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Reflections and Commentary From the Field: Connecting the Reform of Administrator Preparation to the Reform of Teacher Preparation

David H. Monk

Purpose: Attention is drawn in this article to the presence and dysfunctional nature of a disconnection between professional preparation programs for administrators and for teachers.

Findings: A case is made for achieving greater alignment between the work going on in these areas, particularly in light of the growing efforts to hold schools accountable for pupil performance gains. A case is also made for balancing reform efforts so that disproportionate attention is not paid to one area relative to the other.

Keywords: teacher preparation reform; administrator preparation reform; certification standards

My goal in this article is to explore the interface between two historically separate professional preparation traditions within the field of education: the preparation of administrators and the preparation of teachers. My thesis is that this separation is as real as it is dysfunctional and that each tradition would benefit from greater understanding and appreciation of the other. While the separation or disconnection is perhaps understandable given the need for administrators to deal with crosscutting organizational phenomena,

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while teachers focus more specifically on pedagogy as it applies to their areas of specialization, a strong case can be made for bringing the two traditions into closer alignment. I attempt to make that case in this article. I do so by describing the current differences and explaining why the separation is dysfunctional. I also present evidence suggesting that the disconnection is continuing but not inevitable. On balance, I am optimistic about the long-term prospects for building better ties between these two traditions and offer encouragement to those working to take better advantage of the complementarities that can and should exist.

EVIDENCE OF DISCONNECTION

Lack of Student Interest

One does not need to look far to see evidence of a separation between the concerns of teachers and the concerns of administrators. Teacher preparation programs typically require prospective teachers to take course work in the social and cultural foundations of education (Floden & Meniketti, 2005). The rationale is logical enough: Successful teachers need to have some understanding of the institution in which they practice their craft. Similarly, their students will be living in a cultural and social milieu, and it is useful for teachers to have a basic understanding of the social and cultural realities facing their students.

Aspiring teachers appear to see little value in these courses. These are individuals who are highly motivated by their laudable desire to teach. They are keen to know about the latest and most effective teaching techniques and approaches. What motivates them the most are courses that deal directly with teaching and learning phenomena. Information about the social and institutional context is of secondary interest and warrants attention only to the degree that the students can see a direct connection to what they anticipate will be their day-to-day activities as teachers. These students are little interested in the fine points about school boards and the organization of school districts. They want to teach and tend to resent what they perceive to be distractions.

The disinterest and ambivalence on the part of aspiring teachers in foundation courses is reflected at the faculty level within schools and colleges of education. Teacher preparation programs are under enormous pressure to strengthen the content preparation of their candidates. There is similar and mounting pressure to do a better job preparing all teachers to meet the needs of special needs learners and racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students and to become skilled with the use of modern and emerging computing and telecommunication technologies. And, just to make the pressures

even more intense, there is sometimes an accompanying interest on the part of universities to limit the number of credits required for a degree or endorsement for certification.

A not surprising result is periodic effort to reduce or eliminate required foundation courses from the curriculum, typically with the assurance that the relevant material will be infused into existing courses and that students will be encouraged to take foundation courses as electives. Foundation courses thus far seem to have withstood the attack, and their proponents can point to language in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2002) standards about the need for aspiring teachers to “consider the school, family, and community contexts in which they work and the prior experience of students to develop meaningful learning experiences” (p. 15). And, of course, there are questions to ask about whether the courses could actually be designed to better serve the clientele. Floden and Meniketti (2005) surveyed the research literature to try to determine what students are being taught in these courses and found remarkably few studies on the topic. It is quite significant that such a widespread practice, and one that so frequently prompts complaints from students as well as faculty members, has been studied so infrequently.

Curricular Issues

If the focus shifts to a typical educational leadership program and its course offerings, one cannot help but be struck by how the emphasis moves to issues of management and control in organizational settings. Aspiring administrators encounter courses with titles like politics of education, sociology of education, budgeting, law, and organizational behavior, along with courses focused on roles such as the principalship. Perhaps the presumption is that the nascent administrator has already learned the relevant points about teaching and learning since admission to a leadership program typically requires some evidence of time in rank as a teacher.

But even if this presumption is correct, notice the high degree of compartmentalization that is built into the approach. The premise seems to be that it is permissible to focus almost entirely on teaching and learning issues while preparing to be a teacher and then hone those skills during time in rank as a teacher. For those who subsequently move into administration, there comes the organizational and management training that is presumably intended to build on the teaching and learning expertise that was acquired earlier in the sequence. The field’s current practice seems to acknowledge the need for both types of training, but practice is also skewed so that the knowledge comes in sequence and in a highly compartmentalized fashion. A further problem with the compartmentalized and sequential approach is that it seems

to presume there is no new knowledge for aspiring administrators to learn about teaching and learning phenomena, an increasingly indefensible position to take in the face of the research progress being made in many content areas (see, e.g., Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005).

There are efforts under way to strengthen the teaching and learning dimensions of administrator preparation programs, and I review a number of these later in this article. While these efforts are welcome and impressive, they face daunting challenges since the leadership curriculum is already crowded, and aspiring students also need familiarity with the more traditional contents of the curriculum. Moreover, and as will become clearer later, leadership preparation programs do not have a free hand to redesign their curricula since they must adhere to state and national accreditation standards.

Organizational Issues

The organizational structure of education units within higher education reflects and contributes to compartmentalization. Teacher preparation programs typically are located in their own departments or other organizational units within the larger education school or college. These units carry names like departments of curriculum and instruction or departments of teaching and learning. In contrast, educational leadership programs are frequently housed in separate departments with titles like policy studies or leadership studies and tend to operate with considerable autonomy. For example, if a leadership program is looking for the very best organizational theorist, it would be unusual to have the search committee include a person with teaching and learning expertise in a content area like mathematics. Similarly, if a mathematics education faculty is searching for a new colleague in mathematics education, it would be unusual to include an organizational theorist on the search committee.

A simple reorganization of the units will not resolve this particular aspect of the separation. Having organizational theorists in the same department as the teaching and learning content specialists does not answer the more fundamental question about why the math people should care to have an organizational theorist on their search committee and vice versa. Moreover, this cleavage is becoming more pronounced since the teaching and learning content areas are becoming ever more specialized and oriented around content-specific pedagogical knowledge, a point I return to later.

Accreditation Issues

Accreditation standards for these respective fields also come from different organizations and perhaps inadvertently contribute to compartmentalization.

Educational leadership as a field is oriented around standards established by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2002) and enacted by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council in cooperation with NCATE. Elementary education, for example, looks to the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI, 2003) for its standards, and the different content areas within secondary education look to the learned societies that are specific to their areas of specialization. As I will argue later, there are some curious inconsistencies across these standards regarding the level of emphasis to be found on organizational matters such as accountability and the use of measures of learning outcomes.

WHY THE DISCONNECTION IS DYSFUNCTIONAL

Before turning to some more recent evidence of a continuation of the disconnection and the failure to yoke the reform of teacher preparation with the reform of administrator preparation, it is worth noting some reasons why the disconnection is so problematic. The dysfunction stems primarily from conceptual inconsistencies in the fundamental commitments of existing preparation programs. In particular, I see teacher preparation, partly because it has been the focus of reform efforts in recent years, moving in directions that are out of synch with important central commitments of administrator preparation efforts. This is a conceptual problem that has very practical implications for the day-to-day life of students in schools.

For example, one of the major tenets of modern teacher education reform is the need to improve the content knowledge and orientation of teachers. There is a concomitant realignment in how we think about specialized pedagogy. In contrast to what I will call the traditional approach, with its emphasis on generic and crosscutting teaching and learning issues, the new approach stresses the significance and importance of content-specific pedagogy. Broad areas of specialization in, say, curriculum and supervision are giving way to narrower areas of specialization like mathematics, reading, language and literacy, and science pedagogy, to name just a few content-specific pedagogy areas. There are also signs of even more finely drawn areas of specialization such as elementary science education in contrast to secondary science education. Indeed, some states, like Pennsylvania, are going further and proposing to draw distinctions within historically broad certification areas like elementary education (e.g., P-4 coupled with 4-8 grade levels versus P-8) to promote more developmentally appropriate curriculum and instruction needs of students.

In some teacher preparation programs, the shift toward great emphasis on content specialization also manifests itself in the use of content specialists as

supervisors of student teachers in the field. These programs are abandoning the use of generic supervisors, who supervise in multiple subject areas, in favor of content specialists, who supervise only students in their areas of content expertise.

Within educational leadership, the prevailing practice is to think of the administrator more as a generalist who draws on crosscutting generic pedagogical knowledge to inform his or her decisions about programs and schools. Yes, there are curriculum specialists who focus on specific areas of the curriculum, but the traditional district- and building-level administrative structure, complete with superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and assistant principals, remains seemingly disconnected from the increasingly specialized knowledge base that is emerging about teaching and learning issues in various content areas and/or at various age levels. We continue to prepare generalist administrators and layer them onto organizations (i.e., schools) that we are simultaneously expecting to take advantage of the emerging content-specific pedagogical knowledge base.

While I do not have an easy answer to offer about how best to reconceptualize the role of administrative leaders to better tap into and reflect the emerging content-specific knowledge base and evolution of the schools, it is clear that efforts to reform teacher education without paying parallel attention to the administrative implications and the preparation of administrators are problematic. One might even suspect that success at reforming teacher education in the absence of complementary efforts to reform administrator preparation will leave the schools worse off, rather than better off.

This is clearly disturbing and quite ironic in light of the fact that some of the most exciting ideas in the field of education today involve deliberate efforts to blur the traditional distinctions between administrators and teachers. How can it make sense to pursue ambitious efforts to reform the preparation of teachers without paying corresponding attention to the preparation of those who will serve in leadership roles within districts and schools? And yet, as I will show in the following section, some recent efforts to reform teacher education exist largely in isolation from the reform of administrator preparation.

EVIDENCE OF A CONTINUATION OF THE DISCONNECTION

Recent Studies

Several recent, highly visible studies looked carefully at the preparation of teachers and the nature of research that bears on this part of the field

(Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In both cases, leaders in the field of teacher preparation were asked to review the underlying literature and offer assessments. Both volumes are valuable contributions to the literature and draw somewhat different but complementary conclusions about the state of the existing knowledge base. The Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) volume was assembled on behalf of the American Educational Research Association and looks critically at the existing empirical literature that underlies prevailing practice. The Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) volume was assembled on behalf of the National Academy of Education and is structured around a broader question about what is known conceptually as well as empirically in the important domains of knowledge that are relevant to teacher education. The National Academy volume offers a more upbeat assessment of the knowledge base, but what is important for our purposes is the degree to which both of these major reviews pay only limited attention to the broader institutional and organizational contexts in which teaching takes place.

The good news is that both volumes pay some heed to the broader organizational context in which teachers practice their craft. In both volumes, for example, there are examinations of what research has to say about teaching diverse mixes of students; the role of accountability, measurement, and testing; and very practical concerns like teaching methods, field placements, and classroom management. The more frustrating news is that the focus remains on teaching and teacher preparation, with emphasis on important but conventional topics like how best to convey information and share meaning in specific content areas. Neither volume deals explicitly with administrator preparation and the complementarities with teacher preparation that I believe are so important. It is perhaps unfair to fault the volumes for their focus on teacher preparation since, after all, teacher preparation in itself is a vast endeavor, and no single volume can take on every relevant issue. Nevertheless, I see these publications as a missed opportunity for prestigious organizations to sensitize readers to the importance of building bridges across these parts of the field.

Recent Reform Efforts

The Carnegie Corporation of New York, for example, has launched a major effort called Teachers for a New Era that is intended to reshape the face of teacher education. It is an admirable undertaking and promises to have a very positive impact. There is a welcome focus on connecting teacher preparation efforts in education schools and colleges with other parts of the university, the premise being that teacher education needs to be viewed as a

responsibility of the entire university, rather than just the education unit. Indeed, there is an explicit expectation that strong ties be established with university faculty in the arts and sciences to ensure a strong grounding in the disciplines. Very similar reasoning could have led to a parallel expectation that strong ties be established between teacher preparation and administrator preparation efforts within the education colleges and schools, but this line of reasoning was not explored. The Carnegie initiative also stresses the importance of establishing teaching as a clinical profession, with emphasis on the use of multiyear internships to ease transition into the profession. Teachers for a New Era is understandably focused on teachers and teaching. A parallel or complementary focus on administration and leadership will need to come from other initiatives.

Emerging Studies

The U.S. Congress mandated a new study of teacher preparation that is being conducted by the National Research Council (NRC). The language authorizing the study is instructive since it reflects Congress's intention to keep the focus on the traditional core of teaching. For example, Congress (H.R. Rep. No. 108-401, 2004) asks the NRC to "synthesize data and research on the academic preparation and educational characteristics of candidates in pre-service, graduate, and alternative certification programs; the specific content and experiences that are provided to candidates for degrees and alternative certification in education; the consistency of the required course work and experiences in reading and mathematics across teacher preparation programs; and the degree to which the content and experiences are based on converging scientific evidence" (p. 851). This is the study that some labeled the *Flexner Report for Education*, naming it after the famous study from the early part of the 20th century that helped to transform the preparation of physicians. From the authorizing language, it seems clear that the NRC study will be highly focused on the preparation of teachers. There is not even a hint in the authorizing language about broadening the study to be concerned about the preparation of school or district leaders.

Modern Standards

Significant efforts have been made recently to redesign professional preparation standards throughout the field of education. An important premise is that the field is evolving rapidly, along with changes in society's needs for education, and that standards guiding the preparation of professionals in many different parts of the field need to be revised accordingly.

My review of the prevailing standards suggests that we are largely continuing to miss the opportunity to use standards to make connections across different branches of the field.

For example, the standards guiding the preparation of administrators that come from the NPBEA (2002) make mention of learning outcomes and achievement, but typically in an oblique fashion. Six of the seven NPBEA standards make explicit reference to “the success of all students” and describe broad strategies such as having an appropriate vision (Standard 1); well-designed programs (Standard 2); appropriate managerial skills (Standard 3); the ability to harness community resources, including the richness of the community’s diversity (Standard 4); the ability and inclination to act ethically and with integrity and fairness (Standard 5); and an understanding of the social context (Standard 6).

The language in these standards is quite broad. The presumption seems to be that educational leaders are curricular generalists who are responsible for building programs. There are exhortations about what these programs are supposed to do (e.g., most emphatically, they are expected to provide success for all students) along with exhortations to make use of relevant scientific research, but remarkably, little specificity is offered about the means by which these laudable goals are to be achieved. For example, given the growing expectations for accountability and the interest in measuring learning outcomes, one might expect to see numerous references to the use of testing and accountability systems. In particular, one might expect to see a standard stipulating that school leaders be able to demonstrate their knowledge of testing and measurement, along with their ability to interpret and act on the results. Instead, we find only sporadic and broad statements calling for candidates to do things like “use problem-solving skills . . . in the effective, legal, and equitable use of fiscal, human, and material resource allocation and alignment that focuses on teaching and learning” (NPBEA, 2002, Standard 3.3).

The curricular generalist theme running through the NPBEA (2002) standards contrasts with trends in thinking about teacher preparation that stress the importance of content-specific pedagogic knowledge (see, e.g., Grossman & Schoenfeld, 2005). Moreover, the ACEI (2003) standards for elementary teacher preparation are more oriented around teaching and learning phenomena, and an entire standard (ACEI, 2003, Standard 4) is focused on assessment and measures of student performance.

While this emphasis seems appropriate and desirable, the narrowness of the ACEI (2003) standards is striking. Missing is a recognition of the social implications of testing in classroom settings. The language in the standards makes it sound as if all students are capable of achieving and that the testing results simply provide the teacher with a way to convey the good news

that learning is taking place. Not all students perform well on existing tests, and teachers routinely face the challenge of conveying news of poor performance to some of their students. The potentially demoralizing effects of low test score results are part of the classroom reality and speak to the broader social impact of schooling, something that the NPBEA (2002) standards stress. Again, we have an example of a missed opportunity, this time from a teacher preparation standard, for making a connection.

REASONS FOR BEING OPTIMISTIC

Despite the long-standing and dysfunctional separation of teacher and administrator preparation and the recent evidence of a continuation of the disconnection, there are reasons for being optimistic about the long-run prospects for taking advantage of complementarities across these fields. For example, there is a growing literature that looks at the evolution of thinking about teacher leadership and its emerging role within the schools (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The literature is relatively new, with most studies taking place during the last 20 years, and the conceptualization is still very much in flux. Nevertheless, it seems clear that there are benefits to be gained from tapping into the expertise of teachers in developing leadership strategies for schools and teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). What remain less clear are the implications for both the preparation of teachers and administrators. In particular, it is hard to define the best role for generic curricular knowledge that is not directly tied to the content areas, although there are some recent promising efforts to extend the research in this direction (see, e.g., Prestine & Nelson, 2005; Stein & Nelson, 2003).

It is also heartening to see evidence of preparation programs taking up the explicit challenge of anticipating the training needs of both teachers who are playing leadership roles and administrators who are becoming more directly involved in teaching and learning issues. York-Barr and Duke (2004) provided an overview of some existing efforts to prepare teacher leaders, including programs at the Johns Hopkins University, Fairleigh Dickinson University, the Douglas County School District in Colorado, and the elementary laboratory school at the University of California, Los Angeles. I hasten to add to the list the new educational leadership program at Penn State University and note that this leadership program, like many of the others described by York-Barr and Duke, takes advantage of a Professional Development School setting. The Penn State program is also noteworthy in that it is built around a teacher inquiry orientation, with a heavy emphasis on tracking the long-term consequences of the innovation (Dana, Snow-Geron,

& Nolan, in press). By stressing the importance of inquiry as a component of effective and reflective teaching, the Penn State approach opens the door on partnerships across different aspects of the school and district as well as between the university and the schools. A further encouraging development in Pennsylvania involves the commonwealth's recent creation of a multi-year internship program for novice principals that is similar in spirit to the multiyear teacher internship program envisioned within the Carnegie Corporation's Teachers for a New Era initiative.

Returning to the standards governing administrator and teacher preparation, there are places where connections across the fields are quite evident. For example, the ACEI stipulates in its first standard, under the Development, Learning, and Motivation heading, that candidates for elementary teaching need to recognize when an individual student's development differs from typical developmental patterns and collaborate with specialists to plan and implement appropriate learning experiences that address individual needs. Thus there is a presumption built into the teaching standard that the relevant administrators will recognize the need to provide appropriate access to the needed specialists. We can work hard to prepare teachers who are knowledgeable about how to collaborate with specialists, but what are such teachers to do if the specialists in question are no where to be found? The stage would seem to be set for a parallel standard on the administrative side calling for the availability of specialists to work with teachers to plan and implement appropriate learning experiences that address individual needs. But how much sense does it make for a training standard to call for resource availability? An administrator could be perfectly well prepared to know how to make use of specialists, but such training could be quite irrelevant if the administrator is located in a resource-impooverished setting.

There have also been recent and highly critical studies of both educational leadership and teacher preparation programs in American schools and colleges of education (Levine, 2005, 2006). The studies' author, Arthur Levine, reports on his study team's effort to gather information about leadership and teacher preparation programs in U.S. colleges and universities. Levine documents and is highly critical of prevailing practice in these preparation programs. On the leadership side, he reports evidence of a curriculum that is largely irrelevant to the needs of practicing administrators, along with evidence of lax admission standards. He picks up on the disconnected nature of the preparation of administrators and the growing emphasis on teaching and learning accountability in the schools. What is actually encouraging about Levine's indictment is his suggestion that practicing administrators are directly concerned with teaching and learning phenomena and voice complaints about the nature of their earlier training. The interest in these phenomena that Levine reports finding among

practicing administrators is a good sign and suggests that there is a ready audience for continuing professional development for administrators with a teaching and learning focus.

Finally, at least one national accrediting body, NCATE, takes a broad view of professional preparation and has developed crosscutting standards that apply to all educator preparation programs being offered across the unit, which is typically defined as a college of education or the university as a whole. Thus, NCATE does not focus on teacher preparation to the exclusion of preparation of administrators and others who hold other professional roles within schooling institutions. While it is a considerable plus to have NCATE take such a comprehensive view of all professional preparation programs, there remains quite a bit of separation across the specializations, which can be traced in part to the fact that NCATE also embraces the utilization of separate standards by each of the various nationally recognized specializations within the field (e.g., science education, mathematics education, special education, and administration, to name just a few). NCATE thereby seeks to assess both crosscutting program coherence and the effective utilization of specialized knowledge in its evaluations of specific professional preparation program areas in the field of education.

CONCLUSIONS

On balance, I am optimistic about the prospects for building bridges between teacher and administrator preparation programs and expect to see more and more evidence of distributed leadership models in education, where teachers and those with specialized pedagogical content knowledge play significant leadership roles. Nevertheless, I have profound respect for the resiliency of institutions and how difficult it can be to make substantive changes such as those I am exploring in this article. Hard work also needs to be done figuring out the correct balance between generic and content-specific pedagogical knowledge and the role for each to play in both teacher and administrator preparation programs. There is great interest today in reforming teacher preparation. Numerous prestigious groups are focusing on the challenges. And we have seen where this energy can be directed in ways that are fairly narrow and miss opportunities to make connections with the broader organizational context in which educational services are delivered.

There is some parallel interest in the reform of leadership preparation, and the Levine (2005) report is a good example. Here there seems to be a greater understanding of the need to move toward more of a teaching and learning agenda, but here, also, there is great prickliness and defensiveness. More

needs to be done, and I am hopeful that over time, more balanced and comprehensive reform efforts will emerge. The new congressionally mandated NRC study of teacher preparation offers great opportunity since it will be conducted by an independent group with a long tradition of a commitment to objectivity.

I close by noting the wisdom of the old adage of being careful about what you wish for. Reform efforts do not always lead in positive directions, and there may be some risk associated with success at linking the reform of administrator preparation to the reform of teacher preparation. The key is to keep the debate focused on the issues and the available evidence, coupled with parallel efforts to assemble and take advantage of new evidence that is relevant to the questions at hand. We are at an opportune moment to explore and assess strengthening ties between these two parts of the field, and I look forward to seeing the results.

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