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Leadership Dispositions and Skills for Ethnically Diverse Schools

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Quality educational leadership is especially critical today in the era of school improvement, student achievement, and teacher accountability. Leaders help meet ever-changing contexts and opportunities. Senge (1990) observed, “The new view of leadership in learning organizations centers on subtler and more important tasks. In learning organizations, leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers” (p. 340).

In addition to these new leadership challenges, this is a time when school resources—human as well as financial—are limited not only in PK-12 schools but to universities as well (Price, 2008). While American educators today are serving an increasingly diverse community, educators are still predominately middle-class, European American, and English-only speakers (Banks et al., 2005; Jazsar & Algozzine, 2006; Swartz, 2003). Not only must school leaders understand students’ communities and experience, they also need the willingness, attitudes, and ethics or dispositions to work well with diversity and to teach these skills to others (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Dispositions may be defined as, “values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities” (NCATE, 2002, p. 53). More specifically, diversity dispositions include the skills, beliefs and connections to be successful within the community (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2008). For school administrators, the objective is to become a leader who “promotes the success of students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to the diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources” (CCSSO, 2007, p. 16) More than ever before, those who train educators need to assist candidates in cultivating their positive dispositions in order to help all students succeed (Keiser & Smith, 2009)

In order for school leaders to understand the role they play in a diverse community, it is not enough to participate in preparation programs that espouse multicultural education (Fiore, 2009). Educational leadership candidates must have opportunities to engage in dialog on social justice and to reflect about personal beliefs, as well as practice in culturally diverse settings (Barnes, 2006; Guerra & Nelson, 2008; Hafner, 2006, Howard & Del Rosiario, 2000).

The study of school administration and leadership has historically mirrored the prevailing perspectives of business and civic leadership (Fiore, 2009). Viewing leaders as components of a bureaucratic organizational structure, examining characteristics and traits of successful leaders, and identifying leadership in relation to systems and contingency theories are just a few of the perspectives (Lynch, 2012). Northouse (2013) suggested that leadership can be studied by observing traits, examining specific behaviors, focusing on specific situations, and even identifying the effect that charismatic leaders have on their followers. Sound theories associated with effective leadership and organizational structures are critical when examining schools and the leadership skills needed to guide them (Lynch, 2012; Robbins, 2004).

Many university programs that prepare school leaders include courses or program emphasis on diversity and equity, though the number of resources that address teaching social justice in leadership preparation programs is small (Hafner, 2006). At The University of Nebraska at Omaha, educational administration faculty address sociocultural consciousness, cultural proficiency, and community connections with candidates in an intentional developmental manner in order to promote measureable growth in knowledge, skills and dispositions of diversity. The Department of Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Nebraska at Omaha has systematically and intentionally gathered information to assure us so that our students are prepared to lead for social justice. Our future leaders are assessed on how the perceptions of their skills align with stated dispositions that they must have in order to effectively lead in ethnically diverse schools. The department has systematically and intentionally gathered

information to improve the program, but the goal is to understand how candidates' perceptions of their skills align with stated dispositions in order to effectively lead in ethnically diverse schools.

DEVELOPING SOCIOCULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

An educational leader's knowledge of diversity dispositions is founded in self-awareness. Sociocultural consciousness is "the awareness that a person's worldview is not universal, but is profoundly influenced by life experiences" (Villegas & Lucas, 2007, p. 31). Educational leaders without this awareness overuse their own experience, and may misinterpret communication and behaviors of students and other adults. Educational leaders who see themselves as mono-cultural Americans are more likely to perpetuate misconception and stereotypes (Dantas, 2007). Hallinger and Heck (1996) noted that an awareness of positive dispositions and the savvy to utilize them for the improvement of school culture is not only important for administrators to work well with students – it is also critical for the school leaders themselves. Thus, administrators who have not developed this awareness have trouble being the leader of an effective school (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In fact, the leading cause of administrator dismissal is the lack of interpersonal skills (Davis, 1998; Keiser & Smith, 2009).

Based upon studies of teacher and administrator dispositions (Edick, Danielson, & Edwards, 2006; Edwards and Edick, 2006; Keiser, 2007; Schulte, Edick, & Mackiel, 2004; Schulte, Edwards & Edick, 2008; Schulte & Kowal, 2005) and upon analysis of candidate portfolios by the Educational Administration faculty at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, candidates in educational administration have positive beliefs about students; yet tend to undervalue the importance of sociocultural consciousness. This message also comes from reflections of course instructors, employers, and from the candidates themselves (Smith, 2008). Improvement in this facet of the program is imperative. As Parker and Shapiro (1992) state:

More attention needs to be given to future school and district leaders'... ability to support the education of all children. Opportunities' must be provided for leaders to examine and reflect on the meaning of their cultural background, their skin color, and their belief systems as well as the relationship between these attributes and their personal and professional practice. (pp. 387-388)

Developing Cultural Proficiency

Cultural beliefs and models are built over years and are resistant to change (Dantas, 2007). Cultural proficiency, as proposed in *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* by Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003), was selected by our educational administration faculty as an instructional model because it is proactive, usable in any setting, and behavioral rather than emotional. Being culturally proficient enables administrative candidates to address issues of diverse school culture. Those who are culturally proficient "welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ from themselves" (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006, pp. 4-5). The core values of cultural proficiency are:

1. Culture is a predominant force; one cannot NOT be influenced by culture.
2. People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
3. People have group identities that they want have acknowledged.
4. Cultures are not homogeneous; there is diversity within groups.
5. The unique needs of every culture must be respected; (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey & Terrell, 2006)

Developing Community Connections

The social fabric of community is formed from an expanding shared sense of belonging. Educational leaders must interact with a diverse array of constituents including many from different cultural backgrounds, experiences and traditions and speak languages other than English (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). They must have a keen awareness of school-community relations, group dynamics, intercultural tolerance, politics and power, team building and community engagement and how to

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effectively bridge these borders in order to work toward success. Communities are shaped by the notion that, only when members are connected and care for the well-being of the whole, will a civil and democratic society be created (Block, 2009)

At the core of educational leadership skills is an ability to model and help citizens contribute to creating a democratic and just future within the community (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Citizens become powerful when they choose to shift the context within which they act in the world (Block, 2009).

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

The community of Omaha, Nebraska, is remarkably diverse. In the 1960's when desegregation became law, White flight was widespread essentially leaving a large portion of the urban center *hollowed out* with property wealth flowing to the suburban areas. Despite the prolonged struggles over desegregation, racial segregation continues to persist in our schools. Currently the Omaha Public Schools' race composition is 34 % White, 30% Hispanic, and 26% African American. The statistics from the Nebraska State of the Schools Report (2011) indicates the demographic challenges faced by the district including a poverty rate of 69.27%. English Language Learners comprise 14.89 % of children, and includes mobility rate of 18.14%. Sadly, the Omaha World Herald reports that the African American population in Omaha has the highest child poverty in the nation (2011). Seventy-seven percent of African American children are now living in poverty, and of the 1,131 entering kindergarten each year, only 99 of those expect graduate from college. The drop is even sharper among African-American males. Among Latino children, about 1,045 students will enter kindergarten and about 76 of those expect to graduate from college. Male students are projected to experience greater academic failure in this group as well (Building Bright Futures, 2008).

Within this context, the Department of Education Administration and Supervision (EDAD) at The University of Nebraska at Omaha offers aspiring school leaders advanced programs leading to the Master of Science Degree in Education (M.S.), as well as a Doctoral Degree in Education (Ed.D.). The department includes a non-degree administration endorsement program for candidates who have completed a previous master's degree, and meet all other criteria for admission. Perceptions of candidates are supplied in traditional methods—papers, discussions, tests—throughout the program. Faculty in this department, informally assess the attitudes and dispositions during each class session by carefully listening and examining attitudes with class and small group discussions, but the intentional survey of diversity dispositions, connections with the community, and community service have led to insights not only for candidates, but for the program and field as well.

ISLLC Standards

Just as students' schools are expected to meet established levels of achievement on specific grade level and subject level standards, expected levels of proficiency for school leaders have been identified. Standards are being used to build the systems necessary to measure the effectiveness and efficiencies of school leaders, and to ensure that they have acquired the necessary skills and abilities to create collaborative learning environments in which all students can be prepared to live and work in a social and political democracy (Anderson, 2002; Green, 2004).

To quantify and regulate the many facets of school leadership, the EDAD Department adopted the *Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISSLC 2008*. These standards are aligned with the standards outlined by Nebraska Department of Education in Rule 24 and call for:

1. Setting a widely share vision for learning;
2. Develop a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and

6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal and cultural context. (CCSSO, 2008 p. 12)

Following the growth of individuals on these standards as they progress through their program, as well as tracking trends over time for the program takes multiple forms of assessment.

Educational Administration Assessment

Graduate students in education have learned to be excellent students as reflected by high grade point averages, and so to assess leadership, a variety of other instruments have also been developed and validated by the department for alignment to standards and dispositions. When school leaders complete their formal preparation programs, they must be able display the skills and dispositions to increase student achievement, to raise awareness among students and staff, and to create heterogeneous learning communities for students and staff (McKenzie et al., 2008).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Olivia and Marshall (2006) stress that the mission to strive for a more equitable and socially just society begins with educational leadership. It is a moral obligation to create leaders who possess the skills to take active roles that intervene on oppressive *power* differences that work to create schools that develop everyone's capacity to think, to critique, and to carry out civil discourse about complex debatable issues (Surface, Smith, Keiser, & Hayes, 2011). Moral transformative leaders must keep the process of teaching, leading and research aimed at keeping the social justice movement in the forefront. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand how candidates' perceptions of their skills align with stated dispositions in order to effectively lead in ethnically diverse schools.

METHODOLOGY

This study addressed the following research questions:

- To what extent were the EDAD candidates' self-perceptions of their development of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions different at the end of the leadership program compared to their ability to apply the knowledge, skill, and dispositions when they first entered the program as measured on the ISLLC Standards survey?
- To what extent were the EDAD candidates' self-perceptions of their leadership dispositions different at the end of the leadership program compared to their leadership dispositions when they first entered the program as measured on Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI)?

Participants

The participants in this study were the candidates in the Masters/Endorsement program in Educational Administration and Supervision at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (n = 135). The participants were in the EDAD program between the years 2006 and 2010 and include only those candidates who completed the program. The candidates were either seeking a Master's Degree in Educational Administration with the elementary or secondary principal endorsement or just the principal endorsement if they already held a Master's Degree.

Instruments and Data Collection

The pretest and posttest data from the ISLLC Standards surveys and the Administrator Disposition Index (ADI) surveys were analyzed to determine the difference in the knowledge, skills and dispositions. The data were collected when the candidates first entered the program and again when they were enrolled in the practicum field experience. EDAD students complete a survey based on the ISLLC professional standards. The survey offers EDAD candidates a graphic representation of their growth from their own

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perspective. The survey contains 61 questions grouped into six general areas under consideration. Candidates are asked to respond to this survey at the beginning and again during their field-based practicum. Candidates are asked to indicate the rating of their proficiency for each standard by selecting the appropriate value on a 1 to 5 scale indicating whether the candidate strongly disagrees to the strongly agrees that he/she could do what it describes.

The Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI), created by the department, is aligned with the dispositions of effective leadership identified by the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership (Schulte & Kowal, 2005). Smith and Kowal (2005) found the ADI to be “a reliable and valid instrument for measuring the dispositions of effective school leaders” (p. 85). Each candidate determines his or her commitment to each of the leadership dispositions on a 5-point scale ranging from “1” Strongly Disagree to “5,” Strongly Agree. This survey is also administered at the beginning and the end of the program. The Administrator Dispositions Index is also administered to practicing administrators in which they rate the candidates’ dispositions related to effective leadership.

Candidates create a Leadership Framework for their Educational Administration Digital Portfolio. This framework includes the standard and ADI that comprised the pretest and posttest for the study. All measures are stored in an electronic portfolio on the university server, which can be accessed by candidates for individual review and by faculty for aggregate evaluation.

At the end of the masters or endorsement program, candidates use the electronic portfolio to develop a capstone project, a synthesis of learning and experience in educational administration. This is completed concurrent with a candidate’s practicum semester. Practicum is a program of planned experiences in the field consisting of 250 hours of approved experiences. The capstone project consists of:

- 1) A summary of the coursework that the student has taken.
- 2) A professional resume.
- 3) A copy of their dispositions index and standards rating from the assessments.
- 4) Artifacts including papers, projects, and reflections that represent each ISLLC standard.
- 5) Personal and professional reflections focused upon each standard.

A comprehensive written examination is also required of all Master’s Degree candidates. It is usually taken either in the last term of the candidates’ class work or in the session immediately following completion of practicum.

Findings

Repeated measure *t*-tests were used to compare the mean scores for candidates pretest and posttest scores. Total mean scores were calculated for the ISLLC Standards survey as well as the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI) survey. The results of the repeated-measure *t*-tests, significance, and effect size using Cohen’s *d* for the candidates ISLLC Standards mean scores and ADI mean scores were used to determine the significance of the change in scores from the beginning of the administration training program to the end of the program.

Research Question #1. Repeated-measure *t*-tests reveal that for program participants who completed the ISLLC Standards survey the posttest mean scores ($M = 4.70, SD = 0.38$) were significantly higher than pretest scores ($M = 2.48, SD = 0.81$), $t(134) = 29.86, p < .01$ (two-tailed), $d = 2.57$.

Research Question #2 Similarly, *t*-test results reveal that for program participants who completed the Administrator Dispositions Index survey the posttest total mean scores ($M = 4.94, SD = 0.11$) were significantly higher than pretest mean scores ($M = 4.57, SD = 0.50$), $t(132) = 8.56, p < .01$ (two-tailed), $d = 0.74$.

After comparing total scores on ISLLC Standards and Administrator Dispositions pretests and posttests, analyses were also conducted focusing on particular standards and dispositions. ISLLC Standard 2 and 5 which focus on positive school culture and acting fairly ethically were of special interest.

ISLLC Standard 2 states that candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school

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culture, providing an effective standards-based instructional program, applying best practice to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff based on identified needs. The knowledge and skills related to this standard are measured for each administrative candidate through a number of sub-standard items. The means and standard deviations for each sub-standard pretest and posttest score, repeated measure t-test calculation, significance, and effect size of the gains are contained in Table 1.

Table 1
Repeated-Measure t-test Results, Significance, and Effect Size for ISLLC Standard 2 Sub-Standards

Sub-Standard	Posttest		Pretest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
2.1a. I have the skills to assess school culture using multiple methods and implement context-appropriate strategies that capitalize on the diversity (e.g., population, language, disability, gender, race, socio-economic) of the school community to improve school programs and culture.	4.7	0.5	2.4	1.0	24.5	<.01	2.10
2.2a. I have the skills to assess school culture using multiple methods and implement context-appropriate strategies that capitalize on the diversity (e.g., population, language, disability, gender, race, socio-economic) of the school community to improve school programs and culture.	4.7	0.5	2.5	1.0	25.3	<.01	2.18
2.2b. I could demonstrate the ability to make recommendations regarding the design, implementation, and evaluation of a curriculum that fully accommodates learners' diverse needs.	4.7	0.5	2.6	1.1	21.5	<.01	1.86
2.2c. I could demonstrate the ability to use and promote technology and information systems to analyze and interpret data, to enrich curriculum and instruction, to monitor instructional practices and provide staff the assistance needed for improvement.	4.7	0.5	2.5	1.1	22.0	<.01	1.90
2.3a. I can demonstrate the ability to assist school personnel in understanding and applying best practices for student learning.	4.8	0.4	2.9	1.0	21.2	<.01	1.83
2.3b. I can apply human development theory, proven learning and motivational theories, and concern for diversity to the learning process.	4.7	0.5	2.5	1.0	21.5	<.01	1.87
2.3c. I can demonstrate an understanding of how to use appropriate research strategies to promote an environment for improved student achievement.	4.7	0.5	2.4	1.1	23.6	<.01	2.04
2.4a. I could design and demonstrate an ability to implement well-planned, context-appropriate professional development programs based on reflective practice and research on student learning consistent with the school vision and goals.	4.7	0.5	2.3	1.0	25.5	<.01	2.19

2.4b. I could demonstrate the ability to use strategies such as observations, collaborative reflection, and adult learning strategies to form comprehensive professional growth plans with teachers and other school personnel.	4.7	0.5	2.4	1.1	23.4	<.01	2.01
2.4c. I demonstrate personal commitment to the development and implementation of continuous professional growth.	4.9	0.3	3.3	1.1	16.6	<.01	1.40

Leadership candidates' growth in this standard was also compared to growth in the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI). Did leadership candidates lose, maintain, or improve their pretest ADI and ISLLC Standard 2 scores compared to posttest ADI and ISLLC Standard 2 scores?

A repeated-measure Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated. There was a significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest), $F(1,268) = 616.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .70$. There was a significant main effect for test (ADI/ISLLC Standard 2), $F(1, 268) = 393.24, p < .001, \eta^2 = .60$. There was also a significant interaction between time and test $F(1,268) = 313.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .54$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicate that there was a significant difference on the pretest Dispositions ($M = 4.54, SD = 0.63$) compared to pretest Standard 2 ($M = 2.58, SD = 0.87$) and compared to posttest Dispositions ($M = 4.90, SD = 0.44$). There was also significant difference between pretest Standard 2 and posttest Standard 2 ($M = 4.74, SD = 0.35$). Also posttest Disposition scores were also significantly higher than posttest Standard 2 scores.

There was also interest in looking more closely at ISLLC Standard 5, which states that candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting fairly, with integrity, and in an ethical manner. As with the other standards, the knowledge and skills related to this standard are measured for each administrative candidate through a number of sub-standard items. The Standard 5 means and standard deviations for each sub-standard pretest and posttest score, repeated measure t-test calculation, significance, and effect size of the gains are contained in Table 2. This standard was also analyzed in relation to the Administrator Dispositions Index as with the other standards. However, only those dispositions which address ethics were included in the analyses. There were two dispositions identified as being critically related to Standard 5. Those dispositions' pretest and posttest scores, repeated measure t-test calculations, significance, and effect sizes of the gains are contained in Table 3.

Table 2
Repeated-Measure t-test Results, Significance, and Effect Size for ISLLC Standard 5 Sub-Standards

Sub-Standard	Posttest		Pretest		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
5.1a. I demonstrate a respect for the rights of others with regard to confidentiality and dignity and engage in honest interactions.	4.9	0.3	4.1	1.0	10.1	<.01	0.88
5.2a. I demonstrate the ability to combine impartiality, sensitivity to student diversity, and ethical considerations in their interactions with others.	4.9	0.3	3.9	1.0	11.7	<.01	1.00
5.3a. I make and explain decisions based upon ethical and legal principles.	5.0	0.2	3.5	1.2	14.2	<.01	0.64

Table 3
 Repeated-Measure *t*-test Results, Significance, and Effect Size for Administrator Dispositions Index Survey Items 17 and 31

Disposition	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
17. I am committed to ethical principles in the decision-making process.	5.09	< .01	0.44
31. I believe one should accept the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions.	4.73	< .01	0.41
Total	5.57	<.01	0.49

Leadership candidates' growth in Standard 5 was also compared to growth in the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI) item 17 and 31. Did leadership candidates lose, maintain, or improve their pretest ADI items 17 and 31 and ISLLC Standard 5 scores compared to posttest ADI items 17 and 31 and ISLLC Standard 5 scores?

A repeated-measure Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was calculated. There was a significant main effect for time (pretest/posttest), $F(1,268) = 143.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35$. There was a significant main effect for test (ADI#17&31/ISLLC Standard 5), $F(1, 268) = 53.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$. There was also a significant interaction between time and test $F(1,268) = 55.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicate that there was a significant difference on the pretest Dispositions ADI #17 and 31 ($M = 4.66, SD = 0.72$) compared to pretest Standard 5 ($M = 3.82, SD = 0.97$) and compared to posttest Dispositions ($M = 4.92, SD = 0.49$). There was also significant difference between pretest Standard 5 and posttest Standard 5 ($M = 4.94, SD = 0.25$). However, there was no significant difference between posttest ADI#17&31 and posttest Standard 5 Scores.

Also of interest was the growth in diversity dispositions. The educational administrative candidates espoused positive diversity dispositions, which were grouped into three domains. The first domain, *skills in helping students gain knowledge*, had positive results on the pretest ($M = 4.37, SD = 0.34$) and the posttest ($M = 4.48, SD = 0.38$). The second domain, *beliefs about students and teaching /learning* had the highest mean for pretest ($M = 4.71, SD = 0.21$) and for the posttest ($M = 4.77, SD = 0.26$). And domain three, *educators' connection with the community*, was not as positive, with most answering neutral to agree on the pretest ($M = 3.94, SD = 0.53$) and neutral to strongly agree on the posttest ($M = 4.22, SD = 0.45$).with most answering agree or strongly agree in all 3 factors. (Schulte, Edwards, & Edick, 2009). Educational administration candidates espoused more positive diversity dispositions after completing the program. While almost every item showed growth, *educators' beliefs and attitudes about students and teaching/learning* started the semester at such a high level that (4.71, with 5.00 maximum) that there was little room for improvement. *Educators' skills in helping students gain knowledge* indicated slightly significant growth, and the increase in *educators' connections to the community* was statistically significant.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This research was about educational administration candidates' readiness to lead in very diverse environments. Analyses were conducted to summarize our candidates' overall readiness to lead based upon their growth of knowledge and skills using the ISSLC standards. Another summary analysis measured the candidates' growth in dispositions. More in depth analyses were done to measure candidates' diversity dispositions; self-perceived growth of the ISSLC standards and self-perceived growth of their dispositions and an examination of the difference in the growth rate of the standards compared to dispositions in the area of ethics and ethical decision-making. A final analysis was conducted that measured students growth in the area of professional development.

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Educational administration candidates espoused more positive diversity dispositions after completing the program. While almost every item showed growth, *educators' beliefs and attitudes about students and teaching/learning* started the semester at such a high level that (4.71, with 5.00 maximum) that there was little room for improvement. *Educators' skills in helping students gain knowledge* indicated slightly significant growth, and the increase in *educators' connections to the community* was statistically significant. These findings lead to the questions: If candidates begin the program with very positive beliefs and skills in diversity dispositions, then why do they not feel as though they act in a way that connects them to the community? What then allows them to develop more positive connections?

The voices of our candidates provide us with one of the most powerful assessments of our program. Our students must be prepared for leadership within the communities that they serve and according to their voices, they appear to understand the importance of their leadership. For future school leaders it may be proactive to embrace an attitude of cultural proficiency. They ask if this a finding? Those who are culturally proficient “welcome and create opportunities to better understand who they are as individuals, while learning how to interact positively with people who differ from themselves” (Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006, p. 4-5). Using their framework as a guide, success can be found in the perceptions and insights of candidates' comments in class discussions, reflection papers and other work by an increased depth of reflection, and in a climate of shared vision and commitment.

Each semester, candidates soon to graduate, participate in focus groups seeking candidates' understanding of the core standards and dispositions foundational to successful school leadership. The perceptions of candidates, Masters' through Doctorate, indicate that they are deeply passionate about social justice. Actuation of core values is one of the keys to the development of the dispositions that reflect social justice. Indeed, the core values of cultural proficiency often are seen most clearly in their own words when they were asked to tell us their view of social justice. As stated by our candidates:

Culture is a predominate force; one cannot NOT be influenced by culture. Joel, offered his insight of the centrality of social justice when he said, “Do we look at ourselves before we point the finger at others to make a difference? Do we really need more policies or permission to do the right thing?”

People are served in varying degrees by the dominate culture. Social justice is an issue that needs to be addressed at all levels in the educational process, from Pre-K to graduate as explained by Jonny

The earliest possible training of humanity with regard to the importance of developing a social conscience that is considerate of all human beings and other living creatures of nature will best prepare our society, locally and globally, for a life in which all live among each other in peace.

Fran, indicated that social justice involves being ethical, making sure that policies work for the wellbeing of everyone, leading by example

Social justice is a way of living. It cannot be easily defined as that would confine it as more simplistic than its existence. Acting in accordance with social justice means acting with integrity: doing what is right even when no one is looking. It refers to “righting” the “wrongs” you know and see through implementation of policies and setting positive examples. Social Justice is a moral responsibility of all educators.

Michelle offered a clear warning as well

Social justice can be impacted in a negative manner if policies are implemented that make all culture conform to the *American way*. This disallows people to practice their traditions and beliefs. Government laws/policies and education policies can impact social justice.

Issues Related to Social Justice

Jay articulated the responsibility of school administrators

Every decision made by a leader that impacts students, faculty, or the school can be attributed to social justice. When administrators make a discipline decision, they will be looked at and judged by others if their decision is one that is fair. Unfortunately, people need to remember that an equitable treatment does not always come from an equal treatment.

People have group identities that they want to have acknowledged. Jason, also emphasized the role that school leader's play in impacting policy that affects social justice when he noted, "by developing an environment of awareness and tolerance of differences, school leaders provide positive culture that encourages social justice." *The unique needs of every culture must be respected.* Glenn, articulated the need to respect cultures and being an advocate.

Social justice is about assuming responsibility and accountability to advocate for others who cannot advocate for themselves. It's about advocacy and speaking out about inequality that exists in all social aspects of life. School leaders impact social justice by way of being the voice of the masses they teach, lead and work for in the community.

Karla expressed the need to speak out against injustices

School leaders can impact policy that affects social justice by making sure that they continuously make efforts to speak out against the injustices that occur to the members of their school community. They need to be the voice of those whose voices have been silenced by society.

Candidates offered a window to examine the quality of programs, and of their readiness to accept the responsibility inherent in leading.

The study indicates that students who successfully completed the leadership program believed in themselves and they were ready to assume the mantle of leadership. It could be argued that those preparing to become administrators would have a false sense of readiness for the realities of school leadership, and that perhaps these study participants rated themselves more prepared than they actually were. In response to this concern, additional research was conducted by the Educational Administration Department at the University of Nebraska at Omaha that brought an outside view of the student. School district supervisors of our students were asked to rate the students dispositions. This rating was compared to the ratings that the students gave themselves. Using this same survey instrument, site supervisors actually rated the participants significantly higher than they rated themselves (Keiser & Smith, 2009).

The completion of standards and disposition inventories at the beginning of the leadership program help inform program participants about the program's focus and goals, individual progress, and serves as a gathering place for artifacts demonstrating growth. Candidates' portfolios, including their Administrator Dispositions Index and Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards survey scores can continue to serve the program participants after they leave the University.

The results of this study can also be very useful when planning and improving program and program delivery. This data and analyses have been used to report program success to accrediting bodies and to update and improve course syllabi (Smith, 2008). More importantly, professors in the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision can use this information to tailor their classroom activities and discussions to maximize student success.

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