

Original Research Article

Evaluating the Principals' Institute Leadership Development Program

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Abstract

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The Principals' Institute Leadership Development program was designed with three major goals in mind by providing leadership development experiences for, 1) selected public school personnel to successfully complete coursework that would lead to Certification in Administration One, 2) feature professional development opportunities that include facilitated leadership training and transformational leadership frameworks that fostered through mentor-mentee and other nurturing professional relationships in environments where teaching, learning, leading and personal improvement can occur, and 3) advancing professional development for principals. Evaluations during the duration of the leadership development program implications were data-driven using qualitative and quantitative information based on survey questionnaires and personal interviews. The program was evaluated by the stated objectives based on data collected provided opportunities to improve teaching, learning, researching and leading. Evaluations of the program also gave the program management team the opportunity to reflect on its own practices for the improvement of planning for future leadership development programs. The evaluation of this study placed emphases on objectives and purpose, theoretical framework, methods, data collection, results and discussion and scholarly significance of the leadership development program.

Keywords: Leadership, Practice, Professional development, Program

INTRODUCTION

The Principals' Institute Leadership Development program was funded by a grant from a federal agency. The institute was formally evaluated, December 2012. The program was in session for a period of 18 months starting January 2010 to August 2011. The purpose of the grant was to support the preparation of an increased pool of certified and highly qualified school leaders for the partnership county public schools. The participants engaged in course work in areas of school administration, curriculum development supervision, school law, dynamics of group behavior and a series of professional development workshops/seminars for educational leaders. A yearlong practicum experience in a school

setting provided participants with an opportunity to apply the knowledge, skills, leadership competencies and professional disposition acquired through coursework and mentorship by administrator supervisor and college faculty. Participants in the program benefitted from interacting with distinguished lecturers and current practicing educational school leaders in the field of educational leadership administration at the building and district level.

A cohort group of fifteen individuals participated in an 18 month leadership development program at a mid-Atlantic University of the United States. The university had over a twenty year history of preparing individuals for

leadership positions at the building and district level for public school systems. The university continually worked in a partnership agreement with the local school system in preparing individuals for leadership positions. The rationale for evaluating the leadership program was to determine if the training was effective. The effectiveness of the program was determined also based on the goals and objectives being completed successfully (Braun et al., 2011).

School systems continue to look for individuals to serve as school leaders at the building level and district level that are effective with the skills, knowledge, professional disposition and who are high motivators that can make a measureable difference in student achievement (Bottoms and O'Neill, 2001). There is a perception that there are not enough of effective high quality school leaders to serve in some struggling school districts. Therefore, the belief that there is a shortage of such personnel have lead many colleges, universities and other organizations in establishing and implementing leadership development training programs (Roza et al., 2013).

Objectives and Purpose

The Principals' Institute Leadership Development program had only two specific objectives for fostering the expected results/outcomes, 1) to develop the curriculum and/or framework for all three phases of the Principals' Institute Leadership Development program 2) to implement a demonstration of the academic and practicum for the preparation for Certification for Administration One and Orientation to Leadership phases of the institute's program.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the Principals' Institute Leadership Development program focused on several ways of exposing participants to developing skills, knowledge and professional disposition needed in order to succeed as school leaders. Using Hallinger's model, participants were given the opportunities to engage in activities related to developing a collaborative ideal school mission, managing the instructional program and creating and maintaining a positive school environment. Second, participants engaged in leadership development experiences that emphasized building the collaborative process for school success at all levels (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Third, participants looked at ways to help leaders to be aware of the importance of motivating teachers, students and staff for school success (Marks and Printy, 2003). Four, participants were exposed to information that illustrated the craft of effective teaching, learning and leading. Examining ways why leaders need

to know how students learn content and how teachers teach the content are needed for the success of all students (Stein and Nelson). Five, effective school leaders must show high levels of trust within the school environment for school improvement (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). Six, in order to improve student learning, there must a relevant/meaningful instructional program that meets the needs of all students. Many researchers believe that student learning will improve when schools' instructional programs are clearly articulated with relevancy and are reinforced in a purposeful manner (Newman, Smith, Allensworth & Bryk, 2003). Seven, setting effective conditions in the school by the leader for teaching and learning must be more than theory but a practice. School leaders must continue to participate in professional development activities for their own professional growth. It is essential to gain new skills and knowledge about current curriculum, instruction, assessment and how students and teachers are learning today.

The participants in the leadership development program were exposed to contemporary and evolving theories about the success of leadership practices and behaviors. In summary, goal setting based on need was key to the success of the program; communicating high expectations for all, participating in professional development opportunities, building an effective instructional program for current curriculum were all a major experience for participants in the leadership development program. Educational leaders must support the instructional center for the educational learning experiences of teachers and students (Elmore & Associates, 2012).

The leadership development program was implemented by using a progressive approach to teaching and learning as educational leaders. The program looked at eight major points of emphases during the delivery of curriculum coursework during the eighteen months in session.

1. Assigned activities for hands-on projects for small and large group activities.
2. Used an integrated approach related to topics that were current trends and issues in educational leadership.
3. Showed ways to packet participants' expertise and to be experts being recognized at state and national conferences as they presented their research papers on school leadership "best practices."
4. Stated reasons for collaboration for relevant review of case studies, problem solving and critical thinking solutions.
5. Provided ways to illustrate the importance of networking and being political savvy as leaders.
6. Looked at personal goals and career interest per participant.
7. Utilized community expert resources in educational leadership to enhance participants' learning and leadership experience.

8. Emphasized life-long learning and the importance of effective planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating work strategically as an educational leader (Hayes, 2006).

METHODS

Evaluation is an important component of refining the leadership program and documenting impacts. The quantitative method regarding percentages of course evaluation was used and a broader qualitative method narrating the views of participants were used in evaluation the Principals' Institute in order to explore specific facets of the program and to give voice to participants' experiences. The method provided in-depth information that could assist faculty in enhancing the quality of the program that was current and future leadership programs offering leadership training and professional development.

The Sample of Participants

A cohort group of fifteen individuals participated in seven sessions of an 18 month leadership development program at ABC University. The University has had over a twenty year history of preparing individuals for leadership positions at the building and district level for public school systems. The university has continually worked in partnership agreement with the local school system in preparing individuals for leadership positions. The rationale for evaluating the leadership program was to determine if the training was effective. The effectiveness of the program was determined based the goals and objectives being completed successfully (Braun, Gable and kite).

Some demographic information about the participants was as follows: the average age of the participants in the program was: 25 to 34 at 40%; 35 to 44 at 33% and 45 to 55 at 27%. In terms of race, there were 67% black and 33% Caucasian. The gender of the participants was 7% male and 93% female (Dantley, 2011).

Research Questions

For this program, there were three major research questions as follows:

1. Will the selected fifteen participants successfully complete coursework that would lead to Certification in Administrative One?
2. Will the participants engage in collaborative professional development opportunities that included facilitated leadership training and transformational leadership frameworks that were fostered through mentor/mentee and other nurturing relationships in an

environment where positive teaching, learning and personal improvement will occur?

3. Will participants engage with local, state experts personnel and with national professional associations or organizations personnel who will share practical applications of "best practices" and the results of demonstrated research-based on trends and issues facing urban and suburban school leaders?

Data Collection

Data Source

The survey used began with a series of questions on respondents' demographics characteristics, educational background and reasons for attending the Principals' Institute Leadership Development program. A series of questions were discussed related to demographics and background of the participants in the program. The next level of questions was asked of participants related to their level of satisfaction with the program and the skills taught. The participants responses were examined in an overall satisfaction section along with some free responses regarding participants overall impression of the program. The next area related to the seven sessions addressed questions related to single courses taught within the program. A series of question were asked about each course; the participants were asked to rate the level of agreement with a number of statements about the course and the faculty teaching it, and to rank the most important component of the course (NRC, 2011).

The fifteen participants in the program gave mixed views about the program. Data were collected from interview questions and surveys. Qualitative data from interviews and quantitative surveys were collected from the fifteen participants who benefitted from the federal agency grant to evaluate program outcomes. Data collected were from these specific areas as follows: Demographics and Background, Gender, Overall Satisfaction, School Administration Course, Curriculum Course Design, Dynamics of Group Behavior Course, School Law Course, School Supervision Course, Practicum/Internship I Course, Practicum/Internship II Course, Free Response Replies, and Project Evaluation Form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the interviews, participants gave their own free response replies overall about the Principal' Institute Leadership Development program's strength and the need for fine-tuning the program. The input statements from participants were as follows:

1. The leadership development courses received fairly high marks from responding participants. Each course was evaluated based on a scale ranging from 1.00 to 5.00 with 5.00 being the highest.

2. Courses evaluated were: school administration course ranked from 3.40 to 4.47; Curriculum Design course ranked from 2.79 to 4.21; Dynamics of Group Behavior course from 3.31 to 4.54; School Law course ranked from 2.54 to 3.54; School Supervision ranked from 3.67 to 4.58; Practicum/Internship One ranked from 4.25 to 4.67 and Practicum/Internship Two ranked from 4.40 to 4.67 (Dantley, 2011).

3. Some Notable Free Responses included narrative statement from participants were given below under pros and cons:

a. Pros: The true cohort group members were individuals who received grant funding support. Cons: Two cohort members had some difficulties paying for coursework the last semester of the program

b. Pros: The power points were very helpful, because it gave more structure to the presentation. The technology used included underwrite boards, websites, DVDs, google sites, youtubes, cds. Cons: There should have been fewer power point presentations and more time for direct discussions in all classes.

c. Pros: The research-based webinars, educational online articles as well as powerpoints most beneficial. Longitudinal data, various case studies reflecting school law, in-school suspension program helped to increase sufficient knowledge in many areas of leadership. Cons: Peers should have been encouraged to used more than powerpoints overall during their presentation assignments, because computers were in all classrooms.

d. Pros: Most of the professors were practicing principals or had served as principals and/or assistant superintendent and academic achievement specialist. All individuals had successful experiences at the building and district level. All professors were able to put leadership into a perspective that could be understood. All professors had knowledge of the courses being taught. There was evident of rigor for most classes. Cons: The law professor was not as suitable for school law as wished for, because the individual taught the law class as if participants were seeking a law degree from the university. Also, this specific professor did not return papers and give feedback in a timely manner.

e. Pros: A lot was learned from the professors and the peers in the classroom. Professional friendship and support systems were expressed by many of the professors teaching the courses. Cons: Professors need to lecture more by providing more content of the course rather than letting inexperienced participants to present valuable information.

For this evaluation, three research mentioned questions guided the study and were summarized in the results following from the findings in the evaluation of the program:

1. All fifteen participants completed the program successfully and applied and received the Certificate for Administration One

2. Three groups with five participants per group lead professional development facilitating activities related to effective practices for successful leaders. These groups worked also directly with practicing school leaders such as principals from their neighboring county and other counties in discussing the role of human resources personnel, resources available for title one schools and resources for special education students to ensure all student success. Some participants further worked with superintendents from small school districts.

3. All fifteen participants along with the principal investigator attended the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference Educational Leadership formerly the Teaching and Learning, Participants had the opportunity to interact with local, state and national speakers and conference facilitators. Participants were able to gain knowledge and skills first-hand about best practices in educational leadership.

Based on follow-up information fall 2014, the fifteen participants in the leadership development program *gained certification for administration one* at the state level and are currently serving in various positions as school administrators, curriculum specialists, resource teachers, school counselors and regular classroom resource teachers in the public school environment.

Scholarly Significance

The intentions and goals of the program were met. By looking at the intentions of the Principals' Institute Leadership Development program based on goals and following the career growth of the participants, the program had valuable results/outcomes. The program provided an opportunity for participants to qualify and gain certification for Administration One, orientation to leadership and advanced the professional development for principals.

A closer look at participants' actions and learning were significant because of the following:

Participants' reaction in a satisfactory manner was used to measure informally and formally standardized instruction. Questionnaires, interviews, focused groups and personal learning logs.

Participants learning was measured by new knowledge, skills mastered as reflected through oral and written reflections.

Participants engaged in purposeful, meaningful and relevant portfolio and school improvement activities. Rubrics were designed and used to assess each method of learning expectation.

Participants gained new and improved skills and knowledge. The program measured and evaluated the degree and quality of implementation by participants

through direct observations, project completion, supervised interviews, recommendations gathered, electronic portfolio upload to Taskstream, data utilization, agenda meeting notes/minutes. Appropriate assessment tools were used to measure program effectiveness.

Participants learning impacted program results/outcomes, because the program was planned, organized, implemented, monitored and evaluated with participants in mind based a specific set of criteria in alignment with Educational Leadership Constituencies Council standards (National Policy Board for Educational Leaders, 2011) and the needs of today's school leaders. The direct participation of individuals through a collaborative designed school improvement plan was based on typical needs in schools were key group assignments during the duration of course offerings (Rubin, 2009).

Participants in the program were required to show or state what was being learned in the classroom could be transferred or linked was relevant in ways to improve student achievement or performance at local schools within the county as measured by state assessment or local school district benchmarks.

CONCLUSION

The principals' Institute Leadership Development program provided participants with new and continuous learning experiences. The overall success of the Principals' Institute Leadership Development program was determined by participants engaging in classroom activities that were relevant to school leadership. Participants examined and discussed case studies, worked in small and large collaborative group activities; and planning, organizing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating project activities. From the classroom experiences, participants gained a closer relationship with their peers in the cohort. The instructional professors provided relevant instruction in leadership to participants by sharing their experiences from a practical and research-based point of view as current participating principals, former principals and assistant superintendent. Each professor asked questions to encourage dialogue among participants and provided feedback at the end of each session. Professors guided and managed instructional delivery services to keep all participants focused on the learning experiences. Participants in the program maintained a reflective journal (Bolton, 2010) of their experiences during the duration of the program for each session. Participants were asked to talk about their journal recordings and look at the pros and cons of their experiences. Professors encouraged the participants to keep in mind the whole intended purpose of the leadership development program which was to prepare for certification for administration one, orientation to leadership and advanced professional development for

principals. Showing participants how to transfer and/or link learning experiences from the program to real-world application into the public school setting or environment was key to participants' learning experiences (Gibbs, 2011). The program also stimulated change in participants' skills, knowledge and professional disposition about effective school leadership.

Data suggested that most of the professors were current practitioners in the field of educational leadership and that was value-added to the experiences for program participants. Second, payments for all aspects of the program were allotted timely. Third, instructional delivery services were consistent, relevant, rigorous and enjoyable. All instructional services were focused on participants' learning and discussions about current issues in educational leadership for school-based principals. Four, the overall design of educational services were enjoyable based on feedback from participants in the program (Hanover Research Council, 2010).

School systems continue to look for individuals to serve as school leaders at the building level that are effective with the skills, knowledge, professional disposition and individuals who are high motivators that can make a measureable difference in student achievement (Bottoms and O'Neill, 2001). There is perception that there are not enough of effective high quality school leaders; therefore, the belief that there is a shortage of such personnel causes some district to develop intra school system training to "grow and groom their own group of future leaders" (Roza, Celio, Harvey & Wishon, 2013). Many organizations, academies and universities have expanded their reach to provide, on-site, educational leadership development programs.

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