K-12 Educational Leadership Specialization  
Curriculum Guide for Core KAM VII: Research Case Study in Educational Leadership

Introduction

The KAM 7 Research Case Study in Educational Leadership emphasizes the NCATE program standards for advanced programs in educational leadership for principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, and supervisors (Educational Leadership Constituent Council, 1995). To that end, KAM 7 adheres to program standards that focus on performing and applying knowledge and skills. These standards acknowledge that educational leaders must study their craft as they practice their craft, reflecting and then applying what they have learned in their work with people and institutions and the achievement of tasks. This requires patience and perspective, the exercise of judgment and wisdom, and the development of new technical and analytical skills. (p. 197)

To adhere to NCATE Program Criteria, KAM 7 ensures that

1. curricula are designed in an integrated or problem-based mode to promote an understanding of how various knowledge and skill areas in educational leadership are connected;

2. programs promote (a) acquiring concepts and information, (b) integrating concepts with practice and using knowledge in context, and (c) applying knowledge and skills in a workplace environment;

3. bridging experiences that feature clinical exercises and/or field settings are conducted between course content and the workplace;

4. opportunities are provided for candidates to formulate and examine an ethical platform upon which to rely for decision making (Educational Leadership Constituent Council, 1995, p. 200).

Understanding the sometimes value-laden and thorny issues confronted by school leaders in highly diverse communities cannot always be achieved through basic research but instead may require investigation through action research.

The real challenges of professional education are (1) to meld theory and practice, and (2) to prepare practitioners to effectively use the process of reflection, a process of integrating professional knowledge with experience to create a modified knowledge base. . . . Both public and private school leaders at the local, state, and federal levels must possess: (1) a theoretical base for practice, (2) technical skills required to perform managerial responsibilities, and (3) the ability to engage in reflective practice. (Kowalski, 1995, p. 2).

As Schon (1990) acknowledges, effective school leaders must differentiate between “knowing in action” and “reflection in action.” The latter is essential in confronting the unpredictability of internal and external school environments. Effective administration is accomplished through the artistry of applying field experience to a variety of situational contexts (p. 2). Current and prospective K-12 school leaders will need to effectively apply the theoretical knowledge of history, philosophy, and research to their situations (Kowalski, 1995, p. 3).

Entrepreneurial school leadership programs now recognize that effective educational leadership preparation must include approaches and materials that constantly, purposefully, and explicitly
connect theory and practice. A commitment to and an interactive understanding of both knowledge and action are crucial for competent school administrators (Merseth, 1997, p. 1). To this end,

it is the knowledge base relative to decision making that illuminates the value of infusing case studies into graduate education. Those who will contend that there are tried and true recipes for leadership behavior that work in all situations under all sorts of conditions are either misguided or uninformed. (Kowalski, 1995, p. 9)

Case Study Rationale

Cases offer a unique pedagogical approach to bridging the gap between theory and practice. While they are not intended to negate or limit the development of theory or observation of practice, cases provide an opportunity to examine theory and practice in concert in specific settings. Case study research also fosters important skills required to lead in uncertain, rapidly changing environments (Merseth, 1997, p. 2). Cases approximate the situations school leaders typically encounter on the job. Since leaders must produce both qualitative and quantitative evidence to support recommendations and decisions, cases help leaders sharpen analytical skills.

Case study research provides the focal point around which the participants’ expertise, experience, and observations emerge. The most important benefit of using case study research may be that it helps K-12 school leaders learn how to ask the right questions. Engaging in case analysis builds analytical and interpersonal skills, conceptual schemes, and managerial attitudes. In addition, the case study approach contributes to leadership competence in identifying opportunities, defining problems, gathering and integrating data, formulating strategies, and making and implementing decisions.

Case Study Methodology

As Merriam (1998) stated, “Determining when to use case study as opposed to some other research design depends upon what the researcher wants to know.” Yin (1994) suggested that “for ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, the case study has the distinct advantage. . . . Case study is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process.” Dean (2000) stressed the importance of a process rather than an outcome as justification for selecting a case study, citing Sanders: “Case studies help us to understand processes of events, projects, and programs and to discover context characteristics that will shed light on an issue or object” (quoted in Dean, 2000, p. 49).

Case studies in educational research take a variety of forms; there is no specific technique. A case study is essentially a method of exploring the processes and dynamics of educational practice. Case studies typically involve both an historical approach and system analysis in an effort to view the social unit being studied. The goals of case study research, like most other social science based research, are as follows: (a) illustration, (b) concept and hypothesis development, (c) hypothesis testing, (d) prediction or postdiction, (e) methodological testing or refinement, (f) evaluation, and sometimes (g) implementation of change actions. Within the case study method, a variety of materials may be used, including personal documents, life histories, intensive interviews, questionnaires, statistical records, rating scales, and others.

The challenges involved in the case study approach relate to a variety of specific tools that may be necessary in gathering data and to the need for the investigator to control them. A basic concern, then, is how the researcher applies the method. The intensive nature of case investigation may lead investigators to feel so certain about the data that they overgeneralize. Researchers must keep in mind that, even in the case study, one still has the job of clearly
defining and formulating the problem, devising and using accurate tools for gathering data, and analyzing and presenting research findings as objectively as possible.

Case study research involves in-depth examination of a few people, an organization, or a group over a specified time period in a natural setting. Case studies are intensive observations of specific groups or settings within clear boundaries. These observations may be relatively short (a few days) or relatively long (many months). For example, an elementary school serves a particular community. A case study, intent on discovering the school’s effectiveness in serving its natural and bounded community, may study the school and the community through visitations, interviewing pertinent personnel and students, reviewing past records, and talking with parents and other community members.

Case study research is intended to explore important social phenomena by immersing the investigator in a situation for extended periods. The act of case study research is intended to produce information on a given setting in its full richness and complexity. In general, case study researchers begin with only tentative research questions or hypotheses that they informally test as events unfold. The description of events, impressions, and surprises, as well as the hypotheses that emerge from the time the researcher spends in a single classroom or educational setting, are the raw material of case study research.

Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) summarized several fundamental lessons that can justify the employment of the case study method:

1. It permits the grounding of observations and concepts about social action and social structures in natural settings studied at close hand.

2. It provides information from a number of sources and over a period of time, thus permitting a more holistic study of complex social networks and of complexes of social action and social meanings.

3. It can furnish the dimensions of time and history to the study of social life, thereby enabling the investigator to examine continuity and change in life world patterns.

4. It encourages and facilitates, in practice, theoretical innovation and generalization. (pp. 6-7)

Overall Learning Objectives for this Knowledge Area

1. Integrate and apply theoretical and research-based literature relevant to case study research, in particular, the literature pertinent to K-12 educational leadership issues.

2. Review and annotate appropriate case study methodologies to demonstrate proficiency in applying knowledge of educational institutions; its external and internal environments; and the political, bureaucratic, social, and legal dynamics that impact decision making and policy considerations.

3. Critique and analyze proposed and actual solutions and evaluate what has occurred and what might have happened in the selected K-12 educational setting as a result of your case study research.

4. Develop a specific outline for initiating a case study in a selected K-12 educational setting, with special emphasis on current or planned policy initiatives.
5. Observe and participate in the process of bridging theoretical contexts and workplace realities by conducting and reporting on a field-based case study research project within a selected K-12 educational domain.

Each objective relates sequentially to one of the three components of KAM 7, so consider the objectives as you work on the relevant component.

**Criteria For Assessment**

Assessment of this knowledge area will be based on demonstrated competence in the theory and practice of case study research in education. In carrying out a case study, you will be evaluated on your understanding of case study methodology (Breadth component), a critical issue or question (Depth component), overview of the research concerning the issues or question (Breadth component and annotated bibliography), usefulness of the knowledge to the K-12 school leadership area (Application component), and the integration of the case study into the larger area of case study research in education (Application component).

Your individual objectives and needs and the expectation of assessors and advisors will determine the specific requirements. Documentation of your competence is required and will include written papers, but other forms of documentation may also be considered through consultation with your assessor.

**Breadth Component**

**Case Study Methods in Educational Leadership**

**Learning Outcomes**

The rationale for this component is to advance your knowledge of the various case study methodologies used in educational research, with a special focus on K-12 educational settings and communities, by using bibliographic research. As a result, you will critique the perspectives and paradigms associated with case studies as documented in qualitative research methodology. Furthermore, you will assess and evaluate published case study research (K-12) that illustrates examples of different methodologies.

1. By accessing current bibliographic data and references, define, compare, and contrast various case study methodologies (e.g., single/comparative or multiple/ethnographic/life history/social history) as they are identified in the qualitative literature base.

2. Provide written evidence of your familiarity with the advantages and disadvantages of utilizing case study research as a viable methodology in educational research.

3. Identify and critique several published K-12 case studies that exemplify different case study methodologies.

**Demonstration of Competence**

Utilizing relevant academic scholarship materials, write a 25-30-page doctoral-level paper that reflects higher-level thinking skills and that synthesizes various case study methodologies and their relevance to K-12 educational contexts, with an emphasis on policy and leadership.

**Depth Component**

**Current Research and Analysis of Selected Change Issues**
Learning Outcomes

The focus in the Depth component is to identify, define, and critique the method or methods you will employ in meeting the requirements of the Application section of KAM 7. In addition, you will need to provide your assessor with your plans for initiating, implementing, and reporting your K-12 case study research project.

Based on your review of the literature for the Breadth component, select a methodology or methodologies relevant to the K-12 educational domain. In making your selection, you will need to reflect on the works of Merriam (1998), Stake (1995), and Yin (1994) and relate their theoretical constructs to an aspect of K-12 educational leadership you will draw from for your case study project in the Application component.

Reflect and respond to the following questions as a means of preparing yourself to meet the requirements of this component.

1. What knowledge base is necessary for conducting a case study relative to the K-12 setting?

2. What valid evidence is available relating to the impact of case studies on reform or change in the K-12 school/community arena?

3. How do Merriam’s (1998) following guidelines for data analysis clarify or assist you in conducting your own case study?

To begin the more intensive phase of data analysis in a case study, all the information about the case should be brought together, including interview logs or transcripts, field note, reports, records, the investigator’s own documents, physical traces, and reflective memos. All this material needs to be organized in some fashion so that the data are easily retrievable. (p. 194)

Learning Resources

Learning resources for the Depth component of KAM 7 are those focusing on the methodology of choice, as well as refereed journals in general education, educational research, educational leadership, and policy studies.

Demonstration of Competence

1. Prepare a 25-30 page scholarly paper that defines the method or methods you plan to use in your case study (e.g., single or comparative/multiple). Discuss the advantages, benefits, and limitations you predict in using the methodology in relation to the issues or questions that your case study will investigate. Identify and outline the means (product) by which you will report on the implementation and findings of your selected case study research.

2. Prepare an annotated bibliography of no fewer than 15 current research sources that interpret and synthesize what has been published about the K-12 policy, leadership, or reform/change issue or question that you will research through your case study investigation. Be sure to include relevant dissertation references that either use the same case methodology or address the same or similar questions or issues.

Application of Knowledge

Case Study Report and Evaluation

Learning Outcomes
In the Application of Knowledge section you will (a) demonstrate your ability to conduct a case study in a selected K-12 school/community setting using your chosen methodology, (b) report on the procedures and findings, and (c) evaluate the outcomes. To fulfill this component you will be required, in addition to conducting and reporting on your case study, to examine your completed case study through a reflective lens that requires you to use your own experiences in interpreting the results of the study.

**Demonstration of Competence**

1. Conduct a case study in a selected K-12 elementary/secondary/state-level setting that will focus either in part or in whole on the political, bureaucratic, legal, social, multicultural, and reform/change issues germane to the setting. Use an appropriate period of time for the methodology or methodologies previously identified.

2. Demonstrate your ability to use reflective practice by evaluating your case study using a template that helps you critique and analyze the case results from your own professional experiences. You will need to determine the central issue(s), the secondary issue(s), the alternative solutions you would choose within the context of the case results, what would be the best alternative to use and why, and whether you would implement the policy or outcome differently from that represented in the case (Ashbaugh & Kasten, pp.12-17).

You will need to describe how you selected the topic for your case study, collected appropriate background and supporting information, and analyzed the data. You may include descriptions of how and why the problem or problems you are examining came about as well as a description of your philosophical assumptions and the social theories you subscribe to as a scholar-practitioner functioning in your particular K-12 setting. In this regard it may be useful to focus on your role and the types of problems that typically confront you in your educational setting.

**Learning Resources**

Learning resources for the Application component should include those acquired from the Breadth and Depth components, your professional experiences, and other scholarly literature appropriate to your research. You should pay special attention to refereed journal articles, dissertations, and reports in educational leadership, particularly those using a case study approach.

**Recommended Readings**


