudenver

Paper Prepared for the Interactive Symposium on
How Will We Know Whether Cohorts and Other Delivery Strategies Produce Effective School Leaders?

University Council for Educational Administration
Annual Conference, Pittsburgh, PA
November 2002

Abstract

This paper examines issues about leadership preparation by focusing on existing research and unaddressed questions about what happens both inside and outside cohorts, a model for program delivery used in many universities today. This paper seeks to stimulate dialogue about the impact of cohort participation on learning outcomes, professorial roles, and practice. The objective is two-fold: (a) to design a nationwide research agenda about the influence of cohort delivery models on the professional practice of school leaders and (b) to develop a knowledge base about effective strategies for designing and implementing the professional development programs for school leadership in the 21st century.

Performance Outcomes and Accreditation:
A National Research Agenda

The national spotlight is aimed at educational leadership preparation programs as accrediting agencies and state departments of education continue to demand greater accountability (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1998; Van Meter & Murphy, 1997; Usdan, 2002). At the same time, many program faculty are developing varied and innovative instructional strategies and organizational structures to prepare school administrators to lead schools in these complex times (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Murphy, 1993; Peterson, 2002). Calls for reform and program assessment within university-based leadership preparation programs have resulted in moderate changes but few national studies that show value added—that programs actually make a difference (Bogotch, 2001; Forsyth & Murphy, 1999; Glasman, Cibulka, & Ashby, 2002; McCarthy, 2001).

In the face of these pressures and challenges, program faculty have begun to focus on the connection between preparation activities and actual leadership practices. Yet, faculty doing so face a daunting challenge: preparing leaders capable of creating effective learning environments for all learners, establishing socially responsible policies and practices, and collaborating with multiple stakeholders in their communities. Facing these increasing demands, public accountability, and the spotlight of reform cast on the role of school leadership in school improvement, school systems are finding that fewer and fewer qualified educators want to accept these important leadership roles (ERS, NAESP, & NASSP, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Winter, Rinehart, & Munoz, 2001). In addition, challenges to the efficacy of university-based administrator preparation programs (Brent, 1998; Haller, Brent, & McNamara, 1997) cannot be countered without empirical evidence that preparation for leadership leads to effective school leadership (Muth & Barnett, 2001; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2002).

Clearly, no one best model exists for expanding the pool of qualified and willing candidates and preparing them for the challenges that they will face. However, one of the increasingly popular recruitment and instructional delivery strategies is the use of cohorts. Estimates suggest that over 50% of graduate educational leadership preparation programs in the United States are using this approach (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; McCarthy, 1999b). Despite instances of increased academic competition (Hill, 1995), power struggles

(Teitel, 1995), and faculty workload (Burnett, 1999), many benefits are afforded by cohort delivery. For example, the cohort structure has the potential to strengthen curriculum integration, team teaching, and course scheduling (Martin, Ford, Murphy, Rehm, & Muth, 1997; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). Cohort members' learning also can be positively affected, including their scholarship and reflective abilities (Burnett, 1989; Hill, 1995; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Coffin, 1995; Norton, 1995), interpersonal relationships (Horn, 2001a), professional networks (Muth & Barnett, 2001), and persistence in program completion (Dorn, Papalewis, & Brown, 1995; Norton, 1995).

Despite numerous accounts of the viability of cohorts as an instructional methodology, empirical data are largely unavailable to substantiate such claims. Most research has relied on small samples and on the perceptions of those using cohort delivery models (Barnett et al., 2000). Attacks on the profession declare emphatically that empirical evidence fails to substantiate how—or even if—educational leadership preparation programs affect student-learning outcomes (short-term effects) and future practice (long-term effects) as school leaders (Black & English, 1986; Brent, 1998; Haller et al., 1997). The research gap is significant for educational leadership programs in general—and cohort programs specifically—in terms of their short- and long-term efficacy.

Here, we examine these and other issues, focusing both on what research tells us so far and what additional research is needed for us to increase understanding of the impact of cohorts on learning outcomes, professorial roles, and practice. We examine existing research and unaddressed questions about what happens both inside and outside the cohort experience. The primary point, though, is that we—faculty in educational administration—need to do more research on our primary practice: preparing people for administrative leadership positions in our nation's schools. Research on cohorts demonstrates one way to undertake this task.

In addition, as new practices such as cohorts emerge, clear research agendas will help us build evidence about the utility of these practices. The broader these research agendas, the more likely we are to generate a solid knowledge base. And this knowledge base will permit us to choose the most effective strategies for designing and implementing the professional development programs needed for schools in the 21st century.

A Definitional Note

Before continuing, an important distinction needs to be made about the use of the term *cohort* here. Although some leadership preparations programs use the word *cohort* to describe a group of students selected from particular local educational agencies or students who enroll in a program during a specific semester, these students generally do not begin and complete their programs together as an intact community of learners. As they progress through their preparation programs, they generally interact with different students in various classes. Such groups of students are usually excluded from research on cohorts because their learning environments are transient. That is, over the course of a program of studies, their classrooms vary considerably—by subject, professor, and contact with the field—as do the students who populate them.

Thus, this paper reports research only about "closed cohorts" (Norris & Barnett, 1994) in which students remain together throughout their preparation program as a single, identifiable group. The issue of quasi-cohorts (e.g., student-grouping models that are used during program orientation, that track school-district affiliation, or that are created by careful sequencing of separate course scheduling) is addressed in later sections of this paper.

Role of Cohorts in Improving Outcomes

Although research on what occurs in cohort programs is somewhat sparse, a few empirical investigations have examined their use and effects (Barnett et al., 2000; Hebert & Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds & Hebert, 1995; Witte & James, 1998). These studies have generally found that outcomes are positive: Cohorts have an impact on learning and performance. Much of this research has surfaced in the last decade and appears to be located primarily in education as cohorts have become a popular way to prepare educators for various roles (Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Murphy, 1993). What is not "known" or evident from research about participant learning in cohort models—or, indeed, in any other models—is whether such learning transfers to administrative practice (Bridges & Hallinger, 1992; Hebert et al., 1998; Horn, 2001a; Pounder, 1994; Twale & Kochan, 2000).

A premise for using cohorts in administrator-preparation programs is that keeping students together as a unique group of about 15 to 25 learners enhances professional learning and skill development (Barnett et al., 2000; Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Peel, Wallace, Buckner, Wrenn, & Evans, 1998). Investigations of preparation programs delivered as

coherent, sequenced curricula for unique cohort groups suggest increased student completion rates (Reynolds & Hebert, 1995) and enhanced learning achievements (Hebert & Reynolds, 1998) when compared to programs delivered as a series of traditional, separate courses taken by individual students whenever desired or available. Another assertion is that the cohort structure provides excellent opportunities for aspiring school leaders to learn and practice skills in group goal setting, community building, conflict resolution, and culture management (Geltner, 1997). Thus, the use of cohorts often is recommended highly in preparation programs in educational leadership (Milstein & Krueger, 1993; Murphy, 1993).

Role of Cohorts in Learning, Preparation, and Practice

The primary reasons given by faculty for using cohorts are (a) the opportunity for students to form strong interpersonal relationships with peers and faculty and (b) the efficiency of program delivery (Barnett et al., 2000). Anecdotal evidence, usually provided by students and faculty at the close of programs, suggests that the long-term association of learners in a cohort creates caring learning climates that support students' competence and sense of well-being (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994; Peel et al., 1998). Students in cohorts that function well report greater feelings of inclusiveness, more opportunities for collaboration and professional networking, and stronger academic performance than they experienced in their previous higher educational experiences (Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1995; Yerkes, Basom, Barnett, & Norris, 1995). Studies of group dynamics, group affiliation, participant interaction, and personal relationships within cohorts (Basom et al., 1995; Norris & Barnett, 1994) also show that the culture of cohorts that function well increases the level of learning for all participants.

Another finding is that the traditional delimitations of *instructor* and *student* roles routinely dissolve within cohorts while frequently expanding to include school practitioners who participate in elements of program development and delivery (Cordiero, Boutiler, Panicek, & Salamone-Consoli, 1993). Over time, cohort participants assume greater responsibility for their learning—both as individuals and as members of a group—and regularly make known their demands for changes in instructional delivery or learning assessments (Barnett et al., 2000). Thus, cohort faculty often assume roles as facilitators, mentors, and occasionally mediators during cohort meetings that resemble professional development seminars and workshops rather

than traditional higher education lecture classes. However, use of the cohort instructional delivery model occasionally affect faculty teaching adversely because students are more likely to challenge instructors' authority (Barnett et al., 2000; Barnett & Muse, 1993) due to the strong social bonding of cohort groups (Norton, 1995).

Team learning within a cohort does not emerge simply by grouping students together (Basom et al., 1995). Research suggests that learning in a cohort is enhanced when environmental influences are addressed and learner-centered instructional strategies are implemented (Barnett et al., 2000; Hannafin & Land, 1997; Muth et al., 2001). Thus, cohort faculty need to create inviting, risk-safe conditions and address stages of cohort transformation, marked by cycles of conflict and cohesion, so that transformative learning can occur (Geltner, 1994; Lumsden, 1992; Maher, 2001). Linking cohort learning activities to professional practice is strengthened through clinical practice experiences, monitored internships, mentoring, and networking opportunities (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2001; Lumsden, 1992; Milstein & Krueger, 1997).

The cohort model also supports the development of university-district partnerships, often linking classroom learning to professional practice, making it easier to structure and manage. The changed roles of aspiring school leaders, leadership professors, and educational practitioners within collaboratively created cohort programs has the potential of reframing educational administration preparation through closer linkage of preservice learning to professional practice.

Outcomes Assessments: Personal, Programmatic, National

Cohort programs are apt to incorporate a variety of instructional strategies that include integrated course content, team teaching, problem-based learning, reflective strategies, and case studies (Hill, 1995; Martin et al., 1997; Yerkes et al., 1995). Cohort programs also appear to follow some of the current trends in assessment by incorporating diagnostic inventories and individual learning plans (Yerkes et al., 1995). However, a challenge in designing an effective cohort program based upon learning through experiences is the selection of the kind of "present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27).

By developing expectations about problem-based learning activities linked to real problems of practice in K-12 schools (Muth, 2000), faculty enable students to begin early to apply theories and to develop skills needed in their future roles as school leaders (Pounder,

1994). By integrating group action-research projects (Geltner, 1993; Stringer, 1996) and appreciative inquiry activities (Srivastva, Cooperrider, & Associates, 1990) into the curriculum, students learn the power of collaborative inquiry (Churchill, 1996) and the importance of careful use of data and reflection (Nadler, 1977; Schön, 1991). By working together in various small-group and whole-class settings, students learn the challenges of group dynamics when membership changes (Muth et al., 2001). Further, the intact learning environment of closed cohorts supports long-term developmental activities such as role playing, simulation, and in-basket and point-counterpoint activities (Cordiero et al., 1993) that are more difficult to integrate into individual courses where student learning groups are reconstituted each semester.

To accommodate changes in instructional strategies within cohorts, student learning assessments typically include individual and small-group projects and presentations, reflective journals, and field-based inquiries and school projects usually presented through portfolios (Milstein et al., 1993). Real-world, authentic assessments require students to develop collaborative products by sharing papers and resources, gaining peer clarification, working through conflict, and seeking agreement through consensus. Authentic assessments help attune learning to professional practice (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999).

Using the cohort model effectively requires program coherence (Dick, 1990; Muth, 2002b) and faculty engagement in identifying and implementing critical elements that generate optimum learning experiences for faculty and students (Barnett et al., 2000; Kelley & Peterson, 2000). Faculty need to reframe their notion about content covered within individual courses to content delivered through appropriate scope and sequence. Collaborative program development means that the "onus of responsibility is upon all faculty to contribute and explain why their content and ideas need to be included" (Cordiero et al., 1993, p. 27). Thus, determination of desired cohort outcomes requires deliberation during program development to ensure that cohort activities are aligned with what is to be learned, how it is to be learned, what process is to used, and what teachers and students should do (Muth, 2000). Both formative and summative evaluations of programs are necessary to ensure that goals are met.

Another programmatic issue related to cohorts is the increase in faculty workload (Barnett et al., 2000; Muth & Barnett, 2001; Norton, 1995). Most often, the additional work stems from needed coordination among professors, increased student advisement, use of developmental

assignments that lead to multiple readings of papers and field reports, and travel time for faculty to and from off-campus cohort sites. Faculty perceive workload disadvantages despite cited benefits of using the cohort model: predictable course scheduling, easy student enrollment and greater retention, as well as opportunities for creativity and flexibility in instructional and assessment strategies (Barnett et al., 2000).

Cohorts generally move through predictable stages of group development and establish unique personalities (Maher, 2001; Misanchuk, Anderson, Craner, Eddy, & Smith, 2000; Wesson, Holman, Holman, & Cox, 1996). This process may require occasional interventions which add to faculty workload. Group dynamics resulting in collusion and cliquishness, exclusionary group behavior and norms, breakdowns in communication, conflicting problem-solving and work styles, and assumed or assigned roles can impede learning (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001; Teitel, 1995). Additionally, multiple in-progress assessments may be required to measure group development and elicit candid discussions about what is happening within a cohort (Tipping, Freeman, & Rachlis, 1995) and what needs changing. Additionally, initial and continuing group-development activities within cohorts may be needed to enhance group processing, cohesion, and learning. These in turn diminish time spent on content-oriented learning activities (Barnett et al., 2000), assuming, of course, that specific content is more important than learning to learn (Muth, 2000; Smith & Associates, 1990; Tosteson, Adelstein, & Carver, 1994).

Accountability: Personal, Programmatic, National

Perhaps the most attention has been focused on the effects of the cohort experience on students. Claims have been made that academic performance improves (Hill, 1995; Murphy, 1993; Norton, 1995), important leadership skills are acquired (Barnett et al., 2000), and rates of program completion increase (Burnett, 1989; Hill, 1995; Norton, 1995). Although many faculty contend that interpersonal relationships flourish in cohorts (Barnett et al., 2000), conflicting reports have surfaced. On the one hand, cohorts afford students the opportunity to become a cohesive community of learners who bond to one another and thus reduce their professional isolation (Kasten, 1992; Leithwood et al., 1995; Milstein & Krueger, 1993; Norris, Barnett, Basom, & Yerkes, 1996; Norton, 1995). On the other hand, interpersonal tension and conflict may result from personal traumas (Barnett & Muse, 1993) academic competition (Hill, 1995),

domination of the learning environment by a few vocal students (Norris et al., 1996; Norton, 1995), and groupthink (Barnett et al., 2000).

Closed cohorts are perceived to provide unique opportunities for adult students to engage in "democratic, non-hierarchical" (Geltner, 1994, p. 13) communities of learners where all participants are valued and empowered. Geltner suggests that in advance of delivering cohort instruction, faculty need to reflect carefully on their own values and beliefs as individuals and on their behaviors and practices as educators. Empowering a cohort requires changes in the relationships not only among the learners but also between instructors and students through dissolution of traditional power relationships (Barnett et al., 2000; Geltner, 1994; Muth & Barnett, 2001) and between university peers who must engage in collaborative syllabus building. Instructors who design educational cohort programs also need to be cognizant of and address the special characteristics of adult students (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Muth et al., 2001) who need acknowledgment of their expertise and active involvement in the learning process.

Although snapshots exist of some structural characteristics of cohorts, very little is known about the developmental nature of the cohort experience or the contextual factors affecting cohort stability. In order to gain greater understanding about possible developmental and contextual effects, additional research is needed that focuses on the entire cohort experience from faculty and program perspectives. For example, as new instructors begin to work with cohorts at various points throughout the program, what facilitates or hampers their acculturation? How do group cohesion and sense of community develop within cohorts over time? What instructional processes or critical events foster or impede the development of a cohesiveness? What are the long-term effects on the culture of a department using cohorts? Answers to such questions can provide greater insights for program improvement and accountability and help professors of educational administration determine cost-benefits of cohort use.

Accreditation, Accountability, and Cohorts

Although many faculty hold strong views about the benefits or problems of cohort instruction, little empirical evidence exists about the long-term effects of the cohort experience on aspiring principals' future professional practice (Goldschmid & Berberat, 1989; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Muth & Barnett, 2001). A critical piece missing in research about administrator preparation is the effects of the cohort experience on participants' workplace behaviors.

Suggestions have been made that cohorts have the potential to develop transformational leaders (Basom, Yerkes, Norris & Barnett, 1996; Norris et al., 1996). Anecdotal evidence provided by some cohort students suggests "a commitment to transfer . . . learning to their future work roles" (Norris et al., 1996, p. 159). Leithwood et al.'s (1995) study of the factors affecting later workplace performance also indicates a strong relationship between cohort participation and assessment of graduates' leadership capabilities by their co-workers. Unfortunately, a comparison group of non-cohort graduates was not used, making it difficult to ascertain the relative potency of the cohort experience.

Through a comprehensive survey study, Barnett et al. (2000) found that faculty representing 60% of the 383 universities in Canada and the United States that deliver administrative preparation tend to ignore "how the cohort structure can impact the workplace practices of their students" (p. 274). Instead, university faculty tend to focus on how students are affected by learning within cohorts and differ markedly in their views about the potential for cohorts to prepare students for future leadership roles.

> Little direct evidence was provided by respondents regarding how the actual job performance of students had been impacted by the cohort experience. Although many of their comments centered on students' enhanced communication skills and problem-solving abilities, faculty members did not clearly identify examples of how or whether they had observed these practices occurring in the workplace. (p. 274)

Thus, research is needed to assess how cohort programs differ from traditional programs in participant selection, curriculum, instructional processes, exit criteria, and preparation outcomes. For example, what leadership knowledge and skills are brought into the learning environment by entering participants, and what leadership knowledge and skills are gained by cohort members over time? How does this learning differ from that in traditional settings, or is such learning more transferable than that of students exiting more traditional programs with more traditional teaching-learning processes? What are the effects of these differences, if any, on learning, graduates' decisions to apply for administrative positions, their selection into administrative positions, or their performance once in those positions? Even if such comparative analyses cannot be achieved, seeking answers to these questions is essential to determining the efficacy or value added of administrator preparation under current models.

The call to reframe educational administrative practice (Murphy, 1993; 2002) through broadly adopted standards for the preparation, practice, and evaluation of school leaders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Van Meter & Murphy, 1997) requires closer links between university-based programs and the field of educational leadership practice. Research is needed to examine the perspectives of all stakeholders groups involved in the preparation of future school leaders (e.g., cohort students, field-based practitioners, university administrators, district-level employers, and policy makers). Data derived from carefully designed research projects are needed to understand what external factors (e.g., funding, university policies, and school-district policies) support or interfere with the creation and maintenance of cohorts. Such questions are important to improve the quality of professional preparation and to address political trends, acquire support for cohort-based programming, and ensure that the profession of educational leadership prospers and matures.

Need for Empirical Data

One of the biggest influences of the recent educational reform movement has been the focus on standards and accountability. Reforms have dictated that teachers, administrators, and university faculty become more proficient at clarifying learning expectations and creating valid and reliable assessments to measure these outcomes. In building the argument that university-based preparation programs need to increase their capacity to gather and use performance data, we next examine some of the factors influencing data-based decision making, especially the need for empirical data to improve programs and strengthen the profession of educational leadership.

The Era of Data-Driven Decision Making

Over the past decade, K-12 educators have established standards and developed performance assessments across grade levels and subjects. Much of the pressure for such reform has been generated from external sources, particularly lawmakers and business leaders. Besides state-level policy makers, educational reformers have included the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Alliance of Business, and the Committee for Economic Development (Usdan, 2002). A prominent feature of the standards movement emphasizes using data in decision making. On the one hand, classroom teachers have been urged to use "data-driven instruction" (Schlecty, 1997) and create assessments early in their instructional planning rather than at the conclusion of teaching units

(Borko, Flory, & Cumbo, 1993; Hoachlander, Alt, & Beltranena, 2001). On the other hand, principals and school district officials are being held accountable for student performance outcomes, not only in making school- or district-level decisions, but also in reporting progress to parents, local communities, and state departments of education (Clement, 2002; Hoachlander et al., 2001; Hoachlander, Levesque, & Mandel, 1998; Stiggins, 2001). As high-stakes testing increases, these data are being used to make decisions about employment, funding, and accreditation (Glasman et al., 2002).

Similarly, institutions of higher education in general, and educational leadership programs in particular, are being urged to identify learning outcomes for their graduates and create outcomes assessment measures (Loacker, 2000; Palomba & Banta, 1999) which should relate to effective performance. Even as accrediting agencies begin to require universities to specify programmatic outcomes (North Central Association, 1997), increased pressure is placed on programs to enhance access for under-represented racial and ethnic groups while ensuring that course work is relevant and degrees can be completed in shorter time periods (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2000; National Research Council, 1996). Recently, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has demanded that educational leadership programs incorporate standards and performance assessments (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1998).

Empirical versus Anecdotal Data and Reform

These calls for data-driven decision making come at a time when the profession of educational leadership is once again being urged to reform (Usdan, 2002; Young et al., 2002). Even while the field has struggled to demonstrate that formal preparation programs make a difference in the performance of school leaders and their schools—unsuccessfully, according to some observers (Brent, 1998; Haller et al., 1997)—claims have been made that an attitude of complacency prevails. These claims of complacency suggest that faculty are content with current programs and do not see the need to make major changes, especially those dealing with outcomes assessment (Glasman et al., 2002; McCarthy, 1999a). However, this lack of urgency may shift as older faculty retire and more women and practitioners enter the profession (McCarthy & Kuh, 1998; Murphy, 1999).

Despite the dearth of empirical evidence establishing the impact of leadership preparation, efforts are emerging to rectify this problem, including suggestions offered in this paper. Currently, one of the most visible grass-roots efforts being undertaken by educational leadership faculty is a multi-institutional ad hoc committee, Evaluating the Effectiveness of Educational Leadership Preparation (EEELP), led by Robert Kottkamp of Hofstra University and Margaret Orr of Teachers College, Columbia University. The intent of the group is "to foster within and cross-program evaluations, based on how our programs help to improve the quality and effectiveness of public education through leadership development" (Orr, 2002). A similar idea has been advanced by Muth and Barnett (2001). Presently, subgroups of the EEELP are examining (a) student characteristics, (b) program measures, (c) leadership skill development, and (d) impact measures. The first subgroup is examining the entry characteristics of students while the other three groups are focusing on how the curriculum and delivery mechanisms affect students' learning when they are enrolled in the program as well as the performance of graduates' schools and districts once students assume formal leadership positions.

At the same time, a second national endeavor, the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation (NCAELP), has been established (Young & Peterson, 2002). This initiative is a collaborative project comprised of educational practitioners, community leaders, businesses, professional associations, universities, and governmental associations whose purpose is "to improve the practice of educational leadership through high-quality preparation and professional development" (p. 131). To date, NCAELP has commissioned several papers and critiques dealing with the current and future state of affairs regarding educational leadership preparation and professional development. (See the April 2002 special issue of *Educational Administration Quarterly* for the commissioned articles.) Aimed at collaboratively identifying and resolving problems associated with leadership development, the commission intends to address the importance of learning-focused leadership and develop ways to assess and improve programs.

Empirical Data and the Profession

These two national efforts, although taking different approaches, expect to collect, analyze, and compare data about the performance of aspiring and practicing school leaders. Analyses will focus, for example, on the use of standards-based approaches to program

improvement (Glasman et al., 2002). Yet to enhance its standing as a profession, the field of educational leadership must take much more seriously the collection and use of data. Professions monitor themselves and in so doing must have valid and reliable data about the performance of their membership (Young et al., 2002):

> Although many program faculty now collect data on how students are progressing through their programs and whether or not students are meeting the criteria that guide their programs, these forms of evaluation do not reveal how well students will perform once they are in the field. . . . Until we have a process for determining whether or not educational leadership preparation has any of the impacts that we hope for them, it is not likely that we will have adequate information to engage in effective program development. And without evidence of success, faculty members may not be willing to sustain the extra work many program reforms require. (p. 151)

Currently, much of the empirical data being collected about programs is being shaped by accrediting agencies. Because most states require a license or certificate to become a practicing administrator, applicants must demonstrate understanding of and competence in the areas covered by state standards. As a result, the content, performance expectations, and assessment processes in leadership preparation programs have been strongly influenced by these standards (McCarthy, 1999a; Young et al., 2002). Moreover, national standards also are driving programs, the most salient of which are those developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) and NCATE (1995). For instance, most states have joined ISLLC or have adopted their standards for school leadership (Murphy, 2001). In addition, the NCATE accreditation process for educational leadership programs is pointedly directive about empirical evidence to support measures of student performance outcomes. Unfortunately, because university professors tend not to be seen as important sources of information (McCarthy, 1999a; Olsen, 2000), their involvement has been marginal in shaping standards, performance outcomes, and assessments. While some critics claim that professors of educational leadership are passive observers and are politically disinterested (Usdan, 2002), perhaps the recent initiatives, especially the professor-initiated EEELP, will lead to performance standards and assessments that professors across the country can embrace.

Developing a National Research Agenda

Although noteworthy anecdotal data from students and faculty can be found about the benefits of using well-designed and well-implemented cohort programs in educational

administration, empirical evidence currently is sparse on the long-term effects of cohort experiences on the practice of future educational leaders. On the front end, recommendations for improving preparation programs include (a) careful screening and selection of cohort participants, (b) continual attention to group-development processes, (c) integration of experiential activities and reflection into the curriculum, (d) collaboration between faculty and practitioners, (e) continuous assessments of student progress measured against clear standards and performance rubrics, and (f) modeling of exemplary learner-centered instructional strategies. Given the attention to program-specific research already reported above, on the back end much remains to be done to determine the efficacy of cohort structures on performance in the field.

Measuring transference of cohort-based learning to professional practice in school leadership may be difficult, and it surely will be labor intensive, costly, and time consuming. Nonetheless, accountability for the effectiveness of professional development programs requires better data than passing rates on exams, position placements, or anecdotal data from graduates and faculty. Short-term and longitudinal studies are needed to trace and examine the transference of students' learning in cohorts to practice settings and to graduates' professional practices as educational leaders. But following career paths of program graduates is difficult without continuous upkeep of appropriate databases. Further broad-based longitudinal studies that link findings from multiple sites require careful design and diligent attention by consistently involved researchers.

Assuming (a) that difficulties inherent in longitudinal studies can be overcome, (b) that groups of leadership-program faculty will participate in such studies to enhance the efforts of isolated researchers and provide better data for program revision and justification, and (c) that knowing something about transference of cohort learning to professional practice is important, then questions need to be raised about what research is necessary and which strategies might be most effective in pursuing that research. For example, what data will best tell the field whether transference from program learning to field action takes place? How can this transference be determined during a program as well as following the completion of a program? What types of data sources will be most beneficial for such research? What types of databases will be needed to trace graduates' career paths? Should such database development and use be program

specific, or might it be advantageous to create databases for multiple sites, say statewide or regionally, to facilitate collection and use of cohort data nationally?

Some Specific Questions about Learning in Cohorts

Advocates of cohorts often claim that they provide "better environments for learning," particularly for group learning that takes place over time. Is the continuity across collaborative learning experiences and academic terms made possible by cohort structures sufficiently analogous to how people learn in field settings that the probability is greater that what is learned in a program can be used in practice? Do programs designed to focus on problems of practice represent the knowledge and skills that an effective principal must have? Are these problems core vehicles for learning and more likely to produce usable and transferable learning than other methods of instruction and learning? If so, what are the best ways to confirm this? For example, should we design studies that analyze work tasks in school settings in order to examine how work teams acquire and use knowledge and then compare these findings to learning in cohorts?

Another question is whether researchers can identify ways in which cohort instructional design affects actual practice. That is, for example, what instructional processes facilitate learning about and demonstrating leadership? During the course of a cohort program, do students engage in consequential learning activities that require leadership and actually affect practice in field settings? Do activities such as leading a curriculum or legal audit produce immediate changes in system practices or support later leadership behaviors in diverse job circumstances? What are the best ways to capture these outcomes: observations, interviews, or some combination of methods?

Can particular leadership skills be identified that students are expected to acquire during a program? Do these skills directly apply to improving school outcomes and transfer to other practice settings? In what ways does a given program encourage reflection on one's leadership and its consequences? Further, are such reflective practices continued when no longer required by a program? Do program graduates continue to "journal" and think about and reflect regularly on their practice and its effects? If so, does reflective practice make any difference in how well a program graduate leads a school? What would be reasonable ways to examine whether leadership-skill acquisition or reflective practice transfer to on-the-job settings and have any effects there?

Cohort advocates also claim that cohort experiences help develop professional networks that support graduates when they take administrative positions. Are data available that suggest that cohorts accomplish this any more effectively than do non-cohort preparation experiences? How might comparative analyses be structured? Could comparative "schematics" of networks developed by program graduates be examined for use and outcomes? And how might the effectiveness of such networks be assessed? Do they actually make a difference in how cohort graduates think about their work and perform day to day once they are on the job?

Other Questions about Impact on Practice

What are programs, particularly cohort-based programs, doing to assure that students have the skills to improve, for example, classroom teaching? How can program designers and evaluators know, additionally, if a teacher improves because of a graduate's intervention? Then, how can a program know that the teacher's improvement positively affects student outcomes? Alternatively, does a graduate's molding of a school's culture toward high outcome expectations actually improve student performance? What measures can be used to determine these results? How can programs determine how effectively cohorts determine these results or support knowledge and skill acquisition in these areas?

The questions can go on and on, depicting multiple arenas in which effective principals have to apply their knowledge and skills. Can program instructors backtrack to preparation programs to see what learning opportunities might have led to or supported the outcomes of interest? On the other hand, can programs ask what knowledge, skills, and dispositions "make" an effective principal, perhaps using standards developed by various national and state agencies? If so, can they test whether cohort or other programs effectively implement learning opportunities that connect to these standards? Finally, is it possible to establish whether such standards and instructional practices actually have an impact on practice? To demonstrate this impact, programs will have to have clear plans at the outset of a particular cohort—or other—program that connect instructional intent with later outcomes.

Data Collection Processes and Methods for a National Research Agenda

Obtaining meaningful data about student performance in educational leadership preparation programs requires a balance between local autonomy and standardization. Using only standardized measures, such as paper-and-pencil tests, has been criticized as an ineffective

way to determine an individual's ability to lead a school organization. Reliance on such measures also tends to homogenize programs (Horn, 2001b). What is needed is a multi-dimensional approach to data collection. Thus, the shared expertise of practitioners and professors, informed by research and theories, should drive the data collection process. Outlined below are some of the critical issues to consider when obtaining data at the program, regional, and national levels. In addition, the importance of longitudinal research designs and suggestions for ways of obtaining comparable data across programs are discussed.

Program-Level Data Collection

An ideal guiding principle for a coordinated data collection process is to allow individual programs to collect data appropriate to their context. Such efforts could be coordinated by state accrediting agencies, which establish performance standards and minimum performance outcomes, supplying the foundation for collaborative efforts. While many states have adopted the ISLLC standards (Murphy, 2001), some unrest still exists among states, professors, and professional associations about whether these standards reflect what should be taught and assessed in programs (Glasman et al., 2002). Further, individual programs may tend to focus preparation on core concepts such as the political dimensions of leadership, change and innovation, instructional leadership, or social justice. Hence, at the program level, faculty are urged to design assessments that blend data for external audiences and for local program improvement (Glasman et al., 2002).

Program-level data allow faculty to conduct self-evaluations, which can provide feedback on program coherence (Muth, 2000) and lead to program redesign. One recent example of the method of a standards-based program of self-evaluation has been advanced by Glasman et al. (2002). Their program asks students to compile data about a set of core leadership standards, which are evaluated by a faculty committee. For each of the core standards—vision, culture, organizational management, collaboration, contexts, ethical behavior, and work experience—faculty identify the performance expectations emphasized in the program and the criteria used to judge students' performance on these standards. With the guidance of the faculty, students develop a leadership portfolio, which provides evidence related to the performance expectations for each of the seven standards. The portfolio artifacts include student-produced written materials, audio tapes, and videotapes as well as assessments of their field-based experiences by

educators who worked with them during their clinical practice. Based on the results of these assessments, faculty committees may request more information from those students who have not met a standard. In addition, program faculty may alter the curriculum and instructional delivery for those standards where many students are struggling. Although this approach is extremely ambitious, it provides a working model for programs to consider in building a continuous-improvement, standards-based evaluation process.

Regional Data Collection

Besides collecting information about student performance that is program specific, comparable data can be developed across programs within a geographical region. In many cases, these regional standards or performance criteria are those advanced by state licensing agencies. While most program faculty view state accreditation as an overly regulatory, low-stakes endeavor (Glasman, et al., 2002), faculty might be more motivated to engage in the process if it were seen as a means for program renewal and improvement. Because most state-level accrediting agencies specify particular standards for graduates of educational leadership preparation, programs within a state or region might band together to determine appropriate types of common data needs and collect such data across the programs. If designed within the larger, national context, such efforts might have even greater potential for impact on practice.

Through collaborative efforts, faculty in different institutions can learn what others are doing, seek funding support together to assist in their data collection efforts, and incorporate a "clearinghouse" structure for sharing and developing preparation and assessment practices (Muth & Barnett, 2001). Recent funding opportunities from the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds (2001), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) (2001), and other foundations provide models for helping faculty with such regional initiatives. The EEELP and NCAELP could foster such regional efforts as more localized and sensitive ways to address local and regional program needs and outcome preferences.

National Data Collection

To build the reputation of the educational leadership profession, a national database needs to be developed that facilitates the collection, maintenance, and use of comparable data. These data can focus program-improvement efforts as well as publicize the performance of program completers. Such efforts, however, undoubtedly will require the collaboration of multiple

constituencies, including educational leadership faculty and college administrators, practitioners, and professional associations. The biggest challenge in creating a national database is gaining the cooperation and participation of significant numbers of institutions. One approach would be to have an existing accrediting agency, such as NCATE, take the lead. On the one hand, participating colleges and universities already must submit evidence of student performance outcomes on a common set of NCATE standards, increasing the possibility of obtaining comparable data across programs for use in national assessments of program outcomes and impacts. On the other hand, because the data format and types of information may not be uniform across programs, comparability of data could be difficult to achieve.

A different tack might involve a non-accrediting organization maintaining a national database. For example, the UCEA Center for the Study of Patterns of Professional Preparation in Administration has a record of collecting and reporting data about trends in leadership preparation. If the center undertook such data gathering, the scope of its work would expand beyond UCEA's current institutions and capacity, and substantial increases in funding would be required. At present, UCEA centers are self-supporting and do not receive much financial assistance from the organization or from their host universities. Even so, this more centralized alternative might be easier to establish and have wider reach than would multiple separate regional efforts.

In addition, the newly formed NCAELP might be particularly appropriate for coordinating such a national effort. Part of NCAELP's charge is to develop action plans for program improvement and evaluation (Young et al., 2002). The commission is in its infancy and, without substantial resources, will not be able to coordinate a massive, nationwide data-collection and research-management effort. Yet, either NCAELP or UCEA would have the potential for concerted, collective, national action, just what educational administration requires to develop the structures and processes necessary to professionalize the field.

Longitudinal Design

Besides determining the types of data to obtain, serious attention must be devoted to when and how evidence should be collected. For example, it is evident that longitudinal research designs are required to assess the value-added nature of preparation alternatives (Orr, 2002). A framework for evaluating professional development programs, proposed by Guskey and Sparks

(1991), might serve as a template for the types of data to collect at different points in time. In particular, Guskey and Sparks suggest that information be collected about how individuals have been affected (i.e., impact of the learning environment and its relation to learning outcomes) and how their learning has translated into practice (i.e., impact of innovations, application of skills in the workplace, influence on student learning, etc.). This framework has direct implications for graduate programs because data from program participants will need to be collected at multiple points in time: (a) prior to program admission, (b) during the program, (c) at program completion, and (d) at the time when graduates actually engage in leadership positions.

Rarely are baseline data collected about educational leadership preparation program candidates that would allow comparisons with data collected at later points in a program, following its completion, or after program graduates are in leadership positions. While many programs use evidence about applicants' academic potential (e.g., GRE scores, grade point averages, and letters of recommendation) and their leadership capabilities (e.g., recommendations from practicing school leaders and personal interviews) for making admission decisions (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho, 2002), such information has not been related to subsequent performance in the program.

Recent suggestions urge faculty to consider additional information in making admission decisions, such as candidates' ability to reflect and their commitment to social justice (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Nevertheless, current practices provide little information about what students know and are able to do when they begin the program—and how such knowledge and skills can enhance learning processes. Without such data, it is virtually impossible to determine with any confidence just how (or whether) a program influences students' knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Thus, baseline data need to be obtained and compared to similar assessments throughout the program, at its conclusion, and as the graduates begin their first—and later—administrative positions. One way to obtain pre-program data is to use performance assessments, such as those used in the NASSP Assessment Center, that are related to what is exemplary about on-the-job performance. Besides obtaining written information, some programs require candidates to complete in-basket exercises, make presentations, engage in small-group activities, and participate in interviews, which are evaluated by faculty and practitioner teams (Milstein et al.,

1993). In this way, candidates' performances can be used not only for admission decisions but also for comparisons with similar assessments conducted later on.

The standards-based approach advocated by Glasman et al. (2002), for example, could be used to determine types of information to obtain about knowledge, skills, and dispositions. In addition, educational leadership programs that align their programs with national standards, such as those advocated by ISLLC or NCATE, can use these standards to guide data collection at all points along the way. Besides becoming benchmarks for admission and student performance, these data can serve as formative assessments for ongoing program revisions. Regardless of the data collected, some data need to parallel those collected prior to the program, thus ensuring comparability for ascertaining growth in knowledge and skills and their potential transfer to practice.

Finally, data can be gathered after graduates have completed the program. On the one hand, information can be obtained as they begin new school leadership positions. For instance, studies of beginning principals provide valuable data about how preparation programs have affected their attitudes and performance (Barnett, 2001; Berg, 2001; Peel et al., 1998), as well as the progressing stages of development experienced by school leaders (Hart, 1993; Weindling, 2000). In addition, research designs can obtain information from co-workers about graduates' leadership skills (Leithwood et al., 1995). On the other hand, follow-up investigations with graduates who have not taken formal leadership positions also can reveal how programs have influenced their workplace attitudes and behaviors.

Comparability of Data

One of the advantages of gathering comparable data at the regional or national level would be to determine trends and patterns in leadership preparation. However, when collecting, maintaining, and publicizing these assessments, several precautions should be taken. First, comparisons must be sensitive to local variations and contexts. Individual programs need to determine what data to share publicly—perhaps agreeing to and being provided standardized guidelines for data presentation—without using a "one size fits all" approach. In this way, professors and programs could build ownership in data collection and distribution processes. Second, the same type of information must be available across programs. This requires agreements about the domains to be assessed, which might include the performance standards of

professional associations or the outcomes-based standards identified by Glasman et al. (2002). The EEELP initiative is particularly alert to this issue, urging nevertheless that core-learning competencies and instructional standards must be identified, measured, and reported (Orr, 2002). Finally, when information is compared and contrasted across programs, making relative value judgments about whether programs are excelling or floundering should be avoided. If this data-collection endeavor is perceived to be a norm-referenced summative assessment, then faculty will be very reluctant to participate. If, however, information is available about the types of data being collected for different learning domains or core competencies and how students in preparation programs perform in these areas, then the profession can learn how programs affect students' skills and knowledge without chastising or punishing individual programs.

Data Collection Agendas

Several ongoing projects point to the importance of collecting data about the performance of students in educational leadership preparation programs. As mentioned earlier, the goals and expectations of the EEELP and the NCAELP underscore the importance of gathering and sharing inter-institutional data. Although these calls to arms are essential in pointing the profession in the right direction, such initiatives clearly need an organizational structure and funding base to implement their goals (Orr, 2002). Professors acting alone will have considerable difficulty mustering the human and financial resources needed to conduct such a massive effort. What needs to occur—the driving force behind the formation of the NCAELP—is a collaborative approach because "no single organization, group or individual can create the kind of changes for leadership preparation that our nation's children need and deserve" (Young et al., 2002, p. 140).

To advance current collaborative plans, it is worth considering merging the efforts of the EEELP and NCAELP (and, perhaps, UCEA's center). Not only would professors feel their involvement in reform is appreciated and respected, the work already completed by EEELP could provide momentum and direction for NCAELP. Besides creating common goals and operational structures, this consortium would need to search for external funding to carry out the type of data management processes already outlined. Without these resources, efforts may fall on individuals with other demanding professional commitments and lack focused attention.

Conducting meetings and commissioning articles is a very useful first step, yet the serious work of designing and implementing data collection efforts of the scope proposed requires long-

term commitment. Although hiring data collection and management specialists for short time periods would be valuable, having a cadre of full-time professionals devoted to this task is essential. Without the necessary human and financial capital, a coordinated data collection effort is not likely to be realized, and the opportunity to influence educational leadership preparation and promote national professionalization will be lost.

Developing Long-term, Nationwide Collaborative Research Partnerships and Strategies

A nationwide longitudinal study about the effectiveness of cohorts in university-based educational leadership programs is needed. Undertaking such an expansive research effort, however, is not for the faint of heart. The challenges in developing a long-term collaborative—and sustainable—research design that provides meaningful and comparative findings across university and state boundaries need to be identified and addressed. In addition, an investigation of this proposed magnitude may well influence the field both positively and negatively. Thus, the research designers should be clear about what needs national attention and what consequences might follow a focus on those needs.

Broad-based partnerships, for example, are necessary to ensure that a focus on cohorts connects to desired reform outcomes. Inclusive collaboration in design and implementation involves a critical mass of leadership educators and preparation programs as well as representatives of professional organizations, accreditation agencies, and policy-study groups. The significant body of extant literature, both research based and critical of current preparation programs, provides rationale and guidance for conducting such large-scale inquiry. Nonetheless, important design issues must be clarified, time lines established, and actions—not continued rhetoric—initiated.

Developing an Agenda for Reform: Comparability and Sustainability

A first decision to be made in designing a nationwide collaborative study is to determine what types of cohorts within administrator preparation programs will be studied. While the current spotlight is on the effectiveness of programs that prepare K-12 school leaders, all graduates from educational administration programs ultimately influence the effectiveness of administrative practice. Thus, will outcome studies purposefully limit their focus only to cohorts leading to credentialing of K-12 school administrators, or will they include doctoral cohorts that

prepare district and college administrators and new entrants into the educational administration professoriate? Further, many preparation programs are delivered through differing formats to meet specific constituent needs or environmental influences. Some cohorts meet face-to-face regularly at local sites. Other cohort programs are delivered predominately through distance-learning technologies with asynchronous online participant interaction and limited, if any, face-to-face connections among students and instructors. Thus, will these studies be limited to face-to-face cohorts, or will they also include virtual cohorts?

A second consideration in planning nationwide studies of cohorts is establishing the criteria for comparable units, namely defining what a cohort is. Most research has been limited to students that "take all or a significant portion of their course work with an intact group rather than randomly enrolling in courses at their own pace" (Barnett et al., 2000, p. 1). Using this definition of a cohort may limit findings about the influence of preparation programs on eventual administrator practice. What about loosely coupled "cohorts" of students that begin programs together and follow a prescribed sequence of courses that also includes students who do not follow a fast-track completion schedule or who take only selected courses as part of other administrative certification programs? Do quasi-cohorts (i.e., groups of learners formed only for intensive orientation or formed informally by course scheduling) need to be included because loosely coupled "cohorts" may provide peer support and group learning that influences later professional practice? Might the sequencing or types of courses or other learning activities need to be considered to see if they have greater effects than those attributable to how students progress from start to completion of a program?

Additionally, research reports about cohorts have most often emerged from studies focused on specific groups of 15 to 25 learners that spanned inquiry intervals of 3 to 18 months or used data collected at the close of programs, thus providing only snapshots of the cohorts. Many preparation programs leading to K-12 administrator certification or licensure extend over two or more years, yet little is known about the benefits or drawbacks of extended cohort membership (Maher, 2001). Thus, do issues about cohort membership size and their time duration need to be clarified in order to compare findings across sites? Comparability of findings may also be influenced by faculty perceptions about the value of using cohorts in leadership

preparation programs (Barnett et al., 2000), perhaps introducing researcher bias. What strategies need to be used to counteract potential limitations due to bias for or against cohorts?

Administrative licensure of K-12 school leaders is controlled by state agencies that have adopted professional standards for the preparation, evaluation, and practice of educational administrators. Thus, preparation programs, approved by state agencies and accredited by NCATE, are grounded upon administrator standards (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2002; Muth, 2002a) that define preparation and practice outcomes. Forty states have adopted the ISLLC Standards or correlated their standards to align with the ISLLC recommendations, while ten states have either adopted their own administrator standards or eliminated licensure completely. Hence, another design issue related to comparability of findings involves determining what students need to know and be able to do as effective school principals. A nagging problem arises again: How do we define an effective principal? Do ISLLC or NCATE standards directly link to leadership efficacy? If so, in what ways?

Another consideration in the research design concerns sustainability. Undertaking longitudinal studies that span several years and involve multiple inquiry sites require researcher commitment and institutional support. Thus, will study sites be limited only to cohorts at research universities where faculty time and effort is oriented toward inquiry, or will such studies include institutions in which faculty focus primarily on teaching and service? And, does institutional type or orientation have an affect on program outcomes and later practice? Additionally, collecting program participant data at intervals recommended earlier in this paper (before, during, at the end, and after the program) requires institutional approval for human subjects study and deliberate attention to meeting time-sensitive benchmarks. Careful and collaborative preplanning and research oversight is required to ensure that findings yield valid and comparable data.

Another challenge to project sustainability relates to the researchers involved. Because this proposed investigation is intentionally long term, how will local studies be designed to combat researcher relocation or retirement? Sustainability of research also requires tracing graduate career progress following program completion. Thus, databases will be needed that are continually updated to track contact information. Maintaining graduate databases within administrator preparation programs would be ideal, but the reality is that programs seldom have

the resources or even the interest in database management. Labor costs are immense, and most programs nationally are quite small and lack resources. Potential support for tracking graduate whereabouts may be available from state licensing agencies, university alumni organizations, or even school-district offices. However, release of personal information may be restricted by state statute. Thus, study sites will need to develop mechanisms for tracking program graduates over their careers in educational leadership.

Determining the Agenda: First Steps, Next Steps

Reviews of the need to reform university-based administrator preparation programs became extensive in the mid-1980s and after. Since then, more than a decade of responses have ensued (Forsyth & Murphy, 1999; Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; Milstein & Associates, 1993; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; Murphy, 1992, 2002; Usdan, 2002). Researchers from both UCEA and non-UCEA institutions have studied cohorts and shared their findings through presentations at professional conferences, articles in journals, and chapters in books. Their conclusions repeatedly cite a need for more research. Thus, the time is now (McCarthy, 2001) for teams of dedicated researchers to develop proposals for long-term, nationwide, collaborative research designs that allow flexibility and encourages the participation of most preparation programs.

The Future: Both Positive and Negative

Launching a nationwide collaborative research agenda about cohorts presents several major stumbling blocks. The first, and perhaps the most critical, is maintaining an invitational stance that encourages many to join the inquiry. Investigations need to include those professors who perceive both benefits and disadvantages to using cohorts in administrator preparation programs. Because the purpose of this nationwide study is to gather empirical evidence about the influence of cohorts on professional practice of educational practitioners, project designers need to seek involvement and commitment from a broad group of researchers and supporters. Long-term, nationwide studies of cohorts need to acknowledge existing realities: Leadership preparation programs, even within the same state, vary considerably due to university or college purposes and service orientations, political and locational conditions and constraints, and departmental composition and preferences.

Nationwide involvement by a wide field of investigators can create a second stumbling block: engaging a committed team of experienced and novice researchers to sustain the project. Conducting longitudinal studies requires continuing researcher and participant attention, which can become difficult to maintain over time. Thus, the research design must include strategies to ensure continuing participation at study sites. Another stumbling block linked to sustainability is financial support. The project needs to be coordinated by a group that has the credibility to attract and maintain the resources necessary to dedicate time and personnel to the project's maintenance delivery of promised products and outcomes. Unless faculty can gain releases from other responsibilities, the demands of coordinating a national effort and connecting to multiple sites will become too onerous to be handled by a few far-flung professors. Thus, a Center for the Study of Program Effectiveness needs to be created—perhaps as part of the EEELP or NCAELP efforts—and supported by external monies sufficient to develop long-term, coherent baseline data collection processes.

A third potential stumbling block for this project involves overcoming the dualities common to many universities and colleges. Most professors must conform to restrictions that focus on stability of expectations, even while engaging in innovative applications of and research on instructional models that meet demands of the field, of innovators in teaching and learning, and of accrediting agencies. Another issue associated with long-term studies is the cessation of cohort models because of changed institutional missions or support resources, decreases in students, or the exit of key faculty.

Even given these negatives, developing a research project that clearly outlines goals, objectives, and tasks to be accomplished can consolidate many efforts. First, university programs or individual researchers can use the project to mold research designs to unique local contexts, and individual study sites can identify to which parts of the broader research agenda they can contribute. Second, and critically important to the success of this endeavor, a broad-based research project is more likely to attract significant external funding. Prospects for receiving major financial support may be greater if cohort-specific research becomes a fifth component of the EEELP project, further diminishing the appearance of disconnected research priorities.

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