Effectiveness of graduate programs in administrative and instructional leadership

Barbara Cozza, Patrick Blessinger and Marcella Mandracchia

School of Education, St John's University, New York, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is twofold: to assess the effectiveness of the school building and school district leadership programs within the School of Education at a large private university and to find areas for improvement in these programs.

Design/methodology/approach – This study utilized a qualitative grounded theory research strategy using a case study approach of two campuses of the university. Each case study utilized the same data collection methods and data analysis procedures in order to increase validity.

Findings – The key findings revealed that the graduates emphasized the importance of professional support via a cohort structure, a sound program philosophy, and a comprehensive and coherent curriculum. Recruitment and administrative internships were two effectiveness criteria not emphasized by the participants. Thus, the findings suggest the program could be enhanced by the creation of leadership portfolios and quality administrative internships. These findings are also consistent with the transfer of learning theory.

Research limitations/implications – Educational leadership preparation programs continue to be highly relevant fields of study as society places greater expectations on school leaders for meeting learning outcomes and educational standards. Increased calls for accountability have initiated more research on conditions and other factors that lead to enhanced student learning in these programs. To the extent that other universities have similar programs in place, the findings may benefit them in developing or improving their own program(s).

Practical implications – The paper includes implications for the development of innovative programs in administrative and instructional leadership. The findings of this study suggest the program could be enhanced by the creation of leadership portfolios (digital and non-digital) as a culminating experience to summarize accomplishments, demonstrate competencies, and to serve as an authentic form of assessment, as well as the creation of quality administrative internships to provide students with real-life opportunities while they go through the program.

Originality/value – This paper fulfils an identified need to study those program characteristics that have been shown to have the strongest relationship to school improvement.

Keywords Leadership preparation, School improvement, Educational leadership, Student achievement, Transfer of learning

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This qualitative study was conducted as part of the requirements for accreditation for a K-12 school leadership preparation program within the School of Education at a large private university in New York City. This accreditation process served as a practical and suitable vehicle through which to conduct a qualitative multi-case study using focus groups and content analysis of e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts. Analyzed as a holistic body of data, the researchers were able to draw tentative conclusions about the relative effectiveness of the program and based on the findings, the researchers were able to offer recommendations for program improvement. The findings may benefit those universities with similar programs in improving their own program(s). This study was guided by prior research on school building and school district

leadership preparation programs which will be discussed in the paper (Orr, 2009, 2011; Orr and Orphanos, 2011; Pounder, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Young et al., 2009; Hannum et al., 2007; Davis et al., 2005; Barnett et al., 2000).

Purpose of the study

The idea of educational leadership has changed as our knowledge of the field has developed and as new research findings and theories have shed light on its meaning within various contexts (Tucker et al., 2012). Educational leadership preparation programs for School Building Leader and School District Leader continue to be highly relevant fields of study as society places greater expectations on school leaders for meeting national standards and student learning outcomes. Increased calls for educational accountability have initiated more research on the conditions and other factors that lead to enhanced student learning in cohort models in these types of leadership programs (Byrk et al., 2010). According to Tucker et al. (2012):

> [y] research in the last decade has advanced our understanding in two important areas: leadership practice and its effects on schools and student learning, and effective leadership preparation. Although there has been substantial progress on the former area, more work is needed in identifying the linkages between preparation program features and resulting practice by program graduates once they assume leadership positions (p. 164).

As per Tucker, leadership program outcomes are important elements to consider. Many K-12 leadership preparation programs have been redesigned to align with new national standards from accreditation bodies (e.g. Teacher Education Accreditation Council) with a focus on establishing more effective, evidence-based connections between formal leadership preparation programs and practical school situations. A primary area of focus for many research studies on this topic explores the relationship between K-12 leadership preparation program quality features and practical leadership practices that generate an increase in student achievement. Orr and Orphanos (2011) investigated leadership practices of 125 principals who graduated from K-12 leadership programs that were identified as innovative. The study compared this group with a national sample of about 500 principals who graduated from k-12 leadership programs that were identified as traditional. The study revealed that innovative programs outperformed traditional programs in producing principals who were more effective in their leadership practices. This result, in turn, led to greater school improvements and student achievement. In addition, Pounder (2011) noted that future research should focus on innovative programs and specific program characteristics that have the strongest relationship to school improvement.

The purpose of this research study is twofold:

(1) to assess the effectiveness of the school building leadership (SBL) and school district leadership (SDL) programs within the School of Education at a large private university; and

(2) to identify areas for improvement that may be generalizable to similar leadership preparation programs.

Specifically, this study examined the leadership outcomes of program graduates who have assumed leadership positions within K-12 institutions. This study utilized a grounded theory research strategy using a multi-case study approach of two campuses (main campus and satellite campus). Grounded theory was applied to gain insight into the patterns and relationships that emerged from the empirical data (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Each case study used the same set of data collection methods and data analysis procedures in order to provide a more valid basis of comparison across groups.

Based on the nature of the study and the specific elements of the framework, the following qualitative research questions guided the study:

RQ1. How effective are the university's school building and school district leader programs based on the seven criteria needed for graduate programs in educational leadership?

RQ2. Which program characteristics emerged from the study as most important?

RQ3. What are the similarities and differences in the findings between the two campuses?

This study attempted to investigate some of these linkages by examining program graduates who have assumed leadership positions. The ultimate aims of this type of leadership preparation program are to develop knowledge, skills, and capacities for effective leadership, and develop aspirations for career advancement (Orr, 2011).

Literature review

This study focussed on seven effectiveness characteristics for quality K-12 leadership preparation programs that have been shown to have the strongest relationship to school improvement: coherent curriculum (CC), program philosophy (PP), active learning (AL), faculty experts (FE), professional support via cohort structure (PS), recruitment and selection (RS), and quality internships (QI) (Davis et al., 2005; Jackson and Kelley, 2002; Orr, 2006; Young et al., 2009).

The findings in this study suggest that the program could be enhanced with the implementation of leadership portfolios. A portfolio is an authentic collection of student work that reflects her/his progress and achievements. Since the findings in this study emphasize the need for student portfolios, implementing portfolios can provide a means for student reflective inquiry, authentic learning assessment, professional performance evaluation, and as a culminating experience has gained increasing attention within educational leadership preparation programs. In addition to the acquisition of formal theory and concepts, today's educational leaders are expected to possess a wider range of experiential knowledge, professional skills, and a deeper understanding of how their own leadership style. If implemented appropriately, portfolios could provide a mechanism to enhance these qualities in students (Johnson et al., 2006; Meadows and Dyal, 1999).

The list below describes the criteria that was embedded in this study and that represent the seven recommended quality characteristics that all university SBL and SDL programs should integrate into their programs to increase their effectiveness.

The seven effectiveness characteristics for quality educational leadership programs:

(1) A comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned to state and professional standards, in particular the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education/Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards, which emphasize instructional leadership. Coded as CC for coherent curriculum.

(2) A program philosophy and curriculum that emphasize leadership of instruction and school improvement. Coded as PP for program philosophy.

(3) Active, student-centered instruction employing pedagogies that facilitate the integration of theory and practice and stimulate reflection, such as problem-based learning, action research, field-based projects, journal writing, and portfolios that feature ongoing feedback with self, peer, and faculty assessment. Coded as AL for active learning.

(4) Faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including expert scholars and practitioners who had experience in K-12 teaching and school administration. Coded as FE for faculty experts.

(5) Social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure, as well as formalized mentoring and advisement from expert principals. Coded as PS professional support via cohort structure.

(6) Vigorous, carefully targeted recruitment and selection processes that proactively bring expert teachers with potential for leadership into the principalship. Coded as RS for recruitment and selection.

(7) Well-designed and supervised administrative internships that provide opportunities for candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans. Coded as QI for quality internships.

Methods and data sources

Sampling

Purposive sampling was deemed most germane to answering the research questions because it allowed the researchers to receive input directly from those who experienced the program (former students) and who are now practitioners (e.g. superintendents, principals, vice principals, and directors). All 17 participants were full-time employees within K-12 systems and worked within a 20-mile radius of the university.

Purposeful sampling is a non-random sample from a specified group. This study used a particular type of purposeful sampling known as criterion sampling (Patton, 1990). The following criterion used was: a graduate of the doctor of education SBL or SDL program who was employed full-time in a leadership capacity at a K-12 institution.

Program graduates were asked, via an e-mail request, to participate in focus group sessions. In all, 17 graduates voluntarily chose to participate in the study – ten (n ¼ 10) from the satellite campus and seven (n ¼ 7) from the main campus.

Data collection

Given the nature of the research questions, the researchers utilized a qualitative grounded theory design to gain insight into the patterns and relationships that emerged from the empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) by using a multi-case study analysis of two campuses (main campus and satellite campus) which has been delivering leadership preparation programs for several years. Each case study used the same set of data collection methods and data analysis procedures in order to provide a more valid basis of comparison across groups and thereby increase validity, reliability, and generalizability. Thus, this study collected qualitative data from focus group transcripts, e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts and analyzed it relative to the following framework: organize and code the data,

identify themes and develop relevant concepts, refine and clarify patterns and interconnections, and interpret findings in the context of relevant theories of educational leadership.

Descriptive data were collected from the 17 participants through focus group sessions. One session was held for the main campus graduates and one session was held for the satellite campus graduates. Each session was one hour in length and included verbatim audio recordings of each session as well as detailed field notes and observations by the researchers. The questioning process for the focus groups was consistent with the Seidman (2006) three phase interview process – background knowledge, specific information related to the study, and reflection. Following the focus group sessions, the researchers also collected e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts from all the participants to provide a rich set of data to analyze.

Data coding

The data were coded using a two-tier hierarchical coding process: the raw data were coded using keywords (tier 1), then the keywords (also known as codes) were logically grouped into themes (tier 2). The coding was conducted manually and independently by each of the researchers and based on their knowledge on the topic, their experience in the field, and their experience with the qualitative research approach. For the main campus focus group, the most commonly recurring keywords/codes (i.e. networking, communication, collegiality, cohort model, teamwork, mentoring) where logically grouped into the theme called collaboration because all of these keywords have a collaborative element to them. In other words, collaboration is the common thread and chief characteristic that defines each of those keywords. From this coded data, a narrative emerged that explicated a more coherent set of findings related to the interconnections and common patterns that emerged logically from the coded data.

For analysis and interpretation of the data, the research and coding process included the following steps (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998):

· collect raw data from multiple sources and participants;

· organize and prepare the data for analysis;

· transcribe the recordings and researchers' field notes;

· code all data appropriately and ask critical questions related to the data;

· make sense of the data by finding recurring themes and patterns that are germane to the data and to the context from which the data emerged;

· conduct detailed data analysis and reflect on the data in the context of the framework used (e.g. the seven characteristics of quality leadership preparation programs);

· relate the codes and other findings to the research questions;

· interpret findings, generate discussion, and infer implications and conclusions; and

· relate findings to existing theory (literature) or propose new tentative theory.

The study was designed to allow the research team to be attentive to issues of validity by using multiple data sources (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003) and to consider

reliability by searching for patterns based on the seven quality characteristics that drive effective programs (Creswell, 2003).

Key findings
Focus groups
The same process and the same researchers (participant observers) were used during each focus group in order to establish a reliable and valid basis for comparison of data between the two groups.

In an attempt to elicit responses that were most salient to the program goals and aims, the focus group questions centered on the following areas: program successes and challenges, professional knowledge, strategic decision-making, and caring and effective leadership. The list below describes the prompts that were used to generate an open-ended discussion in the focus groups.

Focus group prompts:

- Success and challenges: what successes and challenges did you experience going through the program? Please share your ideas.

- Professional knowledge: what does educational vision mean to you based on your professional knowledge? Please share your ideas.

- Strategic decision-making: can you talk about your long range planning and strategic decision-making process related to how you determine the state of your school environment, identifying problems, and creating improvements in the areas of curriculum development, instructional strategies, technology use, assessment, student support, professional support, budgeting, and facilities development? Please share your ideas.

- Caring and effective leadership: please finish this statement: as a leader, I affect any needed educational change through ethical decision-making based on factual analysis, even in the face of opposition, when Iy Please share your ideas.

The focus group responses were recorded, analyzed, and coded using the seven effectiveness criteria. The coding was independently performed by two researchers on the project team and a third researcher computed the cross-tabulation result to ensure integrity of the findings. The inter-rater reliability was 0.91 for the data coding, which was deemed sufficient.

Relative to the seven effectiveness criteria, the data also illustrates the many relationships within and between the different themes. For instance, the cohort model is widely considered a learning approach whose aim is to foster teamwork, collegiality, decision-making, and problem-solving because cohorts work together to simulate real-world work scenarios and because it functions as a type of peer-teaching model. Cohorts are also social in nature and reflect the diversity of the workplace in terms of diversity of ideas and perspectives.

The findings suggest that while there are areas that both groups experience as positive there are also differences in how they experienced the program. For instance, the fact that the satellite group stressed the benefits of the cohort model, but main group did not, does not necessarily imply that the main group did not see the benefit in using the cohort model. Perhaps their negative perceptions of cohorts were a result with how the cohort model was implemented within their particular program. Both groups did have positive views of the role of teamwork within the program.

In addition, according to the data collected through focus groups and researchers' field notes, Table I shows evidence that the participants believed that the programs met five of the seven effective elements for education leadership programs. Further research is needed to analyze why RS and QI were not emphasized.

E-journal, concept maps, and artifacts

For the e-journals, the participants were asked to reflect on the following:

- Describe your set of intellectual skills, tools, and ideas that enable you as a leader to learn on your own, and transfer what you have learned to new contexts. Explain in your discussion how you have acquired the dispositions and skills for lifelong learning in the field (learning how to learn).
- What evidence can you give that shows that you understand gender, race, individual differences, and ethnic and cultural perspectives for educational practice? (multicultural ideas).
- Explain how you as a leader have integrated technology into the profession.

For the concept maps, each of the participants created and submitted a concept map that described successes and challenges of the program and added input on suggestions for future program implementation ideas.

To support the data, each participant submitted an artifact that showed the accomplishment(s) that he/she attained from the outcome of the program and that showed how the program prepared him/her as a qualified educational leader. Data from e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts from all participants were analyzed and coded using the same procedure as described previously. The coding for the e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts was performed by two researchers on the project team. Each coder independently coded the data and, to test the inter-rater reliability, a third researcher computed a cross-tabulation result.

Criteria for effective graduate programs in educational leadership	Satellite focus group	Main focus group
A comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned to state and professional standards (CC)	Yes, criteria met	Yes, criteria met
A program philosophy and curriculum that emphasize leadership of instruction and school improvement (PP)	Yes, criteria met	Yes, criteria met
Active, student-centered instruction employing pedagogies that facilitate the integration of theory and practice and stimulate reflection (AL)	Yes, criteria met	Area for improvement
Faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including expert scholars and practitioners (FE)	Yes, criteria met	Yes, criteria met
Social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure, as well as formalized mentoring and advisement from expert principals (PS)	Yes, criteria met	Area for improvement
Vigorous, carefully targeted recruitment and selection processes (RS)	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Well-designed and supervised administrative internships that provide opportunities for candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities (QI)	Not mentioned	Not mentioned

The degree of agreement was 0.95 which provided sufficient confidence that the data were properly and reliably coded. Table II shows the results of the inter-rater reliability results.

Table III shows a summary of the raw scores and percentages of coded data for the e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts.
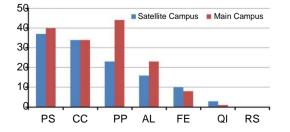
This same data is broken out by campus and shown graphically in Figure 1. The figure shows that the participants emphasized the following program effectiveness criteria: PS, a CC, and a PP. These three criteria accounted for over 75 percent of the coded data, suggesting that these three criteria are of greatest importance to the research participants (i.e. the program graduates).

One caveat should be noted: although PS (cohort structure) was emphasized in the e-journals, concept maps, and artifacts, the focus group data revealed that the satellite campus indicated that the cohort structure is working well in their program but the

Case processing summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Rater A _ Rater B	28	100.0	0	0.0	28	100.0

Rater A _ Rater B cross-tabulation

	Rater B					
Count	1	2	3	5	6	Total
Rater A						
1	2	0	0	0	0	2
2	1	10	0	0	0	11
3	0	0	5	0	0	5
5	0	0	0	2	0	2
6	0	0	0	0	8	8
Total	3	10	5	2	8	28

Symmetric measures

		Value	Asymp. SE	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Measure of agreement	k	0.951	0.048	8.895	0.000
No. of valid cases		28			

Note: No data coded as 7

Codes	PS	CC	PP	AL	FE	QI	RS
Frequency	77	68	67	39	18	4	0
Frequency (%)	28	25	25	14	7	1	0

main campus indicated that the cohort structure needs improvement. In spite of their different experiences using the cohort model, both groups reported positive views of the role of teamwork within the program, suggesting that the cohort model can be a successful model for the main campus. Further research is needed to determine how best to improve the cohort model on the main campus.

Data analysis
The data were further analyzed based on the research questions of the study:

> RQ1. How effective are the university's school building and school district leader programs based on the seven criteria needed for graduate programs in educational leadership?

According to the focus group data collected through researchers' field notes and transcriptions of audio recordings, Table I, discussed previously, shows evidence that the programs met at least five of the seven quality criteria. The fact that RS and QI were not mentioned does not necessarily mean that the programs are not effective in those areas, but rather that the participants simply did not emphasize those areas. Further research is needed to analyze why RS and QI were not emphasized:

> RQ2. Which program characteristics emerged from the study as the most important?

Satellite campus focus group
In order to get a better sense of the most important and relevant characteristics of the satellite campus, the data from the satellite campus focus group transcripts (the raw data) revealed the following keywords (codes). The keywords in italics were the most frequently discussed. In this way, the core themes emerged naturally from the focus group data (codes).

Summary of characteristics that emerged from satellite campus focus group:

- Summary of successes: cohort model; technology; team work; common goals; support; data-driven decision-making; dissertation defense; internship; expert professors; collegial environment.
- Summary of challenges: improve technology; create capstone course; create visionary leaders; share previous cohort knowledge and experience; create better exam preparation; create more practical coursework; create a better balance between team work and individual work; bring speakers with different perspectives into the classes; relate common core standards to theories of leadership and instruction.
- Summary of professional knowledge: three to five plans; technology and financial plans; accreditation process; vision statements; mission statements; leadership; cohort model; grant writing; implementing legislation; how to increase enrollment and course offerings; importance of teamwork; how to communicate with all stakeholders; importance of "themes, patterns, and discrepancies"; data-driven decision-making; support from professors; learning applications for students; using technology; how to develop social capital; getting stakeholders to buy into vision; organizational theory; teaching models and strategies; using course management system; shared decision-making; professionals staff development; small class sizes, collegiality, different visions; different perspectives.

- Summary of strategic decision making: student-centered decision-making; implementing the Dignity Act; value diversity; transition planning; problem-solving; authentic learning; collaborative learning; cohort model; communication skills.
- Summary of budget: data-driven decision-making; strategic planning; problem-solving; financial management.
- Summary of caring and effective leadership: sense-making; student-centered decision-making; multi-culturalism; self-improvement; role modeling; instructional technologies; ethical behavior.

An analysis of the raw focus group data for the satellite campus revealed the following core themes that were most important to this group's participants relative to the effectiveness of the program they graduated from. The first step in the analysis process was to identify from the raw data (transcribed audio transcripts) the most frequently used keywords which then served as the codes for the data. The underlying assumption is that the keywords used most frequently have the greatest importance to the participants. The codes were then logically grouped into core themes. In this way, the core themes emerged naturally from the raw data.

Satellite campus core themes.

(1) Collaboration theme:

- cohort model;

- team work; and

- collegiality.

(2) Leadership and decision-making theme:

- vision statements;

- decision-making; and

- problem-solving,

(3) Information and communication theme:

- instructional technology; and

- communication technology.

Furthermore, in examining some of the more salient comments of the participants, in the area of collaboration, one participant noted, "[y] it was my first introduction to the cohort model and I believe that it helped me in my leadership role to learn how to establish teamwork [y]." Another participant noted, "[y] the cohort model was a benefit; in my cohort there were principals, superintendents, APs and directors and to see all the different perspectives was beneficial on many levels."

In the area of decision-making, and illustrative of how decision-making links to the cohort model, one participant noted, "Going back to that cohort model, in, back to my building, I was able to take the concept back to our shared decision making meetings, and using that model to have the same diversity or really the diversity of staff involved in brainstorming or coming up with decisions that involves all staff and students."

In the area of communication, and illustrative of how technology links to decision-making, one participant noted, "Let me continue the idea of technology and data driven

leadership. It was emphasized throughout all the coursework in the program. It helped me understand information and using it to make district wide decisions and ultimately down to instructional decisions and as a means to assess the effectiveness of the overall program."

Thus, this data illustrates the many, often complex, relationships within and between the different themes and how, qualitatively, some of these themes reinforce other themes. For instance, the cohort model is an approach whose aim is the foster teamwork, collegiality, decision-making, and problem-solving. The social and multivariate nature of cohorts reflects the diversity of the workplace in terms of ideas, perspectives, position, gender, race, etc.

Main campus focus group

In order to get a better sense of the most important and relevant characteristics of the main campus, the data from the main campus focus group transcripts (the raw data) revealed the following keywords (codes). The keywords in italics were the most frequently discussed. In this way, the core themes emerged naturally from the focus group data (codes).

Summary of characteristics that emerged from main campus focus group:

- Summary of successes: authenticity; customer service; reflection; best practices; networking; application of theory; research process; writing skills; communication; expert professors; collegiality.

- Summary of challenges: expert professors; application of theory; networking; data analysis; cohort model; communication; uniformity; capstone.

- Summary of professional knowledge: customer service; vision; sustainable growth; service; teamwork; stakeholders; communication; diversity; expert professors; data driven decision-making.

- Summary of strategic decision making: expert professors; mentoring; research process; customer service; stakeholder; communication.

- Summary of budget: assessment; stakeholders; educational goals; technology; financial management.

- Summary of caring and effective leadership: student-centered data driven decision-making; mediation; transparency; consistency; vision.

- Summary of professional development: reflection; collaboration; collegiality; openness

- Summary of ethical behavior: mentoring; team work; trust; appreciation; communication; honesty; integrity.

The underlying assumption is that the keywords used most frequently have the greatest importance to the participants. The codes were then logically grouped into core themes. In this way, the core themes emerged naturally from the raw data.

Main campus core themes.

(1) Collaboration theme:

- networking;

- communication;

- collegiality;

- cohort model;

- teamwork; and

- mentoring.

(2) Leadership and decision-making theme:

- data driven decision-making;

- data analysis;

- application of theory;

- research process; and

- reflection.

(3) Community service and support theme:

- expert professors;

- mentoring; and

- customer service.

As with the satellite focus group, the same questions were asked to the main campus focus group. The participant responses were recorded, analyzed, and coded using the same procedure and then independently reviewed and coded in order to establish reliability of the coding results. The results showed that all participants place heavy emphasis on three key themes: collaboration, decision-making, and support. The participants consider these three themes the most important for effective leadership.

In examining some of the salient comments of the participants, in the area of collaboration, one participant noted, "Networking with practitioners in the program was beneficial. We had people in the programs who were different in the education field and being able to share their practices and coupling theory with practice was very important and made it truly tangible and worthwhile."

In the area of data analysis, one participant noted, "Those data analysis skills that I learned during my doctoral work are the most valuable skills I use today as an administrator. There should be heavy emphasis on and a logical sequence on applying theory and data analysis."

In the area of community service, one participant noted, "The whole idea of service and the community and helping people comes across here and it is unique to this school – you don't see that at other schools. You are not in a bubble here – you realize that you are part of a larger community.":

RQ3. What are the similarities and differences in the findings between the two campuses?

When the results of both focus groups are compared with each other, the following findings emerged.

Core similarities
The following are the core similarities between the groups for the collaboration theme:

- both groups stressed the importance of creating a team work environment; and

- both groups stressed the importance of creating a collaborative environment.

The following is the core similarity between the groups for the decision-making theme:

- both groups stressed the importance of developing decision-making skills.

Core differences

The core differences between the groups for the collaboration theme:

- the satellite group stressed the benefits from the cohort model, but the main group did not.

The core differences across groups within the decision-making theme:

- the satellite group stressed the importance of vision statements, but the main group did not;

- the satellite group stressed the benefit of developing problem-solving skills, but the main group did not;

- the satellite group stressed the benefit of developing data analysis skills, but the main group did not;

- the main group stressed the benefits of engaging in personal reflection, but the satellite group did not;

- the main group stressed the need to better understand the research process, but the satellite group did not; and

- the main group stressed the need to develop skills for application of theory, but the satellite group did not.

The core differences between groups for the communication theme:

- the main group stressed the need to better understand and apply technology, but the satellite group did not.

The core differences between groups for the community service theme:

- the main group stressed the benefit of mentoring from professors, but the satellite group did not; and

- the main group stressed the focus on community service from school, but the satellite group did not.

These findings suggest that while there are areas that both groups experience as positive there are variances in how they experienced the program. Further research is needed to shed light on why these similarities and differences exist.

Discussion and implications

Transfer of learning happens when learning in one particular context improves or diminishes learning in another related context. This phenomenon is important because the success of leadership preparation programs is dependent upon the ability to transfer what one has learned in a formal learning environment to the more complex real-world work environment. To this end, the findings of this study suggest the program could be enhanced by the creation of leadership portfolios (digital and non-digital) as a culminating experience to summarize accomplishments, demonstrate competencies, and to serve as an authentic form of assessment, as well as the creation

of quality administrative internships to provide students with real-life opportunities while they go through the program. To this end, the campuses cited the following as their primary successes.

Satellite campus: cohort model, problem-solving, data analysis, visionary leadership. Main campus: personal reflection, community service.

The campuses also cited the following as their primary areas for improvements.

Satellite campus: personal reflection, community service.
Main campus: cohort model, research process, application of theory, visionary leadership.

Transfer of learning theory

A plausible theoretical framework that is consistent with the findings is the transfer of learning theory. Baldwin and Ford (1988) defined transfer of learning "as the extent to which the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired [y] can be applied, generalized, and maintained over time" (p. 63). Transfer of learning happens when learning in one particular context improves or diminishes learning in another related context (Perkins and Salomon, 1992). Desse (1958) noted that, "Practically all educational and training programs are built upon the fundamental premise that human beings have this ability to transfer what they have learned from one situation to another" (p. 213). However, Illeris (2010) noted that the problem of transfer of learning is, "What has been learned in one context often can be difficult to recall and apply in a different context" (p. 137).

The researchers believe that the transfer of learning theory supports the findings of this study by identifying two learning components that can be added to the program to enhance transfer of learning:

- creation of leadership portfolios (digital and non-digital) as a culminating experience and project that summarizes accomplishments, demonstrates competencies, and serves as an authentic means of assessment; and

- creation of administrative internships to provide students with real-life opportunities to engage in leadership responsibilities and that serves as an authentic means of assessment.

Kolb (1984) stated that learning is "formed and reformed through experience" (p. 28). Administrative internships can provide a good vehicle for gaining needed experience in administrative and instructional leadership. Experiential learning focuses on meaning-making from active, direct, and personal experiences. Personal experiences that are meaningful (cognitively, emotionally, and socially) can enhance learning. The social aspect of learning is enhanced by creating a learning community that is actively engaged in the learning process, both in and out of the classroom. Thus, instructors can enhance learning by fostering a learning community where students are encouraged to make personal connections with the curriculum and the learning objectives at all levels. In other words, students should be able to apply what they are learning in meaningful and authentic ways (Benander and Lightner, 2005). If implemented properly, internships and portfolios have the potential to enable students in educational leadership preparation programs to practice and document their new learning in more meaningful, active, and practical ways, thus helping to bridge the gap between formal leadership learning and practical leadership outcomes.

Generalizability

As mentioned previously, each case study utilized the same data collection methods and data analysis procedures in an attempt to increase validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings. It is important to note that the results of this study stress coherence with a focus on leadership program content that is centered around an instructional leadership model that enables quality components such as collaboration, understanding of vision, data-driven tasks, shared decision-making, integration of technology, and problem-based learning. These are program qualities that will benefit all leadership programs that consider student outcomes and school reform improvement.

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Appendix. Satellite campus (SC) and main campus (MC) focus group results
Sample of Transcribed Data
Similarities and Differences

Core similarities
Collaboration theme
Both stressed the importance of creating a team work environment:

- Satellite Campus (SC): "one of the things that was valuable for my cohort was along the way previous cohorts came in and shared research that they did, shared their presentations, share where they were with cumulative assignments and portfolios."

- Main Campus (MC): "to piggyback on here on my research here on transformational leadership – two out of the three keys there with the first one being to do constituent groups to members of the team trust your integrity, your honesty, and if you don't have that first level, then the rest of them is not important."

Both stressed the importance of creating a collegial environment:

- SC: "I feel a big part were the professors who are truly experts in their fields and when you walk into a class you feel that it is a collegial environment – you feel that the professor wants you to succeed and they do."

- MC: "Agreed reflection, and then collegiate sharing or collaboration. So when something doesn't work Yes, I will rack my own brain, but then I will pick somebody else's brain to see what they have experienced and how they would handle it."

Leadership and decision-making theme
Both stressed the importance of developing decision-making skills:

- SC: "one of the things I learned in the program was about long-term data decision-making for both instruction and larger administrative issues."

- SC: "I want to stress the importance of continuing to incorporate things like common core standards, coursework should address practical fiscal challenges faced by building and districts and relate those to theories of leadership."

- MC: "not every decision you make is going to be necessarily the right decision. Just everything is a learning experience and documenting that and learning from it."

- MC: "I affect any needed educational change through ethical decision making."

Core differences
Collaboration theme
SC stressed the benefits from the cohort model, but MC did not:

- SC: "in the cohort model I got to see a variety of perspectives and that enabled me to see how administrators would view a problem that helped me."

- SC: "the cohort model was a benefit; in my cohort there were principals, superintendents, and APs and directors and to see all the different perspectives was beneficial on many levels."

- MC: "there is also too much provincialism in the cohort model."

- MC: "cohort can be too diverse that they are unmanageable and on the other hand there is the problem of being too provincial in either coming from all the same place or at the same level."

Leadership and decision-making theme

SC stressed the importance of vision statements, but MC did not:

- SC: "keeping that vision, that mission statement all of those pieces together, we put, as we work together, and I do think that I gained."

- MC: "push forth a vision knowing that the vision is good for children even in the face of opposition, even when everyone is against that vision."

SC stressed the benefit of developing problem-solving skills, but MC did not:

- SC: "enabled me to see how administrators would view a problem that helped me."

- SC: "is important to not only recognize a problem but rather to predict the problem before it becomes a problem."

- SC: "we've had to identify problems and collect data and analyze that data and discuss that with the group and share that with the faculty and the district administration."

- MC: "I have a problem with complacency and I need to continue to ensure that the programs that we have in place are meeting the goals."

SC stressed the benefit of developing data analysis skills, but MC did not:

- SC: "it was very exciting, very powerful, to be able to be the one person in the room who know how to take all that information and yknow not only how to interpret the data and use the data but to make everybody in that room empowered to own what was going on in our building."

- MC: "before the doctoral work there was a gap in the importance of data and in doing data analysis – not until I got to the dissertation work. Those data analysis skills that I learned during my doctoral work are the most valuable skills I use today as an administrator.

  There should be heavy emphasis on and a logical sequence on applying theory and data analysis."

MC stressed the benefits of engaging in personal reflection, but SC did not:

- MC: "It was monthly self-assessments and self-reflections on what was done.

  Just everything is a learning experience and documenting that and learning from it."

- MC: "self-reflection. That is one thing that St John's stressed from day one keeping a journal and weekly. It was monthly self-assessments and self-reflections on what was done."

MC stressed the need to better understand the research process, but SC did not:

- MC: "When I started years ago they taught us how to read and understand research than I did."

- MC: "I think how St John's has enhance this in my practice and helped me to get better at some of these things was giving me the research base information on these types of things."

MC stressed the need to develop skills for application of theory, but SC did not:

- MC: "During my first year, there was a major gap in data analysis – too much theory. Should have been more practical work and real-life scenario."

- MC: "some professors were theorists and very well versed in their areas but the problem was they were not practitioners."

- MC: "There should be heavy emphasis on and a logical sequence on applying theory and data analysis."

Information and communication theme

MC stressed the need to better understand and apply technology, but SC did not:

- SC: "when I started the program I had very limited technology ability but when I came out of the program, I feel I am very adept at technology now; I even run my own consulting company now where I help schools and districts."

- SC: "and specifically for me it was the technology integration and the opportunity to work in a small group and to see how the different groups presented with each of the same common objectives."

Community service and support theme

MC stressed the need for better expert professors, but SC did not:

- MC: "Need professors who have a better connection between theory and practice so need more practitioners to come in and work with the students."

- MC: "some professors were theorists and very well versed in their areas but the problem was they were not practitioners."

- SC: "the success goes to the professors who prepared us for the examy."

- SC: "no matter what the course was or the professor was, we were consistently challenged to look for three terms: themes, patterns, and discrepancies."

MC stressed the benefit of mentoring from professors, but SC did not:

- MC: "I think this directly correlates with the mentoring aspect. Um, when, I was very fortunate as a student here to have excellent mentors."

MC stressed the focus on community service from school, but SC did not:

- SC: "The whole idea of service and the community and helping people comes across here and it is unique to this school – you don't see that at other schools. You are not in a bubble here – you realize that you are part of a larger community. The focus on value and service and community development – you don't see that often at other schools."

About the authors

Dr Barbara Cozza is an Associate Professor and an Assistant Chairperson in the Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership (DAIL) at the St John's University in New York, USA. Dr Cozza has numerous publications and conference presentations on the national and international levels. Dr Cozza's scholarly research focusses on curriculum and administration issues. In the past, she has received professional development grants to provide staff

development to teachers and administrators in the areas of school and university partnerships and learning communities, mathematics and literacy and technology. She continues to develop research and programs in collaboration with schools and districts in the areas of curriculum, professional learning communities and multiage program strategies to improve teacher quality and increase student achievement. Dr Barbara Cozza is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: cozzab@stjohns.edu

Patrick Blessinger is the Executive Director of the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association and a Research Fellow at the St John's University in Queens, New York, USA. Patrick has taught over 150 college and university courses and he has managed academic programs at colleges and universities in the USA and EU. Patrick has co-edited and co-authored seven textbooks on learning-centered teaching using innovative technologies and one textbook on meaningful education and learning. He received several academic awards including a Fulbright Scholarship from the US Department of State and a Governor's Teaching Fellowship from the State of Georgia, USA.

Marcella Mandracchia is a Research Fellow at the St John's University in Queens, New York, USA. Marcella is the team leader of Project HOPE in the School of Education where she conducts data analysis and manages key aspects for the research project. She serves as liaison to the New York City Schools (including the principals, assistant principals, and teachers) that participate in Project HOPE.