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Practicum Experience in Educational Leadership Program: Perspectives of Supervisors, Mentors and Candidates

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An important component of an educational leadership preparation program is the requirement of practicum experiences. The rationale for the practicum requirement is to expose educational leadership program candidates to real-world school leadership experiences. A successful implementation of the practicum experience involves the collaboration among three stakeholders: university professors as supervisors, school administrators as mentors and the program candidates. The stakeholders' perceptions of the quality of the practicum experience are most valuable to continuous improvement of the educational leadership program. The purpose of this study was to investigate the stakeholders' perceived effectiveness of the practicum experience in an educational leadership program in a large public university in the southeastern United States. The findings of this study identified practicum areas that met the educational demands of the program candidates while highlighting practicum areas that needed improvement.

Keywords: *Educutinal leadership, leadership preparation program, practicum experience in leadership program*

Practicum experience is an important component of an educational leadership preparation program. It is designed to expose program candidates to the practical work in the real world of educational leadership. Implementation of the two semester practicum experience involves three stakeholders at a large southeastern public university: university professors as supervisors, school administrators as mentors, and program candidates. The stakeholders' perceptions of the practicum experience are most valuable for continuous improvement of the educational leadership program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how effective practicum experience in an educational leadership program is in serving the purpose of preparing educational leaders for future challenges. Strengths and weaknesses of the practicum experience would be identified through the perceptions of supervisors, mentors and program candidates. Findings of this study would confirm program areas that met the educational demands and highlight areas that would need improvement to make the practicum experience more effective.

Conceptual Framework

The professional literature abounds with programs and research promoting ways to improve the quality of Educational Leadership preparation programs. Promising practices have included engaging in thorough and honest review (Gupton, 1998), listening to the participants and attending to their individual needs (Chan, Richardson & Pool, 2003; Crews & Weakley, 1995; Chan, Jiang, & Patterson, 2008, Lovette, 1997; Van Berkum, Richardson, & Lane, 1994), understanding how adults learn (Daresh, 1997; Kraus & Cordeiro, 1995; Restine, 1997), fostering the development of appropriate dispositions (Lee & Keiffer, 2003; Richardson & Lane, 1994; Roberts, Lindsey, & Jones, 2003; Sorenson & Machell, 1996), understanding and recognizing the difficult transition first-year administrators must face (Hartzell, Williams, & Nelson, 1994; Henderson, 2002; Lyons, 1992), and being more outcome based (Brogan, 1994; Laing & Bradshaw, 2003). Additional promising trends for program improvement include becoming amenable to both nontraditional and innovative approaches (Hoban, Neu, & Castle, 2003) and utilizing portfolio assessment (Marcoux, Brown, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2003; Milstein, 1995; Wilmore & Erlandson, 1995). In addition, according to Grogran and Andrews (2002), there is a need to develop Educational Leadership programs which appeal to aspiring leaders who possess a strong sense of social justice.

Those seeking to strengthen their programs may also wish to look at the importance of mentoring (Coleman, Low, Bush, & Chew, 1996; Gordon & Moles, 1994; Jacobson, 1996; Kraus, 1996), networking (Parkay & Currie, 1992), integrating technology (Sherman and Beaty, 2007) with the potential for reaching a more inclusive population of aspiring educational leaders (Belcher, 1999; Opsal, Brunner & Virnig, 2005; Savicki, Kelley & Lingenfelter, 1996; Sullivan, 2002), cultivating more transformative and relational leadership styles (Preis, Grogan, Sherman, & Beaty, 2007). restructuring the administrative internship program (Gantner & Halsall, 2003), and Collaboration between university programs and the public school districts in various fashion (Aiken, 2001; Clark & Clark, 1997; Goldring & Sims, 2005; Grogan & Roberson, 2002; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Miller, Devin & Shoop, 2007; Milstein & Krueger, 1997 Whitaker, King, & Vogel, 2004).

The use of state and national standards as a way to strengthen educational leadership programs is common (Darling-Hammond, Lapointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Lashway, 1997). In Georgia, the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Standards, established by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration in 2002, have become the foundation for the new standards of Professional Standards Commission. Other standards include the Georgia Board of Regents' newly developed Ten Strands that mandate the contents of educational leadership programs (Georgia Board of Regents, 2007). Regional agencies, such as Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), urge educational leadership program developers to respond to criticisms and suggestions from the field to redesign their programs (Fry, O'Neil, & Bottoms, 2006).

Field experiences in educational leadership bridge the gap between classroom learning and professional practice (Chance, 1990; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; White & Crow, 1993). In addition, activities in practicum experiences should link theory to practice (Cordeiro, & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Daresh, 2002; Williamson & Hudson, 2001). Research indicates that first year principals with an intern experience were significantly more confident than those without an internship experience (Cohen, 2001; Jean & Evans, 1995). In addition, candidates consider school-based practicum activities the most highly valued program experiences (Krueger & Milstein, 1995). Chenoweth, Carr, and Ruhl (2002) noted that key factors in determining practicum success were the quality of mentorship and the time candidates devoted to practicum activities. Jackson and Kelley (2002) found that the variation in the quality of time spent in practicum experiences depended on the use of approaches to allow candidates to observe, participate in, and reflect on leadership issues.

Research findings suggest that field experiences can best be completed in phases (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Hall & Lutz, 1989; Pautler, 1991; Restine, 1990). Specifically, Joachim and Klotz (2000) identified areas of educational leadership that needed to be covered in the field experiences to include skills in school based management, ability to lead diverse student populations, sensitivity to child development, effectiveness in instructional leadership, capability of establishing a community of learners, and accomplishment in reflective practices. Further, Creighton (2001) recommended that practice programs focus on what principals would actually do in a given circumstance, rather than what they might do. Bradshaw, Perreault, McDowelle, and Bell (1997) concluded in their study that candidates of full-time extended internship were better prepared for entry-level administrative positions than their part-time counterparts. In contrast, Wilmore and Bratlien (2005) pointed out that very little mentor training and dedication existed in educational leadership programs. Gaudreau, Fufel, and Parks (2006) suggested that "...more research targeting effective field-based practices, performance assessments, and strong mentoring" (p.30) were necessary to ensure the quality of leadership internship programs, which echoed some of the recommendations by the Southern Regional Educational Board (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2006) in their regional study of internship programs. The SREB's additional recommendations included "the design and implementation of a structured internship focused on essential competencies for leading curriculum, instruction and student achievement" (p.9) and the establishment of partnership between university programs and school district. In a recent national study, "well designed and supervised administrative internships that allow candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans" was identified as one of the common features of exemplary leadership preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007, p. 6). Additionally, this study also found that institutional partnerships appeared to contribute profoundly to the programs' success.

The research findings indicate a link between practicum experiences and the overall effectiveness of the leadership program. However, few studies are found regarding the perceptions among the stakeholders in leadership practicum experiences. Therefore, this study attempts to address the perceptions of the effectiveness of practicum experience from the viewpoint of different stakeholders.

Research Questions

1. How do university supervisors perceive the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?

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2. How do school mentors perceive the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?
3. How do program candidates perceive the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?
4. Do university supervisors, school mentors and program candidates differ significantly in their perceptions of the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?
5. Do gender, ethnicity, leadership experiences and school level make any difference in supervisors', mentors' and candidates' perception of the effectiveness practicum experience in educational leadership program?

Methodology

Research Design

The study was designed to take both quantitative and qualitative approaches. "Considering the breadth and magnitude of much of educational research, it is not surprising that a single study may require mixed methods." (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 277) Program candidates, their university supervisors and school mentors in this study were surveyed to solicit their perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership practicum experiences. The researchers believe that the use of both approaches will present a more holistic picture of the quality of practicum which participants recently experienced. Quantitative and qualitative data would also help the researchers to achieve a triangulation purpose.

Participants

In the spring semester of 2008, ninety candidates in an educational leadership program who participated in practicum experiences were surveyed with 83 responses (92.2%). All full-time and part-time faculty members who supervised practicum candidates were invited to participate in the study. A total of 17 faculty members (70.8%) responded to the survey. Additionally, forty-four candidates' school mentors were invited to participate with 13 responses (29.4%).

Research Instruments

The researchers designed a survey instrument based on the Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards (ELCC) which solicited the candidates' perceptions of their practicum experience (see Appendix A). "The

survey permits one to gather information from a large sample of people relatively quickly and inexpensive. It requires careful planning, implementation and analysis.” (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996, p. 432) The first part of the survey called for certain demographic variables regarding the survey respondents. The next 17 items were related to participants’ perceptions of the extent to which they agreed with the effectiveness of practicum activities. These 17 items were classified into six themes for analysis: course requirements, quality of assignments, assistance to candidates, reflections to journals, supervisors’ school visits, and compliance with ELCC standards. The last part in the survey consisted of 7 open-ended questions to solicit qualitative comments from the participants relating to their practicum experiences. Two other corresponding instruments were constructed to reflect the same items from the perspectives of university supervisors and the school mentors (see Appendixes B and C). All three instruments were professionally examined in contents, format and language by pilot testing with a randomly selected sample of program candidates, supervisors and mentors. All constructive recommendations were incorporated in revising the instruments. All pilot data were tested for internal inconsistencies with $\alpha = .94$ (candidates’ survey), $\alpha = .966$ (supervisors’ survey), and $\alpha = .959$ (mentors’ survey).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive statistics: percentages, means and standard deviations. Comparison was made by ANOVA to determine if differences existed among candidates, supervisors and mentors in their perceptions of practicum experiences. All participants’ responses were also analyzed by ANOVA to consider if gender, ethnicity, leadership experiences and school level made any difference in their perceptions of their practicum experiences. Analysis procedure of qualitative data basically followed the recommendations of Marshall and Rossman (1999): (a) organizing data, (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns, (c) coding data, (d) testing the emergent understandings (e) searching for alternate explanations, and (f) writing the report. In this study, qualitative data of candidates, their supervisors and mentors were analyzed by categorizing the data into seven major themes as indicated by the open-ended questions. Consistencies and patterns of responses from candidates, supervisors and mentors were closely observed and monitored.

Findings

Demographic information

Of the 17 supervisors who participated in this study, 93.7% were over 50 years old; 50% were male and 50% were female; the majority of them were Caucasian (68.8%); 50% were full-time and 50% part-time; more than half of them (57.1%) had over 20 years of P-12 school leadership experience; and half of them had served as practicum supervisors for 5 or more than 5 semesters (see Table 1).

A total of 13 practicum mentors participated in the study. A majority of them (61.6%) were over 46 years of age. Most of them were female (69.2%) and Caucasian (84.6%). They were either school principals (46.2%) or assistant principals (53.8%). Many of them were in their first five years of school administration (38.5%) and had served as practicum mentors for two semesters (61.5%) (see Table 2).

Eighty-three practicum candidates responded to the survey with most of them enrolled in the Master of Education program (75.9%) and the rest in the leadership add-on program (24.1%). Most of the candidates were female (78.3%), Caucasian (66.3%), and held bachelor's degrees (67.5%). Seventy-one percent of them were classroom teachers with about half of them (53%) in elementary schools. Over half of the candidates (60.3%) were in their first ten years of teaching, and 56.6% had no school leadership experience. Most candidates said their career goals were to become educational leaders either at the school level (50.6%) or at the district level (36.2%) (see Table 3).

Results of quantitative analysis

All of the 17 items responded to by supervisors, mentors and candidates were organized under five practicum themes of interest: course requirements, quality of assignments, assistance to candidates, reflections to journals, supervisors' school visits, and compliance with ELCC standards. Descriptive statistics of the responses for supervisors, mentors and candidates are shown in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6 respectively. All the mean scores indicate that the responses were above average. The supervisors rated "Reflections to Journals" and "Supervisors' School Visits" high (4.29 and 4.24 respectively), and "Compliance with ELCC Standards" (3.63) low. The mentors' ratings on the "Quality of Assignments" were high (4.58) and on the "Supervisors' School Visits" low (3.38). Candidates' responses showed that the "Compliance with ELCC Standards" and "Quality of Assignments" were high (3.99 and 3.96 respectively) whereas "Supervisors' Visits to Schools"

TABLE 1.
Demographics of 17 Practicum Supervisors by Percentages

Age:	41-45 (6.3)	Over 50 (93.7)			
Gender:	Male (50)	Female (50)			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian (68.8)	African Am. (18.8)	Asian (12.5)		
Faculty:	Full-time (50)	Part-time (50)			
Years of P-12 Leadership:	1-5 (7.1)	6-10 (14.4)	11-15 (7.1)	16-20 (14.3)	Over 20 (57.1)
Semesters as Supervisor:	1 (12.5)	2 (6.2)	3 (18.8)	4 (12.5)	5 or more (50)

TABLE 2.
Demographics of 13 Practicum Mentors by Percentages

Age:	36-40 (38.4)	46-50 (30.8)	Over 50 (30.8)		
Gender:	Male (30.8)	Female (69.2)			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian (84.6)	African Am. (7.7)	Hispanic (7.7)		
Faculty:	Principal (46.2)	Assistant Principal (53.8)			
Years of P-12 Leadership:	1-5 (38.5)	6-10 (15.4)	11-15 (23)	16-20 (7.7)	Over 20 (15.4)
Semesters as Mentor:	1 (0)	2 (61.5)	3 (15.4)	4 (23.1)	5 or more (0)

TABLE 3.
Demographics of 83 Practicum Candidates by Percentages

Gender:	Male (21.7)	Female (78.3)			
Ethnicity:	Caucasian (66.3)	African Am. (24.1)	Hispanic (9.6)		
Program:	MEd (75.9)	Add-on (24.1)			
Position:	Teacher (71) ILT/ALT (4.8)	Asst. Principal (3.6) District Position (2.4)	Principal (2.4) Other Position (8.4)	Admin Asist. (0)	Dept Chair (7.2)
Degree Earned:	BA/BS (67.5)	MEd (27.7)	EdS (2.4)	EdD/PhD (2.4)	
School Level:	Elementary (53)	Middle (19.3)	High (26.5)	District (1.2)	
Years of P-12 Leadership:	0 (56.6)	0-1 (12)	1-5 (25.4)	6-10 (6)	
Years of Teaching:	1-5 (24.2)	6-10 (36.1)	11-15 (28.9)	16-20 (8.4)	Over 20 (2.4)
Career Goal:	Teacher (1.2)	School Leader (50.6)	District Leader (36.2)	Undecided (2.4)	Other (9.6)

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TABLE 4.
Descriptive Statistics – Practicum Supervisors’ Responses

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{x}	SD
Course Requirements	17	3.00	5.00	4.18	.64
Quality of Assignments	17	2.50	4.75	3.66	.58
Assistance to Candidates	17	2.75	4.75	3.68	.62
Reflections to Journals	17	3.50	5.00	4.29	.56
Supervisors’ School Visits	17	1.00	5.00	4.24	1.16
Compliance with ELCC Standards	17	2.17	5.00	3.63	.85

TABLE 5.
Descriptive Statistics – Practicum Mentors’ Responses

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{x}	SD
Course Requirements	13	2.00	5.00	3.92	1.04
Quality of Assignments	13	3.00	5.00	4.58	.66
Assistance to Candidates	13	2.25	5.00	4.15	.73
Reflections to Journals	13	1.50	5.00	3.69	1.09
Supervisors’ School Visits	13	2.00	5.00	3.38	1.04
Compliance with ELCC Standards	13	2.00	5.00	4.14	.94

TABLE 6.
Descriptive Statistics – Practicum Candidates’ Responses

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{x}	SD
Course Requirements	83	1.00	5.00	3.82	1.21
Quality of Assignments	83	1.00	4.75	3.96	1.08
Assistance to Candidates	83	1.00	4.75	3.65	1.05
Reflections to Journals	83	1.00	5.00	3.60	1.12
Supervisors’ School Visits	83	1.00	5.00	3.07	1.46
Compliance with ELCC Standards	83	1.00	5.00	3.99	.90

was low (3.07). An examination of the standard deviations indicated that candidates' responses were wider apart (average SD=1.14) than those of supervisors' (average SD=.74) and mentors' (average SD=.92) responses.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze if significant differences in the perceptions of practicum experiences existed among the candidates, the supervisors and the mentors. (see Table 7) Post Hoc (Tukey's HSD) Tests were followed up to examine the significant mean differences in between individual groups (see Table 8). No significant difference was found among the responses of the three groups in "Course Requirements", "Assistance to Candidates" and "Compliance with ELCC Standards".

Results of ANOVA indicated that significant difference existed among candidates', supervisors' and the mentors' perceptions in "Quality of Assignments" ($F(2,110) = 3.32, p < .05$). Tukey's HSD analysis revealed that mentors' responses ($m = 4.58, sd = .66$) were significantly higher than supervisors' responses ($m = 3.66, sd = .58$). Candidates' responses ($m = 3.96, sd = 1.08$) were not significantly different from either of the other two groups.

Results of ANOVA indicated that significant difference existed among candidates', supervisors' and the mentors' perceptions in "Reflections to Journals" ($F(2,110) = 3.07, p < .05$). Tukey's HSD analysis revealed that supervisors' responses ($m = 4.29, sd = .56$) were significantly higher than candidates' responses ($m = 3.60, sd = 1.12$). Mentors' responses ($m = 3.69, sd = 1.09$) were not significantly different from either of the other two groups.

Results of ANOVA indicated that significant difference existed among candidates', supervisors' and the mentors' perceptions in "Supervisors' School Visits" ($F(2,110) = 5.35, p < .01$). Tukey's HSD analysis revealed that supervisors' responses ($m = 4.24, sd = .75$) were significantly higher than candidates' responses ($m = 3.07, sd = 1.46$). Mentors' responses ($m = 3.38, sd = 1.04$) were not significantly different from either of the other two groups.

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze if gender, ethnicity, leadership experiences and school level made any difference in the participants' perceptions of practicum experiences. Results of the analyses indicated that no significant difference was found in all the classifications of gender, ethnicity, leadership experiences and school level among the candidates', the supervisors' and the mentors' responses.

Results of qualitative analysis

An analysis of responses from candidates, supervisors and mentors to the six open ended questions is provided below:

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TABLE 7.
Analysis of Variance – Comparison of Supervisors’, Mentors’ and Candidates’ Responses

Item	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Course Requirements	Between groups	1.82	2	.91	.72	.490
	Within groups	139.68	110	1.27		
	Total	141.50	112			
Quality of Assignments	Between groups	6.37	2	3.18	3.32	.040
	Within groups	105.43	110	.96		
	Total	111.80	112			
Assistance to Candidates	Between groups	2.84	2	1.42	1.51	.225
	Within groups	103.39	110	.94		
	Total	106.23	112			
Reflections to Journals	Between groups	6.88	2	3.44	3.07	.050
	Within groups	123.02	110	1.12		
	Total	129.90	112			
Supervisors’ School Visits	Between groups	19.24	2	9.62	5.35	.006
	Within groups	197.70	110	1.80		
	Total	216.94	112			
Compliance with ELCC Standards	Between groups	2.30	2	1.15	1.44	.242
	Within groups	85.59	110	.80		
	Total	87.89	112			

TABLE 8.
Post Hoc Tests (Tukey HSD) – Multiple Group Comparisons of Means

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. Level
Quality of Assignments	1	2	.3021	.2606	.480
	1	3	-.6131	.2920	.095
	2	3	-.9152	.3607	.033
Reflection to Journals	1	2	-.6977	.2815	.039
	1	3	-.0959	.3155	.950
	2	3	.6018	.3897	.274
Supervisors’ School Visits	1	2	-1.1630	.3569	.004
	1	3	-.3123	.3999	.715
	2	3	.8507	.4939	.201

Group 1 = Candidates’ Responses

Group 2 = Supervisors’ Responses

Group 3 = Mentors’ Responses

Strengths of the current practicum course structure:

Participating candidates considered “hands-on” experience and flexibility as the major strengths in the program. In one candidate’s words, “Not assigned specific standards at specific times, this allowed me to participate in a wide variety of standards as they came up in my school”. A few candidates also mentioned that they had “knowledgeable and helpful” mentors and/or supervisors through out their practicum experiences.

Participating supervisors concurred with the candidates regarding the real-life experience during practicum as one strength in the program. In addition, they deemed “Individual support for candidates from supervisor in the course and in reflections of practicum activities” as another strength of the current practicum program. The high quality of the supervisors was also mentioned by the candidates.

Similar to candidates and supervisors, mentors believed that the key strength of the current program was the fact that students were “encouraged to get a broad base of experiences in the practicum”. Additionally, “allowing candidates to participate through their regular work assignments”, “flexibility to explore and develop a variety of skills”, “example practicum activities...”, “...reflection journal on activities”, “...case sessions” and the opportunity to work alone were listed as the positive aspects of the program by individual mentors.

Weaknesses of the current practicum course structure:

The main weaknesses of the current practicum pointed out by the participating candidates included the following: lack of communication between students and KSU professors, no consistency in the requirements among KSU supervisors, delay in assigning supervisors and giving directions to practicum candidates in the beginning of each semester, difficulty in getting help from mentors, not enough specified experiences, and too many hours required for each semester.

KSU participating supervisors considered “lack of consistency in implementation among supervisors and mentors” and the lack of “consistency and uniformed experiences among all candidates” as two major weaknesses in the current program. They also mentioned the need “to meet regularly with all candidates together in supervisor’s group for clarification, examples, questioning, etc”.

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Like the participating candidates and the KSU participating supervisors, the mentors also regarded the lack of consistency in practicum requirements among different supervisors as a major weakness in the current program. The other weakness was the lack of time for the candidates to obtain the hours required for the candidates each semester.

Importance of the role of the supervisor in the practicum experience:

In response to this question, approximately 42% of the participating candidates perceived the role of the supervisor as very important because they guided the overall experience. However, 30% of the candidates regarded the supervisor's role as not very active and another 11% did not see the need for a supervisor. Another group of candidates (15%) considered mentioned mentor's role was more important because they were at the school site.

The participating supervisors' response results indicated that over half of the supervisors (61%) considered their role as "very important", "critical" or "vital" because they "monitor the quality, and the type of experiences that the candidate has". Like the candidates, a small group of supervisors (17%) deemed the mentor's role is the most important.

Part of the participating mentors' response to this question was very similar to the supervisors. Approximately 64% of them believed that supervisor's role was "very important regarding guidance, feedback and advice". Like the candidates, a very small percentage of the mentors did not think the supervisor's role as very important. One mentor thought that the supervisor's role was important, "but he/she needs to visit more than once or twice during the practicum so that the student, mentor, and supervisor can talk".

Importance of the role of a school mentor in this practicum experience:

The majority of participating candidates (72%) considered the mentor as very important if he/she "assigns leadership duties on a regular basis". However, several candidates commented that the mentor "must be willing to offer guidance into their daily operations, activities, and leadership philosophy". One candidate wrote that she fulfilled her leadership hours on her own because her mentor was very busy and she hated "bothering her for leadership ideas".

All participating supervisors regarded mentor's role as the most important and it was "the key to the quality of practice experience of each student" (100%). As one supervisor put it, "They serve as the direct contact for the

local school system that creates opportunities for addressing the standards that are compatible with the needs of the student and the school”.

The mentors’ response to this question was highly similar to those of the Supervisors’. All participating mentors agreed that their role was the most valuable “because the mentor could provide experiences the university courses could not”.

Most meaningful practicum activities:

The participating candidates’ responses indicated that the most meaningful experiences were the actual activities since they were “most like the position” they were working toward (68%). The examples included “leadership opportunities in my school”, “...a week in the capacity of department chair and a member of the local school council for a school year”, “attending leadership workshops, collaborating with the community, which allowed me to meet some important people”, and “budget experiences, testing experiences (helping with coordinating standardized tests)”.

The participating supervisors also considered hands-on activities to be most meaningful. In addition, their specified activities were related to ELCC standards 1, 3 and 4. For instance, one supervisor commented that Standard 3 activities allowed “students to firsthand experience in managing resources, scheduling classes, etc”. Another response mentioned “school improvement planning, budget experiences, working with parents and community”, “activities which enable the student to see the "big picture" of leadership and schooling”, “those that get the student involved outside their trained area” , and “one on one time with the mentor” were responses from individual supervisors.

Over half of the participating mentors’ responses (55%) echoed those of the candidates and supervisors in that they deemed day to day assignment in the “real world” as most helpful. Activities tied to learning, student discipline, budgeting, and schedule were mentioned by mentors. Another mentor thought that the candidates should “get a little experience with everything (planning, organization, management, curriculum, instruction, public relations, etc.)”.

Suggestions to improve the practicum experience:

With respect to suggestions to improve the practicum experience, the participating candidates suggested the following: a. regular communication between supervisors and mentors to “make sure the candidate has been given opportunities to do some administrative work”, b. “specific field experiences

to complete”, c. consistent expectations across the board, d. “embedded experience into each course”, e. slight reduction of the number of hours, and f. reduction of supervisor’s visits to one time or no mandated visit unless needed.

The participating supervisors’ suggestions echoed items b, c, and d in the candidates list of suggestions. Additionally, they also suggested providing more training to new KSU supervisors each semester “...in the management of grading and using systems for evaluation” and “educate mentors on providing meaningful and essential experiences for candidates” as well as on “...providing criteria, rationale, and specific policies/procedures for decision making”.

Regarding the participating mentors suggestions, they were related to items a and c in the candidates list of suggestions. In terms of communication, they wanted to “talk with student, mentor, and supervisor to discuss situations that come up and programs and progress”. With respect to consistency of assigned activities, one mentioned stated that he would like to “ensure that all participants have equal opportunities at leadership roles”.

Additional Findings:

As a part of the study, the researchers also asked the candidates, supervisors and mentors about their perceptions of the role of the supervisor and mentor, experiences they perceived as most meaningful, and their suggestions for program improvements.

Responses showed that 61% of the supervisors and 64% of the mentors felt that the role of the supervisor was very important. In contrast, only 42% of the candidates had the same opinion. Some candidates considered the role as not very important and a few candidates did not even see the need for a supervisor. A small group of mentors also did not think the supervisor’s role as very important, either.

Regarding the role of the mentor, every participating supervisor and mentor deemed the role of the mentor as the most important while the majority of the candidates (72%) had the similar consideration. A few of the candidates mentioned that the willingness of the mentor to guide the candidates could determine the degree of the success of the candidates in the practicum experience.

In terms of most meaningful practicum activities, all three groups considered actual activities in the real world as most helpful and meaningful.

Each group had specific examples of the leadership activities and saw how they were related to the six ELCC standards.

Regarding suggestions to improve the program, candidates, supervisors and mentors agreed that there should be expectations that are more consistent across the board. The candidates and the supervisors also mentioned the need for specific field experiences within the program requirements. The inclusion of an embedded experience into each course was offered as suggestions. Candidates and mentors also considered regular communication among all parties as a needed improvement.

Answers to Research Questions

1. How do university supervisors perceive the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?

Analyses of quantitative and qualitative data indicated that participating supervisors regarded authenticity of practicum experiences as an effective highlight of the leadership program. Reflections of their actual experiences were professionally recorded in the candidates' practicum journals. They rated highly on their school visitations as a means of providing support to leadership program candidates.

At the same time, university supervisors perceived the ineffectiveness of the program as having a lack of consistency between supervisors and mentors. This resulted in differences in practicum experiences among the program candidates. The supervisors seriously questioned whether practicum activities experienced by some candidates were broad enough to cover all the ELCC standards.

2. How do school mentors perceive the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?

Findings of data analyses indicated that mentors believed the key strength of the educational leadership practicum was the quality of candidates' assignments. This was indicated in the broad base of experiences in the practicum to include allowing candidates to participate through their regular work assignments, flexibility to explore and develop a variety of skills, reflective journals on activities, case study sessions and opportunities to work alone.

Like the supervisors, the mentors also regarded the lack of consistency in practicum requirements from different supervisors as a major weakness in the current program. Other shortcomings were the supervisors' school visits and

the lack of time for the candidates to obtain the required number of practicum hours in each semester.

3. How do program candidates perceive the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?

Participating program candidates perceived real life experiences and flexibility as the major strengths in educational leadership practicum. Since they were directed to describe their practicum experiences as they related to ELCC standards, they felt that their hands-on experiences in school met all the requirements of the ELCC standards.

Candidates identified ineffectiveness of the program practicum to include lack of communication between candidates and supervisors, lack of consistency in the requirements among supervisors, less than helpful school visits by supervisors, and delay in assigning supervisors to candidates in every semester. Additionally, candidates reported both successful and unsuccessful experiences working with practicum supervisors and mentors.

4. Do university supervisors, school mentors and program candidates differ significantly in their perceptions of the effectiveness of practicum experience in the educational leadership program?

A summary of findings from quantitative and qualitative data analyses indicated similarities and differences in the perceived effectiveness of practicum activities among supervisors, mentors and candidates in the following:

First, the perceptions of effectiveness of practicum experiences among the supervisors, mentors and candidates did not significantly differ from one another with the highest rating of effectiveness by mentors, candidates and supervisors in ascending order.

Second, the three groups considered hands-on experiences involving real-world activities as the strength of the program.

Third, all three groups considered the lack of consistency in practicum requirements among different supervisors as a major ineffectiveness in practicum experiences. Some candidates and supervisors also identified lack of communication between candidates and supervisors as ineffective.

Fourth, in the role of a practicum supervisor, the supervisors identified themselves as serving a most significant role in guiding the program activities and candidates. However, mentors and candidates who questioned the effectiveness of the supervisors' school visits did not perceive supervisors' roles favorably. The value of the supervisor's role in offering practicum

experiences was perceived as useful by less than half of the participating candidates.

Fifth, in the role of a practicum mentor, the mentors prided themselves as performing an enormous task of ensuring candidates' exposure to leadership experiences. Both supervisors and candidates considered the role of a mentor in assignment of leadership duties to candidates to be important. Candidates were especially appreciative of the role of the practicum mentor.

Sixth, significant difference was observed between the perceptions of supervisors and mentors in the quality of practicum assignments. Mentors considered the practicum assignments to be of higher quality than the supervisors.

Seventh, significant difference was observed between the perceptions of supervisors and candidates in the requirement of candidates' reflection of practicum experiences in journals. Supervisors considered it an excellent activity while candidates did not perceive this as a very beneficial activity.

Eighth, significant difference was observed between the perceptions of supervisors and candidates as related to the value of the school visits by supervisors. However, supervisors considered school visits to candidates to be most helpful to candidates. The candidates themselves considered supervisors' school visits as a waste of time.

5. Do gender, ethnicity, leadership experiences and school level make any difference in supervisors', mentors' and candidates' perception of the effectiveness of practicum experience in educational leadership program?

Results of the quantitative data analyses indicated that no significant difference was found in the perceptions of practicum experiences among all the classifications of gender, ethnicity, leadership experiences and school level of candidates, supervisors and mentors.

Discussion

The findings of this study identified practicum areas that meet the educational demands of candidates while highlighting practicum areas that need improvement. The study contributes to the knowledge base of the field by drawing upon feedback from university supervisors, school mentors and program candidates to evaluate and improve the practicum experience in the educational leadership program. Program candidates are in the best position to discuss their recent experiences of exposure to the real world. Supervisors and mentors can witness from their first hand experience how effective

practicum activities work. Responses from supervisors, mentors and candidates regarding leadership practicum experiences are valuable to program developers in their future program redesign effort. The following observations of responses from supervisors, mentors and candidates merit further discussion:

First, both supervisors and mentors perceived highly the areas of candidates' practicum experiences for which they were responsible. While neither of them criticized the contributions of the other, there was no evidence from the findings to indicate any real appreciation of each other's work. In fact, some supervisors expressed dissatisfaction with mentors' assignments for not covering all required areas while some mentors complained about not receiving clear directions of mentors' roles and responsibilities from supervisors. This is more than a communication problem. The supervisors' dissatisfaction with some mentors may indicate that mentors were not on the same page as the supervisors and some of them may lack training on linking the ELCC standards to the assigned field experience (Chenoweth, Carr, & Ruhl, 2002; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005; Gaudreau, Fufel, & Parks, 2006; Wilmore & Bratlien, 2005). In addition, the lack of appreciation between the supervisors and mentors may also have to do with the lack of institutional partnership which is essential for program success (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005). Since practicum mentors in Georgia serve on a voluntary basis, supervisors are in the position of requesting assistance and cooperation from mentors. Obviously, supervisors' authority in resolving problems in practicum experiences is limited.

Second, differences between perceptions of candidates and supervisors in practicum experiences extend beyond inconsistency of requirements and lack of communication. While full time educational administrative internship in Georgia is not an option, candidates in practicum must earn practicum hours outside their full time responsibilities in school to fulfill requirements. In such situations, expectations of practicum supervisors may be compromised by lack of some practicum opportunities even though candidates tried hard to meet expectations. In many instances, candidates' practicum experiences are limited to only observations, rather than direct participation in the leadership function. The lack of time and limitations of practicum experiences may compromise the practicum quality and program success as cited in the literature (Chenoweth, Carr, & Ruhl, 2002; Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Also, it indicates the need for funding support from state and district levels to ensure the success of practicum candidates in their internship experience (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to offer opportunities for improvement of practicum experiences in educational leadership program:

1. It is recommended that all the practicum supervisors meet to discuss the requirements of practicum experiences and the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders, including all supervisors, mentors and candidate representatives.
2. All first-time and part-time supervisors need to participate in a program workshop to be prepared to supervise candidates in practicum experiences.
3. A communication mechanism has to be built in this entire process of practicum experience delivery. It should be a three way communication network among the three parties: supervisors, mentors and candidates.
4. Regular meetings of supervisors, mentors and candidates should be scheduled to review the progress of practicum activities and assess anticipated outcomes.

Conclusion

Practicum experiences of educational leadership program candidates are needed, not only to fulfill ELCC standard requirements, but also to expose program candidates to real-world school leadership experiences. Unfortunately, because of all kinds of conditional limitations, such practicum experiences can only be offered in conjunction with candidates' regular work in school. However, leadership practicum experiences can be well planned with a high collaboration of supervisors, mentors and candidates who have an invested interest in school improvement. In this study, what we learn from the differences of perceptions among supervisors, mentors and candidates is a caution to all stakeholders that we need to do a better job to prepare the next generation of school leaders. Supervisors, mentors and candidates need to form a coalition to explore other options, especially out-of-the-box strategies, to deliver a highly effective practicum program for potential educational leaders.

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Practicum Experience in Educational Leadership Program

Appendix A:

M.Ed. In Educational Leadership – Perception of Practicum Experiences

Survey of Program Candidates

Section I. Demographics: Please complete the following items by filling in the blanks or checking one of the choices provided.

School: _____

School district: _____

Your KSU supervisor: _____

Your school mentor: _____

E-mail address of your mentor: _____

Current position: Teacher Principal Assistant Principal
 Administrative Assistant Dept. Chair ILT/ALT
 District Office Position Other Position

Educational Leadership Program you are enrolled in:
 M.Ed. Program Add-on Program M.Ed. (Technology Leadership)

Years in P-12 leadership position: 0 Less than 1 1-5 6 – 10

Years as Classroom Teacher: 1- 5 6 – 10 11 – 15 16 – 20 over 20

Highest Degree Earned: BA/BS M.Ed. Ed.S. Ed.D./Ph.D.

Gender: Male Female

Ethnicity: Caucasian (Non-Hispanic) African American Hispanic
 Asian American Native American Other

Career Goal: Classroom Teacher School Leadership Positions Undecided
 District Leadership Positions Others _____

Section II. Guidance and Support from the KSU Supervisor and Field Mentor: **Please rate the following statements by choosing from 1 to 5 (1=least adequate; 2=less adequate; 3=adequate; 4=more adequate; 5=most adequate).**

1	Clear guidance was provided to me regarding the requirements of the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Feedback was provided to my reflective journals on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Site visit(s) was/were helpful to my practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I was assigned a variety of duties to perform in their practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I was assigned meaningful work to do in their practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Supervision was provided to me in each of the practicum tasks assigned to them.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Support was provided to me in performing their assigned administrative duties.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Opportunities were provided for me to observe school administrators at work.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Opportunities were provided for me to participate in hands-on administrative work.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Arrangements were made to allow me to complete all the designated leadership activities.	1	2	3	4	5

11	Directions were provided for me to write required reflections based on my experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
12	My practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard One (Vision) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
13	My practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Two (School Culture) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
14	My practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Three (Management) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
15	My practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Four (Community Relations) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
16	My practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Five (Ethics) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
17	My practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Six (Legal, social and Political aspects of education) was.....	1	2	3	4	5

Section III: Comments on Practicum Experiences

1. What are the strengths of the current practicum course structure? Please explain.

2. What are the weaknesses of the current practicum course structure? Please explain.

3. How important is the role of a KSU supervisor in this practicum experiences?

4. How important is the role of a school mentor in this practicum experiences?

5. What practicum activity/activities do you perceive to be most meaningful? Please explain.

6. What suggestions do you have to improve the practicum experience?

7. Additional comments

Practicum Experience in Educational Leadership Program

Appendix B

M.Ed. In Educational Leadership – Perception of Practicum Experiences

Survey of Practicum Mentors

Section I. Demographics: Please complete the following items by filling in the blanks or checking one of the choices provided.

Age:	Ethnicity:	K-12 Leadership Experience:
30 or under _____	African-American _____	Elementary School _____
31—35 _____	Asian-American _____	Middle School _____
36—40 _____	Caucasian _____	High School _____
41—45 _____	Hispanic _____	District Office _____
46—50 _____	Native American _____	Others _____
Over 50 _____	Others _____	

Gender:	Current Position:	Mentoring Experience:
Male _____	Principal _____	One Semester _____
Female _____	Assistant Principal _____	Two Semesters _____
	Dept. Chair _____	Three Semesters _____
	District Positions _____	Over four Semesters _____
	Other Positions _____	

Name(s) of Student(s) Mentored:	Total Years in Leadership Position:	Name of your school:
1. _____	1—5 _____	_____
2. _____	6—10 _____	
3. _____	11—15 _____	
4. _____	16—20 _____	
	Over 20 yrs _____	
		Name of your school district:

Section II. Guidance and Support from the KSU Supervisor and Field Mentor: Please rate the following statements by choosing from 1 to 5 (1=least adequate; 2=less adequate; 3=adequate; 4=more adequate; 5=most adequate).

1	Clear guidance was provided to candidates regarding the requirements of the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Feedback was provided to candidates' reflective journals on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Site visit(s) was/were helpful to the candidates' practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The candidates were assigned a variety of duties to perform in their practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
5	The candidates were assigned meaningful work to do in their practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Supervision was provided to the candidates in each of the practicum tasks assigned to them.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Support was provided to the candidates in performing their assigned administrative duties.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Opportunities were provided for candidates to observe school administrators at work.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Opportunities were provided for candidates to participate in hands-on administrative work.	1	2	3	4	5

10	Arrangements were made to allow candidates to complete all the designated leadership activities.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Directions were provided to candidates to write required reflections based on their experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
12	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard One (Vision) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
13	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Two (School Culture) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
14	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Three (Management) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
15	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Four (Community Relations) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
16	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Five (Ethics) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
17	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Six (Legal, social and Political aspects of education) was.....	1	2	3	4	5

Section III: Comments on Practicum Experiences

1. What are the strengths of the current practicum course structure? Please explain.

2. What are the weaknesses of the current practicum course structure? Please explain.

3. How important is the role of a KSU supervisor in this practicum experiences?

4. How important is the role of a school mentor in this practicum experiences?

5. What practicum activity/activities do you perceived to be most meaningful? Please explain.

6. What suggestions do you have to improve the practicum experience?

7. Additional comments

Practicum Experience in Educational Leadership Program

Appendix C

M.Ed. In Educational Leadership – Perception of Practicum Experiences

Survey of Practicum Supervisors

Section I. Demographics: Please check one of the choices in the following items:

Age: 30 or under ___ 31—3 ___ 36—40 ___ 41—45 ___ 46—50 ___ Over 50 ___	Ethnicity: African-American ___ Asian-American ___ Caucasian ___ Hispanic ___ Native American ___ Others ___	K-12 Leadership Experience: Elementary School ___ Middle School ___ High School ___ District Office ___ Others ___
Gender: Male ___ Female ___	Current Position: Full-Time Faculty ___ Adjunct Faculty ___	Supervision Experience: One Semester ___ Two Semesters ___ Three Semesters ___ Four Semesters ___ Five or More Semesters ___
Program(s) Supervised: M.ED. ___ Add-On ___ Ed. Tech. ___	Total Years in K-12 Leadership: 1—5 ___ 6—10 ___ 11—15 ___ 16—20 ___ Over 20 yrs ___	

Section II. Guidance and Support from the KSU Supervisor and Field Mentor: Please rate the following statements by choosing from 1 to 5 (1=least adequate; 2=less adequate; 3=adequate; 4=more adequate; 5=most adequate).

1	Clear guidance was provided to candidates regarding the requirements of the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Feedback was provided to candidates' reflective journals on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Site visit(s) was/were helpful to the candidates' practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The candidates were assigned a variety of duties to perform in their practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
5	The candidates were assigned meaningful work to do in their practicum experience.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Supervision was provided to the candidates in each of the practicum tasks assigned to them.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Support was provided to the candidates in performing their assigned administrative duties.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Opportunities were provided for candidates to observe school administrators at work.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Opportunities were provided for candidates to participate in hands-on administrative work.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Arrangements were made to allow candidates to complete all the designated leadership activities.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Directions were provided to candidates to write required reflections	1	2	3	4	5

	based on their experiences.					
12	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard One (Vision) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
13	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Two (School Culture) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
14	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Three (Management) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
15	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Four (Community Relations) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
16	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Five (Ethics) was.....	1	2	3	4	5
17	The candidates' practicum experience relating to ELCC Standard Six (Legal, social and Political aspects of education) was.....	1	2	3	4	5

Section III: Comments on Practicum Experiences

1. What are the strengths of the current practicum course structure? Please explain.

2. What are the weaknesses of the current practicum course structure? Please explain.

3. How important is the role of a KSU supervisor in this practicum experiences?

4. How important is the role of a school mentor in this practicum experiences?

5. What practicum activity/activities do you perceived to be most meaningful? Please explain.

6. What suggestions do you have to improve the practicum experience?

7. Additional comments