

Mapping Principal Preparation in Alberta, Canada

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Abstract: This research project investigates the effectiveness of principal preparation programs for early-career principals using the question *How useful are principal preparation programs to novice principals?* This paper maps the formal and informal principal preparation opportunities available in Alberta, Canada. The analysis was part of the International Study of Principal Preparation designed to explore leadership development in 13 countries. The social, political, and economic context of Alberta is outlined to provide a backdrop for the education system in which principals' practice. The study employed a mixed-methods design comprised of three stages: mapping of principal preparation programming using a range of information sources, case studies of school principals in the first three years of their appointments, and a questionnaire administered to a sample of early-career principals in each country represented by the ISPP research team. This article reports the first stage mapping of principal preparation programming in Alberta, Canada. Principal preparation in Alberta is described in terms of its intended audience, content, structure, deliverers, delivery modes, credentials, and pedagogy. Leadership development opportunities that are described include non-credit in-service, graduate certificates and graduate diplomas, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees. Informal programs may be powerful but variable in terms of rigor. The laddering from graduate certificate-graduate diploma-master's degree may provide an articulation pathway that more traditional programs preclude. Formal programs may link local, national, and international evidence more strongly than their informal counterparts. The mapping of principal preparation in Alberta, Canada, suggests that leadership development has evolved over the history of the province and nation and, therefore, so must leadership development programming. The mapping also suggests that principal preparation should attend more to the needs of all citizens in Alberta, not just the majority. There is a need for ongoing cross-cultural examinations of leadership development and its impact on principals' identities and professional practices. The authors caution against "credential creep" in that more certificates, diplomas, and degrees do not necessarily mean better leadership without adequate attention to the social, political, and economic environments in which leaders practice. Also, the potential benefits of inter-institutional collaboration among organizations and across cultures should be explored in future studies. Finally, the authors do not suggest a one-size-fits-all model for leadership development but, rather, they offer a set of insights intended to inform other professional developers.

Recent research from around the world suggests that principal preparation programs should be offered to principals to prepare them for the complexities of this important role (Cowie, Crawford, & Turan, 2007). Programs should address the particularities of the communities principals serve and help aspiring principals understand the expectations that they must meet (Mulford, 2004). The format of principal preparation “may include mentoring, learning sets, field observation and analysis, school visits, case studies and focus group meetings” (Cheung & Walker, 2006, p. 405). In the context of globalization, cross-cultural comparisons, particularly those that include consideration of societal contexts, are valuable for informing leadership development approaches in specific countries. As Turan (2000, p. 544) stated,

The idea of understanding society and its interrelation with schools has long been ignored by educational reformers and leaders. Educational reforms and studies have focused on the school and ignored its relationship with the different dimensions of social, political and economic life.

Moreover, as Webber and Robertson (2003) noted, it is, “More important than ever [that] leaders to be able to adapt to this changing world and to develop cross-cultural literacy and sensitivity” (p. 15). The International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP) (<http://ucalgary.ca/~cwebber/ISPP/>) is a response to the need for greater cross-cultural understanding of educational leadership and how it can be developed.

The ISPP is an international collaboration of scholars spanning a wide range of countries: Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Jamaica, Mexico, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, the United States, and China. This research project investigates the effectiveness of principal preparation programs for early-career principals. Therefore, the research question is, *How useful are principal preparation programs to novice principals?* The findings from this study are intended to inform leadership development programs around the world.

The ISPP was designed as a three-stage study. Stage one involved the mapping of existing principal preparation in participant countries. In stage two case studies were conducted in each country to describe the early-career experiences and perceptions of novice leaders. In stage three a common survey instrument, based on the findings of preceding stages, is being administered internationally. The qualitative and quantitative data will be used to inform principal preparation and the scholarly community.

The ISPP provides the opportunity for unique insights into leadership development across culturally diverse settings, not just Western

contexts. Cross-cultural collaborations nurtured by the ISPP provide new perspectives that expand and challenge our assumptions about educational leadership, contexts, professional relationships, and behaviors of all members of the school community. The research typology exemplified by the ISPP is possible only because of the convergence of new technologies, global migration patterns, and the willingness of current scholars to embrace both similarities and differences.

This report is a description of principal preparation in the province of Alberta in Canada. Principal preparation in this setting will be described in terms of its intended audience, content, structure, deliverers, delivery modes, credentials, and pedagogy. We will close with a discussion of the implications for “boundary-breaking” leadership preparation (Robertson & Webber, 2002).

Context

What follows is a brief overview of the Alberta setting and its education system. The context will be described in terms of demographics and immigration patterns, economy, governance systems, educational frameworks, quality assurance, and educator appointment requirements.

Alberta is a prosperous western Canadian province with a wealth of natural resources (Government of Alberta, 2010c). The province is the site of the second largest crude oil reserves in the world and of 70% of Canadian coal deposits. Alberta is also the site of the largest petrochemical industry in Canada and, as a result, exports petrochemical-based products around the world. Alberta’s agricultural industry is the second largest in Canada and is predominantly focused on cattle and other livestock, plus grain crops such as wheat, oats, barley, canola, and peas. The forestry industry in Alberta draws on over 38,000,000 hectares of woodlands, which is approximately 60% of the total provincial land base. This strong natural resource base is complemented by the manufacturing, research and development, food processing and professional service industries. The provincial economic base is enhanced further by a strong tourism industry that generates over \$5 billion in annual revenues. A major boost to the Alberta economy came from more open trade with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) partners, the United States and Mexico. Indeed, the value of NAFTA to Alberta is demonstrated in the tenfold increase in exports to NAFTA partners between 1989 and 2008 (University of Alberta School of Business, 2010).

The population of Alberta in 2009 was 3,687,662, the fourth largest among the Canadian provinces (Statistics Canada, 2009). In 2009 Alberta's population growth was the fastest in the nation. Over 60% of international immigrants to Alberta are skilled workers and 59% of those are from Asia (Government of Alberta, 2009a). Within Alberta, there is a large indigenous First Nations population which includes the Blackfoot, Cree, Chipweyan, Dene, Sarcee and Stoney people. There are 134 reserves in Alberta, areas allocated to specific First Nations tribal groups (bands) through treaties negotiated with the federal government in the 1870s (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009). As of 2008, there were over 63,000 First Nations people living on Alberta reserves. However, this number does not take into account the First Nations people living off-reserve or those who have lost their treaty status through marriage (Government of Alberta, 2009b).

In Canada, each province and territory is assigned responsibility for education (Council of Ministers of Education, nd). The exception is First Nations education which operates in the following manner: "Canada's federal government funds the majority of First Nations education through First Nations-operated schools on reserves, provincially administered schools off reserves, and federal schools operated by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada on reserves" (Canadian Education Association, 2007, p. 1). Education of First Nations people in Canada is haunted by the negative legacy of the Indian Act of 1876 which led to the establishment of residential schools where First Nations children often were required to live in an attempt to assimilate the children into the dominant culture (Ottmann, 2009).

In Alberta there are 62 public, separate and francophone school boards that operate within the auspices of the Government of Alberta. It is noteworthy that Catholic separate schools are considered one component of the public system, unlike some other provinces in Canada. One of the tenets of the provincial education system is that parents have choice about where to send their children to school, including private schools. Further, charter schools, which are part of the public education system, have emerged to cater to the demand for specific educational programming, such as gender, pedagogy, English-as-a-second-language and discipline-specific approaches to teaching and learning (Government of Alberta, 2010b)

School-aged children from 6 to 16 years are required to attend elementary through secondary schools. Kindergarten is an optional program for pre-elementary school-aged children. Elementary school

spans grades 1 through 6, junior high school consists of grades 7 through 9, while senior high school grades go from 10 through 12. Quality assurance processes include standardized achievement tests administered in core subject areas at grades 3, 6, and 9. In addition, grade 12 students must write standardized diploma examinations (50% of students' total final grade) in the core academic subject areas which, averaged with a teacher-assigned grade, are used by postsecondary institutions for admission purposes. The department of education requires all schools to follow a province-wide program of studies that covers all grades and subjects (Government of Alberta, 2010a). As part of the quality assurance process, Alberta students are assessed in relation to other students around the world as part of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Data from 2006 indicate that Alberta students score well above international averages (Government of Alberta, 2010d). A recent province-wide study exploring assessment policy and practice reported high levels of confidence and trust in the educational system, including teachers and school leaders (Webber, Aitken, Lupart, & Scott, 2009).

Upon graduation from high school, students may opt to study at a wide range of Alberta postsecondary institutions, including comprehensive universities that offer undergraduate and graduate degrees and focus on both applied and pure research. Other postsecondary institutions focus exclusively on undergraduate degrees, diplomas, and university transfer programs. There are 11 regional colleges that specialize in academic upgrading, apprenticeships, certificates, and diplomas. Two large polytechnical institutions offer credentials in trades and technical vocations, plus applied degrees and transfer programs. Five independent "university colleges" that offer liberal arts, science, and education baccalaureate degrees within a faith-based educational culture. Finally, there are two specialized institutions that offer undergraduate, graduate, and professional development programs in fine arts, cultural, and creativity studies (Government of Alberta, 2010e).

To be certificated as a teacher in Alberta elementary and secondary schools, educators must have at least four years of university education and a recognized degree, which includes detailed study of professional teacher education and at least 10 weeks of supervised student teaching. Teachers who earned their credentials outside of Alberta must be reviewed by the Teacher Qualifications Service (Alberta Teachers' Association, nd). Alberta teachers' salaries are well above those of the average Canadian teacher (Brockington, 2009).

Alberta school principals are expected to align their practice with the principal quality practice guidelines created by educational stakeholders (Alberta Education, 2009). The dimensions encompass fostering effective relationships, visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, developing and facilitating leadership, managing school operations and resources, understanding and responding to the larger societal context (Alberta Education, 2009). Leadership development practices vary across the province and will be explored in subsequent sections of this report.

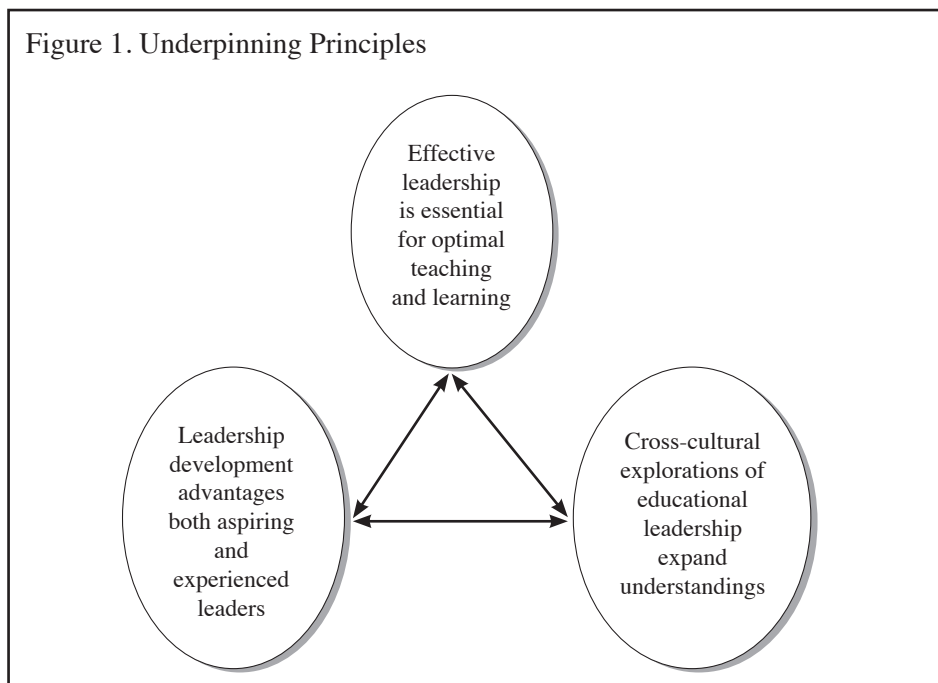
Conceptual Framework

This report is based on several assumptions drawn from recent theory and research. First, effective educational leadership is essential for supporting teachers' instructional capacity and promoting student achievement (Fullan, 2007). Moreover, aspiring principals must understand what effective leaders actually do to provide stability and foster improvement (Leithwood, 2007). Our first assumption is supported further by Murphy's (2008) assertion that, "...leadership is the most critical element in the narrative of organizational recovery" (p.90).

Second, leadership development is advantageous for aspiring school leaders in order to empower them to meet the challenges of modern schooling (Macpherson, 2009; Scott & Webber, 2008). It can be argued that leadership development ought to continue throughout leaders' careers as they move through different contexts and levels of expertise (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000). In fact, successful succession planning is dependent upon systematic leadership development. Leithwood (2007) noted that "unplanned principal succession is one of the most common sources of schools failing to progress, in spite of what teachers might do... especially on initiatives to increase student achievement" (p.45).

Third, cross-cultural understandings of educational leadership are critical in an era of globalization when people and ideas migrate throughout the world (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2009; Shah, 2006). Although the particularities may be different, Scott and Rarieya (2010, p.12) argued that "...regardless of the setting, the role of a school leader is complex, demanding and important" and, therefore, cross-cultural analyses are useful for advancing the knowledge and skills of principals. Scott and Rarieya's (2010) claim is supported by Walker and Dimmock's (2004) assertion:

Since culture is reflected in all aspects of school life, and people, organizations and society share differences and similarities in terms of their cultures, it is clearly a useful concept with universal application and appeal, one appropriate for comparing influences and practices endemic to educational leadership and administration. (p.169)



The assumptions depicted in Figure 1 provide the foundation for the following analysis of principal preparation in Alberta, Canada.

Review of ISPP Findings

Because of space limitations, the following account of ISPP findings is summarized from a previous report (Scott & Webber, submitted) which should be consulted for additional detail. A full listing of ISPP-related publications is available online at <http://ucalgary.ca/~cwebber/ISPP/pubs.htm>.

The published reports written by members of the ISPP research team were analyzed to identify the following themes: cross-cultural insights, succession planning, professional identity, reconceptualizing leadership development, and revisioning instructional leadership. Each of these themes is described briefly below.

Cross-Cultural Insights

Scott and Rarieya (2010) noted that, in reference to their cross-cultural study of principals in Canada and Tanzania, that there were more thematic similarities than differences, though the particularities of each context are important. As Slater et al. (2007) highlighted, educational leaders should strive to become “cultural travelers” (p. 83) who understands the cultural nuances of their work.

More effective leadership development is needed across the countries studied by the ISPP collaborators. However, leadership development is incidental or absent in many countries (Wildy & Clarke, 2008). When leadership development does exist it too often is in the form of an apprenticeship model that reinforces traditional conceptualizations of leadership and the status quo (Onguko, Abdalla, & Webber, 2010). Further, existing principal preparation programs underplays the technical aspects of school leadership such as time management, goal setting, policy interpretation, and budget management (Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008).

Succession Planning

The ISPP team reported failures across nations to plan appropriately for principal succession. This was the case in developing nations such as Mexico (Slater et al., 2007) and Kenya (Onguko, Abdalla, & Webber, 2008) where unclear and corrupt appointment processes marred the credibility of new principals. Surprisingly, it also was a problem in countries, such as Scotland, with well established educational infrastructures (Cowie & Crawford, 2007).

Professional Identity

A recurrent theme across cultural contexts was the difficulty of forming sound professional identities which resulted in discomfort and uncertainty (Clarke, Wildy, & Pepper, 2007). Professional learning networks provide one form of support for newly appointed principals as they form their professional identities (Cowie & Crawford, 2008, 2009; Cowie, Crawford, & Turan, 2007). The formation of professional identity is confounded by the complex expectations for school leaders, e.g., too much paperwork (Slater, et al., 2008), relationship challenges and student behaviors (Nelson, et al., 2008), parental expectations and conflict management (Slater et al., 2007).

Reconceptualizing Leadership Development

One form of leadership development is not appropriate for all settings (Cowie & Crawford, 2007). Therefore, one ISPP report suggested a flexible leadership development framework, called the 4L framework (Scott & Webber, 2008), with the capacity to be modified across cultural contexts (Webber & Scott, 2009). The 4L framework recognized the importance of leadership development across career stages and the need for sufficient time to learn, reflect, collaborate, and grow. The 4L framework also recommended a range of formats, including role-embedded learning, mentoring, action research, networking, internships, collaboration, and formal study. The model includes a description of teachable dimensions of leadership that emerged in the various settings of the ISPP.

Wildy and Clarke (2008), along with Cowie and Crawford (2009) offered conceptualizations of leadership development that encompassed the importance of understanding place, that is, the physical, interpersonal, and personal uniqueness of each principal's setting. They also emphasized the importance of personal resilience, self-efficacy, and the ability to multi-task.

Revisiting Instructional Leadership

The ISPP report underscore the longstanding tension between providing instructional leadership and managing the administration of the school (Nelson, et al., 2008). However, Scott and Webber (2008) argued that leadership and management should not be considered as dichotomous constructs. Rather, they suggested that management ought to be seen as leadership because of the impact of administrative duties on teaching and learning throughout schools. They later posited that leadership and management should be complemented by concurrent attention to educational entrepreneurship (Scott & Webber, submitted) that promotes innovation in the context of social responsibility.

Methodology

The main research question for the International Study of Principal Preparation is *How useful are principal preparation programs to novice principals?* To begin to answer this question, the ISPP research team created a mixed-methods study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009) comprised of three stages: mapping of principal preparation programming using a range of information sources, case studies of school principals in the first three years of their appointments,

and a questionnaire administered to a sample of early-career principals in each country represented by the ISPP research team. The ISPP researchers in some nations restricted their parts of the study to primary/elementary school principals, while those in other countries included the full range of school leaders in the first three years of their initial appointments.

The mapping component required the ISPP team to establish current provisions for leadership development existing within each country using a common framework for analysis. To initiate this process, representatives of the team met face-to-face over a three-day period to plan the details of the overall study. This included the development of a mapping framework that could be applied to the principal preparation experiences available in each of their countries. The mapping criteria included the preparation programs' intended audience, content, structure, deliverers, delivery modes, credentialing, and pedagogy. The research team agreed that they would utilize a variety of information sources such as government policies, institutional program descriptions available in print and online, documentation of professional development providers such as professional associations and consortia, and researcher knowledge of local contexts. As all members of the team had a long history of working within their educational and cultural contexts, their insider knowledge was deemed a legitimate source of qualitative data, along the lines of what Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) and Mills (2011) described as participant observers.

Principal Preparation in Alberta, Canada

A description of principal preparation requires careful explanation of terminology. Table 1 presents the definitions of several key terms relevant to the education setting described in this report.

Current Programming in Alberta, Canada

Alberta has never had formal province-wide requirements for appointment as a school principal beyond the holding of an undergraduate degree and a current teaching certificate. However, a master's degree, usually in educational administration and leadership, is the informal prerequisite in all urban and most rural regions of the province. Therefore, virtually all Alberta principals have a master's degree and increasing numbers hold a doctoral degree. Table 2 summarizes the range of credit and non-credit professional programming available to aspiring and current principals in the province of Alberta. Programming includes non-credit in-service, certificates and diplomas, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees. Each of these programs is explained below in terms of its participants, content, structure, deliverers, delivery modes, credentials, and pedagogy.

Table 1
Defining the Educational Setting

Terms	Alberta, Canada
Ministry of Education	Alberta Education is the provincial ministry responsible for the education of youth from kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12). It is responsible for establishing the Program of Studies and benchmarking standards for students, teachers, principals, and superintendents. It provides resources and funding to support schools, special needs students, francophone schooling, and supports some aspects of Aboriginal education. It provides some professional development support to educators. It also has oversight of the regulations and policies related to K-12 education.
School Boards	The Constitution Act of 1867 provided each province and territory with control of its education system (Council of Ministers of Education, nd). Within the province of Alberta, the legislature has delegated authority for much of the day-to-day operation of schools to school boards (Alberta School Act, 2009). School boards in Alberta make decisions regarding district priorities, resource allocation, policy development, communication with the community and staff, and adjudicating policy disputes (Government of Alberta, 2010b). School superintendents, the chief executive officer in school districts, are appointed by the Minister of Education upon the recommendation of individual school boards.
Teacher Education	Alberta Education, the ministry responsible for K-12 education, evaluates credentials and issues teaching certificates to individuals who possess the necessary educational qualifications. Teacher education is delivered by the postsecondary institutions that have formal agreements with the provincial government to offer programs that meet the specifications for certification. To be certificated as a teacher in Alberta, individuals must hold a minimum of a four-year baccalaureate degree that incorporates at least 48 credit hours (one course normally equals 3 credits) in teacher education and a minimum of 10 weeks of supervised teaching practice (Government of Alberta, 2010f).
School Principals	The principal is the educational leader in a school and responsible for administration and instructional leadership. Principals may be required to teach, depending upon the size of the school. A completed master's degree is the usual requirement for appointment as a principal and increasing numbers hold completed doctoral degrees. All principals must hold an Alberta teaching certificate and have teaching experience. They are expected to meet the professional standards outlined in the <i>Principal Quality Practice Guidelines</i> (Alberta Education, 2009).
Postgraduate and graduate terminology	Alberta universities use the term <i>postgraduate</i> to refer to certificate and diploma programs that are post-undergraduate and not graduate-level credentials. Graduate-level credentials are considered to be more scholarly and rigorous than postgraduate qualifications.
Course	Graduate courses offered by Alberta universities consist of approximately 40 hours of contact time or, in the case of online courses, equivalent study activities, plus individual reading, studying, and completing written assignments.

Table 2.
Leadership Development Opportunities in Alberta, Canada.

	Non-Credit In-Service Certificate or Diploma	Master's	Doctoral
Client Group	Teachers preparing for positions as assistant or vice principals, or principals who already hold master's degrees.	A very small number of principals have a bachelor's degree plus a four-course graduate certificate or an eight-course graduate diploma covering content area in areas such as educational administration, curriculum, or special education	School-based educators who aspire to leadership appointments in schools, districts, and departments of education.
Content	General in-service topics such as brain-based learning, multiple intelligences, learning styles, etc.	Introductory courses in educational administration theory and research; change and innovation, organizational theory, leadership, community-school relations, communication, policy studies, planning, decision making, school culture.	Introductory and advanced courses in educational administration and leadership, focusing on change and innovation, organizational theory, leadership, community-school relations, communication, policy studies, planning, decision making, school culture.
Structure	Short evening or weekend sessions. Occasionally one-week residential/retreat programs.	Four or eight courses, each consisting of approximately 40 hours of contact time or online equivalent. Courses typically consist of readings, semi-structured dialogue, article reviews, reflective essays, and final critical essay.	Typical doctoral students take approximately two years of coursework, usually about eight or more courses, plus two years of research and dissertation writing. After coursework is completed, students must submit a research proposal and complete comprehensive written and oral examinations.
Deliverers	Teachers' associations, school districts, regional consortia, private consultants.	Faculties of Education in urban and provincial universities. Sometimes universities from other provinces and countries, particularly the U.S., deliver programs in Alberta.	Larger universities have offered master's degrees for many decades while smaller universities have offered master's degrees for 15 to 20 years. Several American universities deliver master's degrees in Alberta.

Face-to-face over evenings and weekends.

Certificates and diplomas have been offered in traditional campus venues. Increasingly, they are offered online, in week-long seminars, and over summers.

The course-based master's degree usually is offered in evenings and during summer breaks. Most students in course-based programs are part-time and continue paid employment. Selected universities have slightly over half of course-based students studying via distance and/or online education. Course-based students are the vast majority of master's students. Only small numbers of students complete thesis-based degree programs.

PhD programs are delivered on campus in the usual North American manner: one to two years of coursework, submission of a research proposal, oral examination, dissertation research, and final oral examination. Distance format doctoral degrees are Doctor of Education rather than Doctor of Philosophy. EdD programs typically have slightly more coursework but are consistent in nearly every other respect to PhD programs. Distance EdD programs attract students from a wider geographic area and most EdD students are part-time.

Delivery Modes

Non-credit certificates usually are given but they have no merit in terms of more than attendance records.

Certificates and diplomas have some status but this credential is not as popular as the master's degree. However, the University of Calgary offers a step-by-step credentialing pathway that allows participants to progress from certificate to diploma to master's degrees with full academic and tuition credit for each preceding step. In other provincial postsecondary institutions, diplomas are often used as an articulation pathway to other graduate credentials.

The master's degree is the unofficial requirement for all leadership appointments at the assistant principal level and beyond. It need not be in educational leadership but a master's degree is a de facto requirement for administrative appointments in schools, districts, and departments of education.

Doctoral degrees now are very common among superintendents and senior department of education staff. More and more elementary and secondary school principals hold doctorates and, though still rare, some classroom teachers hold doctorates.

Credentialing

Short presentations with plenty of discussion. No written work. Some professional readings.

Most graduate certificates and diplomas are of high level graduate study. Courses typically consist of readings from refereed sources, intense dialogue, perhaps student presentations, and written assignments.

Master's degree courses are similar to the format for diploma courses, i.e. a rigorous set of expectations.

The focus in doctoral degrees is on integration, some breadth, and a lot of depth of knowledge. There is an expectation for sustained study over a long period of time with the goal of original research being conducted.

Pedagogy

Non-Credit In-Service

Non-credit in-service programming is the most informal of the leadership development options available to aspiring and current principals. Participants tend to be individuals who want to learn more about school leadership as they consider moving into these roles. Alternatively, they are practicing principals who have a master's degree and do not wish to undertake doctoral studies but have a desire to stay current with leadership theory and research.

In-service topics cover a broad range of topics germane to the principalship. Some examples of in-service topics are legal issues for school administrators, shared decision making, instructional leadership, assessment and evaluation, conflict management, and teacher supervision. On occasion, school leaders attend workshops on topics that teachers in their schools are studying, e.g., student engagement, differentiated instruction, student assessment, and specific subject areas like language arts or mathematics.

Most in-service offerings consist of short evening or weekend sessions. They also may be structured as one-week residential courses. Typically, in-service sessions are stand alone and not part of a larger school or district professional development initiative. They usually are delivered by school districts to individuals within their pool of aspiring leaders, provincial teachers' associations through their specialist councils, and regional consortia comprised of organizations representing various educational stakeholder such as school boards, the College of Alberta School Superintendents, the School Councils Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, and the provincial department of education.

Most in-service sessions consist of short presentations in conjunction with group discussion. There rarely is any requirement for written work or demanding professional reading. Participants may be provided with informal certificates for the purpose of verifying attendance but do not lead to any formal credentialing.

Graduate Certificates and Diplomas

A very few principals in Alberta have only a baccalaureate (undergraduate) degree plus a graduate certificate or, more often, a graduate diploma in

areas such as educational administration, curriculum studies, or special education. Virtually all of these principals were appointed two decades or more ago and work in rural school districts. More recent registrants in credit certificate and diploma programs are individuals who are preparing for the principalship and intend to complete a master's degree. The certificate-to-diploma pathway makes the master's degree more attainable for working participants with family commitments.

Graduate certificates and diplomas address a range of topics but, those planning to become principals, most often focus on educational administration theory and research. This area of study includes topics such as change and innovation, organizational theory, leadership, school-community relations, communication, policy studies and strategic planning, plus other related issues. At the certificate and diploma levels, courses tend to be introductory with more in-depth study occurring at the master's and doctoral levels.

Most Alberta universities do not offer graduate certificates but offer graduate diploma programs. However, as mentioned earlier, the University of Calgary offers a progressive path from certificate through diploma to a master's degree. Certificates consist of four courses, each comprised of approximately 40 hours of contact time or online equivalent. Diplomas build on the certificate with an additional four courses (a total of eight courses). Courses require participants to undertake scholarly readings, participate in professional dialogue with colleagues, and complete a range of assessment tasks such as article reviews, reflective essays, and critical literature reviews.

Graduate certificates and diplomas are delivered in Alberta by faculties of education in urban and regional universities across Canada and, increasingly, by American public and private universities. Delivery modes include face-to-face, online, blended, and intensive week-long or summer-based programs. Students most often are part-time registrants in the certificate and diploma programs which are aimed at working professionals.

Although useful, graduate certificates and diplomas have less cachet than master's degrees. They are particularly useful as qualifying work for educators whose undergraduate grades are too low for direct entry into graduate programs.

Master's Degrees

The master's degree in educational administration and leadership is aimed primarily at school-based educators who aspire to leadership positions within schools, districts, and provincial ministries of education. Courses range from introductory-through-advanced levels and cover a wide range of leadership and administrative issues similar to those studied in graduate certificates and diplomas.

Students in master's degree programs in educational leadership offered by Alberta universities may complete either a course-based or a thesis program. Course-based programs require 12 courses and, at some universities, an exit project or major paper. Students in thesis routes normally take fewer courses but undertake a substantial research project and write a thesis that must be defended at the conclusion of the degree program. Course-based master's programs are designed for practitioners who wish to remain in school, district, and provincial systems. Master's degrees that require a thesis are aimed at individuals intending to progress to doctoral studies and to seek research and teaching positions at universities.

Doctoral Degrees

Although the master's degree is the de facto requirement for appointment to the principalship, increasing numbers of school principals have continued their learning through doctoral studies. Indeed, principals who aspire to private consulting, the superintendency, the professoriate, and department of education positions recognize that a doctoral degree expands their career options. Students apply to either the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or Doctor of Education (EdD) program, with the former aimed primarily at future academics while the latter is intended mainly for educators who seek senior leadership positions within the education systems. Both degrees require some course work and a large original research study culminating in a dissertation that is examined by a panel of experts who determine if the research is a significant addition to the scholarly literature. Course work includes qualitative and quantitative research methods courses, plus courses focusing on topics within the field of educational administration and leadership, e.g., planning and governance, educational law, policy and politics, globalization, and technology.

Doctoral students normally take about two years of course work, comprised of eight or more courses. Once course work has been completed, students are required to write a research proposal that must be approved by their supervisor. Then doctoral students must complete a candidacy examination which involves writing a major academic paper and defending it to a panel of academic experts. Upon successful completion of candidacy, students undertake their research and report their findings in a thesis called a doctoral dissertation. The student then must defend the dissertation in an oral examination conducted by a panel of academics that includes the members of the student's supervisory committee plus two external examiners. The successful completion of the research proposal, candidacy examination, research and dissertation preparation and defense normally take about two years.

There are just two universities in Alberta that award doctoral degrees, the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta. The latter institution was one of the first Canadian institutions in western Canada to offer doctoral degrees in education and this has resulted in a relatively large number of principals and superintendents who hold the PhD or EdD. Both the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta continue to offer on-campus face-to-face PhD and EdD programs, while the University of Calgary also offers the EdD in a primarily online format. Both degrees can be taken on a full or part-time basis. The online EdD offered by the University of Calgary has attracted students from across Canada and international settings; however, the international EdD students are generally Canadian expatriates. Recently, several foreign institutions have begun offering doctoral degrees in Alberta in an online mode.

Doctoral degrees are becoming common among senior educational leaders in Alberta. Some school principals hold doctoral degrees and, though it is rare, some classroom teachers hold doctorates. There are few financial incentives for teachers to obtain doctorates if they wish to remain in the classroom. However, doctoral degrees place them at an advantage for promotion opportunities which can result in higher salaries.

Discussion

The value of reporting this analysis of principal preparation in Alberta, Canada, does not lie in its potential to serve as a model for other contexts. Rather, it has merit as information set for those who provide leadership development in other Canadian provinces and other countries. The ISPP has revealed the clear need for ongoing leadership development

and the demand across the participant countries for access to formal and informal programs endorses this finding. Other studies may question the relationship between leadership and student achievement (Levine, 2005; Youngs & King, 2002), but there is merit in studying the ways in which principals can be better prepared. Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) noted that the total impact of leadership on student learning is approximately one quarter of the sum effect of schools. Thus, it seems obvious that attending to leadership development has the potential to improve learning. At the very least, ongoing study of leadership and its influences, such as the ISPP, are valuable in terms of understanding leadership within different socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts.

Our analysis of leadership development in Alberta suggests that leadership development in that setting has evolved over the history of the province and nation. Such change should be expected to continue and, therefore, so must leadership development programming so that principals and superintendents can stay current with the changing educational environment. For example, the demographic changes resulting from globalization have included a much greater diversity in the population of Alberta. This suggests that principal preparation should attend more to the needs of all citizens in Alberta, not just the majority.

The mapping process revealed the wide availability of informal leadership development in Alberta. It is worth noting that informal programs may be powerful but variable in terms of rigor. As well, they can be characterized as fragmented and ad hoc. Perhaps the perceived desirability of informal programming comes from its very accessibility, an attribute that should be incorporated into more formal programs offered by postsecondary institutions. For example, the laddering from graduate certificate-graduate diploma-master's degree may provide an articulation pathway that more traditional programs preclude.

The advantage that formal programming has over informal offerings is the rigor in terms of the evidence-based underpinnings. As well, our examination of the content of formal programs leads to the conclusion that they link local, national, and international evidence more strongly than their informal counterparts.

Conclusion

In this report, we highlighted the importance of the social, political, and economic contexts of educational leadership. We demonstrated the

need for ongoing cross-cultural examinations of leadership development and its impact on principals' identities and professional practices. We also described the context of educational leadership in Alberta and provided a conceptual framework for studying leadership development. The findings of the ISPP across cultures were summarized with the goal of informing the design of leadership development programming across Canada and internationally. This article also mapped the formal and informal leadership preparation opportunities available in Alberta, Canada.

To close, we offer three suggestions for future examinations of leadership development. First, we caution against what we call "credential creep." That is, more certificates, diplomas, and degrees do not necessarily mean better leadership without adequate attention to the social, political, and economic environments in which leaders practice. Second, the potential benefits of inter-institutional collaboration among organizations and across cultures should be explored in future studies. The expansion of globalization makes it reasonable that educational leaders need to develop cross-cultural literacies to a far greater degree than in the past. Finally, the ISPP findings do not suggest a one-size-fits-all model for leadership development but, rather, they offer a set of insights intended to inform other professional developers.

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