

1989

## The role of the principal in educational leadership and change

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### Recommended Citation

Hobbs, Nicholas B., "The role of the principal in educational leadership and change" (1989). *Graduate Research Papers*. 2562.

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## The role of the principal in educational leadership and change

### Abstract

Walker and Vogt (1987) state that today's school systems cannot afford to be static institutions because the environment in which they exist demands change at a rapidly increasing rate. Past research indicates that principals spent a large amount of time on housekeeping chores and in meetings with other administrative personnel (Sarason, 1982). Sarason further adds that the smooth operation of the system often becomes an end in itself and that anything or anyone interfering with this smoothness will be closely scrutinized. Goodlad (1969) indicates that administrators favor teachers who maintain orderly classrooms, keep accurate records and maintain stable relations with parents and communities. Jwaideh's, (1984) research indicates that principals are often recruited from among teachers who demonstrate orderliness and because administrators are rewarded for maintaining the system they are unlikely to challenge it or reward subordinates who do.

**THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL IN  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE**

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**A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Department of Educational Administration  
and Counseling**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education**

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**by  
Nicholas B. Hobbs  
February 1989**

This Research Paper by: Nicholas B. Hobbs

Entitled: The Role of the Principal in Educational Leadership and Change

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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4/3/89

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Walker and Vogt (1987) state that today's school systems cannot afford to be static institutions because the environment in which they exist demands change at a rapidly increasing rate. Past research indicates that principals spent a large amount of time on housekeeping chores and in meetings with other administrative personnel (Sarason, 1982). Sarason further adds that the smooth operation of the system often becomes an end in itself and that anything or anyone interfering with this smoothness will be closely scrutinized. Goodlad (1969) indicates that administrators favor teachers who maintain orderly classrooms, keep accurate records and maintain stable relations with parents and communities. Jwaldeh's, (1984) research indicates that principals are often recruited from among teachers who demonstrate orderliness and because administrators are rewarded for maintaining the system they are unlikely to challenge it or reward subordinates who do.

The principal's role as educational leader and change facilitator coupled with his/her crucial role in school improvement has been

established in the vast amount of literature pertaining to the subject. The literature consistently identifies the principal as the instructional leader and therefore, the key factor in school success (Louisiana State Dept. of Ed., 1985).

Effective leadership comes in many different forms and what may work in one situation does not always hold true in another. There are a variety of styles that can be effective, its the match of a specific style to a situation that is important (Debeuoise, 1984).

In comparison with change in other institutions such as industry, agriculture, etc., educational change proceeds very slowly. Change in education must rely on people and their intuitive resistance to change. Change means uncertainty or venture into the unknown, there is a natural resistance to doing things differently. The problem of change then in education is more a function of people than technology (Louisiana State Dept. of Ed., 1985).

An awareness of the common resistance to change is imperative to the educational leaders

skills in facilitating change. Lippitt (1977) has identified a number of resistors to change. They are as follows:

1. The purpose of change is not clear.
2. Those affected by the change were not involved in its planning.
3. The appeal for change is based on personal reasons.
4. The habit pattern of the individuals involved are ignored.
5. Those being asked to change are afraid of failure.
6. Excessive pressure to make the change is involved.
7. The personal "cost" (failure) is too high, or the rewards are inadequate.
8. There is lack of trust in and respect for the person attempting to initiate change.
9. Those being asked to change are satisfied with the status quo.

Leithwood and Montgomery (1984), have discovered a number of other obstacles that may hinder the effectiveness of the principal and his/her role as educational leader and change

agent. Teachers may present unique obstacles to principals implementing change in the following areas:

1. Lack of Knowledge and skill about new practices.
2. Uneven professional training.
3. Lack of motivation to change, to participate in in-service training and to collaborate.
4. Teachers desire for autonomy.
5. Constraints on program decision making resulting from collective bargaining union contracts.

The principal's role in itself may be an obstacle. The role may be ambiguous in that expectations may be unclear. The principal's role is also complex in considering the number of people affected and the number of tasks to be performed.

A principal's characteristics may serve as an obstacle to change. Principals may lack knowledge about how to assess student needs. Deficiency in routine administrative and leadership skills and



an unwillingness to take risks associated with classroom change.

School boards also may serve as obstacles to change. Boards create excessively rigid and time consuming policies and procedures. The generally conservative stance of central administrators may inhibit school initiated change.

A principal's effectiveness in leadership and change may also be hindered by the community. Parental interest - either too much or too little, may enhance or discourage change.

The above stated research from Leithwood and Montgomery, (1984), and Lippitt (1977), indicates the complex nature of change. For most principals specific training and support is needed to be effective. There are a number of different models and programs designed to enhance the effectiveness of the principal as a change facilitator. What is often overlooked is the fact that principals are also human beings with feelings and anxieties of their own about change, their ability to facilitate it and move the organization toward desirable ends (Rutherford, Horn & Thurber 1984).

The insight of the effective schools research over the past several years has shown the importance of the principal as instructional leader. What is now becoming even more clear is that the principal does not bear the weight of leadership responsibility alone. There are one or more helpers who participate in school leadership and facilitation of school improvement efforts (Hord, Stiegelbauer & Hall, 1984). The importance of the principal is reflected in the number of interventions a principal makes in regards to a curriculum change. Hord, Stiegelbauer and Hall found that about one-third of the important interventions made, when investigating the progress of curriculum change, involved the principal and a teacher or staff member. The incidence of intervention has a strong effect on a teacher's subsequent behavior. Intervention was either complex, about twenty percent of the time or of the simple type, eighty percent of the time. Simple intervention usually involved one conversation with one particular element discussed or acted upon. Complex interventions involved repeated or chain incidents. Such as repeated or

follow-up conversations with a particular teacher on a new teaching strategy or curriculum innovation. The strength and expediency of change is also affected by secondary change facilitators. A secondary change facilitator (CF) is usually a prominent teacher who shares the same goals and possibly the same training for a particular curriculum innovation. Additional change facilitators may also be enlisted depending upon their availability and the size and scope of the change taking place.

In summary the research of Hard, Stiegelbauer and Hall, (1984) indicates that the principal is responsible for leadership in directing change. His or her interactions with teachers has the potential to greatly enhance change and subsequent teacher behavior regarding change. After the principal, enlistment of significant others to serve as secondary change facilitators will serve to expediate and enhance change in general.

The number of leadership training programs estimated at over 400 in the United States alone, (Leithwood, Stanley & Montgomery, 1984), is

evidence of the importance educational agencies place on principal and administrative leadership.

Within leadership training programs, Leithwood, Stanley and Montgomery (1984), have identified some desired levels of administrative profiles that may be strong indicators of effectiveness in decision making and change facilitation. At the lowest of four different levels is the "administrative mode." A decision maker or change facilitator at this level relies on autocratic forms of decision-making and use of vested authority. The administrative mode is reflected in a reactive stance whose goal is to, "run a smooth ship", which means looking after administrative concerns, ensuring the schools appearance is satisfactory and all rules and regulations are followed. The next level up, which is a more effective profile for administrative leadership and change facilitation, is based on humanitarian concerns. Humanitarian goals are to provide a friendly happy environment so staff and students enjoy coming to school. When making decisions which may involve change the humanistic administrator actively seeks staff

input and based decisions on staff preferences but still retained responsibility for the outcomes of the decisions.

Leithwood, Stanley and Montgomery identify program manager as the next most effective level which is characterized by administrative goals that are intended to provide good programs and experiences for students. The administrator at this level seeks opportunities to improve programs. His decision making stance is businesslike but friendly. The program manager is highly effective in viewing decision making and change facilitation as the best opportunity to influence the extent to which the goals of education are achieved. The systematic problem solver, the most effective form of administrative change facilitator has concerns which extend beyond specific programs to everything that happens to students.

Leithwood, Montgomery and Stanley, (1984), have identified four stages in which administrative effectiveness was enhanced. The determination of the particular profile an administrator is at, is imperative when entering a

leadership training program. The expediency through which a trainee can progress is the next most important factor to consider in training programs for leadership and change effectiveness.

Rutherford, Hord, and Thurber's, (1984), research in preparing principals for leadership roles in school improvement points to the many concerns principals may have in attempting to make specific or general changes regarding staff development or curriculum enhancement. Their model for change reveals that effective principals exhibit certain skills such as goal setting, active facilitation of change, and providing the assistance and monitoring needed to ensure that teachers can and do change. For many principals these represent new skills and a changed role. As principals learn and apply these skills and role responsibilities they will have many concerns. Seven change facilitator stages of concern have been identified. Any change that principals make must be made by working with teachers. As a result this model also takes into account the teachers particular stages of concern when making changes. The stages of concern model can be a

powerful tool for the principal in understanding the faculties position and determining a point for intervention. Teachers stages of concern can generally be grouped into three general areas of self, task, and management concerns. (Hall, Wallace & Dossett, 1973).

To facilitate change a principal must choose proper ways to intervene. Intervention may take place during or after a change is attempted. The stages of concern model according to Hall, Wallace and Dossett (1973), can serve as a valuable diagnostic tool in determining when and what type of intervention may be best suited to a particular situation. Hall (1979) has developed a taxonomy of interventions to give principals an understanding of the variety of actions that they might employ to facilitate change. The knowledgeable principal will devise a plan for policy development and implementation. Strategy tactics and action to insure implementation takes place may all serve as points of intervention. Reinforcement of specific behaviors will help to insure "institutionalization" takes place. (Huddle, 1987) Institutionalization is really the

final goal of any change or improvement attempt. Institutionalization is characterized by ownership of the participants in the innovation to the point that a staff may take the attitude that this is how it is done. (Huddle, 1987) Change is a complex and some times delicate process. Principals basically are involved in one of three ways which is summarized by Manuel J. Justiz (1985). Principals make changes happen, help changes happen, or let changes happen. All three have particular good and bad points but the principal that makes change happen is generally considered to be the most effective. This type of person is an initiator and has set clear long range goals. He lets everyone know that he expects alot of himself as well as others.

The current literature indicates that the effective educational leader possesses knowledge and skill about the complexities of the change process. The effective principal thrust in the role of educational leader and change agent must first conceptualize and communicate a clear vision about where the program is headed. The principals ability to enlist the help of good secondary



change facilitators and to create an atmosphere where change and renewal are accepted and expected appear to best fulfill the role of educational leader and change agent.

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