Prevalence of Evaluation Method Courses in Education Leader Doctoral Preparation

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This exploratory study investigated the prevalence of single evaluation methods courses in doctoral education leadership programs. Analysis of websites of 132 leading U.S. university programs found 62 evaluation methods courses in 54 programs. Content analysis of 49 course catalog descriptions resulted in five categories: survey, planning and implementation, research and inquiry, leadership and school improvement, special approaches, and original student research. Most often elective and outside the required curriculum, evaluation methods appear to hold a consistent but secondary place in doctoral leadership training, despite its applicability in education.

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that effective school leadership results in more successful students, and that worldwide, school systems seek leaders with skills to handle the multiple responsibilities of using data, informing decisions, and making assessments to ensure programs benefit learning especially at the local or site level (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Lauer, 2006; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). Yet, relatively few studies have investigated research course content (Bustamante & Combs, 2011; Huck, 2008), and even fewer have examined evaluation methods training in preparation programs (Shepperson & Fierro, 2010). Pragmatic in nature, evaluation seems valuable to administrators who make decisions about the utility, effectiveness, and consequences of programs. In an era of accountability and data-based decisions, assessment, and evaluation would seem important content in the professional preparation of education leaders.

Therefore, empirical study to examine the scope of research training and specifically the inclusion of single courses in evaluation in education leader preparation is warranted. This study sought to address this gap by analyzing evaluation course titles and descriptions in education leadership doctoral programs across the United States. Course offerings were explored in 132 doctoral programs at research universities and colleges in 43 states and the District of Columbia. In all, a total of 62 course titles, and 49 catalog course descriptions, from 54 programs were analyzed. Implications of findings allowed conclusions about the relevance or importance of evaluation methods in education leadership preparation programs.

LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND

Educational Evaluation Defined

Evaluation is a broad field within applied social science in which practitioners collect, interpret, and communicate information to improve the effectiveness of institutions and programs (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Iconic definitions include Scriven's (1967) description of evaluation as a systematic process to determine the quality or value of a program or product. Practitioners display a range of methods, and work within multiple arenas, but retain the overarching goal to make programs work better to solve social programs through an idealized sequence of recognizing a problem, applying alternative solutions, evaluating new approaches, and adopting those that seem most suitable (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991). Working in multiple fields, evaluation has expanded with training programs, professional associations, research and practitioner journals, and codes of professional practice guiding evaluation's growing position as a profession (AEA, 2012; Shadish, 1998).

Educational evaluation in the United States is largely derived from the growth of the federal role in education which is marked with the 1965 passage of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, in response to federal policies for monitoring and assessing student performance, and the expanded role of state and district education offices to manage assessment information. Supported by *Phi Delta Kappa*, The National Study Committee on Evaluation produced a watershed report acknowledging the inexperience of school administrators and university professors in evaluation and providing a detailed discussion of evaluation approaches for education (Stufflebeam, Foley, Gephard, Guba, Hammond, Merriman, & Provus, 1971). These single method approaches have been built upon at least in part by expanding accountability requirements and the current Office of Educational Research and Improvement's (OERI) gold standard for experimental and quasi-experimental education research (Rudalevige, 2009).

Accountability and its growing national and global trend represent a large portion of educational evaluation. Yet, schools regularly conduct small scale evaluations to solve localized and immediate problems (Greene, 1994; Mertens, 2008; Stake, 2010). This has led to some innate tension between the science of measurement and more culturally sensitive, participatory, and natural methods (Ryan & Cousins, 2009). Christie and Klein (2009) argue that standardized accountability need not preclude local decision-making. Rather, habitual accountability may breed a climate of review and reflection, increase evaluative practice, improve a school's capacity to self-assess, and ultimately advance achievement (Ryan & Feller, 2009).

Evaluation in Education Literature

Evaluation researchers publish on educational topics and in educational journals. Heberger, Christie, and Alkin's (2010) bibliometric study found that educational evaluation retains an influential position within education literature. When randomly sampled, the cited references from nine evaluation theorists (Campbell, Rossi, Weiss, Stufflebeam, Patton, Preskill, Scriven, House, and Eisner) totaled 3,791 articles of which 866, (22.8%) fit within the category of education and educational research. Among the top 22 journals in which these select evaluation theorists published, a total of nine were educational journals, including *Phi*

Delta Kappan, Journal of Teacher Education, Journal of Educational Measurement, Alberta Journal of Educational Research, Teacher College Record, Curriculum Inquiry, and Journal of Aesthetic Education, and two on education leadership, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, and *Educational Leadership*.

Teaching Evaluation in Education

Research on teaching evaluation within education programs is limited in scope and depth and much is extrapolated from cross disciplinary studies. A 1986 issue of *New Directions for Program Evaluation* was devoted to the teaching of evaluation across many disciplines including education where it most often related to behavioral testing and measurement in departments of Educational Psychology (Sanders, 1986). Elsewhere, program evaluation courses were found across disciplines, generally focused on introduction to the discipline, design and methodology, and planning and implementation (Connors, 1986; Davis, 1986, Kronenfeld, 1981; Sanders, 1986). Delivery remained largely lecture-based, sometimes incorporating practicum or role-playing experiences, but usually limited to one stand-alone course (Alkin & Christie, 2002; Fierro, n.d.; Trevison, 2004). Learning outcomes were generally limited to the level of informed consumer rather than proficient user, perhaps with the intention that awareness might translate into later professional practice (Donaldson, 2007; Morris, 1994), and in keeping with the notion that professional training, especially at the graduate level, involves learning what Golde (2007) calls "disciplinary norms and identities" (p. 344) more than in-depth understanding of evaluation (Stevahn, King, Ghere, & Minnema, 2005). This precedence suggests evaluation was to varying degrees integrated into discipline content, and that single course offerings remain a viable unit to measure the prevalence of evaluation training within academic programs.

Recent work by LaVelle and Donaldson (2010) points to a strong association between evaluation training, schools of education, and university-based graduate programs in evaluation. The authors found web-based evidence of 48 institutions offering at least two courses in evaluation at the graduate level, with 35 of these offering a specialization or concentration in evaluation. A majority, 29 (60.4%) of these were located in schools of education, of which two were leadership programs. Those departments within schools of education with evaluation programs mainly conferred doctoral degrees, including 36 with PhD and 4 with EdD degrees, with one education specialist (EdS) and five master's (MEd or EdM) programs. While these associations may not directly indicate evaluation training for students in educational leadership, it does suggest a continued relationship of evaluation, psychometrics, research, and graduate education programs.

Education Leader Preparation

There are estimated to be nearly 600 doctoral education leader preparation programs in the United States (Berry & Beach, 2009; Shoho, 2010). Many programs suffered reputations as neither scholarly nor providing the practical skills needed by those who would run schools, districts, and state agencies. Arthur Levine's (2005) well publicized indictment of educational administration as a field "rooted neither in practice nor research, offering programs that fail to prepare school leaders." (p.61) was one among many criticisms of a preparation system that was considered at least partly to blame for the poor performance of American public schools

(Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007; Fullan, 2007). Historically, leading school administration journals showed few investigations into leadership preparation (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004). That has changed and recent preparation research has focused on practitioner training and competencies, including alignment with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Education Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Leadership research, growth of professional organizations, development of standards, and preparation needs had largely benefitted from major foundation support, which has been prevalent since the 1950s (Murphy,Young, Crow, & Ogawa, 2009; Milstein, 1993; Orr, Cordeiro, Thome, & Martinez, 2010).

Standards for educational administrators from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), represent an internal process that Murphy (2003) referred to as "reculturing the profession" (p. 5) from the 20th century school management model into a contemporary profession focused on students, learning, and teaching (Donaldson, 2001). The ISLLC standards suggest competencies that could be construed as evaluative, including data-based decision making, instructional assessment, assurance of effective management and safe environments, and responsiveness to community interests (ISLLC, 2008; Wright & Gray, 2007). Two examples include under Standard 1, Performance, that states that a school administrator should ensure that "*the vision, mission, and implementation plans are regularly monitored, evaluated, and revised*" (ISLLC, 2008). Under Standard 2, Performance, it reads that a school administrator has knowledge and understanding of "*measurement, evaluation, and assessment strategies*" (ISSLC, 2008). The term evaluation is only listed five times in the document. Although it is only occasionally explicitly stated, the ISLLC standards indicate evaluative competencies for effective school leaders and therefore imply their presence in preparation.

Other research centered on redesign of doctoral programs includes redesigned programs which are better suited to practitioners (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010; Walstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010). These are found at a growing number of higher education institutions, sometimes through the *Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate*, which seeks relevant curriculum and clinical experiences, and a more explicitly divide between scholarly pursuit of a dissertation and a PhD from experiential problem-solving and an EdD practitioner degree (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2010; Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006).

Gap in Literature

Studies in education leadership competencies and preparation rarely involve discussion of applied evaluation methods. Absent from existing literature is a clear picture about evaluation training as a skill to assist leaders in making or supporting decisions (Shadish, 1994). No information was found in the review of literature about the prevalence of or the frequency with which students completed single courses of evaluation within preparation programs for education leaders. Empirical studies that systematically examine curricula within school leadership programs most often focused on master's degrees, the customary degree for district and site administrators. The existing literature describes an environment within education that promotes training for evidence-based decision making to inform classroom, school, and system level practices accelerated by accountability policies under *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* legislation. Administrator credentialing and university program accreditation

standards hint to but do not specify that evaluation competencies are required outcomes of preparation programs, despite the predominance of graduate programs in evaluation within colleges of education and occasionally within departments that also train education leaders.

THE STUDY

The study was based on a line of thinking that doctoral education leader preparation programs teach practitioners to use data to ensure effective education programs, problem-solve on school and systems levels, and understand the impact of policy on practice. No matter how minute the differences, evaluation training provides competencies and knowledge useful to school leaders, and it is likely that at least some programs would include single courses in evaluation methods in their program of study. Just as other research courses present skill sets and reinforce scientific habits of the mind, evaluation courses also equip graduates to act as informed consumers; provide strategies for assessing outcomes, impacts, or costs of programs; and ensure some level of proficiency to use data for decision making.

Four principal research questions guided this inquiry:

1. To what extent are single courses in evaluation prevalent in education leader doctoral programs?
2. How likely are students to take an evaluation course in a doctoral program?
3. What course content is evident from course titles?
4. What course content is evidence from catalog descriptions?

Sample Selection

Institutions were initially identified through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as high or very high research doctoral-granting institutions. They were cross referenced against Educational Administration and Supervision programs listing in the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) College Navigator search engine of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). Six categories of programs related to education leadership within the College Navigator drop-down were reviewed for inclusion in the study. Category headings included *administration*; *elementary, middle, and secondary principalship*; *superintendency and systems administration*; and *urban education leadership*. To verify program status, further university, college, department, and program website searches provided specific program titles, verification of active status, doctoral degree type (PhD or EdD), and additional confirmation of PK-12 administrator focus. Cases in which website information was inconclusive, phone calls were made directly to departments or registrars to ensure a focus on PK-12 administration at the doctoral level.

The search resulted in a total of 132 programs, located in 43 states and in the District of Columbia. Programs were defined as a series of courses, seminars, practicum, and other requirements that prepared a student for school administration positions in PK-12 settings and led to a terminal degree. Although not restricted to practitioner preparation, programs needed to include a PK-12 administrator track. Of these, 67 offered Doctorates in Education (EdD), 39 granted Doctors of Philosophy (Phd), 26 offered both EdD and PhD options, and one institution, Harvard University offered both an EdD and an Educational Doctorate in Leadership (EDLD). Programs excluded were those solely geared to higher education; those not currently accepting applicants or discontinued; distance or online programs managed by

continuing education; programs in leadership outside the field of education (*organizational leadership*, *non-profit management*); or, programs or concentrations tangential to school leadership (including *measurement and statistics*, *curriculum and instruction*, *educational technology*, *elementary and secondary education teaching*, and subject-specific teaching).

While *Educational Leadership* was the first and *Educational Administration* the second most prevalent title, other common program labels included: *Administration of Elementary and Secondary Education, Administration and Policy Analysis, Administration and Supervision, Educational Foundations and Leadership*, among others. While it is feasible that graduates from other programs take administrative roles, the central purpose of those programs was not preparation for administrator training. Rather, focus of the study was on programs described as preparing students for practitioner positions at school, district, state, or federal levels.

Data Management, Collection, and Analysis

To identify existing evaluation courses, institution, department, and doctoral program websites were searched and online documents mined to examine programs of study. Three major data sets were delineated from online searches and review of programs of study. All 132 programs were reviewed for evidence of single courses in evaluation, based on the presence of the word evaluation in the title. Courses solely oriented to personnel or teacher evaluation procedures or policies were not included as outside the parameters of this study. Lists of courses, programs of study, and department websites also were scrutinized for the extent to which the course was required, elective, or optional. Microsoft Word and Excel, and Wordle word cloud technologies were used to aid data management and analyses (McNaught & Lam, 2010). For this study, the procedures served as worthwhile strategies to recognize patterns of evaluation training in education leader doctoral programs.

Because a major goal of the study was to identify the relative importance of evaluation courses within the doctoral programs, in all cases possible frequency analysis was completed, under the assumption that a course considered valuable would more often be found in programs of study. Additionally, content analysis included development of categories of courses that also were counted to establish the relative presence of certain content over other. Once course titles and catalog course descriptions were transferred into an Excel spreadsheet, they underwent content analysis using multiple cycle coding. For both titles and descriptions, first cycle initial and theme coding was first used to categorize entries. For catalog descriptions, second cycle focused coding was used to distinguish major content elements (Saldana, 2010).

Study Limitations

Websites were the primary data source, although follow-up phone and/or email verifications were made in a few cases to obtain course catalog descriptions when not navigable online. Online data searches have increasingly become an alternative method to records and document data collection (LeVelle & Donaldson, 2010). Advantages to web-based research include ease of collection, availability of descriptive and frequency data, access to contextual information, and cost-efficiency (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). Disadvantages include time constraints, inaccessibility of some data, incomplete representation of programs, and sample

limitations dependent on individual program web presence. Another disadvantage particular to this study was the fluctuating nature of website redesign and updates. This data must be considered particularly time-sensitive. Collected in early Spring 2010, updates in websites and changes in program curricula will have occurred since the study, thus placing limits on ability to replicate and current accuracy. However, point-in-time research provides a useful first step to identifying the prevalence of stand-alone courses and perceived importance of evaluation as a competency in doctoral education leadership programs.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Prevalence of single evaluation courses

Of the 132 leadership programs investigated, fewer than half, or 54 (40.9%) had evaluation methods courses. In all, 49 (90.7%) programs were found to have just one evaluation methods course, although five programs (9.2%) listed two separate courses, and one program (1.8%) had a three course sequence entitled educational research and evaluation.

Finding 2: Likeliness of students to take evaluation courses

In 54 programs, a total of 62 evaluation courses were identified and program websites were investigated to see whether the courses were required. The smallest group, 16 (25.8%) were required courses in the program of study. Another 18 (29%) appeared to be electives among a short list of possible selections with at least a 50% chance of being selected. The largest number, 28 (45.2%) appear to be optional, one among many possible program elective courses. Required courses were usually found in online brochures or programs of study, within a list of courses to be taken. Elective evaluation courses were on a list of electives that indicated a reasonable chance of selection, for example one of six elective courses in which three courses must be taken. More commonly, evaluation courses were listed among a long list of electives or other class options statistically far less likely to be selected, for example a list of six course electives in programs in which students might normally select only one or two courses or substitute other options.

Finding 3: Course content and titles

In general, course titles specified education, administrative functions, or research. The evaluation courses most often specifically referred to education, schools, learning organizations, or curriculum in 37 (59.7%) of the cases. Besides a focus on education, the titles were organized into three categories as shown in Table 1. Of the 62 courses, the largest group of 25 (40.3%) titles included the words program evaluation, with headings such as *Curriculum and Program Evaluation, Educational Organizations and Programs*, and *Implementation and Evaluation of Programs*. A group of 21 (33.9%) courses were categorized as administration courses with varied titles, such as *Administrative Decision Making; Planning, Research, Evaluation for School Leaders;* and *Evaluation of Educational Products and Systems.* A smaller third group of 16 (25.8%) titles were research courses, with titles such as *Evaluation Research and Measurement*, *Evaluation Models and Techniques*, or *Methods of Evaluation.*

Those titles that mentioned research, methods, models, or design, were generally less clear about the type of research, although quantitative research and statistics were suggestive for five (8.1%) courses which had the words measure or measurement in the title.

Table 1
Content Analysis of Evaluation Course Titles

Theme	*n*	%	Example Course Titles
Program Evaluation	25	40.3	Educational Program Evaluation Program Planning and Evaluation
Administration	21	33.9	Evaluation in Educational Administration Systematic Evaluation
Research	16	25.8	Evaluation Research & Measurement Evaluation Methods
(*n*=62)			

Finding 4: Course content and catalog descriptions

Of the 62 identified evaluation courses, catalog descriptions for 49 courses were located, analyzed, and coded into the following themes: (a) survey to familiarization of approaches and uses, (b) designs to plan and conduct evaluations, (c) evaluation as research and inquiry, (d) evaluation for leading and improving educational institutions or programs, (e) specialized approaches in evaluation, and (f) original student evaluative projects. As shown in Table 2, the largest group, 17 (34.7%) focus on broad familiarity with evaluation models and uses in education. The second largest category of courses, 10 (20.4%) provided instruction on planning and conducting evaluations. Another 6 (12.2%) courses were oriented to using data to make decisions in educational institutions. Another 8 (16.3%) courses mentioned research and inquiry and both quantitative and qualitative methods in evaluation. A small group of 5 (10.2%) courses were labeled specialized approaches. Two Louisiana institutions mentioned state certification guidelines focused on the standards adopted by national professional evaluation organizations. Another two referenced organizational behavior and environmental and political influences. One institution's course focused on international education policy, monitoring, and evaluation. The smallest category 3 (6.1%) of courses specified independent student projects or completion of an original program evaluation.

Among the 49 course descriptions analyzed, there were a few mentions of specific evaluation strategies, including systems theory, needs assessments, performance measurements, or school self-studies. In no case did a course description focus entirely around politics and policies, although it was mentioned in two cases. There was only one instance that varied school stakeholders and local communities were indicated. In several cases, experimental, quasi-experimental, and statistical analyses were targeted. Only once was the term accountability found in course descriptions. Interestingly, there appeared no link between practical application courses and EdD programs or between more theoretical content and PhD programs.

Table 2
Content Analysis of Evaluation Catalog Course Descriptions

Theme	Example Descriptions from Catalog	Frequency
Survey, Overview	"reviews theories,…designs, analysis, current trends" "introduction to concepts, approaches, techniques" "history, state of the art, frameworks"	17 (34.7%)
Plan, Conduct	"knowledge and skills to plan and conduct" "emphasis on needs assessment, school self-study" "charting course, assessing progress…desired outcomes"	10 (20.4%)
Research, Inquiry	"emphasis on quantitative methodology" "naturalistic and empirical methods and procedures" "action research…empirically evaluating"	8 (16.3%)
Lead, Improve	"use data for decision-making purposes" "enable administrator to develop, implement, evaluate" "application to educational progress"	6 (12.2%)
Specialized	"affect organizational behavior, ethical considerations" "meet standards of National Joint Committee" "environmental practical factors influencing design"	5 (10.2%)
Student Projects	"student develops and carries to completion…study" "design, conduct, report a real program evaluation" "prepare and present designs or program evaluation"	3 (6.1%)
($n = 49$)		

DISCUSSION

This exploratory study was designed in response to the growing interest in reforming preparation programs to better prepare education leaders. In this study, classic content and frequency analyses was combined with web-based technology searches to investigate the actual level of importance of courses in evaluation within leading doctoral programs, nationwide. Programs of study, course titles, and catalog descriptions all provided meaningful information to begin to understand whether the professionalization of evaluation, growth in accountability requirements, and interest in real world applicability of leadership preparation was shown by the extent of evaluation training in leadership doctoral programs.

The discovery of single courses in about half of the doctoral programs investigated suggests that overall evaluation is not a core focus. That half of the programs offered evaluation, however, indicates that evaluation was considered viable and valuable in

education leadership training. While the perceived importance of evaluation methods in specific programs remains unclear, patterns emerging from the data suggest that evaluation appears to be rather consistently taught among doctoral programs in education leadership, although not universally required.

In education, it is difficult to define evaluation, whether the actual processes are assessing student outcomes, appraising teacher performance, analyzing instruction or curriculum, distinguishing program outcomes, or reviewing school milieu (i.e. climate surveys). Evaluation is a term that may reflect any or all of these activities and more (Schwandt, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that about half of the education leadership doctoral programs investigated had courses including the term evaluation. Closer examination of both course titles and catalog descriptions supports the somewhat amorphous application of evaluation methods in education. Titles seem nearly evenly divided among evaluation of programs, administrative uses, and research perspectives. Catalog descriptions leaned towards general survey courses with a broad smattering of other learning objectives, most with clear educational foci. In this sample of education leader preparation programs, evaluation courses are about linking inquiry to feedback on school and classroom functions and outcomes.

Results from this study are pertinent to research on education leader preparation and reform. The discovery that many programs offered at least one evaluation course, usually related to issues in education, and sometimes decision making and research, indicate that evaluative competencies found in other professional and clinical fields may also relevant in education (King, Stevahn, Ghere, & Minnema, 2001). Future studies may seek to delve more deeply into syllabi, texts, and class assignments to better understand course objectives, and whether evaluation is situated more around collecting information, following existing accountability requirements, or making administrative decisions. Of key interest would be whether courses are similar to those investigated in the 1980s, more about informed consumer than skilled user, or if courses reflect current accountability and administrative realities. Also, this study did not link evaluation courses with other research and method courses or with the entirety of programs of study which might explain more clearly the place of evaluation content within preparation programs.

Other implications for future research include a need to sample programs through varied lenses. With the current criticism that preparation is not meeting the needs of on-the-job practitioners, the intense national climate of accountability, and the perception that school leaders play a vital role in refurbishing American education, it seems that evaluation offers some tools useful to future education leaders, but the convention that evaluation is taught as a single or series of single courses somewhat adjacent to the main curriculum appears to hold true. Future studies of newly redesigned programs, could serve to better understand the actual content and learning objectives.

It is not only leading research universities and those involved in foundation-supported programs that are revamping programs of study for education leaders, many public, private, and for-profit institutions increasingly focus degree and certification programs on professional skills and clinical experiences. The bulk of practitioner training takes place at regional and other institutions, many of which have practitioner programs focused on real world application more than traditional academic structure. A look at regional universities, private institutions, and other programs that train practitioners may reveal different results from those as leading academic institutions.

The proximity to strong evaluation and psychometric concentrations might provide interesting comparative case studies into whether evaluation competencies are more keenly integrated in institutions or colleges of education with a psychometric training history. These more selective studies may reveal underlying beliefs, context, and content of evaluation courses and provide information about what institutional or programmatic characteristics and influences lead to inclusion of evaluation in doctoral programs.

Accountability overshadows current discussion of educational evaluation. We are in an era when educational policies require school leaders to collect and analyze information to be used to monitor and improve educational programs. There is a public call and increased professional scrutiny for graduate programs in education leadership to produce candidates with these evaluative competencies. Understanding how leading doctoral programs interpret the need for evaluation methods courses offers a valuable piece in understanding what skills are taught and considered important as programs evolve and produce future school leaders.

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