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Characterizing the Touchstones of Educational Leadership: An Analysis of Distinguished Applied Doctorate Programs

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Characterizing the Touchstones of Educational Leadership: An Analysis of Distinguished Applied Doctorate Programs

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Abstract

Doctorate programs in educational leadership have been criticized in recent years for failing to prepare their graduates to effectively serve as instructional leaders in the nation's schools. Criticisms have included ambiguity of purpose and research foci, weak admission and graduation requirements, irrelevant curriculum, and the lack of applied practice. The purpose of this study was to analyze specific characteristics of thirteen highly ranked applied doctorate programs in educational leadership.

Findings revealed that touchstone doctorate programs display many of the features that have been criticized, and that they are largely similar in structure and foci to lower ranked programs. (98 words)

“The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become.” (Fullan, 2001, p. ix).

Background of the Problem

University preparation programs in educational leadership have been criticized in recent years for failing to provide their graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively serve as instructional leaders in our nation's schools (Archer, 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Levine, [2005](#); MacGregor & Watson, [2008](#); Murphy, 2007). These criticisms have specifically targeted principal licensure and applied doctorate programs, and have been most strongly voiced by Arthur Levine (Archer; MacGregor & Watson), who authored the *Education Schools Project* in 2005 during his tenure as the president of Teachers College-Columbia University. He is now (as of May 2011) the president of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation.

Levine (2005) claimed that educational leadership preparation programs were involved in a “race to the bottom” (p. 23) and were in need of drastic changes to come into alignment with the reality of what school leaders need to know and be able to do. The main problems he identified in such programs included misaligned curricula, weak admissions and graduation criteria, and unqualified faculty and clinical supervisors. Levine also argued against the awarding of applied doctorates (aka EdD) in educational leadership for research-focused programs, and the awarding of doctorates in philosophy (aka PhD) for practitioner-focused programs. He advocated for applied practice such as internships, practicums, and cooperative education arrangements – opportunities that are rarely included in preparation programs to the extent he believed they should be. Although Levine's report has been heavily criticized for some of its unsubstantiated declarations (see Young, Crow, Orr, Ogawa, & Creighton, [2005](#)), it caused a tremendous stir in higher learning arenas, followed by acknowledgement

that educational leadership preparation programs do, indeed, have some shortcomings that warrant serious scrutiny (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007).

Some entities had already begun such scrutiny, such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that launched a five-year research study in 2001 called the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) (2011). That study involved working with several universities that offered PhD degrees in education, among other disciplines, through a self-improvement effort of their leadership preparation programs. It also focused on the issue of the obscure lines between PhD and EdD programs that Levine's report later highlighted (Shulman, Golde, Conklin Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). Now in Phase II of its original initiative, CPED is advocating for professional doctorates (PDs) as an altogether new creation – degrees that are specifically designed for providing leaders with the practical skills needed for effectively leading today's schools.

An additional response to criticisms of university programs has been the revision of the main standards used for school leaders originally created in 1996 by the Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). The *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLCC 2008* were revised by the non-profit, non-partisan National Policy Board for Educational Administration comprised of representatives from various stakeholder groups. These standards have been widely recognized and utilized by states in creating their school leadership licensure and evaluation policies (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009).

One result of the perceived inadequacy of universities to effectively prepare educational leaders has been for state education licensure entities to allow for alternative licensure paths that bypass university involvement. Some states are offering their own leadership academies for licensure. Local school districts are increasingly allowed to hire superintendents who do not hold traditional educational credentials (i.e., teacher licensure followed by principal licensure followed by superintendent licensure) (Levine, 2005). Such alternative avenues for licensure and leadership preparation have influenced a trend toward de-professionalizing the work of educational leaders, according to English (2006).

In spite of the criticisms of Levine's 2005 report, his claims have dealt a healthy blow to university preparation programs. Established educational leadership preparation programs are in need of appropriate responses to the claims made by Levine and others. Other programs that are in the design or approval process are in need of exemplary programs to use as models.

It would be beneficial to know if the schools and educational leadership programs that are among the most respected are acceptable in terms of some of Levine's strongest complaints. An appropriate identifier of these most respected touchstone programs is the *Best Graduate Schools in America* index created annually by *U.S. News & World Report* (2010).

The purpose of this analytical study was to identify characteristics of university applied doctorate programs in educational leadership that were highly rated by the *U.S. News & World Report* 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 indexes. The specific guiding research question for this study was, What are the admissions criteria, program and curricular foci, field experiences, and graduation requirements of highly-ranked applied doctorate programs in educational leadership preparation at U.S. universities?

Limitations of the Research

This study was limited to 4-year universities in the United States that were identified by *U.S. News & World Report's* specialty ratings as the highest-rated (top 25) graduate programs in educational administration and supervision. This study was further limited to collectable, publicly available data relative to the applied doctorate programs in the study sample.

Educational administration. In this article, educational administration is defined as the more traditional designation for K-12 school leaders in assigned administrative positions.

Educational leadership. In this article, educational leadership refers to a more current designation for the body of knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed in the scope of multi-age educational organizations that exist today: traditional or nontraditional; formal or informal; public, private, or nonprofit.

Touchstone. “An excellent quality or example that is used to test the excellence of others” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011, n. p.).

Review of Related Discourse

Two salient themes have dominated the national dialogue surrounding educational leadership preparation programs – the shortage of competent educational leaders (American Association for Employment in Education, 2008) and the need for redesigned preparation programs to combat the problems with current educational leadership programs (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007; English, 2006; Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2007). This literature review concentrated on these two themes surrounding educational leadership and university preparation programs.

Need for Educational Leaders

Job opportunities continue to increase within the K-12 educational context. In 2007, over half of the K-12 educational fields reported a shortage and none of the fields reported a considerable surplus (American Association for Employment in Education, 2008). Walker (2008) asserted, “Education is currently a field of growing employment needs in order to develop and provide better services and opportunities for individuals...” (p. 357). Additionally, the perceived shortage of administrators has likely added to the development of many educational leadership preparation programs over the past few decades. The shortage of administrators could be attributed to the diversification of educational leadership positions, from teacher leaders, department chairs, assistant principals, principals, district office positions, and superintendents (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007). Ultimately, the changing dynamics of K-12 education and sustaining the pool of competent educational leaders has shaped the current foci of educational leadership preparation programs.

Changing Foci in Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

Universities around the world offer programs in *educational leadership* preparation. There exists both commonality and variation among such programs, although the extent of either has not been determined as definitions and usages of the term continue to evolve. Many institutions and agencies in the United States have supplanted their use of *educational administration* or *school leadership* (and of *educational management* in the UK) with *educational leadership* in response to changing paradigms of leadership. One example can be found in the recently updated *Educational Leadership*

Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (a joint effort of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Policy Board on Educational Administration). The new standards have altered the terminology used in the original 1996 standards from *school administrator* to *educational* and *education leader* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008).

Additionally, district and statewide initiatives have shaped educational leadership programs as states have developed specific initiatives to focus on the number and capacity of available school leaders (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007). For example, in 2001 Iowa adopted *Iowa's Standard for School Leaders*, which was aligned with the ISLLC 2008 standards but addressed specific state needs (Hackmann & Wanat, 2007). Changing foci in educational leadership preparation programs have paralleled changing definitions of educational leadership.

Changing Views of Definition

One underlying factor in changing foci has been a shift from viewing leadership as the province of a single leader administering from the top of an organization to that of leadership existing among stakeholders throughout the organization. It is now understood that vision must be supported and shared by all, that organizational culture and climate are co-sculpted, that collective management of operations and resources is directly linked to safe learning environments, that communities are partners in the learning process, and that a leader at the top cannot be the sole model of ethical behavior if integrity is to permeate the organization. Recognition has grown that responding to issues that arise out of the many contexts of educational organizations (political, social, economic, legal, and cultural) cannot be accomplished by one person (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009).

Another piece of the paradigm shift has been a redefinition of the idea of what *school leadership* is—a term that connotes what happens within the confines of a building rather than within learning environments that have no walls or have extended boundaries well beyond the school campus. Murphy (2002) stated, “The traditional ways of defining the profession were inadequate to the task of reculturing” (p. 189). *School leadership* has limitations in its usage when considering increasing numbers of home school networks, study at sea, and study abroad programs, as well as learning approaches used outside of the school building such as service learning, community-based learning, place-based learning, and outdoor environmental education. However, while definitions become more holistic, many argue educational leadership preparation programs are not permeating these “new foundations” (Murphy, p. 186).

Problems within Current Preparations Programs

Many scholars have identified problems with current educational leadership preparation programs (Archer, 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Levine, 2005; MacGregor & Watson, 2008; Murphy, 2007). First, too many programs have a research focus rather than a practical focus. According to Murphy (2007), “What universities have been doing to prepare educational leaders is, at best, of questionable value, and at worst, harmful” (p. 582). Murphy argued that the foundations of education administration graduate programs have been “wrongly laid” (p. 582) with values of the academe rather than values of practice. Hence, superintendents and principals are pursuing doctorates that have little relevance to their jobs (Levine, 2005).

Second, the ISLLC 2008 standards, now adopted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), have placed limitations on educational leadership preparation programs. According to English (2006), the ISLLC 2008 standards have limited the responsibilities of school leaders because of the standardized knowledge base. He explained,

... the concept of a monolithic, uncontested, internally consistent fount of universally accepted stipulations and axioms and tenets for an academic discipline is an illusion, supported only in the case of accreditation by a forged, muscular application of raw political power. (p. 461-462)

English (2006) also claimed that the standards are only valid in a static educational environment and do not prepare educational leaders for the changing dynamics of education. English pointed out that diversity requires attention to difference, yet the ISSLC 2008 standards cause the work of faculty moving outside of the boundaries of the standards to be treated with irrelevancy or hostility. Ultimately, curricula are weakened.

Third, faculty members who teach in many school administration programs are unqualified and lack the skills to train tomorrow's school leaders (Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2007). Murphy affirmed that one becomes a professional by engaging in practice. However, he claimed, more than two-thirds of professors of school administration and more than 90% of education professors at research universities did not have K-12 experience.

Lastly, many preparation programs continue to lack coherent curricula, rigor, pedagogy, and structure to provide the skills and knowledge educational leaders need (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Levine (2005) claimed that curricula are disjointed. Clinical instruction is not meaningful and is squeezed in at the school where a student is employed whether or not the principals are competent, qualified school leaders.

Suggested Changes for Educational Leadership Programs

Several recommendations have emerged on how educational leadership preparation programs should be revised. Murphy (2007) argued that curricula should be carefully examined. He asserted, "...there is a huge assortment of things that are more important than dissertations and a wide variety of ways to help people learn things that bear some resemblance to the job they will be doing" (p. 585). Levine (2005) agreed that a relevant and challenging curriculum for school leaders is needed. Levine actually called for the EdD to be eliminated and the PhD to be reserved for future researchers. He also recommended that a master's of school administration degree should be developed. The degree would emphasize business administration and education and would serve as a terminal degree for educational administrators.

Suggestions and actions from other entities have included rigorous evaluations of programs, closing of weak preparation programs, institutional embracing of high standards for programs, investment in professional development for faculty members, increasing the admissions requirements for preparation programs and involving all key stakeholders in decisions about programs (English, 2006; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Levine, 2005). Rising to the call for more relevant and transformative school leaders, the philanthropic Wallace Foundation has partnered with Harvard University ([2011](#)) to launch a new tuition-free Doctorate of Educational Leadership that is designed to spark systemic school change.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to analyze characteristics of highly-ranked applied doctorate programs in educational leadership. This study relied on a content analysis method, a technique used for systematically examining existent data to address educational problems and derive patterns in human behavior or thinking (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Slavin, 2007). In this study, it was posited that characteristics of distinguished doctorate programs are indicative of particular thought and meaning relative to preparing educational leaders through such programs.

Sample Selection and Description

The population for this study entailed 420 U.S. institutions of higher education, the number that offered doctorate programs in 2009 as reported by the National Science Foundation ([2011](#)). Although the report does not indicate the breakdown between applied and philosophical doctorates, the number of doctorates awarded in educational administration was calculated at 2149, or 4.3% of all doctorates awarded that year.

The sample for this study was drawn from universities identified in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) index as among *America's Best Graduate Schools*. This index is viewed as a "competitive measure of institutional quality" (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007, p. 287) and the top programs have often served as touchstones for other schools of higher learning. One particular section of the index, the specialty rankings, provides survey data each year from over 200 universities that grant doctorate degrees in education and various sub-categorizations thereof. The speciality rankings for the sub-category of *educational administration and supervision* are rated by deans of education colleges using a weighted system that considers superintendent assessments, GRE scores, acceptance rates, student-faculty ratios, number of degrees awarded, and research activity/expenditures.

From the specialty rankings for educational administration and supervision, 13 programs were selected for this study that included only those programs that landed among the 25 highest ranked in all four years of the indexes analyzed (see Table 1). A four-year timespan was chosen to show consistency of high performance over time. A second criterion was to verify that the identified programs offered applied doctorate degrees related to *educational leadership*. A final criterion in the sample selection process was the availability of sufficient online program information.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection entailed obtaining pre-existing public data from the 13 sample universities that included information from the 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 *U.S. News & World Report* indexes and from the website of each university's EdD programs. Data were organized and analyzed via an Excel spreadsheet program regarding the EdD admission requirements, program lengths, curricula, field experiences, and other salient features that informed the study.

Two phases of content analysis technique were utilized in this study. The initial phase, analyzing *manifest content* (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006), refers to scrutiny of the "obvious, surface content...that [is] directly accessible to the naked eye" (p. 488), and sorting it into coded categories. These categories included the name of each institution, location, size of student body, title(s) of doctorate degrees,

admission criteria, required total credits and dissertation credits, existence of internships or other field experiences, and any other additional relative information. Once data were collected, frequencies of attributes in the coded categories were tabulated. The second phase of analysis is termed *latent content* (Fraenkel & Wallen) of the data, which involved making assessments and drawing overall inferences as to the meaning of what existed or was shown in the data. In this study, these meanings were derived and subsequently presented in narrative interpretive form as *characteristics* of highly ranked programs.

Implementing both phases of content analysis increases the reliability and credibility of the study. Although traditional procedures for reliability and credibility are often not implemented for analytical research, the use of both manifest and latent content analysis helps to substantiate the research findings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Characteristics of Highly Ranked Educational Leadership Programs

The purpose of this analytical study was to identify characteristics of university applied doctorate programs in educational leadership that were rated among the top 25 by the *U.S. News & World Report*. Of the 13 programs included in the study, the number of full-time and part-time doctorate enrollments in the field of education, both applied and philosophical, ranged from 285 students at University of Pennsylvania, to 1472 students at Teachers College, Columbia University (see Table 1). Enrollment data for individual programs or speciality areas were not accessible, nor were separate figures for EdD versus PhD enrollments. The range for required program credits was from 46 (University of Missouri) to 90 (several) – numbers that are not necessarily reflective of the amount of time or coursework involved. Schools used various formulas for licensure requirements, internship hour equivalents, advanced standing credits, and required dissertation or capstone credits.

The main characteristics examined in this study were admission requirements, program lengths, curricula, field experiences, and graduation requirements. These are presented in the following sections under the headings of program titles and scope, admission criteria, program and curricula foci, and capstone requirements.

[Insert link to Table 1. Highest ranked EdD programs in educational leadership, 2008-2011]

Program Titles and Scope

Program designations ranged considerably and may be the most indicative characteristic for the blurred comparisons of applied doctorate programs in education in the past. Most of the programs contained the term *education* or *educational* in their titles, but not necessarily. Examples included Educational Leadership & Policy, Educational Leadership and Management, Educational Administration and Leadership, Leadership for Educational Equity, Administration and Supervision, Educational Leadership and Higher Education, and Public School Administration. Some of the EdD programs clearly separated K-12 schooling from higher education, and others combined them. Interestingly, a few offered only PhD degrees for higher education leadership programs indicating an assumption of research orientation for higher education administrators or an assumption of higher prestige for practitioners in higher education versus those in K-12 settings.

Licensure. Index figures did not indicate which programs had students who were simultaneously

working on principal or superintendent licensure. Five of the 13 programs provided a licensure option as a part of their curricula (see Figure 1). In most cases, the licensure option mentioned superintendent licensure, however it appeared as if principal licensure could also be a part of some EdD programs, but would likely extend the number of credits required. In one of the programs (Texas A & M), principal licensure was required to be admitted into the applied doctorate program.

[Insert link to Figure 1. Characteristics of EdD programs in educational leadership]

Practice-based doctorate. Of note is the new experience-based Doctorate of Educational Leadership (abbreviated as EdLD by Harvard) launched in Fall 2010 by Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. The new program is a replacement for its long-standing Urban Superintendents Program. Harvard began anew by designing an ideal type of tuition-free degree that is intended to result in transformational, systemic change for the nation's schools. The university's schools of education, business, and government jointly offer coursework. The program culminates in a yearlong paid residency in a pre-arranged K-12 school setting. Interestingly, the new EdLD displays an endorsement from Arthur Levine on its website. Also interestingly, Harvard continues to offer its more-traditional EdD program in Educational Policy, Leadership, and Instructional Practice.

Admission Criteria

The items required for admission were nearly identical among the sample programs. All required a personal statement, recommendations, a resume, transcripts, GRE completion, and experience. Only three (University of Washington, University of Maryland at College Park, and Pennsylvania State at University Park) also required a writing sample, although Vanderbilt encouraged additional materials and publications. Commonly, personal statements were to include descriptions of professional and academic backgrounds, career goals, and sometimes areas of research interests. Applicants were also asked to discuss their perceived fit with the intended program of study, or their perceived strength as an applicant.

Although some programs provided minimum GPA, GRE scores, and years of professional experience, most did not. The lack of minimum quantifications was interpreted here to be for the purpose of using discretion for admitting new students. For a few (University of Washington, for example), their online recommendation form clearly stated the recognition that low GPA scores are often not indicative of a student's potential for success in graduate school. All of the programs mentioned that experience was a criterion, although explanations of how experience was interpreted were rarely given.

Program and Curricula Foci

Several schools in the *U. S. World & News Report* index have adopted a scholar-practitioner focus. The construct, in brief, promotes the idea that practitioner/leaders should be contributors to the scholarly knowledge in the field of education, and the scholarly knowledge should be applicable and useable by practitioner/leaders. Programs that adopt the scholar-practitioner model provide a dual concentration on research and practice, which is, in a sense, a non-acknowledgement of Levine's (2005) argument that EdD programs should be more practice-oriented and less research-oriented. Top-rated Vanderbilt University was the only program in this study's sample that clearly identified a scholar-practitioner model.

Several programs in this study offered curricula that were arranged into themes. These themes almost always included leadership and research, and then something specific to educational content such as history, governance, or policy.

Course topics offered in most of the programs were predictable and covered expected foci such as organizational leadership, ethics, policy, instructional improvement, financial management, decision-making, law, governance, and public relations. To a lesser extent, but still common, were topics of school reform, personnel, history of education, and social/cultural foundations.

Internships and field experiences. Four of the 13 programs in the study required internships (see Figure 1). These ranged from one to three separate experiences. Internships are one of the requisite features of applied doctorate programs, according to Levine's (2005) report, if conducted with quality field supervisor/administrators. However, details regarding the internships for programs in this study were rarely provided online, with the exception of Harvard's new EdLD program. Therefore, the quality of them or the supervisors were not determinable. Harvard places its EdLD students into intensive, year-long internships, called residencies, at one of its pre-designated partner organizations. A few programs required practicums or apprenticeships that were specifically intended for dissertation preparation.

Research and dissertation credits. All of the programs in the study, except for the EdLD at Harvard, required a minimum of three research courses. These commonly included an introductory, a qualitative, and a quantitative course. Most of the programs required additional advanced courses in statistics and analysis. Some programs listed several research courses that could be chosen as part of an individualized plan of study. Although the intention is not articulated in Harvard's online text, it is probable that Harvard's program does not require research courses because it also does not require a dissertation study.

The number of dissertation credits ranged from a minimum of 6 to a maximum of 27, again with the exception of Harvard's EdLD program (see Capstone Requirements). Dissertation credits were generally correlated with the extent of the respective program, never representing more than 30% of the total program credits, but sometimes representing less than 10% of the total program credits. These figures are difficult to interpret in terms of research emphasis, as it is not known how dissertation-oriented a program's research courses and other courses may be.

Capstone Requirements

All but two of the 13 programs analyzed (Vanderbilt and Harvard's EdLD) required a dissertation or offered it as a capstone option (see Figure 1). Nine of the programs did not allow for alternatives to traditional dissertations, although the University of Southern California (Rossier) used "thematic dissertation groups" (n.p.), which is not necessarily considered traditional. It was common for schools that required dissertations to also include oral and written exams for advancing to doctoral candidacy preceding the dissertation phase. Some of the alternatives to comprehensive exams were portfolio defenses (University of Missouri) and reviews of qualifying papers (Teachers College – Columbia University).

For those universities that did not require a traditional dissertation, the term *capstone project* was commonly used. In all instances, capstone projects were practice- and problem-oriented. Vanderbilt

University, the highest ranked school for the past four years, required a group capstone project that addressed a complex problem of practice. The University of Texas, University of Maryland, and Texas A & M University provided a choice of either a dissertation or other capstone. At Texas A & M, the term *record of study* was used to refer to culminating options of dissertations, journal articles, or school district analyses. The new EdLD program at Harvard (2011) will require that its students spend their entire third and final year fulfilling capstone experiences “based entirely in practice” (n. p.) working with school reform initiatives in partner urban school districts.

Conclusion

This study identified characteristics of the 13 highest-rated university applied doctorate programs in educational leadership, according to the *US News & World Report* indexes from 2008-2011. This study adds to the national discussion in terms of critics’ claims of ambiguity between EdD and PhD programs, weak admissions criteria, non-rigorous graduation requirements, and the lack of opportunities for applied practice. However, the data examined in this study revealed much commonality across most of the programs in the sample. Most of the programs required a variety of application materials verifying experience, applicability of the program, and academic potential. All provided coursework and curricula that were appropriate for educational practitioners. All gave attention to research (except for Harvard’s EdLD) without making it the focal point of the program. And all required some type of culminating evidence of mastery for graduation as a dissertation, capstone, or other project. It should be noted that programs with higher percentages of research methods and dissertation credits that also emphasize research in other courses might be so research-saturated that the practice of educational leadership has become lost.

Analysis of the findings from this study revealed that the highly ranked EdD programs are largely similar in structure and foci to lower and unranked programs across the nation. They have many of the characteristics that have been denounced by Levine (2005), Murphy (2007), and others. Without being intimately involved in each program, some of the condemnations of Levine and Murphy could not be verified. The quality, effectiveness, and transformational capability of such programs may not be determinable by their research foci, curricula, and acceptance/ graduation requirements.

A few of these top-rated doctorate programs, such as those at Vanderbilt and Harvard, are beginning to move their foci toward relevant educational practice and leadership by moving away from traditional research and dissertation oriented programs. Time will tell if these changes produce the types of effective, transformational leaders that Levine and Murphy have called for. The findings from this study, however, do not confirm that more traditionally structured or research-focused programs are any more or less in line with Levine and Murphy’s criticisms, or more or less effective, or of higher or lower quality than are more innovative programs.

What, then, can be concluded from the evidence examined in this study? One conclusion is that there are a plethora of types of applied doctorate programs and it behooves the potential doctorate student to become much more familiar with a program before applying than the *U.S. World & News Report* index and university websites can provide. Precautions for potential students are discussed below. Additionally, universities that are in the planning or revision stages of their applied doctorate programs can be aware and cognizant of criticisms of such programs, criticisms that are now becoming widely-held public opinions, and take precautions against them. These also are discussed below.

Precautions for Potential Doctoral Students

In education, the majority of doctorate students complete several years of professional experience before entering their terminal graduate degree program. The average number of years between bachelors and doctorate degrees for those in education is ten years as opposed to a gap of two years for students in arts, sciences, and engineering (Shulman et al., 2006). Because of the tendency to hold a career position before entering and while enrolled in EdD programs in educational leadership rather than the reverse sequence, the distance that people can travel to attend classes is often limited. Many advanced programs in educational leadership are designed logistically to allow for working professionals to complete them. Classes meet in the evenings or on weekends outside of regular work hours. This also means that faculty who teach in the EdD programs are those who are willing or able to work odd hours, not necessarily those who have the most expertise in the course topics. EdD students may have aspirations to attend schools with admirable reputations or specialized programs, but cannot due to work and family constraints. Unfortunately then, programs are often chosen for their convenience of schedule and location rather than for their quality and fit.

Enrolling in a convenient, but less-than-desirable program may appear to be the only option. Another note of concern, however, is the high number of doctoral students who never complete their degrees. Schedule conflicts, job changes, family constraints, and lack of funding are certainly causal factors. However, disillusionment and disconnect with program curricula and philosophy are also prevalent issues. Discovering this disconnect after entering an advanced program can derail career plans and is an expensive waste of time, effort, and money for students and faculty alike (Gardner, 2009).

The main goal for potential doctorate students should be to locate the highest quality program possible that is aligned with their career desires. Flexibility and convenience can be a part of the selection process, but should serve as tertiary criteria, rather than primary or secondary considerations.

Implications for Universities

For universities that are in the process of designing EdD programs in educational leadership, faculty who will be involved are advised to begin by spending time and effort reading and discussing common literature on the current issues at hand, many of which were identified in this paper. Design plans, then, should ensure, at minimum, the inclusion of the following elements:

- Admission requirements that will accurately indicate an applicant's fit between his or her career aspirations and the program's focus as well as potential for successful completion.
- Substantial practical experiences in the form of internships, practicums, capstones, or other fieldwork that are intentionally arranged with highly respected and qualified educational leaders.
- Curricula that are aligned with the position and leadership qualifications that graduates will be filling after graduation.
- Graduation requirements that will aptly prepare candidates to meet the rigor and quality needed for effective educational leadership.

For universities that have programs already in operation, revision unfortunately often entails lengthy timelines in order to gain approval at multiple levels. There are, however, some internal adjustments

that can be made that would greatly increase the relevance to educational leadership practice. The actual items submitted for admission may have to remain the same, but the way those items are weighted or evaluated could be revised. Another easily implemented alteration would be to increase the quality of leaders who would supervise doctoral internships. One further in-house change that could be made, if adding new practicum or internship courses would be problematic, would be to embed shorter field experiences into existing courses.

Recommendations for Further Research

For this particular line of research, analyzing a larger number of institutions will allow for broader generalizations to be made regarding trends in educational leadership applied doctorate programs. Additionally, these institutions need to be re-analyzed over time, perhaps in 5 year increments, to determine subtle or overt ways that program descriptions, content, and requirements are changing.

One dimension of the *US News & World Report* index that was not investigated in this study was that of faculty credentials which, according to Levine (2005), are less than remarkable. It would be beneficial to identify highly respected and qualified educational leaders and examine correlations that may exist in where they obtained their leadership preparation. It makes sense that graduates' leadership effectiveness would be one of the more revealing ways to analyze program quality.

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