

Learning to Lead? What Gets Taught in Principal Preparation Programs

Prepared for the Administrator Preparation Committee

Document can be downloaded at:

http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/Hess_Kelly_Learning_to_Lead_PEPG05.02.pdf

Overview:

The researchers collected and analyzed course syllabi from 56 principal preparation programs around the country (adding up to a total of 210 syllabi and 2,424 course weeks). They examined the emphasis of each lesson and coded them on seven areas of principal competency. Within each area, the researchers then coded the lessons on their primary focus.

The seven areas of principal competency for which the syllabi were coded included:

1. managing for results
2. managing personnel
3. technical knowledge
4. external leadership
5. norms and values
6. managing classroom instruction
7. leadership and school culture

Findings:

Content

- 2% of the course weeks addressed accountability in the context of school management or improvement in relation to standards-based accountability systems, state assessments, and NCLB.
- Less than 5% included instruction on managing school improvement using data-driven decision making, technology, or empirical research.
- 11% of course weeks involved discussions of statistics, data, or empirical research.
- 11% of course weeks dealt with topics related to instructional leadership such as curriculum development, pedagogy, classroom management, and learning theory.
- 360 course weeks (15% of course weeks) dealt with personnel management issues (e.g., hiring, evaluating, developing, and firing personnel). Only 12 weeks discussed teacher dismissal and 9 weeks on teacher compensation. Only 11% of course weeks focused on personnel management addressed recruitment, selection, and hiring of new teachers. About 24% of the 360 course weeks discussed teacher evaluation favoring supportive evaluation techniques over tough-minded techniques
- Technical knowledge topics were the frequently addressed topics in syllabi accounting to a total of 30% of total course weeks (almost twice the amount of time spent on the other six content areas). Topics included school law, school finance, managing facilities, data training, research, technology, coordinating meetings, and food and transportation services. About 75% of these weeks were spent on school law and finance.
- In 42% of courses on school law, finance, and facilities, faculty did not require a final assessment where students had to demonstrate mastery of content.
- External leadership responsibilities included topics such as working with stakeholders like parents and community organizations, negotiating local politics, understanding collective bargaining agreements, and developing small business skills such as public relations and marketing. Only about 8% of course weeks were devoted to these topics.
- Programs provided the most instruction on understanding politics and policy and to public relations. In large programs, there was more instruction on small business skills and collective bargaining than in elite or typical programs.

- Across all syllabi, there was minimal focus on working with parents and school boards (only about 7% of external leadership course weeks).

Ideological Biases of Preparation Programs

- Only 12% (293) of course weeks discussed norms and values related to schooling (the percentage is higher in elite schools).
- Of these 293 course weeks, 190 weeks were clearly left-leaning, 102 were neutral, and 1 was right leaning.

Assigned Readings

- Most common authors: Terence Deal, Kent Peterson, Allan Odden, Thomas Sergivanni, Richard Elmore, and Michael Fullan.
- Least common/most absent authors: Paul Hill, Larry Cuban, William Boyd, Michael Kirst, and Jim Guthrie.

Hess, F.M. & Kelly, A.P. (2002). Learning to lead? What gets taught in principal preparation programs. Boston, MA: Harvard University.