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## The evolving role of American principals: From managerial to instructional to transformational leaders

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### Abstract (Summary)

Trends in the evolution of school principalship in the US from the 1960s to the present are examined. Three roles are analyzed that emerged during this period and that subsequently exerted influence on the principalship - the program manager, instructional leader, and transformational leader. The evolution of these roles in administrative practice are assessed in the light of contextual changes, particularly developments in national and state education policy. Possible directions for future developments in the educational leadership roles of principals in the US are suggested.

### Full Text (6410 words)

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Historical accounts suggest that the roles of American school teachers and administrators have remained relatively stable over the past century 1,2!. Even as waves of reform periodically wash over the education landscape, reshaping professional roles at the margins, the larger body of professional practice is largely unaffected 3!. In contrast with the apparent stability of educational practice, professional rhetoric readily adapts to the American public's oft-changing expectations of public schooling 4,5!. Consequently, American educators are viewed both as highly responsive and impervious to change.

Increasingly, American policy makers have come to view principals as linchpins in plans for educational change and as a favoured target for school reforms. This was particularly true during the 1980s, as education authorities sought to reform the principalship in an image compatible with the currently popular conception of effective schooling 1,6,7!. In practical terms, this shift in perspective implied a de-emphasis in the principal's role as a manager and greater stress on responsibilities for instructional leadership 8!. With the advent of the 1990s, however, concern has been expressed over the compatibility of the principal's role as an instructional leader with emerging conceptions of teacher leadership and professionalism 1,9,10!. This tension leads to our current enquiry into the evolving role of principals in the United States.

This article recounts the evolution of the principalship in the United States over the past 30 years. Three roles played by principals during this period form the focus for this examination: the principal as programme manager, instructional leader, and transformational leader. In each case, I explore the basis of the role and its relationship to the contextual demands for leadership that emerged from the larger policy environment of schools. Finally, I discuss implications of this analysis for the continuing evolution of the principalship in the United States.

### THE 1960S AND 1970S: THE PRINCIPAL AS PROGRAMME MANAGER

The predominant role enacted by American principals, from the 1920s until the 1960s, was one of administrative manager. During this period, there were occasional calls for principals to return to their roots as classroom teachers. For the most part, however, a nationwide trend towards school consolidation, the profession's emulation of corporate management, and the political nature of public educational institutions led the majority of principals to forewear the instructional arena as a domain of primary concern 1,2!.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a new role emphasis emerged for American principals as they became increasingly

responsible for managing federally-sponsored, funded programmes designed to assist special student populations. Compensatory education, bilingual education, education for the handicapped and other federal entitlements required implementation support from the school site administrator. The 1960s and 1970s were also active decades for curricular innovation. Curriculum reform took off in the early 1960s as an infusion of federal dollars gave impetus to widespread innovation in mathematics and science education. Curriculum revisions soon followed in other subject areas and eventually reached most schools and principals. By the mid-1970s, relatively few American principals could avoid the responsibilities that came with programme and curriculum management.

During these decades, American principals assumed a new set of change implementation functions that ranged from monitoring compliance with federal regulations to assisting in staff development and providing direct classroom support to teachers. In contrast to their earlier role, which was oriented to maintaining the status quo, programme/curriculum management was implicitly oriented towards school improvement and change. As a result of increased federal intervention in local policy, principals came to be viewed as potential change agents 11!

Researchers who studied this phenomenon discovered that principals varied widely in their responses to the demands of change implementation 11!. Furthermore, it appeared that variations in the practices of principals were associated with the success or failure of implementation efforts 12!. Thus, studies of change implementation began to solidify what many practitioners already believed; that principals make a difference in the quality of schools as experienced by teachers and students.

Two points concerning this period of evolution in the principal's role are worthy of comment. First, these categorical programmes and curriculum reforms represented innovations conceived and introduced by policy makers outside the local school. In both cases, the principal's role, though apparently crucial, was limited to managing the implementation of an externally devised solution to a social or educational problem. Although these programmes required new levels of teacher interdependence and school-wide co-ordination, the principal's role was to implement innovations whose goals, substance and procedures were designed by others. Second, although these innovations were implicitly oriented towards educational improvement, in reality researchers found that many principals demonstrated a greater concern with meeting criteria for compliance than for programme outcomes. Programme implementation was often viewed as an end rather than a means of improving learning for students 12,13!. This pattern of managerial behaviour was often unwittingly encouraged by programme evaluations, which typically demonstrated a concern for compliance criteria rather than for student or programme outcomes.

Unfortunately, this approach to change implementation also tended to limit the ownership and responsibility assumed by local educators for the long-term institutionalization of programmatic changes 12!. Thus, it is not surprising that the implementation practices of many principals did not support the improvement orientation implicit in the conception of these innovations. These features of the principal's role as programme manager take on significance as we turn our attention to the emergence of the principal as the school's instructional leader during the 1980s.

## THE 1980S: INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS AND EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

In 1979, Ron Edmonds published a seminal article in which he stated unequivocally that strong administrative leadership was a characteristic of instructionally-effective schools. This watershed conclusion gave impetus to calls for principals to engage more actively in leading the school's instructional programme and in focusing staff attention on student outcomes. When combined with the implementation findings of the 1970s, this research suggested a central role for principals in educational improvement. Subsequently, researchers elaborated on Edmond's conclusion in attempts to describe what it meant to exercise instructional leadership 11,14,15!,

The American public's renewed interest in educational improvement and the documented importance of principal leadership converged in the worlds of policy and professional practice. By the mid-1980s, professional norms deemed it unacceptable for principals to focus their efforts solely on maintenance of the school or even on programme management. Instructional leadership became the new educational standard for principals 7,8!. But just what was the nature of this new role and how did principals adapt to these new normative standards?

## A NEW MODEL OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

By the mid-1980s, virtually every state boasted a substantial in-service effort aimed at developing the instructional

leadership of principals 16,17!. School administrators were deluged with a "new orthodoxy" that reflected an effective schools perspective on leadership 7!. The model of instructional leadership disseminated to principals through these state academies was quite specific as to the components of this role.

In contrast to the programme or curriculum manager, the instructional leader was viewed as the primary source of knowledge for development of the school's educational programme. The principal was expected to be knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction and able to intervene directly with teachers in making instructional improvements. High expectations for teachers and students, close supervision of classroom instruction, co-ordination of the school's curriculum, and close monitoring of student progress became synonymous with the role definition of an instructional leader 11,15,18!.

The specification of instructional leadership functions by researchers and programme developers suggested a high degree of clarity in the role of an instructional leader. Yet, a persisting weakness of this literature, cited by several critics, was the inability of the effective schools studies to document the processes by which leaders helped their schools to become instructionally effective. For example, Cuban asserted that:

None of the richly detailed descriptions of high performers can serve as a blueprint for teachers, principals, or superintendents who seek to improve academic achievement. Constructing a positive, enduring school climate remains beyond the planner's pen. Telling principals what to say or do in order to boost teacher expectations of students or to renovate a marginal faculty into one with esprit de corps remains beyond the current expertise of superintendents or professors. Road signs exist, but no maps are yet for sale 19, p. 132!.

Although such critiques from respected academics were fairly common, in fact, the in-service training programmes developed for school leaders in many states attempted to provide road maps for practitioners 6!. Unfortunately, in the absence of clearly delineated co-ordinates, policy makers and programme developers unwittingly relied on their own assumptions and beliefs as they mapped the process most conducive to school improvement 19,20!. A top-down orientation to change was implicit in most policy-driven translations of effective schools research for practitioners during this period.

Principals, described as the catalysts for change in effective schools, were viewed as the key figures in the successful implementation of the effective schools model. Staff development programmes outlined clear, sequential steps for managing school-based improvement teams led by the principal. This was the modal response of training organizations despite the fact that few, if any, effective schools studies described the use of a formal improvement process as the basis for a rise in instructional effectiveness.

Earlier, I noted that programme and curriculum management entailed the implementation of changes conceived by policy makers outside the school. The model of instructional leadership introduced during the 1980s did so as well. The predominant conceptions of schooling taught to principals assumed that the practices of effective teaching (and leadership) could be standardized and controlled 6,21!. Thus, while instructional leadership demanded a new focus and set of work activities from the principal, the role conceived for the principal was still inherently managerial in nature.

## A MODEL OF PRINCIPAL CHANGE

Embedded in this evolving conception of principal leadership was a highly rationalized view of school management and personal, professional change 1,6,19!. The problem of school leadership was framed by policy makers in terms of inadequate principal expertise in curriculum and instruction. Principals lacked knowledge and skills; staff development centres designed for school leaders would provide the missing expertise.

It was the intention of policy makers to reform the managerial behaviour of principals into an instructionally-oriented role. Despite this intent, recent evaluations of state leadership centres find that relatively few resources were actually allocated for coaching and on-site assistance--necessary ingredients for change in practice at the school site 17,22,23!. The results of these evaluations suggest that relatively few administrators left these in-service programmes with the instructional leadership capacities needed for meaningful school improvement 24!.

The paucity of successful instructional leaders is, however, the result of systemic causes that go beyond the nature of principals' pre-service or in-service training 25!. Competing expectations require principals to assume a variety of managerial, political and instructional roles 1!. Even when principals are armed with a more powerful

knowledge base, significant adaptations must occur in the workplace before we can expect to see persisting changes in administrative practice.

There is, however, little evidence that American school district adapted to support the principal's assumption of the instructional leadership role. Principals I frequently returned from training centres to work contexts that made little or no provision for enhancing or supporting new skills in the instructional leadership domain 22,24!. They were exhorted to reorient their role activities in the absence of significant technical assistance, adjustment in role expectations, or policies designed to support the use of new knowledge and skills 22,24!. Thus, it is possible to conclude that, even as the instructional leadership image became firmly entrenched in professional rhetoric, changes in administrative practice were less evident.

his should not be interpreted as a criticism of American principals. It would take a decade or more to transform practice in any profession. Fundamental change in professional roles takes even longer in fields that respond reflexively to environmental demands 4!. Perhaps, if the nation's commitment to the principal as an instructional leader persists for another generation, we will begin to see more significant changes in professional practice.

It is, however, doubtful that this persistence will be forthcoming in the United States. Shifting priorities have already begun to diminish the viability of this image of the principalship. Critics now assert that this conception of the principal as the school's instructional leader is ill-suited to long-term needs for institutional development in schools. Leithwood and his colleagues have concluded:

A!n emphasis on instructional leadershW was wholly appropriate and timely to bring to school leadership in the early 1980s when the term gained a widespread following. But "instructional leadership" conveys a meaning which encompasses only a portion of those activities now associated with effective school leadership 13, p. 10}.

Thus, just when the image of the instructional leader gained professional currency, it began to be questioned. In part, the conceptual and practical limitations discussed earlier undermined the long-term viability of this role's primacy. Beyond this, however, emergent environmental forces began to reshape the context of American education. In particular, shifting perspectives on the needs of the nation's schools changed the normative environment for the practice of leadership. In the next section, I outline the nature of these changes and examine their impact on the role of American principals.

## THE 1990S: ENTER THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER

Recognition that the current system of education is not adequately preparing students has led policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents to re-examine the assumptions that underlie schooling in America. For example, the Carnegie Report on Education and the Economy concluded that fundamental changes were needed in the organizational structure, professional roles, and goals of American public education 26!. Increasingly, reformers recommended the decentralization of authority over curricular and instructional decisions from the school district to the school site, expanded roles for teachers and parents in the decision-making process, and an increased emphasis on complex instruction and active learning.

Underlying these proposed changes is the assumption that those adults who are closest to students--staff members and parents--are in the best position to make wise judgements about changes that are needed in the educational programme of the school. In school-based management, decisions affecting the curricular and instructional programmes that were traditionally made at centralized levels (i.e. the state or school district) devolve to schools. When districts also specify provisions for shared decision making, the involvement of teachers and parents in the decision-making process is no longer subject to the principal's discretion 27!.

Some proponents of school restructuring base their arguments for new governance structures on the need for more sophisticated approaches to teaching and learning 8,10,28!. Emerging conceptions of teaching differ substantially from the notions of effective teaching disseminated during the 1980s 28!. Whereas earlier effectiveness-based conceptions of teaching and schooling attempted to specify the instructional behaviours of teachers, proponents of complex instruction emphasize a more dynamic process of teacher decision making. Smylie and Conyers capture this perspective in their description of teaching

A complex, dynamic, interactive, intellectual activity, not as a string of routinized tasks...If teachers are to meet the rapidly changing needs of their students, their practice cannot be prescribed or standardized. Teachers wiU

require substantial autonomy to make appropriate instructional decisions. These decisions go beyond selecting from an array of previously mastered routines. They include crafting idiosyncratic strategies to achieve classroom, school, and district goals 21, p. 13!.

Potentially, this conception of teaching has important implications for the manner in which schools are organized and administered. The term "restructuring" suggests an explicit attempt to reshape the school so it can better identify and meet locally determined needs. The school is now viewed as the unit responsible for the initiation of change, not just the implementation of changes conceived by others (the predominant view during the 1970s and 1980s). Teachers are viewed as important sources of expertise, rather than as the targets of others' efforts to improve schooling 21!. By implication, the basis for school leadership expands to include teachers (and parents) as well as the principal. These facets highlight a new role for principals (and teachers) in problem finding and problem solving--a role increasingly referred to as transformational leadership.

At the outset of this discussion, it is important to emphasize that the components of school restructuring discussed above are not currently being implemented by large numbers of American school districts. Furthermore, few of the restructuring efforts under way appear comprehensive or uniform in approach. Despite this acknowledged variation, to the extent that American schools do restructure, the changing organizational context will require different leadership from principals. This attempt to suggest the nature of this evolution in the principal's role is based largely on observations of principals in schools that are currently engaged in the type of restructuring noted above 29!.

## RESTRUCTURED SCHOOLS AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The instructional leadership imagery of the 1980s highlighted the centrality of the principal's role in co-ordinating and controlling curriculum and instruction. In contrast, advocates of school restructuring emphasize the diffuse nature of school leadership. As Sergiovanni has noted, the term "instructional leader suggests that others have got to be followers. The legitimate instructional leaders, if we have to have them, ought to be teachers. And principals ought to be leaders of leaders: people who develop the instructional leadership in their teachers" 30!.

Leithwood and his colleagues capture this distinction in approaches to leadership by referring to the instructional leader as "leading from the front or the middle of the band" and the "transformation leader" as "leading from the back of the band" 30, p. 6!. These comments suggest several dimensions on which a restructured school could change the contextual needs for leadership. These include the source of the school's goals for improvement, the nature of the principal's implementation function, and the source of expertise for school improvement.

Source of school goals. The instructional leader attempted to focus staff efforts on the goal of improved student learning. In general, this goal was accepted by the principal as a given; it had either been defined by policy makers at other levels of the education hierarchy or was derived from the principal's personal vision of effective schooling. The problem--inadequate student achievement--was seldom defined collectively by staff inside the school. Thus, training programmes for principals strongly emphasized the importance of a school mission focusing on student achievement. This model placed a premium on principals' ability to get others to accept this particular definition of the problem and to bring teachers' practice in line with efforts to address it.

School restructuring calls for a greater emphasis on problem finding and goal setting by the staff and community. A school's goals are based on problems identified by those who interact on a daily basis with students. Neither the principal's personal vision nor the mandates from higher authorities are the key determinants of an individual school's direction. Subsequent educational changes are conceived primarily by those inside the school, rather than by district, state or federal policy makers.

The emphasis on problem finding further distinguishes restructured schools as contexts for leadership. This perspective assumes that schools often face complex, idiosyncratic problems that are frequently hostile to routine solutions. Thus, Leithwood and his colleague contend that transformational leadership will focus on, "the enhancement of individual and collective problem-solving capacities of organizational members; such capacities are exercised in their identification of goals to be achieved and practices to be used in their achievement" 13, p. 7!.

Implementation functions. The centrality attributed to the principal's role in effective schools led to a view of the principal as the manager of others in the school. Given this perspective, even concepts that are inherently teacher

oriented such as collegiality and school culture came to represent tools to be managed by the principal. Despite differences between the roles of programme manager and instructional leader, both were essentially managerial in nature. Both entailed managing the implementation of packaged solutions designed to address predefined problems. The principal was provided with a new science curriculum, a set of procedures and a budget for managing a compensatory education programme, steps for aligning the curriculum, effective teaching and clinical supervision models, or a process for school improvement planning. They entail implementing an imported solution to address someone else's definition of the problem faced in a local school.

In restructured schools, the principal must not only assist staff in reaching their own conception of the problems facing the school, but also help generate and develop potentially unique solutions. Thus, discussions of school restructuring have emphasized the importance of collegiality, experimentation, teacher reflection and school-based staff development. The focus on collective problem solving and capacity building implies a different role for the principal. These are essentially leadership, not managerial, functions that involve a different relationship of the principal to staff and parents, to problems and solutions.

Source of expertise. Underlying the programme management and instructional leadership roles is the assumption that the knowledge needed for school improvement lies outside the school. This led to an emphasis on staff development training for principals and teachers conceived and directed from outside the school. Also implicit in the instructional leadership literature is the notion that principals must have the knowledge of curriculum and instruction necessary for improvement interventions. This assumption has, however, seldom been supported in reality, particularly in secondary schools.

With school restructuring, the principal, rather than representing the primary source of professional expertise and instructional leadership, is exhorted to tap the expertise and leadership of teachers. Inherent in this orientation is the assumption that collective decision making represents a stronger response to solving non-routine problems. This also highlights the importance of principals' ability to work collaboratively with staff in group problem solving 13!.

In restructured schools, principals must spend a greater proportion of their time working with staff in collaborative modes. Decisions that were previously made alone or with staff in an advisory capacity, now require extensive consultation with various stakeholders. This represents a dramatic shift in the nature of the principal's role even for those administrators who have used advisory committees. Decision making at the school level is no longer a discretionary or private activity for the principal.

The discussion of solutions to the problems faced by schools raises again the issue of instructional improvements. The restructuring movement encourages teachers to explore, develop and use a wider repertoire of instructional strategies 8,10,28!. The idea that a single model of classroom instruction or school leadership is appropriate for all schools is incompatible with the assumptions of school-based reform and improvement 9,10!.

This conception of school reform places a premium on the development of knowledge within the school, for both teachers and principals. This suggests a potentially important role for principals that, interestingly, emerged from the instructional leadership literature. In institutions that devote considerable energy to collective problem solving, principals may best be thought of as "head learners" 9!. This role calls attention to the importance of valuing and modelling ongoing growth and development for all members of the school community. However, in contrast to the earlier models, it also suggests the importance of joint development activities in which principals participate with staff.

A related role to be played by the principal is enhancing connections between the school and sources of knowledge in the environment. School staffs will not always possess the knowledge and skills needed to solve the educational and social problems they identify. The development of a faculty's problem-solving capacity must not only involve the sharing and validation of their own craft knowledge, but also the development of new knowledge 31!.

This notion is compatible with emerging conceptions of teacher leadership, yet maintains a flexible role for principals that remains true to their lineage. I would also note that the leadership development centres which arose during the 1980s have already laid the groundwork for this role by stimulating principals to view their professional development as a part of the job.

## DISCUSSION

In this article I have examined the evolution of the American principalship over the past three decades. In this final section, I reflect on the extent to which the practice, as opposed to the image, of the American principalship has changed. I conclude by speculating briefly on the impact that current trends may have on the continuing evolution of the principalship in the United States.

### HAS THE AMERICAN PRINCIPALSHIP CHANGED?

Historians have suggested that America's public schools have traditionally functioned as a crucible for social experimentation <sup>21</sup>. The birth of the American common school was itself part of an experiment in nation building <sup>32</sup>. Public schools both manifest and inculcate predominant social values, even when they foreswear an explicit focus on values education (e.g. in the back-to-basics movement of the 1980s). Thus, education is properly viewed as a value-driven activity. The American public schools have and will continue to function as a vehicle for sorting and blending societal priorities and expectations <sup>2,4</sup>!

Given this function, we can observe that an important facet of the principal's job involves interpreting community values and ensuring that they are reflected appropriately in the local school <sup>2,33</sup>!. By virtue of their position in the organizational hierarchy, principals find themselves at the intersection where forces seeking the maintenance of traditional values meet those that press for change. Tyack and Hansot <sup>2</sup>! have elegantly portrayed the ways in which American school leaders have historically responded to these normative pressures for stability and change. Here, I focus more specifically on the extent to which recent changes in the normative context of schools have influenced the role of school principals.

Although this article has portrayed the principalship in terms of predominant images, in reality, principals must integrate a variety of role orientations if they are to succeed as school leaders <sup>1</sup>. The notion of role integration does not, however, explain away the fact that principals tend to emphasize one or another role. Cuban <sup>1</sup>! has written of the "managerial imperative" that subtly induces school administrators to disengage from classroom instruction. He refers to this tendency towards administrative and managerial activities as embedded in the "DNA" of the principalship.

While I believe this metaphor to be useful, I would argue that the same metaphor is also of utility in explaining a complementary pattern in the evolution of the principalship: the persisting expectation that principals should play a role in instruction. Even as the dominant image of their role shifted to professional manager, the American principalship retained vestigial memories of its nineteenth century forebear, the headteacher.

Prior to the instructional leadership movement of the 1980s, principals still saw this function as a normative component of their role. Surveys of principals conducted during the 1970s found that a majority of American principals continued to believe that they should function as instructional leaders. Moreover, principals were acutely aware of the gap between this professional expectation and the reality of school administration. That is, self-reports from principals indicated that relatively few met their own sense of the profession's standards for instructional leadership <sup>34</sup>!.

During the 1980s, pressure for principals to exercise their instructional leadership role increased markedly. As I have described, however, the conditions necessary for professional change to occur were either absent or lacking important elements <sup>23</sup>!. Besides professional rhetoric and perhaps a desire to reduce the gap between self-expectations and reality, there were relatively few incentives (and a host of disincentives) for principals to assume instructional leadership responsibilities in a serious manner.

Given this context for change, I suggest that it was possible for principals to accept the importance of instructional leadership and to make symbolic efforts without effecting significant changes in their overall pattern of practice. As noted previously, this conclusion finds preliminary support from evaluations of leadership development efforts in the United States and abroad <sup>22,24,35</sup>!.

The evolution of the principal from school manager to instructional leader suggests that policy makers and principals were ready to adopt the instructional leadership image. The imagery responded to change societal expectations and potentially added meaning to the principal's role in the school. In reality, however, implementation of the role fell short of these expectations. In fact, I would contend that the instructional leadership

model adopted by policy makers during the 1980s, like many earlier innovations, was never truly implemented by many American principals 24!.

In sum, the evolution from manager to instructional leader resulted in a new and considerable set of demands on principals. However, the aspiring instructional leader operated in a context that made relatively few policy adjustments designed to reshape others' expectations of the principal. Thus, eager principals often found themselves swimming upstream in their attempts to put instructional leadership theory into practice at the school site. I believe that the reality of the principal as instructional leader continues to lag well behind the rhetoric and that less has changed in the practice of the principalship, than optimistic observers might wish.

## THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN PRINCIPALSHIP

What, however, is the prognosis for the principalship in the United States if school systems adopt the radical version of school restructuring described earlier? Are principals prepared to assume the role of transformational leaders?

In my view, the changes in practice proposed for principals under school restructuring are more dramatic than those of the preceding decade. In the context of shared decision making, the principal's role is ever more visible and less buffered from the expectations of stakeholders (e.g. teachers, parents, non-certified staff). Even in school districts where central office monitoring remains infrequent, normative and policy-related pressures are likely to force principals to behave in ways that diminish the domain of acceptable practice. Thus, at the school level, the expectations of parents and teachers regarding the authority and leadership style of the principal are changing. Notably, the fact that these role changes are supported by district or state policy places them outside the discretion of the principal.

For principals whose careers have spanned the eras of the school manager and instructional leader, this represents a significant increase in the degree of uncertainty and ambiguity they experience in their work. A stock phrase in the restructuring literature is that school leaders will need a greater tolerance for ambiguity. While under some conditions, ambiguity may contribute to creativity, it is also true that there is a long tradition in which managers seek to reduce role ambiguity and task uncertainty.

As school managers, principals reduced uncertainty in their work by accepting technical uncertainty in the work of teachers as a fact of life. They assumed that, within a broad range of teacher practice, it was difficult to specify one way of teaching as superior to another. The implication was that close supervision and instructional improvement were low pay-off activities, fraught with potential conflict for the school administrator.

Similarly, there was little or no emphasis on defining a common set of school goals. It was taken for granted that schools were intended to achieve multiple goals, no one of which was consistently viewed as more important than the others for an extended period of time. Under these conditions, principals tended to focus their attention on maintenance functions that were characterized by low levels of uncertainty such as facility management, scheduling, and discipline.

As instructional leaders, principals were asked to engage in instructional improvement under the assumption that greater clarity was achievable both in the goals of schooling and in the practice of teaching. In essence, the ends of schooling were defined for principals by policy makers as improved student achievement. The means were specified in terms of selected models of classroom instruction and school improvement. This menu-driven approach to improvement reduced uncertainty for the principal by delineating what to look for in classroom teaching and how to proceed with school improvement.

In fact, this complexity is an inherent component of educational leadership. However, for principals poorly equipped to cope with this complexity, the menu-based approach made it possible for them to assert a limited form of instructional management. Unfortunately, it was a form that could only have limited impact on practice in schools and that may not be most appropriate for the evolving needs of educational institutions 6,24!.

Part of the impetus for restructuring schools arose from the recognition that the rigidly prescriptive reforms of the early 1980s would not accomplish the desired ends for students. Thus, the reforms embodied in restructured schools again raise the level of ambiguity in the work of principals. Goals are no longer vague; nor are they givens. Yet, they must be clearly defined for the purpose of accountability. Furthermore, staff and community must be



involved in the development of goals in meaningful ways. Different curricular and instructional approaches are no longer equally valued; nor have they been reduced to a single model. School staffs must thoughtfully examine current practice and make informed choices as to directions for the development of new practice. Consistent with the earlier discussion, the school will become the initiator of change, rather than simply the implementation agent.

While this scenario is ambitious, it is difficult for us to envision a large portion of American educators who are currently eager to make this transition. Moreover, there is little evidence in the history of American public schooling that leads us to be optimistic about the possibilities for such dramatic change. Thus, it would be Quixotic to assume that a large segment of American schools will engage in the type of restructuring envisioned in this article.

A more likely scenario is already developing in several states. Here, limited forms of school-based management and shared decision making are being explored. Shared decision making is being coded in local policy, but considerable discretion is being left to the principal both over the decisions brought to the school-based council and the nature of its decision-making authority. Under these conditions, we can expect to find continued dissemination of the 1980s instructional leadership model with limited adaptations for shared decision making. Already, many effective school-based leadership development programmes have discovered ways to reconcile the strong leader imagery of effective schools with the transformational notions inherent in school restructuring. In this way schools will continue to respond vigorously to changing normative expectations, while at the same time limiting the erosion of traditional notions of schooling and leadership.

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