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Instructional leadership: The challenge changing the face of the principalship

Abstract

Historically, the role of the principal in the elementary school has been one of management, discipline, supervision and the coordination of these three elements. The principal managed the physical plant, the budget and supplies, and support personnel. She/he disciplined students and staff when necessary and generally supervised all of these elements with a smooth-running operation being the primary goal. For the first half of the Twentieth Century the principal operated successfully in this authoritarian manner (Giammatteo 1981). Increasingly, however, this historical role has been challenged.

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INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP
THE CHALLENGE CHANGING THE FACE OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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by

Karen Nord Murtinger

July/August 1986

This Research Paper by: Karen Nord Murtinger

Entitled: Instructional Leadership: The Challenge Changing the Face of the Principalship

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

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Historically, the role of the principal in the elementary school has been one of management, discpline, supervision and the coordination of these three elements. The principal managed the physical plant, the budget and supplies, and support personnel. She/he disciplined students and staff when necessary and generally supervised all of these elements with a smooth-running operation being the primary goal. For the first half of the Twentieth Century the principal operated successfully in this authoritarian manner (Giammatteo 1981). Increasingly, however, this historical role has been challenged.

Public instituitions reflect the mood, desires and needs of the public. Public schools, because of their proximity to the populace, find themselves in a position most sensitive to this.

In the past two and one half decades this effect on the public schools has become immense. The feminist movement, the youth revolution (Hathaway, 1983), the sexual revolution, the informational revolution, the technological revolution, to name but a few, have all impacted to create a multitude of changing demands on the public schools and, as a result, on the very character of the principalship.

In the 1960's the youth revolution was instrumental in changes in curriculum with their demands for

immediate relevance (Urbain 1974). The Coleman Report (1966), with its emphasis on pupil characteristics and popular interpretation that the child, not the school, was the determining factor in achievement, resulted in an attempt by educators to change the child. Thus the public schools experienced an educational revolution in terms of affective education, values, etc.

The drop in standardized achievement scores and ensuing public demand for "back to basics" (Leininger 1979) fired an era of curriculum revison and reform during the 1970's. This "back to basics" attitude has continued to flourish to the present time.

Now, in the 1980's, in reaction to a stressed economic situation, the public is making further demands upon public education (NCEE Report, 1983) - that of accountability, productivity, and excellence. The public is, more and more, demanding a viable and effective product for their financial investment.

In addition to the public demand for accountability, the schools are being inundated with continually more and more information on how students learn. There has been a proliferation of research in the past decade in educational psychology. The public schools can no longer be content with deciding what to teach and a method by which to teach it. Research in learning theory has given us information on discovery

learning, (Bruner, 1981) mastery learning, (Arlin, 1984) cooperative learning, (Johnson, 1974) open education, etc. Research in learning styles (Patridge, 1981) and teaching of thinking skills (Epstein, 1981) has made the task of educating children in some ways easier and at the same time more complex.

How can the public schools meet the challenge of increased demand for accountability and productivity and at the same time take advantage of the new information available to help improve instruction? The answer is that the school principal must act as an instructional leader.

The purpose of this paper is to examine current research literature which focuses on effective schools and to determine what particular leadership characteristics will be needed by the principal in the elementary schools in order to meet these new demands for instructional leadership.

Specifically, the following question will be examined: Does there exist in recent literature a common set of leadership characteristics of principals in effective schools?

The changing demands upon the schools in terms of accountability, productivity, and excellence, coupled with the proliferation of information in learning theory has significantly changed the character of the

elementary principalship from one of management to one of instructional leadership. The identification of specific qualities which characterize leaders in effective schools will be valuable to both administrators currently in the field and to those preparing to enter the profession. Isolating the individual qualities of successful instructional leadership is an absolute necessity in meeting the challenge currentely facing education.

Included in this review of literature will be a discussion of instructional leadership as a general concept. This will be followed by an examination of specific principal behaviors identified as contributing to effective schools.

Although much of the recent literature addressing the issue of school effectiveness indicates that the key to effective schools is the principal and his/her role in instructional leadership, there is little agreement as to a definition of instructional leadership. DeBevoise (1984) concluded that "beyond the basic competencies, the effective principal has a clear sense of mission and control....and is not content to maintain the status quo". Mazzarella (1982) stated that an instructional leader is "...a principal who engages in activities that significantly affects the learning that goes on in the school". These statements by DeBevoise

and Mazzarella typify the non-specific nature of much of the literature. There is little in the literature at this time with regard to an agreed upon definition of the concept of instructional leadership.

A more concise definition of instructional leadership framed by Pellicer (1982) defined instructional leadership as "those tasks performed by principals in working directly with teachers to evaluate and improve classroom instruction". Herein Pellicer provides the beginning of a definition which can be put into practice both by a practitioner and by an evaluator of the literature.

Not only is there lack of agreement regarding the definition of instructional leadership, there is lack of agreement regarding which behaviors facilitate this affect on the part of the principal. This review of the literature will attempt to isolate specific behaviors from the literature and group them in general catagories in order to make a discusion of instructional leadership more clearly understood.

More than twenty principal behaviors which occurred more than once are identified by this review of the literarure. Additionally, these behaviors are grouped into six common categories in order to assist in organizing the discussion. These six common categories have been labeled 1) Instruction; 2) Outcomes; 3)

Climate; 4) Staff; 5) Management; and 6) Human Relations.

The first of the six common catagories is that of instruction and includes such behaviors as coordinating instruction, instructional support, setting instructional strategies and curriculum development. The coordination of instruction was cited with the highest degree of frequency. These four components of instruction will be discussed in the following paragraphs but it is in no way intended to be a delimiting discussion.

Coordinating of instruction (Brookover, 1979; Clark, 1980; Codianni, 1983; Duke, 1982; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Huddle, 1984; Katins, 1983; Rogus, 1983; Smyth, 1983; Sweeney, 1982; Wellisch, 1978) may include such components as curriculum articulation, grade level and multi-grade level planning meetings, and general faculty meetings, held for the purpose of sharing instructional information in relationship to content. It may mean the provision of release time for individuals at corresponding times so these meetings can be held.

Instructional support (Duke, 1982; MacPhail-Wilcox, 1983; Mazzarella, 1982) may also take many forms. It may mean the procurement of resource people from the community to add depth and breadth to a subject being investigated. It may include the coordination of

scheduling difficulties to make it possible to utilize otherwise unavailable resources. It may be as simple as acting as laison between the custodial staff in saying, "It's ok that those beans are lined up on the floor in room # 126. They are learning about regrouping in math".

The setting of instructional strategies (Clark, 1980; Codianni, 1983; Duke, 1982; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Katins, 1983; Madden, 1976; Mazzarella, 1982; Rogus, 1983; Smyth, 1983; Sweeney, 1982; Weber, 1971; Wellisch, 1978) is a critical area of instructional leadership. It is necessary for a principal to recognize that an instructional strategy which works for one individual instructor might not work with the style and personality of another. She/he must also note that the imposition of a consistent style among all teachers in his/her building would be counterproductive and would probably inhibit the development of individuals to their maximum.

It is, however, necessary for the principal to keep abreast of recent research in instructional strategies and provide a means with which to deliver this information to his/her faculty. This is particularly important given the proliferation of recent research in how children learn discussed in the introduction. This can be accomplished through general inservice, professional leave days for individuals who then share

their learning with the rest of the staff, or directly delivered by the principal following training of herself/himself. The principal should, in addition to providing exposure to a variety of instructional strategies, be aware of the necessity of field testing of these strategies in relationship to an individual's own teaching style. This can be accomplished by constant monitoring and debriefing relative to new or heretofore untried strategies.

An equally important aspect of instruction is curriculum development. Curriculum development (Burnes, 1975; Madden, 1976; Sweeney, 1982) is a more formalized component of instruction. It consists, basically, of the principals participation in the formulation of curriculum guides, unit development, textbook selection and the like in order that she/he is informed with regard to all curricular areas.

The second common category to be discussed in some detail here is that of outcomes. The category of outcomes includes such principal behaviors as emphasizing achievement, frequently evaluating progress, having high expectations for staff and students and high affective expectations. The first three of these principal behaviors were cited with a high degree of frequency.

The emphasizing of achievement (Brookover, 1979;

Clark, 1980; Codianni, 1983; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Felsenthal, 1982; Huddle, 1984; Katins, 1983; Keedy, 1982; Madden, 1976; Niedermeyer, 1976; Smyth, 1983; Weber, 1971; Wellisch, 1978) may take the form of emphasis on high performance on standardized tests, a predetermined percentage to be achieved on test scores within the school curriculum, an expectation of high standards in product-oriented learning activities, or a less formalized expectation of superior performance in extracurricular activities.

Another principal behavior in the category of outcomes is that of frequently evaluating and monitoring pupil progress (Brookover, 1979; Burnes, 1975; Clark, 1980; Codianni, 1983; Duke, 1982; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Felsenthal, 1982; Katins, 1983; Keedy, 1982; Madden, 1976; Niedermeyer, 1976; Rogus, 1983; Weber, 1971; Wellisch, 1978). The key words here appears to be "frequently" and " monitoring". This was not limited to standardized tests given annually, but stressed the frequent monitoring and recording by the principal of the progress made by individual students in the basic skills as they progressed through the school year.

Closely related to the frequent evaluation of student progress is the principal behavior of possessing high academic and affective expectations for staff and students (Brookover, 1979; Clark, 1980; Felsenthal,

1982; Katins, 1983; Keedy, 1982; MacPhail-Wilcox, 1983; Mazzarella, 1982; Rogus, 1983; Sweeney, 1982; Wellisch, 1978). The Pygmalion Effect, the theory that behavior can be changed due to the expectations that may be conveyed by others, is an explanation for this phenomonen.

Thirdly, the common category of a positive school climate features such principal behaviors as providing an orderly atmosphere, and creating a humanistic environment. The category of providing an orderly atmosphere was cited with much more frequency than was creating a humanistic environment. These have to do, not with the physical environment, but with the psychological environment within which the students and teachers work.

The provision of an orderly envrionment (Brookover, 1979; Clark, 1980; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Huddle, 1984; Jacobson, 1984; Keedy, 1982; MacPhail-Wilcox, 1983; Madden, 1976; Mazzarella, 1982; Rogus, 1983; Sweeney, 1982; Weber, 1971) is characterized by a general lack of disruption. In an orderly environment the movement of students throughout the building is accomplished in a manner characterized by control and concern with the minimization of distraction caused to other classes. It would further be characterized by a minimum of interruptions due to the over-use of the public address

system, unplanned interruption of instruction time, etc.

In addition to this the positive school climate incorporates a humanistic attitude (Burnes, 1975; Felsenthal, 1982; Sweeney, 1982). This humanistic attitude embraces such components as concern for others feelings, a concern for their well being, a general lack of oppressivness in rules and regulations, and a building characterized by caring supportiveness.

The fourth common catagory, that of staff, contains three principal behaviors found in the literature, supporting staff, staff development and collaborative staff planning. Of the three, all were cited with fairly equal frequency.

The principal behavior of supporting staff (Clark, 1980; Katins, 1983; Madden, 1976; Mazzarella, 1982; Sweeney, 1982; Wellisch, 1978) can be percieved in many ways. It can comprise such things as supporting and backing a teacher in regard to discipline, relationship difficulties with parents, or other staff. It can be as simple as support in terms of recognition of and praise for an accomplishment.

Staff development (Duke, 1982; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Katins, 1983; Mazzarella, 1982; Niedermeyer, 1976; Rogus, 1982; Sweeney, 1982) may also take many forms. It may include inservice programs, the encouragement of the use of professional leaves, facilitating the

persuance of an advanced degree, or any number of related activities. It may also include the less formalized practice of allowing for opportunities for the staff to interact in order to learn from each other and grow professionally.

The formalization of staff interaction is collaborative staff planning and is the final component of staff development (Huddle, 1984; Meiskin, 1969; Niedermeyer, 1976; Rogus, 1983; Smyth, 1983; Sweeney, 1982). This may include such features as team teaching, shared decision making, goal setting, etc.

The fifth common category considered with respect to principal behaviors which is contributory to instructional leadership is that of general management. There are four principal behaviors specific to this category, goal setting, maximizing of financial resources, troubleshooting, and coordinating. Of these four, goal setting and maximizing of finances were cited with the greatest frequency.

Goal setting (Brannon, 1983; Burnes, 1975; Clark, 1980; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Huddle, 1984; Jacobson, 1984; Katins, 1983; Keedy, 1982; Rogus, 1983; Sweeney, 1982) may take the form of goals in any number of areas served by the principal. They may be goals in terms of the physical plant, relationships between staff, student achievement, etc. Any one of these goals would have

the potential of impacting, however indirectly, upon the instruction of the students.

The maximization of financial resources (Burnes, 1975; Clark, 1980; Duke, 1982; Keedy, 1982; Mazarella, 1982; Niedermeyer, 1976; Weber, 1971) may be described as critical in its ability to effect instruction. The principal may impact instruction significantly in this area simply by the allocation of funds for expenditures for specific instructional materials while denying the allocation for others. He/she may further impact instruction through the dispursement of discretionary funds made available for specific special projects or activities.

The sixth and final common category of principal behaviors to be considered is that of human relations. Human relations behaviors by principals include effective communications and effective diplomacy.

Effective communications (Brannon, 1983; Edmonds, 1978, 1979; Sweeney, 1982) is broad and includes many skills. Included in these skills are such varied abilities as the capacity for providing positive reinforcement, criticizing constructively, being assertive without being aggressive, convincing others to take action, acting as an advocate for programs within and without the school and speaking with candor and honesty to staff and parents, etc.

Effective diplomacy (Brannon, 1983; Sweeney, 1982) encompases many of the elements mentioned in the effective communications but broadens that area. Effective diplomacy adds the component of tact to that of communication.

This paper has attempted to answer the question: Does there exist in recent literature a common set of leadership characteristics of principals in effective schools?

The review of the literature revealed six areas of leadership characteristics which were common to effective schools. They were broadly catagorized into involvement in instruction, outcomes, climate, staff, management and human relations.

Of the more than twenty behaviors identified, seven characteristics occurred in nearly 50% of the articles examined. These seven high incidence principal behaviors include the coordinating of instruction, the emphasis of achievement, frequently evaluating student progress, providing orderly atmosphere, setting instructional strategies, having high expectations for staff and students and setting goals. It can be said with a degree of assurrance that many of these behaviors occur with enough frequency to be of importance when asking if there exists a set of characteristics common to effective schools.

As the public school continues to attempt to meet the changing demands in terms of accountability, productivity and excellence it must keep in the forefront the concept that the product of the school is learning. All other functions of the public school exist to suport learning. As Madeline Hunter stated in "What's Going on Around Here?" (1978), "...the principal's primary function is to be an instructional leader". She/he "... should be teaching (not telling) teachers to be better teachers, parents to be better teammates, students to be better learners, district office personnel to be better colleagues, citizens to be better supporters of education". Hunter continued, saying that the same teaching strategies used in teaching in the classroom must be used by the principal to these ends. This, then, is the true nature of the instructional leader - to continue to teach - however changed and changing his/her "students" might be.

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