EMPIRICAL STUDY

How Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Programs Hone the Interpersonal-Intrapersonal (i²) Skills of Future Leaders

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Abstract

John P. Kotter argues that business schools continue to prepare leaders for 20th century needs, as they typically teach students how to *manage* an organization, rather than how to lead one. In this article, we explore how Kotter's assertion applies to educational leadership preparation programs. We examine the ways a purposive sample of exemplary programs structure and implement learning experiences for aspiring educational leaders. Leveraging our findings from these cases and the literature on transformational learning and leadership, we argue that today's programs should include "powerful learning experiences" that challenge and coach leadership candidates to build the skills and capacities necessary to both *manage* and *lead* organizations. If educational leaders are the "driving subsystem" for school improvement efforts, then leadership preparation must move aspiring leaders beyond technical competence and toward the more transformational aspects of leading.

Keywords: educational leadership preparation; transformational learning; principals; management; leadership; transformational leadership

How Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Programs Hone the Interpersonal-Intrapersonal (i²) Skills of Future Leaders

In his seminal work on leading transformational organizational change, Kotter (1996, 2013) argues that contemporary business schools continue to prepare business leaders for 20th, not 21st, century, needs. They spend most of their time teaching students how to *manage* an organization, not how to *lead one*. He also laments that the terms "leadership" and "management" are often used interchangeably. To him, the practices are not interchangeable. Kotter's notion of leadership aligns with many of the core tenets of transformational leadership, as used in educational scholarship: it centers on the actions leaders take to secure buy-in, inspire and empower others, and produce goal-oriented change (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, 1985). This paper explores if and how Kotter's assertion about business schools applies to educational leadership preparation programs, which are programs, typically offered by a college or university, that prepare educators for leadership positions in K-12 schools and systems. Through these programs, candidates earn a graduate degree (e.g., master's, doctorate) and/or a state license to practice as a school administrator.

This empirical study examines how leadership preparation programs develop educational leaders in ways that attend to both the leadership and management dimensions of the profession. To carry out this examination, we reviewed and analyzed application packets from programs that received the University Council for Educational Administration's (UCEA) Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Program (EELP) Award between 2013 and 2016. UCEA is an international consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children. The EELP Award, which UCEA established in 2013, recognizes exemplary leadership preparation programs and is awarded using a set of research-informed criteria drawn from scholarship on effective leadership development (Young & Crow, 2016). In addition to recognizing exemplary programs, UCEA also uses the award competition as a way to increase awareness of exemplary leadership preparation programs, features, and practices and "to cultivate a group of exemplary programs that model and can help to catalyze and support ongoing program improvement in other [institutions]" (UCEA, 2018, para. 1).

The award competition is national and seeks nominations from any university-based leadership preparation program. Each year, a committee of senior scholars in educational leadership is convened to review applications and assess applicant programs' designs and practices for "exemplary" status—in some years, multiple programs win while in other years, no program is recognized with the award (Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015). A complete application includes: (a) a description aligning the program with UCEA's Program Quality Criteria (Young, Orr, & Tucker, 2012), (b) course syllabi, (c) a description of the program's field experiences, (d) evidence of program effectiveness and impact, and (e) each program faculty member's curriculum vitae (UCEA, 2018).

We intentionally selected EELP Award-winning programs for this research because these programs are recognized for their innovative design and effectiveness, making them distinctive in the field. In this article, we share our findings, including an overview of how our sample of exemplary programs, through transformational learning tenets, address the leadership and management dimensions of the profession. We include how these programs' curricula guide leadership candidates toward forming a strong and clear transformational leadership mindset through what Young (2015) and Cunningham and colleagues (2018) refer to as "powerful learning experiences" and assessments aimed to challenge and coach leadership candidates to build capacity, effectively lead, and purposefully manage.

Educational Leaders in the 21st Century

Arguably, the expectations for today's educational leaders are more broad and complex than ever before (Green, 2010; Peterson, 2001; Sebastian, Camburn, & Spillane, 2018). Researchers, such as Cuban (1988) and Neumerski (2012), acknowledge the persistent tension for educational administrators to lead and manage. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015) articulates that principals of 21st century schools need to be attuned to both the leadership and management aspects of their jobs in order to "foster safe, caring and supportive school learning communities and promote rigorous curricula, instructional and assessment systems" (p. 4). Developing leaders who can "build and strengthen a network of organizational supports; the professional capacity of teachers and staff; the professional community in which they learn and work; family and community engagement; and effective, efficient management and operations" (p. 4) is a complex endeavor.

The decisions leaders make and the actions they take to successfully build professional capacity and cultivate authentic relationships require a

combination of skills. Research demonstrates how educational leaders' decisions and actions can influence numerous school- and student-level factors, from creating working conditions that promote teacher commitment to school improvement initiatives (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015), to fostering a school culture where students feel safe and inspired to learn (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). In their extensive work in Chicago Public Schools, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) assert educational leaders are the "driving subsystem" for school improvement efforts and describe this subsystem as operating along three dimensions: (a) the *managerial,* (b) the *instructional, and* (c) the *inclusive-facilitative*. The managerial dimension, such as balancing budgets, focuses on operations and systems that are essential to running any organization. The instructional dimension focuses on a leader's role as supervisor of a school's "operational core" of teaching and learning (Bush, 2011; Mintzberg, 1979). The third dimension, however, focuses on something more tacit and nebulous: a leader's ability to nurture individual and collective agency among staff and build collective capacity to consistently perform at high levels. Bryk and colleagues (2010) argue that this inclusive-facilitative dimension is the "lubricant" that keeps all of the parts associated with strong organizational performance moving forward efficiently and successfully.

The three dimensions may appear to introduce a tension for current and aspiring educational leaders as well as those who prepare them. That is, although all three are vital for student and school-wide success, some aspiring leaders may disregard or reduce their emphasis on dimensions that are less clearly managerial and instructional, while others may struggle to find an appropriate balance among the dimensions. We have found, however, that is not so much an issue of priority or balance—it is one of approach. That is, attending to the less clearly managerial and instructional dimensions of leadership work requires a combination of

technical skills and what we refer to as *interpersonal-intrapersonal (i²) skills*. These i² skills, which align with Bryk and colleagues' (2010) inclusive-facilitative dimension, serve as an essential emollient, enabling leaders to successfully accomplish a wide range of leadership and management tasks.

Given the complexity of work in which educational leaders must engage, we sought to understand the following: *How do educational leadership preparation programs support leadership candidates in developing the technical and i2 skills needed to attend to both the leadership and management dimensions of the profession?* We explored this question using the application materials of UCEA-recognized exemplary leadership preparation programs. These award-winning programs espouse creating transformational leaders by encouraging leadership candidates to shift their mindsets through a series of transformational and powerful learning experiences (Cunningham et al., 2018; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Young, 2015). While transformational leadership and transformational learning are not synonymous, they can be used in conjunction with one another. Transformational leadership is an approach where focusing on the culture of an organization can lead to positive changes and goal attainment (Bass, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Transformational learning aims to challenge people's default frames of reference—their mindsets—by using deliberate powerful learning experiences such as critical reflection to deepen how people interpret the world and adjust their perspectives (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013; Cunningham et al., 2018; Young, 2015). Mezirow (1997) encourages critical reflection for two reasons:

1. Becoming critically reflective of the assumptions of others is fundamental to effective collaborative problem posing and solving; and

2. Becoming critically reflective of one's own assumptions is the key to transforming one's taken-for-granted frame of reference, an indispensable dimension of learning for adapting to change (p. 10).

As people engage in transformational learning experiences, Mezirow (1997) asserts they become more:

• aware of and critical in assessing assumptions—both those of others and those governing one's own beliefs, values, judgments, and feelings;

• aware of and better able to recognize frames of reference and paradigms (collective frames of reference) and to imagine alternatives; and

• responsible and effective at working with others to collectively assess reasons, pose and solve problems, and arrive at a tentative best judgment regarding contested beliefs (p. 10).

In the context of this study, we posit that programs utilizing transformational and powerful learning experiences targeted toward honing i² skills can guide leadership candidates to adopt a transformational approach to leading and managing schools and districts. This, in turn, better positions future leaders to create positive, sustained change for their students and communities.

Methods

Data sources and data collection. Utilizing a theoretical sampling model (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which our research question drove the selection of data sources, this study examined award application documents submitted by the 2013-2016 recipients of the UCEA EELP Award. UCEA provided access to the applications of the five award-winning programs. Table 1 lists award application statistics across the four-year time period, such as the number of programs that signaled an intent to apply for the award, applied for the award, and won the award. Table 2 describes the five award-winning programs in more detail, such as the program focus (e.g., district- or school-level leaders), degree awarded (e.g., master's, doctoral), program

Table 1. Application Statistics of the University Council for Educational administration's Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Program Award

	2013	2014	2015	2016
No. of programs that signaled intent to apply for the award	10	10	5	9
No. of programs that applied for the award	10	10	3	6
No. of programs that won the award	2	2	0	1

Table 2. Program Features of Winners of the University Council for Educational Administration's Exemplary Educational Leadership Preparation Program Award

Program	Program Focus	Degree Awarded	Program Setting	Yearly Cohort Size	District Setting
A	District Leadership	Ed.D	Urban	Up to 30	Urban
B	School Leadership	Master's/State licensure	Urban	~16	Urban
C	School Leadership	Master's/State licensure	Urban/Rural	6 to 18	Urban
D	School Leadership	Master's/State licensure	Rural	~22	Rural
E	School Leadership	Ed.D	Urban	~20	Urban

setting (e.g., rural, urban), yearly cohort size, and partnership school district setting (e.g., rural, urban). We consider each award-winning program to be a separate participant (N = 5). Our total data corpus consisted of 963 pages and included detailed program descriptions along with course syllabi and content, assignments and assessments, field work experiences, and assessment of program effectiveness (UCEA, 2018).

Data analysis. We employed an inductive content analysis approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), which uses data analysis techniques akin to grounded theory, such as the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and an open coding scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach is especially apropos when extant literature offers few a priori hypotheses. Over five rounds, we separately reviewed an application and engaged in inductive coding to identify in vivo codes (Miles & Hubermann, 1994). After each review, the research team met to discuss each application, its codes, and emerging themes. After examining all five applications, we engaged in the data reduction process and axial coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify primary themes and devise evidentiary assertions (Erickson, 1986).

Limitations. We acknowledge two caveats with our methodological approach. First, our conclusions are limited by the nature of the data. The EELP Award applications offer only an espoused view of what occurs in the five programs, yet it was outside the scope of this study to determine what these programs actually enact in practice (Schein, 2010). Nonetheless, the spirit of a Pedagogical Perspectives article calls for *reviewing* evidence-based best practices used to develop current and future educational leaders, something these applications have in abundance. The second limitation also concerns the data we examined, which was limited to secondary data. Future research aims to collect primary data from faculty members and students about their program experiences. We are particularly interested in

learning what might differentiate award-winning programs from other programs along with whether a program's award-winning status influences future candidates' decision to enroll.

Findings

This study's research question asked how educational leadership preparation programs support candidates in developing their technical and i^2 skills to address leadership and management dimensions of the profession. Although each program we examined was distinct, we found evidence of common practices employed to develop candidates' technical and i^2 skills. In this section, we address three key findings: (a) programs aimed to shift the mindsets of their candidates, (b) programs prioritized the development of i^2 skills, and (c) programs provided practical and authentic field experiences that permitted candidates to engage with current problems of practice in the school's "operational core" (Bush, 2011).

Shifting Mindsets of Leadership Candidates

When leadership candidates enroll in their programs, they have a mindset that encompasses prior knowledge, dispositions, and a set of values and beliefs (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Through coursework and discussions with colleagues, instructors, mentors, and stakeholders in partner school districts, the programs offered opportunities for candidates to examine issues and structures from other perspectives, which laid the groundwork for a potential shift in a candidate's mindset (Young, Gooden, O'Doherty, & Goodnow, 2011). Program B stated, "The focus on preparation is initially on attitudes and mindsets, and then on skills."

Shifting a mindset is akin to *cognitive rewiring* (Hayek, 1945; Strong, 2013), during which an individual's original mindset is shaped by specific experiences. For leadership candidates, this rewiring or reshaping results in new and likely lasting changes that influence subsequent decision-making processes for leadership and management tasks. Through our exploration, we identified three

mindsets relevant to our research question: Mindset A, Mindset B, and Mindset C. Each of these is delineated below.

Mindset A. Rooted in prior experiences, candidates begin a program with a particular perspective (Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1997), which we label Mindset A. Mindset A is the candidate's baseline perspective, and EELP Award-winning programs were committed to understanding their applicants' baseline perspectives. Indeed, programs engaged in the deliberate selection of candidates using admissions processes that included a variety of strategies for ascertaining candidates' viewpoints and assessing leadership potential. Selection committees used interviews, written statements, simulations, and other strategies to build a sufficient profile of their incoming students' Mindset A.

Mindset B. According to research on educational leadership preparation, an effective program subscribes to an institutional perspective that explicitly articulates the type of leader the program is designed to develop (Young & Crow, 2016). We label this programmatic or institutional perspective as Mindset B, which embodies the program's purpose, goals, mission, vision, and/ or theory of action. Table 3 lists the primary goals that each program in our sample articulated for its candidates. Program materials revealed an intent to shift and expand the mindsets of their candidates

through "powerful learning experiences" that were intentionally designed to help candidates develop as transformational leaders (Cunningham et al., 2018; Young, 2015).

Mindset C. Leadership candidates enter their program operating from Mindset A. As a result of encountering the program's Mindset B, candidates' Mindset A may undergo varying degrees of cognitive rewiring from participating in transformational and powerful learning experiences Cunningham et al., 2018; Mezirow, 2000; Young, 2015). Through activities such as keeping reflective journals, continuously revisiting personal leadership development plans, and engaging in cycles of inquiry within courses, the programs in our sample encouraged candidates to engage in critical reflection of their own assumptions and beliefs, an essential practice of both transformational and powerful learning (Cunningham et al., 2018; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Young, 2015). Thus, candidates' new perspective (Mindset C) is influenced by both their original mindset (A) and the program mindset (B), which, through well-designed processes, merge into and manifest as Mindset C. It is within this new Mindset C that a transformational leadership perspective can become candidates' ontological foundation for making future leadership and management decisions.

Table 3. Programs' Stated Purpose, Goal(s), Mission, Vision, and/or Theory of Action*

To "prepare school and district leaders to have the complex knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to lead effective schools. The... mission is to be a force for positive change in the lives of individuals, organizations and communities through unleashing the power of learning."
To "lead beyond their current span of control to change systems to support excellent educational opportunities and outcomes for each and every student; this requires special attention to students of color, students eligible for services for English Language Learning and Special education, those living in low-income households, and others who have historically been underserved by public school systems"
To "[train] emerging leaders...by tapping into and building on local strengths to bolster human capital and systemic capacity. The purpose...is to harness the fertile grounds of community awareness to reclaim school and community outcomes. We believe our graduates are well situated and capable of envisioning, dreaming, and enacting this reclamation process"
To "prepare and develop principals and system leaders who lead significant improvement in the culture, climate, and student learning outcomes of high-need urban schools as a rule, rather than as an exception to the rule"
To "prepare aspiring school leaders who are committed to social justice advocacy to practice in schools"

***To protect anonymity, names and/or identifying evidence were omitted from the statements.**

Prioritizing i² Skills

Our research revealed that programs also prioritized developing and honing leadership candidates' i² skills, which they deemed key to building relationships with students, teachers, staff, parents, and the wider school community. Relationships are particularly important when leaders need to craft and realize a vision for school improvement efforts, as broad "organizational transformation demands that leaders nurture individual agency and build collective capacity to support fundamental change. [A key skill] is a leader's ability to inspire teachers, parents, school community leaders, and students around a common vision" (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 63). Programs developed i² skills by creating conditions for cohorts to establish trust among one another and to work together, taking a candidate-centered approach to teaching and learning, and aiding candidates in understanding that leaders are intimately tied to and influential within the communities they work. To exemplify this commitment, one program reported how "developing effective educational leaders is fundamentally and irrevocably an interpersonal, relationship process—one that requires face-to-face human contact, deep thought, deliberation, reflection, engagement, and interaction" (Program D).

Experience with the School's "Operational Core"

Since school administrators function as both leaders and managers, they are responsible for leading and managing a school's "operational core"—teaching and learning—which requires accomplishing both technical and non-technical tasks (Bush, 2011; Mintzberg, 1979). Technical tasks, which we refer to as *management tasks*, involve decisions typically included in Bryk and colleagues' (2010) managerial dimension, such as balancing budgets and maintaining the physical plant. Non-technical tasks, which we refer to as *leadership tasks*, involve those interpersonal and intrapersonal areas of leadership that may include directing a school-community relations outreach program or building a positive, empowering professional culture among staff and students.

The programs in our sample aided their leadership candidates in using i² skills to learn how to work in the operational core to address both management and leadership tasks. For example, programs invited candidates to gain experience with management tasks by having them shadow a budget meeting or perform school safety walks. To gain experience with leadership tasks, programs assigned mentor principals to coach candidates through authentic leadership work, such as building a trusting school environment or contending with a public relations challenge. Programs also deliberately planned how candidates would use their i² skills to accomplish management tasks. For instance, Programs C and D required candidates to conduct an equity audit of school resources (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009) and to analyze findings using a social justice leadership lens in order to develop a set of recommendations for how the school could promote more equitable resource allocation.

Discussion

Our research demonstrated how a sample of educational leadership preparation programs intentionally developed their candidates' i² skills, recognizing the foundational role such skills played in the decision-making of future educational leaders. This finding provided us with the opportunity to build a conceptual model of how programs influence candidates' mindsets and future practice. Figure 1 illustrates our proposed conceptual model and shows how Mindsets A and B converge to form Mindset C, which educational leaders then rely upon as they exercise and continue honing their i² skills to accomplish both leadership and management tasks within schools' operational core. The development of i² skills is critical, as it sits at the intersection between Mindset C—the "new" way a leader thinks about how to make leadership and management decisions—and the leader's educational context.

For aspiring educational leaders to truly experience a transformation in their learning to the point of reshaping their foundational perspective for decision-making (i.e., Mindset C), they must engage in reflective, transformational, and powerful learning experiences in their program (Cunningham et al., 2018; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Young, 2015). Based on our findings, we posit that effective programs guide candidates to a point where candidates can no longer turn back—that is, they come to "know too much" (Program B). Indeed, prior literature (e.g., Alfred et al., 2013) describes how adult learners engage in transformational activities to advance new perspectives and habits of mind. Our evidence suggests that the EELP Award-winning programs are designed to help students hone their i² skills to build an inclusive, socially just, and improvement-focused Mindset C as their default perspective, which then influences future decision-making. Moreover, responsibilities

traditionally viewed as technical tasks may be subsumed under a broader leadership umbrella, resulting in more decisions being classified as non-technical rather than technical. Whether a decision concerns allocating school resources, scheduling classes, creating budgets, supervising personnel, crafting a vision, or spearheading school improvement efforts, the cognitive framework driving the decision is that inclusive, socially just, and improvement-focused Mindset C.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored if and how Kotter's (1996, 2013) assertion of outmoded business leader training applied to a sample of five award-winning educational leadership preparation programs. Our findings provide promising evidence countering Kotter's concern, as the sample of programs offered a leadership-focused perspective. Based on the data, we suggest effective programs guide
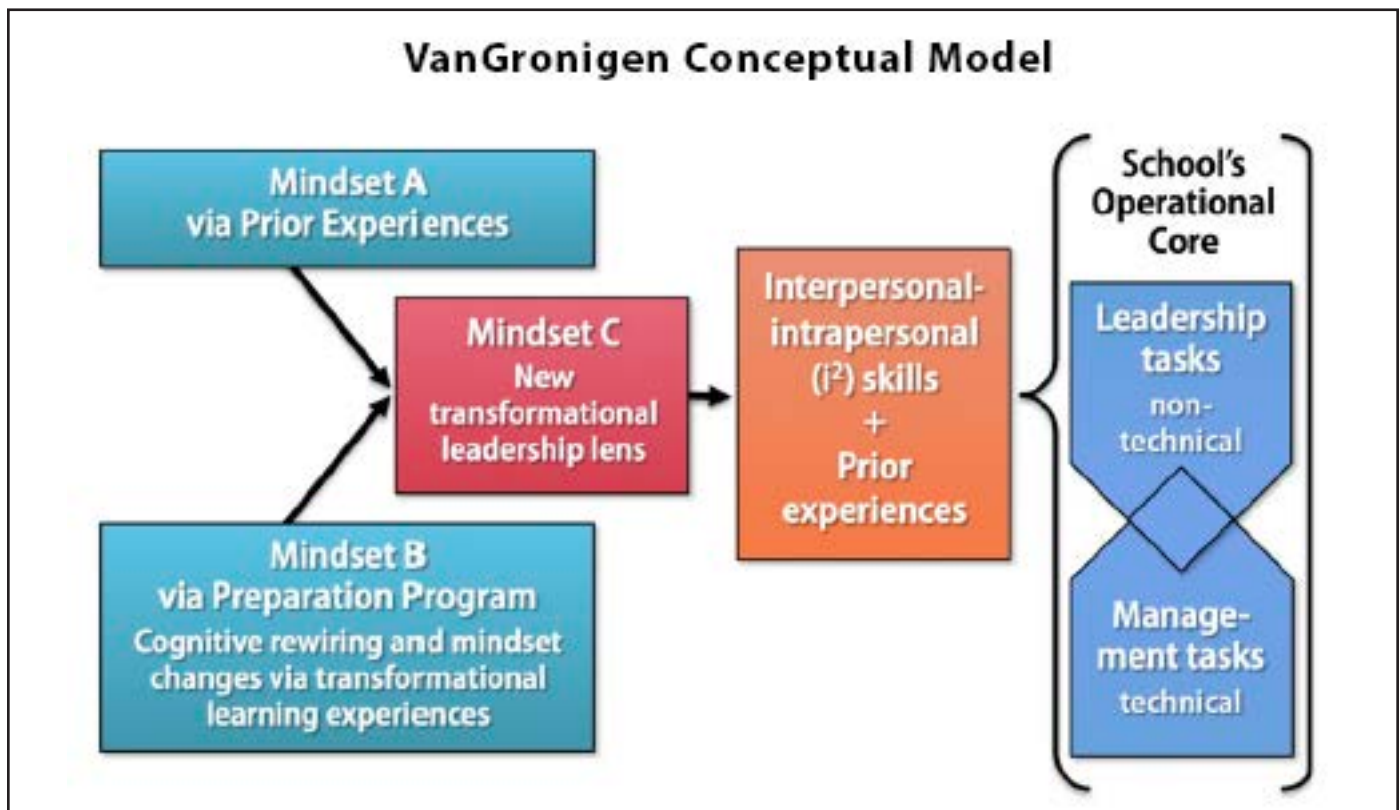

Figure 1. Conceptual model demonstrating the mindset shift of educational leadership preparation program candidates from initial enrollment (Mindset A) to future practice within an educational context.

candidates toward developing a distinct set of i^2 skills through a process of transformational and powerful learning experiences. When used in concert with candidates' newly formed perspective (i.e., Mindset C), i^2 skills can then be leveraged and applied to the leadership and management dimensions of the profession.

The programs we studied desired to shift the core perspectives of their candidates, prioritized the development of candidates' i^2 skills, and provided practical and authentic field experiences that permitted candidates to engage with current problems of practice in schools' operational core. They accomplished this by (a) aligning their programs with a distinct purpose, goal, mission, vision, and/or theory of action (Mindset B); (b) involving candidates in ongoing transformational and powerful learning experiences that incorporated critical reflection and cycles of inquiry, including purposeful community building and networking opportunities within cohorts and between candidates and partner school districts; and (c) engaging candidates in authentic field experiences (Cunningham et al., 2018; Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1997; Young, 2015).

However, our study examined a small slice of the leadership preparation program landscape and that slice was distinctive in that it comprised five programs recognized for the strength of their practices. A next step, and one we recommend, is to conduct research with graduates from EELP Award-winning programs who are applying in their educational contexts what they learned in their programs. Our proposed conceptual model needs to be examined and tested in the field. Potential studies could examine (a) how much candidates' mindsets shifted from Mindset A to Mindset C, (b) the extent to which and how Mindset C influences educational leader practice, or (c) the extent to which and *how* graduates use i^2 skills to accomplish leadership and management tasks. This additional research—exploring how graduates apply what they learned in their leadership preparation programs—will provide valuable insight into practice along with outcome data for programs to use for self-assessment and improvement.

Leadership preparation matters. Over the past two decades, scholars have built a significant base of knowledge on the development of educational leaders (Young & Crow, 2016). This study contributes to that knowledge base and initiates a new strand of questions about transformational and powerful learning experiences and their influence on candidate learning, thinking, and practice. The recently released 2018 National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Standards require educational leadership preparation programs to build the skills and capacities candidates need to both *manage* and *lead* organizations (NPBEA, 2018). Consequently, we feel this research is especially timely and our results may have implications for how programs design learning experiences that build candidate capacity to address the managerial, instructional, and inclusive-facilitative dimensions of 21st century educational leadership.

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