

FROM PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION TO ON-THE-JOB DEVELOPMENT: WHAT DO BEGINNING PRINCIPALS NEED?*

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Abstract

Wyoming principals were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the strengths and deficits of their preparation program, their professional development needs as beginning principals, and the areas in which their districts offer professional development. Findings indicated much variation in perceptions of preparation program strengths and deficits. The internship was viewed as valuable in providing experience of day-to-day school administration; however, time commitment and financial burdens were of concern. While districts provide adequate professional development in instructional leadership and using data to inform decisions for beginning principals, development needs in the areas of communication, relationship building, and conflict resolution were not provided by districts.



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1 Sumario en español

Los directores de Wyoming fueron inspeccionados con respecto a sus percepciones de las fuerzas y déficit de su programa de preparación, su desarrollo profesional necesita como empezando a directores, y las áreas en los que sus distritos ofrecen el desarrollo profesional. Las conclusiones indicaron mucha variación en percepciones de fuerzas de programa de preparación y déficit. El puestos de interno fue visto como valioso en proporcionar experiencia de la administración diaria de la escuela; sin embargo, compromiso de tiempo y cargas financieros fueron de preocupación. Mientras distritos proporcionan el desarrollo profesional adecuado en el liderazgo instruccionales y utilizar los datos para informar las decisiones para empezar a directores, el desarrollo necesita en las áreas de comunicación, edificio de relación, y resolución de conflicto no fueron proporcionados por distritos.

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2 Introduction

Public schools currently function in an educational context that focuses on accountability and demands rigorous standards and increased student achievement. Several studies on educational reform have highlighted the role of school principals in improving student achievement (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Leithwood, Lewis, Anderson & Walstrom, 2004; Tucker, Henig, & Salmonowicz, 2005). Quality schools are dependent upon well trained principals who can develop effective teachers, implement organizational processes, and set a vision for learning (Harris, 2006; Steyn, 2008). As a result, the importance of rigorous and effective principal preparation programs has been underscored (Oplatka, 2009). However, principal preparation programs have recently come under fire due to concerns about the perceived lack of relevant learning outcomes (Hess & Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005). For example, the U.S. Department of Education characterized conventional school leadership training programs as incoherent and scattered (Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Policymakers underscore the importance of college and university preparation programs in developing potential principals who are skilled in creating positive school cultures and closing achievement gaps (Pounder, 2011). The onus is on educational leadership faculty to evaluate their programs to ensure they graduate leadership candidates equipped to lead 21st century schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain stakeholder input to help inform the educational leadership program review process at the University of Wyoming. To this end, we (educational leadership faculty members) surveyed Wyoming principals regarding their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their principal preparation program and internship, their support and development needs when they first began as principals, and the current areas and modes of delivery in which their districts offer professional development.

3 Background

A standards-based approach to principal preparation began with adoption of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards in 1994. Throughout the late 1990s, many universities organized their school leadership curriculum around the ISLLC standards (Eller, 2010). By 2002, the ISLLC and National Council of Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) initiatives were incorporated into the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, NPBEA, 2002) program standards for school administrators (Harris, Ballenger, & Leonard, 2004). By 2005, one-third of all universities that grant certification in school administration had been accredited by NCATE (Orr, 2006).

Implementing ELCC standards has had the greatest impact on state and national policy that leverages administrator preparation (Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011). These standards provide colleges and universities guidance in developing course requirements and internship activities to prepare principals (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008). Consequently, principal preparation programs have become more focused, resulting in

decreased curriculum variability and better accountability measures for licensure candidates (Harris et al., 2004; Pounder, 2011).

Prior to the NCATE accreditation visit to the University of Wyoming, College of Education in 2008, educational leadership faculty members reviewed and revised all principal and superintendent preparation courses and assessments to ensure they were aligned with ELCC standards (NPBEA, 2002). Having now taught all these revised courses at least once, we are currently reviewing their content, knowledge, application and assessments and realigning them to better meet the needs of the future school leaders that we prepare.

The brief literature review that follows focuses on the evolution of the principal role, instructional leadership and school effectiveness, multiple roles of the principal, principal preparation programs, the internship, and principals' professional development needs.

4 The Evolution of the Principal Role

Originally, principals were simply classroom teachers with no training in specialized leadership skills (Sheets, 1969). However, as America became more urbanized, the role of the school leader became more complex. By the 1940s, the principal was expected to be a democratic leader and by the 1950s, principals took on the role of applying school laws to ensure equity and equality (Harris et al., 2004). The report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), forced a shift from the managerial paradigm that was predominant for most of the 20th century, to a focus on instructional leadership driven by standards, competency and accountability measures (Barnett, 2004; Green, 2010; Steyn, 2008). Leaders who work with teachers can have a big influence on their instructional practices, which in turn may lead to increased student learning (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). In the current context of school reform, the instructional leadership dimension of the principal's role is viewed as a "cost effective way to improve teaching and learning throughout the entire school" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2).

5 Instructional Leadership and Student Achievement

The school principal is now seen as the "chief learning officer" (Green, 2010, p.3). This instructional leadership role has many dimensions and includes: (a) creating a comprehensive, rigorous and coherent curricular program, (b) providing personalized and motivating learning environments for students, (c) developing the instructional and leadership capacity of staff, (d) maximizing time spent on quality instruction, (e) supervising instruction, (f) monitoring and evaluating the impact of the instructional program, and (g) developing assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress (Green, 2010). Instructional leaders make student and adult learning their priority by activating the community's support for school success, setting high expectations for performance for students and teachers, and creating a culture of learning. They collect multiple sources of data, analyze them, and use them to drive decisions on instruction and to address barriers to student learning (Dufour, 2002). While effective performance of all these tasks has been shown to have a moderate effect on student achievement, the greatest impact occurs when principals focus on adult learning and staff development (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). However, not all principals embrace the instructional role equally. In a study of elementary, middle, and high school principals, Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou III (2010) found that elementary and, to a lesser degree, middle school principals, adopted the instructional leadership role more fully than did secondary principals. They concluded "high school principals are still in the managerial mode of thinking...and have not fully transitioned into the mode of instructional leadership" (p.4). Given the plethora of different tasks that fill their days and the broadness and depth of the instructional leadership role, it is hardly surprising that principals have varying perceptions of what it is and enact it differently.

6 Multiple Roles of Principals

While the instructional leadership role of school principals may currently be the main thrust, over the past two decades responsibilities of school leaders have become multi-faceted (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). The principal position has expanded to encompass the roles of educational visionary, instructional and curriculum leader, assessment expert, disciplinarian, community builder, public relations and communication expert, budget analyst, facility manager, special programs administrator, as well as overseer of legal, contractual, and policy mandates. Furthermore, principals must possess superior communication and relationship building skills as they navigate the needs of students, parents, teachers, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies (Lazaridou, 2009; Steyn, 2008).

Today's principals need highly specialized skills in many areas. Fullan (2002) observed "Only principals who are equipped to handle a complex, rapidly changing environment can implement the reforms that lead to sustained improvement in student achievement" (p. 16). There is no doubt the role is demanding, especially for beginning principals who frequently face challenges related to their new position of authority in the social and organizational structure of the school (Woods, Woods, & Cowie, 2007). These problems include staffing issues, student discipline, challenges from parents and community, teaching and learning, budgets and resource use, school policies, problems and conflicts, and the legal and regulatory framework (Woods et al.). Developing the capacity to build strong, cohesive relationships and mediating conflict among adults requires learning that is seldom part of principal certification programs (Zalman & Bryant, 2002).

School leaders need training so that they "are well prepared for the realities and demands of their jobs in particular schools and districts" (Wallace Foundation, 2006, p. 3). As a result, universities that prepare principals are charged with developing candidates' real-life problem solving skills while creating a curriculum that integrates the ELCC standards.

7 Principal Preparation

Over the past 20 years, the debate on how to effectively train principals to maximize theoretical learning that translates to real world educational leadership has reached little consensus (Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009; Sherman, Gill, & Sherman, 2007). A balance must be achieved between the format of programs (e.g., specific coursework, internship requirements), the specific knowledge imparted (e.g., leadership roles), and skill acquisition throughout the curriculum (Lazaridou, 2009). The main thrust is that university school leadership preparation programs are under significant pressure to either justify their current practices and programs or to transform the way school leaders are prepared (Commission on School Leader Preparation in Illinois Colleges and Universities, 2006).

The role of university principal preparation programs is to ensure participants are ready to confront the difficulties of school leadership (Hess & Kelly, 2007). However, as Sackney and Walker (2006) observed, no leadership program can *fully* prepare people for the actuality of the principalship. Imparting the breadth of knowledge concerning the roles and responsibilities of the principalship can be daunting (Keedy, 2006; Tighe & Rogers, 2006). The most prominent debate concerning preparation programs is that pre-service principals are not equipped with the skills to apply theoretical learning to real-life situations (Oplatka, 2009). Identified weaknesses within educational administration programs include both recruiting quality applicants (Oplatka, 2009) and balancing content of training activities to reflect values, skills, knowledge, and processes (Isik, 2003; Sherman et al., 2007). Beyond doubt, high quality principal preparation that focuses on organizational and instructional leadership and high quality internships strongly impact future leadership practices (Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

8 Internship

As the ISLLC (1994) and ELCC (NPBEA, 2002) standards were refined to meet the complexities of training principals, a seventh standard was added which addresses the internship (Martin, Wright, Danzig, Flanary, & Brown, 2005). All NCATE/ELCC accredited principal preparation programs are required to have a substantial internship component, defined as

8.1

the process and product that results from applying the knowledge and skills described in the previous [ELCC] standards [1-6] in a workplace environment. Application of standards-based knowledge, skills, and research in real settings over time is a critical aspect of any institutional program. (NPBEA, 2002, p. 18)

Principal internships should exhibit the following characteristics: (a) be substantial in breadth and scope, (c) be aligned with standards, (d) occur in real settings, and (e) be planned and guided cooperatively by strong practitioner and university mentors (NPBEA, 2002). The main goal of the internship or field experience is to acquaint pre-service principals with problems they will encounter soon and to provide a framework for solving these problems, in other words, to bridge the gap between theory and application (Bush, Glover, & Harris, 2007; Greenlee, Bruner, & Hill, 2009). Internships should be seen as a support to the preparation program curriculum and may be viewed as the capstone of leadership training. Internships socialize aspiring principal candidates from a teacher worldview to that of a leader and school administrator (Oplatka, 2009; Risen & Tripses, 2008; Schechter, 2008). It is through the internship that aspiring principals gain practical leadership knowledge and skills, for example, on budgeting, organizational management, supervision, instructional leadership, decision making, and facilitating meetings (Gutmore, Gutmore, & Strobert, 2009). Furthermore, internships help to develop a continuum of collaborative and self-directed leadership skills (Geismar, Morris, & Lieberman, 2000; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Martin, et al., 2005; Schechter).

The ideal internship occurs when candidates can leave their classrooms in the hands of a substitute teacher and work full-time with a practicing administrator in an authentic setting (McGregor & Watson, 2008). Such opportunities provide experience of the reality of the day-to-day challenges of the principal role, increase technical expertise (Archer, 2005) and clarify roles (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). However, Orr (2011) reported that internships are the most challenging feature of principal preparation programs to deliver. Perceived success is contingent upon variables such as release time to complete duties, financial constraints, and mentor assignments. Since most students in principal preparation programs are employed full-time as teachers, clinical experiences in which they must leave their classrooms may cause financial constraints. In these difficult financial times, few sponsoring districts can afford to support interns by paying for substitutes (McGregor & Watson, 2008). Frequently, from our own experience in Wyoming, these costs are borne at the expense of interns, causing a further financial burden in addition to degree program costs.

Field mentors are an integral part of the internship; therefore, it is critical to carefully select and match interns with qualified mentors, as well as create authentic activities between the two that require reflective practice (Bush, 2009; Orr, 2011). While support systems for interns in the field are vital to a successful internship, principal preparation candidates also report the value of cohorts in developing networks that endure far beyond the program (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000).

9 Cohorts

Learning in cohorts has been recognized as an effective means to build communication and support networks among future school leaders (Norris, 2001). The cohort experience can build interpersonal relationships, reflective abilities, and group learning skills (Barnett, et al., 2000). Connections forged in cohorts tend to be strong and sustaining. Beginning principals are frequently placed in highly demanding and stressful situations and left to learn on the job as best they can (Spiro, Mattis, & Mitgang, 2007). Dialogue with cohort peers can help reduce feelings of professional isolation and loneliness and problems with coping with a wide range of tasks simultaneously (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Such peer networks are important for new principals especially those in rural schools in small districts, who may have few colleagues (Duncan & Stock, 2010). Pounder (2011) emphasized the role of cohort models that encourage positive student relationships and enhance professional socialization in high-quality principal preparation programs.

10 Professional Development Needs of Principals

When principal preparation candidates move into the stage of early career administrator, they frequently experience a false sense that their professional development needs are lessened (Grissom & Harrington, 2010;

Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009; Peterson, 2002; Spillane, Healey, & Parise, 2009). However, similar to teachers, principals require on-going, job-embedded opportunities for professional growth (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008) as well as formal training (Spillane et al.) if continuous improvement is expected. This is especially true for early career principals (Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009; Woods, Woods, & Cowie, 2009). In fact, Michaelidou and Pashiardis (2009) surmised that, "the needs of novice principals, when compared with the more experienced ones, entail a much wider spectrum of developmental domains" (p. 404). These needs include technical skills as well as acclimation to the supervisory role (Eller, 2010; Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009). Daresh and Playko (1994) found that novice principals, as opposed to those about to exit the profession, were mostly concerned with socialization including acceptance from teachers, stakeholders, and their own supervisors (Zepeda, 2007). Such needs align with Fuller's (1969) and Zepeda's (2007) descriptions of novice employees who are concerned with survival, learning the day-to-day operations of their role, and compliance.

In general terms, Peterson (2002) placed the professional development needs of principals into two categories, namely structural and cultural elements. Structural elements, sometimes referred to as technical skills (Eller, 2010; Woods et al., 2009), directly impact student learning, while cultural elements hinge more on the development of interpersonal skills and collaborative processes (Rodriguez-Campos, Gomez, & Shen, 2005). Quinn (2004) compared professional development opportunities for principals in the United States and England and concluded that recent accountability measures have caused professional development to focus solely on instructional leadership, that is, structural skills.

However, cultural skills are equally important. Successful instructional leadership requires a foundation of well-developed interpersonal and collaborative skills. National and international research (e.g., Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009; Rodriguez-Campos et al., 2005; Wong, 2004; Woods et al., 2009) has highlighted the desires of principals for more professional development in mentorship and coaching, especially in working with sub-par employees. Interestingly, Grissom and Harrington (2010) found that principals who engaged in professional development with a focus on mentoring and coaching were rated as more effective by the teachers they supervised. Additionally, principals value networking opportunities in which to engage in reflective dialogue with other administrators concerning, planning, implementing, and supporting processes that elevate standards for student performance (Duncan, 2009; Hill, Hawk, & Taylor, 2001; Reardon, 2011).

While there is little research on individual professional development needs of principals (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Spillane et al., 2009), just as with teachers, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to principal development is ineffective and districts need to ascertain the specific areas in which their principals need support (Duncan & Stock, 2010). These areas may then be offered through school districts' staff development programs, provided by professional organizations, or delivered in collaboration with colleges or universities (Mohn & Machell, 2005; Peterson, 2002).

According to Sparks (2007), "significant change in an organization begins with significant change in what leaders think, say, and do" (p. 3). To impact student learning, principals must begin first with their own learning. According to Kegan (2000), effective PD for principals should be grounded in the theories of adult learning and should focus on understanding of self, of context, and the dynamics of the interactions between the two. In so doing, leaders increase their intellectual, emotional, inter and intra-personal capacities. For buy-in and engagement, PD needs to address leaders' specific needs (Inman, 2009). To be effective, learning processes must also resonate with the modes in which leaders prefer to learn.

Building on adult learning principles, mentoring, coaching, and professional networks are being increasingly recognized across the professions as effective avenues for PD and as valuable tools to develop and grow individuals (Kay, Hagan, & Parker, 2009). Moreover, such processes not only model and help develop a culture of collaboration but also are a cost-effective way to augment formal PD (Duncan & Stock, 2010).

11 Wyoming Context

Education in the state of Wyoming is characterized by its own set of unique nuances. Although the 10th largest state by area, it is the least populated state with an estimated population of 544,270 in 2009. As a result, most students are educated in rural school districts. According to the 2010 Wyoming Education

Summary (2010) compiled by the Wyoming Department of Education, 87,420 students were enrolled in public schools in 48 districts throughout the state in fall of 2009. Two hundred and eighty-six principals served 354 Wyoming schools. In rural areas, one principal may be in charge of the elementary, middle and high schools. Wyoming elementary and middle (K-9) schools (274) outnumber high (9-12) schools (74), and K-12 schools (6).

The educational leadership program at the University of Wyoming has an annual intake of approximately 30 graduate students (master's and principal endorsement). Five years ago, the program changed from a traditional campus-based, intensive weekend, cohort model to a blended outreach mode of delivery that included face-to-face intensive weekends on two off-campus sites as well as weekly online discussion components throughout the semester. Students can now enter the program each semester and exit when complete - a revolving cohort as opposed to one that is static. The internship requirement is 440 hours.

12 Research Design and Methods

The overarching purpose of this study was to use stakeholder input to inform a review and realignment of the principal preparation program content and process at the University of Wyoming. Our aim was to identify (a) what practicing principals perceived as areas of strength and areas of deficit in their principal preparation programs; (b) their professional development needs as beginning principals, and (c) the areas in which districts currently provide professional development, so that we could address areas of deficit in our program. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

1. In what ways did principals' preparation program prepare or fail to prepare them for the principalship?
2. In what ways did principals' internship prepare or fail to prepare them for the principalship?
3. What obstacles did respondents encounter in completing the internship?
4. Early in their career, in what areas did principals perceive they needed the most professional development support?
5. What professional development opportunities do Wyoming school districts provide?

The study followed a survey design. A paper survey including a cover letter and self-addressed return envelope was sent to all 286 principals in Wyoming in fall 2010. The cover letter described the purposes of the study, the time commitment in completing the survey, and an explanation of why a response was important (Dillman, 2007). Of the 286 surveys mailed out, 106 principals responded giving a response rate of 37%.

12.1 Study Participants

Of the 106 Wyoming principals who returned surveys, average years in the principalship was 10.72 years (range = 1-31 years), and time in their current position was 6.16 years (range 1-27 years). Respondents had held on average 2.14 principal positions (range 1- 6). The majority of respondents (64.2%) supervised schools in the K-8 range, while 31.1% served in secondary schools (9-12) and 4.7% supervised a K-12 campus - thus providing a sample proportionally representative of Wyoming school levels. With regard to school size, the majority of respondents (78.3%) were principals in mid-sized schools (101-500 students): 11.3% served small schools with less than 100 students, and 10.4% had a student population greater than 500. The majority of respondents (42.5%) worked in districts serving more than 2000 students; 28.3% came from very small districts serving less than 1000 students; 15.1% worked in schools district serving 1001-2000 students, and 14.2% of the respondents did not answer this question. Just under half of respondents (43.3%) completed their principal preparation program at the University of Wyoming and 39.6 % completed their program in states adjacent to Wyoming (Nebraska - 14.1%; Idaho - 8.5%; South Dakota - 6.6%; Montana - 5.7%; Utah - 2.9%, and Colorado - 1.8%). Therefore, the sample represented mainly respondents from principal preparation programs in the Mountain West area.

12.2 Instrument

A survey was designed by the researchers and included several sections and sub-sections. The first six questions in Part A concerned demographics of respondents. Part B of the survey was designed to solicit respondents' responses to the following areas of principal preparation: (a) the areas in which their principal preparation program prepared them well for the principalship; (b) the areas in which their preparation program failed to prepare them; (c) the ways in which their internship prepared them well for the principalship; (d) the ways in which their internship failed to prepare them; (e) the obstacles they encountered in meeting their internship requirement, and (f) the time commitment for the internship. Items a-e were deliberately left open as we assumed that principals would identify as both strengths and deficits those areas that they perceived were most relevant to their success as leaders.

Fifteen Likert-scaled items derived from the review of literature measured principals' perceptions of the most important areas for support and development they required as beginning principals (where 1= no support needed and 5 = high levels of support needed). Cronbach's Alpha indicated reliability of .838 for these items. Additionally, principals rated the same 15 items with respect to the amount of professional development (1= no PD; 5= much PD) they received from their school district. Cronbach's Alpha indicated reliability of .897 for these items. These 15 items were followed by an open-ended question in which principals could elaborate on the type of professional development their school district provided in that area.

12.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative responses to the open-ended questions that asked respondents to identify areas of strength and deficit in their principal preparation programs and internships were initially coded separately by the researchers. The initial coding resulted in 73 themes, many of which were common to both researchers. Items were then recoded collaboratively by the researchers and condensed into 12 primary themes (*school law, instructional leadership, using data, budgeting and finance, student discipline, working with parents, staff issues, leadership theory, cohorts, supervision and evaluation, 'real world experience, and mentoring*) until 100% agreement was reached (Hatch, 2002). These themes were ranked in order of frequency, and then aligned to ELCC (NPBEA, 2002) standards. Finally, primary themes along with the corresponding ELCC standards were attached to either program or internship strengths or weaknesses. Additionally three themes, *time commitment, financial burdens, and being out of their classrooms*, emerged as obstacles to completing the internship.

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Predictive Analytics Software (PASW) version 18.0. Initially, means and standard deviations were calculated for the 15 items that respondents were requested to rate on a 1-5 point Likert scale: (a) their professional development and support needs as beginning principal, and (b) the professional development and support provided by their districts. T-tests were conducted to identify areas of significant differences between respondents' areas of need and the areas in which districts provide professional development. In addition, Pearson correlations were conducted to explore relationships among the areas specified for professional development need.

13 Findings

13.1 Strengths and Deficits of Principal Preparation Programs

Respondents were asked to describe the strengths and deficits of their principal preparation program. Interestingly, the total number of program strengths (230) mentioned by participants was greater than the number of deficits (156). Several themes overlapped as both perceived strengths and weaknesses. This is understandable, since Wyoming principals received their professional preparation from various universities, in different states, and over an extended timeframe. Table 1 displays the top themes in rank order along with the corresponding ELCC (NPBEA, 2002) standards.

Principals' Perceptions of Preparation Program Strengths and Deficits

Strengths		Deficits
Theme	ELCC Standard	Theme
ELCC Standard		
1. School law 2.3 , 2.4	3.2.	1. Supervision/Evaluation
2. Leadership theory 3.1, 3.3	3.1.	2. Budgeting/Finance
3. Supervision/Evaluation 2.2	2.3, 2.4	3. Instructional leadership
4. Budgeting/Finance 3.2	3.1, 3.3	4. Staff issues
5. Instructional leadership N/A	2.2	5. Discipline
6. Cohort format 3.1	N/A	6. Data
7. Internship 3.2, 4.1	7.1-7.6	7. Working with parents

Table 1

Respondents identified school law as the primary strength of the programs. For example, one respondent stated, “The focus on law and understanding the rights that parents, students, and teachers have.” Another respondent concurred, stating, “It gave me the basic framework of responsibility for legal guidelines.” Finally, one respondent stated that her school law class was the best preparation she received while in her program. School law was also mentioned by a few respondents as a weakness of the programs, but the number was too low to classify it as a primary deficiency.

The second theme coded as a strength was preparation in developing and applying leadership theory when managing the organization. For example, respondents’ descriptions included terms like leadership and management theory, change theory, conceptualization of leadership philosophy. Finally, one respondent referred to this philosophical training as development of, “introspective beliefs and leadership tenets.” Leadership theory was not identified as an area of deficit of the programs.

Supervision and evaluation of staff was coded as the third most common strength. Respondents’ answers include terms like evaluation, supervision, or growing teachers. Nevertheless, it was also rated as a most common deficit area, with many principals feeling they were not prepared to meet these demands. This contradiction can best be represented by principals who stated their programs gave them a general awareness of personnel and evaluation issues, yet still lacked the mechanics of improving mediocre teachers. One principal wondered, “What to prepare for when working with a marginal teacher?” When analyzed by format, more principals felt they needed guidance in summative evaluation of teachers as opposed to formative supervision of teachers.

Budgeting and finance appeared as both an area of strength and deficit. Although this theme was rated the fourth most common strength by respondents, it was also rated as the second most common program deficit. For example, one respondent stated, “Certain courses were very relevant like school budget.” However,

another respondent disagreed and was blunt in his assessment of the failure of his program to address this area by writing in response to deficit areas, “Budget, budget, budget.”

The fifth most common strength coded was instructional leadership. Respondents’ answers included the terms instructional leadership and curriculum knowledge and development. Interestingly, instructional leadership was rated the third most common weakness of programs. For example, one principal stated his program helped develop his dispositions concerning effective instructional leadership. Conversely, several principals identified this area as the sole weakness within their program. However, it must be noted that many of the respondents had completed their principal preparation program several years ago when the principal’s role had a more managerial focus and the instructional leadership role was not emphasized to the same extent.

Additionally, respondents identified strengths that were exclusive of content areas. For strengths, several principals valued the cohort format in which classes were delivered. One respondent summarized this theme by stating, “It was a life changing experience. I loved the collegiality of our cohort group.” Another principal stated the, “cohort experience provided me an excellent support group to gain and share information.” Still another respondent observed, “the cohort format was a godsend. It was available for sounding board issues.” Additionally, several respondents identified the internship as the most positive aspect of their program. One respondent surmised, “I think that my program gave me a good base of knowledge, but as any program, the intern hours and hands on time gave me the needed preparation for my job.”

Staff issues, discipline, data, and dealing with parents were all primary themes exclusively coded as deficits of the programs. Two of these themes, resolving staff issues and working with difficult parents, are associated with communication and interpersonal skills, such as conflict management strategies, consensus building, building a collegial faculty, and responding to upset parents. Additionally, principals identified development in handling student discipline as a deficit in some programs, a finding that needs to be addressed in principal preparation programs as, in practice, discipline is a “day-to-day” trial that is most time consuming. The final area of program deficit was lack of training in using data, for example, using data to inform decisions, collecting meaningful data to chart improvement, and reporting data required by state and federal accountability measures.

13.2 Strengths and Deficits of Internship Experience

Respondents were also asked to describe the strengths and deficits of their internship program in preparing them for the principalship. In comparison to the preparation program as a whole, in which more strengths than deficits were described, the numbers of deficits (45) and strengths (44) respondents reported in the internship experience were almost equal. Table 2 displays these themes in rank order along with the corresponding ELCC (NPBEA, 2002) standards. Two themes emerged as common to strength and deficit areas, discipline and supervision and evaluation.

Internship Strengths and Weakness as Identified by Principals

Strengths		Weaknesses
Theme	ELCC Standard	Theme
ELCC Standard		
1. Day-to-day/real-world 3.1, 3.3	7.4	1. Budgeting/Finance
2. Mentoring N/A	7.5	2. None
3. Discipline 2.3, 2.4	N/A	3. Supervision/Evaluation
4. Supervision/Evaluation N/A	2.3, 2.4	4. Discipline

Table 2

The majority of respondents agreed that the internship provided a glimpse into the day-to-day responsibilities of the principalship. This real-world experience was viewed as an opportunity to accept the genuine responsibilities of the position and experience a breadth of situations. For example one principal stated, “90% of my principal pedagogy was developed in my internship.” Another respondent concurred by concluding that because of the internship, she was able to identify pertinent questions to ask when solving her own school problems. Finally, one principal succinctly described the feelings of many by stating, “The primary help was the actual day-to-day spontaneous events that occur that a principal deals with each day: discipline, parents dropping in, and teachers with concerns like ‘Have you got a minute?’”

A second theme coded in the analysis was the perception that respondents were provided effective mentoring by practicing principals. Mentors and interns cooperatively planned internship activities and provided guidance as interns navigated the trials of the principalship practicum. For example, one principal stated, “I was able to shadow my principal and observe leadership in action.” Another respondent concluded, “Great practical experience. It allowed me to view others’ philosophies and develop my own.” Additionally, a few respondents stated that the effectiveness of the internship was contingent upon the strength of their mentors. For example, one principal stated, “The internship effectiveness is directly related to the leadership capacity of the leader under whom the internship is completed.” Another respondent concluded that her mentor was not a strong advocate of the internship process.

In regards to areas of deficiency in the internship, the majority of principals pinpointed training in budgeting and financing. Others identified lack of experience in student discipline. However, several respondents indicated high levels of satisfaction with the internship by responding ‘none’ to the question that asked in what way did the internship fail to prepare them for the principalship. For example, one principal stated, “There’s a learning curve for every job so I don’t think the internship failed me at all.”

13.3 Obstacles to Completing Internship

Respondents were also asked to identify their biggest obstacles in completing the internship hours. Three primary themes were identified, time commitment, financial burdens, and being out of their classrooms. Most respondents highlighted the time commitment of the internship when coupled with their teaching duties. Interns either had to temporarily vacate their teaching duties to complete the required internship hours or carry out the hours after contract time. Additionally, several respondents identified financial hardship. While some districts fully supported internships, many participants had to pay for the cost of substitutes

for the time spent out of their classrooms, and others had their pay docked for each day acting as an intern. Some respondents mentioned the added work of preparing lessons for the substitute to teach on top of their internship duties and others noted the deleterious effect of their absence on student progress, as substitutes hired were of varying quality.

13.4 Professional Development Needs of Beginning Principals and Areas of District Support

Principals were asked to reflect on their professional development and support needs as beginning principals, and on the amount of professional development provided by their district in these areas (Table 3). Please see Appendix A for questionnaire. On a 1-5 point Likert scale, where 1= no support needed and 5 = high levels of support needed, principals indicated that early in their career, they needed most support in working with difficult staff members ($M = 4.13$). The second most important area was working with difficult parents ($M=3.71$). Other areas perceived important for support (means >3) were instructional leadership, using data to inform decisions, school budget and finance, creating a collegial faculty, working with difficult students, and legal issues. Areas of least need for support (means <3) were working with the community, the school board, sustaining personal motivation, working with outside support agencies, the media. Diversity issues and learning about the district were ranked lowest. Additionally, principals rated on a 1-5 point Likert scale (1= no PD; 5= much PD) the amount of professional development they received from their school district in the 15 areas.

Perceptions of Support and Development Needs for Beginning Principals and Areas in which Districts Provide Professional Development

		PD Needs				PD Dis- trictsPro- vide	
Area	Mean	<i>SD</i>	N		Mean	<i>SD</i>	N
Working with difficult staff issues***	4.13	0.94	106		2.11	1.06	106
Working with difficult parent issues***	3.71	1.14	106		1.79	0.95	106
Instructional leadership	3.58	1.20	106		3.50	1.20	106
Using data to inform decisions	3.50	1.21	106		3.53	1.25	106
continued on next page							

School budget and finance***	3.48	1.13	105		2.20	1.04	105
Creating a collegial faculty***	3.44	1.18	106		2.53	1.21	106
Student discipline issues***	3.26	1.26	106		2.19	1.18	105
Legal issues***	3.25	1.11	106		2.57	1.16	105
Working with the community***	2.95	1.00	106		1.86	0.89	106
Working with the school board***	2.84	1.23	106		1.88	1.09	106
Sustaining personal motivation**	2.81	1.42	106		2.32	1.24	106
Working with outside support agencies***	2.68	1.10	106		1.78	0.92	101
Working with the media***	2.61	1.11	105		1.75	0.87	106
Diversity issues*	2.41	1.11	106		2.10	1.02	106
Learning about the district	2.38	1.16	105		2.41	1.12	102

Table 3

Note: PD needs: 1 = no need; 5 = high need. PD provided: 1 = no PD; 5 = much PD

*** differences significant at $p < .0001$; * differences significant at $p < .01$

Principals indicated that their school districts provided most professional development in using data to inform decisions ($M=3.53$) and instructional leadership ($M=3.50$). They indicated low to very low levels of district professional development in all the other categories. T-tests indicated highly significant differences between support required by beginning principals and the amount of professional development provided by

districts in all categories except for instructional leadership and using data to drive decisions, areas that were important to principals and addressed by districts, and learning about the district, which was neither perceived as a PD need by principals nor an area that districts addressed. Pearson's r indicated low (.309) to very low correlations (-.01) between support needed and district professional development provided in 13 areas of the 15 areas. The two exceptions were in instructional leadership ($r = .632$) and data-driven decision making ($r = .651$) where districts do seem to be accommodating these needs. The main areas of difference between professional development needs and district professional development provision occur in the areas of communication, relationship building and conflict resolution, that is, the categories of working with staff, parent, and student issues, and creating a collegial faculty. School districts appear to provide little in the way of meeting these needs.

These 15 Likert scaled items were followed by an open-ended question that allowed respondents to explain the type of professional development their districts provided. Three main areas emerged, workshops and conferences, district administrative meetings, and mentoring. Most principals in this study stated that the majority of their professional development needs were acquired out of district through attendance at workshops or conferences. With regards to on-site professional development provided by the district, respondents agreed that district administrative team or principal meetings were the best avenues for professional development. The final theme was mentorship. Principals acknowledged the fact that many relied on a mentor as a guide in providing additional professional development and support. However, it could not be ascertained whether these mentors were assigned by the district or developed through informal networking with other administrators.

14 Discussion

Principals in this study participated in preparation programs, over a wide time span, delivered by universities and colleges throughout the US, although mainly by those in the Mountain West area. In contrast to Levine (2005) and Hess and Kelly (2005), who questioned the quality of learning outcomes in preparation programs, participants identified more strengths than deficits in their overall programs. The main areas identified as both strengths and weaknesses were those covered by ELCC standard 2 (school culture, effective instructional program, best practices for student learning, comprehensive professional growth plans), and standard 3 (managing the organization and resources), suggesting that these are the areas principals see as most important in their day-to-day work-life. Principals on the whole perceived that preparation programs provided a good grounding in school law and leadership theory. However, supervision/evaluation and budget/finance appeared in the top themes for both strengths and deficits, indicating that program evaluators need to examine closely their curricula in those areas. Instructional leadership was also identified as a top strength and deficit, demonstrating it is a priority area for principals; this finding is unsurprising given the current emphasis on leading learning, the complexity of the instructional leadership role (Green, 2010), and the differing degrees to which principals enact it (Grigsby et al., 2010).

Perceived program deficits focused strongly in the area of cultural elements (Peterson, 2002), that is interpersonal communication and conflict resolution, including student discipline, staff, and parental issues. As Fullan (2003) observed, school leaders need to communicate well, build relationships, and mediate conflict. Dealing with the opposing demands of a variety of stakeholders is stressful and time consuming (Duncan & Stock, 2010). These are areas, although specified only indirectly in the ELCC standards, that preparation programs can and need to address. With regard to program structure, several respondents highlighted the value of the cohort in building supportive relationships and networks (Barnet et al., 2000; Norris, 2001).

While internships may be the most challenging feature of the principal preparation programs (Orr, 2011), when well-planned to provide a 'hands-on' experience, the internship is a valuable apprenticeship for the principalship (Bush et al., 2007). Although respondents in this study agreed with Sackney and Walker (2005) that the internship cannot fully prepare them for the complexity of the principalship, they emphasized its importance in providing a glimpse of the day-to-day realities of the position (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Oplatka, 2009). Similar to Orr's (2011) findings, participants emphasized the contribution of supportive internship mentors to the quality of their experience. Bush (2009) emphasized the importance of critically

selecting high quality internship mentors. However, in rural areas such as the Mountain West, because of distances between schools, there may not be much choice of where to intern; therefore, rather than being selected for leadership quality, mentor principals tend simply to be those who agree to accommodate interns. Generally, in our extensive experience working with interns, principals who choose to mentor interns tend to be those who are genuinely interested in helping less experienced colleagues. However, given the need expressed in the literature for coaching and mentoring training for principals (Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009; Rodriguez-Campos et al., 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2011; Wong, 2004; Woods et al., 2009), as university faculty, our principal preparation program internship experience can be strengthened if we can work more closely with mentor principals, and provide workshops on mentoring and coaching. Connected to this finding, respondents also expressed appreciation of peer support provided by the cohort structure of some preparation programs provided. Similar to Teitel's (1997) findings, principals in this study perceived the cohort format as integral to developing breadth in their understanding of theory as well as providing a prelude to the informal networks created among practicing principals. As Walker and Dimmock (2006) noted, a cohort format provides the networking necessary for professional dialogue, nurtures interpersonal skills, and builds enduring professional connections.

While respondents highlighted strengths of the internship, they shared many of the difficulties encountered in the literature regarding participation. As McGregor and Watson (2008) observed, the ideal internship occurs when participants can work full-time with a practicing administrator. However, most interns are teachers and must take a significant amount of time out of the classroom to fulfill the time requirement (as much as one semester in this study). Participants noted that the quality of instruction in their absence was highly dependent on the skills of the substitute teacher hired – an area of specific concern in rural areas where the substitute pool is small (Van Den Bussche, Temesvari, & Czarnecki, 2007). Another issue arising from requiring substitute teachers is their cost. While some participants indicated their districts were fully supportive of the internship, for a larger majority, internship meant paying substitute costs out of their own pocket and negotiating personal leave days to participate. School districts vary not only in availability of fiscal resources but also in their willingness to invest funding in sponsoring aspiring school leaders (McGregor & Watson, 2008).

For growth in the leadership role, principals require job-embedded and formal professional development (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; Spillane et al., 2009). Perspicacious principals identify their own weaknesses, seek out professional development opportunities (Zepeda, 2007), and communicate an attitude of continuous improvement (Byrnes & Baxter, 2006). In this study, it was interesting to compare the areas of perceived professional development needs for beginning principals with the areas that districts provided. Districts seem to provide adequate PD in instructional leadership and using data to inform decisions, a finding that reinforces the accountability enforced emphasis on these areas that Quinn (2004) identified. However, the discrepancy between needs identified in the relational or cultural skills (Peterson, 2002) - staff issues, parental issues, creating a collegial faculty, and student discipline - and the minimal district PD provided in these areas is highly significant. As participants noted, conflict and communication issues are unpredictable and time consuming. Navigating situations in which emotions run high requires developing appropriate relational skills (Eller, 2010; Fullan, 2003). As Zalman and Bryant (2002) observed, and as borne out by this study, these skills are a major focus neither of principal preparation programs nor of district PD initiatives.

As we review our principal preparation program at the University of Wyoming, this finding is key. The main day-to-day role of the principal is working effectively with a wide range of individuals and stakeholder groups. While the current thrust is instructional leadership, to be successful in this area requires a foundation of strong-interpersonal skills. Universities and school districts need to be cognizant of this and ensure that programs and professional development opportunities promote growth of cultural as well as structural skills. Additionally, when professional development activities are planned, two points are underscored in the literature. First extended learning activities should mimic the career stages of the principalship, from entry to exit needs (Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009; Peterson, 2002). Novice principals desire different knowledge than veteran principals or those about to exit the profession (Eller, 2010). Secondly, professional development should encompass the needs of adult learners (Hill, et al., 2001; Langer & Applebee, 1986). Such tenets include: (a) ownership of learning activities, (b) appropriateness of learning activities, (c) structure

of learning activities, (d) collaboration during activities, and (e) reflection after the conclusion of activities (Zepeda, 2007).

15 Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the focus on accreditation and ELCC standards has placed the onus on principal preparation programs to examine closely the content and skills they teach, as well as to align these to ELCC standards. Study findings indicate much variation in participants' perceptions of strengths and deficits in principal preparation programs, suggesting that there has been little consistency in program content across universities and over time periods. The areas identified as strengths and as deficits in preparation programs are those that are most relevant to principals in the day-to-day running of their schools. The structural areas principals identified focused mainly on ELCC Standards 2 and 3, that is, instruction and organizational management, while the cultural areas pertained to relational skills. Therefore, when aligning principal preparation programs with ELCC standards, it is imperative to also teach and provide opportunities to practice the relational skills that underpin the structural components the standards address. While principal development begins with principal preparation programs, it does not end there. Rather, it should be an on-going process embedded throughout the careers of educational leaders. To develop principals who can successfully lead schools requires ongoing crucial conversations and partnerships between the colleges who prepare principals and the districts that employ them. As Bottoms and Garner (2007) advised, universities need to build reciprocal relationships with schools and districts, rather than view them as a resource to be tapped when required.

16 Limitations and Areas of Further Study

The survey had an acceptable response rate and respondents provided a proportional representation of elementary, secondary and K-12 Wyoming school principals. The majority of the respondents had completed their principal preparation programs in the Mountain West region of the United States, a predominantly rural area, and so the findings may be less applicable to more urban regions. Respondents were asked to think back to their preparation programs and their professional development needs when they were beginning principals; thus, their perceptions may have been impacted by experiences during the intervening time from beginning as principals to the present day. The survey was limited to Likert-scale items and open-ended responses. Further research is required into the degree to which content and skills of principal preparation programs are transferred to professional performance as practicing principals. This research will require collaboration among university educational leadership faculty, professional organizations, beginning principals, and the districts in which they are employed.

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Access Wyoming Principal Preparation Survey Here⁶

⁴<http://www.wallacefoundation.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/WF/Knowledge%20Center/Attachments/PDF/FINALWallaceCLSPerspective.p>

⁵<http://edu.wyoming.gov/DataInformationAndReporting.aspx>

⁶See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m40890/latest/Duncan.pdf>>