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Podcast Script

State Rule for Approval of School Leadership Programs: The Matrix

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² This paper was originally presented at the 2008 UCEA Conference, Orlando, FL

³ The Innovative Session was video-taped and presented a readers' theatre followed by audience participation. The camera crew was led by doctoral students, **Tommy Tucker** and **Maggie Fernandez**. What follows is the edited audio transcription of the presentation.

Ira: Welcome. I am Ira Bogotch. The following presentation describes a two year journey of how one school leadership faculty here at Florida Atlantic University revised its masters and certification program to meet new state mandates. The original presentation was made in front of a live audience at the 2008 UCEA conference held in Orlando. We are re-recording our session for this podcast. Missing from today's performance are Tony Townsend, who is now at the University of Glasgow and Michele Acker-Hocevar who is on faculty at Washington State. Jim Burnham our new coordinator will be playing himself and Tony. Maggie Fernandez, a graduate assistant who video-taped the UCEA session will be Michele. Present today are Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Jim Burnham, Daniel Reyes-Guerra, Bob Shockley, Dianne Wright, Maggie Fernandez, and Meredith Mountford.

We begin by listening to the voice of the state of Florida as Meredith Mountford reads Rule 6A-5.081 APPROVAL OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

MEREDITH

The Legislature and State Board of Education recognize multiple pathways for demonstrating the standards required to qualify for a Professional Educator's Certificate. To ensure capacity and quality of pre-service school leadership programs and the development of inservice school leaders required in Section 1012.986, F.S., this rule sets forth requirements for approval of two levels of school leadership programs. Level I programs lead to initial certification in educational leadership for the purpose of preparing individuals to serve as school leaders who may aspire to the school principalship. Level II programs build upon Level I training and lead to certification in School Principal. This bi-level certification and preparation process includes programs offered by postsecondary institutions and public school districts.... (Specific Authority 1012.98, 1012.986 FS. Law Implemented 1012.986, 1012.56 FS. History–New 6-20-07. Copyright © 2006 Department of Education)

Maslin-Ostrowski: Our primary objective today is to tell our faculty's story honestly and with good humor. Along with other public and private universities in this large southern state, 2007-2008 was a difficult year in terms of revising educational leadership programs for the Department of Education. Re-approval during 2008-2009 was also difficult as we moved from planning to implementation in 2009 and 2010. We hope that our presentation will be informative as we reveal the internal dynamics of an educational leadership program faculty wrestling with external mandates as well as our professional responsibilities. There were tensions and contradictions, and what we called *difficult conversations*. We cannot tell all, even if we wanted to. We are talking about real people and real situations. But we have agreed to be transparent and respectful.

We hope that *what* we say and *how* we say it invites you to examine, share, and question your own experiences of educational leadership program change.

MAGGIE FERNANDEZ (FOR MICHELE): We want to make it clear from the beginning that the educational leadership faculty of South University (pseudonym) was not interested in making cosmetic changes (e.g., lipstick on a pig) by aligning new standards to old content and courses, but rather to use the state's top down actions to fuel an holistic rethinking and restructuring of leadership preparation for school leaders. Nevertheless, transactional changes, with minimal costs to institutions, remain a tempting choice under particularly difficult circumstances such as unfunded, externally-driven mandates.

Mountford: On its face, a discussion of a single department of educational leadership as holding power seems more a fantasy than reality. But in fact, the geographical location of South University, its demographics, its recent successes with passing NCATE and gaining admissions to UCEA, the publicity from its new pilot internship program in a large urban school district, along with the reputations of individual faculty, statewide, nationally, and internationally are all bases of negotiated power. Each of the faculty brings with her/him a constituency to her/his work that whether known or unknown by local school districts or the State Department of Education, gives the faculty the legitimacy, space and position to exert different bases of power that ultimately benefit local students and the state. In other words, we came to understand our political position: to successfully compete in the marketplace while building a model leadership preparation program.

Bogotch: Jim, as the newest member of our faculty, what do you think about all this?

Burnham: Like many of you in the audience, we used the state initiatives to make changes that were both needed and already in progress. Thus, to some degree, the state's imposition was a welcomed event. This process brought the faculty into a meaningful dialogue, with all the promises and pitfalls of such a process, but it resulted in an outcome that more professionally and more pragmatically addresses the needs of future school leaders. The process afforded the interaction and consensus building needed to make a faculty more "whole" and have a better understanding of the role each plays in the overall success of our students, and that is ultimately a reflection on us as an institution of higher learning that is in touch with the realities of professional school leadership.

Reyes-Guerra: [Interjects] According to State Department Rule 6A, we could lose state endorsement and maybe lose accreditation.

Bogotch: Hold on. I want to call on our Chair, Robert Shockley, someone who intimately knows the workings and all the key actors on the state level. Bob, what do you think about what Daniel just said?

Shockley: [pauses for effect as he looks first at audience and then back to Daniel] Well, essentially, yes, we could lose accreditation. But, I don't think that is going to happen and I know that is not the state's intent. The state has its own culture, language, and accountability measures. Just look at our state capital. It is physically located in the north central region of the state. It is not easily accessible, at least from where we live and work. But many of us make the trip north because we want to work with the government to make needed changes in education throughout the state. We have worked hard to develop positive relationships with state officials – even though we are so far away geographically, and, at times, philosophically. Where we come together is that we, too, want our graduates to be distinguished school leaders and to be ready to take leadership responsibilities immediately upon graduation.

Rule 6A, the reform act we are referring to here, can be seen as part of a bigger, more far-reaching goal affecting licensure of professional educators, specifically teachers. It is interesting to follow the pattern between what is happening in school leadership and what has been happening to teacher education as all part of a puzzle. By identifying the patterns with respect to licensure and accreditation, first in terms of what happened in teacher education and then educational leadership, it is almost predictive of what is coming to educational leadership.

Bogotch: You just heard a state insider's view. What makes our department so very interesting is that we also can hear an outsider's perspective from someone on the school leadership faculty, and our former Chair Tony Townsend. Here is what Tony said at UCEA.

JIM BURNHAM for Townsend: Well, I guess the reality is that we all need to understand that things are changing very, very quickly. And, over the past few years for teachers, principals, and departments of educational leadership, we have had to deal with changes coming as a plethora of new responsibilities that come crashing in. You don't have time to adjust to the first change before the second change arrives. In these dynamic situations, we have to adjust to new responsibilities, new laws, and new requirements at a time of diminishing resources.

Bogotch: We pause, because we're professors. And, as professors, we ponder, but not too ponderously, I hope. We reflect, but not too self-reflectively. In so doing, we try to come up with conceptual frameworks. Meredith, is there a conceptual framework that makes sense of all this?

Mountford: There are at least two conceptual frameworks inside this big change process. We should first look at the institutional change process literature and then to political power in particular. You know it is not enough just to resist and say we are going to comply with the state, but rather we tried to bring valid theories and evidence of leadership not only from our current leadership program, but also from the state's huge list of competencies. As a faculty we made lists of what we see in the literature, what we already teach in our courses, and perhaps more importantly what we don't see either in ourselves, our courses or in the state. For example, we don't see topics like internationalism, social justice, inclusion, experiential learning, adult learning, second language acquisition, etc. in the state's standards and competencies. Yet, these are part of "what should be" as a leadership conceptual framework. Instead, state officials want our graduates to know how to raise student achievement equitably and deliver mandated programs and changes in today's curricula and pedagogies. The bottom line questions, however, are not addressed in the state's standards and competencies: to whom are we as educators accountable? What are the purposes of public education in a democratic society? And, if I might, I would like to add the question, whose leadership theory is this?

Bogotch: So, you can see that we are trying to make sense. And it comes down to state level unfunded mandates and policies – top down, on the one hand, and, individual

faculty and program responses on the other hand. [Those of you who are following along with the video powerpoint, my comments refer to Table 1] The underlying tensions reflected in Table 1 leads to the one overriding research question: **How can an educational leadership faculty work through the dynamic tensions created by external and unfunded mandates and still bring best practices to pre- and inservice administrators?** Every educational leadership program faculty answers this question empirically, not just conceptually, for itself and for its constituencies.

Table 1: Countervailing Forces

State-Level Unfunded Mandates/Policies	Individual Faculty and Program Responses
DOE- Cecil Golden - The Rule of State Government	Inclusion of National and Post National Standards
Trust in Market, Competitive Ideology	Trust in Professional Counter-Insurgent Strategies for Program Improvement
New State Certification Examination	New Partnerships with School Districts and Pilot Internships

In terms of Mandates, we have the State Department of Education and Rule 6A. We also have to work inside the ideology of a market economy. In addition to both the DOE and the market, our students have to take a new state certification test based on the mastery of 91 discrete managerial tasks.

I turn again to our Chair, Bob Shockley to ask: How do we make sense of these forces?

Shockley: In the 1980s, the State Department developed criteria for state certification for educational leadership. It created a dual level system of certification. Level I is what universities do; Level II is what school districts do. Candidates for school leadership positions needed to meet the two levels of preparation in order to earn their certification. This is the way it has been structurally for many, many years in the state. There are problems inherent in this structure of course, and we as a faculty have been working for years to solve the problem even before passage of Rule 6A. The problem is how we at universities can better align with what the school districts are doing. Too often in the past, there has been a culture of us doing our thing and culture of school districts doing their thing, and those hurt by this structure were the candidates going

through the state system. That's the history. In 2000, all state statutes were sunset and there was a re-drafting of all the work that had been done.

The new state law is named the Cecil Golden Act. In the Act, there are state mandated services for professional development, certification requirements, and leadership opportunities, all of which come with on-line website support in terms of articles and training materials available for educational leaders, program and school districts as well. The intent is to try to build a structure to bridge what's happening in the university to what's happening to school districts.

In 2006, the Legislature developed leadership standards focusing on instructional leadership as well as describing 91 discrete skills necessary to "successfully lead the improvement of student achievement" (website). These skills are part of The William Cecil Golden School Leadership Development Program, a competency-based, comprehensive and coordinated statewide professional development system for current and emerging school leaders.

Bogotch: Our state has been accused, rightly or wrongly, of not paying attention to what goes on across the nation or the world. Tony has some important ideas on what we mean by national and post-national standards. Jim, can you tell us what those are?

Jim Burnham: What we know is that the US has defined a series of standards for leadership. The standards identify specific items along with some big picture items. What we also know is that the word *standards* is not uniformly used around the world. There are places that talk about leadership capabilities rather than leadership standards. If we look at the differences between standards and capabilities, what we see is that standards are based on something we learned yesterday that we could do today. Standards say nothing about leadership beliefs will be tomorrow. Standards are rooted in the times of today. Capabilities however open the doors to new leadership directions instead of looking at the past for guidance. And so, just the conversation that we hold as a faculty about the differences between standards and capabilities is important. It takes us in new directions. Instead of looking at the past, we look to the future to change the directions of leadership.

Bogotch: But can we move from standards to capabilities when we have a market economy, market forces and an ideology that privileges competition over cooperation? Any thoughts on that, Daniel?

Reyes-Guerra: When you look at the new rule, and standards, it is infused with a market ideology. For example Cecil Golden materials are accessed on line and state approved. While the materials are required they are not made available to be used freely. You have to pay for the materials. It is not that the state is giving you anything. Not only are you are going to have to buy a program developed by the state or, if not the state, by a private organization approved by the state, but the materials are required for certification. That is a market ideology which is permeating the whole system. On top of this change based on Rule 6A, anybody who wants to now can get a program certified and approved, not just universities, but also districts can now start their own programs. A new organization in association with a school district as partners can offer a program. Now, all of sudden, everyone is in the market and we are all competing. Who is going to come out with the fastest, cheapest product just so long as it is approved? This is a major market shift for anyone with access to the educational leadership preparation market.

Bogotch: It might be helpful to hear from a faculty member of the educational leadership department who is NOT directly affected by all of this. Dianne Wright is an Associate Professor of Higher Education Leadership and is the chair of a new higher educational initiative exploring the development of standards for Higher Education Programs. Dianne, what are your thoughts on this debate?

Wright: I have had many discussions with my colleagues in higher education on the topic of standards, while not necessarily using the term standards. We actually do not use the word. As I and my colleagues have studied what has been happening in K-12 education, we, too, have come to the conclusion that accountability is not going away. When we read former College President Levine's attack on educational leadership programs, we were thankful that he did not say anything about Higher Educational leadership programs; but as we read his scathing remarks, he could easily have included higher education, more so because we don't have standards or NCATE. So we in higher education have taken a different approach. Because accountability is not going away and as money gets tighter, dropout rates increase at all levels as does the costs of education, a group of us in higher education are pushing the field in the direction of standards because we prefer to act now rather than have them imposed upon us later. And so as not to repeat the tensions in K-12 education, we have worked for commitments to quality, such as quality guidelines and commitments to excellence – instead of standards.

Bogotch: All of this reminds me of the movie the *Matrix*. Remember when Morpheus meets Neo for the first time, he describes how Neo must be feeling – like Alice falling down the rabbit hole. He calls this the Matrix, a world pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth. In this world, you become a slave in bondage, a prisoner in your mind. But words alone cannot describe the Matrix. One has to see it for her/self. Then, Morpheus offers Neo a choice: take the blue pill and the story ends, you wake up at home in bed inside the Matrix, blind to the truth; take the red pill and you get to stay in wonderland and see how deep the rabbit hole goes. Frankly, that is what we as professors of educational leadership can offer – a choice between the truth and nothing more.

To be very honest with you, we as a faculty did not always know which pill we had swallowed. Our leaders in the Department would send us reassuring e-mails of the journey ahead. But they ended their communications with specific tasks often labeled “homework.” Not once, not twice, but again and again and again. I’m talking homework, not leadership. We were given graded homework assignments. Some e-mails told us to fill in the attached template; some called for us to align course content to the new state and national standards. Some brought us into the matrix to pull the world over our eyes. So even as we had swallowed the red pill, we had to live within templates and matrices. What happened was that we as a faculty exploded and imploded. Fortunately, our leadership was there to guide us through what was termed difficult conversations. Pat, as the facilitator of the sessions titled “difficult conversations,” how would you describe what happened?

Maslin-Ostrowski [as she walks center stage she says to the audience and faculty: “the homework wasn’t graded. It was just returned with the message redo”]. Michele and I worked hard to filter what we were learning from the State. But deadlines kept changing; state expectations were also changing along the way. It was a convoluted process that was stressful. Why? Because it threatened the integrity of our program. This work itself of developing new courses brought great drama and emotion to our meetings. In part this happened because we are very passionate about what we do and the state’s mandates felt as if our philosophical foundations were being shaken. We had to engage in difficult conversations: what courses and content would stay and what would go. It threatened how we conducted our daily business. It was a clash between our autonomy as university faculty and having to deal with outside forces, so you can see the internal-external conflicts that we felt.

Basically, we were in cognitive overload. So, the conversations were not smooth and easy. We actually turned to the literature and faculty expertise for how to hold together, to hold onto our interpersonal relations in order to survive and continue to take risks. As a faculty, we prided ourselves on the way we have always treated one another and on our trust and respect for one another. And now we were struggling with all this. We will continue to struggle during implementation. We will go back and forth inside and outside the standards and competencies to bring democratic leadership and social justice that are outside the standards to our students.

Bogotch: Where do we stand today? Do we stand alone or are we standing alongside our educational leadership colleagues nationally and internationally? Our last words now come from our department leaders who led us in this change process, Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, Bob Shockley, and Michele Acker-Hocevar spoken by Maggie Fernandez..

Maslin-Ostrowski: My last words have to do with the conundrum which is that educational leadership programs are conceived as both the problems and the solutions. We are the bad guys not doing it right but also the ones needed by the state to bring about reform. It is a reform dilemma for us: do we buy into these external rules which are being imposed for the goal of raising student achievement and test scores. If you buy into that you become part of the system and lose your faculty autonomy. So, in making changes do we develop counter-insurgent strategies to work with the state and also to do what is best for our students and with our district partners?

Shockley: There were many positives and many negatives. For this faculty, rather than taking all the state's competencies and skills and trying to fit them into our existing structure, which is historically the easiest thing to do with a current program, the faculty said no, let's use this opportunity to completely rework our program. They put everything, every course, on the table. I think that part was a very healthy decision and the students will be the beneficiary of that process. The other issues of mandates and skills are ongoing. We are still not where we need to go. We are not where we want to be yet. We need to embed what we think are our leadership principles into the process. We are not there yet, but it has been interesting journey

Maggie Fernandez for Acker-Hocevar: For me, as professors, it is our responsibility to bring new knowledge and skills to the field whether or not the government mandates it. I do believe that the role of the school leadership faculty is to figure out how to deal with the complexity of change--live on the edge of chaos, not to run from it.

Where I ended up is with the question, how the process we went through might be made less traumatic and smoother. I don't have the answers. We went through deep structural changes which caused all of us to rethink our own work: what was renegotiable and what was not. I also believe that the state's competencies asked us to do things we don't have the knowledge or skills to do well, for example, teaching reading to speakers of other languages, or designing ESE programs. The standards called for instructional practices requiring a depth of knowledge that most professors don't have. It is a huge job (to reform) and it will take more than well-intentioned actions to make change. I hope we can continue to reckon with and think about them beyond this presentation.

Bogotch: That brings our session to a end. Yet there are still voices in the air.... Speak up now or be silent.

An Anonymous Male Voice (Daniel): Ira, I think you are wearing rose-colored glasses. You and the faculty have summed up the process and products as more positive than I recall them being. We are good little soldiers in the State's army. That is how I feel. We still have not gotten to the good stuff, like talking about social justice or diversity or those other "strands." We have not yet created concrete strategies, e.g., course binder with skills listed and links to the education code or a test prep course, to minimize the impact of teaching 91 skills on our 5-week classes. In fact, we have not yet talked about whether our 3 credit course structure has outlived its usefulness in such a prescriptive curriculum environment. Master level students are not concerned about us winning their hearts . . . maybe their minds, yes, insofar as it helps them pass the state examination. I know my heart has not been won. Counter-insurgency! What counter-insurgency? Legacy, Ugh!!

Female Voice (Dianne) (off Stage Right): As I read/listened to this narrative, I get the sense that we will each have our own unique and idiosyncratic ways to interpret events through our own well-crafted philosophical perspectives. For me, the battle of who controls schools is part of the battle for who controls knowledge within the nation, states and across borders; who has access and who does not; and who is given power over others to shape the discourse of school reform.

We hope you enjoyed this podcast and we want to thank Professor Edith Rusch, Editor of the Journal of Research on Leadership Education and the leadership of UCEA for bringing this presentation to you today. Thank you.