

# PROLIFERATION OF MASTERS DEGREES IN GENERAL ADMINISTRATION: REFOCUSING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP REFORM\*

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## 1 Overview

By the numbers, the United States' school leadership is probably the best formally educated in the world. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES, 2003-04, Table 28, p. 67), 90.7% of school principals had master's degrees or higher formal preparation, including doctorates. The rate was even higher for public schools where only 1.7% of principals had less than a master's degree. This high level of postgraduate education has been achieved because in states such as Illinois, one must have a master's degree as a partial requirement for the school administrative certificate (Illinois State Board of Education, 2005). There are 26 universities that offer master's degree programs in educational leadership and administration (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2009) that prepare principals. What is a master's degree in educational leadership and administration? What does the master's degree add to the certification process in education?

Despite the high level of formal preparation of school leadership candidates, Levine (2005, 2006, 2007) criticized education programs in his policy reports on America's education programs. In the first report, *Educating School Leaders*, Levine (2005) challenged that

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<sup>1</sup><http://ijelp.expressacademic.org>

## 1.1

Today, principals and superintendents have the job not only of managing our schools, but also of leading them through an era of profound social change that has required fundamental rethinking of what schools do and how they do it. This is an assignment few sitting school administrators have been prepared to undertake” (Levine, 2005, p. 6).

In the report, Levine unequivocally concluded that school leadership programs offered inappropriate degrees, and taught irrelevant curricula that did not prepare for the job of school leaders. In particular, Levine challenged that “the typical course of study for the principalship has little to do with the job of being a principal. In fact, it appears to be a nearly random collection of courses” (2005, p. 27). One of Levine’s recommendations calls for the closure of weak programs that do not have the capacity for substantial improvement. Levine concluded that “most of the programs examined . . . were inadequate. Some of them have the capacity for substantial improvement; many do not” (p. 65). Similarly, in the third report, *Educating Researchers*, Levine (2007) recommended that schools of education “need to be stronger in carrying out education research and preparing scholars for the future. I am convinced that universities are the best place to carry out education research” (p. 80). The question asked in this paper is whether master’s degree programs in educational administration in the nation in general, and Illinois in particular, have the capacity and structure to adequately prepare administrators who are also scholars for the future.

Colleges of education and associations overseeing school leader preparation programs throughout the nation heeded Levine’s call. One year after Levine’s *Educating School Leaders* report, the Commission on School Leader Preparation in Illinois Colleges and Universities (2006) responded by submitting the *Blueprint for Change* report to the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The commission made six main recommendations: 1) restructure admission criteria and recruit high quality principals, 2) improve programs using rigorous assessment data, 3) create meaningful clinical and internship experiences, 4) establish a rigorous certification exam, 5) revise the certification and endorsement structure, and 6) coordinate a rigorous program review and approval process. In 2007, the Illinois Council of Professors of Educational Administration (2007) followed suit by commissioning a Special Task Force to conduct a gap analysis of the programs offering degrees and certification in school leadership. In its conclusion, the Special Task Force concurred with Levine that “broad strategic change must occur.” According to the Task Force, leadership preparation programs should “focus on preparing leaders who can improve student achievement and overcome the myriad challenges facing schools today” (p. 11).

However, neither the *Blueprint for Change* nor the Special Task Force’s gap analysis addressed the first part of Levine’s criticism regarding the proliferation of degrees and certificates in school leadership preparation programs. Levine analyzed,

## 1.2

There are too many degrees and certificates in educational administration. They mean too many things, and they risk having no meaning at all. For instance, the doctor of education degree (Ed.D.) is reserved by some institutions for practitioners, but others award it to academics and researchers as well” (Levine, 2005, p. 41).

Arguably, the many degrees and certificates to which Levine referred include master’s degrees and principal certificates. Yet, in its recommendation for implementation, the Special Task Force recommended to “Form a task force through the IBHE [Illinois Board of Higher Education] to assist colleges and universities in establishing clear and distinct guidelines in educational leadership between Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs” (ICPEA, 2007, Implementation 2.6, p. 13). This recommendation highlights the limitation and, apparently, triviality, of the Special Task Force’s gap analysis on at least two counts. First, while the Special Task Force’s focus was on school leadership, not just the principalship, it is questionable why preparation at the doctoral level became singled out. By law, the State of Illinois requires school leadership candidates, both at the school building and district level, to have a master’s degree. Nowhere does the state of Illinois attach the superintendency, principalship, or any other type of school leadership preparation, to achieving a doctoral degree. Second, while it is clear that the Special Task Force’s singling out of the doctor of education degree

was in response to part of Levine's criticism (Levine, 2005), the justification for not questioning master's degrees, as well, seems ill-guided. Indeed, Levine's study gave the example of the doctor of education as being an "inappropriate degree" because, in part, colleges of education did not have the capacity to establish the required doctoral culture. As such, it appears legitimate for Levine to question the tendency for school boards to prefer superintendent and principal candidates with doctorates (Ehara, 2000; Glass, 2003), if that terminal degree that is not based in research, on one hand. On the other hand, however, Levine's call, extended beyond the doctor of education; he questioned the purpose of the myriads of degrees and certificates in educational administration. In fact, in both perspectives, the rationale in this review for strengthening the academic relevancy of the master's degree, as a foundation for the doctoral degree, would even be more pertinent.

Therefore, there seems to be a need to ask whether or not the different master's degrees in educational administration are quality, appropriate, post-graduate degrees that could, notably, prepare for a quality terminal degree. This question is pertinent because, if the principals or the superintendents must effectively contribute to overcoming "the myriads of challenges facing schools today" (ICPEA, 2007, p. 6), they must be appropriately educated. They must be aware of the interconnectedness of school violence at the local level and the socio-economic challenges facing society and the future of education, not just at the state and national level, but also at the international level. In other words, the state-approved certificate in educational administration ought to be bestowed to a professional who is not only conversant with the execution of the school's daily operations, but also capable of envisioning and conceptualizing solutions for a better world for tomorrow. Unfortunately, since the Council for Social Foundations of Education (CSFE) lost its membership on the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in 2004, social foundations of education that would have provided school leaders with the required knowledge and skills have been marginalized. As Dottin, Jones, Simpson and Watras (2005) argue, "while the NCATE standards call for foundational study in professional education, such standards do not call for specific courses or specific disciplines" (p. 250). Indeed, the Council of Learned Studies in Education (1996) articulated the interpretive, normative, and critical studies component of school principal, school superintendent, school psychologist, and school counselor certification programs (Standard III) as follows:

### 1.3

Professional preparation leading to certification and/or licensure as a school principal, school superintendent, school psychologist, or school counselor shall include studies (at least one course, preferably two or more) in foundations of education. Such coursework must utilize the foundations' interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives to address: (1) societal and cultural influences on schooling; (2) the analysis of policy issues; and (3) the ethical dimensions of schooling. (Council of Learned Societies in Education, 1996)

The issue is not whether or not individual programs, or individual faculty, address international and global diversity in the course offerings; the purpose of this review is to question whether there is a deliberate and planned emphasis in master's degree programs to graduate principals who are conversant in problem-posing and problem-solving within the global and international context. For instance, Knowledge Indicator IH of the Illinois Content Area Standards for Superintendents states that the competent school superintendent "understands the historical, moral, philosophical, and political traditions of education in the USA and other countries" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2002, [http://www.isbe.net/profprep/CASCDvr/pdfs/29130\\_superintendent.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/profprep/CASCDvr/pdfs/29130_superintendent.pdf)<sup>2</sup>). Although the purpose of this review is not to argue whether or not all superintendent preparation programs should offer courses that specifically cover the social foundations of education in the USA and other countries, it seems intriguing to observe that the same bold language is not used in the corresponding Illinois Content-Area Standards for Principals or in the Standards for Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for principals (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002). As such, this review questions how master's degrees in educational administration can expect their principal candidates to become global change agents if such a content area is not a priority of the state or nation.

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.isbe.net/profprep/CASCDvr/pdfs/29130\\_superintendent.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/profprep/CASCDvr/pdfs/29130_superintendent.pdf)

When the certification system was initiated in Illinois in 1986, the state prescribed graduate level courses required for each certificate. For instance, beginning January 1986, the minimum requirement of graduate-level study for the general administrative endorsement (for principals, assistant principals, assistant or associate superintendents, and other similar or related positions) was

- a. 12 semester hours of Instructional Leadership (i.e., skills in promoting academic achievement, implementing school improvement, long-range planning, program evaluation, and personnel evaluation);
- b. 9 semester hours of Management of Public Schools (i.e., skills in personnel management, school governance, school law, school finance, and interpersonal communication); and
- c. 4-6 semester hours of Schools and Public Policy 4-6 (i.e., skills in establishing effective school/community communication and involvement, and analysis of political and social context of schools).

Today, the revised policy—2004 General Administrative Endorsement (required for principals, assistant principals, assistant or associate superintendents, and staff filling other similar or related positions)—is much looser. The state no longer prescribes minimum semester hours of graduate-level study. Instead, the Illinois State Board of Education requires that “candidates for the general administrative endorsement shall hold a master’s degree awarded by a regionally accredited institution of higher education that encompasses the coursework in educational administration and supervision” (ISBE, 2005, p. 62). But what exactly is a master’s degree? What courses do master’s degree programs offer that specifically prepare the school leader for apprehending the overarching challenges facing education and society?

## 2 What Is a Master’s Degree in Educational Leadership and Administration?

The typical master’s degree in educational administration in Illinois is about 36 credit hours of postgraduate work. Some schools offer the Type 75 Certificate-only to candidates who already have a master’s degree. At some institutions, the certificate is one to three courses shorter than the master’s degree, but all the courses taken for the certificate are generally counted toward the master’s degree. The tendency at other institutions seems not to allow candidates to enroll in certificate-only options, or not to have those options at all. The inconsistent nature of the relationship of the master’s degree to the principal certificate can be summed up in two observations. First, in programs that offer the principal and general administrative certificate-only, the courses that make the difference between the certificate and the master’s degree are disciplines that are critical to the preparation of school leadership. For instance, at Roosevelt University, candidates for the Type 75 Certificate may not take 1) Data Analysis and Action Research for Educational Leaders and 2) Social Foundations of Diverse Communities. At Aurora University, candidates for the Type 75 Certificate may not take Technology in the School of the Future. At Chicago State University, candidates for the Type 75 Certificate-only complete all the 12 courses for the MA in General Administration, except 1) Integrating Technology in Curriculum and Instruction or 2) Fundamentals of Educational Research. Although these program options have unquestionably been approved by the Illinois State Board of Education, the concern expressed in this review is that, according to the Illinois Content Area Standards for Principals and the national Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for principals (National Policy Board for educational Leadership, 2002), all these course contents are indispensable foundations for school building leadership.

The second contradiction is that, although programs advertize separate certificate-only options, many colleges of education and departments advise students with prior master’s degrees against not completing the two or three courses that separate the certificate from the master’s degree. In addition, the trend in most education administration programs is not to give that option at all. Thus, at Western Illinois University, applicants are informed that “persons seeking Illinois Type 75 administrative certification through Western Illinois University must complete the master’s degree program including the following 36 semester hours of course work, EDL 555 (Internship), and have a minimum of two years of full-time teaching experience” (<http://www.wiu.edu/grad/0405catalog/edad.shtml><sup>3</sup>). At Governors State University, the statement

<sup>3</sup><http://www.wiu.edu/grad/0405catalog/edad.shtml>

reads, “If you now have a master’s degree from an institution recognized for teacher education and two years teaching experience while holding a valid teaching certificate, you may be able to receive certification without completing the entire master’s degree in educational administration... Normally this will be one course less than the entire master’s degree program. If you are in this position, you should seriously consider completing the degree, rather than stopping the program one course short of having a second master’s degree” ([http://www.govst.edu/uploadedFiles/EDAD\\_HBOOK\\_rev1jul09.pdf](http://www.govst.edu/uploadedFiles/EDAD_HBOOK_rev1jul09.pdf)<sup>4</sup>). At Illinois State University, the language is even less ambiguous. The program advertizes, “A student seeking a Master’s degree and Type 75 Certification will earn a Master of Science in Education degree. Because of the Type 75 Certification requirements, the plan of study has little room for student choice due to accreditation requirements” (<http://www.eaf.ilstu.edu/programs/masters/p12masters.shtml><sup>5</sup>).

To further answer questions related to the quality and nature of master’s degrees in educational administration, we reviewed course listings and catalog descriptions for Illinois universities offering those programs, as well as, programs in other states, and compared them. The main focus of the review was to ascertain whether 1) the different degrees were different in course offerings, 2) the course descriptions were relevant to the challenges of conceptualizing global issues, and 3) the curricula allowed students some choice of key critical courses that might complement core coursework. This paper also looks at the demographics of students attending the master’s degrees, as well as, the breakdown of the programs by sectors (i.e., public, not-for profit private, and for-profit private institutions).

According to the Illinois Board of Higher Education, there are 26 universities that offer five different types of master’s degrees in educational leadership and general administration—Master of Arts (M.A), Master of Science (M.S.), Master of Arts on Education (M.A.E.), Master of Education (M.Ed.), Master of Science in Education (M.S.Ed.) (<http://www.ibhe.org/BHEProgramInventory/default.htm><sup>6</sup>). Sometimes, at one institution, two different types of master’s degree programs in educational administration are offered, with seemingly different denominations. To what extent are these master’s degrees different?

### 3 What Are the Requirement for the Master’s Degree and Certification in Educational Administration?

Beginning in July 2004, in Illinois, the following policy was issued for general administrative and superintendent endorsements (ISBE, 2005). The policy stipulates several requirements for the certification of principals and superintendents; the excerpt below only lists the requirements relating to the academic preparation of candidates. The similar language applies to the Special Education Director and Chief School Business Official:

**General Administrative Endorsement (2004):** This endorsement is required for principals, assistant principals, assistant or associate superintendents, and staff filling other similar or related positions as indicated in 23 Ill. Adm. Code 1.Appendix B. (See also 23 Ill. Adm. Code 29.120.)

- a. Candidates for the general administrative endorsement shall hold a master’s degree awarded by a regionally accredited institution of higher education that encompasses the coursework in educational administration and supervision.
- b. Candidates shall have completed an Illinois program approved for the preparation of administrators or a comparable approved program in another state or country or hold a comparable certificate issued by another state or country.

**Superintendent (2004):** This endorsement is required of school district superintendents.

- a. Candidates for the superintendent’s endorsement shall hold a master’s degree awarded by a regionally accredited institution of higher education.

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.govst.edu/uploadedFiles/EDAD\\_HBOOK\\_rev1jul09.pdf](http://www.govst.edu/uploadedFiles/EDAD_HBOOK_rev1jul09.pdf)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.eaf.ilstu.edu/programs/masters/p12masters.shtml>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.ibhe.org/BHEProgramInventory/default.htm>

- b. Candidates shall have completed an Illinois program approved for the preparation of superintendents or a comparable approved program in another state or country or hold a comparable certificate issued by another state or country. (ISBE, 2005, pp. 62-63)

As this excerpt shows, the basic requirement for both the general administrative and superintendent endorsements is the master's degree. Both candidates are also required to complete a specialization program specific to the principalship or superintendency. Furthermore, principal candidates must verify they have a minimum of two years' full-time teaching or school service personnel experience." (<http://www.isbe.net/certification/requirements/administrative.htm>). Likewise, candidates for the superintendent endorsement must "have at least two years' administrative or supervisory experience in schools." In this review, we question what constitutes the academic preparation and the professional preparation of principals. How do principal preparation programs differentiate their post-graduate, academic preparation from the completion of "an Illinois program approved for the preparation of administrators"? For the superintendency, the confusion appears to have been avoided, as colleges of education implement post-master's programs specific to the preparation of superintendents. Thus, Illinois State University requires an additional 36-credit hour "Post-Master's Graduate Certificate for the Superintendent Endorsement," beyond candidates holding "a master's degree, P-12 leadership experience, and a Type 75 certificate." The Type 75 Certificate is the technical term used in Illinois to refer to the general administrative endorsement. Similarly, to obtain the superintendent endorsement through Northern Illinois University, "candidates must possess a master's degree in education administration or its equivalent," and then complete "a 33-semester-hour advanced study program leading to an Educational Specialist in Educational Administration degree (Ed.S.), or a 63-semester-hour Doctor of Education program in Educational Administration (Ed.D.)" ([http://www.niu.edu/teachercertification/advcert/acp\\_ac.shtml](http://www.niu.edu/teachercertification/advcert/acp_ac.shtml)<sup>8</sup>). At Western Illinois University, candidates for the superintendent endorsement must complete a 36-hour Education Specialist degree in addition to "a master's degree in Educational Administration/Leadership from an accredited university" (<http://www.wiu.edu/grad/0506catalog/edad.shtml><sup>9</sup>). The university of Illinois at Urbana Champaign requires a 40-credit hour Certificate of Advanced Studies for the superintendent endorsement. Therefore, the issue is not whether or not the master's degree in principal preparation is inadequate, but whether or not colleges of education can clearly delineate the relationship between the academic post-graduate preparation from the certification components.

This distinction between the academic and professional preparation of a principal and that of a superintendent underscores the premise of this paper that little attention seems to have been paid to the academic preparation of the principal. What exactly constitutes the master's degree in the principal preparation, and what constitutes the candidate's professional preparation? The contention, in this paper, is that if the master's degree at the principal level is blurred, and if the same master's degree is used for admission to subsequent superintendent certification, whether it is an Education Specialist degree or a doctoral degree, then school leadership as a whole will have a shaky foundation.

#### 4 Who Attends Universities Offering Master's Degrees in Educational Leadership and General Administration?

According to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (2009), there were 4949 students enrolled in master's degrees in educational leadership and administration during the 2008 fall semester (Table 1). If the programs preferred by students preparing to become principals of schools can be an indication of the status and direction of education in Illinois, the following numbers can be startling. Firstly, only 38% of these students attend public Illinois universities and colleges. Not only do private universities attract the majority of principal candidates in their master's degrees in general administration, but the not-for profit sector appears to be the most popular, especially among minority candidates—Black and Hispanic. It might be informative to study why, although Black candidates (n = 775) represent 15.7% of total enrollments in master's degrees, and

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.isbe.net/certification/requirements/administrative.htm>

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.niu.edu/teachercertification/advcert/acp\\_ac.shtml](http://www.niu.edu/teachercertification/advcert/acp_ac.shtml)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wiu.edu/grad/0506catalog/edad.shtml>

about one fourth of white enrollments, Black candidates out-number White candidates in for-profit private master's degrees. In addition, less than one fourth of Black candidates are enrolled in public institutions. The same seems to be true of Hispanic enrollments. Less than one third of Hispanic candidates are enrolled in public institutions, and there are more Hispanic candidates enrolled in for-profit private institutions than there are in public institutions (Table 1). There certainly are geographical or financial reasons for minority candidates to prefer for-profit institutions over public ones, but it seems necessary for administrators of principal preparation programs in public institutions to assess the impact of their contribution to the field of school leadership in Illinois.

**General Administration Candidates in Illinois Colleges and Universities, by Ethnicity, and the Status of the College/University, Fall 2008**

	Public	Not-For-Profit Private	For-Profit Private	Total
Black	181	215	645	775
White	1,498	1,444	625	3,402
Hispanic	105	79	159	318
Asian/Pacific Islanders	23	18	27	58
Hawaiian	0	0	0	0
Indian	3	3	3	7
Foreigners	5	10	24	31
Multiracial	0	0	0	0
Other	77	129	257	358
Total	1,892	1,898	1,742	4,949

**Table 1**

NOTE: Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education

What is more, Black and Hispanic candidates' preference for for-profit master's degrees does not seem to be for any institutions. As Table 2 illustrates, one for-profit private university's master's degree program enrolls, by itself, more Black and Hispanic candidates than all public institutions combined. There certainly are financial (e.g., financial initiatives available to students) and organizational reasons (e.g., the attractiveness of courses offered on week-ends, or in cohorts) why students prefer a college or a university over another, but it seems necessary to assess what has put public institutions at a disadvantage. Table 2 also provides the enrollment of master's degree candidates in educational administration in programs with at least 15 black students. As the table shows, public institutions such as Chicago State University, located in predominantly Black neighborhoods, as well as other public universities and colleges such as Governors' State University and Northeastern Illinois University located within greater Chicago, pale in minority enrollments in comparison to for-profit universities.

**Master's Degrees in Educational Leadership and General Administration in Illinois with 15 Black Students or More, by Ethnic/Racial Groups**

Sector	Institution	Program Name	Black	Hispanic	White	Asian	Other	Total
FP	American College of Education <sup>30</sup>	Master of Education in Educational Leadership	291	124	339	13	134	901
NP	National-Louis University <sup>31</sup>	M.Ed. in Administration and Supervision	95	19	200	1	53	368
P	Governors State University <sup>32</sup>	M.A. in Educational Administration	66	39	308	1	18	432
FP	Argosy University Chicago Campus <sup>33</sup>	M.A.Ed. in Educational Leadership	65	7	69	3	28	172
P	Chicago State University <sup>34</sup>	M.A. in Educational Leadership & Administration	54	9	9	0	1	73
<i>continued on next page</i>								



NP	Olivet Nazarene University <sup>35</sup>	M.Ed. In School Leadership/ M.A.Ed. In School Improvement Leadership	26	5	312	4	3	350
NP	Roosevelt University <sup>36</sup>	M.A. in Educational Leadership	20	7	60	3	9	99
NP	DePaul University <sup>37</sup>	M.A. and M.Ed. in Educational Leadership	19	5	59	0	14	97
P	Northeastern Illinois University <sup>38</sup>	M.A. in Educational Leadership	17	32	130	7	14	200
NP	St. Xavier University <sup>39</sup>	M.A. in Educational Administration/Supervision	16	6	74	0	5	101

**Table 2**

NOTE: Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education Degree Program Inventory, Fall 2008 Enrollment; Key to Abbreviations: P = public; FP = private, for profit; NP = private, not for-profit

<sup>30</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl25\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl25$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>31</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl19\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl19$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>32</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl14\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl14$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>33</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl26\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl26$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>34</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl2\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl2$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>35</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl21\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl21$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>36</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl22\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl22$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>37</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl15\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl15$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>38</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl6\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl6$_ctl0',''))  
<sup>39</sup>[http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:\\_\\_\\_doPostBack\('AAQueryGrid\\$\\_ctl23\\$\\_ctl0',''\)](http://cnx.org/content/m33601/latest/javascript:___doPostBack('AAQueryGrid$_ctl23$_ctl0',''))

## 5 A Plethora of Master’s Degrees

As early as 1991, Osguthorpe and Wong (1991) surveyed 664 education programs and found a plethora of master’s degrees, the most popular being, by order of popularity, the Master of Education, the Master of Arts, and the Master of Science. Osguthorpe and Wong questioned the proliferation of master’s degrees, and called upon colleges of education to start a national dialogue so that the confusion would be avoided. Long before Levine, Osguthorpe and Wong recommended,

A national forum should be established in which the master’s degree in education can be addressed. This forum might include representatives from the national associations, such as the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the Council of Graduate Schools, or the Holmes Group, as well as a group of faculty and administrators from the broad range of schools of education that offer graduate programs. (Osguthorpe, 1991, p. 18)

Unfortunately, as Table 3 shows, the confusion still persists. The real question to ask policy makers is the basis for approving all 16 master degree specializations. Are all these degrees different, and do the differences in names have specific bearing on the academic contents?

**Number of Master’s degrees in Educational Leadership and Administration in Illinois, by Specialization, College or University, Fall 2008**

Degree	Specialization	Institution
M.A.	Educational Leadership and Administration	Chicago State U, North Central College
	Educational Administration	Governors State U, Dominican U
	Educational Leadership	Northeastern Illinois U, U of Illinois Springfield, Aurora U, Bradley U, DePaul U, Roosevelt U, American College of Education, Lewis University
	Educational Administration and Supervision	Loyola U-Chicago, St. Xavier U
<i>continued on next page</i>		

M.S.	Educational Administration	Illinois State U
	Educational Leadership	St. Francis U
	Educational Organization and Leadership	U of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign
M.Ed.	Educational Organization and Leadership	U of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign
	Educational Leadership	DePaul U, Lewis University
	Educational Administration and Supervision	Loyola U-Chicago, National-Louis U
	School Leadership	Olivet Nazarene U
M.A.Ed.	School Improvement Leadership	Olivet Nazarene U
	Educational Leadership	Argosy U-Chicago, Argosy U-Schaumburg
M.S.Ed..	Educational Leadership	Illinois State U, Western Illinois U
	Educational administration and Supervision	Eastern Illinois U
	Educational Administration	Northern Illinois U, Southern Illinois U-Carbondale, Southern Illinois U-Edwardsville

**Table 3**

NOTE: Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education; Individual School Catalogs

As this table shows, there are four different types of master of arts (M.A.) degrees in educational administration, three different types of master of science (M.S.) degrees, four different types of master of education (M.Ed.) degrees, two different types of master of arts in education (M.A.Ed.) degrees, and three different types of master of science in education (M.S.Ed.) degrees. Often, two different master's degree specializations coexist at one institution. Thus, the Department of educational Leadership at North Dakota University offers both the M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and the M.S. in Educational Leadership (<http://www.und.nodak.edu/dept/registrar/catalogs/catalog/graddept/depts/edl.htm>). In the lines below, we question whether these specializations are different.

## 6 Are M.A. or M.S. Programs Distinguishable from other Master's Degrees?

Even more intriguing than the distinction between the master's degree and the certificate are the specializations offered through the different master's degrees in educational administration. A review of the descriptions of the courses required to achieve a particular master's degree specialization at an institution does not seem to indicate any deliberate difference among masters of science, arts, or education. However, there appears to be two exceptions. First, at least one of the 26 universities distinguished the Master of Education (M.Ed.) from the Master of Arts (M.A.). Thus, the graduate school at Loyola University Chicago ([http://www.luc.edu/education/academics\\_degrees\\_masters.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/education/academics_degrees_masters.shtml)) delineates the difference between the M.Ed. from the M.A. in the following terms,

The M.A. degree requires a minimum of 24 hours of coursework and the completion of a thesis. It prepares students for acceptance into doctoral programs and advancement in their professional discipline. The

M.Ed. degree requires a minimum of 30 hours of coursework and successful completion of a comprehensive examination. It prepares students for advancement in their professional discipline.”

Second, there are only three programs that require a thesis, and all three are M.A. or M.S.: the Master’s of Arts in Educational Leadership at DePaul University, the Master’s of Arts in Educational Leadership at Lewis University, and the Masters’ of Science in Educational Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. No other Illinois colleges and universities with a master’s degree in educational administration require completion of a thesis. Overall, the majority of master of arts or science programs are hardly distinguishable from the master of arts in education, or master of education, or master of science in education.

## 7 Are Candidates Required to Learn Research Methodologies

Most programs seem to require research. However, there are a number of programs that do not require any research methodology at all. What is more puzzling, even the so-called traditional M.A. and M.S. programs (Osguthorpe & Wong, 1991) do not all teach research methodologies. Those programs may list research courses, but the catalog description of such courses indicates little research methodology. Yet, both the Illinois Content-Area Standards for Administrative Certification (<http://www.isbe.net/profprep/pcstandardrules.htm><sup>40</sup>) and the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2002) unequivocally stipulate that school leadership candidates acquire knowledge of research methods. While the programs are free to teach what they see fit for their institutional needs, it might be difficult for graduates from programs that do not require research methodologies to pursue doctoral degrees. In fact, it might strengthen the quality and appropriateness of the Ed.D. in educational administration if its feeders—master’s degrees in educational administration—emphasized research, whether applied or not. The contention in this paper is that doctoral programs should revise their admission criteria to include applicants’ demonstration of educational research methodologies.

## 8 Is There Room for Foundations Courses in Principal Preparation Programs?

One of the consequences of the current tendency to broaden requirements in leadership preparation programs is that “foundations courses in education programs have been marginalized” (Dottin, Jones, Simpson & Watras, 2005). Other researchers have decried the little visibility accorded to social foundations in education and the negative effects such marginalization has on the quality of teacher preparation (Bullough, 2008; Butin, 2005). It appeared necessary to review the type of foundations courses that are taught in the master’s degree programs in educational administration. The question is whether all the programs preparing principal and superintendent candidates consistently offer these foundations courses.

Given the tough challenges that the world is facing—population displacement because of wars, international terrorism, global warming, etc.—one would expect educational administration programs at the graduate level to provide candidates with a solid foundation in the interconnectedness of local, national, and global challenges facing society, as well as the interdependence of the world community in solving those problems. At the district, state, and national level, many intervention programs, strategies, and theories are continuously developed to make education in the USA probably the best research-informed in the world. However, those initiatives and strategies are rarely coordinated or known beyond the district or state boundaries. For instance, I would challenge that very few principal preparation programs in other states, if any, include in their curricula Illinois’ Renaissance 2010, California’s Education and the Environment Initiative of 2003, Tennessee Exemplary Educator Program, Texas Steps Up Initiative, etc. The point, in this paper, is not to list all notable initiatives, but guard school leadership programs in particular against “provincialism.” Part of “educational leadership literacy” taught or enhanced in master’s degrees in educational administration ought to include the ability to compare and apply not just school policies at the federal level, but also systematic knowledge of other states’ educational systems. If not, how will educators avoid reinventing the wheel? At the international level, how much do our candidates know about the Escuela Nueva movement

<sup>40</sup><http://www.isbe.net/profprep/pcstandardrules.htm>

that originated in Columbia in 1975, or United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) global Education for All? To answer these questions, and many others, we reviewed school leader preparation programs, and compared their course offerings to the foundations required by the Illinois State Board of Education. Below are state-required skills and performances that candidates for school and district leadership must exhibit (ISBE, 2002; 23 Illinois Administrative Code, Ch. I, S. 29). Table 4 lists fundamental knowledge and skills that principals must demonstrate in their specific subject areas and professional roles to ensure that Illinois students meet or exceed the expectations defined by the Illinois Learning Standards<sup>41</sup> (ISBE, 2002).

**Reference to Educational Foundations in Illinois Content Area Standards**

Foundations Area	State Standard
Philosophical, Historical and Sociological Foundations of Education,	<p>The competent principal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has knowledge of the philosophy and history of education (1G)</li> <li>• Designs curricula with consideration for philosophical, sociological, and historical foundations, democratic values and the community’s values, goals, social needs and changing conditions (1H).</li> <li>• Analyzes school problems with an understanding of major historical, philosophical, ethical, social and economic influences in a democratic society (1R)</li> </ul>
Global (Comparative and International) Education	<p>The competent principal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knows about global issues and forces affecting teaching and learning (6G).</li> </ul> <p>The competent superintendent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the historical, moral, philosophical, and political traditions of education in the USA and other countries (IH).</li> </ul>

**Table 4**

The first observation was that none of the 26 universities offered a “specific” course in comparative or international education. The second observation was that only a handful master’s degree programs offer specific courses in social foundations of education, and many times, these courses are electives. The same holds true for principal certification programs in other states. Programs such as the M.A. in Organizational Leadership and Policy Studies with Administrator I Certification at the University of Maryland (<http://www.education.umd.edu/Depts/EDHI/academics/certification.html#ma>), the M.Ed. in Educational Leadership at Lamar University (<http://dept.lamar.edu/leadership/DegreePlans/Principal.html><sup>42</sup>), or the M.A. in Educational Leadership- K-12 Administration at Eastern Michigan University (<http://catalog.emich.edu/preview>), to name a few programs, do not have a core requirement in psychological, sociological, historical, or philosophical foundations of education. The lack could also be found in such other areas as diversity, educational

<sup>41</sup><http://www.isbe.net/ils/Default.htm>

<sup>42</sup><http://dept.lamar.edu/leadership/DegreePlans/Principal.html>

<sup>43</sup>[http://catalog.emich.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=5&poid=3601&bc=1](http://catalog.emich.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=5&poid=3601&bc=1)

technology, etc. Table 5 lists the only educational foundations courses found in master’s level programs preparing principals in Illinois. This list does not include programs where foundation courses are electives.

**Educational Foundations Offered in Master’s Degree Programs**

Institution	Degree	Educational Foundations
St. Xavier U	M.A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Context</li> <li>• Educational Movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century</li> </ul>
DePaul U	M.A. and M.Ed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• Education and the Social Order</li> </ul>
U of Illinois Urbana/Champaign	M.S. and Ed.M.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological Foundations of Education (4 hours)</li> <li>• Social Foundation (2 hours)</li> <li>• Philosophical Foundations (2 hours)</li> </ul>
Southern Illinois U Edwardsville	M.S.Ed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociological Foundations or Philosophical-Historical Foundations</li> </ul>
Eastern Illinois U	M.S.Ed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological Foundations</li> </ul>
Northern Illinois U	M.S.Ed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological Foundations</li> </ul>

**Table 5**

Not only is the number of programs that have developed educational foundations as required by the state insignificant, but concerns should be raised, overall, about the adequacy of academic preparation of school leaders in this context. The limited representation of specific social foundations of education courses in the preparation of school leadership also underscores the void left by the Council for Social Foundations of Education (CSFE) within the teacher accreditation process. If the Council still had a say in the accreditation process, each master’s degree program in educational administration would be expected to offer “at least one course, preferably two or more” courses in foundations of education (Council of Learned Societies in education, 1996).

## 9 Conclusions

The author of this review relied on course catalogs and course descriptions available online. He cannot claim to have represented additions to programs' curricula that are not published, or that may have been implemented at the individual faculty level as programs prepare for NCATE re-accreditation or respond to other internal and external reviews. Also, this review could not verify if an individual faculty member had taken the initiative to include contents such as international or comparative education topics in a given course. Such an inclusion could only be verified through an interview with instructors. Similarly, some courses currently being offered, but which are not listed in programs' catalogs, may not be included in the tables created above. In most cases, however, courses that are listed in the programs' catalogs as electives were not recorded in this review because there is no guarantee that such courses are permanently and constantly offered. With this caution, the following conclusions can be drawn from this review.

Firstly, the reviewer acknowledges timely efforts that states have undertaken to reform school leader preparation programs. In Illinois, both the *Blueprint for Change* and the gap analysis pointed to the urgency that a broad systemic change must occur. However, the primary focus of the recommendations pertaining to the academic preparation of school leaders seems to have been misplaced. The “doctor of education” may need retuning, but the typical school principal does not hold a doctorate; s/he is required to have a master's degree. Unfortunately, there are too many types of master's degrees with seemingly uncontrolled enrollments and uncontrolled specializations. Since the intention of state boards of education appears to be that of making the master's degree the backbone of their administrative certification process, who is controlling the degree's appropriateness? It does not seem that the proper procedure for reviewing the contents and rigor of these master's degrees have been planned or monitored. As a consequence, master's degrees in educational administration lack in the very academic depth that the certification process was supposed to bring to school leadership. If the capacity to understand the context of education around the world is weak, and/or the capacity to decipher research and data is not taught, school leaders will not be able to effect the changes needed in schools.

Secondly, the master's degree in school leadership must provide the candidate with the skills and knowledge necessary to understand and envision issues and forces affecting teaching and learning within and between school districts, states, the federal administration, and within the world. School communities can no longer afford to ignore educational initiatives and theories implemented in other districts, states, and other countries, or disregard the challenges that other states and countries face. For this depth in master's degree programs to be added, colleges of education must particularly reassess the need for social foundations of education in the preparation of school leaders. As this review illustrated, the curricular contents of many master's degrees in educational administration are not consistent in addressing the type of knowledge and skills that are critically needed in the schools of the future. Because such courses as philosophical, sociological, historical, psychological foundations of education, and comparative and international education are not identified in course descriptions or listings, the guarantee that all faculty will cover the contents is compromised. In this perspective, it seems appropriate to argue that the inconsistency in which these courses are offered, if it is not reverted, will negatively affect the integrity of the master's degree in school leadership programs.

Thirdly, master's degree programs in educational administration must not be confused with the certification process. State boards of higher education and the different accreditation agencies must redefine the core coursework required for the master's degree to reflect the need for the school leader for the future to understand the historical, moral, philosophical, and political traditions of education in the USA and other countries.

Fourthly, states can no longer afford to let accreditation agencies allow unplanned proliferation of post-graduate degrees in school leadership. If there must be some “master of science” or “master of arts” degree programs for which writing a thesis is required, and others for which it is not, the difference ought to be justified. Clear, universal, and consistent criteria institutional capacity to offer master's degree in educational administration and criteria for developing the M.A., M.S., M.Ed., M.A.Ed., or M.S.Ed. degrees, must be established. Furthermore, the rationale for assigning a field to the degree—educational leadership, educa-

tional administration, educational administration and supervision, or organizational leadership—ought not to be an unplanned occurrence.

Finally, the purpose of this review is not to question the legality of master's degrees in educational administration in Illinois or the nation. All the programs reviewed for this paper are fully approved. The intention is to use the noted differences among the different master's degree programs, such as discrepancies in minority enrollment, marginalization of educational foundations and master's theses, to provide a basis for improved collaboration among colleges of education. Institutions ought to learn from one another about best practices in recruitment retention and retention of candidates, thesis counseling, and strategies for balancing studies in foundations with meeting the requirements for certification approval. At the same time, this introspection ought to help institutions collaboratively assess and plan their institutional capacity to graduate candidates who are appropriately equipped for the school of the future. Corollary, this collaboration could serve as a starting point, for both institutions and policy-makers, in the necessary dialog over the redefinition of what constitutes an appropriate degree in educational administration. The heart of school leadership is the master's degree in educational administration. Efforts to reform school leadership must begin with the assessment of the academic depth, integrity, and universality of the master's degree in educational administration.

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