

Prospective School Leaders' Educational Platform: A Reflection Prior To Action Tool

Martha N. Ovando

Department of Educational Administration

The University of Texas at Austin

Sanchez Building # 374

Austin, Texas 78712

movando@mail.utexas.edu

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ABSTRACT: Previous research suggests that reflection is essential to professional leadership practice. It is not uncommon to read titles such as “the reflective leader,” “the reflective practitioner,” “the reflective principal” and the like. Similarly, it has been recognized that thinking about or pondering an ideal may lead to enhanced educational practice (Kuhn, 1991; Oesterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schön, 1987). While reflection-on action, enhanced reflection and guided reflection are powerful ways to enhance professional practice, little is known about the potential of “reflection prior to action” as a vehicle for leadership development.

Reported here are the results of an action research study. This study attempted to determine the importance of thinking about one’s educational values and beliefs and developing an educational platform before entering school leadership practice. Following qualitative research guidelines, data was collected using participants “written words” (Sprinthall, Schmutte & Sirios, 1991) in response to open-ended questions. A total of 35 graduate students enrolled in an administration preparation program participated in the study. Results suggest that writing an educational platform is very important because it promotes reflection prior to action, it helps during the transition from teacher to school leader, it has several professional uses, and it enhances self-awareness and value clarification.

Prospective School Leaders' Educational Platform: A Reflection

Prior To Action Tool

Introduction

The challenges of the new millennium and the increased accountability demands require a different kind of leadership that will enable school leaders to serve students better. While institutions of higher strive to equip school leaders with the theoretical knowledge and technical understanding necessary to ensure that all students are successful, researchers affirm that leadership development tends to be shaped by a set of “beliefs, opinion, values, and attitudes which provide a foundation of practice” (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 1998, p. 133), in addition to administration knowledge and skills. The set of personal educational values and beliefs has become to be known as an educational platform (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 1998). Most school personnel, including school leaders, may possess an educational platform which guides their actions and decision making, however, , it may not necessarily be explicit and known to others. Therefore, those aspiring to become school leaders may benefit from writing their own educational platform early on as they prepare for the rigor of school leadership practice. Further, early awareness of one’s own educational platform is necessary not only for school leaders but also for teachers. As Sergiovanni and Starrat affirm, “Unless teachers and supervisors uncover their platforms, they will not establish a base of mutual understanding that is necessary to ground their collaborative efforts” (2001, p. 70).

Therefore, aspiring school leaders need to develop their educational platform and engage in what, for the purpose of this paper, is coined as “reflection prior action” efforts. The literature suggests that essential to leadership practice is reflection. It is not uncommon anymore to read titles such as “the reflective leader,” “the reflective practitioner,” “the reflective principal,” “the reflective professional,” and the like. Similarly, researchers have recognized that thinking about or pondering an ideal, issue, or problem may lead to enhanced educational

practice (Kuhn, 1991, Oesterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schön, 1987, Schön, 1983). While Schön (1983, 1987, 1988) advanced two ways in which reflection can be accomplished-- reflection-in- action and reflection-on-action-- others affirm that “enhanced reflection” may also contribute to better practice (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997; Airasian & Gullickson, 1995; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Shulman, 1987). However, few studies have focused on the potential of “reflection prior to action” as a developmental vehicle for the preparation of aspiring school principals.

This paper presents the results of an action research study which required that prospective school principals develop their educational platform, think about their educational values and beliefs and share them with their peers. It reports the perceptions of prospective school leaders relative to the importance of developing their own educational platform before entering the world of leadership practice, and its potential uses. It also notes lessons learned as a result of engaging in “reflection prior to action” using one’s educational platform. Finally, implications for leadership preparation programs are highlighted.

Background

Educational leadership has changed and evolved through the years as a result of dramatic changes in the external environment. School leaders face more complex and demanding challenges to educate all children. As a result, performing the role of the school leader at the campus level requires more than effective leadership practices. As De Pree affirmed, “Leadership is much more of an art, a belief, a condition of the heart, than a set of things to do. The visible signs of artful leadership are expressed ultimately in its practice” (1989, p. 11).

Furthermore, according to Tirozzi, these challenges may “include changing demographics, schools and curricula that are inappropriately designed for today’s adolescents,

principals trained to be managers rather than instructional leaders, and dramatic shortage of qualified candidates willing to take on the principalship” (2001, p. 435). Similarly, Houston (2001) asserts that the expectations for today’s school leaders are inappropriate and that the current preparation programs are inadequate. Houston further observes that “preparation programs for the next generation of leaders must involve a constant dance between doing the work and thinking about it” (2001, p. 432).

Thus, it seems imperative to search for ways in which aspiring principals begin to think about what it really means to be a school leader while they are engaged in school leadership preparation programs. Prospective school leaders need to embrace a proactive thinking mentality as they acquire the leadership knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to function as visionary instructional leaders. For instance, aspiring school leaders may engage in the development of their educational platforms as a way to visualize their educational values and beliefs and what these mean prior to entering the field of school leadership practice.

Educational Platform

A platform can be defined as a declaration of the principles on which a person or a group of persons stands. It generally encompasses strongly held beliefs of an individual which guide his or her actions. According to Sergiovanni & Starrat, an educational platform “is made up of those basic assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and values that are underpinnings of an educator’s behavior” (2001, p. 84). They also affirm that “just as a political party is supposed to base its decisions and actions on a party platform, so too educators carry on their work, make decisions, and plan instruction based on their educational platform” (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2001, p. 70). Therefore, it is apparent that not only professional educators, including school leaders, but also those preparing for school leadership at the campus level may benefit from platform definition and clarification efforts.

An educational platform may include the aims of education, views of knowledge, the social significance of student's learning, the image of the learner, the image of the curriculum, the image of the teacher, the preferred pedagogy, and the preferred school climate (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2001, pp. 78-79). While these may serve as a starting point, prospective school leaders may also want to include their preferred leadership style and process to work with teachers and other school community members or any other component that will serve as a foundation of their future leadership practice.

Developing an educational platform may contribute to developing the new kind school leadership needed to meet the many demands of the present century. Ferrandino points out that, "the principalship of the 21st century requires something more than a compendium of skills. It requires the ability to lead other and to stand for important ideas and values. It requires never losing sight of a vision" (2001, p. 440). In addition to elaborating their educational platform, aspiring school leaders must engage in platform sharing and clarification practices and develop the ability to reflect prior to their leadership practice. By reflecting early on in their preparation, school leadership students will "be proactive, not just reactive, when examining and evaluating their practice" (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997, p. 227).

Researchers and practitioners advocate reflective practices as a professional growth strategy for teachers and other education professionals. However, few have focused on reflection opportunities for prospective school leaders as they prepare for school leadership (Kottkamp, 1990). Most recently, preparation programs have reinforced the importance of reflection for the development of school leadership capacity. Thus, in an effort to take an integrating approach some programs have combined administrative theoretical knowledge, field-based experiences, and reflection, generating a three-dimensional foundation for the development of leadership capacity (Ovando, 2000). However, additional inquiry is needed to

document the true benefits of reflection before prospective school leaders actually begin their professional administrative practice.

Professional Reflection

Professional reflection constitutes a valued strategy for enhancing professional practice. Schön reported that, “when someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context” (1983, p. 68). Applying this construct to teaching, Schön (1987) also proposed educating the teacher as a reflective practitioner. Others affirm that “teachers must reflect on their practice in order to understand, critique, and modify it; reflection is a central process of constructing knowledge and developing professionally” (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997, p. 219).

Early studies of reflection-in-action found that “practitioners do frequently think about what they are doing while doing it. In professional practice, reflection-in-action is not a rare event. On the other hand, we have also seen how systems of knowing-in-practice may limit the scope and depth of reflection” (Shön, 1983, p. 275). Further, arguments stressing that reflection-in-action “interrupts any doing, any ordinary activities no matter what they happen to be. All thinking demands a stop-and-think....,” (Arendt as cited by Schön, 1983, p. 278) acknowledge the idea of reflection-on-action. According to Schön, such arguments tend to “admit the possibility of reflecting-on-action (even the pitcher who never ‘thinks’ during the game is happy to review films of the game in the privacy and safety of the locker room), but they point to the dangers of reflection-in-action” (1983, p. 278).

As a result, two forms of reflection--reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action--have received a great deal of attention from researchers and practitioners. Prior research suggests that these two forms of reflection have the potential to enhance professional educational practice. While both types of reflection call for thinking about an idea or an action, each one has distinctive characteristics. Reflection-in-action “focuses on the spontaneous and tacit reflection and decisions teachers make when they are engaged in the process of teaching” (Airasian &

Gullickson, 1997, p. 220). On the other hand, reflection-on-action “takes place out of the activity of practice; it is consideration of an action, belief, or effect divorced in time from the factors that prompted the need for reflection” (Airasian & Gullickson, 1997, p. 220). It, “involves a post hoc, conscious replay of an activity or event from practice” (1997, p. 22).

More recently, researchers report that other forms of reflection may also render successful results for improving educational practice. For instance, “enhanced reflection” has been found to be a promising vehicle to enhance teaching practice. According to Airasian & Gullicksons, enhanced reflection depends “upon formal information gathering to support and enhance reflection in the hope that it will stimulate teacher awareness, recall, reflection, self-evaluation and improvement (1997, p. 226). Further, others suggest that the following strategies were found to enhance teacher reflection: self-reflection tools, media recording and analysis, student feedback, teacher portfolios, student performance data, external peer observation, journalizing and collegial dialogue/experience sharing/joint problem solving. (Airasian & Gullickson, 1995).

Another form of reflection recently reported is known as “guided reflection.” Hole and McEntee explain that “the ordinary experiences of our teaching days are the essence of our practice. Using a guide to reflect on these experiences--either individually or with colleagues--is an entry to improving our teaching” (1999, p. 34). They further state that “cultivating deep reflection through the use of a guided protocol is an entry into rethinking and changing practice.” (1999, p. 36). More recently, Costa & Kallick found that the act of guided reflection provided opportunities for:

- * amplifying the meaning of one’s work through the insights of others;
- * applying meaning beyond the situation in which it was learned;
- * making a commitment to modifications, plans, and experimentation; and

* documenting learning and providing a rich base of shared knowledge. (Costa & Kallick, 2000, p. 60)

Researchers and practitioners have found that reflection may take several forms. However, it appears that most tend to emphasize either reflection-in-action or reflection-on-action concentrating on occurring teaching events or on previous practice rather than visualizing future practice.

The potential of reflection for school administration practice has also been recognized. The idea that reflection is a powerful tool for effective administration is widely accepted and promoted (Ashbaugh & Kasten, Hart, 1990; Houston, 2001, Moller, 1996; Polite & McClure, 1997, Stevenson, 1993). Similarly, others suggest that reflective practice may have implications for professional development of school administrators.

The implications of reflective practice, some argue, go beyond enhancing individual administrative professional practice. Supporting this notion, Osterman affirms that reflective practice enhances professional practice in several ways. It leads to greater self-awareness, to development of new knowledge about professional practice, and to a broader understanding of problems which confront practitioners. Because it enhances professional growth, and thereby responds to the needs of individual practitioners, it also influences the environment of the workplace in ways that support organizational change and effectiveness. (1990, p. 134).

Thus, it can be noted that reflective practice has implications not only for professional enhancement but also for effective administration and overall school effectiveness. According to Hart, “to become a more effective administrator through reflective practice, a person needs to use new knowledge and different sources of information, integrate this expanded knowledge

base, and translate the resulting self- and organizational awareness into action toward school improvement” (Hart, 1990, p. 153).

Furthermore, it is relevant to observe that learning to be a reflective professional administrator requires opportunities to develop the ability to do so. Consequently, preparation programs should design innovative theoretical and experiential learning strategies so that prospective school leaders develop the capacity for reflection. As Hart concluded, “by developing the habits of reflective practice, administrators can improve the quality of their choices and the range and scope of knowledge applied to the improvement of schools” (1990, 167).

The aforementioned discussion supports the notion that reflection may contribute to the improvement of teaching, school leadership and school effectiveness. However, we must realize that prospective school leaders need to develop the capacity to reflect before they actually engage in leadership actions. Therefore, students of school leadership need to engage in learning experiences to develop reflection skills so that they can adopt a proactive perspective in order to understand and clarify their educational values and beliefs associated with their future school leadership role. As Hart contends, “the habit of reflecting on what one knows before and while acting, improves the quality and creativity of choices and eventually contributes to the knowledge available in subsequent choices” (1990, 153).

Recently, researchers discovered that students of school leadership gain important insight about their philosophical foundation by engaging in platform development before entering administrative practice (Ovando, & Hutto, 1999). Thus, administration preparation programs should aim at encouraging “learners to make informed, thoughtful, and self-reflective judgments about their own practice” (Stevenson as cited by Taylor, 1995). However, “there is a genuine concern for the method (how can we do it?) and the outcome (what out to be?) of educational practice. Critically reflective inquiry in administrator preparation requires coming to terms with

the fundamental purpose and function of schooling and addresses the practical details of accomplishing goals” (Taylor, 1995, p. 65). Thus, there is a need to document further the importance and benefits of using prospective school leaders’ educational platform to achieve reflection prior to action for leadership development.

Methods and Data Sources

The purpose of this study was to determine the importance of developing an educational platform before entering the world of school leadership practice. This study focused on the following questions:

- 1) How important is it to write an educational platform? Why?
- 2) How can prospective school leaders use their educational platform?
- 3) What lessons do prospective school leaders learn from developing an educational platform?

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. Data sources included a review of the literature and participating administration graduate students’ “written words” (Sprinthall, Schmutte & Sirois, 1991, p. 102) in response to open-ended questions. The intent was to record participants’ perspectives without predetermining or influencing their perspectives (Patton, 1994). Data were collected over a period of two years. Data analysis required coding and sorting verbatim in order to “isolate patterns, processes, commonalties and differences; and to gradually elaborate a set of generalizations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 9). Thus, participant responses were analyzed inductively in order to develop generalizations about the phenomenon of study.

Following convenience sampling guidelines, two cohorts of prospective school leaders enrolled in a university based school leadership preparation program participated in the study. This convenience sample included a total of 35 graduate students. All participants were certified teachers, and their teaching experience ranged from two to 20 years. While they had varying

degrees of experience, they all had completed 12 credit hours of educational administration work in a preparation program at a major university. A majority of the respondents were female. Most of the participants were placed as administrative interns at elementary schools serving diverse student populations within an urban school district located in a central state.

Each participant had an opportunity to think about his/her educational beliefs and values and to write an educational platform in a speech format to be delivered at a Back to School night. Participants could follow the general guidelines and components of a platform as suggested by Sergiovanni & Starrat (1998). However, they had freedom to include only those components that they felt were most important. After writing the educational platform, participants shared it with their peers and discussed their differences and similarities. At the end of the process, participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions relative to the experience of writing an educational platform.

Findings

The focus of this study was on prospective school leaders' perceptions about the importance of developing an educational platform prior to leadership action. Participants' responses were clustered around the research questions, and emerging themes were identified as coding of the data progressed. The following section presents a summarized account of the study results.

Importance of Writing an Educational Platform

All the respondents agreed that thinking about and writing their educational values and beliefs as an educational platform is most important for their future as school leaders. Two main reasons supporting the importance of an educational platform emerged from the data.

Reflection. Respondents reported that thinking about their beliefs, and attitudes is important because it provided them a chance for reflection. They also see the educational

platform as an instrument or a tool to examine deliberately review their educational values. As a participant pointed out:

I found that writing the platform was beneficial for me in terms of providing me an opportunity to reflect on my beliefs. . . For me writing the educational platform from principalship point of view helped me to visualize and be able to articulate my hopes for teaching and learning.

Another noted:

It became extremely reflective for me to write my educational platform. I tried to steer clear gimmicks that are “hot words” for the current time and instead reflect on what I have done from the first year of teaching to present. I really thought about the changes I have made over the years and why I made those changes.

A third one said:

I can use it as a reflection tool to remind myself of what I once considered to be important. Additionally, it will help me understand my changing attitudes about some of the components by examining old copies of the platform and observing what has changed and systematically analyzing why my conceptualization has changed.

It appears that writing an educational platform is also important as teachers move from teaching to leading, and they can visualize their leadership roles. As a helping teacher stated:

It was very important. I am a helping teacher this year, so as I transition to a leadership role. I felt it was very important for me to articulate my values and beliefs about education because I need to reflect upon my actions. This really helped tie together my beliefs and action.

Another one said:

... I believe that, as future educational leaders, we need many opportunities to verbalize just what we believe. My educational platform reflects my belief in the importance of giving teachers opportunities to follow the child....

A third one noted:

Writing my platform gave me an opportunity to reflect and express my educational belief system in writing. After this summer, I realize that taking the time to reflect is important to my continued growth as an educational leader. I need the motivation to reflect on my beliefs and put them into an organized format.

Furthermore, writing an educational platform allows prospective school leaders to think about the values and beliefs that are truly important to them as educators. As a participant explained:

... Writing my platform down also allowed time for me to reflect on the things that have become truly important to me. My platform is like an oath that I have taken and that I pledge to follow.

Another one stated:

I think my educational platform has helped me to distill and crystallize my thoughts and philosophies about education. It has caused me to be thoughtful and reflective about what my convictions and beliefs are about my position as an instructional leader.

A third one indicated that:

...Writing this platform has helped me reflect on what it is I truly believe about the role and responsibility of students and teachers, as well as the role that parents play in education. I consider it a starting point as a new administrator.

Foundation. According to respondents, an educational platform is also important because it has potential to serve as a foundation for school leadership practice. It appears from

the data that an educational platform may constitute a solid base that supports leadership behaviors and actions. In other words, a basis upon which school leaders stand. As a participant observed:

It was very important for me to write down my educational platform. One reason is that for the first time, I put my ideas about education on paper in a user-friendly format. Second, I feel the foundation the platform provided me with reasons for behaving the way I do.

Another one noted:

My educational platform is a stable foundation that expresses what my priorities are in terms of teaching and learning.

A third one explained:

This educational platform was certainly necessary for me to compose. It gave me the opportunities to soul search my foundation of the kind of administrator I want to be. The process it took me to create the educational platform, also gave me the support I will need when articulating my beliefs, goals and vision to parents, teachers and colleagues.

Uses of an Educational Platform

Once an educational platform is elaborated in written form, all respondents affirmed that it can be used in several ways and with specific professional purposes. The data suggest that an educational platform can be used as a component of a professional portfolio, as a guide for action, as a reference for leadership actions, and as a reflection tool.

Portfolio Component. A portfolio is usually a collection of professional artifacts that illustrate an individual's professional experience and achievements. It can become evidence of competence when an individual is in search of a professional position. It may include a curriculum vitae, professional certificates, academic achievements and statements of professional

goals and aspirations. The data reveals that an educational platform can be used as another component of a professional portfolio. The following participants remarks reflect this use:

I want to use it as part of my portfolio. I want to continue to add and update my portfolio as I continue to learn and grow in my professional career.

I will use this a starting point for being able to define my beliefs in the complex educational process. I will be using it in my portfolio too.

I plan to use it in my portfolio that I wan to compile to take with me into interviews next spring as I begin look for my first job as an administrator/instructional leader.

This platform development is an important process for each educator to go through because it teaches you how to be honest with yourself. This is a critical piece of any educational portfolio. It is important to reflect upon your beliefs and record them for future reflections as an educational platform.

Guide for Action. It appears from the data that an educational platform can also provide guiding information for professional school leadership performance. According to the respondents, it can be a useful guide for future leadership actions, daily decisions and long-term goals. The following comments illustrate this point:

My platform is my guide, and more, a rubric for my actions. If I want to see my vision become a reality, I will need to ensure that my beliefs and my actions match, that they support each and do not contradict each other.

My platform can be used as a guide that can be built upon as I add to my educational foundation. I can use the platform to test my stance on certain issues and concerns to see if I am satisfied with my stance or if I want to amend my thinking.

My written platform will be my basis on which to relay my educational values, beliefs, etc. It will be my guide on which to act out or attend to my journey. I will be able to revisit, adjust and remind myself of thoughts as needed.

I can also use this piece to guide my reflections; all that I do and contemplate should be founded in these beliefs. I can also use this as a sample to guide others in articulating their educational creed.

I would use it this as a road map, helping to guide decisions I make. I would look to this platform as a reality check. Are the decisions I am making in line with my beliefs? Have my beliefs changed? This platform could be a tool in assisting others (teachers) to write a platform.

Reference. The data also revealed that participants can use their educational platform as a reference. In other words, they may consult it for obtaining relevant information about their educational values and beliefs as well as a reference for professional growth. The following participants' comments support the educational platform as a reference.

I would use my platform to guide me in my daily decisions and long term goals. It would become a point of reference. Am I doing what I believe in? Does this really go in the same direction that I am asking others to go towards, etc.

I will use this as a reference. It will change as I grow. My platform will be my promise, if you will, to my school and community. It will provide them with my expectations and let them know what to expect as well.

The platform can be used to better express myself in interviews, clarify my goals to my teachers, and set my vision to my parents and community. I can use it to map my leadership journey and as a reference to check myself. My educational platform will be a work in progress, changing as I grow and as the needs of children change.

It should serve as invaluable in my profession since it has allowed me to internalize my beliefs system and I am now able to rely on my platform as a quick reference point in rationalizing the decision making involved with my daily duties. (R119)

Lessons Learned from Developing an Educational Platform

Data revealed that all respondents agreed that engaging in platform development is a powerful learning experience. The following examples of lessons learned as result of engaging in platform development emerged.

Self-awareness. Participants reported that they can achieve a marked realization or knowledge often of something (values and beliefs) not generally or previously known or perceived. In other words, they achieve a high level of self-awareness about what it means to be a school leader as a result of elaborating their educational platform. The following statements support this notion of self-awareness.

I learned more about myself through this activity. What do I believe? What do I value? Who is important in the school community? Most importantly, I thought about myself as

a principal. I know that as a principal you cannot be wishy-washy on your beliefs and values about education.

As I wrote my educational platform, I realized that I had to be truly committed to the things that were being included in my platform. . . I learned that putting something down on paper made me more aware and committed to what I chose to write. Much thinking and reflection preceded the actual writing of the platform.

As I developed my educational platform, I learned so much about myself as an educator. I learned that some of my “beliefs” did not match my practices. I learned how to be honest with myself while writing this platform. As an educational leader, I need to know what I am talking about. This development of my platform taught me how to be concise yet clear in my beliefs.

I felt that by writing this platform I became more aware of who I am as an educational leader and what role I play. It was a rewarding process for me because it helped me answer the question, “What difference am I trying to make?”

Value Clarification. The data also revealed that participants learn how to make clear what they value most both as teachers and as prospective school leaders. Additionally, they learned that it is important to make their values understandable to them and to others in the school community. The following statements support value clarification.

It makes teachers verbalize and clarify their attitudes to be more effective. It allows teachers to make their values, beliefs and attitudes more visible to others. It is a starting point for teachers' integrity and professional development.

I projected my self into the role of principal and felt the excitement. I examined, in my mind hypothetical issues and concerns I would face as a supervisor. I reaffirmed my convictions about education.

No matter if you are an administrator, teacher, student or parent, you should be able to express your beliefs in the educational process. It helps others understand where you are coming from and where you are going. It defines you as a person and gives you credibility. When I become an assistant principal or principal, this will be one of the first activities that I will take the learning community through. I believe in the process.

Writing for a parent audience forced me to clarify my thoughts and beliefs, to be more specific and to include aspects which I may have left out. It helped me understand that I am accountable for what I promise.

Conclusion

This paper sought to determine the importance of developing an educational platform before entering the world of school leadership practice. It also focused on how prospective school leaders could use their educational platform and the lessons learned from elaborating an educational platform.

This study followed qualitative research guidelines that suggest that "written words" (Sprinthall, Schmutte & Sirois, 1991, p. 102) in response to open-ended questions is an

appropriate strategy to determine participant perspectives (Patton, 1994). Data were analyzed inductively in order to develop generalizations about the phenomenon of study. The sample included a total of 35 graduate students who were certified teachers and whose teaching experience ranged from two to twenty years. All were enrolled in an educational administration preparation program in a major university.

Participants engaged in an educational platform development experience according to the general elements of a platform, as suggested by Sergiovanni & Starrat (1998), but they had freedom to include the components most important to them. After writing their educational platform, participants responded to open-ended questions relative to their thinking and the experience of writing their educational platform.

The results of this study suggest that developing an educational platform is important. First, it allows reflection not only about one's educational values and beliefs but also about the transition from teaching to leading. Second, it has potential to become a solid foundation for professional school leadership practice.

Additionally, the results of this study indicate that prospective school leaders may use their educational platform as a portfolio component, as a guide for action, as a reference to consult their values and beliefs.

Finally, it seems that prospective school leaders learn valuable lessons from developing an educational platform early in their school leadership preparation. For instance, they enhance their self-awareness about their educational values and beliefs, and they achieve value clarification prior to entering the world of school leadership practice.

This study lends support to the notion that reflection has potential to improve administration and supervision practice (Hart, 1990; Osterman, 1990; Sergiovanni & Satarrat, 2001). It further reaffirms the notion that writing is a meaningful strategy to facilitate reflection-on-action and plays an important role in helping individuals on their practice (Berkey, Curtis,

Minnick, Zietlow, Campbell and Kirschner, 1990; Kottkamp, 1990). It is also congruent with Kottkamp's conclusion that "writing a platform engages the author in a reflective process" (1990, p. 195).

The findings relative to achieving higher levels of self-awareness as a result of reflecting on one's educational platform also reinforces the assertion that "reflection raises to a conscious level the unconscious thoughts, assumptions and patterns that guide action, making change possible" (Hart, 1990, p. 155). It further supports the contention that "by increasing self-awareness, the reflective process creates opportunities for continued professional growth" (Osterman, 1990, p. 137).

This study also advances the idea that reflection should not only take place as school leaders engage in administrative practice but before they enter administrative practice. Thus, those preparing for school leadership need to engage in reflection prior to action so that they develop the capacity for a professional reflective practice. As Hart contends, "reflective practice maintains that the habit of reflection is an important component of effective organizational leadership, and is essential for educational reform" (Hart, 1990, p. 143). As others recognized, when school administrators participate in a formal preparation endeavors,, reflection should be a critical component so that "reflective practices can logically follow" (Haring-Hidore, Freeman, Phelps, Spann and Wooten, 1990, 180)

Therefore, it may be concluded that, as a reflection prior to action tool, an educational platform leads to a greater sense of the significance of educational values and beliefs clarification and has potential to develop the habit of careful and purposeful thought before actual school leadership practice. Furthermore, the following propositions are advanced:

- 1) Sharing one's educational platform with peers results in an enlightening experience and in an enhanced understanding of one's own values and beliefs.

2) Reviewing one's educational platform motivates a greater commitment to work with all students.

3) Clarification of one's educational platform provides a solid foundation for leadership practice and may be used as a reference.

4) Analysis of one's educational platform may illuminate areas of strength as well as areas for further development prior to leadership practice.

5) As a "reflection prior to action" tool, the educational platform has potential to enhance school leadership development.

6) School leaders and teachers may also benefit from examining their educational platform. They could identify areas of agreement and disagreement, and address their differences in order to enhance their working relationship as they attempt to meet the needs of all students.

Finally, it is relevant to state that providing opportunities for reflection prior action may have implications for school leadership preparation programs. Thus, it is imperative to create and test innovative approaches to facilitate the development of a proactive school leadership and the habit of reflection as those in preparation programs transition from a teaching role to a leadership role. While the literature suggests that some preparation programs have incorporated reflection as a means to facilitate the connection of theoretical knowledge and field practices (Kottkamp, 1990; Ovando, 2000), it is critical to expand the opportunities for reflection prior to action for future school leaders. As Houston affirms, "preparation programs for the next generation of leaders must involve a constant dance between doing the work and thinking about it" (2001, p. 432). By enhancing reflection opportunities, preparation programs can contribute to the development of the kind of reflective school leadership necessary to meet the challenges of the new century as well as to better serve all students.

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