Mr. Zirkel’s survey leads him to conclude that, with the exception of their high regard for *Educational Leadership* and the *Kappan*, superintendents and professors of educational leadership aren’t on the same page.

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Several studies have examined the value of professional periodicals the members of these two groups choose to read and how they rate them for quality.

**BY PERRY A. ZIRKEL**

Based on a series of surveys, Public Agenda reported in *Different Drummers* that there was an “often staggering” disconnection between professors of teacher education and public school teachers in their respective views of public education. This finding led to a public debate in the pages of *Education Week* as to the value of teacher training.¹

Is there a similar disconnection in the field of educational leadership between academics and practicing administrators? One of the ways of addressing this issue is to explore which professional periodicals the members of these two groups choose to read and how they rate them for quality.

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periodicals to professors or practitioners in various fields, with the typical measures being ratings of perceived quality (referred to here as “rankings”) or self-reports of actual usage (referred to here as “readings”). For the field of educational leadership, one line of studies has explored the rankings of both rankings and readings of professors. Another line of inquiry has explored the readings of school superintendents. However, none systematically compared the reading habits and the rankings of educational leadership professors and the superintendents.

EXPLORATORY COMPARISON

As an initial exploration of academics’ and administrators’ rankings and readings of educational leadership periodicals, this study compares the results of Russell Mayo and Perry Zirkel’s 2002 national survey of school superintendents with those of a subsequent survey of faculty members at the institutions in the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA). Both studies used the same survey instrument. The results are only exploratory, because the response rates were relatively low — 30% for the professors and 38% for the superintendents. The first item on the survey required respondents to choose the five “best” periodicals in educational leadership from a list of 34 and then rank them from 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest rating). Additional spaces were provided for write-in choices. The results, summarized in Figure 1, show that the professors’ top choices were largely refereed journals: Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ), American Educational Research Journal (AERJ), Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis (EEPA), Journal of School Leadership (JSL), and Educational Researcher (ER). The superintendents’ top choices for these quality rankings were largely nonrefereed magazines: School Administrator (SA) and the American School Board Journal (ASBJ). The two notable exceptions, serving as a bridge between the exclusive choices of each group, were Educational Leadership (EL) and the Phi Delta Kappan (PDK), both of which are nonrefereed but highly selective in terms of their ratio of submissions to acceptances and more scholarly and in-depth in terms of their articles.

Another survey item asked the respondents to list the educational leadership periodicals that they read regularly. The results, summarized in Figure 2, show three groupings of periodicals, with more overlap than is apparent in Figure 1. The first group are refereed journals, which — again — were exclusive to the professors; the additions to those in Figure 1 were the Review of Educational Research (RER), Teachers College Record (TCR), the Harvard Educational Review (HER), and the Journal of Staff Development (JSD). The bridge journals — Educational Leadership and the Kappan — were not only common to but also read regularly by the highest percentages of both the professors and the superintendents. The third group of periodicals were non-refereed practitioner magazines, with School Administrator and American School Board Journal having shared, albeit secondary, readership among professors; the two additions were the secondary principals’ NASSP Bulletin (NB) and its elementary principals’ counterpart, Principal (PR) magazine, which were choices for the professors, not the superintendents.

INITIAL IMPLICATIONS

The professoriate’s preference for refereed journals is not surprising, given the current norms of the promotion and tenure system in higher education. The choices pro-
Professors make within the refereed category are at least partly attributable to organizational affiliations: EAQ is a UCEA-sponsored journal, although it requires a separate subscription, and ER, AERJ, EEPA, and RER are journals that can be chosen as part of the dues of the American Educational Research Association. Similarly not surprising is the superintendents’ choice of such concise, practitioner-oriented magazines as SA and ASBJ. These are the “house organs” of the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Boards Association, respectively.

The problem is that the two groups, who are the putative leadership in educational leadership, are marching to the beat of different drummers. Yet each group must continually inform the other if educational leadership is to be effective. A recent study found that educational leadership faculty wrote less than one-fifth of the articles in SA, PR, and a relatively recent NASSP journal, Principal Leadership, further suggesting the disconnection between the scholarly researchers and the purportedly “evidence-based” practitioners.  

The bridging position of Educational Leadership and the Phi Delta Kappan, which both professors and superintendents regard highly and read regularly, represents the opportune connection. Several steps may help make the most of this opportunity to integrate the perspectives of these two groups, which is more than just “balance between the practice of education and research in education.”

First, inasmuch as most of the authors in all of these periodicals are professors, colleges of education should realign their promotion and tenure criteria to provide greater recognition for publication in these two journals; their selectivity, reputation, and joint readership more than compensate for their nonrefereed status.

Second, the editors of these two journals and members of their two constituencies should foster more collaboration: articles co-authored by academics and administrators should become the norm rather than the exception, thus promoting the integration of theory/research and practice that both sides espouse.

Third, given the current emphasis on “scientifically based research,” which is embodied in but not at all limited to the No Child Left Behind Act, the editors of the nonrefereed periodicals, including SA and ASBJ, should put a higher priority on the scientific pedigree of the research reported in the articles they accept for publication, thus better aligning these outlets with the professors’ mission.
Fourth, taking a lesson from the professors who read the purely practitioner-oriented journals, superintendents need to take a more active role in at least sampling, if not serving as reviewers or authors for, the leading refereed publications, such as EQA. Alternatively, Education Digest or a similar publication could help fill the gap for busy administrators.

Finally, if educational leadership is to become a fully realized and preeminent profession, then Educational Leadership or some other journal will ultimately have to become the effective equivalent of the New England Journal of Medicine. Such a journal will present “serious research knowledge to educational practitioners in . . . a lively and varied . . . manner, and [will be] both a prestigious publication outlet for researchers and a helpful resource for practitioners.” No Superintendents and their counterparts in academe work in different contexts, but the connections need to be strong and interactive. Professional periodicals serve as one of many bridges that need repair, reinforcement, or even reconstruction to integrate scholarship and practice for effective research-based leadership.


7. Donald J. Hackmann and David M. Quinn, “Are Educational Leadership Programs Connecting with the Field?,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, Austin, Tex., November 2006.


