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ABSTRACT

A theme common to recommendations for change in school leader preparation is that preparation be grounded in practice and include field-based experience or internship. Despite recognition for reform, substantial change has been slow to emerge. This study was conducted in North Carolina in 1995 to assess revised leadership preparation programs established by the state. Despite standards revisions, many problems remain in actual practice. Examples include interns being seen as part of school staff or ignored, inability to afford full-time internship, nonconstructive relationships between mentors and interns, and assignments to irrelevant duties. Having access to a quality principal who is also a good mentor is key to having a successful internship. A good mentor is willing to give the intern real and significant responsibilities, the opportunity to try without risk of reproach, time for constructive feedback and processing of those experiences, and understanding of "inside stories" and thinking that underlie administrative decisions and actions. The internship experience can be strengthened when universities and local school districts enter into partnerships that acknowledge the realities and complexities of the principal's job and stay focused on successful teaching and learning for all students. (Contains 35 references.) (RT)

The Good, The Bad, The Ugly: Internships In Principal Preparation

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Demand for changes in school practice continue into the new century. At the national, state and local level demand for improved student achievement, greater accountability, and increased choice dominate the discussion. Parallel to the call for reforms in public education emerged a call for changes in the preparation of school leaders (Griffiths, Stout & Forsyth, 1988; National Commission for the Principalship, 1990; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989).

A theme common to nearly all recommendations was that preparation be grounded in practice (Anderson, 1991; Leitwood, Jantzi, & Coffin, 1995; Milstein & Krueger, 1997) and include some field-based experience, most commonly called the internship.

These early discussions about leadership preparation led to creation of a set of standards for the school leadership (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) and to articulation of standards for the preparation of school leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2001). Both documents were designed to provoke intense scrutiny of leadership preparation and reflected one dominant theme of school reform recommendations---the critical role of the school leader.

Some discussions of reformed preparation questioned the ability of programs to improve themselves (Achilles, 1998; Dembowski, 1999; Haller, Brent, & McNamara, 1997; Murphy, 1991; Schneider, 1998). Others explored ways to strengthen programs, especially the internship (Bass, 1990; Chance, 1990; Daresh, 1988; DeSpain & Livingston, 1997; Foster & Ward, 1998).

Out of this milieu many preparation programs adopted a proactive stance and began to modify their programs based on both the standards for school leaders and the recommendations from researchers and professional organizations. While programs varied, often to conform to state requirements, they reflected several common components:

- a sense of purpose and vision developed collaboratively with students, local school personnel, and practicing school leaders (Achilles, 1994; Clark & Clark, 1996);
- a knowledge base that incorporated the knowledge and skills required for contemporary school leadership (Murphy, 1991; Thomson, 1993; Thurston, Clift & Schact, 1993);
- a recognition that the primary function of schools is to improve the quality of teaching and student learning (Achilles, 1998; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996); and
- a more thoughtful and purposeful inclusion of clinical activities including school-based internships (Leitwood, Jantzi, & Coffin, 1995; Milstein & Krueger, 1997; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989).

Despite the nearly universal recognition for reform, substantial change has been slow to emerge (Achilles, 1999). Some programs modified course work, others changed field-based experiences. Others ignored the demands while a few launched substantive reviews of their programs including the underlying principles on which the program was built (Williamson & Hudson, 2000a).

Context for This Study

Concurrent with the national debate, the North Carolina legislature disestablished existing preparation programs in state universities. They were replaced by new programs that reflected a commitment to core knowledge grounded in practice, a problem-based pedagogy, and the inclusion of a full-year internship (Quality Candidate Committee, 1994).

The newly designed programs reflected the strengths and interests of individual campuses but included several mandated components. To be recommended for a principal's license, students needed to complete an approved Masters of School Administration (MSA) degree and receive a satisfactory score on the Interstate School Leaders License Assessment (Educational Testing

Service, 1997). Each program was designed to be grounded in practice and approval was contingent on a commitment to a problem-based pedagogy and clinical components. Further, all programs were required to include the equivalent of a full-year field-based (internship) experience (Ward, 1996).

Field-Based Experiences

Recommendations that students participate in a comprehensive internship program were a central feature of plans for the reform of leadership preparation. They emphasized field-based experiences, time in schools working with practicing school leaders and opportunity to both experience the realities and confront the complex issues of school leadership (National Commission for the Principalship, 1990; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1995).

Internships, an opportunity for students to learn while doing, have long been a feature of leadership preparation (Chance, 1990; Foster & Ward, 1998). Missing too frequently were links between the university experience and that in the field (Bass, 1990). While not universal, many internships asked students to select a school, often the one in which they taught, as a place for hands-on experience with school leadership. Such an approach often disconnected the field-based experience from the knowledge and skills learned in the university classroom and placed students at a disadvantage. Students found it difficult to question practices and norms if they were completing their internship with the principal of their own school.

Daresh (1988) and others suggested that field-based components of leadership programs must not only develop competence and confidence in handling the day-to-day regularities of schools, they must provide an opportunity for students to think about and reflect on their personal development as school leaders. He suggested that such reflection occurred best in a setting where students raised questions, challenged current practice, and explored their own evolution as a leader. The internship site, due to its close connection to their teaching careers, often failed to offer such opportunity.

One way that universities may address this dilemma is by providing the forum for students' reflection on leadership practices and their own professional development. Seminars, site visits, and a growing network of colleagues with whom students can process their experiences were identified by students (Williamson & Hudson, 2000b). Combined with exposure to the real problems and regularities of schools, these opportunities to critique, process, problem-solve, and dream helped make the internship the most meaningful aspect of the program for many students. The internship, complemented by the seminar, was the place where connections were made--between theory and practice, between the ideal and the real, between professors and students, and among one another.

New NCATE Standards for programs preparing educational leaders (National Policy Board, 2001) align with standards for school leaders adopted earlier (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996). The first six standards for accreditation incorporate the language of the preparation standards. The seventh standard, however, departs from the focus on curricular experiences present in the first six and suggests a hearty internship experience, one described as "substantial, sustained, standards-based experience in real settings that are planned and guided cooperatively by university and school district personnel for graduate credit (p. 13)."

This Study

The revised leadership preparation programs were launched in North Carolina in 1995. Shortly thereafter a systematic investigation of the impact of the redesigned program began (Williamson & Hudson, 1998). The study was designed to incorporate the student voice as one measure of program reform (Williamson & Hudson, 1999) and gathered data from a variety of sources including short surveys, student writing samples including reflective journals, interviews and focus group discussions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Stauss, 1967) was selected to analyze student responses. This approach allowed themes to emerge from the disparate data sources and included comparisons of student perceptions about school leadership upon entry to the program, while an intern, and after employment as a school leader.

Findings

The North Carolina principal preparation program described in this paper is aligned with the ISSLC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996) and the more specific, but highly correlated state standards. When the program was initially designed the state standards required a yearlong internship. Political and fiscal realities led to an interpretation of that requirement as "the equivalent of a full-year field experience."

Currently, NCATE standards for advanced programs in educational leadership are being revised (Educational Leadership Constituent Council, 2001). The first six standards reflect the ISLLC standards. The seventh specifically addresses the internship calling for "substantial, sustained standards-based experiences in real settings that are planned and guided cooperatively by university and school district personnel" (Educational Leadership Constituent Council, 2001).

The debate that has arisen regarding the standards reflects both the problems associated with the internship and opportunities that exist for addressing those problems. Many programs, including the one discussed here, face situations where due to many factors, students participate in internships that would be described as "unacceptable" under the standards. The challenge lies in addressing the real issues collaboratively with school districts so that the result is a "substantial, sustained standards-based" experience.

Uncovering and talking openly about both the obstacles and the opportunities is a beginning point for improving principal preparation. What earlier studies (Hudson & Williamson, 2000; Williamson & Hudson, 1998)

revealed about the role of the internship, along with more current data, extend the dialogue.

Substantial

> *Experiences provide genuine experiences leading, facilitating, and making decisions characteristics of school administrators. Such experiences generally include a six-month (or equivalent), full-time mentored experience, preferably involving two or more setting and multiple levels.* (NCATE Standard 7)

When North Carolina revised standards for preparation programs at state universities they also created the North Carolina Principal Fellows Program, a state-funded initiative to provide selected students with substantial cash grants for full-time study in an approved Masters of School Administration Program. Student study consisted of a year of full-time graduate course work followed by a year of full-time internship.

The program, while very successful in both design and implementation, failed to provide sufficient candidates for school leadership. Most students in approved programs attended classes as part-time students, generally taking two classes each semester. Those students had a very different academic experience (Williamson & Hudson, 2000).

In the preparation program described here, some successes connecting the internship with authentic leadership experiences have been marked. Students consistently praised the internship as both illuminating program work and building understanding of theory in practice (Hudson & Williamson, 2000). Those data have been consistent for both full-time and part-time students.

The "secret" to those successes was two-fold. One involved grounding program work in problems of practice so that most courses included clear connections and field-based components. From their very first course, students

spent time in the field interacting with school leaders, and engaging in some administrative practice. The second factor was the internship seminar, a weekly meeting where interns come together in a "safe" setting to share, process, challenge, and make sense of their field experiences. In so doing, the interns begin to link their own beliefs about school leadership with their practice. As a result, they frequently leave the internship with commitments to practices that support them during their transitions into leadership roles (Hudson & Williamson, 2001).

Time and money are key to providing a full-time internship experience. Nearly all full-time students in the MSA program are on Principal Fellow scholarships. During their internship year, they receive both a scholarship and a stipend equal to the beginning salary of an assistant principal. Part-time students have less time for the internship and rely on their teaching salary to support them and their families. Those students are unable to forfeit their salary in order to fulfill the internship obligations.

For those full-time students, interning in multiple settings at multiple levels is possible and encouraged. Most fulfill their internship obligation at two sites (e.g., elementary, middle, high) and in diverse settings (e.g., rural, suburban, urban, poor, middle-class). One former high school teacher, for instance, completed her internship in middle and elementary schools; one with many students described as "at risk" and the other with an affluent, advantaged student body; one urban and one very rural; both with effective principals but with very different styles.

Providing such opportunities is more challenging for part-time students. Unfortunately, these students usually end up completing portions of their internship with mentors of convenience, most frequently the principals with whom they work. Occasionally, by working with the principal and the district, the student gained additional released time to devote to internship experiences. This was the exception rather than the rule.

More frequently, students were forced by circumstances to work internship experiences around their teaching responsibilities during the regular school year.

For these part-time students, the "equivalent" of a full year internship required two summer experiences of 4-6 weeks in settings outside their own school and where students were present (e.g., summer school, year-round school). Even in those settings, interns were too frequently either seen as part of the staff or ignored. Particularly in fast-paced summer programs, the emphasis was on students, not mentoring future leaders.

One student, for instance, arranged to intern in a remedial summer program in the building where he taught. The summer school "principal" was an assistant principal elsewhere in the district. Since the intern knew the building well, the mentor depended on the intern for physical plant concerns, too frequently to the exclusion of the teaching and learning emphasis desired by the intern and the university.

Sustained

> *Experiences are planned occurrences during the entire course of the program. They include an extended period of time near the conclusion of the program that allows for application of skills and knowledge on a full-time basis.* (NCATE Standard 7)

Providing full-time internship opportunities for all students near the conclusion of the program proved problematic. Part-time students, absent financial support from the university, district, or some other source, could not afford to take unpaid leaves from teaching to complete internship requirements.

Given this reality, part-time students typically began their internship after just 12 hours of coursework in required classes. While not weighted toward to the end of the program, such a model did provide internship experiences throughout a greater portion of their course of study.

Part-time students typically take three years to complete the program, including two summer semesters. For the elementary school teacher with little

planning time, virtually all internship experiences occurred "outside the regular hours or calendar of schools/districts." This "internship of convenience," was usually at the school where the student taught, and happened after the regular school day or on days when school was not in session. During the summer, the longer 4-6 week experience was mostly outside of the "regular" calendar except students who interned in year-round schools.

"Internships of convenience" with "mentors of convenience" were less than optimal experiences for students. There were exceptions. In one setting, the mentor had a long-term relationship with the student. In fact, the principal trusted the intern more than she trusted the assistant principals. She lobbied the district for a second planning period for the intern. On a high school block schedule, the result was a half-day each day over the course of a year for the student to devote to internship experiences. The intern was given access to the principal, given real and meaningful projects to plan and implement, and was trusted to deal with students and families without constant oversight. The principal made time for the intern so that they could process his experiences and talk through the issues that emerged.

Unfortunately, this student was an exception. Much more typical was Susan, who had taught in her school for fifteen years. She was recognized as a school leader and was highly respected by her colleagues. Her new principal, new to both the school and the community, wanted the intern to assist him transition into his new position. While relying on the intern for advice, the principal was at the same time, threatened by her. When the intern's colleagues and parents bypassed the principal and went to the intern for advice, the principal felt that his authority was being undermined. As a result, he was wary. Though he agreed to serve as her mentor, he held his knowledge of leadership close and was unwilling to "open up" to the kind of processing that would make the internship meaningful.

Students report that it is the processing of internship experiences, not the actual experience, where meaning and understanding are developed. They

suggest that it is one thing to observe an event or a decision, yet another to understand the "behind the scenes" story and thinking.

Sustained experiences are important, but not sufficient. Even students who have full-time or "almost" full-time internships do not have optimal experiences without opportunity and time to process and reflect on their experiences.

One full-time intern, for instance, spent most of a semester answering the phone and trying to figure out what was going on in the school. The principal, highly regarded as successful and effective, simply had no time for the intern. The assistant principals were engaged in political jockeying for position in the school's leadership. As a result, they were cautious, guarded, and unwilling to share what they knew. In this case, without the university seminar and peer group, the student would have "wasted" five months. Time would have been spent, but without the "planned occurrences" that could have contributed to a meaningful internship.

Standards-based

> *Experiences reflect the application of skills and knowledge articulated in national, state, and local standards. Individual needs of the candidates are considered in the design of the experiences.* (NCATE Standard 7)

It is hard to imagine an internship experience that could not be, in some way, connected to state and national standards. The issue, perhaps, is one of balance. An intern, for instance, who is treated like a substitute assistant principal might end up spending too much time on bus routes and substitute teachers, to the exclusion of more important standards-related activities.

To avoid this possibility, initial meetings between the mentor, university supervisor, and intern focused on the purposes of the internship and the roles of each party. Program faculty emphasized that we were training students to become principals with a full, deep, and meaningful understanding of the

complexity associated with the role and accompanying responsibilities. To accomplish that, the internship must provide experiences that encompass all the standards. Further, those experiences must be individualized to build on student strengths while providing opportunities for growth.

One student, for instance, served for years as the chair of her school's exceptional children's department and was quite knowledgeable about her field. She did not need internship experiences in that area. Her assigned site, however, was undergoing a federal audit of exceptional children's records and she was assigned the task of "getting ready." The assignment reflected building needs, not those of the student.

The extent to which students were exposed to a wide array of appropriate standards-based experiences was frequently up to the student and the university supervisor. Frequently, mentoring principals were too busy with their own work to pay adequate attention to the intern's needs. However, if the intern sought out appropriate opportunities, mentors were typically willing to allow the intern some latitude in exploring areas of interest. The dilemma for students was the need for them, often in isolation, to identify and select activities.

Such willingness to support the intern's growth of knowledge and skills was not always the case. In one instance a principal with an excellent reputation as an instructional leader turned out to be quite insecure in her role. As a result, her "I'm the boss" attitude significantly constrained what the intern could do. Every contact with student or parent, for instance, had to be scrutinized by the principal before a decision could be made. The principal saw the school as "hers," an attitude that limited the intern's access to important learning opportunities.

Real Settings

Experiences occur in multiple administrator settings and allow for the demonstration of skills and knowledge associated with leadership actions. Experiences should include work with appropriate community

organizations such as social service groups and local businesses. (NCATE Standard 7)

Constraints on providing internship for part-time students within the normal calendar and work day of school leader were discussed above. The financial impediment that often precludes such experiences also is a barrier to opportunity to interact with community organizations and businesses.

Standard four, working collaboratively with diverse families and communities and mobilizing community resources, identifies an important aspect of the principal's role. Yet even in schools where the mentor is skilled at such work, it is frequently difficult for the intern to "get connected" with such initiatives.

Again, there are exceptions. One intern joined her mentor as he was about to open a new school. Establishing contacts in the new community, orienting and building relationships with staff, parents, and students, and answering the myriad questions that arose from various constituencies became part of her role. As a result, the student had meaningful opportunities to develop skills working with internal and external publics.

For others, the experience is more problematic. In one school, the mentor lived in the community and had long-standing relationships with many of the key players. An intern who taught in the school and knew most of those same people had no difficulty accessing and working with external communities. Another year, an intern from outside the community had a more difficult time. The principal was reluctant to "let go" of well-established and trusting relationships. Concurrently, key players in the school community were reluctant to embrace the newcomer, the "outsider." With only a 5-month term as an intern, the student had neither the time nor the means to establish community relationships that would have enriched the internship experience.

This particular standard can be addressed through course work as well as through the internship. Clearly, experience in the "real world" is preferable. Such

"real world" experiences offer the opportunity to deal with authentic issues with real-life constituents.

Planned and Guided Cooperatively

> *Experiences are planned by the individual, the site supervisor, and university personnel to ensure inclusion of appropriate opportunities to apply skills and knowledge. The three entities work together to meet individual and program needs. Mentors are provided to guide the candidate during the experiences.* (NCATE Standard 7)

In the preparation program described in this paper, all internships began with a conference among the student, the mentor principal, and the university supervisor. In that setting, roles were discussed and appropriate activities for the intern were described and included possibilities for action research projects. Such projects provided meaningful involvement for the intern, aided knowledge and skill development, and simultaneously allowed the principal to accomplish something related to school improvement. It was a mutually beneficial project; individual, school and program needs were addressed.

However, internships did not always proceed as planned. In the case of full-time interns, this conference typically took place in late spring before the internship began in late summer. Plenty of time remained for the district to transfer the principal. Often, even when central office, the principal, the university, and the intern agreed to the assignment of an intern, the district transferred a principal. Does the placement change if the principal is reassigned? Is the assignment about exposure to multiple levels and divergent settings or is it about learning from a particular mentor? And what is the district's role in this decision?

Such questions were not just hypothetical. All too often, mentors were transferred and the new principal had little or no experience. While such

personnel moves were fully the purview of the district, they nonetheless minimized the collaborative work between district and university to assure appropriate placement for interns.

Particularly in the case of full-time interns who are paid a stipend by the state, local districts tended to view the interns as employees. Even though not district employees, the district did issue a monthly check, using state money. In some instances, the resulting attitude is, "We're paying them. We'll put them where we need them." Neither the student, nor the university was consulted about placement decisions.

On several occasions, districts "used" interns to address district needs. On one occasion an assistant principal left at mid-year. In another, a principal went on an extended sick leave. In both cases, the district reassigned the "paid" intern as a replacement, without consultation with the university.

Such reassignments are problematic. Can the university say, "No, such a move is not in the best interest of the student?" If the district is the student's first choice for a job, can he/she afford politically to refuse the move? If the answer to that question is "no" and the student and university agree to a move, can job responsibilities be renegotiated? If the district needs the student to "substitute" for an assistant principal, can the university effectively argue for the broader exposure required for a meaningful internship while the assistant principal's assignments go undone? Not if the university wants to maintain good relations with the district.

The wording on NCATE standard seven states, "mentors are provided." It does not address either issues of quality or the training and support that an effective mentor might require. One of the toughest lessons learned from dealing with internships is that excellent principals do not necessarily make excellent mentors.

Given the increasingly complex role of the principal, what motivates a principal to serve as a mentor? The most frequent response reflected the principals' sense of mission as an educator, an altruistic commitment to training

those who will replace them. Should there be more? It takes knowledge of standards, experience, time, energy, and commitment to mentor an intern well. Ought universities and/or districts do more to reward and support mentors in more concrete ways? Who ought to provide training and support? Should mentors be paid? If so, by whom? Can the university supervisor provide the connection mentors need or should they have opportunities to connect with and learn from one another?

These and other questions emerged from our work with interns in the recently redesigned leadership preparation program in North Carolina. We continue to refine the program, to build connections between the university and local school personnel, to identify and nurture effective mentors, and to articulate the value that emerges for local districts when they support a more comprehensive internship experience for their teachers who are working on their administrative degree.

Summary

Quality principal preparation includes a high quality internship. Experiences establishing and supervising both part-time and full-time interns suggest that there are good, bad, and ugly possibilities. Good experiences were highly correlated with the NCATE standards. More frequently than we might like, the experience might be described as bad, or occasionally ugly.

Key to a good internship was access to a quality principal who was also a good mentor. The good mentor was willing to give the intern real and significant responsibilities. He/she gave the intern opportunity to try without risk of reproach. Time was provided for constructive feedback and processing of those experiences. The mentor was comfortable enough, both as principal and mentor, to reveal the inside stories and thinking that underlay administrative decisions and actions.

The mentor was key to a successful internship. Understanding that fact suggests that student interns should "follow" the selected mentor even when that

person is transferred to a different school. If we recognize that excellent principals and excellent mentors are not necessarily one and the same, then perhaps "refusing" an assignment to a particular person need not "offend" either principals not selected or district personnel.

Quality mentors possess similar predispositions. They treat the intern as part of the administrative team and guide the internship during field-based experiences. They "protect" the intern from the limits of an assistant principal role, and devote sufficient time to meeting with the intern to process and make meaning of the experience.

It is important interns have opportunities to assume responsibility for real projects and to develop knowledge and skills that are applicable across diverse settings. It is also important that time to reflect on and process their experiences in a safe, neutral setting be provided. These requirements can best be accomplished when interns "work" at being interns---at times and in places where they aren't also trying to balance interning with teaching responsibilities.

Bad experiences were characterized by the absence of such qualities. Either there was little variety in activity provided for the intern or the activities lacked significance. For a number of reasons---insecurity, inability, control issues---the principal did not allow the intern access to the experiences that built knowledge, skills, and confidence. An equally bad scenario was the intern who was basically ignored, left on his/her own. Bad internships were also characterized by the absence of feedback from the mentor, with little time allotted to helping the intern process their experiences.

Ugly internships included situations that "set up" the intern for bad experiences. In some cases, the principal changed at the last minute and the intern was left at a school with a new principal who was not a good mentor. In other cases, the district shifted an intern from one school to another, leading to unfinished projects and a disturbing lack of continuity. In the worst cases, districts set the intern up for failure. An intern, for instance, sent into a school "in

crisis" to work with an incompetent principal was almost certain to not have opportunity for a rich and engaging internship.

The NCATE standards will help preparation programs better articulate and support good internships for students. Simultaneously, the quality indicators they reflect minimize the chance of a bad or ugly internship. On their own, however, the standards are not adequate to address the challenges of the internship.

Implications

Recommendations for improved principal preparation, including the new NCATE standards, universally recognize the importance of the internship. The challenge facing preparation programs is how to strengthen the experience and align the experience of students more closely with the vision articulated by the standards.

Given the importance of internships, how do we make real, full-time experiences available for all students? Who pays? Who mentors? Who trains and supports the mentors? Who supervises? How do we ensure that students get "substantial, sustained, standards-based" experiences?

University personnel alone cannot accomplish the vision described in the standards. It requires a partnership between universities and local school districts. An important key step is for university training of prospective principals, including the internship, to be valued by schools. That value must be grounded in school and district belief that university personnel appreciate the realities and complexities of the principal's job. Schools and districts must share commitments to the dispositions, knowledge and skills that will enable future principals to accept those complexities and stay focused on successful teaching and learning for all students.

Such partnerships require universities to step forward, to invite and welcome conversation with local school personnel about their programs and about the internship experience. Such a proactive approach requires recognition, through

allocation of time and resources, that supporting viable, high-quality internships is part of a shared commitment to the future of our schools.

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