Professional Preparation and Development of School Leaders in Australia and the USA

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INTRODUCTION

Educational reformers and researchers in Western countries have discussed the role of the school principal as the key decision-maker, facilitator, problem-solver, and the agent of change at the school site, (see, for example, Edmonds, 1979; Clark, Lotto, and Astuto, 1984; Smith and Purkey, 1983; Adams, 1987; Gamage, 1990 & 1996c; Barth, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1991; Thomson, 1993; Caldwell, 1994; and Cranston, 1996). However, research studies on the demographic characteristics and professional development of educators have focused more on teachers than on school administrators. Little information is available about the profiles and preparation of school leaders to meet the new challenges in the twenty-first century schools.

In recent years, with the increasing collaboration and communication among educational institutions in different nations, comparative and international education scholars in Australia, the United States, China and Britain have initiated a series of research projects to examine and compare the professional education and experiences of school leaders. Initially, Sharpe (1976) conducted a study of the profiles of high school principals in Australia and the United States. Subsequently, in a study funded by the Federal Government, Chapman (1984) prepared extensive profiles of Australian school principals. More recently, Daresh and Male (2000) designed a small-scale exploratory study of selected first-year British head teachers and American principals.

Meanwhile, Su, Adams and Mininberg (2000) initiated a survey study of selected American and Chinese school principals as a part of the collaborative training and research programs in the International Professional Development Academy (IPDA) at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). The IPDA was created to:

• develop an awareness of the goals and responsibilities of educational administration for schools in the twenty-first century;
• broaden perspectives on the current school reform issues in the international context;
• compare theories and their application in practices in educational administration at different levels of schooling and across national borders; and
• develop friendship and understanding among international scholars and practitioners in educational administration.
Furthermore, the IDPA planning to establish an international foundation in the pre-service and in-service curriculum for educational administrators, helped the current and future education leaders to develop broad and comparative perspectives on critical issues in educational reform, and to improve their knowledge and understanding of education and schooling in a global context. In keeping with this goal, key researchers at the IPDA shared their findings from the United States-China comparative study of school principals at international conferences and began to work with educational scholars in Australia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Norway to replicate the principal study in their regions in order to shed new lights on the profiles and preparation of school leaders in a multi-national context. Findings reported in this paper represents the collaborative efforts between Australian and American scholars.

RESEARCH METHODS

The comparative survey study of school principals was first conceptualized and designed by researchers at IPDA in 1997, and survey data were first gathered from a group of Chinese and American school principals in 1998 and 1999 (Su, Adams, Mininberg, 2000). The American sample consisted of school principals and assistant principals in Los Angeles County and adjacent counties and many members of the sample were enrolled in post-graduate programs at CSUN as California school administration practitioners seeking the second level (Tier II, Professional Administrative Services Credential) of administrative certification necessary for continued employment as school leaders. Altogether 111 survey records were gathered from American school principals and assistant principals.

During the Northern winter of 1999, when an Australian scholar visited the College of Education at, CSUN IPDA decided to collaborate with the University of Newcastle by replicating the principals’ study in Australian schools. The Australian data was collected from 102 principals and deputy principals within the school districts of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Maitland. In the Northern summer of 2000, two researchers from IPDA travelled to the University of Newcastle in Australia in connection with the study. Together, they visited schools, interviewed representative principals to collect additional information and seek clarification on the data collected in the empirical survey from 102 Australian school principals and deputy principals. The American and Australian school principals are comparable in that all of the respondents came from major coastal and urban areas in their nations. About two thirds (71%) of the Australian school principals surveyed were primary (K-6) school principals and one third (29%) were secondary school principals. In the American sample, half were secondary school principals and half were from elementary schools. In this discussion and analysis, it is necessary to bear in mind that Australia and the United States have different historical, political and social backgrounds and take into consideration such differences in the interpretation of the data collected.

The survey questionnaire contains both structured and open-ended questions and was based on the research model in the American National Study of the Education of Educators (Sirotnik, 1988) and on the principals’ knowledge and skill base as identified by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (Thomson, ed., 1993). It covers four parts: Part I on participants’ background information; Part II of participants’ pre-service and in-service training experiences; Part III on participants’ views on the principal’s job and responsibilities as well as their fundamental beliefs in what schools should be for; and Part IV on participants’ perceptions of the goals and tasks of school reform and the role of the principal in reform. In addition to survey questionnaires, the researchers interviewed selected school principals both in the United States and Australia. The interview questions
covered similar grounds as the survey questionnaire, but allowed selected respondents more
time and freedom to explain and describe their views and perceptions.

It is important to add that in collecting the survey data from the American school leaders, the
target group was the ones who were seeking second level credentials by undertaking
professional development programs in educational administration at university campuses.
However, the Australian data were collected from practitioners serving in three school
districts, who were not undertaking university level professional development studies at the
time of the survey.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Two research reports have been prepared on the findings from the Australian-American
comparative study of school principals. A comparative analysis of findings on the basic
beliefs and values of school principals, which regard education and schooling, their views
on school reform and the role of the principal in reform, as well as their visions of the ideal
schools for the twenty-first century will be presented in another article. This article focuses on
the profiles and entry perspectives of Australian and American school principals, and on the
pre-service and in-service training programs in which they have participated. Implications
for change in the recruitment and training of school principals are advanced in this article.

Profiles of Australian and American School Principals

Data from the survey of school principals present interesting profiles of the Australian and
American school principals. Figure 1 shows that of the Australian principals surveyed, 62
per cent were male, and 38 per cent were female, whereas for the American principals surveyed,
58 per cent were female and 42 per cent were male. It seems that there is more gender equity
among the American school administrators. This is also true for elementary level school
administrators in the United States. If we look at the secondary school principals only, then
61 per cent of the American sample were males. This figure is closer to the data gathered by the
National Center for Education Statistics, which shows that the majority of the American
public school principals were men (65.4%), and only 34.5 per cent were women (National
Center for Education Statistics, 1997). The American national data also indicate that there
has been an increase in the proportion of new women principals: from 41 per cent in 1987-
88 to 48 per cent in 1994-95. Even in Australia, current trends show that the numbers of
women occupying principal positions both at primary and secondary levels are on the rise.
For example, in the school districts of Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Maitland out of total
of 176 principals 46 or 26 per cent were women principals whereas 74 per cent were male
principals. However, in Newcastle, which is the most urban district, out of 66 principals, 30
or 45 per cent were women principals, showing new trends in the Australian system.

Figure 1 also presents information on the age distribution of principals in the two countries.
The Australian principals were older than their American counterparts. While 22
per cent of the American principals were under the age of 40, only 2 per cent of the Australian
principals were under this age. In fact, 60 per cent of the Australian school principals were
between the age 41 and 50 in contrast to 42 per cent of the American principals in the same
age bracket. Thirty-five per cent of the Australian principals versus 31 per cent of the
American principals were between the ages of 51 and 60 years. Based on data from the school
visits and interviews, we learnt that prior to 1989, the Australian principals, particularly in
New South Wales’ (NSW) were appointed on the basis of Seniority Lists maintained by the
system using information from the comprehensive evaluations conducted by the school
inspectors. As those lists only identified people entitled to be appointed to principal
positions, sometimes people had to wait for years until a vacancy arose. This explains why
many Australian school principals were in a higher age bracket when they were compared with the American principals. However, it is important to note that the school systems in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Victoria started the selection and appointment of school principals on merit with the introduction of school-based management in the mid 1970s (Gamage, 1996b; Gamage, Sipple & Partridge, 1996). In New South Wales, it was the introduction of the Scott reforms with community participation in school management that paved the way for the selection of principals on merit enabling the appointment of younger people to these positions (Gamage, 1992; 1996c). Consequently, the Australian principals generally had longer service (average of 16 years) as teachers before they became school administrators than did the American principals (average of 13 years). The American national statistics indicate that all principals had come to their assignments with an average of 10 years of prior experience as teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996a) and that the average age of all new principals had increased from those under 35 years (13%) to those in the 45 to 49 year age group (32%). Therefore, more American principals are entering their positions at an older age (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Whether it is better to have older, more experienced than younger (or visa versa) principals in schools needs to be further investigated.

**Figure 1. Age and Gender Distribution of American and Australian Principals**

There is also a great difference in the academic degrees held by Australian and American school principals. As shown by Figure 2, while 17 per cent of the Australian principals had less than a bachelor’s degree, 45 per cent hold bachelor’s degrees, 34 per cent have master’s degrees and only 2 per cent have doctoral degree while 2 per cent preferred not to respond to the question. Nearly all of the American principals in the sample had higher degrees, with 90 per cent holding master’s degrees and nine per cent with doctoral degrees. One explanation for this difference is that in the United States, in almost all states, one of the key criteria for appointment to a position of principal is a master’s degree in educational administration (Baltzell and Dentler, 1983; Bennett, 1987; Barson, 1990; Richardson and Prickett, 1990). In Australia, the academic and professional qualification required for principal remains a four-year bachelor’s degree or equivalent. However, under the merit
selection system introduced since 1989, selection panels are giving preference to higher
degree qualifications. In 2000, all three vacancies in high school principalships in the Hunter
area of New South Wales were filled by graduates holding master’s degrees in leadership
and management in education (MLMed) of the University of Newcastle, which is a clear
sign of the current trends. The national data from the United States also indicate that more
than 60 per cent of public school principals held master’s degrees and more than nine per
cent held doctoral degrees (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996b). In fact, it has
become very common for American school teachers to pursue master’s degrees. Many earn
them in evening programs while teaching full time in schools during the day.

![Ethnicity and Degree Distribution of American and Australian Principals](image)

**Figure 2. Ethnicity and Degree Distribution of American and Australian Principals**

Although the Australian school principals have lower level degrees than their American
counterparts, more and more Australian universities today offer a wide array of courses and
graduate programs aimed specifically at the school administrators - courses and programs in
school management, educational administration, leadership, educational policy, school
organization, business administration and so on. They are available at graduate certificate,
graduate diploma, masters, master’s honours and doctoral levels. The latest, teacher training
inquiry instituted by the NSW Government, in its report (Ramsey, 2000), has emphasized
the desirability of recognizing qualifications in leadership and management in education for
appointing candidates to principal’s positions. With this trend, it is expected that Australian
school leaders are more likely to seek higher levels of training and degrees in the future.

Both the United States and Australia embrace increasing diversity in their school population.
In California, for example, more than half of the students are from minority backgrounds.
However, the professions of teaching and educational administration are still dominated by
the mainstream/Caucasian group. More than 80 per cent of the American teachers are still
white. In our sample, 86 per cent of the American school principals were white, and only 14
per cent were minorities (11% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% black). This is very similar to that
revealed by the American National Center for Education Statistics: 85 per cent were white
and 15 per cent were minorities (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Calls and efforts for change have been made to recruit and train more minority teachers and educational administrators to meet the needs of the diversified student population (Dillard, 1994, and Su, 1997).

The Australian school principals in our sample were also predominantly white (96%), with only three per cent Asian and one per cent Aboriginal backgrounds. These figures seem to be closely related to the homogenous nature of the student population in the sample area. According to the 1996 official statistics, in Newcastle 91 per cent, Lake Macquarie 95 per cent, and in Maitland 96 per cent of the student populations consisted of Caucasian backgrounds.

**Entry Perspectives – Why did you want to become a Principal?**

There have been some studies on the entry perspectives of teachers (see Su, 1993, 1996, 1997; Choy, 1993; King, 1993; and Gordon, 1994), but there is very little research on those of educational administrators. Entry perspectives comprise a set of subjective reasons involved in a career choice. They include preferences for intrinsic or extrinsic rewards, preferences for certain occupations, and the development of a commitment to a career choice. Extrinsic rewards include what we usually think of as the earnings attached to a role and involve salary or money income, a level of prestige, and power over others, while intrinsic or psychic rewards for teaching consist entirely of subjective valuations made in the course of work engagement (Lortie, 1975).

Data from the current study of American and Australian school principals reveals interesting similarities and differences. We asked them to consider the importance of a series of reasons for becoming school principals. As indicated by findings presented in Figure 3, while the Australian principals considered “to have a personally satisfying job” and “to provide effective leadership” as the most important reasons, the Americans regarded “to help children and young adults,” “to make a contribution to society,” “I like children and youth,” plus the two most important reasons identified by the Australian principals as the most important. It seems that the Australian principals were less concerned about the purely altruistic reasons than the American school leaders, who appeared to be more idealistic. One reason for this discrepancy might be due to the fact that most of the American education administrators made their own decisions to become school principals and undertook training for this position. Another reason might be that the targeted American principals, were the ones who were undertaking their level two accreditation programs at university campuses. These principals would have been more articulate in defending their decision to provide a more unselfish motive. On the other hand, the Australian group, not being a specially selected group who had had the experience of working together for a considerable period of time similar to the American group, were perhaps, more forthcoming in expressing their inner feelings.

One thing in common in the views of the Australian and American principals is that they all considered intrinsic reasons as much more important than extrinsic reasons. Both rated “to have a high paying job,” “to have job security and a steady income” and “I was influenced by others” as not very important. In both the United States and Australia, teachers’ salary was known as one of the lowest among all the major professions in the society, and principals’ salary was higher than the average for teachers but still lower than most other professions in the society. A few American principals in our sample mentioned that they did get into educational administration for higher salary and more income because the teacher salary cannot support and satisfy their families’ financial needs.
Even in Australia, there is a clear distinction between the salaries of the classroom teachers and principals. The step one of a classroom teacher in 1999 was $27,258, rising to $50,000 after 13 years of service on the basis of annual increments. The lowest level, primary principal started with $55,548 while the larger primary school principal’s salary was $77,894. In the case of smaller high schools, the principals received a salary of $77,894 while the larger size high school principals were paid a salary of $81,299, illustrating a significant gap between teachers’ salaries and principals’ salaries (NSWDET, 1996).

![Figure 3. Reasons to Become School Principals](image)

**Figure 3. Reasons to Become School Principals**

Another commonality in Australian and American school principals’ entry perspectives is the emphasis they placed on school reform. Both rated “to work with teachers in school improvement efforts” and “to have an impact on school restructuring” as among the more important reasons for becoming school principals, although they did not give “to help transform society” equally high ratings, perhaps recognizing the limitation of their impact on the society. In comparison, the American principals gave these reasons higher ratings than their Australian counterparts.

The written responses to the open-ended question of why they wanted to become school principals reveal interesting differences between the Australians and the Americans. Most of the American principals mentioned that they came into education administration because of their belief in the value of public education, an opportunity to enjoy working with children and people, need to exert a significant influence on school change, and desire to make a positive difference in the lives of those involved in their schools.

Within the Australian sample, a significant number indicated that they became school leaders because they wanted to take the challenge and help to improve schools and student outcomes. They expressed confidence in the job and wanted to implement the educational philosophies that they believed in, to share their ideas, to give all students the best possible education, and to make them into good Australian citizens, who can improve society. A few Australian school leaders in the sample stated very practical reasons for becoming principals: a career change encouraged by peers and improved salary. One frankly stated, “Ego, to get a promotion, not to do play-ground duty and a challenge.” Another was bold enough to state “money” as the major cause to get into principalship.

Some Australian principals described their visions for school reform and they considered becoming principals as an opportunity to realize their visions. They wanted to use their knowledge and skills to improve educational outcomes for pupils on a whole school basis. One stated that he could influence change as he had something to contribute. Another wanted to make a real difference to students and stay in the education process by applying
the knowledge and skills that he had acquired to build a better school than the one he worked in. These principals believed that they could influence the implementation of policy and educational practice and that they had developed sufficient skills to allow them to serve as effective leaders.

When asked in the survey if they planned to stay as school principals for the rest of their careers, the American and Australian principals expressed mixed feelings. More than 42 per cent of the American principals surveyed intended to remain in their positions and they considered the principal’s job as “stimulating,” “challenging,” and “satisfying.” However, about 34 per cent of them gave a resounding “no” to this question, and 24 per cent were “not sure” or uncertain. About half of these principals would like to move into administrative positions at the school district level later on in their careers, but the other half cited “stress level” and “work load” as the major reasons for them to leave the principal’s job. One American principal felt that “it begins to eat me alive and I want to be out - almost to do anything else.” Another one complained that the load was so “overwhelming” that she was “peddling” as fast as possible but all she was hearing was “requests and demands for more.” Such feelings of frustration and being spread too thin appear to be very common among American school principals (Portin and Shen, 1998; and Richardson, 1999).

A recent study (Adams, 1999) related to the growing shortage of applicants, both in California and throughout the United States, for administrative positions, surveyed a population which had completed requirements for administrator certification to establish why qualified educators were choosing not to seek positions, and why those who currently hold administrative positions were considering leaving the field entirely, or seeking return to classroom teaching assignments. Respondents from this research sample of 109 certified educators cited the following factors affecting their decisions not to seek or to remain in administrative posts:

- increased demands to layer on new responsibilities not readily seen as related to teaching and learning,
- erosion of their authority to effect change in their organizations,
- escalating expectations for accountability, lack of support,
- statutes and mandates which dictate practice,
- compensation which is not commensurate with their responsibilities,
- long hours which leave little time for family or personal renewal, and
- a pervasively stressful political environment for school leaders.

Findings from the current study have lent further support to these observations. Australian school principals feel similar stress as their American counterparts. They see themselves as working in environments of constant change and uncertainty. For some, the result is a sense of powerlessness and loss of control. Stress among some has occurred as a result (Cranston, 1996). There is also a shortage of qualified school principals in Australia. A concern exists in a number of states where there is a decline in the number of applicants for principal positions in general, and in country and remote locations in particular (Scott, 1999). In this study, the vast majority (80%) of Australian participants indicated that they preferred to stay on as principals as they enjoyed the challenge and variety associated with the job. However, some wanted to make changes or move up in the administrative ladder. A teaching principal indicated that he would prefer to get into a non-teaching principal position while a deputy principal wanted to become a principal. Another principal would like to move upwards to a position of Superintendent or Chief Education Officer.
A small number of Australian principals in the study were planning to leave their positions. One explained that he had been the principal of three schools and preferred to have a change. A female principal confirmed that she did not want to stay in the job but preferred to undertake travelling and doing volunteer work. One principal gave a definite and negative answer when asked if he would stay as the principal, “No. I do not have a death wish, the stress levels and lack of support threatens principal’s health.” Another lamented, “Not sure. I believe change is important to maintain enthusiasm, interest and challenge.” A few of them felt that they had stayed in one position too long and wanted a career change. A few more stated that they were closer to retirement and plan to retire as principal. Clearly, serious measures should be taken to reduce the stress level of principal’s work and to address the professional development needs of principals in order to renew their commitment to their work and to retain the best school leaders in the education system.

**Pre-Service Training**

In addition to variance in their profiles and entry perspectives, the Australian and American principals in the sample had very different experiences in pre-service training, both in length and in content. Figure 4 shows that the majority (76%) of American school principals in the sample, participated in two or more years of formal training programs, 20 per cent attended one-year programs, and only four per cent received just a few months of training. In sharp contrast, 66 per cent of the Australian principals in the sample did not have any pre-service training before they became school principals. This outcome appears to be the result of not having any pre-service requirements by the system except being a good practising teacher. Of those who did, four per cent received only three months of training, two per cent had half a year of training, five per cent received one year of training, nine per cent had two years and 14 per cent, four years of training. It is obvious that those who have indicated as having one or more years of training have interpreted their own university level professional studies as pre-service training as the system did not either provide or require that type of training.

As has been noted by scholars in other comparative studies (Daresh and Male, 2000), there is a long history of formal programs for principal preparation in the United States. Since the end of the nineteenth century, there have been efforts to develop programs of study on university campuses, that would enable individuals to enter the field of school management and administration (Culbertson, 1990). Principals must have at least three years of teaching experience, university master’s degrees, and they must have completed mandated programs of study leading to the receipt of licenses or certificates to serve as school principals in their respective states.

In contrast, Australia, Britain, China and many other countries, have been using the traditional apprenticeship model where future school leaders have been prepared mostly by moving up the ranks from classroom teachers to master teachers to heads of departments and to school principalship, although there has been a shift in recent years in these countries to create and require some formal pre-service training for school administrators (Daresh and Male, 2000; Su, Adams, and Mininberg, 2000). In England, a new central government initiative for improving the management and leadership skills of head teachers and other senior professionals has been launched. The Labour government has recently published in its White Paper, *Excellence in Education*, its intention for all prospective head teachers to undertake formal preparation for the position. The emphasis placed on professional development is such that newly appointed British head teachers are entitled to a grant of 2500 Pounds Sterling, within the first two years of their appointment for the purpose of obtaining professional development, preferably at university level. The demand for educational management programs has increased to such an extent that in 1999, the
University of Leicester (a medium size British University) had over 1300 candidates enrolled for its MBA in Educational Management (Gamage, 2001). Australia, which followed the British model in the past, has also begun to stress the importance of appropriate training, selection, development and rewards for principals and other school leaders (Caldwell, 1994).

In China, where formal principal training was nonexistent only a few years ago, the National Ministry of Education now requires all the principals to obtain certificates of pre-service training, at least for a few months, before they take leadership positions. Educational administration has also emerged as a formal teaching and research area in a few leading Chinese institutions of teacher education. Nevertheless, all of these new developments cannot be compared to the well-established certificate and graduate programs for educational administration in American colleges and universities. The Chinese school principals participating in the International Development Academy at CSUN were quite impressed with the breadth and depth of the educational administrator training programs in California.

Figure 4. Selection and Length of Training Programs for American and Australian Principals

We asked the principals to rate the importance of a list of topics covered in their pre-service principal training programs, based on the first tier general requirements in California’s education administrator preparation program. Figure 5 shows a comparison of views held by Australian and American principals. The American principals considered “legal aspects of educational administration,” “principles and practices of curriculum development” and “organization and administration of elementary and secondary schools” as the most important topics. They also gave other topics relatively high ratings. As indicated by findings from another survey study in California (Adams, 1999), school administrators here felt that their programs of university course work and supervised field experiences had prepared them well in such areas as supervision, curriculum, law, finance, and school and community relations.

In comparison, the Australian principals assigned much lower ratings - only one item was rated slightly higher than three on a five-point scale - to all of the topics than their American
counterparts. The Australian principals also gave “field work” the lowest rating—less than one point on the five-point scale. As we have seen from the data presented earlier, about two-thirds of the school principals in the sample did not have any pre-service training before they took the leadership posts. Of those who took some pre-service training, 76 per cent did not have any fieldwork requirement. Many of the other principals covered by the American curriculum were also conspicuously missing from the pre-service training programs experienced by about one-third of the Australian principals in the sample. In some ways, the Australian school leaders have to learn their job on the job, by being a principal. Even at the follow up interviews, the principals emphasized that they were not either provided or required to undertake any pre-service training. However, some, on their own have undertaken university level studies in educational administration and leadership and in considering merit, the system has recognized such qualifications for appointments to principal positions.

In the research and reform literature, there have been strong arguments and empirical evidence as to the importance of good field experiences. Many future teachers even consider field work and their field mentors as the most significant sources of influence on the development of their fundamental education beliefs, attitudes and values (Su, 1992; Reiman and Theis-Sprinthall, 1998). Improving field experiences and internships with competent mentors and role models have been recommended as important measures to improve graduate education programs for educational administrators in the United States (Daresh and Playko, 1993; Schmieder, 1994). In California, for example, since 1997, entry-level administrators have been required to identify a university adviser and a practitioner mentor with whom to work in the development and implementation of a professional growth plan of 12-24 months duration. Doing that requires the establishment of a close relationship between the universities and those in the field (Cairns, 1995), which is often a weak point in the preparation of teachers and education administrators in the United States.

In fact, when asked to make recommendations to improve the existing pre-service training programs, both American and Australian principals placed heavy emphasis on the importance of connecting theory learning with internship and fieldwork, especially observation of exemplary education administrators. They wanted to have “more hands-on experiences,” “more mentoring by experienced site administrators,” “more emphasis on practical skills and realistic issues and problems that a principal may face,” “more shadowing and mentoring,” “more in-basket activities in every course,” “more case studies of principal’s work,” “more observation of exemplary principals,” “longer commitment to fieldwork,” and “stronger link between the university and the school district.” The Australian principals pointed out the non-availability of such programs but emphasized the need to require current and prospective principals to undergo comprehensive training in educational administration and leadership with incentives provided by the system. These
suggestions have strong implications for restructuring the pre-service training programs for educational administrators both in the United States and Australia.

The American principals in our study also wanted to add more computer education and application experiences to their pre-service training curriculum. Moreover, they would like to receive more training on diversity, evaluation, personnel, budget, and special education issues, matters that the Australian school principals did not mention in their recommendations. In view of the fact that no pre-service requirements were laid down by the Australian system, the principals suggested that there should be well-structured comprehensive pre-service training programs for the principals.

One aspect in common between educational administrators in the United States and Australia is that becoming a principal is a personal career choice and the candidates have to pay for all the training costs and spend their own time to complete the study. Now, because of the adoption of merit selections and the implementation of school-based management by almost all Australian school systems, many current and more specifically the prospective school leaders are undertaking university level professional development programs. These programs are followed either by distance learning mode or by attending university campuses in the evenings after school. Since 1998, in most university campuses, the course-work graduate level programs are being offered only on the full-fee paying basis. In both systems, seeking promotional positions is purely a personal decision. In this context, the Australian participants too have no alternative but to pay for their own professional development. However, in 2001, the Federal Government in Australia announced its plans to establish a fund to award interest free loans for those who wish to undertake such programs. In contrast, in countries like China and Korea, becoming a principal is largely an assignment or appointment by the higher authorities, and pre-service training is also arranged and paid for by the government authorities. The Chinese candidates can study full-time with full pay and full benefits. Therefore, they have the advantages of time and money over American and Australian school principals.

In-Service Training

Apparently, American school principals have received much more in-service training than their Australian counterparts. To begin with, the majority of the Australian school leaders, 81 per cent in our sample did not have any in-service training. As shown by data in Figure 4, the majority of the American principals, 83 per cent in our sample, had more than one year of in-service training. In fact, nearly half of them received two years of in-service training.

In Australia in the past, the beginning principals were provided with a two-day induction program at the beginning of the year, but those who had to take up their positions in midyear had to miss out on this program. Currently, no such program exists but the training and development directorate has organized a number of relevant programs and these are provided on-line to be followed by the current and prospective principals, if they choose to do so. However, depending on the Government’s prioritized agenda for the year such as child protection legislation, creation of learning organizations, getting the foundation right, excellence in teaching and learning, partnerships in public education, a fair go for all; the principals are in-serviced at the district level, requiring them to provide in-service to their staff at schools.

In contrast, the American in-service programs are more formal, more structured and developed, often located on the university campuses. In addition, much of the in-service training in the United States has been provided by professional organizations, state and county agencies, and the administrators’ own school districts. For example, in California,
educational administrators are required to take a second tier administrative credential program, which is a pre-requisite for entry-level administrators. It generally covers ten different topics of study as shown in Figure 6. These topics are encompassed within five thematic areas which are mandated for program inclusion by the state certifying agency, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing. The five thematic areas under which all topics and courses of study are subsumed include:

a) organizational and cultural environment,
b) dynamics of strategic issues management,
c) ethical and reflective leadership,
d) analysis and development of public policy, and
e) management of information systems and human and fiscal resources.

When asked to indicate the relative importance of these ten course topics, the Australian and American principals held some different views, as shown by Figure 6. Again, the Australians assigned much lower ratings to almost all of the topics than their American counterparts, as some of the Australians had not had in-service training in these areas. The American principals considered “leadership for information management and change” and “ethics, morals, and values for educational leaders” as the most important topics of in-service training, whereas the Australians regarded “an induction plan” as more important than others.

![Figure 6. Importance of Topics in In-Service Training Programs](image)

Interestingly, “organization and administration of multicultural programs” was considered as one of the most important topics by American principals, but it was ranked as the one of the least important by Australian education administrators. This might be due to the lack of diversity among Australian educators and students, although education for aboriginal students is a concern for the school principals we interviewed. In contrast to most areas in the United States, the student and teacher and educational administrator population is quite homogeneous in the Newcastle area, therefore educators there may find much less pressure to deal with the multicultural and diversity issues, although they also teach about minority cultures and other cultures in the world in their general curriculum.

In making recommendations for improving the existing in-service training programs, the American and Australian principals reiterated their recommendations for the pre-service preparation programs, again with an emphasis on the importance of quality fieldwork: “more practical with actual school situation and cases,” “more nuts and bolts of site organizational structure and change,” and “better connections between theory and practice.” Furthermore, the American principals demanded that university in-service courses be taught by professors...
Su, Gamage and Mininberg who had been principals over the last five years in order to address current problems in schools. They also wanted the university to eliminate redundancy of requirements for the first tier and second tier programs.

Our participants’ observations and suggestions are not new. Reformers in the U.S. have repeatedly recommended “pairing” and “mentoring” of novice principals with experienced and exemplary administrators on the job (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986; Daresh and Playko, 1991; Elsberry and Bishop, 1993; Adams, 1999), where leadership and management skills are taught along with counselling in times of trouble, creativity is nourished, and advice is provided on job and career decisions (Parks, 1991). They also point to the need to include in the in-service training for educational administrators more on-site content, careful choice of the contexts, and systematic planning by school systems and universities (Hart and Weindling, 1992). Moreover, some researchers have argued that in-service training of educational administrators should focus more on life situations than on academic subjects (Richardson and Prickett, 1994) and that it is critical to offer in-service training in context-laden situations so that novice administrators can learn to devise solutions relevant to local conditions (Murphy and Hallinger, 1987).

In a cross-national study, Coleman and his associates (1996) reported that while mentoring is often part of the pre-service administrator-training process in the United States and Singapore, in the United Kingdom it takes place as in-service education for the new principal already in a position. In such cases, the new English principal tends to place high value on the support obtained from a trusted peer. Another study in Australia also found successes in a peer assistance program involving training, observation, and feedback (Brady, 1996). Adams’ recent study (1999) in California indicates that such support is increasingly the norm in that state’s districts, where not only is designation of a mentor, and of a defined induction program, developed collaboratively with a university adviser, required by the state’s certifying agency, but also in districts, which are establishing comprehensive in-house institutes and academies to aid new administrators and increase the likelihood of their success in meeting district goals. Our participants’ responses clearly support the findings, conclusions, and recommendations made by these scholars.

Recognizing the fragmented nature, the short duration and the lack of their in-service training, the Australian principals suggested that the future programs be organized in a more consistent, structured and comprehensive manner and with more emphasis on up-to-date knowledge and on practice. They also wanted to have more opportunities to share information with colleagues both at home and abroad, and they were particularly interested in lessons of school reform from other nations. We anticipate and expect more and more exchange and communication between educational administrators in the United States and Australia through the efforts of comparative education scholars.

CONCLUSION

In summary, both the Australian and American school principals in our sample had chosen to enter leadership positions primarily for altruistic and intrinsic reasons, although the Americans seemed to be more idealistic and more reform-oriented than the Australians. At the same time, the American principals were more stressed out than their Australian counterparts and as a result, one third of the Americans in our sample intended to leave educational administration. Although the majority of the Australian principals in our sample plan to remain in their positions, they also expressed feelings of powerlessness and stress. Currently, there is a severe shortage of principals, particularly in the United States. It is important for educational policy makers to reflect on findings from this and other related studies and develop strategies to recruit and retain high-quality school leaders.
Another major finding from the study shows that the Australian school principals tend to be more senior in age and teaching experiences but lower in academic degrees than their American counterparts. Apparently, seniority bears more importance in the selection and appointment of school leaders in Australia, whereas formal, graduate-level, and university-based credential program is a must for the selection of school principals in the United States, regardless of the candidates’ age and teaching experiences in schools. All American principals must have completed formal credential training on a university campus before they could apply for the leadership positions in schools. In contrast, most of the Australian principals have little or no pre-service training before they took their positions. The American colleges and universities also offer extensive second-tier or graduate level in-service professional development programs to school principals, whereas the majority of the Australian principals do not receive any formal in-service training from the university. For years, scholars in different parts of the world have debated the issue of whether or not people could receive adequate professional preparation for the principalship through academic experiences on the university campus. The Australian, British and Chinese view in the past has been that there is no better preparation for leadership than on-the-job experience as a head of department, member of senior management team, and deputy headship. They did not feel that pre-service training is something that should necessarily take place on a university campus. The contrasting American position has also been fixed. It maintains that the route to the principalship is one, which can only take place through the completion of university courses, academic degrees, and governmental licensure (Daresh and Male, 2000). Increasingly, the Australian and British educational system are encouraging candidates for principalship to have higher degrees. The Teacher Education Inquiry established by the New South Wales Government expects that more and more Australian universities will offer formal and graduate-level training programs in educational administration (Ramsey, 2000).

Moreover, findings from this study reveal that the Australian and American principals differ in their views of the importance of various subject areas for pre-service and in-service training, especially regarding field experiences. The Australian principals have placed much less importance on field experiences in formal training programs because most of them have learned to become principals on an apprenticeship model, immersing themselves in real school field experiences everyday. However, in making recommendations for the improvement of pre-service and in-service training programs for school principals, the Australians and Americans are in total agreement and both want to place heavy emphasis on connecting theory with practice and especially on the observation of exemplary educational administrators. The principals’ views and voices have strong implications for developing and restructuring the existing training programs for school principals and call for a much closer link between the school and the university.

Findings from this project and other recent comparative studies of school principals demonstrate that nations continue to differ in both theories and practices in preparing their educational leaders although they have all recognized that principals are at the center of school improvement efforts. Educational policy makers and reformers should draw some useful lessons from this comparative study in their efforts to recruit and prepare more and better principals, who are committed to meeting the challenges of the twenty-first Century and demands of changing societies. After all, the effective principals are the ones who create effective schools where all students can learn.
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REFERENCES


