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ABSTRACT

As part of a study of teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction, a research team interviewed 85 elementary and secondary classroom teachers in 5 school districts in the San Francisco (California) Bay Area to gather teachers' perspectives on administrative leadership. Teachers portrayed effective principals as creating environments around the classroom that minimize uncertainty and maintain a positive atmosphere. The principal's role thus focuses neither on inspiring effective teaching nor on proposing innovations, but on limiting the factors that impede the teacher's own abilities to teach effectively. This view of the principal's role conforms neither to the research-based vision of the principal as a somewhat powerless middle manager nor to the view in the effective schools literature of the principal as actively involved in classroom affairs. Focusing on the needs of a varied staff in a given school requires principals to provide leadership based on problem-solving rather than on conformity to research-generated prescriptions. Agreement among teachers and principals on the principal's role will enhance the potential for concerted efforts at school improvement. (PGD)

ENABLING TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that research on the role of the principal has generated extensive lists of traits, behaviors, and strategies effective principals display, the link between principals' behavior and teacher effectiveness still remains somewhat of a mystery. Understanding teachers' perspectives regarding what constitutes school site leadership represents one way to move beyond questions of what effective principals do to an understanding of how and why specific behaviors translate into improved instructional outcomes.

As part of a study of the sources of teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction, a research team interviewed 85 classroom teachers in five school districts in the San Francisco bay area in an effort to construct a picture of administrative leadership from teachers' perspectives. Rather than images of "heroic leadership" or "gatekeeper of change," teachers portrayed an effective principal as someone who builds an environment around the classroom that minimizes uncertainty and maintains a positive atmosphere. In short, teachers view the principal's role as one of enabling effective instruction by teachers.

Merging this view of the principal's role with other research that portrays principals as somewhat powerless, middle managers, or the literature on effective schools that describes principals as strong individuals who actively intervene in classroom affairs presents a dilemma for both researchers and practitioners. Yet several conclusions emerge.

One component of leadership in schools involves "the mundane work of making a bureaucracy work." (March, 1978). Yet teacher diversity also requires principals to find the proper balance between control and discretion so that teachers with differentiated needs experience conditions that support them. By focusing on the needs of a given staff and a given school, leadership becomes an exercise in problem solving, not conformity to a set of research generated prescriptions.

Future research must still focus on merging teachers' and principals' perspectives. Understanding how principals who are constrained by limited resources and power can still successfully buffer teachers' classrooms from organizational uncertainly still remains a mystery. An image of instructional management that focuses on the linkages between the school and classroom promises ultimately to unite teachers and administrators in the school improvement effort.

Images of educational leaders--strong, charismatic individuals possessing a vision of what instructional excellence means, coupled with the organizational skill to implement it--are familiar to virtually every teacher and administrator in education. John McPhee's (1966) description of Frank Boyden, former headmaster at Deerfield Academy or Sarah Lightfoot's (1983) portrayal of Norris Hogans, principal of George Washington Carver High School in Atlanta, support the persistent belief that great men and women do make a difference. Leadership is a highly valued commodity in our society and, in many ways, we find it difficult to envision a successful organization, including a school, that does not have a strong leader.

This fascination with leadership has generated a plethora of research suggesting that the principal exerts a great deal of influence on instructional outcomes (e.g., see Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985 for reviews of this research.). Early efforts contributed to an understanding of the principal's role by identifying broad indicators of effectiveness such as emphasis on goals (Brookover et al, 1978), coordination of the instructional program (Wellisch et al, 1978), and monitoring of student progress (Venesky & Winfield, 1979). Recent approaches have attempted to translate these global conceptions of the principal's role into specific job behaviors (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). And though research has produced list after list of "effective principal behaviors"--a recent compilation of research revealed a list of over 80 traits exhibited by effective principals (PDK, 1983)--the fact remains that leadership never seems to emerge simply because someone followed a particular recipe. Debates rage over which metaphor for

the principalship--manager or instructional leader--best describes the role (Tracy, 1984; Dwyer et al, 1985).

Supplementing this research on principal effectiveness is a wide range of studies that attempt to provide insights into the principal's role by offering greater definition to and understanding of its complexity. For example, research in the tradition of Mintzberg's (1973) time and motion studies of managerial behavior characterizes the principal's role as fragmented and disjointed, composed of brief, verbal encounters with few if any unifying elements (Martin and Willower, 1981). An opposing, interpretive view emerges from the work of Lortie (1983), Sarason (1982), and Walcott (1973) who use both the results of interviews and direct observation to penetrate the "subjective world" of the school principal. This work portrays principals as "middle-men," buffeted by a variety of difficult-to-control forces and competing demands both within and outside of the school. Principals differ in the degree to which they act to control these factors, or be controlled by them (Sarason, 1982; Crowson & Morris, 1985). Recent efforts attempt to merge the descriptive and interpretive approaches (Dwyer et al, 1985).

In many ways, research on the leadership role of principals is barely emerging from its infancy. Many research efforts treat the link between principal behavior and teacher effectiveness as a black box, failing to focus on the ways in which global behaviors such as pursuing a vision, maintaining high standards, or developing trust actually translate into increased instructional effectiveness (Rowan, Bossert, and Dwyer, 1983; Kroeze, 1984). Most studies are correlational in nature, focusing on <u>what</u> it is that effective

principals do without taking into consideration how and why specific behaviors might penetrate the classroom (Bridges, 1982; Persell, 1982). The unfortunate result is that study after study simply adds behaviors to the list until "the skills and traits needed for the job sound almost like a description of Wonder Woman or Superman" (PDK, 1983:3).

To move beyond questions of "what effective principals do" to an understanding of how and why these behaviors influence student learning requires the generation of conceptual models to guide interpretation (e.g., see Bossert, 1982; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Models which specify the interrelationships among individual and organizational variables help to address issues of causality. In their absence, practitioners and researchers alike risk mis-applying research findings because complex bureaucratic and cultural contexts modify and warp well-meaning policies into unintended outcomes (Firestone & Wilson, 1985).

Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) have developed a model for understanding the impact of principal behavior on student learning composed of three variables: (1) principal strategies, (2) classroom related and school related factors, and (3) student learning. They suggest that research should focus on two fronts:

- o attempts to define specific classroom and school factors that influence student learning, and
- o attempts to identify specific principal strategies which influence the classroom and school.

This paper explores the latter alternative. As part of a study of the sources of teacher effectiveness and job satisfaction, a research team interviewed 85 classroom teachers in five school districts in the San Francisco bay area. Using this data, I will

paint a picture of administrative leadership through the eyes of classroom teachers, a picture constructed from their responses to open ended questions regarding organizational factors that support and detract from their effectiveness. The picture of leadership that emerges is one grounded in the norms and values of practicing teachers.[1]

Teachers' perceptions generated this portrait of instructional management. Thus, it understandably represents an incomplete picture. They often ignore the fact that principals are also constrained by many forces beyond their control. Teachers focused their comments on the classroom, often failing to consider other aspects of school-site administration involving non-instructional matters. However, even an incomplete picture of what teachers believe administrators "ought" to do to support effective classroom instruction is helpful. It begins what will hopefully become an increasingly productive dialogue that merges principals' and teachers° perspectives regarding life in schools and classrooms.

An Overview

Teachers spoke with one voice in identifying the principal as the central actor in shaping the environment around their classroom. Not surprisingly, over 95% of the teachers in our sample responded that their school was different in some way as a direct result of its principal. In both substantive and symbolic ways, the principal "sets the tone."

Teachers view their work as exceedingly complex, filled with ambiguity and uncertainty[2]. Yet they lack the status and authority to control their environment. In the face of this uncertainty and

vulnerability, teachers turn to the principal--the individual with the greatest access to parents, central office personnel, school staff, and students--to shape the environment around their classroom. Simultaneously, the principal must maintain the feelings of autonomy and professional efficacy that teachers believe are essential to generating increased effectiveness in the classroom.

What emerges from teachers' comments is a description of administrative behavior that is neither surprising nor revolutionary, nor filled with images of heroic leadership. But effective administration does involve a delicate balancing act. Teachers expect their principal to minimize uncertainty and promote a positive atmosphere in the environment around their classroom without intruding and removing what little discretion they possess. From teachers' perspectives, leadership in schools becomes a task of enablement[3], a task of providing the conditions that allow competent teachers to flourish and to maximize their effectiveness.[4]

But teachers' comments went beyond such broad generalizations in describing the principal's role. They focused on specific acts of buffering and bridging between the environment (school and community) and their classroom which influenced their effectiveness. Teachers desire the principal to insulate them from the uncertainties associated with teaching, to seal off the the daily interaction between teacher and student in the classroom from unnecessary ambiguity.[5] Not surprisingly, teachers felt most successful when the principal was a source of certainty, not the reverse.

A decade has passed since Dan Lortie spoke of the "endemic uncertainties of teaching" as a theme that dominated the perspective

that teachers bring to their job (Lortie, 1975). In discussing this theme, Lortie alluded to teachers' comments pertaining to the uncertain outcomes of teaching. That is, teachers never seemed to be sure if what they did in the classroom with students really ever had the desired effect.

The current analysis extends Lortie's original point one step further. Teachers' perceptions regarding their profession are not dominated solely by uncertainty regarding outcomes; they are also consumed by uncertainties surrounding the teaching process itself. Influences outside teachers' control make the process as well as the outcomes of teaching problematic. Broken copying machines, unannounced field trips that remove students from class, spur of the moment parent conferences to justify a failing grade, an unceasing parade of classroom interruptions--these and a myriad of other surprises can create a daily classroom environment where teachers define success in only the most modest of terms. When asked what prevents him from doing his best, one suburban high school teacher answered in this way:

> Interruptions...In one period today, I had three phone calls and three people came into my room. It is unbelievable. To me, classroom time is sacred. Every time there is an interruption in a discussion, you completely lose any semblance of order.

Teachers reveal their vulnerability to circumstances beyond their control in comments such as this. More importantly, our interviews with teachers confirm prior research which suggests that principals who successfully implement policies that limit classroom interruptions can increase allocated learning time and potentially, teacher effectiveness (Stallings & Mohlman, 1981).

However, teachers' descriptions of conditions supporting their

effectiveness turn on a second issue as well. Beyond administrative efforts that insure adequate time, materials, and training, teachers require an enabling "affective" environment, as well. Often referred to as "school climate," the manner in which the principal shapes the norms and attitudes shared by staff and students stands as a central concern for teachers. Teachers spoke of such things as support, a sense of professional safety, pats on the back and other forms of recognition, camaraderie, and a family feeling. All of these experiences are important to teaching success from teachers' perspectives. According to a veteran, junior high math teacher:

> This is the first principal that asks, "What can I do for you?" I feel much better and more confident [because of her]. I feel respected as a teacher and as an individual and this gives me more energy to give more positive input to my work.

Though most individuals could not articulate why such an environment was so important, those who did alluded to the importance of minimizing stress and avoiding burnout in maintaining effectiveness. Accordingly, teachers turned to the principal as the primary architect of this critical, positive environment. It appears that teachers invest a great deal of affect in their view of the principal, looking to the office as a symbolic one that can be used to manipulate school-wide morale (Firestone and Wilson, 1985). What others have described as a "positive ethos" appears to be essential to effective instruction (Rutter et al, 1979).

The view of administrative leadership as a job involving uncertainty reduction and the maintenance of a positive atmosphere has been discussed by others (e.g., see Sweeney, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1985; Rutherford, 1985). But unlike studies which view schools as rational

systems and leadership as a process of tightly coupling policies to outcomes and frequent intervention in classroom and curricular affairs, the teachers in our sample offered a more subtle perspective on the principal's role. Enabling effective instruction in varying contexts may involve quite diverse strategies on the part of the principal. It involves differentiated responses to teachers' individual needs. It challenges school administrators to become problem solvers, not recipe followers, in their efforts to increase teachers' efficacy.

Yet, it appears that the overly prescriptive quality of the research on principal effectiveness may have prompted some administrators to act without fully taking into consideration the consequences of specific actions in a particular context. Principals often implement policies based on an over-simplified view of what is, in fact, a complex role in a complex undertaking (Lortie, 1983). Indeed, teachers in our sample recounted numerous examples of administrative actions that actually generated incompetence rather than reduced uncertainty and enabled effectiveness. Their comments illustrate the complexity involved in managing a school.

Below, I discuss each of the conditions enabling teacher effectiveness in turn, using teachers' comments to support my argument.

Enabling Teaching Effectiveness by Minimizing Uncertainty

Children are full of surprises, and the challenge of dealing with an amazing variety of minor crises, emotional displays, and unexpected occurrences is one thing that makes involvement with children an

attractive and rewarding experience.

Removing the surprises associated with school children is an impossible--and probably undesirable goal. But the comments of teachers in our sample suggest that organizational conditions in general and administrative actions in particular have a critical impact on the amount of disruption to the daily routine a teacher can tolerate. School-wide conditions that constantly disrupt the teaching process, combined with the surprises inherent in childhood and adolescence, construct an environment where teachers simply cannot teach. Teachers therefore described administrative leadership in terms of uncertainty reduction. When teachers can expect with reasonable certainty that administrators will:

- o treat classroom instructional time as sacred,
- o insure the availability of instructional materials to support curricular plans, and
- o construct clear and enforceable policies and provide training to implement them,

then an environment exists where success ultimately depends upon the teacher. One elementary school teacher summed it all up when she described the most difficult thing about teaching as, "Lots of little things over which teachers have no control like the number of kids with problems, paperwork, and interruptions. There isn't one big thing." The compilation of small events produces a teaching environment in many schools that works against success, as indicated by teachers' comments discussed below.

"I can't teach and listen to the PA at the same time"

Several studies have documented the variation that exists within teachers' classroom regarding the use of instructional time (Denham

and Lieberman, 1980; Harnischfeger and Wiley, 1984)). But it would appear that at least some of the variation found in teachers' allotment of instructional time can be attributed to organizational factors beyond teachers' control (Stallings & Mohlman, 1981). Administrative policies regarding discipline, use of the public address system, and student conferences during class time create an environment where teachers' major concern is not if interruptions will happen, but when and how often.

Administrators and counselors can serve as prime sources classroom interruptions. Several teachers felt that these interruptions were the major factor that limited their classroom effectiveness. For example, one department head told us:

> I get calls because I'm in charge of the master calendar; administrators want information from me; sometimes I have to test new students. Interruptions from the career center, requests for students, telephone calls, field trips are all sources of disruption and distraction during my class time.

A young high school English teacher complained that counselors and administrators called students out of her class frequently, so that she routinely encountered "two to three interruptions per period." A third teacher would "cut down on the paperwork that causes interruptions" as an important change that would increase her effectiveness. She stated:

> If students are out, you have to make up homework assignments [for them] and most of the time you don't get [them back]....Someone comes to your class [for an assignment] and you have to write it up while the class waits. Or you write a referral and it disrupts your whole class.

A junior high school teacher interpreted such actions on the part of administrators as symbolic of the low status teachers occupy within the school:

> An administrator can walk in and interrupt what I am doing

> with any cockamamie thing...He butts into my classroom with all sorts of nit-picky stuff. The message is clear. What I am doing is not important. The kids can pick this up.

Accordingly, administrators can best protect instructional time by focusing their efforts on minimizing classroom interruptions.

A lack of school-wide discipline also contributes directly to the frequency of classroom interruptions. One teacher cited "hammering on classdoors and screaming in the halls and outside the windows" as a major source of classroom interruptions. Another teacher "had to keep the classroom door closed because of firecrackers in the hall." In each of these cases, teachers felt that such a lack of school-wide discipline reflected administrative priorities in the school that were not supportive of classroom effectiveness. This concern for disciplinary support and its relation to classroom interruptions is also reflected in a recent Educational Research Service poll of teachers which indicates that 72% of American teachers consider disruptions due to poor discipline as a problem that detracts from quality teaching (ERS, 1985).

"The tools of the trade--May I have some please?"

> It's almost an impossible job to have to meet individual student needs, but not have the materials to do it...I'm befuddled why teachers are not told certain resources are available to them. Like I only found out about a thermafax machine two weeks ago (This is May)...You don't know what's there unless you stumble across it.

Though many of us hold romantic images of dedicated teachers who foster student learning in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds our interviews with teachers indicate that the availability of adequate instructional materials remains a key issue for virtually all of them. Our data mirrors that of national surveys of teachers'

attitudes, surveys that report teachers' dissatisfaction with the material resources with which they work (Harris, 1985; ERS, 1985).

In short, frustration results when administrators are unable to assure teachers that they will receive adequate material support for their instructional efforts. For example, a high school English teacher who had not received any books until February stated, "I felt very discouraged. At the time, I felt like I was trying to give my best, and we [didn't] even have books." Another teacher told us about copying machines that only worked 50% of the time, making it "impossible to know for sure if you would be able to teach the lesson you had planned on any given day." An urban, junior high teacher related the following situation that brought him to the brink of defection from the teaching profession:

> The first year as a beginning teacher I taught history and math. I got a set of math books...in February! I never did get history books. Instead, every night I wrote history and mimeographed it. The total supplies I got that year was chalk. Paper came from a publisher I went to and dug through his trash cans and cut it up. I admit it was a pretty serious situation but it existed and it still exists.

Teachers clearly pointed to their administrators as having an influence on the availability of materials. An elementary school teacher with 14 years of experience contrasted her present principal with another, more effective principal in terms of material support:

> I'm a great advocate of one of my former principals. He begged us to use the xerox machine so we could be more effective in our work...Here at this school, we have the same xerox machine, but the principal does not allow us to use it. When we requisition supplies, we have to wait forever. I waited two weeks to get more lined paper.

Other teachers confirmed the important role the principal plays in providing an enabling instructional environment by attributing part of their effectiveness to actions by the principal geared to supplying

resources. For example, this elementary school teacher described the role of her principal in this manner:

> [The principal] works hard at supporting instructional activities...She always brings in new programs if she thinks we'll be interested in them. If you show interest in an area, she will get materials or person resources for you. For example, she told me about and helped arrange the artist career program for my class because she knew I would be interested in it.

Interestingly, another teacher viewed the efforts of the administration to insure adequate materials as another expression of the status of teachers:

> We are fortunate in this school because we have a discretionary fund to buy material. We don't have to go to Santa Claus to ask if you can have money to buy two jars of glitter. This enhances the dignity of the teaching job because it gives us autonomy to get what we can. I would like for all of my colleagues to have that and they don't.

Teachers in our sample frequently confronted large classes of students with wide ranging ability levels. Such diversity requires teachers to display enormous flexibility in developing materials to meet individual student needs. When teachers cannot be certain they will have access to adequate "tools of the trade" to perform their job, they believe their effectiveness suffers. Even worse, it appears to remind teachers of the low priority administrators place on their efforts. In contrast, when administrators minimize uncertainty, rather than contribute to it, they help to create an environment that enables success.

"What will the policy be this week?"

In the recent Educational Research Service poll of American teachers, approximately 50% of them indicated that "inconsistencies" in policy enforcement due to administrative personnel changes was a

problem detracting from quality teaching (ERS, 1985). This view, coupled with the descriptions within our sample of the deleterious effects of poorly designed and implemented school policies, suggests that this is a major source of uncertainty for classroom teachers. "Stop changing the rules," was the advice one of our respondents offered when asked how the principal could support his success in the classroom.

The mere presence of a discipline or attendance policy does not insure that administrators will deal with these issues in a certain manner. Thus, this high school teacher cited "a weak administration" as the single most important factor that limits his effectiveness:

> Teachers need to know what the policy is and to be assured that it will be enforced so that they know how to handle a number of issues that arise in the classroom. If the principal follows his policies, then teachers and counselors know how to respond and how to predict the outcomes of their own and students' behaviors.

"Strong leadership," as another teacher called it, provided a sense of certainty that enabled him to "know generally what to teach." In contrast, inconsistency in policy enforcement by administrators impedes good teaching as described by this urban, high school teacher:

> As it stands, the discipline policy is given to students at the beginning of the year, but the students don't care about it because they know that the administration does not hold students to it. This lack of consistency makes my job much more difficult.

Other teachers described discipline policies in their schools that involved so much paperwork that most teachers learned to tolerate disruption rather than deal with the administration. It appears that the distinctions between clear policies and meaningless bureaucratic red tape are not always clear in teachers' minds.

Many teachers lack even the certainty that they will receive

basic training in implementing district and school-wide policies. It is no surprise that many new programs never get off the ground. Instead, teachers often described district training efforts as unrelated to issues central to classroom instruction. For example, a high school teacher told us there was a need to:

> Have more workshops that actually relate to subject matter issues. Many of the workshops now are concerned with computer use or with cooking or with first aid. There are a number of teachers, however, who are teaching subjects for which they were not certified and so for these teachers it would be very useful to have inservice training to help them.

Without "materials to fit the curriculum and enough money for training," teachers are forced to improvise on a daily basis. In contrast, school programs and policies supported by training efforts designed to reinforce and strengthen teachers' skills enable instruction.

In summary, when both the process and the outcomes of teaching are painted in ambiguous and uncertain terms, it appears that teachers find their continued effort difficult to sustain. Teachers feel that they have minimal control over many of the aspects of the teaching workplace that contribute to that uncertainty, thus placing responsibility for maintenance of a stable environment around the classroom in the hands of school administrators. Leadership in schools may not be the exotic and unknown phoenix it is sometimes made out to be. According to teachers, one critical element involves managing the basics of instructional time, material, and training. The other critical factor involves the maintenance of a positive atmosphere.

Enabling Teaching Effectiveness By Maintaining a Positive Atmosphere

Researchers and practitioners in both private industry and education have noted for many decades the importance of building some sort of positive atmosphere or morale in explaining organizational effectiveness. Halpin (1959) called it "consideration"; Blake and Mouton (1966) called it "concern for people"; and Hersey and Blanchard (1977) called it "relationship orientation." Research on effective schools refers to a "positive school learning climate" and a "positive ethos" as key variables in explaining school effectiveness (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985: 223; Rutter et al, 1979). Regardless of its label, teachers' discussions of organizational conditions which promote teaching effectiveness invariably seem to center on the key role of the principal in constructing such an enabling climate. Being accepted, supported, nurtured, and encouraged by "the boss" stands along with uncertainty reduction as a key factor in supporting effective teaching as identified by teachers in our sample. A veteran, junior high school teacher described the relationship between his principal's management style and his own teaching this way:

> An encouraging attitude rather than a parental and critical attitude helps make good teaching. It makes me feel safe in the classroom. I am safe to make my own judgments and decisions and I will be backed up by her.

Providing a zone of "professional safety"--a grant of autonomy within broad limits that allows teachers to experiment and address specific classroom needs--represents an activity to be conducted by the principal alone. It rests at the center of an enabling environment for successful teaching. Though the argument could be made that positive morale is a desirable if not necessary condition in any organization, teachers' comments suggest that it is particularly

critical in education. Accordingly, one elementary school teacher told us:

> If a teacher is going to be effective, he needs to have better morale than most teachers have. If one is not appreciated and if one's work is maligned, and if one's work is not being financially rewarded, after awhile, that person's effectiveness is diminished.

How does the principal go about constructing this enabling, affective, environment? Teachers described such homely things as good human relations skills, listening abilities, and the frequent use of praise and recognition as the essential ingredients of the effective principal. When principals support teachers by acknowledging excellence, and couple credible feedback with the necessary support to act on it, they maximize classroom effectiveness. Teachers' comments break down into two categories: examples of principals' general encouragement and support, and examples of principals' trust and construction of a zone of professional safety. I will discuss each in turn.

Encouragement/Support

As a visible, sympathetic, and listening boss, a principal provides substantive support for teachers efforts that helps them "stay the course" through those days when nothing seems to go right. The pat on the back, recognition in front of parents or peers, and credible feedback are all necessary, according to teachers, for effective teaching. When the principal is willing to "give time and listen to complaints, teachers feel secure and confident." Several teachers, when asked what changes they would make in their school to increase teacher effectiveness, referred to "better morale, more camaraderie, more positive reinforcement and praise, and greater

visibility on the part of the principal," as topping their agenda. When the principal serves as a positive role model, "impressing on the faculty that we are a family and need to work together," teachers find it easier to succeed. A junior-high school social studies teacher stated it succinctly, "You can only learn to be an effective teacher in a supportive, nurturing environment."

The manner with which the principal engages teachers also serves as a symbol of their status in the school, and the worth of their work. "Ignoring teachers' recommendations" comes across as a "lack of respect for teachers, as professionals." The resulting environment, according to several teachers, works against classroom effectiveness. For example, a veteran high school teacher cited the following treatment of the teaching staff by administrators as the major impediment to her effectiveness:

> Sometimes, [the principal] treats teachers as the lowest status on campus...the custodians, the students, and the aides get more respect from him than the teachers...You can't talk to him; you can't share the concerns you feel.

Another teacher cited similar concerns with the work atmosphere in a school where she formerly taught, "where teachers were very divided and demoralized." She seriously considered leaving teaching because of the bad feelings among the staff that resulted from the environment created by the administration "who had spies throughout the school and humiliated and degraded particular departments."

Though teachers' comments such as "an enthusiastic principal helps to make an enthusiastic staff," may seem trite and overworked, their message is clear that encouragement, recognition, and praise represent the basic ingredients for successful teaching. When combined with a principal's action that supports teachers' exercise of

professional discretion, an environment that enables effective teaching begins to emerge.

Professional Safety

Beyond the kind word, a second component of a positive atmosphere involves such things as trust, confidence, and faith--what one teacher described as a "comfort zone" constructed by the principal that enables teachers to carry on, knowing that they will be supported even in the event of unexpected outcomes. Without this sense of professional safety, teachers justifiably will avoid risk and experimentation, regress toward the mean, and strive for nothing higher than mediocrity. What one teacher described as the game of "gotcha," administrators who look for every opportunity to criticize teachers, causes them to hide their work, retreat behind the classroom door, and demand an isolated autonomy that ultimately benefits no one. In contrast, principals who set a tone in the school where teachers "don't have to worry about pussyfooting around" remove potential impediments to effectiveness and set the stage for growth.

Teachers' comments regarding the importance of professional safety reveal their desire for professional recognition. They, like other clinically-based professionals such as doctors, believe that relationships with their clients--students--are unique and not amenable to standardized treatment. Thus, teachers believe that they require a degree of autonomy to perform their job effectively. As one urban, elementary school teacher put it, "working under an administration that gives me the freedom to teach the assigned curriculum in my own way," is the major thing that enables him to do his best. Such an atmosphere enables teachers to tailor lessons to

the needs of the class in a way that matches their own areas of strength. The principal must demand accountability while accepting "different teaching styles and techniques." A principal who acknowledges the professional expertise of the staff creates an enabling environment for good teaching, as described by an elementary school teacher:

> As a teacher, I've got to be flexible. The principal understands this...I like her attitude. Each of [the teachers here] know what we're supposed to do. We're professionals.

A sense of professional safety also appears to be necessary if evaluative feedback is to have a positive impact on instruction. Feedback on instruction, something teachers claimed was in short supply, generates improved instruction only when it is received in a supportive environment, as described by a suburban elementary school teacher:

> I want non-threatening feedback from someone who has the time to really take a hard look. It would have to be someone whom I respected and looked up to...I need a comfort zone, meaning a framework around me within which I have the freedom to be myself, to use my own judgment, and get trust and respect.

When teachers experience such a comfort zone, when they perceive that the principal "has faith and confidence in them," when teachers "feel comfortable around the school," the school environment ceases to be an impediment to success.

Though teachers were unanimous in their desire for a principal who trusts and supports them, many also acknowledged the complementary, and sometimes conflicting role the principal must fulfill in holding teachers accountable for performance standards. Teachers in our sample vigorously embraced accountability goals and in

several instances, castigated their principal for not confronting incompetent teachers. The principal serves as both an enabler....and as a judge, a requirement that a district bureaucracy places upon a professional.[8] Just as teachers must support students' self concepts while simultaneously passing judgment on the quality of their work, so too must a principal juggle seemingly conflicting roles.

Ultimately, teachers' acceptance of and reaction to evaluative feedback depends on the credibility of the source. Evaluative feedback that springs from a broad and comprehensive effort of school improvement and instructional reform taps teachers' intrinsic motivations focusing on student learning. Teachers in our sample desired more feedback on their performance, but lack of time, expertise, and resources prevented most administrators from offering feedback that teachers perceived as supportive and useful.

The final benefit teachers receive from a principal who fosters a positive atmosphere arises from the critical role the principal plays as the bureaucratic head of the school. Few programs get off the ground in any school unless they have the support and backing of the principal. The principal controls resources that can be used to promote or bury any new program. Teachers' enthusiasm can be quickly dampered when they encounter roadblocks in implementing new ideas. A high school English teacher described the role her principal played in enabling her effectiveness in terms of the support she received:

> I wouldn't have had the opportunity to do career work if the principal didn't see it as a priority. Many programs fly or don't because of the support of the administration. If the principal is effective, his or her support is crucial to the success of programs at the school.

When a principal's support for effective classroom instruction

translates into an atmosphere around the school where teachers know that they will be "backed up when you need it," they can focus limited time and energy on improvement rather than "covering the rear." Teachers believe that such an atmosphere enables teaching effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

Past research has labeled the principal as a person caught in the middle (Sarason, 1982). The flow of daily events is characterized by brevity, disjointedness, and fragmentation (Martin & Willower, 1981). Yet in the face of these constraints, effective principals appear to take control over events and fashion an atmosphere that increases student achievement (Rosenholtz, 1985).

Teachers in our sample mirror this dichotomy. They clearly view themselves as professionals engaged in complex work that requires freedom to make independent judgments and to exercise discretionary power. Yet they also acknowledge the key role played by the principal in shaping and molding the symbolic and substantive organizational environment in which they must work. Teachers realize as well that, in some districts, "all the power sits downtown," limiting principals' ability to have any appreciable impact at the building level; yet they clearly turn to their principal for assistance anyway.

Given these dichotomous descriptions, teachers' views of the principal's world appear to be overly simplistic. Their focus on the desired end state of a school environment enabling classroom instruction often fails to capture the complexity of the principal's role. Teachers either ask for things that their administrators cannot deliver, or fail to ask at all in the belief that their principal is

totally powerless. Neither view is always true. The need still remains to find a common ground, if it ex' s, that merges the professional world of the teacher with the realities of bureaucratic life experienced by the principal.

But a second paradox emerges from teachers' images of principals who enable classroom effectiveness. Though teachers desire certainty and emotional support in their environment that allows them to implement their plans, at the same time they reject any intrusion into their classrooms. They eschew administrative attempts to specify goals and classroom procedures (Lortie, 1975). In light of the research that characterizes effective principals as setting clear goals and intervening when necessary in classroom affairs (Rosenholtz, 1985; Rutherford, 1985), whom are we to ! lieve?

Compounding this problem, teachers' definitions of enablement vs. intrusion appear to vary tremendously. Thus, in one suburban school, one teacher praised her principal's actions, while another teacher in the same school indicated such strong reservations with his management style that she was considering a transfer. What one teacher saw as supportive feedback from her principal, another teacher interpreted as "critical comments" that prompted her to "chuck [them] into the trashcan." The implications for principals struggling to support their teachers become blurred as different lenses render the sought after image out of focus.

I provide these examples to support an important, though frequently overlooked point: "simple variables are unlikely to provide substantial leverage in effecting change within complex and varying organizational settings (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985:239)."

Appropriate actions by a principal in one school might produce havoc in another. Effective principals do more than follow rules, they engage in daily problem solving to adapt their personal training and beliefs to community and district givens and the schools' instructional climate. They pursue both direct and circuitous routes to promote the effectiveness of their professional staff (Dwyer et al, 1985).

In essence, teachers perceive the effective principal as someone who continually provides assistance while staying out of the way. In this respect, teachers believe they can be most effective when they are granted professional status. But other research on the principal's role provides a view of a middle-manager, someone whose job it is to exercise authority over teachers in an attempt to achieve organizational goals (e.g., see Sarason, 1982). Thus, the principal walks a tightrope as an enabler and a bureaucrat.

As a manager of professionals in a bureaucracy, no simple or foolproof path emerges to guide principals attempting to promote effective teaching. Research on the principal's role does not offer a guided tour guaranteed to show the way to better schools and classrooms. Instead, such research merely generates "treasure maps" filled with riddles still to be solved. Yet this view of the principal from teachers' perspectives offers certain unique solutions to some of those riddles, a topic to which I now turn.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The overly prescriptive quality of much of the literature on the principal's role has prompted many individuals to lose site of the ultimate purpose the principal fulfills as an enabler of classroom

instruction. Too much emphasis on what principals do and a lack of attention to how and why specific behaviors and strategies increase student achievement make it difficult to translate research findings into practice. Since a school can be no more or less effective than the quality of the interaction that occurs between teacher and student in the classroom, administrators ultimately must focus their attention on improving that exchange. And because teachers are united in their descriptions of the conditions that promote success, but divided in their assessment of appropriate methods for obtaining them, principals who enable effective teaching engage in a differentiated response to teachers' needs.

Based on teachers' descriptions of the conditions that promote success in the classroom, a conservative picture of the principal's role emerges that de-mystifies complex models of instructional management. Organizational conditions enabling teaching effectiveness suggest that the glamourous roles for principals such as "instructional leader," or "gatekeeper of change" that have been popularized in recent years are not the panacea for the problems of all schools striving to improve. It appears that principals seen as effective by teachers first attend to the everyday realities of organizational life in schools--minimizing interruptions and excessive paperwork, insuring the availability of adequate instructional materials, enforcing clear, simple policies, providing appropriate training, and fostering positive, supportive human relationships throughout the school. Little magic is woven through this picture. Instead, educational administration reduces to "the mundane work of making a bureaucracy work. It is filled with activities quite distant from those implied by a conception of administration as heroic

leadership. It profits from elementary competency." (March, 1978:233) Teachers don't need Superman--Clark Kent or Lois Lane will do just fine.

The image of school-site leadership that flows from teachers' descriptions is this: Effective leadership takes many different forms and styles, but it always leads to the same end--the construction of an environment around the classroom where principals minimize uncertainty and assure emotional support for teachers. This perspective helps us to understand how and why specific administrative behaviors translate into teachers' feelings of efficacy. Organizational conditions, more than any lack of expertise on the part of teachers, impede effective instruction. Successful administrators focus their efforts on manipulating those conditions to enable--not prescribe--instruction. After all, teachers, not administrators, ultimately control learning outcomes in schools.

This analysis of teaching and the organizational conditions that support classroom effectiveness paint a picture of organizational leadership that rests soundly within the norms and values of the teaching profession. Rather than control through tight coupling (Rosenholtz, 1985), leadership may also be viewed in terms of enablement. The major flaw in much of the research on effective schools and the leadership prescriptions it offers becomes clear at this point. Most of this work was conducted in the turbulent environments of urban schools, where active, highly visible principals achieved success because only in this manner could they buffer their teachers from uncertainty. The appropriateness of generalizing these findings to other settings is questionable (Rowan, et al, 1983).

Enabling effective instruction in other contexts might involve much less visible involvement by the principal in teachers' classrooms. Some teachers in our sample were supported by principals who manifested their expertise behind the scenes, yet produced results which enabled teachers to succeed in much the same way urban teachers in effective schools do. Leadership in schools involves finding the proper balance between control and discretion so that teachers with differentiated needs experience conditions that support them. By focusing on the needs of a given school and a given staff, instructional management becomes an exercise in problem solving, not conformity to a set of research generated prescriptions. This picture is both more complex and more subtle than preceeding descriptions.

Many problems still remain for future research. Keeping in mind the danger of prescribing what ought to be from what is (the naturalistic fallacy), these findings must be treated cautiously, accepted as plausible hypotheses for future testing. Principals still toil under a mountain of constraints. Being a principal will always involve as much art as science.[9] Lack of money, time, expertise, and power constrain even the most well intentioned individuals in their attempts to effectively buffer teachers' classrooms from organizational uncertainty. The need remains to combine teachers' and principals' perspectives into a unified model.

Thus, teachers' perspectives on the conditions enabling their classroom success do not represent the last word. Teachers, after all, have been described as "wanting it all" on many previous occasions (McPherson, 1979: 241). At the same time, their perspective cannot be ignored. Without their cooperation and support, the most well intentioned reform effort will fail. Somehow, over the past

several decades, researchers and policy makers alike have lost sight of the fact that the interests of teachers and administrators are essentially identical. Both benefit from good instruction and achievement gains. Both benefit from effective schools. Therefore, a perspective on instructional management that emanates from and focuses on the classroom has the potential to reverse an unfortunate and sometimes disruptive trend. It makes teachers and administrators partners in the school improvement effort.

NOTES

1

This paper uses the findings of an ongoing study of the sources of teacher effectiveness and satisfaction, sponsored by the Walter S. Johnson Foundation and conducted by Milbrey McLaughlin, Annette Lareau, Scott Pfeifer, Deborah Swanson-Owens, and Sylvia Yee of the Stanford University School of Education. Data for this paper was gleaned from questions such as, "What things in your classroom or school enable (or prevent) you from doing your best as a teacher?" and, "If you were principal, what would you change to enable the teachers to be more effective?" Comments were coded based on the framework presented in the paper, subject to comments and criticisms from members of the research team.

2

Analysis of the entire set of teachers' responses in this study revealed a complex set of professional skills teachers identified as necessary to effective teaching. In all, over 155 separate responses described the diversity of the teaching act. See Swanson-Owens, 1986 for a further elaboration of this point.

3

Ken Macrorie in his book, "Twenty Teachers," uses the term "enabler" to describe teachers who, in his words, "did good works." (p. xi) Teachers who are enablers allow others--both students and colleagues--to do their best, "to extend their already considerable powers." (p. xii) But the term applies equally as well to principals, or anyone, for that matter, who manages the work of others. Teachers in this sample portrayed effective principals in much the same way Macrorie portrays the 20 teachers in his book.

4

I intentionally ignore the difficult issue of teacher incompetence in this paper, though several teachers did mention it as an important issue for principals to deal with in the school. However, I believe that emphasis on teacher incompetence has far exceeded its usefulness, given that the worst estimates claim that no higher than 10% of teachers fail to perform adequately. The remaining 90% must still be supported, and this paper addresses this issue. For a discussion of district approaches to evaluation that achieve both accountability and improvement goals, see McLaughlin & Pfeifer, (forthcoming).

5

Buffering and bridging of the technical core of the organization is a recurrent theme in organizational theory (see Scott, 1981: 188-203 for a complete discussion). It has been directly applied to interpretations of the effective schools research in the work of Rosenholtz (1985:370-373). In this conception, classrooms are viewed as separate sub-units of the school organization, and teaching becomes the "technical work of the enterprise." Just as the manager of an auto plant buffers his assembly line by insuring an adequate supply of raw

materials, so too must the principal perform similar activities to insure that teaching occurs uninterrupted.

6

In the ERS poll, 53% of the teachers felt that lack of sufficient materials were either a major or minor problem detracting from quality teaching. In the metropolitan Life poll, 39% of the teachers indicated that they faced the least adequate teaching environment in terms of materials and support personnel, and another 40% reported experiencing a teaching environment where specific aspects of that environment were deficient.

7

At this point, the nagging issue of accountability rears its ugly head. Pressure from both parents and central office personnel often make it difficult for a principal to provide a comfort zone while demanding adherence to bureaucratic regulations. Teachers' comments did shed some light on this issue, which I discuss in greater detail in a later section.

8

Special thanks go to Larry Cuban for pointing out this important point while reviewing an earlier draft of this paper.

9

School administration has also been described as following "a bus schedule with footnotes by Kierkegaard" (March, 1978: 244). Such an analogy captures both the mundane aspects of administration--making the bus schedule work--and the artistic--the need for footnotes from the sages to assist our interpretation of the ambiguities of life. Both are necessary for administrators striving to comprehend both the possibilities and limits of deliberate action.

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