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ABSTRACT

School administrators' uses of subjective understandings and common language to gain and maintain power and predictability in their environments are described. Micropolitical theory, with a focus on language, is utilized to understand administrators' knowledge of the assumptive worlds of their subculture, and how these assumptive worlds constrain and limit conflict. Interviews with 20 assistant principals and onsite observations of their schools identified four domains of site-level assumptive worlds: (1) the right and responsibility to initiate; (2) acceptable and unacceptable values; (3) patterns of unexpected and sanctionable behavior; and (4) special conditions management. Assumptive worlds create in administrators the following characteristics: avoidance of value conflict and risky change, defensiveness, and belief in a "one best system." A conclusion is that assumptive worlds function to reduce inherent dilemmas by confining values and behaviors to acceptable domains. An implication is that reform efforts and administrator education programs will encounter administrator resistance when mandated in ways that disrupt assumptive worlds and must therefore consider political behavior. A table that lists assistant principals' policy initiatives is included. (26 references) (LMI)

The Assumptive Worlds of Fledgling Administrators

By

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Barbara Mitchell, School District of Philadelphia

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THE ASSUMPTIVE WORLDS OF FLEDGLING ADMINISTRATORS

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Probably the most common way educators explain befuddling uncontrollable phenomena is to throw up their hands and exclaim "it's all political!" This paper analyses the meaning of this expression by focusing on the micropolitical world of educators.

In this paper, we describe school site administrators' subjective understandings and common language about the ways to gain and maintain power, control, and predictability in their environments. Data from a multi-site study of assistant principals (hereinafter APs) are analyzed to identify rules of the game for the following micropolitical domains:

1) Who has the right and responsibility to initiate policy or take action? How do APs gain or lose power according to how well they understand use and comply with the rules?

2) What are appropriate values to espouse in school site conflicts policymaking? Is there a "taken for granted" framework in which policy occurs that is obvious to insiders?

3) What behaviors should be exhibited in conflict situations? (How do APs know when they "blew it"?)

4) How do site administrators manage special school conditions? (What are the shared understandings about critical site variables that affect choice and opportunity?)

Theory Building

People act with understandings about constraints learned through linguistic expressions and interaction. Within cultures there are assumptions about what common goals and constraints exist that have evolved from living in the same communicative environment. Political actors exist, talk, get inspired to act, and constrain their actions and options according to unstated mutual, reciprocal understandings shared with people who occupy the same social world.

Our analysis focuses on "how mutual understandings of human beings might occur" (Schutz, 1958, p. 53), through language and interaction in the policy culture. It follows Putnam's (1973) demand to focus on the "cognitive predispositions" (p. 5) to understand "the beliefs, values, and habits of thought that guide and inform a politician's more ephemeral responses to his environment" (p. 3).

Micropolitical theory assumes the inevitability of conflict in organizations (e.g., in school sites). This paper is built upon the assumption that schools are arenas of constant values conflicts ("arenas of struggle" Ball, 1987 p. 19). It assumes that administrators in entry level positions (like assistant principals) are learning to be political actors and so they are quickly learning and acutely aware of the unwritten rules for allocating power, resources, and responsibility. It investigates administrators' knowledge of the assumptive worlds of their subculture. It shows how assumptive worlds function to constrain and limit conflicts within manageable arenas and issues.

The Concept of Assumptive Worlds

Political actors are socialized within their sub-cultures to understand the shared understandings about what is right and proper. The cultures of their policy environments shape the perceptions of these political actors. These perceptions relate to the expected behaviors, rituals, and judgments about feasible policy options. This perceptual screen we term the "assumptive worlds."

Young (1977) identified these "assumptive worlds of policymakers" as the "subjective understandings of the environment in which they operate" (p. 2), incorporating "several intermingled elements of belief, perception, evaluation, and intention as responses to the reality out there" (p. 3). This is a crucial, unexplored variable in site level politics. It means that among policy actors there is a shared sense of what is appropriate in action, interaction, and choice. That sense is inculcated through socialization in their distinctive organizational culture, and it affects policy making.

Applying the Concept to Micropolitics of Schooling

Marshall, Mitchell, and Wirt (1985) discovered assumptive worlds of state policy makers. They saw state policy making as a dramaturgy, a ritual of ceremonies and behaviors whereby values conflicts are resolved by invoking rules and those who defy the rules lose power.

This paper uses that same analytic framework to analyze school site data. But the school site presents a different set of values that assistant principals must negotiate through. The

data on assistant principals were replete with stories featuring common understandings about what does and does not work in school site politics. The stories identify the understandings about how one gains and maintains power.

The assistant principalship is the entry level line[1] administrative position where new administrators learn rules in the administrative culture. APs have to learn the rules for how to survive in the particular setting with their principals and how to do their tasks while at the same time demonstrating their abilities in order to impress superiors that they would be trusted and/or promoted. Fledgling administrators, through informal socialization, learn micropolitical assumptive worlds. As will be shown, APs learn the rules about right and responsibility to initiate action. The successful AP must practice Limited Risk Taking (LRT) in order to gain recognition and clout. Appropriate uses of power include acting as a "street level bureaucrat", rationing services, redirecting priorities. Special school conditions limit what is possible in schools as, for example, when union contract rules and unstated norms dictate a separation between teachers and administrators, immobilizing policy for collaborative team decisionmaking.

Methodological Development

This analysis is a form of political anthropology, a way "to perceive regularities and similarities and differences in behavior, institutions and systems of behavior, and to develop therefrom correlations and principles of behavior" (Merritt,

1970, p. 200). How policy actors actually behave is dependent upon the aspects of their underlying perspectives that are politically relevant (Merritt, 1970). Interviews and observations of assistant principals revealed their insider stories about how to act, both in front of and behind the scenes.

This analysis followed methodological developments emerging from (a) the tradition of using a field study approach to identify the normative and cognitive bases for action, and from (b) Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative method of analysis to discover grounded theory, which builds upon but explores beyond previous theory. The analysis which follows builds on the tradition of analyzing political actors' stories to understand the cultural understandings of power at the school site. Political actors display their understanding of how the policy process is affected by the power,control, authority, and reward systems in their policy environments.

Focusing on Language

The focus on words and language has great potential for understanding latent operational values in the cultures of policymaking. As Greenfield said, "a language is a dialect with its own army and navy." (Greenfield, 1986)

Power is enacted through language. In the policy arena, where alliances, power, and boundaries are unclear and shifting, language can be a most powerful tool for embedding values, enforcing norms, absorbing uncertainty, and reducing values conflicts (Edelman, 1977).

Language domain analysis is the most appropriate explicit methodology for discovering how people construct their world of experience from the way they talk about it (Donmoyer, 1984). Stories reveal culture and values. As Burlingame (1983 says:

> Those interested in politics seek to identify the characteristic patterns of individuals, how these patterns are influenced by membership in particular social groups, e.g., their particular nation and culture, and most importantly, how compromises are struck between differing individuals or groups. . . . Stories . . . . tell us how power is distributed in our society. The story both creates and displays a universe of "facts and values." We are able to ground our construction of life because the story tells us what "is" and what "ought" to be . . . . (p. 2).

By tapping into the political actors' words and stories, this analysis (a) examines how the dominant story emerges in the assumptive worlds, (b) identifies the guides to action, the norms, and informal boundaries of behavior and choice in the political environment of school sites, and (c) draws implications about the effects of assumptive worlds.

Research on site level assumptive worlds, focusing on policymakers' words about boundaries, areas of values conflict, and informal rules governing the appropriate use of power will add to our understanding of "it's all political." Using qualitative data from a multi-site study, this paper generates hypotheses about the micropolitical world of school administrators.

Specific Methods

This paper is the product of a secondary analysis of interview and on-site observational data, collected in 1983-1985 in twenty schools in three eastern states. Pseudonyms were assigned to all research subjects and their schools. The

original focus was on the career socialization of the twenty assistant principals.[1] For this paper field notes and audio tapes of interviews were reviewed with perspectives derived from micropolitics to explore the fit of assumptive worlds concepts for organizing fledgling administrators' understandings of school site politics.

The Findings on Assumptive Worlds

From the analysis of assistant principal data we identified four domains of site level assumptive worlds. This section describes the domains and the next section discusses the functions and consequences of these assumptive worlds in managing site level politics.

These domains are action guides that contain operational principles that are shared understandings about how to act and think. The domains and operational principles are described below, with illustrations from the assistant principals' assumptive worlds.

Ironically, the richest data were from stories of mistakes, violations of the rules, and failures to act and think within the assumed parameters. The interview data show the cognitive mapping--the understood part of the assumptive worlds--emerging from the words and stories of site level political actors.

The Right and Responsibility to Initiate

School site administrators are responsible for implementing district policies and for creating and initiating effective, efficient and humane ways of fulfilling district directives and

site goals and objectives. Assumptive worlds specify who is obliged and who has the right to initiate action on education policy issues.

Principals and APs are middle managers in the district hierarchy. Their input into developing educational, personnel and fiscal policy as well as the time framework for the school day is limited (Timar, 1989). They are expected, however, to implement district policy and to remain within the budgets allotted by the district.

The principal exercises discretion and assigns the AP his/her responsibilities. The AP is expected to follow the directives of the principal, often responsible for required central office paper work, meeting deadlines, and responding to crises, particularly in student affairs. The principal also delegates responsibility for site level initiatives. When this is done APs are able to display how well they "read" both the site and the district. They use individual creativity and initiative, taking risks and seeking recognition for themselves, making sure that it is not detrimental to the principal.

Limit Your Risk-Taking

In spite of the hierarchically-set boundaries APs learn to be resourceful, finding limited risk solutions to problems encountered in the everyday workings of the school site. APs the practice of "limited risk taking" (LRT) helped APs to set the parameters for the types of actions they could initiate (Mitchell, 1987). Limited risk taking necessitates that the actor effectuate some salutary idea or project that improves the

school without creating massive change or opposition, that increases efficiency but that costs nothing nor takes the time of one's superiors. The outcome has to be successful or at least do no damage.

The AP must be able to read the school site's values from the perspective of the principal, the staff, and students and parents and promote a L&T project that does not violate the district's stated or unstated goals or the union contract. This leaves very little leeway for the AP to initiate school-based programs or change policy.

One AP, William Russell, believed the disciplinarian needed to be physically strong, unwaveringly consistent and very visible. He was the Celtic High School's disciplinarian meeting frequently with the discipline team to ensure that decisions about cases were consistent. But when a student committed suicide in the boys' lavatory he initiated immediate policy changes to meet the needs of the staff and children who witnessed this tragedy. He risked re-thinking his own policies, immediately involved police, parents, school district support personnel, community counselors and mental health personnel to assist in handling the physical and emotional responses of the staff and students and he developed a curriculum that led to a required conflict resolution course. This AP saw that crisis requires and offers the opportunity for policy and program initiatives which would normally take time, lobbying and trial-and-error.

Robert Frost High School is a tough school; its students come from East City's lowest socio-economic stratum. When the

principal, Dr. Harold Fergusson, arrived on the scene, the average daily attendance level stood at 59%. Dr. Fergusson's initiatives focused on students' self-image and self-control through student activities. The AP David Greenberg disagreed with Fergusson's initiatives, favoring an emphasis on academics, and was often at odds with faculty members. However, he conceived and implemented a program that helped raise student attendance to 75%.

Dave garnered staff, principal, and media support for the SPIRIT Program. He created an efficient discipline suspension report form; he relocated the discipline office; and created a "holding area" for wanderers. Halls were safer and more quiet. The suspension form was so well-received that his sub-district adopted the form. He initiated the "Frost Flash Newsletter", the only publication that went out from the school. Even though this AP was often in disagreement with his principal, these successful risks enabled him to survive the daily value conflicts with staff members.

When Dr. Perkins became the principal at Longfellow High School, his two assistants were Ellen Carson and a man who had been a popular candidate for the principal position and was at the time a resentful and uncooperative AP. Dr. Perkins came to rely on Ms. Carson and to give her wide discretion. After a few weeks, Ellen initiated a new policy that resulted in more teacher work and a teacher grievance. Ms. Carson was given the task of implementing a more effective cut policy.

When Dr. Perkins was reprimanded for lax attendance-taking (the district had lost subsidy funds for undercalculating the

number of students in attendance). Teacher allocations to each building were based on the average daily attendance, and the school could lose two teachers. Further, student "cutting" was on the increase.

Teachers at Longfellow were in the habit of turning all cut slips over to the vice principal. Ms. Carson said: "Teachers tell me they are here to teach their subjects not to do paperwork." If a student was present but not in class, a teacher wrote a cut slip. Because so many students at this "model school" were involved in student activities, the paperwork was monumental. It could take a few weeks to trace one student. Ellen declared immediately that this was not the function of the AP, and put a new policy into effect requiring teachers and department heads to deal with student cuts. Cuts would not be reported to the AP until the third violation.

The teachers, through the union, objected to the policy and submitted a grievance. Carson's risk was calculated, since she knew other APs used such procedures. Dr. Perkins supported his AP, and the faculty soon accepted the policy and the good effects of reduced student absence.

These examples show APs initiating policy, marketing their ideas and getting support for changes at the site level in the areas of student discipline, attendance, staff practices and on-site curricular changes. But there appears to be a limited range of appropriate activities in which to effect policy change. APs' creativity must focus on site-level problems and crises and take risks only where success can be assured. They are bound by limited resources and little cash-on-hand. Staff tasks can be

changed within the constraints of the building norms, the union contract, and the principals' willingness to give support.

APs were not expected to take risks that could get the principal into trouble or embarrass the district. They asked APs to perform tasks assigned to them so the school could run smoothly and there would be no negative attention for the district to explain away.

The APs in this study learned the same rules but in different situations including: being new to administration, being new to a school, working with a new principal in the AP's building, and having long-term experience with one principal in the same building.

Next, looking at uses of power which are deemed appropriate will give us a better sense of the total arena in which assistant principals can play out leadership roles.

Re-make Policy Quietly

When an AP is assigned to a school, both the district and the site principal have made assumptions about how this person will behave. Conformity to the rules is expected. The rules are unstated but APs must nevertheless learn them.

The AP serves several masters: the principal at the site level and the superintendent at the district level. However, the loose coupling in schools allows the AP to quietly ignore unworkable bureaucratic rules (Weick, 1982). To serve the goals of the school and meet the needs of the teachers and the students, APs find it necessary to overlook or even defy the demands of the district or even their principal.

A micro-politician understands what s/he can promise and deliver. S/he knows how to use special resources or networks to circumvent rules or bureaucratic structures. Many of the APs found themselves facing dilemmas in which they had to master the political skill of finding problems-solutions that satisfy a variety of clients and audiences. And bureaucratic rules-demands were often less pressing than the site demands.

Ellen Carson promised a teacher whose classroom had been moved to the school basement that she could get him "all the furniture he wanted." She got on the phone to other APs within her network, learned how one obtained furniture across the district, and had delivery arranged four phone calls later. The teacher thought Ellen was a wonderful problem solver Ms. Carson gained the confidence she needed as a new administrator to take on bigger and bigger problems as well as to identify solutions available to site-level administrators.

Elizabeth Anderson at times was bothered by her conscience when she chose to defy district policy and federal law. Ms. Anderson was responsible for the special education department and for rostering and substitutes. Her urban inner-city district often failed to send substitutes to her school when teachers were absent. As many as twelve teachers could be absent on one day, and the district might send zero to five substitutes forcing overworked teachers to cover other classrooms. If three or more special education teachers were absent, Ms. Anderson would keep the children in school for part of the day by doubling-up classes

(a violation of law if classes were more than 15 pupils). Later she would send the children home if a parent was at home.

Anderson interpreted the policy to fit the needs of her school, dealing with emergencies with the resources she had available. Although this violated PL 94-142, she knew she was keeping peace in her school where such services were scarce and where teachers complained bitterly about the number of classes they had to cover for absent colleagues. She knew that the union-negotiated policy of paying back coverage periods created disruption. Ms. Anderson was behaving like Weatherly and Lipsky's (1977) street level bureaucrat who translates specific policy into practices that will best serve the needs of the site so they fit with one's sense of what goals are really important and what resources are actually available in the everyday workings of the organization. Actions like this made her enormously popular at the school site, for she defended teachers by taking risks herself.

Elizabeth Anderson made a very risky interpretation of PL 94-142 as she redirected the priorities of the federal law to make life at her school site more palatable for staff members. She didn't get caught (or, perhaps, the district chose to ignore a practice that, in the end, cost less money).

Acceptable and Unacceptable Values

The politician knows how to read the value systems at the site and in the district then act, make decisions and allocate resources in congruence with those values.

Transfer to Avoid Moral Dilemmas

Alexis Clark had observed a security guard deliberately provoke a student into hitting him. This was a student she had been counseling and who had improved in behavior and academic standing over several months. When the guard reported the incident as an assault, Ms. Clark explained what had happened to the principal and told him she was going to write a negative report on the guard. Her principal, a friend of the guard and a believer in military-type discipline, responded that if she wrote such a report, he would write a negative evaluation of her.

This was a dilemma. She had to choose between overlooking an ethical error she believed her powerful junior high principal made or fighting him at the district level. She wanted a promotion, and this could be damaging. She understood that this principal did not accept women as administrative equals, but she believed it was indefensible not to support the student's case.

Her moral dilemma was solved without open battle when a friend transferred the student to another school without the stigma of a disciplinary label. Her principal, although not aware of this outcome, was satisfied with the transfer. Ms. Clark was able to resolve her problem by using network resources within the district.

Divergent Values and Actions Will be Sanctioned

Ms. Anderson, at the end of her career, opted to support the values of the teachers at the site. She defended her actions:

> I do what a reasonably intelligent person would do under similar circumstances. If I have a job to do, I'll do it, but will do it my way because in the long run I have to answer to me. I have to live with my decisions.

However, Anderson knew she would never be promoted.

David Greenberg felt strongly the conflict between his own personal values and his assessment of dominant societal values:

> The American system is not going to support inner-city schools. I know people with money. They don't care about these kids. We have a superintendent cheering us on, but in an environment where no one cares but us. . . . Do businesses really want Black people to move up? . . . Power and money don't give a damn. That's why now I'm not sure I want to be a principal. I have to survive.

This personal conflict often put him at odds with teachers and with the power structure. He demanded that teachers hold higher standards for students and became so critical of teachers and of his principal, that staff members not only disagreed with him but also expressed open hostility towards him and his ideas. He had not learned the political skills that would help him survive.

Of the twenty subjects in this study, eighteen began their administrative careers aspiring to move up from the assistant principalship. Divergent values or inappropriate uses of power served to hold back their careers. Others were able to work within the understandings of assumptive worlds constraints and to leap to more responsible or powerful positions.

Violating the Patterns of Expected Behavior

What happens to the AP when his/her behaviors in conflict situations are unacceptable or challenge the district or site status quo? How serious does a challenge have to be in order to invoke penalties and what kinds of sanctions are used to discipline an administrator who goes too far? Were APs aware when they "blew it"? The individual stories of these

administrators show how they learn what violates district and site cultural expectations and what happens in the political process of response.

Aloofness Cannot Be Maintained

The Whitman District was rife with conflict. AP Martin Jameson's principal, James Armstrong, was under siege because his athletic director had resigned the position and then asked for it back. Mr. Armstrong had already appointed another person who was supported by the superintendent and then withdrew this appointment when the former director reapplied. This infuriated the superintendent and his supporting board and split the faculty very deeply into two factions.

Jameson, with a new contract and promotion to a twelve month position, was in a position to gain the sponsorship of his superintendent. The superintendent frequently shared information with Jameson and asked him to join a local service club that was a pet project of the superintendent and several board members. His closest friend advised him to join and joining would have been a sign that Martin wanted the superintendent's sponsorship.

However, Mr. Jameson's professional philosophy directed him to remain aloof from the conflict and to tell this superintendent that he didn't have enough time for the club. He said:

> I try to be as fair as possible. I avoid conflict without compromising too much. As assistant principal you deal with all the competing interests in the school. Where there is conflict there is misunderstanding, no one is happy in the resolution of the problem.

Later, when his principal was reassigned, the search was on for a principal, with Martin Jameson a popular choice. He was

quizzed by the board in his interview about not joining the service club and he did not get the superintendent's support.[1]

Martin defied the social expectations of the superintendent and board, and avoided the conflict between his superintendent and his principal. Having defied the expectations he knew he had to be ready to move to another district while he was still under consideration for the principalship at Whitman and not stuck in a position.

Don't Get Labelled as a Troublemaker

Katherine Rhoads was in "one of the roughest middle schools" as a new AP and said that if she showed she "had the right stuff" in the performance of her job and that she could "go along" with the administrative group that she would get a principalship. She had, however, challenged her district's model test answers after having failed a principal-level written examination. She believed the model test answer contained wrong information. Her challenge would force the district to re-administer the entire test to every applicant. Other administrators told her she was a troublemaker. Clearly, if she forced the issue out of conscience, she might never be considered for a principalship in this district. Reading the cultural signposts, Mrs. Rhoads withdrew her claim.

David Greenberg found himself embroiled in a conflict as spokesperson for the APs in his administrators' union. The Administrators' Association was bogged down in negotiations for administrative raises for several months. Greenberg made a public, personal attack on the superintendent and was immediately

admonished by the association president for it. Because of the overwhelmingly negative response of his colleagues, he withdrew his statements. He was told privately that he was putting his promotability in jeopardy and, in subsequent applications for principalships, he had been in the final round of candidates, but had not been selected.

Keep Disputes Private

As part of her responsibility for building repairs and maintenance Ellen Carson coordinated projects with the building engineer and the district engineer's office. Ms. Carson and her principal became involved in a disagreement with the district level engineer over priorities for repairs and equipment. The two administrators, asserting that theirs was a "special school", were demanding extra resources and trying to circumvent regular policy guidelines in which schools took turns getting services.

The arena of this struggle was widened when a deputy superintendent was called in to mediate. She confided her nervousness, saying, "What do I know about boilers and roof repairs?" But this was the wrong focus for her concern because, in the ensuing compromise she and her principal had to accept a "dressing down" by the engineer and the deputy. In return the engineer's office agreed to some of the demands the school made. Carson was told that there were some services they just would not get because no one else got them either and because there was no budget for them and anyway who were they to ask and don't bother the district engineer about this again. Carson's summary of the political lesson learned was: "Ask for the moon and be happy if

you get a ride in the shuttle and a yelling at." The larger lesson was: if you want special treatment do not open up conflicts because you will get only a bureaucratic response.

Cover All Your Bases

Elaine Jones was the only Black and only female administrator in a predominantly white school (1800 white students) that many Black students (900) travelled long distances to attend. Her principal, a white male, was, she felt, uncomfortable with women in administrative roles. The Black students at Southwest High viewed Mrs. Jones as more sympathetic to them than the other two APs or the members of the discipline team. Elaine confessed that she felt like a token at times and that she was isolated from other administrators. She had no set daily schedule and little control over her environment. The tasks she was assigned were mainly clerical: bus token distribution, credits for coursework, and levelling classes to the contracted size. She was also responsible for one third of the teacher observations and reports in the building. In her disciplinarian role she saw mostly Black students who sought her out as their advocate. Elaine spent a good deal of time with students calmly allowing them to ventilate. Often students arrived at her office very hostile. She listened and helped them to work out their problems, effectively maneuvering students in the direction she wanted them to go to maintain an environment of calm and order without racial conflict.

When she did not complete the teacher observations, Elaine was seen as inefficient by members of the staff.

Although her time-consuming listening and guiding may have contributed significantly to keeping racial tensions from erupting in her school, she was unable to effect site-level policy so that the need for this service was recognized and responsibility officially allotted to her. She was faulted by her colleagues for falling behind in scheduled teacher observations and earned the label as "inefficient." While her position looked like and functioned as a token appointment, Jones' behavior--her choice to spend time at racial peacekeeping --went unrewarded in that particular administrative cultural setting. While dealing with unresolved racial tension, she did not cover her bases in her formally assigned work.

In the policy arena, crises can create chaos or opportunity.[4] In the policy culture of school site administrators, APs must choose the right behavioral responses. They must avoid opening up unresolved inequities, incompetence, inappropriate rules and norms. Crises are opportunities for APs to display their fit and loyalty to the administrative culture. The AP who responds to crisis by expanding the crisis, including larger dilemmas is violating the assumptive worlds of site administrators.

School Site Conditions That Affect Political Relationships

Although sites may be quite different, APs know that within their particular site they must attend to issues of trust and turf.

Build Administrator Team Trust

A quick glance at the situations faced by Ellen Carson and by David Greenberg give us a sense of the vast differences among school sites and cultures. Ms. Carson worked with a new principal and Mr. Greenberg worked with a principal new to his building, and both were in urban high schools. Their relationships with their respective principals were of a different nature: Dr. Perkins' offered a partnership of trust in which he gave his AP support and commendation and she reciprocated with enthusiasm, loyalty and dedication. Dr. Fergusson and Mr. Greenberg's partnership fostered disagreement and Dave's perception that Dr. Fergusson displayed contempt towards him. (At one point Dave confronted Dr. Fergusson with, "Why are you laughing at me?") He was not part of the principal's inner circle. The staff knew this. Dave was relied upon by his principal and students, and his energy and his ability to cover details were much needed. However, his personal sense of discouragement about the effects of schooling conflicted with the administrative culture's norm of boosterism and it prevented a trusting partnership between him and his principal.

Ellen's school was academically renowned; Dave's was often called a "hellhole". The nature of the student bodies--their socioeconomic levels, their academic and social skill levels, their responses to authority--and the expectations of the faculties resulted in a very different school day for students and teachers in each building and in very different student outcomes and staff commitment.

Thus, APs at various sites experience a different set of emotional, intellectual and physical as well as personal responses to their clients and to ard their work although they perform similar tasks.

Align Your Turf

APs' involvement in prized policy initiatives and tasks relates directly to the relationships among administrators at the site. Turf is often allocated according to who got there first but site administrators understand which assignments are prized. Ellen Carson's colleague ruled over the prized tasks of advanced placement, graduation, and special events while she got the tasks of discipline and repairs management ("the pits"). But discipline was prized in Martin Jameson's school: he was hired specifically to develop and implement a new discipline policy. Elizabeth Anderson decided to implement mastery learning/goal setting in her school. She developed and communicated the policy and she used her daily rounds of the classrooms, her staff development sessions, and her observation of teachers to enforce it.

Doris Schroeder's principal believed in rotating tasks among the site administrators. However, her fellow AP tried to monopolize the discipline tasks. She knew, understanding the assumptive worlds, to make sure that discipline was part of her turf.

We can see that each site has distinguishing featues but, nevertheless APs know to analyze the context of their site and align themselves and their work for political advantage.

In these stories we have seen that to assert one's own personal values and social goals, to a professional ideal or to unfavored factions in conflicts between site and district is a violation of the expected patterns of behavior of APs. In the cognitive map of the administrative culture, there are roles, statuses, tasks, loyalties appropriate values, appropriate risk-taking and uses of power. Violations of the expectations by APs can lead to to sanctions that are quite severe and are understood by all members of that culture. Some result in a mere smack on the hand with no wider implications, and some challenges result in less predictable sanctions.

Summary and Implications

Fledgling administrators' acceptance of assumptive worlds affects their ability to do their work, to be seen as competent, and to garner support within the site. Therefore, they must work within the assumptive worlds parameters. As a result, assumptive worlds function to constrain initiative and values choices.

Constraining Initiative

Assumptive worlds constrain and limit the range of policy initiatives, the ways to use power, the range of espoused values, and the opportunities for establishing a rewarding career by building trust and establishing themselves as "in charge" of their own turf.

Table 2 summarizes the policy initiatives taken by APs at several of the sites in this study. The range of acceptable policy decisions remain within the site. The AP is permitted to

exercise authority over children, teachers, parents and curriculum and instruction at the site. As we look at the range of unacceptable policies that APs attempted to establish, we see that these either challenged the principal's policy authority or left the locus of control of the site and attempted to revamp existing power arrangements or to change or challenge existing policies. It was this kind of activity on the part of the AP that incurred disfavor, dressing down and even punishment. These actions clearly went beyond the defined power boundaries of the position of AP (and even the principal).

It is clear that school districts will impose sanctions on their administrative line officers--by the superintendent, her/his agents, or by the principal. The range of sanctions includes mere dressing down of an individual to changes in work assignments and locations or denial of promotion and even demotion. (Martin Jameson's principal was moved from high school principal to middle school principal in a politically divided district.)

Knowledge of this does not prevent APs from actively pursuing promotion through innovative and effective suggestions and ideas. They learn from small mistakes; they learn what resources they can call on; they watch the politics in their districts (and beyond); they gossip and listen to the grapevine; they build networks of friends (other APs or principals) on whom they can rely for advice; and they respond by adjusting to what works. In order to survive they limit the risks they take, and they work toward reducing conflicts so that their work lives are

more manageable. Survival depends on knowing the rules of behavior.

Constraining Values

APs understand their world as one with political rules. While they recognize the bureaucratic, hierarchical arrangements that prescribe their tasks and the limits on their discretionary behavior, they know they can risk certain limited initiatives and they can quietly re-make policies to fit site needs. They learn that their personal and professional ethics and morality must be modified to conform to the dominant values in the culture of school administrators. They learn that acts of loyalty, avoidance of trouble, keeping conflicts private, and avoiding unvalued work are behaviors that will help them fit more comfortably in administration, and they know that they must establish trust and turf, no matter what their sites offer as obstacles.

Fledgling administrators learn to repress their awareness of inherent inequities in the structure of schooling (see Marshall, 1985 and 1990). They know that they are expected to avoid trouble and keep discussion of conflicts confined within the site administrators' insiders group. They know they must exhibit behavior that demonstrates their agreement with the dominant values of the site, whether in their daily task fulfillment (e.g., Jones covering her bases with teacher observations) or their social affiliations (e.g., pressure on Jameson to join the superintendent's social club). They know that they must simply keep values conflicts simple, constrained, and private. The

political behaviors that expand conflict and invite in a larger audience must not be used (Schattsneider, 1960).

Implications

The micropolitical analysis identifying assumptive worlds uncovers strong forces that function to reduce the inherent dilemmas by confining the values debates within the domains of acceptable values and by confining behaviors to within the acceptable domains. Assumptive worlds create in administrators the following characteristics:

1. avoidance of values conflicts
2. avoidance of risky change, and
3. a kind of groupthink-defensiveness.
4. one best system (Tyack)

In historical analysis, Tyack (1974) has demonstrated the emergence of a "one best system" in which divergent thinking about curriculum, school management, and even the functions of schooling are not questioned by school professionals. In organization theory, March and Simon (1958) call this "uncertainty absorption"--a phenomenon whereby doubt, alternative perspectives, divergent needs and consideration are submerged in the interests of efficient decisionmaking and maintenance of order, control, and predictability. Here, in micropolitical analysis, we find a process in the work world which guarantees conservative forces will prevail in school leadership!

The functioning of assumptive worlds guards the district and board from the critical pressing dilemmas and ambiguities that appear in the daily work of schools. Site administrators, by

constraining values and behaviors, ensure that divergent values, alternative proposals, aberrant behaviors never get beyond school site boundaires, thus protecting the authorities from "the stresses and strains of alternative proposals" (Iannaccone, 1975, p. 58).

Finally, assumptive worlds ensure the maintenance of myths, beliefs and structures which become part of the institution of American schooling (although, historically, they were once open political conflicts as demonstrated, for example, by Ravitch, 1983). Assumptive worlds maintain the acceptance of the following values built into the structure of schooling:

1.) authority of professional expertise reified in the selection and promotion system,

2.) acceptance of inequality,

3.) separate "decisional" zones (Hanson, 1979) for teachers, site administrators and central office administration,

4.) resistance to centralized authority, or localism (here played out at the site level);

5.) a hierarchy, with chain of command, supervision and monitoring, administered by professional managers, is essential for the task of schooling.

These myths and assumptions have become cornerstones in American education and fledgling administrators maintain them. To question them openly, even to affiliate with those who question them, could mean career suicide.

Assumptive worlds maintain cornerstone assumptions. As such, they function as barriers to change and reform. Recent

reforms (e.g., restructuring to reduce hierarchical decisionmaking and reduce the chasm between decisionmakers and teachers, give more evaluative power to site administrators) will encounter subtle but strong resistance because of site administrators' assumptive worlds.

Administrator training. Good faith efforts are underway, from legislatures, professors, National Policy Boards and professional associations, to enhance the skills and leadership of school administrators. However, no such efforts can succeed when they ignore the potent political parameters imbedded in fledgling administrators' assumptive worlds.

Reform. Similarly, efforts to "restructure" schools or otherwise alter the ongoing tasks and structures of schools, will meet the resistance of administrators schooled in their assumptive worlds. New policies that introduce divergent values may have the force of law but when they moral legitimacy (Habermas, 1975), and when they require administrators to risk sanctions within their assumptive worlds will be ignored. Efforts to standardize services (e.g., P.L. 94-142) will be undermined as administrators follow their own assumptive worlds' rules and transfer students and teachers, re-make policy, and quietly resolve legal and moral conflicts, keeping them localized and privatized.

School site management, accountability, and "empowerment" reforms will encounter administrator resistance when they are mandated in ways that disrupt assumptive worlds rules about boundary, turf, right and responsibility to initiate, and limits on risk-taking.

Concepts like turf, boundaries, dominant values, privatizing conflict- these are political concepts. APs, as fledgling administrators, are learning cognitive maps of the micropolitical assumptive worlds. Such lessons are not easily unlearned.

As Benveniste (1989) says: "the reforms [will be] subverted by the complex interplay of human transactions that do not happen to fit the printed scenario" (p. 329).

APs know that the site is a political arena, full of judges, and that theirs is political work. As Wiles, Wiles, and Bondi (1981) discuss, the rules for practical politician/administrators stress 1) control and maintenance of conflict, 2) maintaining stability and predictability, 3) keeping control over change, 4) maintaining boundaries, and allocating resources. Site administrators learn that, as the political link between the occupants of the school building and the district/community, they must follow the political more than the bureaucratic rules.

Table 1

Policy Initiatives of Assistant Principals

Acceptable*		Unacceptable**	
Person	Policy	Person	Policy
Anderson	Peer observation. Goal-oriented classroom instruction Special Education.	Carson	Demand extra resources/ Circumvent regular policy guidelines
Carson	Cutting. Attendance. Maintenance.	Clark	Challenge to principal's discipline code
Greenberg	Discipline Code. Attendance.	Greenberg	Usurp negotiation power of administrators' union
Jameson	Discipline Code Attendance. Post evaluation-teacher conference.	Jameson	Social decisions/ administrative fit.
Long	Reverse principal policy directive.	King	Challenge sex discrimination policy.
Rafferty	Discipline	Jones	Priority to reduce racial tension without site support.
Russell	Curricular addition	Rhoads	Change district examination policy.
Simpson	Curriculum/ Staff dev		
Tiempo	Counseling pilot program		

*All on site

**Alters existing power arrangements

Footnotes

[1]It is generally agreed that line positions in school administration include the superintendent, assistant and associate superintendents, and high school principals. Staff positions include curriculum directors, supervisors and division heads. Elementary principals have been classified as staff positions by some researchers; however, if line positions are characterized by decision making and staff positions are characterized by specialized knowledge of a subject area and jurisdiction over that area of expertise rather than over many people, then the elementary principalship should also be viewed as a line position (Ortiz, 1982; Marshall, 1979; Kantor, 1977; Peters and Waterman, 1983).

[2]Thirteen were women and seven were men. Most of the APs (over 80%) of the twenty cases assumed the position would be a transitional one in which to learn skills and prove oneself ready to take on a principalship, a directorship or an associate superintendency.

[3]Later, Jameson accepted the position of chief school administrator in a small K-8 district in another community. Thus, he became principal/superintendent of a district with an even higher salary. Three years later he moved to a more affluent elementary (he preferred elementary) district as its superintendent.

[4]In the Chinese culture, the word for crisis denotes the possibility for chaos and for new opportunity (Fred Wirt, personal communication June, 1989)

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Appendix 16

END

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