An Analysis of the 2013 Program Evaluation Proposals for the School Leadership Preparation Program
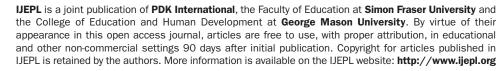
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Abstract This article presents a content analysis of the 2013 School Leadership Program (SLP) grants. SLP projects provide a unique opportunity for participants in the field to explore innovative leadership preparation and development and their impact on program participants, schools, school districts, and students. The article begins with an overview of the SLP, the changing field of leadership preparation, and current research in the field. Findings then reveal a range of evaluation tools, methods, and data, the presence of myriad evaluators participating in the projects, and little focus on external dissemination of program evaluation methods beyond the scope of the projects. Suggestions for research to extend the field are provided.

Keywords Program evaluation; Leadership development

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*During the last decade, programs to prepare educational administrators have
undergone considerable change. Growing specialization in the field of
educational administration resulting from new knowledge production
(for example, operations research) is one reason for the program change.
Another is the continuing search for more effective patterns of field
experience, instructional method, and content in preparatory programs.*
—*Piele and Culbertson (Wynn, 1972, p. vii)*

In 1972, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the University
Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) published a monograph series on
"administrator preparation." Piele and Culbertson's foreword (in Wynn, 1972) in each
of the monographs in the series began with the quote above. This series focused on
topics such as *Unconventional Methods and Materials for Preparing Educational
Administrators* (Wynn, 1972), *Training-in-Common for Educational, Public, and Business
Administrators* (Miklos, 1972), and *Emergent Practices in the Continuing Education of
School Administration* (Lutz & Ferrante, 1972). Forty years later, the conversation con-
tinues around how to best prepare school leaders and the "search for more effective
patterns." While field experiences, instructional methods, and content are still at the
forefront of research about how best to prepare aspiring school leaders, the research
field has expanded. Innovative programs, partnerships, inclusion of non-university-
based leadership providers and delivery structures, as well as other contributing fac-
tors that impact effective preparation, are being explored.

Research on the effectiveness of school leadership preparation programs is sur-
prisingly limited, in spite of the need to examine leadership preparation and its im-
pact on the field. Recently, there have been numerous calls for more in-depth studies
on the impact of those programs on school leaders and, ultimately, on student
achievement (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2012; Kottkamp & Rusch, 2009; Murphy
& Vriesenga, 2006; Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Sanzo, 2012). The dearth of research
on leadership preparation and development is even more shocking because of in-
tense criticism in recent years about how school leaders have been prepared (Hess
& Kelly, 2005; Levine, 2005), especially with the increased attention to and scrutiny
of these programs in the wake of the scathing 2005 Levine report. Nevertheless,
"there is a small and growing body of evaluation research on leadership preparation
program models and features" (Orr & Barber, 2009, p. 458).

Contributing to the accumulating evaluation research around leadership prepa-
ration programs are evaluation findings from projects funded by the School
Leadership Program (SLP) grant. Since 2002, the United States Department of
Education (USDE) has funded 110 projects designed to prepare (and/or develop)
aspiring and current assistant principals and principals. A component of the federal
grants—to date totaling more than $170,000,000 in appropriations—is a require-
ment to evaluate the intervention programs. There has been an increasing interest
in the program evaluation components of these grants and the implications they
may have on research into leadership preparation programs, including participant
outcomes and impacts on student achievement.

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This article extends an earlier analysis of select SLP projects, specifically around the program evaluation features in the funded proposals. In that paper, Sanzo (2012) examined fifteen funded proposals from the 2008, 2009, and 2010 grant award cycles. This study examines thirteen funded proposals from the 2013 USDE grant cycle. The decision to exclude the previous grants from this study (2008, 2009, 2010) was based on several factors. First, the grants had been previously reviewed in an earlier study. More significant, however, were the USDE's revisions to the request for proposals for the 2013 grant cycle; these made it difficult to develop a longitudinal study using the same approach as was used for the first set of grants. Both the program features component and the evaluation components changed in significant ways. It was decided, therefore, to focus on this specific round of grants. This article begins with an overview of the SLP, discusses possible reasons behind the changing leadership preparation field, and shares research within the scope of leadership preparation. The process for analyzing the program evaluations in the 2013 funded proposals is explicated, followed by a presentation of the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research.

Significance

A review and analysis of these program evaluation proposals can help to extend the field's knowledge of the types of measures, tools, processes, and techniques recognized by national experts in the field and being used by disparate organizations. It is important to know what methods of evaluation are being used and how these methods impact our ability to know (or not know—depending on their limitations) what effect the programs actually had. This analysis provides insight into which critical program evaluation approaches the USDE recognizes as worth funding. Knowledge of this can then translate to a streamlined integration of evaluation efforts not only across SLP projects, but also within the broader school leadership preparation community. The SLP grant program represents the unique and concerted efforts of leadership preparation and development programs across the United States to shape and advance the state of leadership preparation. Not understanding what is actually occurring in these SLP projects would mean missing prime opportunities to truly understand the real impact of leadership preparation on the field. This is not a new argument. Kottkamp and Rusch (2009) wrote that what "we as a field of research produce is a lot of islands sprinkled across a vast sea" (p. 80). It is incumbent upon us now, as researchers and scholars, to bring these islands together to create a large enough mass to demonstrate effectiveness and impact in a concerted manner.

Setting the context: The SLP

At the federal level, the United States Department of Education (USDE) has sponsored the School Leadership Program (SLP) grant since 2002 to fund innovative leadership preparation and development programs. According to the USDE:

> The School Leadership Program provides competitive grants to assist high-need local educational agencies (LEAs) with recruiting, training, and retaining principals and assistant principals. A high-need LEA is defined as one that: (1) either serves at least 10,000

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children from low-income families or serves a community in which at least 20 percent of children are from low-income families; and (2) has a high percentage of teachers teaching either outside of their certification or with emergency, provisional, or temporary certification. (USDE, n.d.)

The grant policy changed in 2008 to fund five-year programs, in comparison with the previously three-year program cycles, in direct response to the need to increase the time frame in which to measure grant effectiveness. A greater awareness of impact and outcome measures has guided conversations around these grants in recent years. The 2011, 2012, and 2013 national conferences sponsored by the School Leadership Program Communication Hub (now School Leadership Preparation and Development Network [SLPDN]) dedicated a significant amount of time to program evaluation and the impacts of the program features. The SLPDN is an organization that connects all current and past SLP grantees in a variety of ways, including through national conferences, webinars, and collaborative research and publications.

Characteristics of these grants are innovative approaches to leadership preparation and development that go beyond university-based classroom instruction that is typically separate from district leadership practices. Each grant involves a variety of partnerships to design and implement activities to prepare aspiring leaders and/or provide professional development to current assistant principals and principals. Examples of innovative activities described by the USDE (USDE, n.d.) include fiscal incentives to retain new leaders and to encourage others to enter school leaders, providing stipends for mentors, and professional development that targets instructional leadership.

Leadership preparation: Criticism and change

Criticism of leadership preparation programs is not new. The 1972 series on administrator preparation referenced at the beginning of this manuscript cited concerns about preparation programs that, in some cases, parallel contemporary critiques. Structural components were found to lack "a Gestalt conception" (Farquhar & Piele, 1972, p. 16) programs suffered from "limitations and obstacles that hinder recruitment" (p. 21), and some participants expressed "little satisfaction with the internship" (p. 31). Similar concerns associated with leadership preparation can be seen throughout subsequent decades. In 1987, UCEA sponsored a blue-ribbon panel focused on developing administration skills. This panel's report identified problems with leadership preparation which included "the poor quality of candidates for preparation programs" and "the irrelevance of preparation programs; programs devoid of sequence, modern content and clinical experiences" (Hale & Moorman, 2003, p. 6).

"Traditional" notions of leadership preparation remain and continue to be fodder for unfavorable critiques with researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. In 2004, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII) blamed "traditional education administration programs and certification procedures" for "producing insufficient numbers of (educational) leaders" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovations and Improvement, 2004, p. 3). Further, the OII faulted these programs for not having a recruitment process and instead allowing students to self-enroll, for having insufficient screening processes for applying stu-

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dents, for failing to have an interconnected program curriculum, for having poor linkages between theory and practical application, and for not connecting the program to the individual's projected career path and administrative placement (i.e., rural or urban setting) (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, 2004).

Notably, Levine's 2005 report, *Educating School Leaders*, condemned leadership programs for being outdated and for participating in a "race to the bottom." This report served as a polarizing call within the field of educational leadership preparation. His report perhaps best crystallizes the "traditional" notion of leadership preparation. Levine (2005) found rampant "curricular disarray," "low admissions and graduation standards," and "inadequate clinical instruction," among other cutting assessments. Other critics have expressed alarm about the state of leadership preparation, including the state of research in the field:

> Given the applied nature of the profession and the centrality of preparatory activities to departments of educational leadership, the fact that serious academic work on pre-service training remains a minor element in the school administration scholarship mosaic is as surprising as it is disappointing. (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006, p. 187)

More recently, a focus on such elements of leadership preparation as school leader evaluation and the relationship between leaders and student achievement have gained momentum (Sanzo, 2014; Sanzo, 2016). The increased interest in the role of the school principal in relation to student achievement has accelerated the proliferation of non-university-based preparation providers in the field and increased the influence of foundations on training practices.

State and national policies around school leadership and leadership preparation programs have changed in turn. Examples of these changes include the 2015 collaboration of a consortium of national organizations and policymaking bodies to revise the national leadership standards to create the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015); state mandates for massive overhauls of university-based leadership programs in states such as in Kentucky and Alabama; national attention to the evaluation of school principals and the connection between leadership effectiveness and student achievement; a proliferation of value-added evaluation models for principal evaluation at the state level; and the requirement, from the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), that programs demonstrate the impact of their candidates on student learning (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Additionally, UCEA has developed research briefs, conceptual guides, and other materials to aid in leadership preparation and development programs, such as *A Policymaker's Guide: Research-Based Policy for Principal Preparation Program Approval and Licensure* (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015) and *The State Evaluation of Principal Preparation Programs Toolkit* in collaboration with New Leaders (UCEA & New Leaders, 2016).

Researching the Field

Research in the field of preparing school leaders is growing, perhaps in response to

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the critics (Sanzo, 2014). This is an era of greater accountability and transparency, with calls for linkages between programs and the impact of their graduates in the schools they serve (Kowalski, 2009). Additionally, the role of school leaders has changed dramatically. University faculty, not-for-profit foundations, and other stakeholders interested in preparing school leaders have contributed to the increasing body of work in the field. The Danforth Foundation, for example, responded in the 1980s and 1990s with the funding of the Danforth Programs for the Preparation of School Principals (Milstein, 1993) and conducted case studies on their program sites. More recently, the Wallace Foundation began funding projects and research on school leadership, totaling about $286 million since 2000. And the recent call from the United States Department of Education for school leadership program proposals has highlighted the need for evidence-based research to support the programs.

More research on leadership preparation programs is emerging from program evaluations (see Aitken & Bedard, 2007; Buskey & Karvonen, 2012; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Eddins, Kirk, Hooten, & Russell, 2013; Haeffele, Hood, & Feldmann, 2011; Sanzo, 2012). Orr and Barber (2009) deftly synthesized the prevailing thoughts of and trends for program evaluation in leadership preparation and relied on Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey's (1999) definition of program evaluation as being

> the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs. It draws on the techniques and concepts of social science disciplines and is intended to be useful for improving programs and information social action. (cited in Orr & Barber, 2009, p. 457)

Orr and Barber (2009) highlight the political tensions that can be involved in evaluating programs, especially in light of the evaluation's ability to "influence resource allocations, institutional decisions, and policy and program reform" (p. 458).

Other examples of increased research in the field include the development of the *Journal for Research of Leadership Education* by UCEA. This publication was developed in 2006 and provides cutting edge research on the preparation of aspiring and current leaders. The Taskforce on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Programs also contributed to the increased knowledge base on school leadership preparation programs as well. The Taskforce began as a pre-session conversation at the 2001 UCEA conference (Kottkamp & Rusch, 2009). Since that meeting, the Taskforce expanded its role and provided "an example of different use of time and of the potential to grow cross-institution research communities" (Kottkamp & Rusch, 2009, p. 81). In collaboration with the Utah Educational Policy Center, UCEA also supports the Center for the Evaluation of Educational Leadership Preparation and Practice. In 2013, the center presented an updated version of the 2010 *Developing Evaluation Evidence: A Formative and Summative Evaluation Planner for Educational Leadership Preparation Programs* (Orr, Young, & Rorrer, 2010).

Program characteristics, or "features," have garnered a large amount of interest and research focus in an effort to identify how to effectively prepare aspiring school leaders. Most research has involved "case studies of innovative preparation programs and survey-based investigations of the efficacy of specific program features" (Orr & Orphanos, 2011, p. 21). "Innovative" program features have been recognized as

being more effective. Such features include a well-defined theory of action, a coherent curriculum in alignment with national and state standards, integration of theory and practice, and socialization and support mechanisms such as cohorts and mentoring (Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

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Recent attention has been given to the effectiveness of programs for leadership preparation (Belle & Sanzo, 2014; Burt, Shen, Leneway, & Rainey, 2014; Salazar, Pazey, & Zembik, 2013; Sanzo, 2016). For example, Fuller, Young, and Baker (2011) and Orr and Orphanos (2011) examined the influence of principal preparation programs on student achievement. Orr (2011) studied the program experiences and career outcomes of graduates of leadership preparation programs. It appears the trend of exploring program features may be giving way to more focus on the impacts of those features on program graduates, the schools they lead, and the achievement of their students. This makes the SLP program especially important to study because of the program's attention to the short-, mid-, and long-term impact of innovative programs on student achievement, graduates, and the schools and districts the graduates serve.

Methods

A content analysis was conducted on selected funded 2013 SLP proposals. The research questions draw from the Sanzo (2012) study and were modified based upon the results of that analysis, as well as on a review of the current literature:

1. What evaluation methods are proposed in the SLP grant applications?
2. What evaluation tools are proposed in the SLP grant applications?
3. What are the data being collected and how are they analyzed?
4. Who are the evaluators?
5. What is the purpose of the program evaluation?

Twenty grants were funded in the 2013 cycle. The focus of this article is on leadership preparation, rather than on the professional development of current school leaders. Therefore, six of the proposals were excluded from the review because of their sole focus on the development of already licensed school leaders. A seventh proposal seemed to focus, in part, on preparing aspiring leaders, but it was difficult to understand whether the grant activities actually focused on the preparation component, and therefore it was excluded. The remaining thirteen focused either solely on preparing aspiring school leaders or on both preparation of aspiring school leaders and providing professional development to current assistant principals and principals.

A content analysis was employed on the USDE SLP grants (Patton, 2002). A research team familiarized themselves with the coding schema used in the 2012 Sanzo study (Appendix A) and read through each grant proposal first, then through the entire funded grant proposal. The process allowed the researcher and the team members to become familiar with the program evaluations throughout all proposals, and then understand the broader context within which the proposals were situated. Because of the number of proposals reviewed, the research team employed a manual coding process, rather than an electronic program. This allowed the research team to develop more familiarity with the program evaluation proposals. During this process, notations were made on the original analysis document (Sanzo, 2012) wher-

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ever revisions, additions, and deletions were necessary because of the new round of funding. As in the original study, the research team used the following process: "Each program evaluation section was initially reviewed in the selected grant proposals, followed by an overall review of each complete grant application. This process allowed the researcher to identify the specific information required from each grant application that would be needed for a more detailed analysis to address the research questions" (Sanzo, 2012, p. 249). The analysis process included the grant abstract, the grant proposal in its entirety, and specifically the program evaluation and management plan. Although the appendices are not part of the consideration process for funding by the USDE, the team felt this was an important component to review, as a further window into the program evaluations. Throughout the process, the research team took notes to create a preliminary coding schema, through which a coding guide was developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

After discussion among the research team, a decision was made to collapse the themes relating to methods, data, and tools into one category, primarily because of the relational ambiguity of each as well as the overlapping references in the grants. Because of the involvement of the author in a previous study on the same topic, the author sought to maintain transparency and ethicality by implementing triangulation, peer debriefing, reflective commentary, and member checks (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007):

> Throughout this process, the researchers ask participants if the themes or categories make sense, whether they are developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate. (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127)

Sanzo, in the 2012 content analysis of program evaluations, argued, "It is neither the purpose nor intent of this manuscript to evaluate the quality of the leadership preparation program proposal, nor to make a judgment on the quality of the evaluation" (p. 247). This study adds to the baseline understanding first begun by Sanzo (2012) about the various facets of the funded program evaluation proposals, including designs, methods, personnel, and tools: "With better understanding about the nature, processes, and content of the program evaluations, further research on leadership preparation programs can build on this foundation" (Sanzo, 2012, p. 248).

Limitations

This study is an analysis of thirteen funded grant proposals that are a part of the twenty funded proposals for the 2013 USDE SLP cycle, and the findings are limited to those grants. Most of the proposals that focus on aspiring leadership preparation also include program features that focus on providing professional development to current school leaders. Wherever obvious in the proposal, the evaluation measures related to current school leaders were excluded from the analysis. However, because of the design of the proposals, it was difficult to bifurcate all their components, so some conflation of aspiring leadership program design and current leadership development program design may have occurred.

These proposals also are just that—proposals. The funded projects have the leeway to make revisions and are encouraged to do so as the project is implemented,

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with USDE approval. It may be the case that certain components were revised, eliminated, or added in subsequent follow-ups about implementation of the program evaluation. However, the intent of this study is to understand the components of the funded program evaluations.

Finally, the review only included what was publicly available through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The materials provided through the request did not include any appendices and only comprised the fifty or fewer pages in the formal application. While the funders' explicit directions were that any items included in the appendices would not be a part of the reviewed proposal, it appears there were appendices in some proposals that further explicated the program evaluation (i.e., timelines and personnel). Therefore, the research team may not have had access to all of the content of the proposed program evaluations.

Findings

The results of the content analysis are presented below. As noted above, the analysis was conducted on the funded proposals made available through the FOIA request. As evidenced in the presentation of the findings, and as referenced earlier, it was clear that additional information related to the program evaluations had been provided in the grant proposal packet provided to the funding agency. Additionally, the program evaluations only reflected what was developed for the purpose of the proposal and may have been modified upon funder approval to meet the evolving needs of the grant. There was a range of methods, tools, data and overall ambiguity in many of the program evaluations; there were myriad evaluators anticipated to be utilized in the program evaluations; and program evaluations were geared primarily toward the grant itself.

Ambiguity: Methods, tools, and data

Included in nine of the proposals was some type of logic model used to inform both the program implementation and the program evaluation. It was apparent that grants included additional information such as in-depth timelines, but these were not made available by the FOIA request, nor were they a part of the official review by the USDE as outlined in the request for proposals. Therefore, it was not possible to review these specific tools.

Each proposal referenced the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures. There was very little description of the types of methods and tools that would be used for the collection of qualitative data in the program evaluations. Examples of the vagueness of approaches and data types include

- observation of key leadership activities and venues
- assessment of quality of co-operation of school districts and quality of inter-institutional collaboration related to delivery of common core instruction
- participants' self-assessment of strengths and weaknesses
- site visits
- ongoing benchmarks for culture improvement (specific to each school)

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- quality of peer and principal teacher observations
- ongoing leadership interviews by project staff
- coaching logs
- qualitative notes from school leadership interviews
- focus groups
- surveys (perceptual and attitudinal)

Only limited qualitative tools were specifically identified in the proposals. One project cited the use of the "instructional rounds" process developed by Richard Elmore and his colleagues and another identified a specific tool called the "Leadership Cohort Exit Survey," which provided qualitative data. One grant also referenced the use of both the EDM Quality Measures tool and the UCEA Program Quality Assessment. These two tools use a rubric system to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership preparation programs.

In terms of quantitative data, most often the long-term effectiveness of the projects was measured through student achievement data. Primarily, student achievement data was being measured through state assessments or general student achievement measures. Evaluation of the data ranged from simple comparisons of the data to multilevel modeling and propensity score matching. Additionally, proposals referred to the analysis of data through the use of descriptive processes, comparisons, and score trend analysis without any further descriptions.

Few grant proposals proffered specific quantitative tools that would be used in the grant. References were made to developing reliable and valid tools to use in the grant. The VAL-ED was referenced twice, the Chicago 5 Essentials support once, with the use of the SLLA exam as measures of success in other program evaluations. While grant proposals indicated they would use the following data in their evaluations, they provided no specifics: school level aggregate data, attendance, tardiness, discipline, school climate, academic rigor, graduation rates, pre-post scores (often with no additional description), 360 resident evaluation, program evaluator data sources, and GREs.

In sum, the methods, data, and tools were generally vague, with little description of what types of data would be sought, how they would be collected, or how they would be analyzed.

Myriad evaluators

There was a mix of evaluators who were identified as participating in the grant. Eleven of the thirteen proposals identified the program evaluators for the projects. Seven projects employed external evaluation companies and one of the projects used an external consultant (single person). Three grant proposals identified evaluators internal to the project, with one grant using one person to evaluate the grant and two projects using a lead evaluator and a team to assist. Finally, two of the grant proposals indicated they would contract with an external evaluator after the awarding of the grant from the USDE, meaning ultimately nine of the grants would have evaluators who were not one of the project partners providing preparation and/or development services.

Three of the external evaluator companies had also served as external evaluators on previously awarded USDE SLP projects. These external evaluators are large, na-

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tional evaluation companies that are prominent in evaluation projects related to education. One of these external companies is listed as the program evaluator for two of the 2013 funded projects reviewed for this study, meaning the three external evaluators served four funded projects in total.

Interestingly, those same projects made up four of the five projects using specific research questions (in addition to the project goals and objectives) to guide their evaluations. The fifth project with research questions employed an internal evaluator with significant experience in program evaluations, having previous evaluation experience with large-scale grants.

Program evaluation intent: Primarily grant focused

There was one grant that discussed a specific approach, utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2002), from the field of program evaluation. There was no reference to the use of evaluation tools or processes from any of the UCEA centers, outside of the reference to the "program quality" rubric. Additionally, no grants referenced specific program theories to inform the evaluation model.

Twelve of the thirteen grants specifically talked about the dissemination of project findings. Methods of dissemination were vague—generally publications and conference presentations. None of the dissemination efforts focused directly on the utilization of evaluation processes and lessons learned from an evaluative standpoint. All dissemination efforts were directed toward leadership development. A component of the grant proposal was to include the potential contributions to the field. This was reviewed in each of the funded proposals to see if information regarding evaluation methods was considered to merit as a contribution to the field. In none of the proposals reviewed was this seen as a potential contribution to the field. While most of the projects sought to contribute to the broader field of leadership preparation and development, this was specifically for program features and not related to the program evaluation methods.

Discussion, implications, and future research

This study extends the conversation about program evaluations developed for use in the USDE School Leadership Program grant (Sanzo, 2012). In this current study, the 2013 analysis revealed similar findings as in Sanzo (2012). The discussion of evaluation methods and tools was limited, and the majority of the evaluators identified in the proposals ranged from externally contracted personnel and companies to internal grant personnel. This study also reveals that while there was much interest on the part of the grant writers/team in disseminating lessons learned about the projects, there was no articulated interest in specifically discussing the program evaluation methods separately from the findings. This section will provide a discussion on the above findings and their implications and will make suggestions for future research.

The findings may, on one hand, suggest a cause for concern because of the lack of detail about the overall measures, tools, and general approach to the program evaluations; on the other hand, the findings may be encouraging. It is evident from the review of the proposals that the grant writing teams worked together to develop a comprehensive and integrated program that deeply connected the various program

features and the project measures for the program evaluation. The program evaluations did not present themselves as generic evaluations; rather, it appeared that feedback from the program evaluations was intended to provide guidance to the grant project personnel to make ongoing changes throughout the course of the project. Fifty pages is not a lot of space to detail a very large five-year project. Critics may argue that the lack of specificity is a detriment to the project, that it can potentially impede the successful evaluation of the overall program, and that it might adversely impact participants, districts, and PK-12 students. However, at the same time, the ambiguity provides a measure of flexibility—to be more "design-based" in thinking about program evaluation, to potentially develop real-time measures and tools with direct application to the project, and to implement the lessons learned from those evaluative tools and measures. The USDE has expressed an understanding that program designers may need to make ongoing revisions both to the program features and the program evaluation components; this ambiguity at the proposal phase provides that opportunity, rather than locking a program into a five-year, unchangeable initiative. It is difficult to predict how a leadership development program might change over the course of five years. Each program evaluation's approach appears to provide the flexibility to adapt to evolving programs.

While it is encouraging that there is more potential research emerging from program evaluations, as Orr and Barber (2009) point out, more effort is required to bring lessons learned from program evaluations into the field of leadership preparation. School leadership preparation research and the evaluative methods used by individual leadership development programs can be better aligned. Bridging the gap between program evaluation and research is critical. It appears from the content analysis that SLP projects want to share the lessons learned through their program evaluations with the broader leadership preparation and development community. However, what is less clear is the intent to share the methodological approaches of their evaluations with the field. This is a significant limitation and harms the field if there is not a specific discussion around program evaluation methods and around how evaluations for programs are revised across the duration of the projects. Emerging studies from the SLP grants provide a venue for a focus on evaluation and impact, as well as specific program features.

An argument can be made that, with today's push for rigorous research, there is a concern that the field of educational preparation is not looking more deeply into disseminating their program evaluation methods. Yet it is probable that this is an indication that grant members involved in the work are incredibly busy and not able to focus their attention on multiple dissemination efforts. It is incumbent on the broader field of educational leadership scholars to contribute to the work and to participate in collaborative research that capitalizes on program evaluations' findings to improve projects and to disseminate these findings on leadership preparation and development programs. The funded proposals do highlight a desire to publish lessons learned and effective program features, and this will help share the types of methods employed in the evaluations.

The methods and tools provided in the grant proposals were limited. It may be the case, as mentioned earlier, that this was due to the page limits imposed on the

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applicants. However, if there is an interest in methods, as articulated by the field's call for improvement in preparation and development practices, then programs must better understand evaluation techniques. Most of the grants made allusions to survey tools and other instruments without specifying the types of tools they would choose to employ. The SLP grant has been in place for over a decade and there is enough historical perspective to understand the types of tools and methods that have been used. While Sanzo's (2012) study is the first to explore the SLP grant proposals, other studies have been published featuring specific SLP grant findings, including the types of program evaluation methods that were used (Sanzo, 2014; Sanzo, Myran, & Normore, 2012). If it is the case that there is no broad understanding of these tools, then it is imperative to catalogue these, to identify their best uses and possible constraints, and to share these with the field. Additionally, future research is recommended around the fidelity of program evaluation implementation by different configurations of evaluation teams, including the number of team members, the background and experience of the team members, and whether the evaluators are internal or external to the grant.

The SLP grant provides a unique opportunity for the field to explore innovative leadership preparation and development and their impact on program participants, schools and school districts, and students. This article provides only an initial understanding of one small facet of the overall program. It is incumbent on us as a field to coalesce the "islands sprinkled across a vast sea" (Kottkamp & Rusch, 2009) in order to create a large enough mass for research purposes and in turn to impact the field of leadership preparation in a large-scale and focused manner.

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Appendix A

Partners

- Lead Partner
- Other

Evaluation Approach

- Articulated evaluation theory
- Articulated methodological approach
- Articulated purpose

Evaluation Tools

- Empirically validated and tested
- Developed during the grant by the evaluators for the grant
- Developed by a third party vendor
- Formative use
- Summative use
- Local consumption use
- providing data intentionally transferable to other leadership prep programs

Data

- Quantitative
- Qualitative
- Project participants (aspiring leaders, current leaders, coaches, mentors, other)
- Timeline for data collection
- Articulated means of analysis

Evaluator

- Internal to lead grantee
  - private company
  - university-based group
  - university-based person
  - district-based
  - private person
- Internal to one of the project partners
  - private company
  - university-based group
  - university-based person
  - district-based
  - private person
- Third party vendor/External
  - private company
  - university-based group
  - university-based person
  - district-based
  - private person