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Guest Editorial: One Size Does Not Fit All, One Critique Does Not Fit All Schools of Education

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Abstract

Many years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King reminded us that skin tone should never be a factor to judge an individual, but rather the content of the individual's character is the issue to be considered. Just a few years ago the sociologists Lawrence Harrington and Samuel Huntington (2000) completed a study which addresses Max Weber's premise that culture does matter when looking at the differing levels of societal effectiveness. As we read Dr. Arthur Levine's *Educating School Leaders*, we question if Dr. Levine has operated from the understanding that the differences in schools of education are numerous and that each must be evaluated based on the content and outputs of their programs.

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Guest Editorial: One Size Does Not Fit All, One Critique Does Not Fit All Schools of Education

David Hand and Patrick Otto

Many years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King reminded us that skin tone should never be a factor to judge an individual, but rather the content of the individual's character is the issue to be considered. Just a few years ago the sociologists Lawrence Harrington and Samuel Huntington (2000) completed a study which addresses Max Weber's premise that culture does matter when looking at the differing levels of societal effectiveness. As we read Dr. Arthur Levine's *Educating School Leaders*, we question if Dr. Levine has operated from the understanding that the differences in schools of education are numerous and that each must be evaluated based on the content and outputs of their programs.

Dr. Levine's work has generated its share of criticism. It appears that the critiques tend to fall into three general areas. These areas can be loosely summarized as follows:

- Yes, Educational Leadership degree programs have had their challenges, but with all of the attention brought to light by Levine and others, these programs are getting better (AASA 2006).
- There are data to counter Levine's assertions and promote the opposite view; that those matriculating from today's Educational Leadership programs are better prepared than ever (NCPEA 2007).
- Dr. Levine's research methodology was flawed and therefore, the findings are invalid (UCEA 2006)

The focal point of this commentary is most closely aligned with this third criticism. Two years after the release of *The Education Schools Project: Educating School Leaders*, it still appears that Dr. Levine misses the mark when applying his findings to many private institutions offering Educational Leaders programs. It appears that Levine's data

provides too narrow of a picture to make general, industry wide application.

Dr. Levine raises good questions; some have application to the program with which we have association. However, our overall impression of Levine's report is that his view is reminiscent of the retail wars of the 1980s and 1990s. At that time, the stores operating under the large department store model, such as Sears and Montgomery Wards, were locked in a losing battle with the low-cost mass merchandisers, namely, Wal-Mart. The traditional department stores had dominated the retail market, but they were being greatly challenged for market share. They complained about the upstart mass merchandisers. They questioned the quality of the products sold by Wal-Mart and others. They questioned the effect that Wal-Mart was having on the community. They questioned the validity of the mass merchandiser's business model, but in the end the leading retailers of the department store model suffered greatly.

Applying this analogy, Columbia's Teacher's College would be one of the leading department store retailers, analogous to stores such as Sears. The mass merchandisers, the Wal-Marts, would be those schools of education that Levine described as "the Eminent University." These would probably be Nova Southeastern, the University of Phoenix, and many other universities that offer nontraditional course delivery options for the adult professional wishing to earn an advanced degree.

Given Dr. Levine's position, his view is understandable. Columbia's Teacher's College represents what has been the standard model for providing quality preparation for educational leadership. They could feel threatened by other competing models. Wal-Mart did beat Sears and Wards. Wal-Mart also beat K-Mart, a rival with a similar business model. Today, Wards is no more,

and Sears and K-Mart have actually merged in an attempt to stay viable.

We have seen an explosion of retailing business models. There are specialty stores doing very well. Department stores that were flexible and adapted to the challenges of the 1980s–1990s have survived where others less adaptable have not. New business models have subdivided the market area that had been between the traditional department stores and the mass merchandisers, and stores selling everything for a dollar have found a niche below the mass merchandisers. New retail models now offer many more options for the consumer. It is the same for schools of education.

It is not our intent to challenge Dr. Levine’s research methodology or his interpretation of his research. We understand that others have and will continue to raise those questions. We do question Dr. Levine’s generalization and application of his findings. It appears to us as though Dr. Levine is looking at the worst aspects of the mass merchandising universities and painting all schools of education with this view. We are probably seeing Dr. Levine’s response to a changing paradigm. This does not mean that everything Dr. Levine is charging is unfounded.

The School of Education with which we are associated would fit into the specialty retailer model.

- We do have a focused mission and purpose which does compliment the University.
- Very few of our classes and none of our core courses are taught by adjuncts.
- Dr. Levine’s research held that the philosophy courses were viewed as irrelevant; whereas here, numerous candidate surveys show that they are viewed as the basis from which our programs are built.
- Dr. Levine has presented very startling data from the “Deans and Faculty Survey.” The data tells us that of the schools of education that have M.A. II programs, only 9% of the faculty has had principalship experience and only 2% superintendency experience. For those schools with Ed.D. programs, the levels are even worse. Of our graduate faculty, 44% have had principalship and or superintendency experience, as has our dean.

- Aligning our curriculum with the Educational Leadership Constituency Council Standards is integral to keeping our curriculum relevant.
- Scholarly research applicable for educational policy formation is taking place.

As an industry, we do need to be cognizant of the many challenges that are inherent to any service-providing institution. We must insist on adequate program funding. We must insist that our curriculum remains relevant and valid. We must be diligent to raise our admissions standards. With these concerns, Levine is correct. However, these are not new concerns nor are they necessarily urgent, but rather they are ongoing concerns.

Ours is not the only school of education which does not fit neatly into Dr. Levine’s box of poorly performing schools of education. There are many schools of education that provide a vibrant and valuable service to the larger field of education by providing well prepared and well qualified educational leaders.

In his work *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) reminds us that “Enduring great companies preserve their core values while their business strategies and operating practices endlessly adapt to a changing world” (p. 195). Is it possible that, like some of heads of the leading department stores of the 1980s–1990s, Dr. Levine was not able to maintain his institution’s core values while having the operational flexibility to adapt to the rapidly changing world of education, and if so, might he in fact be expressing his own growing irrelevance? Could it be that in his role as President of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and Project Director of The Education Schools Project Dr. Levine is failing to take into consideration that when it comes to reform in the Educational Leadership program industry, one size does not fit all.

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