PROLOGUE

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Every field of professional practice must periodically reflect on its past, assess current conditions, and chart a course for the future. This book is designed to stimulate thinking and action for the field of educational leadership. The authors portray historical achievements and short comings, describe what is transpiring now, and explore implications of current developments.

Given the range of perspectives the authors bring to this task, it is not surprising that they offer varying interpretations of our field's past and different visions for its future. It is a privilege for me to highlight briefly a couple of areas where tensions are especially pronounced and to mention a few challenges and opportunities facing our field.

The standards movement is one source of tension and debate in educational leadership. This movement, with its reliance on high stakes testing, is the dominant school improvement strategy affecting all levels of education and driving the curriculum in K-12 schools as well as teacher and administrator preparation programs. Passage of high-stakes tests is required for grade promotion, high school graduation, and teacher and administrator licensure. Also, test scores are used to evaluate and rank K-12 schools, determine which schools must provide their students other educational options, and accredit schools and university preparation programs.

In our field the standards movement is being operationalized primarily through the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). There has been surprising support for the ISLLC standards among policy makers and accrediting agencies; these standards have been adopted or adapted for administrative licensure in 40 states. ISLLC has been applauded for shifting the focus from school management to the school leader's role in ensuring the success of all students. Advocates contend that adoption of the ISLLC standards will result in more rigorous preparation and more competent leaders. But critics are concerned that the standards overlook important leadership characteristics such as cultural competence, and that an emphasis on the standards will reduce preparation to a single "approved" method, which perpetuates the status quo.

Even more controversy surrounds the merits of strategies used to determine whether school leaders meet the standards. About 13 states have adopted the Education Testing Service's School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA) as a licensure requirement. This instrument consists of a set of vignettes to which individuals respond, and the test is evaluated by a national group of trained assessors. Some contend that having universities align their admissions process and curriculum with SLLA will have a positive impact on the quality of preservice programs and the school leaders they prepare. But others assert that use of this licensure test will narrow the focus of preparation and downplay

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creativity and imagination, ethical dimensions of leadership, and important social justice perspectives. Also, concerns are raised that licensure tests disproportionately eliminate candidates of color. Administrative standards and related assessments have far reaching implications and deserve our most careful consideration.

The privatization of education—opening education to the marketplace—is another source of contention in our field and beyond. Both advocates and critics of school privatization agree that this movement could dramatically affect the direction of schooling in our nation. School leaders will be operating in a very different environment if a consumer-driven educational system becomes the norm. Recent federal initiatives, including the No Child Left Behind Act, place more emphasis on family choice and the use of public funds in private schools, and corporate involvement in public education is increasing each year. Support for privatization is based in part on the premise that competition, including private options, can improve educational opportunities and ultimately the academic performance of all children. Four fifths of the states have embraced this notion to a degree with charter school legislation, and almost half of the states are considering limited voucher programs for low-income students or those attending deficient public schools.

Under marketplace models, individual schools will become less diverse, because families will select school where students and staff share their characteristics and values. Some view this as healthy, because such homogeneity will reduce conflicts about mission and goals within schools. However, others are concerned that this development could threaten our national commitment to instill in our youth respect for diversity in backgrounds, perspectives, and ideas.

School leaders, education faculty members, and policymakers need to understand the values guiding various models to privatize education and the implications of decisions to infuse market forces in education. Consumer-driven education, with its focus on individual choice and advancement, differs greatly from government-run schools that are intended to promote the general welfare and the common good. Regardless of one's position on the merits of school privatization, leadership preparation programs need to explore the potential for this movement to alter the purposes and basic structure of schooling in our nation. If school privatization becomes dominant, the change in the nature of education in our nation could be as momentous as the common school movement in the 1800s.

There are other environmental factors creating challenges and opportunities at all levels of education, such as the incredible technological advances that are allowing diverse parts of the world to be connected through distance education and are changing the concept of "school." Although educators cannot control such developments, they have an important role to play in shaping responses to new technologies and influencing standards for the use of distributed education, policies for acceptable use of the Internet in our schools, strategies to assess the quality of materials on the web, and numerous other technology-related issues. Also, the rapidly changing student demographics are beyond our control, but school leaders can influence how diversity is embraced and valued in

establishing communities of learners in our schools.

Specifically within our field, evaluating the efficacy of leadership preparation presents tremendous challenges. For decades, such preparation has been severely criticized (most recently in the 2005 Levine report), and there have been numerous calls for more research on the effectiveness of university programs. In fact, this is one area where there appears to be universal agreement; empirical documentation of the merits of leadership preparation is sorely lacking, and much that is written about this topic cannot be considered research. While many educational leadership units are reforming their programs in a variety of ways, such as incorporating problem-based and field-based learning, aligning courses with ISLLC standards, using cohort groups, and requiring student portfolios, we do not have research substantiating that these reforms are producing more capable leaders who can create school environments that empower teachers and enhance student learning and social development.

In short, we do not have credible evidence to counter the allegations that the current preparation of school leaders is inadequate or perhaps even misdirected. There have been studies of graduates' and faculty members' perceptions of leadership preparation programs and a few studies that assess coworkers' perceptions of school leaders.   However, researchers are only beginning to isolate particular components of preparation programs in such studies, and most extant research does not relate changes in preparation to success as a school leader, much less to student performance in the schools they lead.

Given the paucity of data supporting the merits of university preparation programs, a number of states are considering or adopting provisions that eliminate credentialing requirements for school leaders. And alternative preparation routes, a number of which are totally online, are lucrative for entrepreneurs willing to develop consumer-friendly options. Some educational leadership faculty members feel that alternative preparation and licensure models should be resisted because they will have a negative impact on the quality of school leaders. Others, however, embrace the competition and call for partnerships among school personnel, universities, for-profit groups, and professional organizations to devise new and improved approaches to prepare school leaders. These alternatives to university preparation and licensure are not a passing fad and must be addressed in a thoughtful manner.

There are some promising signs regarding the evaluation of leadership preparation in initiatives supported by various professional associations, accrediting agencies, and task forces. Some states have engaged in "Critical Friends" reviews or other statewide assessments of their educational leadership preparation programs. Yet, these efforts are not coordinated and usually do not extend to alternative preparation routes. In fact, little has been done to assess the effectiveness of non-university options or even to *describe* the increasing number of alternative models.

Very few people are championing the status quo, but considerable debate surrounds how and what to change in preparation programs. Which criteria are

most important in judging preparation effectiveness? Should we use backward mapping to identify elements of preparation that influence leader behaviors with the greatest positive effect on student learning as measured by performance tests? Should we focus on how leadership is distributed and teachers are empowered within the school? Should the emphasis be on social justice concerns, such as how leaders' actions nurture democratic schools and affect various groups of children and their families? Are there ways to assess leadership preparation that would incorporate all of the above and draw on various strategies and perspectives?

One difficulty in evaluating preparation programs is the lack of agreement about the most valued student and school outcomes and hence the central roles for school leaders. But if we allow these competing visions or environmental uncertainties to immobilize us, we are admitting defeat before we even start. Academics, practitioners, professional organizations, accrediting agencies, and others with a stake in improving schools need to engage in meaningful dialogue about the outcomes we are trying to achieve so we can design research on how traditional and alternative leadership preparation programs affect these outcomes.

Never has it been more important to have transformative leaders who engage in critical analysis of current conditions and are willing to question structures and deeply rooted cultural norms. Educational leadership faculty should model how facilitators and guides can empower others to create vibrant learning communities, if we expect our program graduates to assume new leadership roles. We should resist becoming entrenched in polar opposite positions about what is needed to address the challenges before us, and instead should search for common ground. Creative tension is healthy, and I certainly am not advocating that we should all embrace a single perspective. However, we must fashion opportunities for real collaboration among all interested parties.

A theme throughout this book is that we can learn a great deal from the past but should not be bound by it. And we can benefit from new approaches and ideas, but simply because they are new does not always suggest that they are better. Indeed, transformative leadership does not mean that we throw out all that has been done in the past or that we blindly embrace a new orthodoxy. Rather, it means that we critically assess the impact of everything we do and question our *own* assumptions and activities drawing on multiple perspectives to expand our thinking. And we must take some risks, even if we fail at times, because only by taking risks can we strengthen the preparation of school leaders and ultimately improve our schools. Our field is at a crossroads, and current decisions *will* affect generations to come.

The chapters in this book offer more than a critique of leadership preparation, although the authors are not hesitant to criticize various practices. But they go much further in offering concrete steps to assess such preparation and the foundation upon which it is built. It is an exciting time in our field, and we can make positive contributions to education if we capitalize on the opportunities presented. But if we are complacent and hesitate too long, university leadership preparation programs are likely to be left behind.