DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 523 EA 002 121

By-Cross, Ray; Bennett, Vernon S.

Problem Situations Encountered by School Principals in Different Socioeconomic Settings.

Pub Date Feb 69

Note-19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Amer. Educ. Res. Assn. (Los Angeles, Calif., Feb. 4-8, 1969).

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.05

Descriptors-*Administrative Problems, *Administrator Responsibility, Community Characteristics, Community Relations, *Elementary Schools, Human Relations, *Principals, *Socioeconomic Influences, Statistical Analysis, Tables (Data)

Identifiers-Chi Square Test, Darling Taxonomy of Administrative Problems

To determine the effect of variations in institutional dimensions on administrative behavior, this study identifies the differences between problem situations confronting elementary principals of schools located in lower socioeconomic communities and those confronting principals of schools in higher socioeconomic communities. The institutional variable is the socioeconomic composition of the communities in which the schools are located. Ten schools in a Midwestern urban school system were divided into five high socioeconomic and five low socioeconomic schools and the 10 principals were used as subjects for the study. Problems confronting the principals were identified by direct observation and categorized by means of the Darling taxonomy of administrative problems. Each subject was observed for 2 full days with 995 problem situations recorded for the "high" group and 1,051 recorded for the "low" group. Analysis using Chi square tests shows that there are significant differences between the distribution of principals' problems in the "low" and "high" schools with respect to (1) their functions, (2) types of problems they encounter, and (3) origin of their decisions. Different skills are required of principals in the two settings, with principals in the "low" setting encountering more human relations problems and having less time for creative thinking. (TT)

PROBLEM SITUATIONS ENCOUNTERED BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS

By

Ray Cross
University of Minnesota

Vernon S. Bennett
Superintendent of Schools
River Falls, Wisconsin

Presented at the
1969 Annual Meeting
of the
American Educational Research Association
February 4-8, 1969
Los Angeles, California

The purpose of this study was to identify the differences between problem situations confronting elementary principals of schools located in lower socioeconomic communities and those confronting principals of schools in higher socioeconomic communities. The investigation was pursuant to other studies which have examined situational factors influencing the behavior of status leaders.[1,2,3]

One of the better known models for the explanation of administrative behavior, that formulated by Getzels and Guba,[4] postulates that administrative behavior is a product of the ideographic (personal) and the nomethetic (institutional) dimensions of the organization. It is assumed that institutional dimension varies from one school to another, and that administrative behavior varies with the pressures generated by the character of the institutional dimension. The institutional variable whose influence was considered in this study was the socioeconomic composition of the communities in which schools are located.

A number of writers have discussed the influence of the socioeconomic level of the community on the school.[5,6,7] All essentially agree that the operation of a school is profoundly influenced by the socioeconomic character of its community.

---

1 Hemphill, John K., Dimensions of Executive Positions. Bureau of Business Research, Columbus; The Ohio State University, 1960.

2 Laidig, Eldon L., The Influence of Situational Factors on the Behavior of Selected Elementary School Principals, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Austin: The University of Texas, 1967.

3 Stogdill, Ralph M., et al., A Predictive Study of Administrative Work Patterns, Bureau of Business Research, Columbia: The Ohio State University, 1956.

4 Getzels, Jacob W., "Administration as a Social Process," in Andrew W. Halpin, ed., Administrative Theory in Education, Chicago Midwest Administration Center, 1958, pp, 150-165.

5 Conant, James B., Slums and Suburbs, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961.

6 Mays, John B., The School in Its Social Setting. Edinburg, Great Britain: Neil and Company Limited.

7 Phillips, Walter. "The Influence of Social Class on Education: Some Institutional Imperatives,' Berkely Journal of Sociology, 5 (Fall, 1959), pp. 63-88.

Consideration of these writings gave rise to the major hypothesis of the study - that the frequencies in various categories of problems confronting principals of schools located in low socioeconomic communities would differ from the frequencies for principals of elementary schools located in high socioeconomic communities.

Design of the Study

The broad setting for the study was a metropolitan school system located in the Midwest. By means of a socioeconomic rating devised by the school system five "high" socioeconomic schools and five "low" socioeconomic schools were identified. The five "low" schools were in the lower twenty percent, socioeconomically, and the five "high" schools were in the upper twenty percent of the city's seventy-five elementary schools. The principals of the ten schools were the subjects for the study.

The device used to investigate the problems confronting the principals in these schools was a taxonomy of administrative problems developed by David W. Darling.[1] The Darling taxonomy is a classification scheme which permits the categorization of administrative problems according to three dimensions - administrative function, problem type, and origin of decision.

The administrative function dimension, originally developed by Livingston and Davies,[2] prescribes four categories of functions of educational administrators; (1) educational program, (2) developing personnel, (3) community relations, and (4) managing the school. The problem type dimension is adapted from Katz's[3] three skill approach to the analysis of the work of the administrator. The problem types are (1) technical problems, (2) human problems, and (3) conceptual problems.

---

1 Darling, David W., The Development of a Decision Making Model and the Empirical Testing of the Model Using Selected Elementary School Principals in Decision Making Situations. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Austin: The University of Texas, 1964.

2 New York State Teachers Association, A Developing Concept of the Superintendency in Education. Albany, New York: The Association, 1955.

3 Katz, Robert L., "Skills of an Effective Administrator," Harvard Business Review, Volume 33, Number 1, 1955, pp. 33-42.

Barnard's[1] conceptualization of the origins of decisions is the basis of the third dimension, which separates problems into (1) intermediary problems (decisions occasioned by orders from the hierarchy), (2) appellate problems (decisions occasioned by appeals or requests from subordinates and extraordinates), and (3) creative problems (decisions originating within the person of the administrator).

The dimensions just described were the basis of a three dimensional taxonomy developed by Darling for the classification of problems confronting elementary principals. His investigation[2] demonstrated that all of the 1196 decision situations confronting his subjects could be categorized according to this taxonomy. The three dimensional graphic model of the taxonomy is presented in Figure 1.

The four by three by three schema permits problem situations to be classified into thirty-six different categories. For example, a problem concerning educational program (one of the four functions) could be either technical, human, or conceptual (problem type). In turn, an educational program problem requiring technical skill could be either intermediary, appellate, or creative in origin. (See appendix for illustrations of each of the thirty-six categories of problems). All problem situations encountered by an elementary principal can therefore be distributed into thirty-six distinct sets. Figure 2 illustrates a more detailed breakdown of the model. Note the coding used to designate the classification of problems. Figure 3 illustrates the classification of a single problem on all three dimensions simultaneously.

Data on problem situations encountered by the subject principals were gathered by means of direct observation. The observer first established his skill in classifying problmes by categorizing the in-basket problems used in the Whitman School simulation (on the function and problem type dimensions) and comparing the

---

1 Barnard, Chester I., The Functions of the Executive, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938.

2 Darling, op cit

results with Hemphill's[1] classifications of the same problems. It was felt that the index of agreement of 87% sufficiently established the observer's accuracy in problem classification. The observer additionally prepared himself by means of sixteen hours of trial observation of non-subject principals.

During a pre-observation conference with each subject the general nature of the research and ground rules for the observation were discussed. An explanatory letter was also sent to the staff members in each school. In this letter the non-evaluative nature of the investigation was made clear. The staff was asked to disregard the presence of the observer and to conduct school business as usual.

Each subject was observed for two full days. During the observations the investigator classified the problems encountered by each principal according to the Darling taxonomy and took copious notes on the background of the various problems. During the observations, the observer did not communicate with the subject. Clarifications were made during a conference with the subject following each day of observation, and problems were reclassified if it seemed appropriate.

Pursuant to the major hypotheses, three null subhypotheses were tested by means of chi square. These were as follows:

a. There is no significant difference between the distribution of principals' problems in the "low" schools and the distribution of principals' problems in the "high" schools on the function dimension of the taxonomy.

b. There is no significant difference between the distribution of principals' problems in the "low" schools and the distribution of principals' problems in the "high" schools on the problem type dimension of the taxonomy.

c. There is no significant difference between the distribution of principals' problems in the "low" schools and the distribution of principals' problems in the "high" schools on the origin of decision dimension of the taxonomy.

---

1 Hemphill, John K, Daniel Griffiths, and Norman Frederiksen, Administrative Performance and Personality, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1962, pp. 51-55.

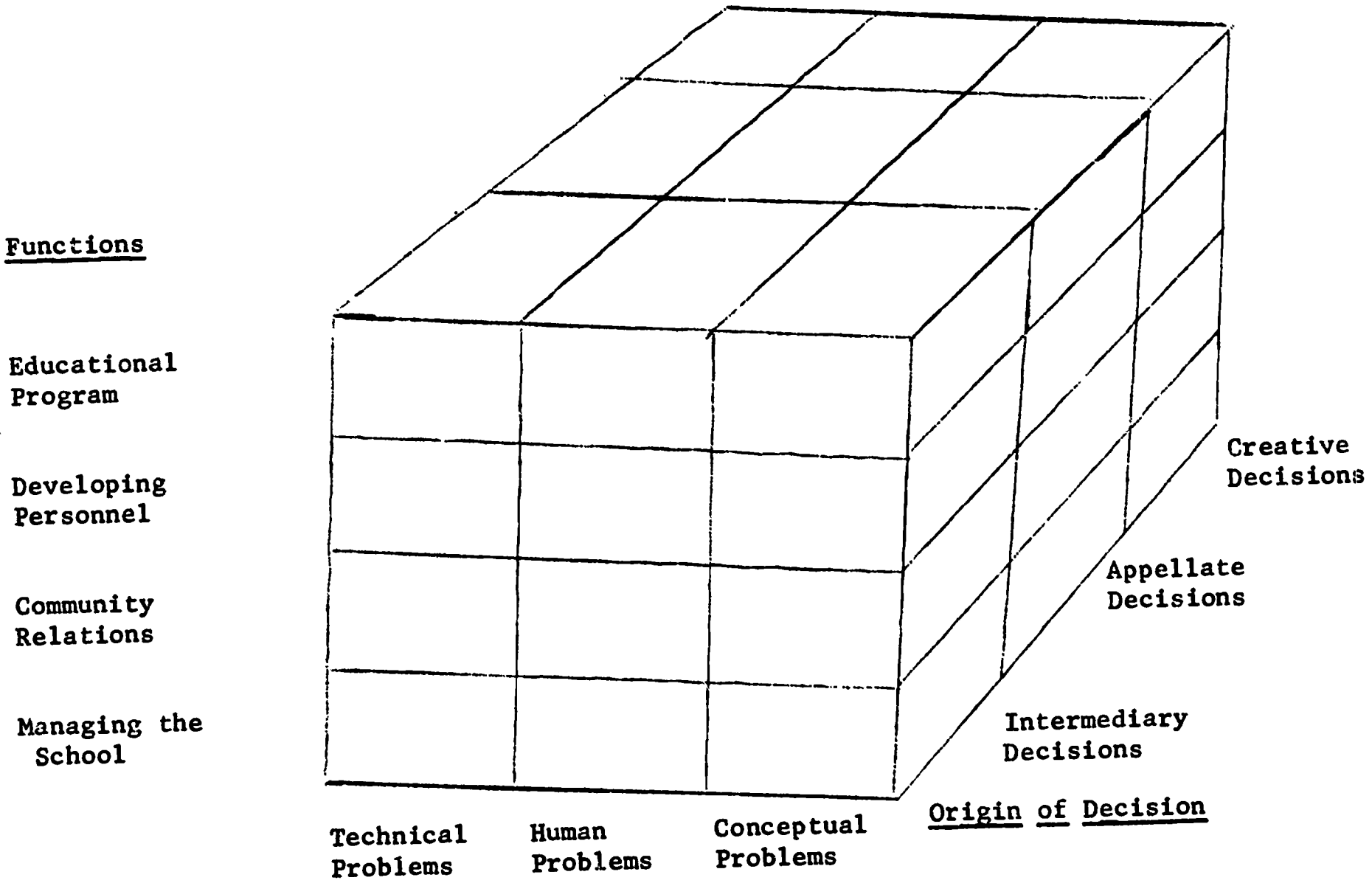


Figure 1. A Three-Dimensional Figure Illustrating Problem Situation Classifications

1 From Darling, op.cit.

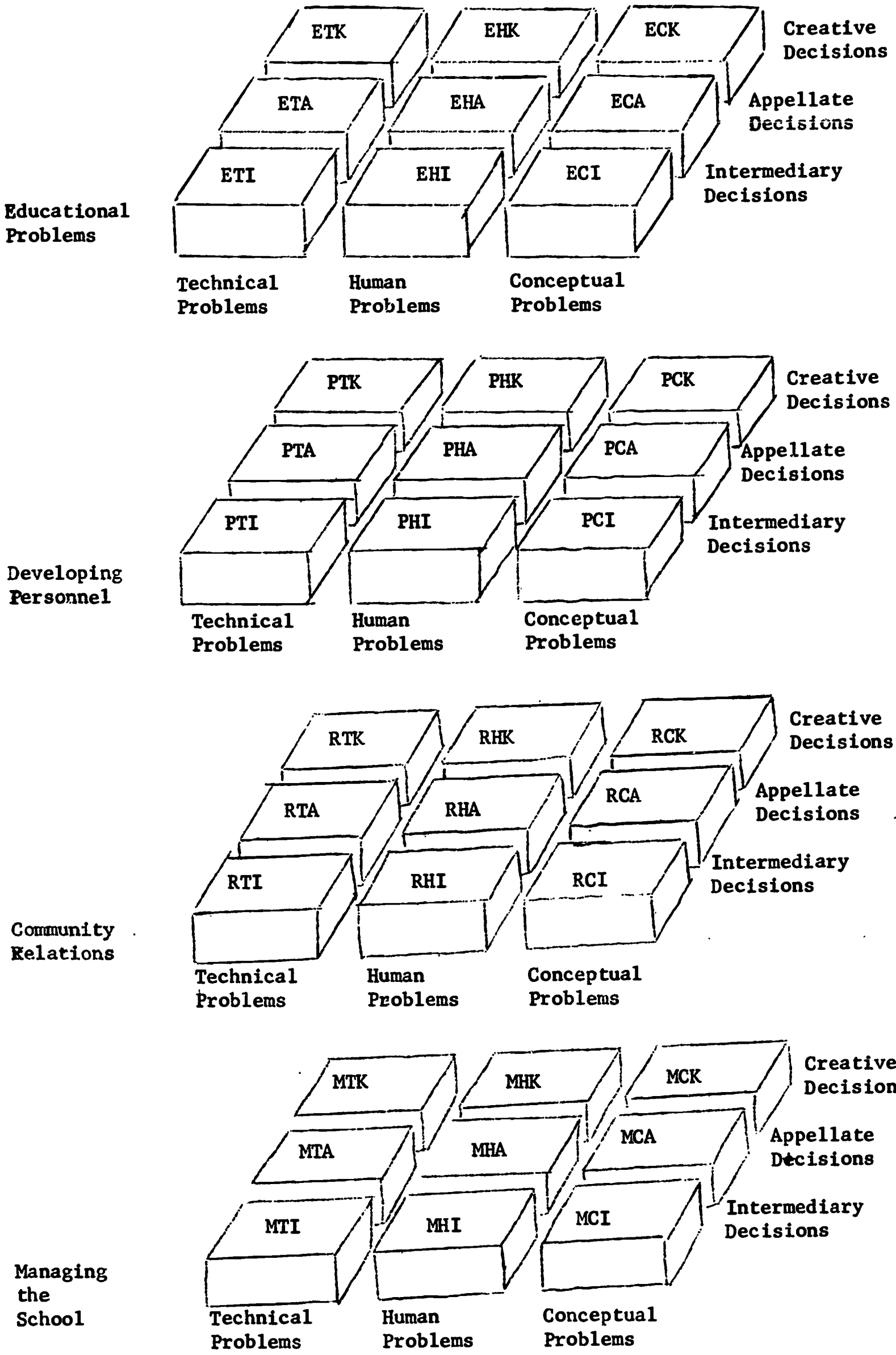


Figure 2. A Sectionized Three-Dimensional Figure Illustrating Problem Situation Classifications

[1]From Darling, op cit

EACH PROBLEM SITUATION has a three-letter designation. The first letter refers to the Function of the Principal, the second to the Problem Type, and the third to the Origin of Decision.

For example: The superintendent asks the principal for a report of his students whose parents are employed on Federal property. This would be coded MTI.

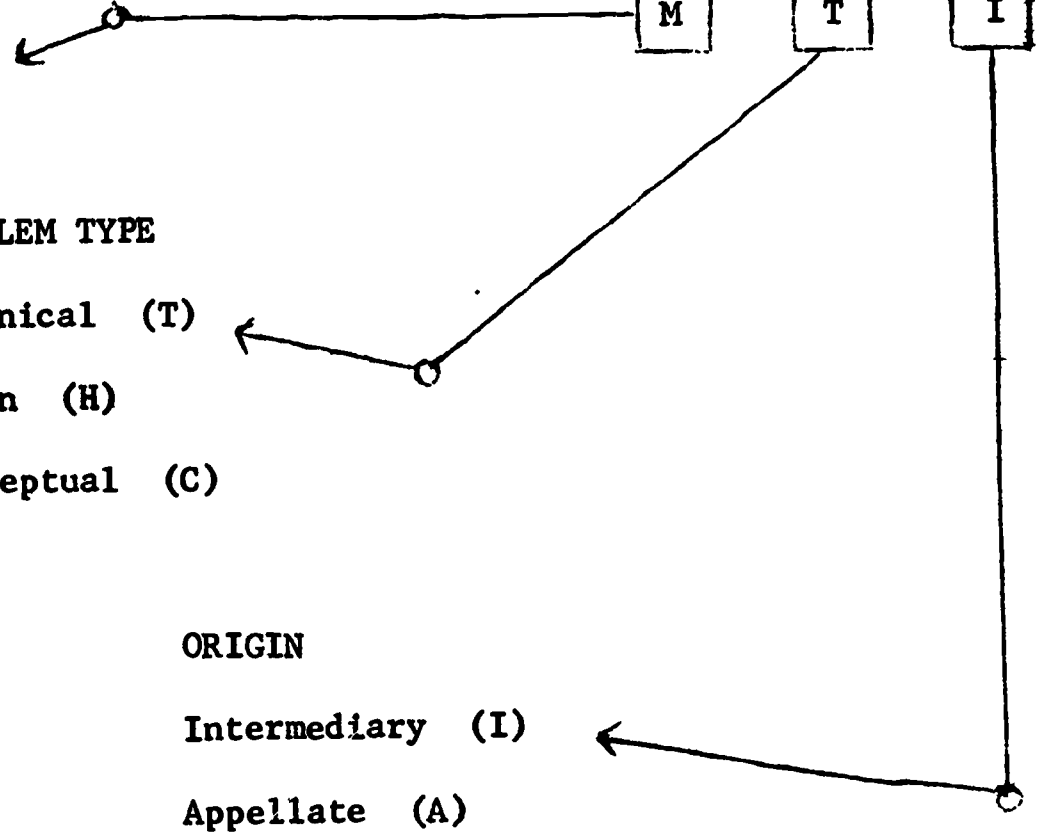
FUNCTIONS

Educational Program (E)

Developing Personnel (P)

Community Relations (R)

Managing the School (M)



PROBLEM TYPE

Technical (T)

Human (H)

Conceptual (C)

ORIGIN

Intermediary (I)

Appellate (A)

Creative (K)

Figure 3. A Coding System for Problem Situation Designations

1 From Darling, op cit

Findings

A total of 2,046 problem situations was recorded during twenty days of observation. A total of 995 problems was observed in the five high socioeconomic schools, and a total of 1,051 was observed in the five low socioeconomic schools.

Table 1 presents the accumulated distribution of problems in thirty six categories for principals in low socioeconomic school settings. Of the thirty-six cells of the taxonomy, the three having the highest combined frequency for the five principals in "low" schools were: (1) management problems requiring human skill and originating from a subordinate or extraordinate (MHA); (2) management problems requiring technical skill and originating from a subordinate (MTA); (3) community relations problems requiring human skills and originating from a subordinate or extraordinate source (RHA). These three categories accounted for approximately one-third of the problems in the low socioeconomic settings.

Table 2 presents accumulated distribution for the principals of schools in high socioeconomic settings. The highest frequency of problems for principals in high socioeconomic settings was in the classification MTK, management problems requiring technical skill and originating with the principal himself. High problem frequencies also occurred in the classifications MTA and RHA, as was also the case with the problem of principals in "low" settings.

In order to better summarize the nature of problems encountered by principals in the two socioeconomic settings, Tables 3, 4, and 5 were constructed to present a distribution for each dimension. Each table shows for both "high" and "low" schools the numbers and percentages of problems which fell into the various categories of one of the three dimensions of the taxonomy. Chi square tests supported the rejection of the three null subhypotheses ($p < .01$ for each dimension of the taxonomy). The major research hypothesis of the study, that there would be differences in the frequency of various categories of problems encountered by principals in the two socioeconomic settings was therefore accepted.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF 1,051 PROBLEMS
ENCOUNTERED BY FIVE PRINCIPALS
IN LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOL SETTINGS

ETA*	32	PTA	22	RTA	31	MTA	117
EHA	37	PHA	46	RHA	114	MHA	134
ECA	36	PCA	14	RCA	48	MCA	9
ETI	16	PTI	9	RTI	5	MTI	20
EHI	1	PHI	1	RHI	0	MHI	0
ECI	12	PCI	6	RCI	3	MCI	4
ETK	18	PTK	9	RTK	12	MTK	99
EHK	20	PHK	60	RHK	35	MHK	42
ECK	22	PCK	9	RCK	4	MCK	4
Total	194		176		252		429

* Each Problem Situation has a three letter designation. The first letter refers to the Function of the Principal, the second to the Problem Type, and the third to the Origin of Decision. (see Figure 2 for key to the letter codes.)

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF 995 PROBLEMS
ENCOUNTERED BY FIVE PRINCIPALS
IN HIGH SOCIOECONOMIC SCHOOL SETTINGS

ETA	37	PTA	19	RTA	17	MTA	97
EHA	43	PHA	33	RHA	68	MHA	22
ECA	26	PCA	14	RCA	31	MCA	6
ETI	15	PTI	7	RTI	2	MTI	16
EHI	4	PHI	2	RHI	1	MHI	0
ECI	9	PCI	5	RCI	0	MCI	2
ETK	57	PTK	22	RTK	23	MTK	116
EHK	38	PHK	67	RHK	44	MHK	29
ECK	62	PCK	28	RCK	20	MCK	13
Total	291		197		206		301

TABLE 3

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF PROBLEMS
IN EACH CATEGORY OF THE FUNCTIONS DIMENSION
FOR PRINCIPALS IN HIGH AND LOW SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS

Function	High Setting		Low Setting	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Educational Program	291	29.2	194	18.5
Developing Personnel	197	19.8	176	16.8
Community Relations	206	20.7	252	23.9
Managing the School	301	30.3	429	40.8
Totals	995	100.0	1,051	100.0

Chi Square p .01

Table 3 presents the data for the functions dimension. The table indicates that principals of both "high" and "low" schools encountered problems more frequently related to managing the school than to any other function. This was more marked for principals of low socioeconomic schools than for principals of high socio-economic schools. Principals of both high socioeconomic schools and low socio-economic schools encountered personnel and community relations problems with almost equal frequency. A noticeable difference between principals of "high" and "low" schools on the function dimension was in the area of educational program.

Table 4 submits data on problem situations according to problem type, or skill required to deal with the problem. The skill required most frequently of principals in "low" settings was human skill, while principals of "high" schools more often broughttechnical skill to bear. Principals in both types of schools were required to use conceptual skills less frequently than technical and human skills.

Table 5 reveals the sharpestdifference in problem situations encountered by principals of "low" schools and those in "high" schools. This breakdown for the origin of decisions dimensions shows that the problems of principals in low socio-economic schools most frequently were occasioned by requests or appeals from sub-ordinates and extraordinates while a plurality of problems of principals in "high" settings was generated by the principals themselves. It is noteworthy that few of the problems handled by the principals were intermediary problems. Rarely was a principal observed to respond to an initiative by someone in the hierarchy. This does not necessarily indicate an absence of hierarchical control, however. The principals could frequentlyhave been acting according to system rules and norms, even though it was apparent neither to the observer nor possibly to the principals themselves.

Additional chi-square tests were computed to furtherassess the influence of the socioeconomic character of the community on problems encountered by principals. It would seem that, if community socioeconomic character is an important influence

TABLE 4

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF PROBLEMS
IN EACH CATEGORY OF THE PROBLEM TYPE DIMENSION
FOR PRINCIPALS IN HIGH AND LOW SETTING SCHOOLS

Problem Type	High Setting Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Technical	428	43.0	390	37.1
Human	351	35.3	490	46.6
Conceptual	216	21.7	171	16.3
Totals	995	100.0	1051	100.0

Chi Square $p < .01$

TABLE 5

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGES OF PROBLEMS
IN EACH CATEGORY OF THE ORIGIN OF DECISION DIMENSION
FOR PRINCIPALS IN "HIGH" AND "LOW" SOCIOECONOMIC SETTINGS

Origin of Decision	"High Setting" Number	Percent	Low Setting Number	Percent
Appellate	403	40.5	640	60.9
Intermediary	63	6.3	77	7.3
Creative	529	53.2	334	31.8
Total	995	100.0	1051	100.0

Chi Square $p < .01$

on problem situations, then there should be few differences in the distributions of problems confronting the five principals within each of the two groups. Chi square tests were computed, comparing the distribution of problems of each principal with the distribution of problems for the other four principals of schools in the same type of socioeconomic community. The tests were computed for each dimension. The resulting thirty chi-square tests showed that in no case did a principal's problems differ significantly on any of the three dimensions from those of the other four principals of schools located in a similar socioeconomic setting. In summary, there were significant differences between problems of principals of "high" schools and problems of principals of "low" schools on all three dimensions of the taxonomy, but on none of the three dimensions did any principals problem frequency distribution differ from the combined frequency distribution for the other four principals in the same socioeconomic setting.

Discussion

Two cautions are in order in interpreting the results of this study. One caution concerns the small number of subjects in the study. Even though a large number of problems were observed, these were confronted by only ten subjects. A second caution stems from the fact that the principals were within the same school system, hence, the procedures, policies, and norms may have dictated to some degree the kinds of problems encountered by principals in each of the two socioeconomic settings. Thus, it is not known to what extent these findings may be generalized to other school districts.

The study does present a contrasting picture of the problems of principals in the two socioeconomic settings. Principals of low socioeconomic schools appear to be forced into the role of the counter punching manager who is under persistent pressure from human relations problems. The high number of problems of an appellate nature (60.9%) indicates that the majority of the actions of principals in low socioeconomic settings were reactions to the initiatives of others. Principals in

high socioeconimic schools also appeared to be under pressure from appellate problems, but to a lesser degree (40.5%). Fifty-three percent of the problems of principals in "high" schools were creative in origin compared to 31.8% for principals in "low" schools. It would appear that just as bad money drives out good, appellate problems drive out creative ones. A principal who is bombarded with appellate problems has little time to generate creative problems.

A second interesting comparison is the type of skill required of principals in the two settings. For principals in both community settings conceptual skill was less frequently required in meeting problems than the other two types of skill. The percentage frequency of the other two types of skill was reversed in the two socioeconomic settings. The problems of principals of low socioeconomic schools most frequently required human skill (46.6%) while those encountered by principals of high socioeconomic schools most often required technical skills (43%).

The somewhat contrasting pictures of problems of principals in the two socio-economic settings is reminiscent of a study by Nicholas, Virjo, and Wattenburg, who found the "urgency, crisis, and harassment characterized the challenges confronting principals in 'low' setting schools, whereas business like routine operations were the nature of the challenge presented to principals in 'high' area schools." It appears that the work environment of the principals of the low socioeconimic schools places them in the role of counterpunchers (high number of appellate problems) whose time is absorbed by management functions involving human relations problems. Principals of high socioeconomic schools appear to be under less pressure from appellate problems involving human relations. This permits them to do more creative problem solving, both in the management area and in the area of educational programs.

---

[1]Nicholas, Lynn N., Helen E. Virjo, and William W. Wattenburg, Effects of Socioeconomic Setting and Organizational Climate on Problems Brought to Elementary School Offices. Cooperative Research Project Number 2394. Detroit: College of Education, Wayne State University, 1965.

Implications

The implications of the study are limited by the previously cited uncertainties concerning the generalizability of the findings. Only replications in other school systems can eliminate these uncertainties. If the findings of such replications are consistent with the findings of this study, the following implications will acquire more validity.

This study suggests that principals in low socioeconomic schools do not have an adequate amount of time for educational prog ram and creative problems due to the large number of appellate and management problems encountered. Therefore, the chief implication of this study concerns staffing. Principals in low socioeconomic schools are of primary importance in adapting educational programs to meet the needs of deprived children. This study suggests that they are handicapped in this effort by immediate pressures from the school community environment. If school systems hold an instructional leadership expectation of their principals in low socioeconomic community schools, they must consider as a matter of policy, an objective system of supplementing the administrative staff in those schools.

A second implication concerns the nature of college and university programs for the preparation of elementary school principals. The prevalent practice is to have a single preparation program for all elementary school principals. Since the nature of the challenge to principals appears to vary with the socioeconomic composition of the school's community, it seems appropriate to consider the diversification of preparation programs accordingly. It is true that such a step would generate other problems, such as the necessity for early identification of the type of school which a trainee is destined to administer. However, such a problem is surmountable, and the game may well be worth the candle.

APPENDIX

CONDENSED EXAMPLES OF THE THIRTY-SIX TYPES OF PROBLEM SITUATIONS

ETA. A teacher informed the principal that a field trip had been planned. She asked the principal to approve the trip.

EHA. A teacher brought a boy to the office for praise. The boy had completed an excellent art project.

ECA. A newspaper reporter asked the principal for his comments concerning the educational values gained by pupils bussed for integration purposes.

ETI. A curriculum director asked the principal for the names of teachers to serve on a science textbook selection committee.

EHI. The assistant superintendent requested information of pupils planning on attending summer school classes.

ECI. A curriculum director asked a principal to preview selected family living film strips to determine if they should be shown to sixth grade pupils.

ETK. The principal requested that a storage room be remodeled for special reading instruction.

EHK. The principal visited a classroom to observe a child whose behavior had been less than desirable.

ECK. The principal visited a classroom to observe a mathematics lesson.

PTA. A teacher requested to visit another school for a day.

PHA. A teacher requested that the principal visit another teacher in the building because of a noisy classroom condition.

PCA. A teacher requested that the principal help plan a science unit.

PTI. The central office sent a notice concerning a fine arts assembly. It was recommended that a date be set for the program.

PHI. The central office called for a recommendation on a teacher.

PCI. The central office sent a self-evaluation form for all new teachers and requested that the principal explain the form to each first-year staff member.

PTK. The principal called a meeting of all teachers to explain next year's budget system.

PHK. The principal talked to a hallway supervisor about the conduct of children in the hallways.

PCK. The principal gave a fifth grade teacher suggestions on how to approach a parent concerning a recommendation to fail a second grade child.

RTA. A local club chairman called the principal for permission to use the gymnasium for a meeting.

RHA. A parent called the principal to determine why her child was eliminated from the school safety patrol.

RCA. A community minority group leader asked the principal for suggestions on how the "group" could help disadvantaged youth.

RTI. The central office asked the principal for the number of parents that attended the kindergarten roundup day.

RHI. The central office asked the principal to clarify a complaint that was received from a parent.

RCI. The central office asked the principal to plan an "open house" program due to the fact that the building was to be retired at the end of the year.

RTK. The principal called a doctor in order to set an appointment for an injured boy.

RHK. The principal attended a "coffee" honoring the PTA officers.

RCK. The principal sent a letter to a civic organization suggesting that the club sponsor a field day program.

MTA. The principal received a requisition from a teacher for visual aids.

MHA. A teacher brought a boy to the office and requested that he be disciplined for fighting in the hallway.

MCA. A custodian asked the principal for advice on arranging plants in the school garden.

MTI. The central office requested that the principal send in the monthly attendance record.

MHI. The central office informed the principal that visitors should not be allowed in the school during the last two weeks of school.

MCI. The central office asked the principal to evaluate the plans for a new elementary school.

MTK. The principal asked the custodian to set up chairs for a meeting.

MHK. The principal noticed two boys fighting in the hallway and called them into his office.

MCK. The principal made suggestions to the custodian that would result in additional storage space.