THE

PRINCIPALSHIP

CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

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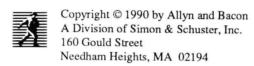
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Preface

Few educators and citizens will argue with the proposition that the principal of the school is the most important administrator in the American educational system. To be successful every group, even the street gang, must have a leader or face the prospect of a mob bent upon the destruction of everything in its path, including itself. Without a leader every group will move toward randomness and failure. All brutish conquerors know that the way to grasp control of a community is to destroy its leadership structure, leaving it in a temporary state of disorder, before substituting their own leaders to control the situation. There is no doubt about it: The school must have leadership and have it now when it is being so severely criticized for its shortcomings. The leadership structure of the school will seldom rise appreciably above the quality of leadership furnished by the principal.

The need for leadership knows no boundaries. Depending on the quality of their leaders, entire communities progress toward the good life or lean toward mediocrity in daily living. The primary difference between these communities is the quality of their leaders. Moreover, the quality of leadership in the community affects the efforts of educators in achieving high quality education for students.

For this reason we have emphasized how those appointed to the principalship can assume leadership with the school faculty and with the

systems in which the school interacts. The reader will find in this textbook a wealth of information about how one can assume leadership of a school and how that leadership can result in the development of educational excellence. Leadership within interacting systems is the central theme of the textbook; however, we do not in any way neglect the technical aspects of running a school. The technical aspects of school administration cannot be separated from the social realm because they are intermingled; one cannot exist without the other.

Much of the current and past literature expounds on the principal as the instructional leader of the school. But in this textbook we do more than expound on this point. We help the reader learn (1) how to become a leader with the faculty and (2) how to use this position of leadership to move the school faculty toward educational excellence. Our approach to how the principal acquires a position of leadership with the faculty, parents, central office personnel, and other citizens is based on over thirty years of research about the emergence and success of community leaders. This account of how one becomes a leader is therefore superior to many small group research projects in which so many of the subjects were captive students or organizational workers. Leadership in the political crucible of the real world is vastly different from leadership in a captive group of fifth-grade students; consequently, the reader may find some of our concepts unique. But we do not in any way ignore the vast amount of empirical evidence accumulated about leadership; these concepts are explored in consistency with our approach.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this text are concerned with the background development, preparation, and means of appointment of the principal. Along with Chapter 17 (Days in the Lives of Principals), they provide an introduction to the principalship, with particular emphasis upon the principal's primary role in the scheme of things.

In Chapters 3 through 6 the reader is directed toward a systems approach to the principalship. The basic concepts of general systems theory are described and further highlighted by cases illustrative of the concepts. The educational leader who does not understand the school as a system in interaction with other systems will be severely handicapped in grasping a leadership position with the faculty, superordinates in the central office, students, and parents.

Chapters 7 through 10 discuss the difference leadership can make in the quality of education offered children and youth. This process requires knowledge of the change process, the development of a climate (or condition) for instruction and learning, and the techniques of supervision. Yet mere use of techniques is not sufficient. The principal and faculty must see in their mind's eye where the school must go to achieve excellence. Throughout this and other parts of the text we describe in considerable detail those conditions found to be associated with schools of quality.

Chapters 11 through 16 emphasize selected technical aspects of managing a school, including such leadership tasks as providing for an adequate library, understanding legal concepts, computer aids to administration, school plant facilities, and personnel management. Yet, even in these chapters we continue to support the leadership role of the principal because separating the technical from the social dimensions of administration is an arbitrary decision. These dimensions are intermingled and mutually supportive. Chapter 17 is really a source chapter for the entire book. Through the presentation of actual logs kept by principals, letters, memoranda, and other information, we present "days in the lives of principals." These materials may be used for discussing the tasks that the selected school principals performed. They are also useful for the classroom or small group discussion.

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About the Principal

INTRODUCTION

The school principal or head teacher was one of the first positions that emerged in the profession of educational administration. In fact, the position appeared so many years ago that an accurate history of its development is somewhat lost in antiquity. Despite current expressions about the limitations of practicing principals, the principalship has a proud, distinguished tradition. Most of us did not know much about the school superintendent or other central office administrators, but all of us remember, with varying feelings of awe, the principal of our school. Nothing could surpass the impressions made when the teacher threatened a trip to "the office."

Just who is the principal of the school? What are the principal's tasks, responsibilities, duties, and functions? These are but a few of the ideas about the principalship that are discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Their purpose is to explore the development, tasks, leadership functions, selection processes, educational preparation, and personal demands of those who occupy the position of school principal. Along with the material in Chapter 17, which serves all chapters in the book,

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce the reader to the leadership role and function of school principal.

Excellence in education is essential for the survival of American democracy and the continued leadership of the United States among the nations of the world. We must have well-administered schools that are adequately supported by parents and other citizens. The results of research, upheld by almost unanimous opinion, have led to the widespread conclusion that strong leadership by the school principal is essential for achieving educational excellence. For example, comparative research of effective and less effective inner-city schools has highlighted strong leadership of the principal as a vital characteristic of schools of quality.[1] Yet principals are not miracle workers. The dedicated support of groups in the school's environment (such as parents, members of the central office staff, boards of education, and other officials) is essential.

The excellent school is a well-administered system interacting with a supportive environment. The strongest and most resolute principal and faculty will be severely restrained from achieving high marks of excellence if forces in the environment are at cross-purposes to the objectives of the school. Therefore, principals are accountable for the development of cooperative support among the environmental systems with which the school interacts. For example, in addition to encouraging teamwork within the school, principals must look beyond the four walls of the school for the support of the district office staff to develop good school and community relations.

In this book we emphasize the technical-knowledge and leadership aspects of the principalship. Leadership in both the technical and social subsystems is essential. The school must be thought of as a system functioning within an environment (or suprasystem). As the school interacts with the environment, the principal has the task of promoting among the faculty and support staff a self-sacrificing devotion to educating children and youth to the limits of their abilities.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP

The lack of documentary evidence has clouded the early development of the position of principal; however, the position emerged as schools grew large enough to demand more than one teacher, and school trustees began to appoint "head teachers."[2] Before the appointment of head teachers or

[1]Ronald Edmonds, "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor," *Educational Leadership,* 37 (October 1979), 15–24.

[2]John S. Brubacher, *A History of the Problems of Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947), p. 588.

"principal teachers," the one-room teacher was responsible for everything. As school enrollment burgeoned in urban areas after the colonial period, the appointment of head teachers and teaching principals became accepted. With the growth in complexity of operating schools, the members of governing boards felt the need to have someone "in charge."

The term *principal* was derived from *prince* and means first in rank, degree, importance, and authority. The principal, therefore, was one with authority to make decisions about the operation of the school. According to most accounts, the formal designation of a principal was in Cincinnati about the middle of the 19th century. Yet the position of school principal is primarily a 20th-century development and was concomitant with the great growth of pupil enrollments after 1900.

The development of the principalship dims in significance compared to the rapid changes in the functions of the position in the 20th century. The position emerged as a routine administrative function. Someone had to see that the building was heated, the schedules were set, rules of procedure were followed, and strict discipline was maintained. The technology of operating a school was primitive in comparison to administering a modern comprehensive high school. Since the early schools were small and served a neighborhood, their relationships with parents and other citizens were personal.

The administrative functions of the principal have since become increasingly complex. With the development of pupil transportation capabilities and the consolidation of elementary and high schools, administrative tasks in such areas as curriculum and instruction, business management, school-plant management, pupil personnel, faculty relations, and school–community relations overburdened the principal. Additional staff became necessary, including assistant principals, deans, counselors, department heads, and directors of various activities, all especially evident in the large senior high school. The principals of large elementary and secondary schools lead large administrative staffs. The modern comprehensive school is administered by a team that must cope with many complex problem areas; in fact, many educators believe that the principalship of a large inner-city school is the most difficult administrative position in the field of education.

The emergence of the junior high school and, more recently, the middle school, added other dimensions to the principalship. The junior high school was to serve the unique developmental, emotional, and exploratory needs of students in that age bracket. During the 1950 to 1980 period many junior high schools were converted to middle schools. For years educators complained that the junior high school had become a shadow of its big brother, the senior high school. Consequently, the middle school was envisioned as an opportunity to offer a unique curriculum.