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AUTHOR   Williamson, Ronald D.; Hudson, Martha
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ABSTRACT
                This paper examines proposed changes in a
principal-preparation program in a medium-sized state university. The report
discusses the implications of national and state standards for school leaders
on program quality, describes the design and initial implementation of a
longitudinal study instituted to assess student perceptions of program value
and usefulness, and seeks to generate a dialogue with colleagues interested
in principal preparation. The article is based on a multiple-case study. In
the pilot phase, data were gathered by asking students to complete a short
survey providing demographic data and information about the value of their
program. Then, selected students discussed their experiences in the program.
Focus groups, student writings, program documents, and researcher reflection
on program changes were also used to accumulate information. The study
provided rich descriptive data regarding the experience of students, but
these data were limited in that they could not be generalized to other
programs--the data identified specific student perspectives on the value of
selected administrator-preparation programs but were limited by the students'
uniqueness. Future studies should explore the appropriate balance between
theoretical issues of school leadership and the practical learning necessary
for success as a school leader. (Contains 46 references.) (RJM)

PREPARING TOMORROW'S PRINCIPALS:
Meeting Emerging Challenges

Ronald D. Williamson, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
  and Cultural Foundations
University of North Carolina at
  Greensboro
PO Box 26171
Greensboro, NC 27402-6171
(336) 334-3468
e-mail: RDWILLI2@UNCG.edu

Martha Hudson, Ed.D.
Department of Educational Leadership
  and Cultural Foundations
University of North Carolina at
  Greensboro
PO Box 26171
Greensboro, NC 27402-6171
(336) 334-3465
e-mail: MBHUDSON@UNCG.edu

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As demand for school leaders rises school districts report a significant shortfall in the pool of aspiring school leaders (Educational Research Service, 1998). One report on the shortage of candidates suggested that the decline represents a recognition by potential applicants that the principals' job is more complex than ever before (Anderson, 1991). More recently a study by the Educational Research Service (ERS) (1998) affirmed the shortage. Nearly half of districts surveyed, regardless of location (rural, urban, suburban) or level (elementary, middle, high school), reported a shortfall.

It is critical, therefore, that preparation programs be designed to meet both needs--prepare candidates in sufficient numbers to meet the demand, and ensure quality candidates ready to meet the challenges of the contemporary principalship. In North Carolina, a committee created by the General Assembly studied the problem and framed recommendations as follows:

> Recent changes in the public schools have placed increasing demands on public school administrators. Research on effective schools and the movement toward site-based decision making have identified the principal as a key factor in efforts to improve schools. It is imperative therefore that competent persons be attracted to and prepared for a career in school administration (Quality Candidate Committee, 1994).

The concerns raised in North Carolina were representative of concerns expressed in other states. In Anderson's (1991) review of principal preparation programs, he claimed that practicing administrators have long been dissatisfied with their graduate training. According to Anderson, "the central problem appears to be that most university programs present knowledge about school administration, but do not help students develop skills to translate that knowledge into practice" (p. 6). This is particularly important because the principal is a key agent to achieve educational excellence. Given this belief, Anderson criticized traditional training programs for "not providing the field-based experiences necessary for developing outstanding principals" (p. 9).

Similarly, the University Council for Educational Administration (1987) cited the lack of preparation programs relevant to the job related demands encountered by school administrators as one problem related to principal preparation. Concerns were also expressed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (1989) which called for a year long field residency to address the problems. The National Commission for the Principalship (1990)

also called for preparation programs that were based on the realities of the workplace.

Nationally, there are calls for changes in principal preparation programs designed to increase their effectiveness in preparing new principals for tomorrow's challenges (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989; National Commission for the Principalship, 1990). Existing and emerging national standards call for programs that are both inclusive of core knowledge and problem-based and grounded in practice (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996).

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss an investigation of the implications of these changes on one principal preparation program in a medium sized state university. Specifically, the purposes are:

- To examine the implications of national and state standards for school leaders on program quality in one principal preparation program,
- To share the design and initial implementation of a longitudinal study instituted to assess student perceptions of program value and usefulness, and
- To generate discussion with and seek the advice of colleagues interested in principal preparation in order to enhance the research design of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The creation of standards and the emphasis on aligning preparation programs with practice are consistent with recommendations for improved administrator preparation programs. Jenkins and Bebar (1994) found that clear performance domains can positively impact preparation programs. Similarly, Thomson (1993) added that the absence of uniform licensure standards and a common framework of knowledge and skills negatively impacted the preparation of professional principals. The emphasis on practice is supported by researchers like Richardson and Lane (1994) who argued that it is essential that principals develop critical analysis skills and the ability to apply those skills in school settings. More specifically, Holifield and King (1993) identified a number of needs of aspiring and beginning principals that were clearly practice-based, including finance, law, staff relations, student discipline and motivation, scheduling, and issues of exceptional children.

In response to demands for greater accountability in the preparation of school leaders, North Carolina reconfigured its principal licensure process. In addition to completing a Masters of School Administration degree, aspiring principals must also successfully pass the School Leaders Licensure Assessment developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) and designed to measure a student's capacity to meet the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards.

The introduction of state and national standards, complemented by the requirement to pass a national test based on those standards altered the context in which educational leadership programs function. Several important questions have emerged:

- What are the implications of national standards on the content and pedagogy of preparation programs?
- What role do preparation programs play in assisting students to successfully complete licensure requirements?
- What factors do students use to assess quality preparation programs?
- What strategies may be used by programs to prepare students for school leadership in a changing educational context? (Williamson & Hudson, 1998b)

Context of this Study

Early in this decade, the North Carolina General Assembly launched an initiative to examine administrator preparation programs in the state. At the time there was tremendous variety among the programs and significant difference in the perceptions of quality by prospective administrators completing such programs and their employers (Quality Candidate Committee, 1994). At the time it was possible to be licensed as a school leader by taking a few classes and earning an endorsement to another masters degree.

The General Assembly established an Educational Leadership Task Force which found that administrator training programs and entrance standards to those programs should be improved. Task Force members believed that strengthening leadership training would improve the quality of the state's public schools.

As a result of the Task Force's recommendations, the state disestablished all "certification only" and master's level administrator preparation programs. To

replace these programs the state invited the sixteen campuses of the state university system to submit proposals for creation of a new Master's in School Administration program (MSA). This competitive proposal process resulted in a reduction in the number of Master's programs to seven (later nine) across the state.

The request for proposals specified a number of criteria for judging the merits of the proposals. Among the more significant were an emphasis on a common core of knowledge and skills grounded in practice, the use of varied methods of instruction, and the integration of clinical components throughout the program. Another requirement of the new programs was that they provide students with a significant, active, full-time internship experience.

New Masters of School Administration Programs

The new Master's in School Administration programs were selected on several criteria including their ability to show how the common core of knowledge and skills emphasized in the program would be grounded in problems of practice. It was also necessary that schools demonstrate how instructional practice and methodology would incorporate practice and problem-based approaches.

Principal Fellows Program

As a result of the study of preparation programs for school leaders in North Carolina, referred to earlier, the General Assembly established the Principal Fellows Program. The program was created to ensure that the "best, most highly qualified students" are able to attend master's programs in school administration for two years on a full-time basis. These programs offered one year of full-time academic study, enrichment activities, and a one-year internship in a North Carolina public school.

This university is one of nine state institutions participating in the Principal Fellows Program. During the first five years of the program 34 Principal Fellows have enrolled in the Masters of School Administration program.

Standards for School Leaders

In 1993, the state legislature created the Standards Board for Public School Administration and charged it with establishing standards for the licensure of administrators in North Carolina. The Standards Board, after years

of work and consultation with experts and practitioners across the state, created a set of ten standards identifying what the state's future school leaders should believe, know, and be able to do. Expected knowledge, skills, and professional perspectives were delineated for each of the ten standards.

Both the national standards and those developed for North Carolina emphasize the complexity of the leadership role (Bolman & Deal, 1991), the importance of moral and ethical grounding (Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992; 1996), the value of working closely with parents and community (Epstein, 1993; Prestine, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1994), and the importance of student learning as the primary function of schools (Newman, 1991).

The national standards identify teaching and learning as the primary purpose of schooling (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) and this emerged as the central theme. Complementing the focus on learning and student achievement is the importance of assuring that schools consider the individual needs of students. Candidates, therefore, must examine each scenario on the licensure test in light of its impact on the student--often requiring deviation from established practice and policy.

The importance of working with parents and community to support student learning is yet another theme. Establishing a close working relationship with parents and designing ways in which parents and other care givers can be actively involved in school life is central to contemporary school leadership (Comer 1996, Epstein, 1993).

Ten performance domains were identified in the North Carolina standards (North Carolina Standards Board, 1998). While greater in number and of greater specificity in some areas, the North Carolina standards parallel the six ISLLC standards for school leaders. Student achievement and success is the foundation upon which the other standards rest. The school leader is envisioned as one who understands the importance of working with teachers, parents, and community to establish a successful learning environment for students.

Licensure Exam

Accompanying the adoption of state and national standards, a consortium of states (District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and North Carolina) contracted with Educational Testing Service (ETS) to develop a

licensure assessment. Known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), this group, under the auspices of the Council of Chief State School Officers, merged their state standards into six ISLLC standards and worked with Educational Testing Service to develop a practice-grounded, problem-based examination that would assist states in determining that prospective administrators were "safe to practice"--"a mechanism that helps ensure that only individuals who possess important knowledge and skills enter into professional practice" (Educational Testing Service, 1997, p. 6).

This determination would be based on scores on the School Leaders Licensure Assessment, scored using rubrics closely aligned to the standards. In other words, students would be expected to answer practice-and problem-based questions in ways which demonstrated that their knowledge, dispositions, and performances were consistent with the standards. Initiated in January 1998, this test is now used to determine who is licensed to practice as a school administrator in North Carolina. Student scores will also be used as one measure of the success of the Master's in School Administration program at each of the participating schools.

Varying from traditional paper and pencil tests the School Leaders Licensure Assessment asks students to respond to a series of authentic tasks each designed to elicit the students' thinking and approaches to resolving complex and occasionally contentious leadership issues. Composed of four sections, the six-hour test expects students to use documents and data from real school-life situations, and critically examine the strategies used by other school leaders on a range of situations.

Methodology

This research, based on activities of the educational leadership program at one state university, explores the impact of national standards for school leaders on the structure, content, and quality of the program.

A multiple case study approach was selected for gathering these data (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Lightfoot, 1983; McLaughlin, Irby & Langman, 1994; Polakow, 1993) in order to examine the multiple perspectives that students bring to the program. In the pilot phase, data were gathered in two ways (Williamson & Hudson, 1998a). First, students completed a short survey providing demographic data and information about the value of the program. Second, selected students were invited to meet with one of the researchers and

participate in interviews about their experience in the MSA program. Each interview was taped and later transcribed and analyzed for commonalities in language, themes, and perceptions. Neither rigid adherence to an interview guide nor forced respondent compliance was utilized. Priority was given to the dynamic and spontaneous nature of each interview and to the development of a trusting relationship between respondent and researcher (Yin, 1994).

In the second phase of the study analysis of student writing was added to surveys and interviews to enhance understanding of student perspectives. In addition, students were asked to complete a Critical Incident Report describing a significant event which molded their thinking about school leadership. At the end of the first year of employment, employers of selected graduates were interviewed regarding the student's preparation for school leadership and ways in which the university might refine its preparation program.

Data Sources

The data sources used in this study are primary and naturalistic in nature. Primary data sources for the pilot phase of this study were student surveys, individual and focus group interviews, and program documents. During the second phase of the study, sources were student surveys, interviews, focus groups, student writings, program documents, and researcher reflection on program changes.

A variety of methods may be used for data collection in a case study. Yin (1994) identified six different sources of information---documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Documents include letters, memoranda, agendas, and other formal written reports or communiqués. Archival records consist of survey data, personal records such as diaries and telephone contacts, organizational charts, and budgets (Yin, 1994).

The second source of information suggested for case study information is the interview, considered one of the most important sources of information for case studies (Spradley, 1979; Yin, 1994). Three types of interviews are often included in case study methodology: open-ended, focused, and structured. Open-ended interviews provide the opportunity for greater interaction with the respondent and allow respondents to enunciate their own insights into the issue being investigated (Spradley, 1979).

Focused interviews serve an important function in case study research. They provide an opportunity for the researcher to corroborate certain facts which have already emerged from the documentation. The role of the researcher is to ask specific questions which, when carefully worded, invite respondents to provide their own new or unique perspective on the topic (Yin, 1994).

A third data collection method utilized in case study research is direct observation. Using this method the investigator visits the site and observes the respondents. Such a strategy may involve formal observation of meetings or classrooms and less formal observation such as those made when conducting interviews or other data collecting strategies.

Participant observation is the fourth method of case study data collection suggested by Yin (1994). It is a "special mode of observation in which the investigator is not merely a passive observer. Instead, the investigator may take a variety of roles within a case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied" (p. 92).

The final method of case study data collection is the use of physical artifacts(Yin, 1994, p. 94). Such artifacts may include a tool, a work of art, or some other physical evidence.

This study used several data collection methods. They included: a student survey and survey of employers, focused interviews with students and employers, a critical incident report to provoke thinking about significant events during a student's preparation program, collection and analysis of student writing, a group interview of students both during the program and following graduation.

Collection of Data

Each element of the study utilized a different data collection method. Table I outlines the data sources and collection schedule for this investigation using the crosswalk technique (O'Sullivan, 1990).

The first phase, the pilot, involved data compiled from a student survey administered in the month prior to graduation in May 1998. During this same time selected groups of students participated in focused interviews in which their perceptions of the quality of the program and their preparation were elicited.

Based on the experiences gained from the pilot study (Williamson & Hudson, 1998a) data collection was refined for the formal study and consisted of data from a student survey administered on entry to the program, an analysis of student writing about the reasons they aspire to school leadership, and a review of program documents.

Subsequent phases of the study will continue to gather data from these sources. Additional data will be collected from student mentors during their internship, from exit surveys upon graduation, from employers during their initial employment as a school leader, and from placement data maintained by the School of Education.

An eight-step data collection process was utilized for this study. Each step was designed to gather information about student attitudes toward school leadership and perceptions of quality in their leadership preparation program.

Phase 1 - The Pilot Study. Initial data gathering for phase one was comprised of two separate activities (Williamson & Hudson, 1998a).

Step 1: Demographic Survey: Students completed a short survey constructed to identify underlying demographic variables which might impact the findings of this investigation. Students enrolled in the final semester of the MSA program were asked to respond to the questions. Based on that information a demographic profile of students emerged.

Step 2: Focused Interviews. Following examination of this data selected students were invited to meet with one of the researchers and participate in a lengthy focused interview about their experience in the MSA program. Each interview was taped and later transcribed and analyzed for commonalities in language, themes, and perceptions of the MSA program.

Open-ended questions were asked based upon the information provided in the surveys. The interviews allowed the researchers to probe the written responses and elicit information from the respondents which would elaborate on their thinking. Information provided by the respondents was redirected to the respondents for clarification and explication. Neither rigid adherence to an interview guide nor forced respondent compliance was utilized. Priority was given to the dynamic and spontaneous nature of each interview and to the development of a trusting relationship between respondent and researcher (Yin, 1994).

Table 1
Evaluation Cross-Walk

Data Sources

Questions	Survey	Writing Samp	Interview	Employer Data	Incident Rpt	Artifacts
Pilot Study						
1. Who are our students?	X					
2. How do students describe their experience in the MSA program?			X			
3. What elements of the MSA program do students find most useful? of greatest value?			X			
Formal Study						
1. What are the demographics of students in the MSA program?	X					X
2. What do students believe about leadership when they begin their preparation program?	X	X				
3. How do student beliefs about leadership change during their time in the MSA program?		X	X			
4. What critical events mold and shape student thinking about leadership?			X		X	
5. What factors do students consider in selecting a preparation program?	X		X			
6. What elements of the MSA program do students find most useful? of greatest value?			X		X	X
7. How successful are our graduates when they become school leaders?				X		X

X - Item covered by this data source

The focus of this investigation was to identify those factors which motivated students to enter the program, and to elicit student perceptions about the quality of program components including their classroom and internship experiences.

Phase 2 - The Formal Study. Several sources of data were used during this part of the study.

Step 3: Student Survey - Each August a new cohort of students enters the MSA program. Based on the pilot study the researchers refined the student survey and interview protocols. The refined survey was completed by all students entering the program in August 1998 (Williamson & Hudson, 1998c). The survey provided a detailed demographic profile of students in the program and captured, in their own words, initial beliefs about leadership and quality preparation programs. Similar data will be gathered at several key junctures throughout the students' time in the program and upon program completion.

Step 4: Student Written Work. During the first semester in the program students were asked to prepare a written statement of beliefs about leadership and the role of the school leader. Upon completion of the program students will prepare a similar statement for their exit portfolio. Both writing samples will be reviewed to identify key words and phrases which illustrate student thinking about leadership. The documents will be analyzed to identify patterns and trends in student thinking during their time in the program.

Step 5: Focused Interviews. Selected students were invited to meet with one of the researchers and participate in a lengthy focused interview about their experience in the MSA program. The interviews were taped and later transcribed and analyzed to identify patterns in language, themes, and perceptions of the MSA program.

As during the pilot study open-ended questions were used to probe written responses from the survye and elicit information from the respondents which would elaborate on their thinking. Similar strategies were utilized: information provided by respondents was redirected for clarification and explication, rigid adherence to an interview guide and forced respondent compliance was avoided. In each case priority was given development of a trusting relationship between respondent and researcher (Yin, 1994).

These interviews asked students to identify those factors which motivated entry the program, and to talk about their expereience in the program and their perceptions of those program elements of greatest value (Hudson & Williamson, 1999).

Step 6: Critical Incident Reports. All students must complete a year-long internship as part of the Masters of School Administration program. During this internship students will be asked to complete a Critical Incident Report. The report was designed to heighten student awareness of an incident which they experienced which impacted their perceptions of the MSA program. Each student will have full authority for selection of the incident. The only guidelines provided to respondents will be that the incident have special significance to them and that it served as a catalyst for clarifying and understanding the role of the preparation program in their development as a school leader.

Step 7: Employer Interviews. During the first year of employment as a school leader the student's employer will be invited to participate in a focused interview about the quality of the student's preparation for school leadership and their beliefs about strategies which the university might use to refine and strengthen its preparation program. These interviews will be taped, transcribed, and the data analyzed to ascertain trends and patterns.

Step 8: Documents and Other Artifacts. Each student will be invited to provide documents and other artifacts which reflect on their preparation for school leadership. Additionally, documents from the School of Education, including student test results and placement information will be gathered and analyzed to identify trends and patterns.

Analysis of Data

The data collection methods established for this study provided an array of statements, documents, and observations. All information was organized, categorized, analyzed, and synthesized beginning with initial data collection as suggested by Fetterman (1989), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Yin (1994). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) noted that "data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds" (p. 127).

Following transcription of the interviews, the transcripts were analyzed by the researchers and a tally of key words or phrases was obtained. This analysis assisted the researchers in focusing subsequent data analysis activities on these descriptors.

Several strategies were suggested for analysis of data during a case study. They included writing memos to oneself or keeping a reflective field log (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); preparation of analytic files organized by generic category such as title, introduction, conclusion, quotations (Lofland, 1971); and use of coding systems to organize information (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Charles (1995) suggested a procedure for analyzing case study information. It involved a four-step process: "(1) identification of topics, (2) clustering of topics into categories, (3) forming the categories into patterns, and (4) making explanations from what the patterns suggest" (p. 121).

Three approaches to qualitative data analysis were suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). First, was data reduction consisting of "selecting, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming" the data (p. 10). The authors suggested that data reduction is a part of data analysis that "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified" (p. 11).

The second data analysis consideration suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) was the need for data display. This consists of an organized presentation of information. The authors suggested that such a display often consists of extended text or the use of graphics including matrices, graphs, and charts. Construction of such displays was part of analysis and assisted in developing and drawing conclusions.

The third recommended analysis activity was conclusion drawing and verification. This activity consists of "noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Verification consists of using the emerging data set to find corroborating information for the conclusions. It includes testing meanings "for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their confirmability--that is, their validity" (p. 11).

An ongoing data analysis process was utilized for this study (Eisner, 1991; Yin, 1994). Information was arranged in files for each cohort of students (Glesne & Peshkin (1992). Sources of information were charted and coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Charles' (1995) four steps were utilized to identify topics,

cluster topics into categories, form categories into patterns, and develop conclusions based upon the patterns.

The analysis of data followed five specific steps. The following section describes each of those steps and illustrates its application to this investigation.

1. After each student interview the tape of the interview was transcribed and a written record prepared using a commercially available word processing program. This created a computer file for each interview. This activity provided an opportunity to identify key words which were used repeatedly throughout the conversations. Transcribing each tape also provided an occasion to listen to each interview again.

2. Following review of each transcript the highlighted segments were read, clustered into categories and assigned titles. Each subsequent interview was handled the same way. The highlighted sections of each interview were compared and clustered into categories. Occasionally a new category emerged.

3. The categories which arose from this review were examined and grouped into meaningful patterns. The frequency of statements using key words or phrases was tabulated and examined. This resulted in regrouping and occasionally discarding categories.

4. Distinct patterns emerged from this review. Each pattern was studied to establish commonalities in the information, uniqueness of each event, and missing information which might be gathered from further review of the transcripts and documents. Particular attention was given to identification of dissonant voices (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

5. Several themes surfaced in this study. After delineating the themes a new set of transcripts was printed and used to identify statements by participants which illustrated each theme. Different colored markers were used, one for each theme, to highlight items in each transcript. A note pad on which the critical elements of each theme were outlined was prepared. The transcript pages containing statements and examples illustrating each theme were noted. These note pages were used to report the data from this investigation.

Validity and Reliability

Four tests are suggested for judging the quality of research designs (Kidder, 1981). They include construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

Construct validity is defined as "establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied" (Kidder, 1981, p. 7). Yin (1994) suggested three tactics for case-study research which address this test. They included use of multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having key informants review drafts of the case study report.

All three approaches to establishing validity were used for this study. Multiple sources of information were gathered from surveys, focused interviews, review of documents and other artifacts, and *Critical Incident Reports*. Each data source was charted and tracked. A coding schema permitted the researchers to establish a chain of evidence. Finally, upon completion of preliminary findings the researchers asked respondents to review the findings and comment on their appropriateness.

The second criterion for judging the quality of research design is internal validity (Kidder, 1981). This criterion involves establishing a causal relationship showing that certain conditions lead to other conditions. Yin (1994) suggested that pattern matching and explanation-building are two strategies which assure internal validity of case study research design.

Explanation building is suggested as a test of internal validity (Yin, 1994). This is described as "narrative building" (p. 114) and involves telling the story of the various cases. It involves describing the events at each site, providing a general explanation, comparing individual cases to the explanation, and refining the explanation on the basis of each new case.

Use of explanation building as a strategy for data presentation and analysis was used for this investigation. Such a strategy established the chain of evidence as a mechanism for presentation and explanation of the students evolving views of leadership and of their preparation programs.

External Validity

The third test of the quality of a research design involves "knowing whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study" (Yin, 1994, p. 43).

This study investigated the impact of a school leadership preparation program on student perceptions about the role of school leaders. The study provided rich descriptive data regarding the experience of students. However, these data are specifically limited in that they cannot be generalized to other cases.

Reliability

The fourth test of the quality of a research design is reliability (Kidder, 1981). It is defined as "demonstrating that the operations of a study--such as data collection procedures--can be repeated, with the same results" (p. 8). Miles and Huberman (1994) described the reliability issue as "whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods . . . Have things been done with reasonable care?" (p. 278).

Yin (1994) offered suggestions for addressing the reliability question. First is the development of a detailed description of the procedures used throughout the case study. This may include the development of a case study protocol and a case study data base. Second, is to make as many steps as possible operational. Yin described it as conducting "research as if someone were always looking over your shoulder" (p. 45).

A protocol was developed for this case study. The protocol included the steps utilized in examining student data, the process for developing interview guides for focused interviews, and a system for coding and analyzing the information generated by the data collection instruments.

The data for this study was gathered from students in the natural setting of the MSA program. What Lincoln and Guba (1985) call naturalistic inquiry, others call a phenomenological approach. Borg, Gall and Gall (1993) elaborated on the value of such an approach. It allows the researcher to "develop an understanding of individuals and events in their natural state, taking into account the relevant context" (p. 194). It is based on an appreciation for the uniqueness of each individual and the settings in which they live and work. This "phenomenological reality" (p. 194) is particularly relevant when the researchers want to examine and understand a program or event from "the perspective of the participants" (p. 195).

While such studies provide valuable insights into the thinking of the subjects, they are limited in the ability to make generalizations based on their

findings. Findings are very context-specific, reflecting the unique orientation of the subjects. Therefore, this study is limited in two ways:

- The information generated by this study, while useful in identifying specific student perspectives on the value of selected administrator preparation programs, is limited by the unique characteristics of the students who participated in the study and the program in which they were enrolled.
- The results of the study are not generalizable and cannot be construed to be applicable to other programs in other locations.

Questions for Further Study

As a result of the pilot and initial data collection several questions emerged which will guide subsequent phases of this investigation. They include:

- What is the appropriate balance between examination of larger, more theoretical issues of school leadership and the practical learnings necessary for success as school leaders?
- How do preparation programs assure student success on licensure examinations and at the same time provide students with the opportunity to "stretch." to "talk about issues not talked about in schools," and to "expand their horizons?"
- What are the implications of national standards on content and pedagogy, on the balance between theory and practice?
- What exactly is the role of preparation programs in preparing students to work in diverse settings?
- How do preparation programs provide for learning that is meaningful, authentic, and immediately applicable to problems of practice?
- How does a program ensure that case studies, problem-based learning activities, vignettes, data analyses, and other such practice based activities are an integral part of all course work, regardless of the teacher?

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