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ABSTRACT

The development of the modern public school principalship is reviewed, and it is concluded that although there are divergent conceptions of the principal's role, no thorough analysis has been found concerning how the principal functions. Three research projects on the functions of principals are briefly described. A bibliography is included. (Author/MLF)

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CEBC Notebook

The Competency Based Curriculum

No. 1, Vol. 5, October 1975

Responses from the July issue of the Notebook were highly favorable to the emphasis on competency-based staff development. Both higher education and public school people expressed strong support for competency-based staff development as the route to program improvement in pre-service and in-service preparation of educational administrators.

The August meeting of the National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration focused upon efforts to assess competence. Ben Harris, The University of Texas, Austin, Al Wilson, Kansas State University, and Vivian Smith, Quebec, have prepared articles to include assessment procedures developed in the projects centered at their institutions. Dave Erlandson, Queen's College, describes the work of the Interest Group on Competency Based Education in his editorial.

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FUNCTIONS OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Alfred P. Wilson, Kansas State University
Vivian Smith, Quebec, Canada

Historical Perspective--a Brief Review.

To adequately understand the principal's function as it is presently constituted, it is imperative that one comprehend how the position evolved.

The genesis of the modern public school principalship occurred in the early high schools about the middle of the 19th century.¹⁶ However, Jacobson, Logsdon and Wiegman state that these high schools were established to cater to the educational needs of a select few and an examination of the principal's functions reveals that the principalship was not a professional position as it is today. They further state that "in addition to teaching and administering his school, he often served as town clerk, church chorister, official visitor of the sick, bell ringer of the church, grave digger, and court messenger, not to mention other occasional duties."¹⁶

Edmonson, Roemer and Bacon state that the evolution of the principalship can be divided into five stages. First, one teacher taught all subjects to the students at all levels in a one-room school house. Second, as the towns and cities grew there was a resultant increase in school enrollments. This development necessitated the acquisition of two or more teachers, one of whom was designated as head teacher or principal responsible for maintaining discipline in addition to teaching a full schedule of classes.⁴

In 1839, a special committee appointed by the Cincinnati Board of Education to study the position of principal teacher outlined his responsibilities as follows:

1. To function as the head of the school charged to his care;
2. To regulate the classes and course of instruction of all the pupils;
3. To discover any defects in the school and apply remedies;
4. To make defects known to the visitor or trustee of the ward or district if he were unable to remedy conditions;
5. To give necessary instruction to his assistants;
6. To classify pupils;
7. To safeguard schoolhouses and furniture;
8. To keep the school clean;
9. To instruct assistants;
10. To refrain from impairing the standing of assistants, especially in the eyes of their pupils;
11. To acquire the cooperation of his assistants.¹⁶

Third, as the school enrollment continued to increase several teachers were hired and the responsibilities and influence of the principal grew to the extent that he began to exert a vital influence over the pupils, the school program, and even relationships in the community itself.⁴ Thus, at the fourth stage of development the principal was increasingly freed from his own teaching duties so by 1857 the principals in some schools in Boston were relieved of their teaching duties for part of each day to enable them to inspect and examine classes other than their own.¹⁶ By 1867 the principal teacher in New York City had a class "for whose progress and efficiency he was specially responsible."¹⁶

However, Pierce emphasizes that the principals were slow to carry out their new functions.

The principals were slow individually and as a group to take advantage of the opportunities for professional leadership which were granted them. This tendency was especially marked during the period 1895-1910. The principalship was well established from an administrative point of view, and at that point, principals appeared content to rest. Except for sporadic cases, they did little to study their work, experiment with administrative procedures, or publish articles on local administration and supervision. The large body of them were satisfied to attend to clerical and petty routine, administering their schools on a policy of *laissez faire*.¹⁶

Gradually, as the school enrollments continued to increase and many high schools became complex organizations, it was necessary for school boards to create new positions such as those of vice-principal, heads of departments, and clerical workers. In this fifth stage of development of the principal's function,

The principal became more and more a professional leader as details of administration and problems of students were centered in these various administrative assistants. His function became that of coordinating the efforts of all the individuals under him, integrating the school as a whole, keeping in touch with outside agencies, and devoting attention to professional improvement and progressive programs.⁴

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A reading of a sampling of textbooks and periodicals written during the 1950's and 1960's dealing with the principal's function reveals that while there were some writers who encouraged principals to place more stress on the supervisory and professional leadership aspects of their function, there were many other writers who did not accept this viewpoint completely. Panniger discovered that the functions of the principal were not generally agreed upon.

The following are several additional examples from the literature which illustrate this point. Reavis¹⁸ emphasized that no greater test of leadership exists on the part of an elementary school principal than his positive influence on the professional development of his staff. Drummond, Goodlad, and Spain³ stressed that the elementary principal holds a key position in the improvement of the professional staff in his building. Corbally, Jensen and Staub¹ speaking about the secondary school principal stated that "despite the frustrations of administration and demands on his time that the improvement of instruction is his most important responsibility." And in 1967, Stewart⁴ said that the principal's true function is educational leadership and that his primary concern must be the instructional program of the school.

Yet, while these writers were vehemently insisting that the primary business of the principal was instructional supervision, there were other educational writers who rejected this thesis. Lucio and McNeill¹³ presented their view of the changing supervisory functions of the principal. They suggested that the general supervisory functions of the principal have diminished in the wake of the trend toward enlarged systems with many new specialists. Other factors detracting from the principal's key supervisory function they state are growth of professional organizations and the improved preparation of teachers.

In 1963, two studies pointed out the lack of a clearly defined function for the school principal. The first of these studies was conducted by the Illinois Elementary School Principals Association.¹¹ Highlighted in this study was the great diversity in definitions of the principal's function. It also noted that the expected performance of the principal varied considerably from one school district to another. In the second study, McNulty and Dean⁴ stated that there are no clearly defined and commonly accepted criteria enabling one to identify with any degree of certainty or unanimity those knowledges, insights, and skills uniquely necessary to the proper functioning of the elementary school principal.

Writing in 1964, Erickson⁵ said that he had made a study of recent volumes on the principalship and had been struck with the impression that what the authors included and excluded seemed to have been determined rather arbitrarily. In none of the volumes was he able to find convincing arguments concerning the competencies that are cardinal in the leadership.

Here and there, for example, authors emphasize that the principal must 'provide leadership' or must concern himself primarily with 'the instructional program.' But many of the exhortations seem unrealistic in the light of recent developments in the schools.

A few months later, Erickson⁶ again stated that "instructional supervision by the principal seems, then, to be less and less defensible in many schools; in addition, it is becoming less necessary."

The extent of the lack of agreement among the principals themselves concerning their functions was noted by Hamachek⁹ who stated that even among themselves principals are in conflict about what their jobs are and what they ought to become if they are to survive. So serious was this disagreement that Cronlor² warned that "the school principalship in America approaches a cloverleaf. Either it veers sharply in turn towards 'Instructional leadership' or it hurtles further onward toward the role of building manager."

After studying the normative role of the elementary principal, Foskett⁷ concluded that there is a degree of ambiguity in the position of the elementary principal and that the evidence suggests that the function is inadequately defined.

But in attempting to define the principal's function writers sometimes describe conflicting ideals for the principal to follow.¹⁰ An example of such an occurrence is seen in a comparison of two articles, one by Stanavage²¹ and the other by McNally¹⁵ which were written within the same year. In describing how the principal will function, Stanavage stated that he will devote much of his time to the improvement of instruction and the curriculum. McNally, on the other hand, suggested that the instructional leader conception of the principalship has become outdated and inappropriate.

This confusion concerning the principal's function is still a problem with which administrators are attempting to cope in the 70's. It is explained in part by what Wood²³ discovered when he studied the manner in which elementary school principals are selected in Indiana. He found that very few of the school districts surveyed had written policies for the selection of elementary school principals. Screening committees were used in very few systems. He recommended that school systems should develop job descriptions for all positions and that written policies should be developed for the recruitment, limitations, screening, and selection of principals.

Gould⁸ stated that the literature reflects a decided need for further research in the area of role expectations for the high school principal.

Ryan¹⁹ recommended that a complete examination and review of the principal's function be made in order to clarify it and to make it fully understood by both the principal and his subordinates.

Commenting on this problem of function ambiguities, Tschirki²² emphasized that immediate attention should be devoted to clarification of expectations of the principal. He concluded that a concerted effort should be made to identify essential competencies for a more clearly defined function.

The reported studies have shown that there are divergent conceptions of the principal's function and that no thorough analysis has been made in this regard. These findings suggested that such an analysis would be most beneficial at this time when educators are reorganizing the school systems and universities are redeveloping their training programs.

Defining

From the above history it is relatively apparent that although there are divergent conceptions of the principal's role, no thorough analysis had been found concerning how the principal functions. In addition there was no

evidence in the research indicating whether or not the functions were similar for elementary, middle school, Junior high and Senior high school principals.

To answer these concerns a series of interfaced studies have been and are being conducted by the author and his colleagues. In depth reports are reported throughout the literature and will continue to be reported as the research progresses.

A brief report of what has been completed is shared below along with other research in progress.

Defining Principals' Functions

From the above history it is apparent that although there are divergent conceptions of the principals' role, no thorough analysis had been found concerning how the principal functions. In addition, there was no evidence in the research indicating whether or not the functions were similar for elementary, middle school, junior high and senior high school principals.

To answer these concerns a series of interfaced studies have been and are being conducted by the author and his colleagues. In depth results are reported as the research progresses.

A brief report of what has been completed is shared below along with other research in progress.

I. A content analysis has been made of the elementary, middle, junior, and senior high school principal's functions as delineated by the authors of books listed in the most recent edition of Books in Print and periodical articles listed in Education Index since 1970. Thirteen books and 155 periodical articles were selected and were analyzed using the theme as the coding unit, the paragraph as the content unit, and six major function categories which consisted of 168 subcategories to classify the data. In addition, the results of the analyses were compared, analyzed and summarized. Intercoder agreement was established at the following levels: A. Identification of the correct number of categories +1.00, B. Classification according to the particular behavior, that is, cognitive, affective, or psychomotor, without specifying the particular level or subcategory a. cognitive +1.00 b. affective +1.00, C. Classification according to the particular behavior, that is, cognitive, affective, or psychomotor specifying the particular level or subcategory as defined by Krathwohl, Bloom, Masia, in their books, on the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (cognitive and affective). Cognitive +1.00, Affective +.77. The psychomotor area had no subcategories.

II. A 124 item, 7 point Likert type rating scale was developed from the 168 categories used to do the analysis of writers in books and periodicals. The Likert type rating scale which enables one to determine the degree of importance placed on the varied functions of principals has allowed research on attitudes of superordinates, subordinates, peers and the varied groupings of people served by principals. At this point in time, national studies have assessed high school students perceptions, school board members perceptions, and superordinates perceptions. Research is also in progress on perceptions of university professors, peers, and varied publics such as The Taxpayer Association.

III. - Using the 124 items earlier defined as functions, the Performance Profile of Principal's Functions (PPPF) was developed. The PPF was developed as a program for training evaluators to transcribe data recorded by audio tape recorders to checklists with an inter-rater correlation coefficient of .985. The checklist and evaluator training program have been used efficiently and effectively to provide a profile of individual principals and principal groups.

The future research on principal functions should be exciting for with the bank of information gathered, a core of functions common to all levels of the principalship is beginning to emerge. Also, functions more important to specific schooling levels, (i.e., Elementary) Geographic locations, (i.e., North Central States) Income levels (i.e., Title I schools) and ethnic and religious environments are beginning to emerge. Expectations of the various publics are being compared and analyzed. Hopefully the studies will be duplicated to the extent possible and thus bring into focus emerging trends and perhaps allow us additionally to systematically project principal functions in the future.

Documents relating to each of the three projects noted above are available from the Kansas State University, Department of Educational Administration. These materials are of particular importance to those in competency-based educational program development and to those conducting research on the principalship.

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