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ABSTRACT

This short speech examines the principal in his various roles as an educational leader, personnel manager, and business manager. It reports evidence indicating that the principal's primary role, that of educational leadership, is being eroded as a consequence of the expansion of his other roles. The author suggests a readjustment of priorities to set the role of the principal in the proper direction. To this end, the author says, some duties traditionally held by the principal must be delegated, the concept of the principal's role as defined must be accepted, and he must be offered clearly defined responsibility and authority, and a measure of budget and staff flexibility; and he must recognize his school and community as having specific needs and characteristics. The author sees as crucial priorities for role adjustment and redirection of energy the areas of decisionmaking, community relations, administrative structure, curriculum and administration, good order, discipline, and learning. (Author/DN)

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THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The role of the principal which I will discuss is,
in my opinion, becoming one of the contentious issues in
Canadian education.

As man in the middle, his role places him in either
direct or indirect involvement with all members of the
community - from infant to pensioner. We must then ask
ourselves what is his role and postulate the directions
which seem imperative for continued success of the role and
position as we know it today.

In order to discuss the principalship a definition
of the role is required and I present to you the following
policy statement adopted by the Vancouver School Board:

"The role of the principal is to provide
educational leadership and facilitate
excellence in his school. To this end a
principal should delegate day-to-day
details in the many other areas of
responsibility that he has by virtue of
the Public Schools Act and tradition so
as not to neglect this primary role"

What is significant in this statement is the priority
placed on the leadership-responsibility concept which is
inherent in the position, and, secondly, the recognition and
emphasis given to the delegation of responsibility thus
allowing provision for maintenance of effective instructional
leadership. This effectiveness of the incumbent's role
performance is dependent on the adeptness with which he can
develop and refine his administrative skills. The principal
must, however, view his role as a totality. He should
effectively maintain a balance among the specific roles and
continue to develop the skills associated with these roles.

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The role of the principal may be envisioned as a conceptual framework of skills which Downey categorized as -

1. technical-managerial (business management)
2. human-managerial (personnel management)
3. technical-educational (curriculum development)
4. speculative-creative (change and innovation)

In order to effectively translate these skills into action, strategies must be employed by the principal. This may be approached through the application of Nelson's skill strategy domain -

1. control strategy - applies to the management activities that one undertakes to regulate a program or affairs which are part of the organizational function.
2. implementive strategy - refers to the direction of one's effort toward those things which help expedite, fulfill and complete the operations in the organization.
3. evaluation strategy - involves the analysis and assessment of activities designed to meet goals and procedures.
4. developmental strategy - is the exercise of creative talent and imagination in generating ideas, formulating propositions and planning approaches that may result in improved performance.

Although this domain embraces the entire spectrum of administrative behaviour the principal should continually assess the dimensions of his role and deploy the necessary strategies for effective role performance. In this way his position as middleman may be enhanced and he will meet the challenge of leadership by providing direction, justification and goal attainment.

Although an attempt has been made in this presentation to describe briefly a conceptual framework for the role, the question remains to be answered - "How does the principal who is incumbent perceive this role?"

Research

An analysis of the findings of recent role studies of the principalship may serve to illustrate his perception of the role and provide some implications for role

development in these trying and exciting days in the history of education.

In 1968 Melton replicated a study of principal role perception completed a decade before. His findings, despite the difference in time, location and social change, showed that principals were actually engaged to a greater extent in managerial-administrative tasks. Instructional leadership tasks were perceived to be ideally a first priority, but in actual performance rated third. Although Cross & Bennett studied principal task performance and school socioeconomic setting, their findings state that immediate managerial administration problems were consuming most of the principal's time (more than 40%), regardless of the socioeconomic setting. Cross states that to exercise effective instructional leadership, principals must reduce the time spent on these types of problems.

The role of the principal was also the subject of two studies in Victoria, B.C. in 1971. One of the basis of a Master's thesis by Jenvey - the other was completed by a committee of an administrator's section of Greater Victoria.

Jenvey investigated the relationship between the ideal and the actual task priority. His study revealed a wide disparity between the tasks the principals rated ideal priorities and the priority he gave to actual tasks he was engaged in. Jenvey found that principals preferred to be engaged in supportive instructional tasks, i.e. staff motivation and evaluation, while in fact their actual task priorities were office routines and discipline.

The Greater Victoria Administration Role Study was extensive and involved both elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals. Although the findings of this study closely correlate the result of other studies of the principal's role, there is evidence of task predominance in some areas which may be indicators of future priority

The principals indicated a desire for more involvement in establishing educational objectives, in dealing with individual teaching problems; involving and co-ordinating community resources, planning school construction or additions and developing in-service programs.

The Canadian Education Association recently published a study of the role of the urban secondary principal. Their findings support the Victoria study. Both reports conclude that the principal's role is expanding to the

detriment of his first priority - instructional leadership.

I do not envision a radical change in the role but rather a re-adjustment of priorities to give direction.

The position has been developed over many decades and has proven to be the most workable solution for the concept of responsible leadership. The community and parents in particular want someone in charge. This is especially true now when a decline in public confidence in social, civil and law agencies is being expressed. The "man in charge" in the school has become increasingly visible, accessible and accountable whereas his counterpart in the social, civil and law agencies is no longer in direct contact with the public.

If the role is to be redefined in terms of priorities some duties assigned by tradition and practice will have to be delegated. Election of functional involvement and leadership based on professional consultation, co-operative decision making and co-ordination of human and physical resources, must be realized as role priorities.

The effectiveness of the principal's involvement in high level tasks will depend on the clarity with which his job responsibilities and authority are defined. Responsibility and authority are complementary. At present confusion results because there are sometimes divergent role components. For example - school dress regulations may be a school responsibility and the principal may, in his wisdom, decide what is a good policy for his school and learning situation. Frustration may result when the policy is questioned even by a minority, forcing the school to react because the responsibility for the policy was not supported by authority. Too often the principal's role is frustrated by assigned responsibility without clear definition of supportive authority.

The problem of responsibility is also related to the crucial matter of school budget. How can a principal be expected to provide an elite program and staff structure when every phase of the school budget is regulated at the District level? Shouldn't the principal be granted a budget and staffing formula within which he can organize and meet the needs of the situation? If accountability is part of the role he had better be granted a solid base which gives him a measure of budget control for the operation of his school.

There is also a need for the recognition of differentiation of schools and the communities they serve. I believe this is becoming more apparent as urbanization increases and diverse communities develop within the urban area. If the concept of special identity for schools is accepted and recognized the responsibility for leadership accorded the principal in these schools must be accompanied by a measure of freedom and support, so that the needs of the particular school can be met with confidence.

If we accept the concept of the principal's role as defined and we are prepared to offer him clearly defined responsibility with authority, a measure of budget and staff flexibility and recognize his school and community as having specific needs and characteristics - then I believe the priorities can be defined and the role performance set in new directions.

Assuming that the responsibility and freedom suggested is granted, I see the following areas as crucial priorities for role adjustment and redirection of energy.

Decision Making

The delegation of more responsibilities to his staff will be necessary. Tradition and practice with the hierarchical connotation must be supplanted by the concept of collegiality. This means that the principal will play the role of "first among equals". The staff, or those with delegated responsibilities would act as advisors. An expression of collegiality would be in their use of the decision making process with the principal. The implementation of the recommendations or actions would be in the principal's responsibility. However, if staff recommendations appear to contradict Board decisions, the principal may have to use his veto or impose a decision because he is responsible to the community through the Board. In this way the principal's role as leader, decision maker and co-ordinator would be confined to a high level of administration.

The Community

The role of the principal with the Community will broaden. The principal, in co-operation with the community groups will assist in the co-ordination of a broad continuum of school-community co-operative experiences for everyone from pre-schooler to pensioner.

Although the school curriculum is set by provincial bodies, the wise principal will incorporate within the school program the needs of the community. The principal will have to play the role of a skillful assessor of his community and be a knowledgeable and bold innovator. He will still have to maintain the standards expected for his school but give a measure of involvement in school planning, to his community.

Another area of increasing role responsibility will be with the social agencies, i.e. public health, welfare, and services such as the police. Although these agencies and services have always had a close working relationship with the school, increasing crush of social problems and loss of confidence in some agencies by many parents sharply focuses on the school and principal as a "new neutral ground" where the horizontal co-ordination of services will be made in order to provide the best in child and parent welfare and guidance.

Community involvement will mean different approaches for each principal, but the priority seems imperative as public pressure grows for a community-oriented administration and school. I use the word "administration" because I believe that the principal's role is to perform administrative functions openly with his community.

To play the role of administrator with its connotation of status would be a serious impediment to the horizontal effect and open communication required for his work in the community.

Administrative Structure

With the school districts under pressure of reduced resources, alternate forms of lay and professional assistance will have to be considered and incorporated to assist the principal. The roles of principal and vice-principal will change through re-assessment of the responsibilities to assistants. Crucial to the implementation of any role change from the traditional administrative structure is the adeptness and foresight with which the principal can delegate responsibility and appropriate authority so that the new type of assistants can administer with confidence within clearly defined role definitions and functions. The principal's role will assume a new dimension - that of economic assignment of administrative responsibilities in order to be free to concentrate on the instructional leadership priority.

Curriculum and Administration

The research studies clearly indicate a desire by principals to increase their involvement in curriculum task areas. It is encouraging to note this desire for, and recognition of the primary purpose of their role. However, of all the tasks assigned to the role these constitute the most critical for the success of the role. The rise of professionalism among teachers means the principal's role will be cosmopolitan in scope. His expertise will not be in specific fields but will lie in knowledgeable leadership of school objectives and programs and how to meld these to achieve the desired educational outcomes for the pupils. The critical nature of the task requires a greater degree of skill and strategy application because he will be working in an area of real leadership not status leadership. Achieved prestige and influence will have to be earned as his staff looks to him for more leadership than ever before. His role will take on an internal dimension - that of constant self-education and in-service, so that he will be exceptionally knowledgeable about learning theories, curriculum development and organizational techniques.

Good Order, Discipline and Learning

Finally, I must speak to you about the role and the spirit of the school.

Nothing detracts more from a school's image than a poor reputation for either discipline or learning. In these days of accountability, it seems essential for the principal to state clearly his philosophy and approach in relationship to order, discipline and learning. Whatever his stand may be, he had better accurately assess his reference groups and their expectations for him. The role may prove difficult when, as man in the middle, he must contend with conflicting reference group preferences. For example, a school board may state that it favours a minority committee report on corporal punishment which disapproves this disciplinary approach. However, the school act may grant the use of such a practice with discretion. His community of parents may also express that they favour use of corporal punishment. I believe this is when his role will be most frustrating and involve on his part a statement of policy, which he knows will be supported by his community if a crisis arises. Although I have stressed the concept of school differentiation and the principal's role within schools, I firmly believe that every principal is committed to developing in his school

the kind of spirit which gives his pupils and staff pride and confidence in their work and school. A principal may play his role correctly, but if he cannot engender this spirit of pride, he has failed to fulfill his first obligation - educational leadership.

In conclusion, it may be said that the role will have to be clarified and redirected, but the success of this depends on both the principal and the degree of flexibility granted to administration. Much depends upon the principal because he is the major influential, an employer of skills and strategies which may provide success, justification and respect to his position as middleman to pupil, teacher, trustee, community and district administrative reference groups.

This raises some questions -

Can the principal be leader among equals without hierarchial status?

Will new administrative positions create more role and staff problems for the principal and incumbent?

Where does the principal draw the line on shared responsibility with the community?

Are central administration prepared to grant responsible authority and are principals prepared to accept it?

Can the principal, as middle man, really centre all his energy on instructional leadership? If so - how?