Exceptional Scholarship and Democratic Agendas: Interviews with John Goodlad, John Hoyle, Joseph Murphy, and Thomas Sergiovanni

CAROL A. MULLEN
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

ABSTRACT: This portraiture study of four exceptional scholars in education – John Goodlad, John Hoyle, Joseph Murphy, and Thomas Sergiovanni – provides insight into their scholarly work and life habits, direction and aspirations, assessment and analysis of major trends in the profession, and advice for aspiring leaders and academics. Telephone interviews with the leading scholars (4) and their referral colleagues (8), in addition to document analysis, validated the following criteria for the selection of exceptional scholarship previously generated via survey respondents (educational leadership professors): The scholar (a) publishes widely, (b) has broad impact, (c) has multiple spheres of influence, and (d) has established mentoring systems. Democratic concepts and agendas for education emerged from the interviews focused on exceptional scholarship, an outcome incorporated within the results.

KEYWORDS: Biographical interviews, crowning metaphors, democratic agendas, educational leadership, exceptional scholarship, John Goodlad, John Hoyle, Joseph Murphy, Thomas Sergiovanni.

The subject of exceptional scholarship in the field of leadership has received greater attention outside education, especially in the corporate world. Although the research on the topic of distinction, achievement, and impact in education is modest, conceptual frameworks and empirical data have been emerging. Kiewra and Creswell's (2000) study of educational psychology, Gambrell's (2000) work in literacy research, Sirotnik and Soder's (1999) biographical analysis in teacher education, Havighurst's (1971) collective account of leaders in American education, Tschannen-Moran and Nestor-Baker's (2004) interviews with productive scholars in education, Kochan = Mullen's (2003) study of the collaborative experiences of female education scholars, and Murphy's
portrait of the educational leadership profession have all expanded what is known about eminence relative to education and particular disciplines.

This biographical interview study advances a conversation about the meaning of exemplary leadership, identifies habits and practices of leading scholars, and informs the professional development of educational leaders. Democratic agendas for education that emerged from the interview data are described. To help build a strong knowledge base in leadership education, I provide sketches of the academic life-world of four top scholars in education. Included are ideas that should benefit rising leaders.

**Background and Methodology:**

**Study Design and Procedures**

Adapting Kiewra and Creswell’s Methods

Inspired by Kiewra and Creswell’s (2000) recognition of leading scholars in educational psychology – Richard Anderson, Ann Brown, Richard Mayer, and Michael Pressley – in 2002 I created a survey-based, interview study of exceptional leaders (for the published article, see Mullen, 2004, 2006). However, unlike Kiewra and Creswell, who generated names based on the American Educational Research Association’s (AERA) Division C (Learning and Instruction) membership, I did not preselect scholars. Instead of surveying nominators via an association’s divisional membership, I distributed my survey nationwide to potential nominators. In other words, instead of relying solely on data from a single association, I expanded the focus across national associations, in addition to universities. I avoided tying the results to particular associations and their own star leaders.

In contrast with Kiewra and Creswell’s focus on cognition and learning, my survey provided no premapping of the discipline (educational leadership). The selection of supervision, policy, or any other focus seemed arbitrary, so I opted for openness, hoping for greater inclusivity. As additional distinctions, I discuss the demography of my respondents herein and obtained a higher response rate; Kiewra and Creswell’s results were based on 41 (out of 113) responses, whereas I received 233, comparable with Murphy’s (1999) 105.

My study further differs from Kiewra and Creswell’s in that I incorporated the perspectives of referral colleagues and triangulated my results using a survey/interview/document analysis design. However,