Commentary: UCEA CASTLE Response to "An Interview With Joseph South"

Scott McLeod
University of Colorado Denver

Jayson W. Richardson
San Diego State University

The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) was founded more than six decades ago to build a knowledge base of research and effective practice for the field of educational leadership. UCEA is a collective of approximately 100 top research institutions with programs in educational leadership and policy and is the leading professional organization for professors in the field. In addition to promoting, sponsoring, and disseminating research on the essential problems of schooling and leadership practice, UCEA also works to positively influence local, state, and national educational policy and to improve the preparation and professional development of educational leaders and professors. The Center for the Advanced Study of Technology Leadership in Education (CASTLE) is one of UCEA's nine national program centers. CASTLE was founded in 2005 and remains the nation's only academic center dedicated to the technology-related needs of school principals and superintendents.

Dr. Scott McLeod is the founding director of CASTLE and is the recipient of numerous national and international awards for his work on digital leadership issues, including the 2016 International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Outstanding Leadership Award. Dr. Jayson W. Richardson is a director of CASTLE and also serves as UCEA's associate director of program centers.

The following questions were posed to us by by members of Working Group E of the Jefferson Education Accelerator initiative on the Efficacy of Educational Technology Research, including J. Michael Spector, Kay Persichitte, Ellen Meier, Glen Bull, and Joseph South.

Question:

In what ways do educational leadership programs currently prepare future principals and superintendents to make appropriate selections of technologies currently available? In what ways do educational leadership programs currently prepare school administrators to help make selections of technologies not yet created and evaluate the impact on learning in their classrooms?

Response:

As a whole, the scholarly literature on digital leadership concerns – including empirical research articles, refereed conference presentations, and dissertations – is rather sparse (McLeod & Richardson, 2011). For instance, the most recent literature review (Dexter, Richardson, & Nash, 2016) uncovered only 83 empirical, peer-reviewed articles on school technology leadership published between 1998 and 2015, an average of less than five per year over the 17-year span. Most of those articles pertained to digital leadership issues in the P-12 realm rather than at the postsecondary level. Accordingly, our empirical knowledge of university-level administrator preparation in the area of digital leadership remains scant (see also McLeod & Richardson, 2014).

Our sense from working in this area for over a decade is that most university educational leadership preparation programs are struggling to address in their curricula and instruction the technological changes that are transforming society and the schools we serve. The number of educational leadership faculty members who have placed technology-related concerns at the forefront of their scholarly work may be fewer than a dozen. Since approximately 600 programs across the United States – and numerous more internationally – prepare principals, heads of school, central office administrators, and superintendents, most of these programs, thus, either lack the faculty to develop and teach coursework in this area or, perhaps, are hiring a local education practitioner as an adjunct faculty member to teach a course or two. To our knowledge, no one has done a recent assessment of educational leadership programs' curricular coverage of technology leadership issues.

Over the past half century, the field of education has witnessed a critical shift in both scholarly and practitioner perceptions of school administrators. Rather than being viewed as mere managers of their school organizations, school administrators now are expected to first and foremost be instructional leaders. Facilitating the adoption and effective implementation of learning technologies falls squarely within these instructional leadership expectations, particularly given the rapid expansion of digital devices and environments in P-12 classrooms. Currently, however, few educational leadership preparation programs have the internal capacity to help school administrators work in concert with teachers and information technology (IT) support staff to select existing or prospective learning technologies or to evaluate the impact of those technologies on learning.

In addition to the technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) and other resources from our instructional technology faculty colleagues, two recent leadership-focused resources that may be of assistance with this work include the online ETIPS school technology leadership cases created by Dexter, Harris, and Gibson (2017) and the TRUDACOT instructional discussion and redesign protocol (McLeod, 2015), both of which are intended to help school leaders assess and improve their organizational and instructional technology-related decision-making.

Question:

How do educational leadership programs prepare future school leaders (i.e., principals and superintendents) to evaluate technological products or services for district-wide adoption?

Response:

Given the present circumstances, we believe that few educational leadership programs are preparing future school leaders who know how to effectively evaluate technological products or services. Most principals and superintendents, thus, are learning on the job. The primary mechanisms that school administrators employ to evaluate technological products and services include (a) delegating this responsibility to building- and district-level IT support staff, who may or may not have educational backgrounds; (b) creating teams of classroom educators, instructional technologists, and IT support personnel and then deferring to their judgment; and (c) allowing teachers to make individual, independent decisions about technology implementation within their classrooms. Some school leaders who are utilizing digital platforms to connect with fellow educators in informal professional learning networks also may be asking role-alike peers about product-specific successes, challenges, perceptions, and other evaluation-related concerns.

Question:

How do educational leadership programs currently prepare future teachers and school leaders to appropriately interpret evidence on the efficacy of technology use?

Response:

While many educational leadership program faculty members likely have the methodological expertise and experience to effectively interpret evidence on the efficacy of school technology deployments, we believe that few faculty members or programs actually are doing so. We note again that few educational leadership scholars have made technology a focus of their work.

Evaluation of technology efficacy and usage is a critical concern for most school organizations. Principals and superintendents usually struggle to explain to their parents, school boards, and communities the return on investment of their technology deployments, particularly for large-scale 1:1 initiatives in which every student is given a personal learning device such as a laptop or tablet computer. Most educational leadership faculty and programs are conducting their research and evaluation efforts in other school domains. Accordingly, if any technology-related data collection and analysis occurs at all, in most schools those activities either are done internally or through a vendor-provided solution. In both cases, that work may or may not be methodologically sound. Faculty assistance in this area could be extremely beneficial to schools and districts.

Question:

What is your vision for the future as schools of education adapt to a rapidly-changing technological environment? In what ways do you feel schools of education will need to change to adapt to the rapidly-changing technological environment?

Response:

In a 2011 call to action for educational leadership programs, we noted how rapidly digital technologies were transforming the information landscape, the economy, and learning. We went on to state as follows:

On the research front, the attention that we pay to technology-related leadership issues is nearly nonexistent. The presence of (and attendance at) technology-themed presentations at our most important conferences is scant at best. Even worse, the prevalence of technology-oriented topics in our most-cited journals is virtually nil (McLeod & Richardson; 2011). Accordingly, we have little to no scholarly knowledge about what it means to be an effective school technology leader.

On the policy analysis and advocacy fronts, few of us are familiar with the federal and state policies that impact school technology funding, implementation, and integration. Even fewer of us are serving as advocates in this area or conducting analyses that could inform legislators and other policymakers. As such, our nation's laws and policies regarding school technology continue to be informed primarily by corporate vendors, fearmongers, and a bevy of other self-interested parties.

On the teaching front, only a handful of the nearly 600 educational leadership programs in America are even attempting to provide meaningful, substantive preparation of technology-knowledgeable school leaders. Many of the rest have no coursework at all in this area or, what may be even worse, have a single course that often is dedicated to tools rather than instructional and organizational leadership issues. This would be fine if technology-related topics were substantially integrated into other courses, but they usually aren't (Schrum, Galizio, & Ledesma, 2011). As a result, our conversations about what it means to be an 'instructional leader' ignore the powerful learning revolutions that are occurring all around us. And, of course, few of us are preparing the next generation of educational leadership faculty to be knowledgeable and proficient in this important area of school leadership.

On the service, outreach, and professional development fronts, few of us are facilitating and enhancing existing school leaders' knowledge, skills, and understanding in the area of digital technologies. Not many of us are working hand-in-hand with school systems to create relevant and powerful digital learning experiences for students, nor are we assisting them with the organizational adoption of communication, management, analytical, and other technologies. The resultant impact is that we're often seen as largely irrelevant by practicing administrators who are desperate for help as they scramble to adjust themselves and their institutions to the realities of a technology-suffused, globally-interconnected age. (McLeod, 2011, pp. 3-4)

Six years later, these concerns remain applicable for most educational leadership programs. We will leave it to our faculty colleagues to determine whether these concerns remain relevant for their individual teacher education programs and schools of education. Our vision is that one day these concerns will begin to vanish as we become more proactive, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of students, educators, and society.

Question:

What are we missing? What else should we be considering as we develop recommendations for building capacity in schools of education for effective preparation of teachers and school leaders?

Response:

In an earlier work we attempted to make a critical distinction for our educational leadership faculty colleagues. We noted three key faculty intersections of technology and school leadership: (a) using digital technologies to teach traditional educational leadership content; (b) training school administrators to better use digital technologies; and (c) preparing school administrators to be better technology leaders (McLeod, Bathon, & Richardson, 2011). For the first intersection, the technology emphasis for faculty is on the transformation of delivery, not the transformation of content (e.g., moving traditional educational leadership courses online). For the second intersection, the technology emphasis for faculty is on course content rather than course delivery, but the content focus is on digital productivity and communication tools (e.g., acquainting preservice principal licensure students with technologies such as spreadsheets or Twitter with the goal of future usage by those administrators).

In contrast, the third intersection also is concerned with course content rather than course delivery, but the content focus for faculty is on leadership capacities rather than tools. As we said at the time,

The tools are the low-hanging fruit; we must extend ourselves further to accomplish the more difficult work of preparing school leaders who understand what it means to transform student learning environments in ways that are technologically-rich, -meaningful, and -powerful. . . . While it is appropriate and desirable to transform the technology tool usage of both our students and ourselves as faculty, neither of those specifically target one of the most critical educational issues of our time: *the need to create and facilitate learning environments for P-12 students that prepare them for the digital, global world in which we now live.* (pp. 292-293; emphasis added)

Looking at the other commentaries in this series, we see significant parallels between teacher education and preservice administrator preparation. We believe that this third concern presents the largest challenge to administrator preparation programs, teacher education programs, and schools of education: in a rapidly changing world the question of relevance emerges quickly to the forefront. As P-12 schools begin shifting their learning environments toward deeper learning, greater student agency, more authentic work, and richer technology infusion in an attempt to be more responsive to societal and workforce needs, schools of education must not only catch up but lead the way.

Facing head-on as postsecondary faculty this challenge of relevance to schools' work and students' life readiness will require a willingness to address institutional inertia, outdated curricula, our lack of technological familiarity and fluency, the fears and control needs of both ourselves and university administrators, our lack of understanding regarding learning possibilities, and most importantly, our lack of vision for what learning, teaching, and schooling could be instead.

For educational leadership faculty, we will return full circle to the recent digital leadership literature review noted at the beginning of this commentary. Dexter et al. (2016) utilized Hitt and Tucker's (2016) unified model of effective leadership practices to organize their analysis around the five broad leadership domains of (a) establishing vision; (b) facilitating student learning; (c) building professional capacity; (d) supporting the organization; and (e) partnering with external stakeholders. Within these five domains, they also summarized critical literature gaps and key research needs and concluded with recommendations for leadership preparation and other faculty action. In other words, the review provides educational leadership faculty with numerous concrete steps that we can take to enhance the depth and breadth of our technology-related teaching and scholarship. If we choose to advance along these fronts, we can expand our work in new directions and

make immediately impactful contributions to both our preservice students and the schools and administrators we serve.

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