

Scholarship in School Leadership Preparation: The Unaccepted Challenge

By Philip Hallinger

Over the past 20 years two lines of argument have fostered global interest and investment in the preparation and development of school leaders. First, policymakers have increasingly come to the conclusion that education is a critical lever in social, economic, and cultural development, and that leadership is a necessary factor in creating quality educational systems.¹ A second line of argument is grounded in the belief that the personal professional learning of leaders is a fundamental precondition for the creation of a learning community.² Proponents of investment in leadership preparation are, however, too often forced to rely on an uneasy policy logic patched together out of indirect research sources, personal experience, and rhetoric. What role could the journal play in addressing this problem? In this brief essay, I will offer a few thoughts.

Does Leadership Make a Difference?

The focus on leadership preparation is grounded primarily in the belief that school leaders make a difference in schools. A body of literature supports this contention and has begun to identify the means by which school leaders achieve results.³ In recent years, however, the trend of scholarly discussion – if not empirical investigation -- has shifted away from whether and how leaders make a difference. Today, the discussion centers on the values that foster effective leadership. This emergent focus is captured in the phrase, “Leadership for what?” Concurrently, the concept of *leadership* has attained a privileged position *vis a vis* its poor relation, *management*.

While space limitations prevent even an abbreviated discussion, I assert that neither set of questions about the role and nature of leadership ought to be privileged; both are important. There can be no disagreement with the observation that, throughout the world, education is a morally-grounded, value-driven enterprise in need of passionate, caring leaders. Nonetheless, nobody who has studied leadership practice in an organizational context or attempted to lead an organization of any size would deny the importance of managerial leadership and management skills for achieving results.

Leadership that makes a difference creates not only an inspiring moral purpose for the school community, but also the management structures and processes that enable the

vision to take hold and thrive in practice.⁴ Even Ken Leithwood's widely-reported empirical research on transformational leadership has confirmed the importance of *management* in sustaining successful school improvement.⁵ I assert that *in the majority of organizational contexts, inspirational leadership without effective management will seldom fulfill and sustain the aspirations it creates*. As organizational theorist James March observed, the role of the educational leader is akin to "creating bus schedules with footnotes from Kierkegaard."⁶ Leadership must be inspirational and skillful, moral and practical, process-driven and results-oriented. These issues concerning the nature and role of leadership must form the foundation of any discussion of leadership preparation.

Does Leadership Preparation Make a Difference?

American education reforms, jump-started in 1982 with publication of the *Nation at Risk* report, went on to reshape the landscape of leadership preparation in the USA.⁷ In 1988, while serving as an education advisor to the state of Tennessee, I responded to a policymaker's query about the impact of principal preparation as follows: "There is no evidence either to validate or even suggest that university preparation programs or state certification makes a difference in the performance of school principals." This observation notwithstanding, over the next two decades the preparation and development of principals and other educational leaders evolved into a growth industry, one which continues to attract increasing *global* interest and investment.⁸

Note, however, that in two respects, the landscape of school leader preparation is little changed since 1987.

1. Global interest in the preparation and development of school leaders continues to be driven first and foremost by the policy logic that leadership makes a difference in reform implementation, school improvement, and student learning.
2. Systematic investigations of the impact, costs, and benefits of preparation programs on participants and their schools are almost as hard to find today as in 1988.

Concurrent with this increased focus on the pre-service preparation of school principals, we also began to see greater interest, first in the USA and then abroad, in the provision of professional development programs for practicing school leaders. In 1992, I edited an issue of *Education and Urban Society* specifically devoted to the evaluation of professional development programs for school principals.⁹ This theme issue presented results from

evaluation and research studies of professional development programs operating in the USA, Canada, Belgium, Sweden, and England. While the chapters described an interesting diversity of professional development models, a salient conclusion concerned the scarcity and methodological limitations of research on professional development programs.

Conclusions

These comments reinforce the potential role that this new journal could play. Values, passion, personal beliefs and commitments will always have an important place in discussions about the direction of a value-driven enterprise. However, as a scholar and leader of an educational institution, it is my own personal hope that 20 years hence, empirical data about the effects of leadership preparation on the participants, their stakeholders, and their organizations will have displaced rhetoric and policy logic as the driving rationale for leadership preparation. This will, however, only occur if we as a community of scholars become more systematic, programmatic, and grounded in our inquiry. As a forum for discussion, the *Journal* can perhaps nudge this process along by framing of issues and communicating global findings about leadership preparation that makes a difference.

¹ Murphy, J. (1992). *The landscape of leadership preparation: Reframing the education of school administrators*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

² Barth, Roland S. (2001). *Learning by heart*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

³ Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal: A passing fancy that refuses to fade away. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 4(3), 221-240.

⁴ Cuban, L. (1988). *The managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Kotter, J. (1990). What do leaders really do? *Harvard Business Review*, 68, 103-111.

⁵ e.g., see Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1999). Transformational leadership effects: A replication, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 10(4), 451-479.

⁶ March, J. G. (1978). American public school administration: A short analysis. *The School Review*, 86(2), 224.

⁷ Hallinger, P. (2003). *Reshaping the landscape of school leadership development: A global perspective*. Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger. Murphy, J. (1992). *The landscape of leadership preparation: Reframing the education of school administrators*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

⁸ Hallinger, P. (2003). *Reshaping the landscape of school leadership development: A global perspective*. Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.

⁹ Hallinger, P. (1992). School leadership development: Evaluating a decade of reform. *Education and Urban Society*, 24(3), 300-316.

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