Closing the Gap: Challenges between Student Expectations and Competencies to Meet School Administration Workplace Demands

Clifford E. Tyler,* School of Education, National University, USA

Abstract

Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) Schools of Education in California are faced not only with the challenge of closing the gap between student expectations on the one hand and the realities of university instruction and the workplace on the other, but three additional new challenges. These are (1) meeting the diverse and rapidly changing needs of students; (2) adequately preparing them to successfully transition from course theory to

competent practices to meet the demands school administration; and (3) assuring their success in passing the California state-mandated administrative performance assessment. This paper will describe these challenges and what can be done to meet them. Students' changing needs will be described related to the skills they must acquire to successfully complete their theoretical course content and apply it to their fieldwork/intern experiences. The paper will also describe the challenges that higher education faces to provide them quality courses and a fieldwork and intern course experience, preparing them to pass all three cycles of the state-mandated California Administrative Performance Assessment (CalAPA), or to remediate failing students at IHE expense.

*Corresponding author. Email: ctyler@nu.edu

Literature Review

There is considerable literature describing students' changing needs, the gap of student expectations, realities of IHE instruction and higher expectations, and workplace demands for students following graduation. While dealing with daily issues that challenge school leaders, exemplary leaders keep a careful eye on emerging and "disruptively transformative" trends that may impact their schools, teachers, and students in the next one to three years. By doing so, they avoid making short-term decisions that will haunt them in the near future as the disruptive trends change the dynamics in and around schools.

According to Bill Daggett (Daggett, 2014), there are five disruptive emerging trends confronting Higher Education as it seeks to address today's issues:

- Impact of digital learning. Students are increasingly using a wide range of social media tools to do just that including: Texting: 71% of high school students and 63% of middle school students communicate with others via text messages, an increase of 44% since 2008. Twitter: 3 out of 10 students in grades 6-12 are using Twitter to follow others or to share 140 characters about their daily life on a regular basis. Videos: Since 2007 the number of middle school students creating videos and posting them online has doubled from 15% to 30% today. Similar trends are evident for higher education students.

- Heightened demand for career readiness: higher and different academic skills and knowledge needed for success in higher education and in the workplace. The workplace has changed in fundamental ways. The education system is not preparing

students for this changing work environment. Among the changes in the workplace 3.8 million jobs in the U.S. that pay in excess of $50,000 a year have been unfilled for several months, despite the fact that there are 13 million people on unemployment. Why? Our society is facing a skills gap.

- Increased emphasis on application-based learning: Knowledge, i.e., information, facts and data, no longer needs to be accessed, nor acquired from an all-knowing authoritative source such as a textbook, an encyclopedia or, yes, a teacher. "The facts" are everywhere and are widely available from a variety of sources at the click of a mouse or tap on a screen. Most importantly, our students already know how to get it. The traditional classroom is, for many of them, an anachronistic model that's different from the world in which they live. They have intuitively figured out how to retrieve information they need, use it to solve everyday problems, and communicate and collaborate about the same information with others. How they are asked to do things in school seems increasingly disconnected from their world

- Use of data of analytics to implement growth models: American schools are data rich but analysis poor. Although schools have volumes of data but, unlike medicine, schools have not learned how to monitor, track and introduce effective interventions based upon acquired data. As more sophisticated assessments and use technology are developed in more robust ways, there will be an explosion in the use of data for both formative and summative purposes. More sophisticated use of data will enable acceleration of movement toward implementing growth and continuous improvement models. With an increasing amount of data on individual students, one-size-fits-all instructional delivery system will become ineffective. The

need to individualize the organization and delivery of instruction will require focused and sustained professional development. 20th century instructional practices will become obsolete, while data analytics will bring both great opportunities and challenges.

- The present education system has been focused on tests that measure a student's degree of mastery of a set of knowledge and/or skills at a point in time. It has not typically focused on the ongoing growth in learning of a student has over a period of time. That is about to change. By leveraging data, there will be better support growth models as a way to know what a student knows and is able to do. Rapidly improving schools have changed their focus to a continuous improvement model for every student. Students are, in effect, evaluated by the amount of improvement. Out of this movement there will be a change in our student's report cards, which will track a student's reading ability over time and shows how prepared the student is to comprehend texts related to high school, college, the military, personal use, national assessments, and the workplace.

To counter these five disruptive trends, there are a number of strategies that deserve to be tried more broadly:

A. Successful schools create a culture that supports improvement before they attempt to implement change. Without a strong cultural foundation, the proposed solution can be mistaken for the problem. This was the misstep that occurred with the introduction of Common Core Standards and new teacher evaluation systems in New York and Kentucky.

B. Taking control or being controlled. School leaders do not allow themselves to be distracted by external pressures. Within the framework of their system-wide strategic approach, these leaders put in place short-term—typically 20-day—action plans for administrators and teachers. These action plans have specific, measurable outcomes related to the improvement of student performance. School staff act upon, monitor, and revise these plans continually to inform the next short-term action plan cycles.

C. It takes a system to improve student performance. Actions at the organizational leadership, instructional leadership, and teaching levels are coordinated and aligned to support instruction and learning. Improving student performance to agreed-upon levels is non-negotiable in every classroom.

D. Using data to make decisions. High-performance schools and districts use data to define expectations, to constantly monitor progress, and to diagnose the effectiveness of instructional practices in real time. Using such information, they adjust course immediately based upon the data.

As noted above, the transition from school/college to university can be extremely challenging, both for the student and academic staff involved in teaching the new cohort. This transition has been identified as a major cause of anxiety among first-year university students (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Failure to successfully manage such transition may result in significant distress, poor academic performance, and increased drop-out rates (Yorke and Longden, 2004).

According to Smith and Wertlieb (2005), a key factor in the ease of transition from school or college to university is student expectations, or, more specifically, the gap between students' prior expectations of IHE and the reality of university life. There is a

growing body of evidence showing that many students arrive at university with unrealistic expectations of what they will find there (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Smith & Hopkins, 2005; Crisp et al., 2009; Murtagh, 2010; Kandinko & Mawer, 2013).

Three Major Gaps and Challenges for Educational Administration Students to Bridge in Order to Ensure the Success of All Students

The first challenge is that Educational Administration graduate students entering National University are typically in their 30's and 40's, full time public school classroom teachers, and ethnically diverse, i.e. Asian, Hispanic, Afro-American, and East Indian. They teach in highly ethnically and socio-economically diverse school districts, and many of them speak English as their second language. Some of them write poorly and need writing center assistance to compose sentences to express their thoughts. Nearly all of them have aspirations of becoming school administrators and enter into an administrative services credential program for this purpose, but are not sufficiently aware of the challenges of the profession. Despite or perhaps because of this lack of awareness, many of them expect to be adequately prepared by passing these courses with preferably an "A" grade, transition into the fieldwork activity course with minimal activities to complete the credential.

The second challenge is that Institutes of Higher Education in California have the responsibility and challenge of teaching a quality set nine of credential theory courses, and supporting these candidate to successfully apply these theoretical concepts into practical school fieldwork and intern settings. Most courses are taught by adjunct faculty members, some of whom are not trained well to work with these graduate students in disseminating

the content. Since nearly all of these courses are taught online instead of in-person, many adjunct faculty members need more training and support from the university in using Blackboard Learning Management System in effectively teaching these courses. Candidates complete a portfolio of administrative activities demonstrating competency in areas identified in the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders as sanctioned by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing for awarding of the preliminary administrative services credential. A triad consisting of the university supervisor (faculty member), the site mentor/administrator, and the candidate, develops a plan of relevant activities to the courses they have completed at the onset of the class.

The third challenge is for IHE to adequately prepare students to pass the California Administrative Assessment Exam in three leadership cycles. They need to analyze data to inform school improvement and promote equity, thus facilitating communities of practice. Effective, equity-driven educational leaders promote a collaborative professional learning culture in schools, and provide meaningful data in video-taping teacher classroom observations, so as to focus on coaching individual teachers to strengthen their teaching practices and improve student learning and/or well-being. This is a new California Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) requirement for students and IHE's, who holds both accountable for and is in the experimental phase this academic year.

CCTC contracts with the Pearson Company to read, assess, and analyze candidate program evaluations completed by the student candidates, and indirectly evaluates the university effectiveness in preparing them to be successful school leaders. More recently, this fieldwork and intern course experience and accompanying courses has also been designed to prepare students for the state-mandated California Administrator Performance

Assessment (CalAPA) for the 2019-2020 school year. This plan ensures that the activities in which the candidate is engaged are aligned in a sequence so that they coincide with the theory learned in the courses the candidate will take. Because the candidate has courses scheduled in advance, the triad has advance notice of the course learning outcomes and can plan accordingly. If a student does not satisfactorily complete and Administrative Assessment Exam, IHE's are responsible for retraining and tutoring the student for a second attempt at passage.

There are three CalAPA leadership Cycles. Leadership Cycle I focuses on effective, equity-driven educational leadership to inform school improvement. Specifically, a plan is developed that aligns with the site's collective vision through the use of multiple measures of data and root analysis to identify areas of need for equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes for all students.

The candidate inquiry tasks are to select an interest area and collect multiple sources of related quantitative and quality data for the school over a three-year period before conducting an equity gap analysis. Next, the student candidates create a plan to identify potential causal factors—institutional or structural—to inform the development of a problem statement, and define a specific area of education needed related to equity.

The third step is to develop potential strategies for equitable school improvement based on the problem statement. Feedback is gathered from key stakeholders. The fourth and final task for the candidate is to reflect on his/her leadership capacity to analyze multiple sources of date, conduct an equity gap analysis, and develop a problem statement and potential strategies to inform school improvement and equity for all students. Support for the administrative candidate is provided from various sources, e.g. local control

accountability plan, collection of qualitative data, discussion with the administrative

candidate for potential structural institutional factors, and communication of the plan

through various stakeholders.

Leadership Cycle 2 focuses on facilitating collaborative professional learning within

a community of practice to improve teaching and student learning. Finally, Leadership

Cycle 3 focuses on instructional supervision, where an administrative candidate coaches a

volunteer teacher to strengthen teacher practices and improve student learning. Once

again, the candidates' tasks are to investigate, plan, act, and reflect.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no question that IHE and schools of education face daunting challenges in

preparing students to transition from theory to practical applications in fieldwork

experiences. These include: 1) working with students to effectively write and

communicate in English; 2) more and better training of adjunct professors for online

instruction; 3) providing learning opportunities for students to gather and interpret

feedback and data; 4) helping students in their fieldwork to understand and take

responsibility for outcomes; 5) preparing students to successfully pass the California

Administrative Performance Assessment (CalAPA). A successful transition will require the

university administrative and faculty working together in concert with the California

Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

References

Daggett, Bill. (2014). Lessons learned from the nation's most rapidly improving and transformative schools. *International Center for Leadership in Education.* 22nd Annual Models Schools Conference, June 2014. Retrieved from
    http://www.leadered.com/pdf/2014MSC_AddressingCurrentandFutureChallenges.pdf

Lowe H., Cook A. (2003). Mind the gap: Are students prepared for higher education? *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 27, 53–76. doi: 10.1080/03098770305629

Rideout, S., & Rideout, N. (2017). An investigation of first-year students' and lecturers' expectations of university education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8 (2218).
doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02218

Smith J. S., & Wertlieb, E. C. (2005). Do first-year college students' expectations align with their first-year experiences? *NASPA Journal*. 42, 153–174.

Smith K., & Hopkins, C. (2005). Great expectations: Sixth formers' perceptions of teaching and learning in degree-level English. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*. 4, 304–318.
doi: 10.1177/1474022205056173