

# Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development

The Journal of the California Association  
of Professors of Educational Administration

Volume 9, 1997

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## Dedication

This 1997 issue of  
*Educational Leadership and Administration:*  
*Teaching and Program Development*  
is dedicated to the memory of

**Jim Parker**  
*California State University, Dominguez Hills*

Jim was President of CAPEA in 1992-1993 and we miss him.

assessment center results, again, provide the individuals with comparative data but, this time, opportunity to see their scores alongside those achieved by established, seasoned professionals.

The preliminary outcome of the study includes parallel observations that (a) any relationships between individual course performance and assessment center skills appear artifactual, but that (b) knowledge and skill in overall course work and assessment center results are related. If, differently, the candidates' course work are very poor predictors of skill mastery, course by course, skill by skill. But, higher test scores on all courses is a good predictor of better skill mastery in the assessment center. If, indeed, the assessment center simulations parallel the job experience, accumulated knowledge from courses appears to be the best predictor of administrative success.

The results reflect an orthogonal relationship between course content and skill application. Academic understanding, therefore, does not automatically translate into high job performance. Accordingly, the university faculty may desire to place greater emphasis on job related content in the curriculum while simultaneously encouraging increased accumulative knowledge of those completing both programs.

The pilot study provides excellent feedback to individuals on both knowledge-based test and assessment center results. While relationships between the accumulative knowledge from both credentials and assessment center results were significant, the Professional Administrative Credential program has a greater relation to direct job application indicated in assessment center results than does the Preliminary Credential. Since the Professional Credential builds upon accumulative knowledge obtained in the Preliminary Credential, this finding should not be surprising. The study supports the importance of accumulative knowledge as well as skill application. By blending the CTC requirement of course work and professional development activities, the individuals are given an excellent opportunity to tailor the IIP to specified needs.

The study does underscore both the importance of the recent revisions made by CTC to the advanced credential and the need for the ability to continue carefully assessing the professional capabilities of the candidates at the beginning of the final phase of university work. With the study results, the faculty has additional information to assist candidates in entry level positions.

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## A Constructivist Approach to the Authentic Assessment of Educational Leadership Students

Jose A. Lopez

California State University, Hayward

& Marianne Camp

Hayward Unified School District

### Introduction

The notions of constructivist learning and authentic assessment are the underlying concepts in the California State University Hayward (CSUH) Educational Leadership preparation programs. In the spring of 1995, we began to implement a revised assessment system with one group of students. This student authentic assessment system incorporated characteristics of constructivist learning both in its intent and design.

The concepts of constructivism and authentic assessment, when applied to the measurement of leadership capacity, are fraught with challenges. Educational leadership programs seek to prepare individuals to lead America's schools in ways we have yet to agree upon. The answer may lie in the marriage of these two important concepts.

The assessment of students in preparation programs for educational leadership should incorporate the principles of constructivist learning. When learning is viewed as an internal process, students create meaning of their experiences.

Many authors of educational reform speak of the importance of



creating a shared sense of meaning. Sergiovanni (1992) describes "leadership through purposing" (p. 72) as an approach that provides meaning and sense. Participants in successful school improvement efforts engage in reflective practices that lead to constructing their own meaning of their situations. This new-found meaning provides the basis for improved decision making which influences the practice of the school's personnel. Deal and Peterson (1990) further emphasize the importance of leadership in "identifying the link between values and purposes in local schools..." (p. 88). Lee states that, "...sense making is the meanings or interpretations individuals attach to their experiences [that are]... developed in social contexts through social mechanisms, such as various forms of communication and interaction" (p. 85).

## Constructivist Learning

Lambert (1995, p. 17) provides several principles of constructivist learning that support its application to the assessment of educational leadership students:

- ◆ Knowledge and beliefs are formed within the learner.
- ◆ Learners personally imbue experiences with meaning.
- ◆ Learning is a social activity which is enhanced by shared inquiry. Learners play a critical role in assessing their own learning.
- ◆ The outcomes of the learning process are varied and often unpredictable.

Walker and Lambert (1995) state that constructivist learning is "based on assumptions from community of learners theory, students construct meaning from personal values, beliefs, and experiences. The development of personal schemas and the ability to reflect on one's experiences are key theoretical principles" (p. 9).

## Authentic Assessment

Traditional methods of assessment of student learning are not sufficient to address the purposes and outcomes successfully. Barnett (1995) examined discussions of current assessment practices in educational leadership. He found that the common proposition is the inclusion of dynamic displays, or visible exhibitions of student performance. Authentic methods of assessment, as proposed by Wiggins (1992) and others for K-12 schools, can serve as guideposts for students of educational leadership. Barnett (1995) defines authentic assessment as, "attempts to capture what is learned during experiential activity...as ways to ascertain how people behave in a real-life or simulated learning situation" (p. 199).

The more traditional methods of assessment, such as numerical or letter marks or student written work, do not result in multiple forms of evidence to determine mastery of important leadership competencies. What is more important is that such measures do not allow for students to make sense of or develop meaning of the assessment because they are externally developed.

## Authentic Assessment Based on Constructivist Principles

We must examine the effectiveness of our present assessment processes to allow students to develop their own meanings of leadership. We should develop student assessment systems based on constructivist principles that produce personal significance and utilize authentic performance measures. CSUH includes the following components in this effort:

*Student Self and Peer Assessment*—The outcomes of such an assessment would result in students:

1. Understanding their learning processes better;
2. Identifying professional strengths, values, and behaviors;
3. Identifying areas of professional development needs;
4. Receiving feedback; and
5. Being given an opportunity to synthesize learning.

*Evidence of Achievement*—A constructivist authentic assessment system should include evidence that would be used to:

1. Determine degree of mastery of body of learning;
2. Demonstrate competence (performance-based);
3. Provide documentation of addressing program competencies;
4. Give evidence of proficiency;
5. Provide opportunity to synthesize learning;
6. Give feedback to student and teacher; and
7. Determine whether outcomes and values of program have been achieved.

One cohort of CSUH educational leadership credential candidates each year has organized itself into teams, each of which worked to develop its unique assessment system. Students grouped themselves in different ways. Some groups based their membership on geographic proximity of their communities. Others formed group according to the districts where they worked. Students were free to select the individuals with whom they wanted to work. The only limit in the formation of groups was a size limit between four and five members.

The assignment called for the creation of a system of assessment to be implemented in a day-long activity by the end of the spring quarter.

Practicing administrators and other faculty members subsequently participated in the summative exercise.

Students in the educational leadership program are organized into cohorts. Each cohort remains together for a sequence of three quarterly courses with one university instructor. The culminating activity for the cohort was the implementation of the assessment system students developed. This effort is now in its fourth year.

Students received instructions to include the following in their assessment systems:

*Purpose*—Students were to list specific purposes of the assessment activities based in part, on literature they read on authentic assessment practices. In addition, a group of students made a presentation to the class on alternative assessment approaches.

*Description of Components*—Students were to describe what would occur during the assessment. Students received examples of possibilities including: exhibitions, portfolios, interviews, in-basket scenarios, and writing exercises.

*Criteria for Assessment*—Students were to provide all criteria that would be used in the process of assessment. Students received examples of the criteria used to evaluate leadership that included: the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing competencies (1995), the National Policy Board for Education Administration (NPBEA) competency domains (1993), and the Educational Leadership Profile of the Department of Educational Leadership (1996).

*Process*—Students were to describe the sequence of activities in their assessment systems. These were to be followed during the final assessment activity.

*Evaluation*—Students were to describe how their performances and knowledge were to be evaluated and the documentation to be used. Portfolios formed a part of the assessment process. Students determined the specific format and contents of their portfolios. Each team provided required documentation of student mastery.

*Products*: Students provided a list of products that the instructor was to receive upon the conclusion of the assessment activity. These included: portfolios and rubrics with evaluative criteria, interview questions, in-basket scenarios, and other evaluation instruments.

## The Development of an Educational Leadership Assessment System

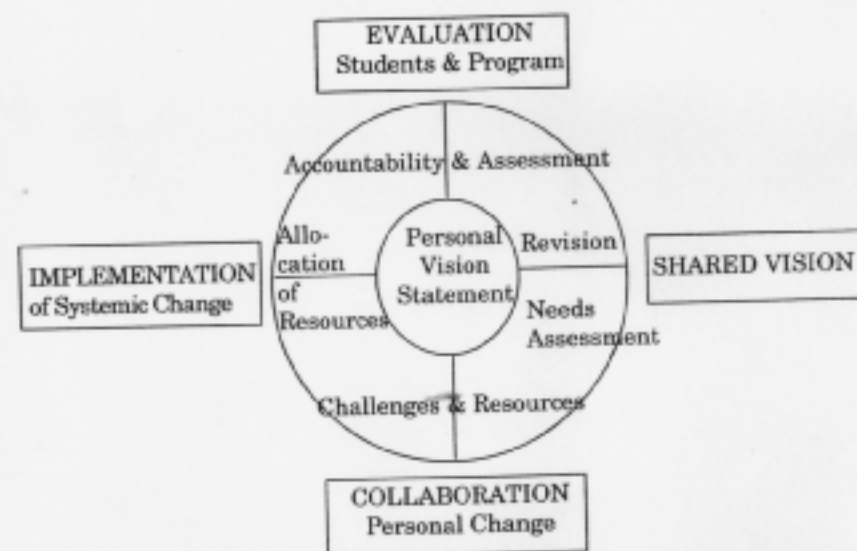
The following illustrates the results of the development process that

was used and provides encouragement for continued use of constructivist approaches. The student recounts the experience of developing and implementing the system that she and three others created.

Initial discussions were intense as everyone tried to collectively make sense of shared learning experiences over the year. There were four in the group. We had spent the year together learning about bold, socially responsible leadership. The purpose was clear. The team now needed to create an assessment system that reflected its collective learning and was to be used to evaluate oneself and each other.

It began by creating a visual that would include components of what we agreed were essential to educational reform. We called it a "Leadership Skills Mandala," using the circle to illustrate the cyclical nature of change (see Figure 1).

Figure 1  
Leadership Skills Mandala



At the core is the "personal vision," a statement of one's individual beliefs and commitments about students, learning, and educational reform. Intense debates ensued over the differences between a mission and vision. Through that debate we clarified our thinking not only about the language but what is more important about what the team's values. The discussion took place over several meetings, trying to get consensus

on what seemed like a small part of the whole. We began to get anxious about the amount of time elapsed as the deadline drew near. Each agreed to write their *personal* vision and that became the first page of the personal portfolio. We then quickly came to agreement on the other components of educational reform; shared vision, collaboration, implementation, and evaluation. The internal parts of the mandala also fell quickly into place as steps needed to accomplish each reform component.

In retrospect, the amount of time at the beginning of the process was extremely valuable. We were able to build a framework with the Mandala that gave a structure to the process. The in-depth discussions gave both collective and individual meanings to the components. Once the Mandala was in place to use as the framework, the team was able to create individual portfolios, each adding their own physical evidence reflecting one's individual leadership experiences over the year.

There was a commitment to make the assessment a "real world" experience. We created a situation similar to applying for an administrative position as a leader in a school or district committed to educational reform. Besides the portfolio, we developed a list of interview questions that could be asked in an interview for an administrative position that required "bold, socially responsible leadership." The questions reflected the components of the mandala; beginning with a question regarding a personal vision as an educational leader. Other questions included how to create a shared vision, shared participation, commitment and responsibility, issues around change and implementation, assessment and accountability.

Discussions about which questions to ask and how to word them clarified what we valued. We realized in discussions what we truly valued had to be assessed. In the year-long program, the issue of diversity was the backdrop for everything we had learned. As a result, we added an interview question to address the issue of diversity even though it was not part of the Mandala.

The team realized it could not have questions without a criterion with which to assess the responses. It was with this understanding that we developed a rubric to use as criteria for each interview question (see Figure 2). This was when the assessment tool consciously became a learning tool. What did we value in a vision statement? What are the essential elements of systemic change? What does collaboration look like? What does diversity mean to us? It was in coming to agreement about these and similar questions that our theory became cemented by practice. Collaboration, as we experienced it, was what we needed to do to complete this assignment. Our definition of diversity was the team members, diverse in gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation,

united by a common purpose. The program evaluation rubric (see Figure 2) defined the skills we were using in the process of developing the assessment system. Theory became practice in each step.

**Figure 2**  
**Sample Interview Question Rubric**

	Personal Mission	Steps To Create Schoolwide Mission	Empowering Learning Community
1.	Response is strongly student centered. Belief that all children can learn is articulately stated. Celebrates diversity. Articulates multiple elements of collaboration. Articulates high expectations of self, students, parents and staff.	Collaboration is integrated and articulated as part of every step. Creates emotionally safe environment. Defines shared values. Mutual respect is part of the culture. Defines learning community including all stakeholders.	Provides for a system of shared governance and decision making that includes staff, students, parents and community. Provides learning opportunities that focus on best practices. Ensures equal access to information. Creates extensive time for collaboration. Encourage taking risks to improve student learning. Create a structure that provides positive recognition from a variety of sources.
2.	Response is student centered. Belief that all children can learn is stated. Appreciates diversity. Articulates some elements of collaboration. Articulates need for high expectations.	Collaboration is integrated and articulated. Safe environment. Defines shared values. Mutual respect is part of the culture. Defines learning community.	Provides for a system of shared governance. Provide learning opportunities that include best practices. Ensures access to information. Time for collaboration. Safe to take risks to improve student learning. Create a structure that provides positive recognition.

(Figure 2 continued on next page)

Figure 2 Continued

	Personal Mission	Steps To Create Schoolwide Mission	Empowering Learning Community
3.	Response discusses students. Belief that all children can learn is stated. Acknowledges diversity. Articulates few elements of collaboration. Expectations are vague.	Discusses role of collaboration, school culture and environment, shared values and learning community.	Includes some decision making by staff. Provide staff development. Attempts are made to share information. Time for collaboration is sporadic and/or not part of contract day. Principal provides some positive recognition.
4.	Students are minimally mentioned as part of the vision. Maintains some forms of tracking. Minimally addresses diversity. Uses top down management. Has different expectations for different groups of people.	Minimally discusses role of collaboration, school culture and environment, shared values and of learning community.	Minimal decision making by staff. Minimal staff development, information sharing, collaboration time, or recognition of efforts.

On the assessment day, the culminating activity was to implement the assessment system we developed. The performance assessment would include applying for a job that involved each presenting their portfolios, visions and responding to the "interview" questions. The team developed a rubric evaluation form to receive comments from faculty from the Department of Educational Leadership and each other.

When we finished each had experienced a performance assessment with clearly articulated criteria that we had created. We not only felt successful, but were committed to helping create similar experiences for students in the schools in which we would eventually work.

## Evaluation of Student Assessment Systems

The evaluation of the student-developed leadership assessment systems was a multifaceted effort. Students initially evaluated their work while in development. Teams spend over six hours of class time but countless more hours between class sessions. The instructor reviewed draft plans in several areas. This included analyzing the teams' proposed purposes, activities and assessment instruments. The instructor would challenge underlying assumptions of purposes and effectiveness of activities to assess leadership domains. Student teams also presented their work to each other for critique and comments. The data received was used to create final plans.

Assessing the effectiveness of each plan involved student team members and outside evaluators. All systems included peer assessment with written and verbal feedback. Practicing administrators and faculty of the Department of Educational Administration also participated in the assessment activities. They assumed evaluators' roles in the process of implementing the teams' plans. Along with student team members, they provided written and verbal feedback to the individual students and overall comments of the system.

## Challenges and Findings

Apparent in the description provided by this group is that the constructivist process that students followed resulted in an assessment with significant meaning for them. In addition, the criteria they developed not only reflected their own perspectives but they also imbedded the California state competencies and the domains of national organizations. This is significant because they made no conscious effort to incorporate these into their "Mandala."

An important ingredient in the CSUH Educational Leadership program is the alignment of student experiences with the core values of the department: democratic collaboration, equity/diversity, critical inquiry, continuous improvement, and bold, socially-responsible leadership. The assessment system presented in the foregoing description clearly bridges the experiences of the students with the core values.

The assessment system describes how students were able to make meaning of their learning opportunities and apply that learning both collectively and individually. The constructivist approach challenged students to identify their own professional strengths, values, and behaviors.



Challenges remain to be explored and issues still exist. Some competencies are more easy to "measure" in this type of system. The examination of values and beliefs are evident but what is less rigorous is their measurement of application in a school setting. For example, the "instructional leadership" competency was displayed through having students verbalize their knowledge by answering questions. This approach did not result in evidence of ability to apply the knowledge. Students did document experiences during their fieldwork and internship as evidence of application, but even this does not speak to the quality of the experiences.

Another issue to be resolved in the future is that students focused on competencies of importance to team members. Other areas were not assessed or were examined only marginally. The degree of importance of all competencies in the educational leadership field comes into question.

While these examples speak to apparent shortcomings of the assessment processes used, they do not speak to the any inherent weaknesses in using a constructivist approach. On the contrary, it seems evident that this approach proved to be successful in having students develop meaning and purpose of the assessment process.

The results of these experiences point to preliminary conclusions about the assessment of students of educational leadership:

1. Constructivist learning should play a part in the development of some aspects of the system of assessment;
2. Multiple approaches are needed in addition to student-developed systems;
3. Opportunities for application of competencies in authentic settings is critical; and
4. Measures of quality of learning should be developed to assess experiences.

The assessment of educational leadership capacity is not an easy task. Such an assessment is not a terminal activity to be put into a portfolio and forgotten. Using principles of constructivist theory and authentic assessment approaches can serve to improve the process. Students engaged in developing the means to assess their leadership abilities learn reflective practices, "sense making," and other techniques that can become lifelong skills. Students engaged in these approaches learn to collaborate and refine their own values, and belief systems. The benefits of the marriage between constructivist principles and authentic assessment approaches provide promise in measuring educational leadership capacity.

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