THEORY INTO PRACTICE: A STUDY TO ASSESS THE INFLUENCE OF A CUSTOMIZED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ON A COHORT OF ASPIRING URBAN LEADERS*

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Abstract

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in conjunction with the Grand Rapids Michigan Public Schools (GRPS) collaborated to implement a Wallace Foundation Grant Program designed to develop urban school leaders. The theoretical constructs of the program were evident in the research on leadership and change. This research formed a basis for the customized program content. Three major constructs were explored: (a) characteristics of effective leadership, (b) change and communities of practice, and c) adults as learners. The program coordinated state standards, integrated district initiatives, and provided the aspiring leaders/candidates with skill sets that could be transferred to current and future settings. The program was created around a cohort model, with participants who were carefully selected for leadership development. The GRPS district leadership chose the participants based on their potential for successful urban school leadership. The implementation of the program by GVSU faculty was based on a unique team teaching approach. The instructional team members were selected based on their urban school leadership experience and their highly successful collegiate teaching experience. GVSU faculty prepared a customized course of study for the cohort participants. Ultimately, the course of study was designed to lead the participants toward a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership or Educational Specialist Degree. There was an expectation that all cohort participants would complete (a) a degree-seeking program, (b) the required courses needed to obtain Basic Administrator Certification, or (c) a Michigan Central Office Endorsement. All aspiring leaders/candidates had a customized planned program prepared for them, outlining how they would be able to complete the course of study A survey of participants at the conclusion of the program strongly indicated the value of the cohort model in their development of skills to be effective urban school leaders. At present, approximately 90% of the cohort participants either remain or have been promoted as urban school administrators.

Sumario en español

En julio, 2008, el Michigan Alineó Sistema del Desarrollo de Líder Grant fue financiado por la Base de Wallace. La Base de Wallace es una organización filantrópica nacional cuya misión es de mejorar el vive de niños desventajados. Uno de sus objetivos es de desarrollar calidad líderes urbanos de escuela como una manera de lograr esta misión. El objetivo del subsidio fue de establecer un sistema alineado del desarrollo de liderazgo entre el Departamento de Michigan de la Educación (MDE), los colegios y las universidades, distritos intermedios de escuela, K-12 distritos de la escuela, y organizaciones profesionales mayores. La Universidad occidental de Michigan y el Departamento de Michigan de la Educación sirvieron como investigadores de co-director.

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1 Introduction

In July, 2008, the Michigan Aligned System of Leader Development Grant was funded through the Wallace Foundation. The Wallace Foundation is a national philanthropic organization whose mission is to improve the lives of disadvantaged children. One of their goals is to develop quality urban school leaders as a way to achieve this mission. The goal of the grant was to establish an aligned system of leadership development among the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), colleges and universities, intermediate school districts, K-12 school districts, and major professional organizations. Western Michigan University and the Michigan Department of Education served as co-principal investigators.

As a result of this grant, colleges and universities from across the state of Michigan were asked to apply to become an educational partner with the Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) to develop an aspiring leaders program. At the conclusion of the grant program an independent study was conducted. The study focused on the accomplishments of the grant components and to determine its influence on the grant participants. The study also wanted to gather information on program viability that could be shared with a broader audience of urban school leaders and university professors of educational leadership.

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[1] http://www.ncpeapublications.org/latest-issue-ijelp.html

2 Background

The GRPS was a logical choice for the implementation of the Aspiring Leaders Program because of its urban demographics. One major component of the grant was to extend the learning from this program to provide coaching and mentoring for principals of non-Title 1 high priority schools. Other components of the program included:

- Developing a leadership academy to increase the pool of aspiring leaders especially in urban school districts
- Assisting major professional organizations to develop and implement an MDE-approved endorsement and enhancement program for practicing administrators
- Developing a certified teacher leadership program
- Creating a toolkit for the MDE that included VAL-ED, an assessment instrument for administrator performance developed by Vanderbilt University in conjunction with the Wallace Foundation

The purpose of the leadership academy was to develop a customized program that would result in administrator certification for aspiring administrators. The academy would be collaboratively developed by university professors and representatives from the GRPS, and would adhere to the following components:

1. Maintain the integrity of colleges and/or universities involved.
2. Meet State of Michigan certification standards.
3. Address the unique needs of a school district.
4. Provide a leadership academy on-site within the GRPS system.
5. Work collaboratively with grant participants to meet their expressed needs in leadership training.

It was expected that officials from the GRPS and professors from the colleges or universities selected would establish the curriculum jointly and address these components, in addition to incorporating current district initiatives into the program.

The College of Education at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) was very pleased to be selected to participate with the GRPS in developing this leadership academy and become part of the Wallace Foundation Grant.

As GRPS and GVSU began their planning efforts for this grant, it became clear that it was important to select university professors who had administrative experience and expertise related to large urban K-12 settings. In addition, it was decided that a team of three professors would work collaboratively on the project. This team of three professors all had a variety of urban leadership experiences in elementary, middle, and high school principalships, including a director of special education. Their background knowledge helped maintain a consistent focus on the expectations of the grant and build relationships with the aspiring leaders and school district personnel, promoting long-term support and sustainability for the project. The team of professors co-planned and co-taught throughout the entire program. The majority of the students attended the team taught classes, which was an exceptional experience at the university level. A very small number of participants' schedules did not allow for attendance at all of the team taught classes. Professors agreed to meet outside of class time with these participants which added to the customization of the program.

In November 2008, a joint leadership planning team met to answer important questions and clarify planning items that needed to take place prior to starting the program. Those in attendance at the meeting included the chief academic officer and the directors of elementary and secondary programs for GRPS, the three professors from GVSU, and a grant representative from Western Michigan University.

In the fall of 2008, a focus group of approximately 8-10 teachers, administrators, and central office staff from GRPS met to provide various perspectives about what was expected of school principals and what should be emphasized when teaching courses in the program. School district priorities, such as cultural competence, were discussed for incorporation into the program. Participants were also asked what their concerns were as they assumed the role of building principal. Among their concerns that they wanted addressed were: creating a vision that charts a course for the future of a school; evaluating staff; understanding the dynamics

of change; dealing with generational differences in faculty; resolving conflict; and conducting productive staff meetings.

In December 2008,an advising session was hosted at GRPS for aspiring leaders/candidates. A customized program was planned for each of the candidates, defining the specific courses each of them needed to take to obtain Michigan Basic Administrator Certification. This was an arduous task, because many participants had taken 1 or 2 master's classes, some had none, and all were in need of explanations of which courses were necessary and why. Because advising is not only assigning courses, but an examination of a student's personal goals and aspirations, this became a highly time consuming process. The team of three professors took this time and found that it became an important component in relationship building with the participants.

3 Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study program is: 1) to provide information on the specifics of the Aspiring Leaders Program; 2) to ascertain the influence the program had on the participants acquisition of leadership skill sets; 3) to share lessons learned about customizing leadership training programs for potential urban school leaders.

4 Program Design

In January2009, GRPS personnel and GVSU professors met to discuss and map out the curriculum for the aspiring leaders' Michigan Basic Administrator Certification/Master's Degree program.

4.1 Key Program Components

A model structure highlighting the key components of the leadership academy were developed (Figure 1). It served as a base for collaborative planning between GRPS and GVSU.
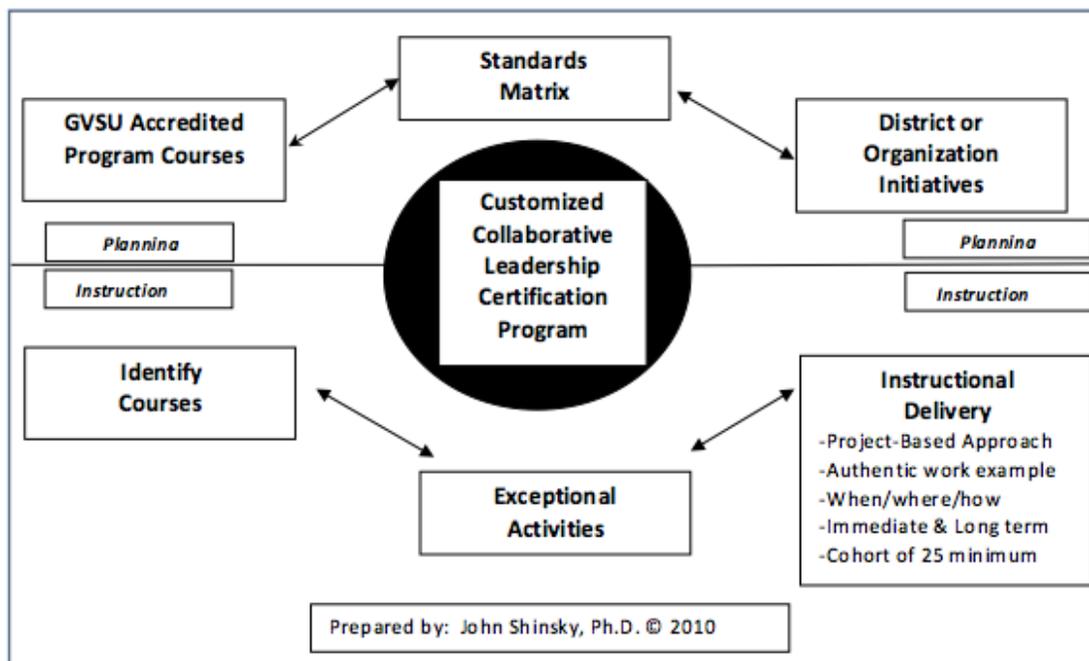

Figure 1. Model Structure of Leadership Academy

The program was designed to coordinate state standards, integrate district initiatives, and provide the aspiring leaders/candidates with skill sets that could be transferred to their current and future settings. The program was designed around a cohort model, with participants who were carefully selected for leadership development. The GRPS district leadership chose the participants based on their current and future potential for successful urban school leadership. The participants all were interviewed by a team of district administrators. They were rated on prior work in quasi-administrative roles e.g. school improvement chairs, participation on curriculum committees, and willingness to manage after school activities. They were also screened on ability to share their future goals, writing ability, and their commitment to completing the program if chosen.

4.2 Instructional Delivery:

For each case study presented to the group, students were given a theoretical framework that gave an underlying basis for the issue. They were also given an authentic example of how one of the three professors dealt with such a situation in their past experience. With the combination of theory and practice the students gained a problem solving process they could use as a school leader. The professors impressed on the students the notion that simply knowing one administrator's solution of a problem is not sufficient basis on which to form a solution since no two problems have all the same dynamics. Students were required to know theory in order to make their informed solution for the presenting problem. It is with the addition of the knowledge of a theoretical framework in combination with the knowledge of authentic situations that give a leader a deeper understanding in problem solving. The mantra for the entire program became "theory into practice".

The class presentations were done as a team of three professors. This is a model seldom seen in a university setting; however its effect on the delivery of the curriculum was crucial to the participants' understanding. The reason for this is team learning—each professor had to be proficient in every lesson presented whether or not it was his/her usually assigned class. A camaraderie sprung up that allowed for each professor to hold up a mirror to his/her own practice with input from other members of the team. The result of this team teaching made for a richer experience for the participants. The teaming also allowed for a great deal of 1 to 1 and small group discussion, giving each participant more individual attention from the professors.

Another component of the instructional delivery, that was a hallmark of the program, was allowing the participants to engage in a Socratic type dialogue around urban education issues. Not only did this strengthen the relationships of members of the cohort but also gave participants a forum in which to share and defend ideas, as well as pose questions to their peers. These discussion and presentation skills are basic to their ability to lead a school faculty.

Other critical components of the program design included:

- Cohort structure (The group incorporated a diverse membership of GRPS K-12 professionals.)
- Course/activity matrix-state standards (Students could see their progress through the standards and how they eventually led to state certification.)
- Sample lessons plans (Professors shared their lesson plans and asked for feedback from the team.)

The program design was based on a team teaching approach. The GVSU instructional team members were selected based on their urban school leadership experience and their highly successful collegiate teaching experience. The team felt it important to honor each member's instructional methodology and integrate it into a coherent program for the participants. This approach led to a collegial spirit that was recognized by participants as being an important part of their learning. An example of this collegial exchange was when one professor challenged another professor on assumptions he had made on a particular problem. The spirited exchange that followed was great modeling for the participants, as they saw debate and information exchange as growth in learning. It dispelled the notions for them that as a leader you have to know everything and that conflict is detrimental. It reinforced that as a leader it is important to use the knowledge of all staff members.

4.3 Cohort Structure

There was one cohort of aspiring leaders/candidates selected for the program. It contained 32 participants, with program delivery from June 2009 through June 2010. There were two courses (six credits) per semester for both the Educational Leadership Master's Degree and Educational Specialist Degree programs that were offered in addition to certification requirements.

GVSU and GRPS officials prepared a course of study for the cohort participants. This clearly delineated the sequence of courses and the time and location for each course. Ultimately, the course of study was designed to lead the participants toward a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership or Educational Specialist degree.

There was an expectation that all cohort participants would complete (a) a degree-seeking program, (b) the required courses needed to obtain Basic Administrator Certification, or (c) a Central Office Endorsement in the State of Michigan. Each aspiring leader/candidate had a customized planned program prepared for him/her, outlining how s/he would be able to complete the course of study they had chosen. Since not all cohort members could participate in all the aspiring leader classes, the path to the degree had to be done individually.

The courses taught during the program met NCATE-ELCC-ISLLC standards and incorporated GRPS' initiatives. Specific course details and activities were designed by GVSU and the GRPS staff to ensure that the information shared incorporated current research and practices that could be immediately applied in the GRPS district. Co-teaching between GVSU and GRPS staff was encouraged. An example of this integration of district initiatives was the urban issue of the impact of student demographics determining level of achievement. The discussion with the cohort participants was that through effort and hard work students can achieve at higher levels. Participants were asked to role play how they would present this issue at a faculty meeting.

5 Theoretical Frameworks

Three theoretical frameworks formed the basis for the program. They were:

- Leadership theory
- Change theory and Communities of Practice
- Adult learning theory

Research in the area of leadership, change and adult learning theory formed a basis for the customized program content.

5.1 Characteristics of Effective Leadership

In an effort to address the unique needs of the GRPS district, the university instructional team incorporated research-based leadership practices that focused on practical results. This allowed the aspiring leaders/candidates to see the link between what they learned and how it would result in improved student performance.

The following seven characteristics of effective leaders, as described by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) (Table 1), were incorporated into various activities throughout the training and served as a foundation for leadership development.

Table 1. Seven Characteristics of Effective Leaders

Vision	Communicator	Learner
• Focus; optimizer	• Communication; relationship	• Intellectual stimulation
	• Input and visibility	• Monitoring/evaluation
Understand Change	• Knowledge of and involvement in curriculum, instruction, assessment	• Resources
• Order		• Focus, intellectual stimulation

5.2 Change Theory and Communities of Practice

Senge (1990), maintains that one of the most powerful elements of a change process is team learning. His premise is that when people learn together they can be agents of change because through this learning their mental models of how things should be, are changed. The professors used this change model as an introduction to the need to develop communities of practice within each school.

A basic argument made by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger is that communities of practice are everywhere, and that we are generally involved in a number of them – whether they are at work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests. Etienne Wenger (2006) wrote:

"Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."

School faculties are indeed communities of practice! Understanding this dynamic is especially important for an urban school leader. The many challenges faced by teachers in this setting make success a group effort. The participants worked in groups on how to build collegiality among staff. The vision speech requirement was an important exercise for participants in building their knowledge of how to develop relational trust among a school staff.

5.3 Adult Learning Theory

It was important for the participants to understand the dynamics of adult learning theory. Adults approach learning with different experiences, both in quantity and quality than young students. These experiences prove to be the most influential resources in adult learning (Lindeman, in Knowles, Holton III, Swanson, 2005). Therefore, to maximize the learning of adults, experiential techniques such as conversations, case methods, and actual problem solving activities tend to be the most effective strategies (Brayman, Grey, Stearns, 2010). This principle guided not only the program professors in their lesson design, but was also presented to participants as important information for a successful leader to possess.

5.4 Additional Research

The breadth and depth of research employed in the preparation of this program also made use of the work of such outstanding researchers as Tony Wagner, James Kouzes, Barry Posner, Robert Marzano, and others

(see reference list). These researchers' work was utilized to assist participants in designing solutions for authentic problems they were given in class.

Tony Wagner - Harvard Change Leadership Group, provided a change model grounded in authentic work. Aspiring leaders/candidates utilized the planning templates found in the book "*Change Leadership*" to build a mental model of a preferred future for their schools.

James Kouzes and Barry Posner - Their leadership theory, as expressed in "*The Leadership Challenge*" and in "*Encouraging the Heart*"describes leadership as the process of making a difference by building relationships. Their theory includes five leadership practices: (a) modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart.

Robert Marzano - Through his research on leadership practices that make a positive difference in schools, Marzano provided a targeted set of practices that allowed the aspiring leaders/candidates to build on their repertoire of leadership skills.

6 Qualitative Study Methodology and Program Evaluation Design

Qualitative data were collected through oral interviews of participants. Triangulation of the data was made possible through review of program documents including end of class evaluation sheets, standards/class activity matrices, end of program evaluations by participants, and reflections of professors. The professors also utilized ongoing evaluation as a mechanism for obtaining feedback. This, in turn, guided lesson design and presentations. This information allowed the professors to further customize lesson delivery to maximize the candidates' learning.

The Aspiring Leaders program had four key evaluation components:

- Candidates' end-of-class evaluations (Candidates were asked to reflect on what they had learned at the end of each class session.)
- Candidates' evaluations at the end of each course
- Independent evaluation report
- Reflections of program professors

To collect information on the "story" of the program in the nature of a qualitative study the professors wanted an unbiased evaluation of the total program. Therefore, they hired an independent researcher to conduct individual oral interviews with each participant in the program to determine if their objectives had been met. All participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Document in compliance with the requirements of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Grand Valley State University. The researcher went over the Informed Consent Document with each participant to ensure understanding prior to beginning the interviews. Once the document was signed, the interview began. The researcher used a tape recorder and hand-written notes to document the responses.

6.1 Participant Characteristics

Fourteen of the participants were in the Master's Degree program, and ten were seeking the Educational Specialist Degree. The participants represented a broad range of roles within the district. These roles included: 4 principals (3 at elementary schools, 1 at a middle school), 5 assistant principals (middle school), 1 Assistant Principal/Dean of Students (High School), 1 Dean of Students (High School), 1 Math/disciplinary Literacy Coach, 1 Language Coach, 1 Math Curriculum Coordinator, 1 Secondary School Reform Specialist, 1 Public Safety Officer, 1 Youth Advocate, 1 Physical Therapist, and 3 classroom teachers (upper elementary 4th-8th grade). Sixteen of the twenty-four participants were female, and 8 were male.

6.2 Number of Years in Education

The participants experience in education ranged from a low of 3 years to a high of 27 years. The average was 12 years in education. Nearly all have spent the majority of their professional educational careers at GRPS.

There were a few who had prior careers outside of education – these individuals had worked for the National Park Service, Juvenile Court Probation, higher education, and private industry. The average number of years with GRPS was 10.5, with a low of 3 years and a high of 26 years.

7 Results

7.1 Candidates' Reflections, Recommendations, and Lessons Learned

In the spirit of a qualitative study which is to ask, "what really happened here?" Actual comments from participants will be used throughout the results section.

Customization of Instruction and Planned Program

GRPS participants cited the development of a cohort as key to the customization of instruction. Courses were customized for this specific cohort. Working and learning with others who were part of the same system and culture allowed them to build on a common experiential base that would not have existed in a more heterogeneous classroom setting.

The content focused on the urban setting rather than the continuum of experiences that might occur across settings. Candidates indicated that this helped them focus on issues that were relevant to themselves – such as exceptional classroom management issues – and their population, such as poverty and transient living conditions. The content was enriched by the experiences the professors shared regarding each of these topics. Having professors who had previously walked the same path as the candidates was seen as a major factor in taking the learning from theory to practice.

"They did a great job to make sure we were hitting standards."

"It gave us an opportunity to reflect on strengths and weaknesses as leaders."

"The class time was customized-flexible, Content was practical, making sure we knew standards, customized to freedom to learn. It was customized to what GRPS is doing. They were flexible around our needs. Everything we learned was aligned to standards, and that was helpful, it was embedded in what we did."

"What made it so great was the people-Professors molded us into a team. I feel they will be there to support me even now. Everything was well-thought out, meaningful, pertinent, powerful-ready to use."

Practical Application to Authentic Work

In relation to applying what they learned to their work, participants noted that the content gave them a chance to really think about what it means to lead a faculty in implementing a program such as "an effort-based education" and relate it to their own beliefs and biases. Exploration of such a process gave the participants the tools that will help them remove barriers for children and ensure they are able to advance in their learning.

"Courses included both theory and hands on ideas of what could happen now, today, in your position. It was current and relevant. They have real life experiences, and could relate to situations we face day to day. I felt they understood me personally - where I have been and where I want to go."

Facilitation of Ongoing Dialogue, Sharing, and Collaboration

Participants reported that they had grown as leaders, and had become more confident in their own ideas and opinions. Reported areas of improved skill included increased confidence in public speaking, conducting research, running meetings, and creating a shared vision with their colleagues and staff. Several noted they felt more confident in situations with conflict and understood better how to be okay with disagreement. They all felt they had more tools in their leadership tool box as a result of going through the program. The employment of the Socratic Method gave participants the opportunity to challenge one another's assumptions about leadership. The importance the program made on using theoretical constructs along with real-life examples gave each participant a measure of independent thought as they approached a problem solving situation.

"Difficult conversations with staff using skills I learned have helped to make me more confident. This
    is something I never thought I could do, and while it's not fun, what I learned has made me more
    confident helped me to keep a focus on what is best for children."
"I am able to exercise judgment/perspective and not personalize things. I feel I have broadened my views.
    I gained more exposure to different ways of doing things to impact student's achievement."

Professors' Ongoing Availability

The professors had "on the job" knowledge of many of the issues and situations the participants were
experiencing, and sound advice for each one related to their given role and situation. Several indicated they
particularly valued the knowledge base related to performance evaluation. In addition to being perceived
as credible, candidates indicated that all three of the professors were very approachable, both in and out of
class. They expect the relationships that were formed with the professors will continue, adding to the support
network created within the cohort. The professors' passion for education inspired the cohort members to
achieve excellence in what they were doing.

"The instructors were awesome, made you feel like family. Well explained-course work was interesting-
    activities were engaging and ones you were going to use. I have since encountered similar situations to
    what we discussed."
"Members of the cohort were comfortable to say whatever they wanted, it was a safe space to speak and
    learn."

The Power of Cohort Learning

The cohort was unanimously viewed as a powerful mechanism for building a support network by all of
the participants. Several members also indicated that the diversity of the group – different positions within
the district and different cultural backgrounds – helped them to gain a better understanding of the content,
essentially accelerating their own learning as they viewed it from the eyes of others in the cohort. Everyone
said they knew their confidences would be kept, and they now had people they could turn to for advice
without fear of negative consequences.

"The cohort format provided built in support from others in group."
"Educators need to believe in themselves—they need time to be reflective, this program offered time for us
    to do that."
"This is my third master's program, and my first cohort experience. It felt like being with family."

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Reflections of Program Professors

The three professors of record discussed in depth their observations and feelings as the program unfolded day
by day. It became abundantly clear that a very special educational opportunity was being made available
to the candidates, but it was also having a profound effect on the professors themselves. Those reflections
are noted in the following five areas:

1. Candidates' Ongoing Advising and Support
The professors' willingness to make themselves available to students on an "on-call" basis built a sound
foundation of trust that was maintained throughout the program. Each candidate received individualized
advising and career guidance for the duration of the program. Because all courses were designed and taught
by the same team of professors, the "match" between course selection and their daily activities (both in class
and at their job site) was very effective.

2. Uniqueness of Team Teaching at the Collegiate Level
The professoriate is, in many ways, a lonely position. As a team the three professors involved in this
program utilized each other's strengths in their instructional delivery. It was similar to an ongoing peer-
review process in action. Each professor was chosen for his/her success in his/her classes based on student

evaluation and peer review, so that the "best of the best" were teaching. What an opportunity to grow watching master professors ply their craft! How often does this happen in the university structure? It was not only the co-teaching, but also the joint planning that was highly informative, as each professor really began to ponder their own pedagogy and delivery system.

3. Positive Effects of the Cohort Structure

This group of candidates represented a diverse group of aspiring school leaders in relationship to age, gender, experience, race, and training. By the end of the program, having experienced many learning situations together, they became a cohesive group of enthusiastic educators dedicated to each other's success. The network they created will provide an ongoing support system for many years to come.

4. Customization of Program

One of the unique aspects of this program was the professors' ability to customize the program to assure they met (1) the candidates' needs as urban educators, (2) the district's initiatives, (3) the State of Michigan Standards for Leadership Programs, and (4) NCATE accreditation requirements. This was accomplished through the development of matrices that aligned standards, curricula, instructional methodologies, activities, assessments, and the Grand Rapids Public Schools curricular initiatives.

5. Ongoing Assessment

The assessment of candidates' mastery of the course material was documented in daily evaluation sheets as well as performance on course assessments (e.g., candidates were required to do a formal presentation of their vision for a school as it begins the school year). Through the lens of a school administrator, the professors evaluated the candidates' mastery of the skills being taught. The professors critiqued their colleagues' instructional delivery and made recommendations for enhancements to their class presentations. This continual feedback loop resulted in a more targeted instructional delivery system.

9 Improvements for Future Programming

After an intensive review by the team of professors who were the instructors in the Aspiring Leaders' Program, they concurred on the following list of program improvements which would have enhanced the program:

1. The inclusion of more authentic problem solving experiences focusing on current issues that challenge urban school leaders would have deepened participants understanding of urban leadership.
2. Regular meetings with the current administrators in the GRPS to share their experiences in the program and to pose questions about the nature of school leadership would have added a "real life" dimension to the program.
3. Actively working to build a culture of collaboration and support within the GRPS for these participants as they assumed leadership roles could have increased participants' confidence as they assumed their roles as urban school leaders.
4. Making connections to the larger community including Intermediate School Officials, leaders in city government, and State Officials (including local elected representatives and members of the Michigan Department of Education), would have increased the support network for the participants.

10 Recommendations for Future Leadership Preparation Programs

For those districts seeking partnerships with universities in creating leadership training programs, the professorial team for the Aspiring Leaders Program would strongly recommend the following:

1. Allow sufficient time for instructors to coordinate course competencies with state standards. It is only with a deep understanding of the breadth of the material that professors can plan meaningful learning experiences.
2. Universities and school districts alike should seek out partners who are ready to commit the resources and personnel necessary to have participants fully engaged in the program.

3. School districts involved in a leadership training partnership need to openly share challenges, needs, and current initiatives with their university partner. By doing so they ensure the participants will receive targeted training to meet the needs of the school district.

4. A critical component of success in a leadership training program is to create a cohesive instructional team to enhance program delivery. A collegial team of professors can bring a great experience base to the program which they can model for the participants.

5. Leadership training programs should balance face to face and on-line instruction. It is necessary to have enough interaction among the participants to build a sense of community and encourage networking.

6. Leadership training partners should engage the voice of the participants at the planning stages of the program to allow their needs to be heard. Their needs form the foundation for a truly customized program.

Universities and K-12 school districts can join forces to build a preferred future for the nation's children. The Aspiring Leaders' Program is one example of how such a successful program became a reality. Such partnerships may provide solutions to the challenges of urban school leadership.

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