Redesigning a Leadership Preparation Program Aligned to the Missouri Leadership Development System

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of a principal preparation program revision at Southeast Missouri State University. The redesigning of the leadership preparation program provided an opportunity to transform learning experiences for candidates seeking an initial principal certificate while at the same time updating course content to make it more relevant, accessible, and aligned to new standards. Aligning to the new state leadership standards, faculty redesigned curriculum, instruction, and key assessments to prepare candidates at the pre-service level. Another caveat of the new design was to move all coursework to an all online environment. There will be a brief discussion as to the transition of face-to-face, blended, and online delivery of content.

Redesigning a leadership preparation program at the university level is often the result of new or revised policy standards. At the national level, many educational leadership preparation programs align with the National Education Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards and/or the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). In Missouri, state leadership standards have been developed to align with both the NELP and PSEL national policy standards.

The Missouri Leadership Standards, now referred to as the Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS), were designed to engage aspiring and current principals in professional learning through their entire leadership career. The primary purpose of the MLDS is the development and support of effective school leaders. Effective school leadership is viewed as an essential factor to ensure equitable access to excellent education for all students (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019a).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the process to redesign a leadership preparation program at Southeast Missouri State University. Aligning to the MLDS, the Southeast educational leadership faculty members were charged with the task of redesigning curriculum, instruction, and assessments to prepare candidates at the pre-service or aspiring principal level.

Understanding the Development of the Missouri Leadership Development System

Beginning in 2014, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education convened key stakeholders throughout the state who were instrumental in the principal support and development field. After research and study of current educational leadership practices, the stakeholders identified five domains, or standards, summarizing the roles of a principal in order to effectively lead a school focused on teaching and learning. These domains include:

1) Visionary Leader-develops and implements a vision for the school to guide the learning of students.
2) Instructional Leader-ensures a guaranteed and viable curriculum, guarantees effective instructional practice, coordinates the use of effective assessments and promotes professional learning.
3) Managerial Leader-implements operational systems, oversees personnel and ensures the equitable and strategic use of resources.
4) Relational Leader-interacts professional with students, staff, family and community.
5) Innovative Leader-continues professional growth, actively engages in reflective practice, and applies new knowledge and understanding to drive appropriate change.

Each domain is described through a set of 32 competencies, organized across a continuum of four levels including aspiring (pre-service), emerging (initial years of practice), developing (subsequent years when leadership skills are further developed), and transformational (the target phase where principals are fully responsive to lead schools). Each level represents advancement in leadership growth across the career of a principal, beginning with pre-service preparation (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019b).

The MLDS was implemented in the fall of 2016, with facilitators, coaches, and/or mentors beginning to work directly with Missouri principals to assist them as they worked to master the leadership competencies associated with the emerging level of leadership. Further work has been done to provide one-one mentoring and coaching as principals travel though the developing and transformational levels. Networking also occurs through a series of regional and state meetings where all participants gather to address professional development in a collegial manner.

Literature Framework for the Missouri Leadership Development System

The MLDS is based on the foundational work of several authors in the field of education who have researched multiple approaches in addressing excellent teaching and learning experiences. At the fundamental level, school leaders should be prepared to not only recognize, but improve exemplary instructional practices leading to increased student achievement within the

classroom setting. Although this scholarly investigation is not all inclusive, the MLDS focuses on current research involving classroom instructional themes, domains, influences, strategies, and techniques.

In *The Artisan Teacher*, Rutherford (2013) described excellent teachers as artful, knowledgeable, skilled masters of their craft. Derived from the observation of multiple teachers in the field, Rutherford identified 23 themes of skillful instruction. Charlotte Danielson (2007), focused on the aspects of a teacher's multiple responsibilities, resulting in a Framework for Teaching consisting of four domains, 22 components, and 76 elements which promote student learning. In a meta-analysis of teaching and learning practices, Hattie (2009) organized 138 teaching/learning influences by their effect sizes on student achievement. In their book *Classroom Instruction That Works*, Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) offered a taxonomy of nine strategies that represented the most effective attributes of teaching. Lastly, in *Teach Like a Champion*, Lemov (2010) details 49 techniques for putting students on a path to college by implementing concrete and specific essential tools. The foundation for school improvement practices put forth by these authors resulted in the leadership competencies evident in the MLDS model.

Redesigning Leadership Preparation at the University Level

As a result of the implementation of the MLDS at the state level, the faculty at Southeast Missouri State University began a self-study to determine how the current educational leadership curriculum aligned to the new standards/competencies evident in the Aspiring Principal level of development. The school administration curriculum reflects the leadership preparation program completed as a master's degree, leading to the Missouri initial administrative certificate.

As suggested by Reeves (2003), with the implementation of standards, there is a move to reform curriculum. The faculty began addressing curriculum revisions, which ultimately led to the addition of new coursework, updated syllabi, and a redesign of key assessments to measure the knowledge and skills essential to prepare leaders for the field of school administration.

Using a backward mapping process (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001), the faculty compared the leadership domains and competencies included in the Aspiring Principal level to current course learner outcomes. Faculty members divided the work of revising goals, objectives, key assessments and instructional activities, deciding on a timeline for completion. Each syllabus was reviewed to determine gaps in program requirements.

Several areas emerged which needed to be included in the redesigned leadership program. Within the Relational Leader domain, the faculty realized several gaps where apparent in the curriculum. According to Green (2010), there are several internal and external relationships which can enhance or hinder the teaching and learning process. Relationships must be built to bridge the school environment with the internal teaching staff and students as well as the external public of parents and community in order to move a school forward.

A new course, Diversity and Equity in Schools, was designed using the work of Skrla (2009) to address the internal relations area. Within this course, candidates are required to examine the culture within their own schools to identify factors impacting student and teacher success. This process focuses on three areas including teacher quality equity, program equity, and achievement equity. Data is collected and analyzed in order to develop goals for school improvement. The equity audit and subsequent goal development is considered the key assessment for the course, measuring candidate performance aligned to the Relational Leader domain.

For the external area, a project was included where candidates completed a needs assessment of the school attendance area, including activities, mission, and vision of civic, religious, and community organizations. From this needs assessment, information is organized into a School and Community brochure or handbook to promote the bridge between the internal and external relationships, providing resources within the local community.

The capstone requirement for the degree program is the Internship, which is a field-based program of study. Under the direction of both the university supervisor and the building level principal, candidates are required to complete authentic leadership projects as a culminating experience. After review, the faculty concluded this capstone would need to be drastically revised to align with the Aspiring Leadership domains and competencies.

At Southeast Missouri State, the Internship is a two-course sequence, spanning over two semesters of work. For Internship I: Leadership for Research in Action, the course was redesigned to include an action research activity, focusing on school-based teaching and learning improvements. This action research is also mandated by the state of Missouri as a performance assessment fulfilling a component of the certification process. This action research project is designed to identify a school-wide problem through data analysis, development of a school improvement plan and the steps of implementation, communication with staff, motivation techniques, culminating with a focus on self-reflection and legal implications. These activities cover the domains of Visionary Leader, Relational Leader, Managerial Leader, and Innovative Leader.

The purpose of this activity is to determine the proficiency to which the aspiring principal is prepared to assume the duties of an instructional leader. Candidates are required to read, interpret, and apply current literature in order to inform their action research project and the cycle of inquiry. According to Sagor (2000), the definition of action research:

> …is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the "actor" in improving and/or refining his or her actions (p. 3).

The author also suggested that action research has several positive effects, including relevance, as the focus of the research is determined by the researcher, who is also the consumer of the findings. In addition, Sagor suggested action research helps educators be more effective at what they care most about - *teaching and the development of students*.

This type of research activity was viewed as instrumental for candidate growth within the internship experience, instructing candidates how to assess a specific program, practice, or initiative in their own schools. Candidate performance is measured by a key assessment rubric which requires the presentation of the results and conclusions of the action research project.

Internship II, now referred to as Leadership for Experiential Learning, includes projects relating to each of the five leadership domains. Candidates are required to complete 150 clock hours in a field-based setting. The Internship includes the following authentic leadership projects:

1) Visionary Leader - review current state assessments and develop a strategic plan for improvement.
2) Instructional Leader - review special services programs, apply instructional learning through participation in the teacher evaluation process, and evaluating curriculum, instruction and effective student assessments.

3) Managerial Leader - review of the building level budget, staffing, and scheduling process, facility management needs assessment and improvement plan, review of building code of conduct and involvement in student discipline and conflict management strategies, crises planning and trauma informed practices.

4) Relational Leader - review of community and public agencies providing school support services, attending school board meetings/work sessions, review of parent/community volunteer model.

5) Innovative Leader - review of building level professional development model, participation in a state/national leadership organization, and review of the building level technology plan.

Candidates are instructed to complete the project in the field under the direction of the building level principal, write a summary of their work, followed by a reflection of how the project has impacted their growth as a leader. Performance is measured in each of the five domains, assessed by a rubric developed by the leadership faculty.

Data Collection to Inform Practice

In order to assess candidate performance and to address program improvement, key assessments were designed to measure the Missouri leadership domains, both at the formative level and the summative level. Based on the five MLDS leadership domains, assessments were developed to be completed in a specific course as candidates matriculated through the preparation program. A description of the key assessments, aligned to course objectives, was included in the updated syllabi. As an example of a key assessment, for the course EA655 Leadership for Effective School Operations, candidates are asked to complete a comprehensive school safety audit. Using the findings of the audit, candidates then develop a strategic action plan for improvement based on the data collection and analysis within the local school setting. Candidates are then scored on a 0-4 rating based on their level of performance.

Scoring rubrics for all key assessments were created to note the level of proficiency for each candidate, with the goal of data collection to be completed each semester. Candidates were required to use an electronic portfolio format to upload assessments for faculty to review. This portfolio was viewed as a means to view candidate performance and growth throughout the program.

Next Steps to Address Improvement

Currently, educational leadership candidates work toward requirements for either K-8 Elementary Principal or 7-12 Secondary Principal. The move to a K-12 administrator certification is forthcoming. After the Missouri state board of education approval and open comment period has been completed, new regulations will be written, with a proposed fall of 2020 implementation. All universities, including Southeast Missouri State University, will be required to submit an updated curriculum matrix to reflect the new certification requirements. This matrix must be approved by the state educational agency in order for degree programs to be offered for each individual leadership preparation program.

In addition to the new certificate, an updated content assessment will be implemented as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the K-12 principalship. The new assessment of 100 multiple choice items will be based on the MLDS framework and competencies. The assessment is designed to measure educator candidates' content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and dispositions and work style (Sagor, 2000).

Lessons Learned through Redesign Process

Several lessons were learned over the course of the program redesign. First, the idea of collaboration should be foremost to address program improvement efforts. The faculty joined together to study the new leadership domains, revise and update syllabi, and develop new key assessments to measure student performance and growth. This collaboration was viewed as a strength of the redesign efforts leading to a shared vision and mission for the preparation program.

Second, the faculty has been adamant regarding the idea of staying current in the field of educational leadership as an important facet of leadership preparation. To address this, faculty members are involved in the state and national leadership organization, where the Missouri Professors of Educational Administration (MPEA) meet once per month during the academic year to collaborate with colleagues across the state. Representatives from the state education department also attend to address state mandates, updates to the leadership programs, and requirements for each university to follow in order to prepare candidates for the initial principal certification.

Delivery of Content

Through the redesign process the graduate faculty was also going through changes in instructional delivery. As content was changed, the method of instruction was also changed. Coursework presentations went from face-to-face, to blended courses (a mix of face-to-face and online), to completely online delivery. Staying up-to-date with standards and content was just one hurdle of the redesign. Faculty had intensive onsite training on online delivery and best practices. The faculty was committed in continuing to foster authentic relationships with students and ensure high levels of student engagement.

Summary

The task of redesigning the leadership preparation program at Southeast Missouri State University continues to be a multi-year journey. By collaborating with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and leadership faculty throughout the state, candidate performance and preparation has been improved. Work will continue as the faculty continues to provide a comprehensive and authentic leadership experience for all candidates.

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