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**ABSTRACT**

Administrators draw on prior experiences when negotiating, implementing new curricula, and resolving conflicts. This study attempted to determine whether building level administrators included graduate study, union leadership roles, coaching experiences, and school committee leadership as part of their career development prior to assuming educational leadership roles. The study also investigated possible male-female differences, such as total number of years as teachers and/or administrators, training choices, and ratings of administrative preparation experiences. A field-tested questionnaire was sent to 218 randomly selected elementary, junior high, and high school principals in southeastern Michigan districts with a school population between 2,400 and 30,000 students. Responses were received from 190 (87 percent) of the total group, including 128 male principals (67 percent) and 62 females (33 percent). Findings showed that female principals, compared with males, enter their roles with more teaching experience and more school committee leadership experience as teachers, but with less experience in other work-related settings that might enhance and hone their leadership skills, such as noneducation union membership and athletic coaching. The women surveyed moved out of their teaching districts to obtain their administrative positions and spent fewer years as administrators. The men were more likely to be principals where they had taught and to have been in administrative roles longer. All respondents attached a high degree of importance to advanced degree work. Appendices contain a sample questionnaire and summary data tables. (13 references) (MLH)

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# **The Sources of Administrative Training in the Preparation of Building Level Administrators**

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## **Introduction**

It can be argued that success of school reform efforts at the local school building level is greatly dependent upon the leadership skills of the local building administrator, i. e., the principal. "Principals are the educational leaders of their schools. The positive contributions of education to our society are contingent upon the leadership afforded schools through principals" (Page & Page, 1984, p. 3). The better the training of these leaders is, the more successful their leadership efforts will likely be.

When a school administrator is asked how he or she learned to do something in a particular way, the answer is usually related to experience. Blumberg (1988) stated that the decision basis upon which school administrators build successful leadership strategies is the development of a sort of memory bank regarding what does and does not work. Administrators draw upon prior experiences when negotiating, implementing new curricula, and solving conflicts. What are these sources of experiential administrative learnings?

## **Objectives of the Study**

In order to assure the fundamental quality of the pre-service training of principals, states generally require administrative licensure or certification as a condition of employment. The process for obtaining this certification in most states requires the completion of formal course work at the graduate level. Typically, this training is in the traditional educational administration areas, such as school law, supervision, school finance and curriculum development. Yet, this training is only one source of needed and valuable preparation for the principalship. Achilles (1987) noted that would-be principals must go beyond the university classroom to gain meaningful learning experiences in a variety of settings, which learnings can be applied to the leadership role in a school setting. It is especially important that future administrators learn the skills required for effective communication, including one-on-one interaction and group consensus building (Dwyer, 1985; Mazarella & Grundy, 1990).

Sources of these experiences include leadership roles, both formal and informal, in union activities, especially teacher unions. Service as chair of school-related committees, such as curriculum and staff development groups, is another opportunity to develop leadership skills. A third experience often cited as preparatory to educational leadership is the role of coach of a student activity, such as a varsity sports' program. Years of successful experience as a teacher and professional recognition within a specific school district are two other prerequisites noted in the

literature (Buckner & Jones, 1990; Lambert, 1987; Schainker & Roberts, 1987).

### **Specific Questions**

How do practicing educational leaders at the local school building level perceive these sources of preparation for their principals' roles? Are these perceptions different for male and female principals? Which of these preparation sources did principals actually experience before assuming their roles? Were these experiences different for males and females?

This study attempted to determine whether building level administrators included graduate study, union leadership roles, coaching experiences, and school committee leadership as part of their career development prior to assuming administrative roles in education. Further, the researchers investigated whether there were differences between males and females, in certain demographics, such as: total number of years as teachers prior to administration; total number of years as administrators; choices of training; and in how these two groups rated their administrative preparation experiences.

### **Methodology and Sample**

A questionnaire focusing on the demographic information noted above, and the participation in and rating of the importance of specific leadership skill-building experiences, was developed and field-tested with appropriate non-sample principals. (A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.) This survey was sent to 218 elementary, junior high, and

senior high school principals [142 males (65%) and 76 females (35%)], randomly selected using the Sample Size Table by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), in districts with a school population between 2,400 and 30,000 students (Class 3). These public school districts were located in Wayne and Oakland counties in southeastern Michigan, and were primarily in suburban-type communities. Responses were received from 190 (87%) of the total group, including 128 male principals (67%) and 62 females (33%).

The questionnaire asked for responses on 14 questions concerning administrative training in general, individual professional training, and individual professional background. The first eight questions asked respondents to identify certain demographic information including:

- gender;
- present administrative level;
- years in present position;
- years served as a building administrator;
- years taught;
- subject and grade level taught;
- level of graduate work completed; and
- present graduate study.

Six additional questions were asked regarding the respondents' participation in and rating of the importance, relative to preparation for educational administrative roles, of the following:

- union participation outside of educational settings;

- union leadership, both within and outside of educational settings;
- school committee leadership;
- advanced degree work; and
- coaching position experiences.

Data are summarized in Tables 1-4 in Appendix B.

To test the differences between gender-grouped responses, the Chi-Square test and the t-test for unmatched groups were used.

## Results

Fifteen different comparisons were made between the male and female responses to the questionnaire. Of these comparisons, six indicated significant differences in the responses, while nine did not.

Significant findings. There was a significant difference when comparing male and female responses on whether they moved out of their teaching districts to obtain their current leadership positions. Females more often moved from their teaching districts than did their male counterparts in the sample ( $\chi^2=4.457$ ;  $p=.0348$ ). (See Table 5, Appendix C.)

A significant difference was also found in the length of time females were teachers before becoming administrators ( $t=-3.042$ ;  $p=.0027$ ). Specifically, females were teachers an average of 2.8 years longer than were the males surveyed. (See Table 6, Appendix C.)

The difference found in the lengths of time males and females had been in administration overall was also significant ( $t=6.78$ ;  $p=.0001$ ). The males surveyed were administrators an average of 7.2 years longer than the females. (See Table 7, Appendix C.)

Male and female respondents also showed significant differences in their participation in school committee leadership ( $\chi^2=4.084$ ;  $p=.0433$ ) and in their participation in athletic coaching ( $\chi^2=28.632$ ;  $p=.0001$ ). The female principals surveyed were more likely to have been in leadership positions on school committees, as teachers, while the male principals were more likely to have been athletic coaches, as teachers. (See Tables 8 and 9, Appendix C.)

There was also a significant difference between the male and female responses regarding union participation outside of the teachers' union ( $\chi^2=18.083$ ;  $p=.0001$ ). Male respondents more often had experience in non-educational unions than did the females. (See Table 10, Appendix C.) None of the survey respondents had been in a non-educational union leadership position.

Other findings. There were no significant differences between male and females responses regarding ratings on the importance (as a source for administrative training) of athletic coaching, school committee leadership, teacher union leadership, and advanced degree work. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the proportions of males and females in each of the administrative categories of the study, that is, elementary principals, middle school/junior high school principals, and senior high



school principals. There were also no significant differences in the proportions of males and females who were involved in teacher union leadership (prior to administration), or in current advanced degree pursuit; in the number of years males and females had occupied their present administrative roles; and in the type of graduate degrees held by each group.

## **Conclusions**

Summary of findings. Research focused on developing a better understanding of the educational and experiential background of building level administrators, and what they feel most effectively prepared them for that role, provides the framework upon which applicants seeking to move into administration can base their efforts. Such research also provides university training programs with guidelines to develop meaningful and effective programs for potential administrators.

This research indicated that, in comparison with their male counterparts, females:

- more often moved from their teaching districts to other districts for administrative appointment;
- spent a longer time as teachers prior to becoming administrators;
- spent fewer years as administrators;
- were more likely to have been in leadership positions on school committees as teachers;

- were less likely to have been athletic coaches as teachers; and
- were less likely to have been involved in non-teachers' unions.

Although the literature is replete with statistics showing the dearth of females in secondary school principalships, this sample showed no difference between the proportions of men and women principals at all levels, including secondary principalships.

Both females and males highly rated the importance in their administrative preparation of advanced degree work ( $x=2.9$  on 4-point scale), and school committee leadership ( $x=2.8$  on 4-point scale). Rated less highly important by both groups was experience in teacher union leadership ( $x=2.4$  on 4-point scale), and in athletic coaching ( $x=2.2$  on 4-point scale).

Discussion of findings. The sample proportions were approximately one-third female and two-thirds male, although national statistics show education to have a majority of female teachers at the elementary level (83.7%), and nearly the majority at the secondary level (49.7%) (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1990).

- Overall in the sample, more than half of the respondents indicated that they had moved from the districts in which they began teaching, to their present positions, but proportionately, more were females.

- All of the respondents had some teaching experience at some level, elementary through high school, prior to becoming administrators.

•Although the females in the study had fewer total years of administrative experience, they were not different from the males in the number of years in their current administrative positions.

•Women had more involvement in school committee leadership positions before becoming administrators, whereas the male respondents had more participation in athletic coaching.

•At least one-third of the male respondents had, at one time, been members of unions outside of the teachers' union, primarily in the trades while employed prior to becoming a teacher, or in summer work. Only 3% of the females had such experience.

•Another area having to do with the respondents' professional backgrounds was the level of education. Both males and females were similarly involved in pursuing advanced degrees, or in having obtained advanced degrees beyond the master's level. It was clearly evident that most of the respondents, both male and female, felt more education was needed for their present roles, or for advancing in their positions.

## **Recommendations**

Several recommendations can be made based on the findings noted above. Since advanced degree work is central to assuming the principal's role, university training programs are key to making a difference for aspiring women students. It appears that it would be beneficial for such training programs to assist female leadership aspirants to obtain earlier recognition as potential administrators, so as to shorten the time they spend

in the teaching ranks before moving up. There would also be merit to providing a set of alternate, experience-based opportunities for these women to grow in the understanding and use of a variety of leadership skills, which skills often are developed in the coaching and union experiences for male aspirants.

Suggested strategies for enhancing and strengthening the administrative preparation program for female students include the following activities.

- Provide the opportunity for women students to build networking groups. These groups can assist in developing the support needed by the members in marketing themselves and their talents (Hallinger & Murphy, 1991).

- Develop career awareness courses for women students, which courses would assist these students in the implementation of long-term personal planning for leadership development.

- Provide courses tailored to identifying the leadership strategies that will build on unique female characteristics, such as concern for participation and sensitivity to the human dimension of leadership.

- Identify and develop mentor principals from among local practitioners in the area who would be willing to sponsor aspiring females. If such mentors were also women, they could provide role model functions as well.

- Develop a "reach-out" program that would offer local school districts on-site assistance in providing training for would-be female

administrators (Carmichael, 1982; LoPresti, 1982; Schainker & Roberts, 1987). Administrative staff development programs would be designed jointly by university personnel and school district administrators, to identify potential female leaders from among the teachers of the district and encourage their professional growth, through both on-site course delivery and in-district administrative internship experiences.

- Employ female professors in educational leadership programs who can provide the understanding and experiential guidance necessary to support female leadership students.

### **Summary**

This research found that female principals, as compared to their male counterparts, enter their roles with more teaching experience and more school committee leadership experience as teachers, but with less experience in other work-related settings that provide the potential of enhancing and honing their leadership skills, such as non-education union membership and athletic coaching. The women in this study found their administrative appointments in districts different from the ones where they gained their teaching experience, and spent fewer years as administrators; the men in the study were more likely to be principals where they had taught, and to have been in administrative roles longer. All respondents attached a high degree of importance to advanced degree work relative to gaining the principal's role.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Questionnaire**



## ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING INVENTORY

1. What is your present administrative level?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Elementary    \_\_\_\_\_ Junior High    \_\_\_\_\_ High School
  
2. What is the number of years you have served in your present administrative position? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is the total number of years you have served in all administrative positions and at what levels? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Elementary    \_\_\_\_\_ Junior High    \_\_\_\_\_ High School
  
4. How many years did you serve as a teacher before becoming an administrator? \_\_\_\_\_  
Grade level \_\_\_\_\_ Subject(s) taught \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. What is your sex?    \_\_\_\_\_ Male    \_\_\_\_\_ Female
  
6. Please list all your degrees and their areas of concentration.  
\_\_\_\_\_ BA/BS    \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ MA/MS    \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Ed. Sp.    \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Ed. D/Ph. D.    \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Are you presently working on an advanced degree? \_\_\_\_\_  
Degree \_\_\_\_\_ Concentration \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Did you begin your career as a teacher in the district in which you are presently an administrator? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Before beginning your career as a teacher, did you hold a job where you were a member of a union? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Before beginning your career as a teacher, did you hold a union leadership position? \_\_\_\_ If yes, please indicate appropriate positions:

\_\_\_\_\_ President \_\_\_\_\_ Vice President \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_ Negotiator \_\_\_\_\_ Building Rep. \_\_\_\_\_ Treasurer

Total number of years? \_\_\_\_\_ Last year? \_\_\_\_\_

11. During your career as a teacher, did you hold a union leadership position? \_\_\_\_ If yes, please indicate appropriate positions:

\_\_\_\_\_ President \_\_\_\_\_ Vice President \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary

\_\_\_\_\_ Negotiator \_\_\_\_\_ Building Rep. \_\_\_\_\_ Treasurer

Total number of years? \_\_\_\_\_ Last year? \_\_\_\_\_

12. During your career as a teacher, did you hold a leadership position or serve as a member of any school committees (i.e., curriculum or professional development, department head, behavior)?  
If yes, please specify. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Total number of years \_\_\_\_\_

13. During your career as a teacher, did you hold a leadership position as a coach on any school athletic teams (i.e. baseball, football, etc.)? If yes, please specify  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Total number of years \_\_\_\_\_

14. Please rank the following activities in order of importance (using a rating of 4 for most important, follow by 3, 2, and 1) that you feel most prepared you for your present administrative position.

\_\_\_\_\_ Coaching Positions \_\_\_\_\_ Committee Leadership

\_\_\_\_\_ Advanced Degree Work \_\_\_\_\_ Union Leadership

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS  
ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING INVENTORY**

**APPENDIX B**  
**Summary Data Tables**

**Table 1**

**Demographic Data: Administrative Level vs. Sex vs. Average Number of Years in Present Position by Sex**

|             | Administrative Level |    |           |    | Average Number of Years in Present Position |        |
|-------------|----------------------|----|-----------|----|---|--------|
|             | Male                 |    | Female    |    | Male  | Female |
|             | $\bar{n}$            | %  | $\bar{n}$ | %  |   |        |
| Elementary  | 73                   | 57 | 47        | 75 | 5.5   | 4.8    |
| Junior High | 28                   | 21 | 10        | 16 | 7.2   | 5.5    |
| High School | 27                   | 21 | 5         | 8  | 2.6   | 6.8    |

Table 2

Demographic Data: Levels of Teaching Experience

Average of Years Teaching Experience vs. Gender

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|                                   | <u>Male</u>                 |                             | <u>Female</u>               |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                   | <u><math>\bar{n}</math></u> | <u><math>\bar{x}</math></u> | <u><math>\bar{n}</math></u> | <u><math>\bar{x}</math></u> |
| Elementary Teaching               | 54                          | 42                          | 43                          | 62                          |
| Junior High Teaching              | 40                          | 31                          | 9                           | 14                          |
| High School Teaching              | 34                          | 30                          | 10                          | 16                          |
| Average Years Teaching Experience |                             | 9.3                         |                             | 12.1                        |

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**Table 3**

**Demographic Data: Career Began as Teacher in**  
**Same District as Administrator at Present vs. Gender**

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|            | <u>Male</u> |          | <u>Female</u> |          | <u>Total</u> |          |
|------------|-------------|----------|---------------|----------|--------------|----------|
|            | <u>n</u>    | <u>%</u> | <u>n</u>      | <u>%</u> | <u>n</u>     | <u>%</u> |
| <b>Yes</b> | 63          | 49       | 21            | 33       | 84           | 44       |
| <b>No</b>  | 65          | 50       | 41            | 66       | 106          | 55       |

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Table 4

Data Analysis: Teachers' Union Leadership,

Committee Leadership, Coaching Positions vs. Gender

|                      | Male (N=128) |    |           |    | Female (N=62) |    |           |    |
|----------------------|--------------|----|-----------|----|---------------|----|-----------|----|
|                      | <u>Yes</u>   |    | <u>No</u> |    | <u>Yes</u>    |    | <u>No</u> |    |
|                      | $\bar{n}$    | %  | $\bar{n}$ | %  | $\bar{n}$     | %  | $\bar{n}$ | %  |
| Union Leadership     | 61           | 47 | 67        | 52 | 35            | 56 | 27        | 43 |
| Committee Leadership | 109          | 85 | 19        | 14 | 58            | 93 | 4         | 6  |
| Coaching Position    | 59           | 46 | 69        | 53 | 4             | 93 | 58        | 6  |

|                      | Total (N=190) |    |           |    |
|----------------------|---------------|----|-----------|----|
|                      | <u>Yes</u>    |    | <u>No</u> |    |
|                      | $\bar{n}$     | %  | $\bar{n}$ | %  |
| Union Leadership     | 96            | 50 | 94        | 49 |
| Committee Leadership | 167           | 87 | 20        | 10 |
| Coaching Position    | 63            | 33 | 127       | 66 |



**APPENDIX C**  
**Statistical Tables**



**Table 5**

**Gender vs. Administrative Position in Teaching District**

| Coded Chi-Square X <sub>1</sub> : Sex Y <sub>1</sub> : Same distr |       |           |
|---|-------|-----------|
| Summary Statistics  |       |           |
| DF:   | 1     |           |
| Total Chi-Square:   | 4.457 | p = .0348 |
| G Statistic:  | 4.535 |           |
| Contingency Coefficient:  | .151  |           |
| Phi:  | .153  |           |
| Chi-Square with continuity correction:                            | 3.822 | p = .0506 |

Table 6

Gender vs. Number of Years Teaching

| Unpaired t-Test X 1 : Sex Y 2 : Yrs. Tchg |        |                   |            |                 |
|---|--------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
| DF:                                       |        | Unpaired t Value: |            | Prob. (2-tail): |
| 188                                       |        | -3.042            |            | .0027           |
| Group:                                    | Count: | Mean:             | Std. Dev.: | Std. Error:     |
| Group 1                                   | 128    | 9.892             | 6.128      | .542            |
| Group 2                                   | 62     | 12.645            | 5.218      | .663            |

**Table 7**

**Gender vs. Total Years as Administrator**

| Unpaired t-Test X <sub>1</sub> : Sex Y <sub>1</sub> : Total Yrs. |        |                   |            |                 |
|--|--------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
| DF:  |        | Unpaired t Value: |            | Prob. (2-tail): |
| 188  |        | 6.78              |            | .0001           |
| Group:   | Count: | Mean:             | Std. Dev.: | Std. Error:     |
| Group 1  | 128    | 15.609            | 7.463      | .66             |
| Group 2  | 62     | 8.485             | 5.116      | .65             |

**Table 8**

**Gender vs. School Committee Leadership**

| Coded Chi-Square X <sub>1</sub> : Sex Y <sub>2</sub> : Comm Ldship |       |           |
|--|-------|-----------|
| Summary Statistics   |       |           |
| DF:  | 1     |           |
| Total Chi-Square:  | 4.084 | p = .0433 |
| G Statistic:   | 4.671 |           |
| Contingency Coefficient:   | .145  |           |
| Phi:   | .147  |           |
| Chi-Square with continuity correction:                             | 3.165 | p = .0752 |

**Table 9**

**Gender vs. Athletic Coaching Experience**

| Coded Chi-Square X 1 : Sex Y 3 : Coach |        |           |
|--|--------|-----------|
| Summary Statistics                     |        |           |
| DF:                                    | 1      |           |
| Total Chi-Square:                      | 28.632 | p = .0001 |
| G Statistic:                           | 32.077 |           |
| Contingency Coefficient:               | .362   |           |
| Phi:                                   | .388   |           |
| Chi-Square with continuity correction: | 26.955 | p = .0001 |

**Table 10**

**Gender vs. Non-Education Union Experience**

| Coded Chi-Square X <sub>1</sub> : Sex Y <sub>1</sub> : Union before tchg |        |           |
|--|--------|-----------|
| Summary Statistics   |        |           |
| DF:  | 1      |           |
| Total Chi-Square:  | 18.083 | p = .0001 |
| G Statistic:   | 21.985 |           |
| Contingency Coefficient:   | .295   |           |
| Phi:   | .309   |           |
| Chi-Square with continuity correction:                                   | 16.569 | p = .0001 |