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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the research concerning the relationship between the organizational and social context of schools and principal instructional leadership. The discussion centers on several contextual variables that include school level, staff composition, technical clarity and complexity, and district context. Particular attention is focused on the ways in which the social context of schools influences the principal's leadership role. Findings support the notions that the nature of the school's technology, the type of district support, the characteristics of the teaching staff, the school level, and the social context combine to form a school culture all of which creates a context for principal action, and more specifically, an appropriate style of instructional leadership. (JAM)

ORGANIZATIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT AND THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL[1]

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Running Head: Organizational and Social Context

Over the past quarter century the notion that leadership in organizations is situational has reached the status of a truism. Few would argue against the assertion that a leader must take the particular characteristics of the organizational setting into consideration when acting. Common sense, as well as numerous studies, confirm that a variety of contextual variables influence the nature of organizational leadership.

Despite this development, research in educational administration has paid relatively little attention to the organization's impact on school administrators (Bridges, 1977; 1982). Most models of educational leadership are uni-directional. They attribute the effectiveness of the organization to the leader without considering the nature of the school context and its influence on the actions of school leaders (Bossert, Rowan, Dwyer, & Lee, 1982; Lotto, 1984; Murphy, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1983; Rowan, Dwyer, & Bossert, 1982; Sirotnik, 1985). This inattention to the school context is especially apparent in discussions of the principal's role as instructional leader (Jordan, 1986). Researchers have consistently interpreted the finding that effective urban elementary schools are characterized by strong instructional leadership to mean that strong leadership by the principal is a prerequisite for improving schools (e.g., Brookover et al., 1982; Lipham, 1982; Shoemaker & Fraser, 1981).

This interpretation is reflected in the structure of school improvement programs. These typically carve out a uniform role for the principal regardless of the school context (Farrar, Neufeld & Miles, 1983; Firestone & Herriott, 1982). Even if strong instructional leadership is necessary to generate improvement in low-income, urban, elementary schools, the appropriate style of instructional leadership in other schools may vary depending upon both organizational (e.g., school size) and environmental (e.g., community support) factors.

In this article we review research on the relationship between the organizational and social context of schools and principal instructional leadership. We discuss this relationship with respect to several contextual variables including school level, staff composition, technical clarity and complexity, and district context. We pay particular attention to ways in which the social context of schools influences the instructional leadership of principals.

Limitations of Research on Instructional Leadership

A growing body of research has examined the effectiveness of principals and their schools (see Bossert et al., 1982; Cotton & Savard, 1980; Dwyer, 1984; Glassman, 1984; Greenfield, 1982; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982; Persell, Cookson, & Lyons, 1982; Russell, Mazzarella, White, & Maurer, 1985; Rutherford, 1985; Yukl, 1982). This research serves as the knowledge base for many school improvement and principal training programs (Murphy & Hallinger, in press a). As a result, principals are now being expected to play a more active instructional leadership role than has been the case in the recent past (Coleman, 1983). It is assumed that this instructional leadership activity will improve schoolwide instructional processes and student learning. We believe, however, that the efficacy of these efforts to improve schools by applying leverage at the level of the principalship is made problematic by important limitations of the research base.

First, studies of principal leadership and school effectiveness have not utilized research designs that allow for the specification of a causal relationship between principal leadership and school outcomes (Bossert et al., 1982; Kroeze, 1984). Most of the research has used case study (New York State, 1974; Venezky & Winfield, 1979; Weber, 1971), ethnographic

(Dormoyer, 1985; Dwyer, Lee, Rowan, & Bossert, 1983) or correlational designs (Biester, Druse, Beyer, & Heller, 1984; Estler, 1985; Glasman, 1984; Jackson, 1982; O'Day, 1984; Ogawa & Hart, 1985). As Bossert and his colleagues (1982) have noted, it is possible that the, "perception of strong leadership [found in this research] results from the process of becoming an effective school," rather than from the behavior of the principal (p. 36). In addition, few studies have investigated the influence of principal leadership on mediating variables such as improved instruction (Gall et al., 1984) or on outcome measures such as student achievement (see Biester et al., 1984; Glassman, 1984; High & Achilles, 1986; Jackson, 1982; Krug, 1986; O'Day, 1984; Ogawa & Hart, 1985). Thus, the interpretation that effective principals produce effective schools has yet to be substantiated.

The second limitation is also related to the issue of research design. To begin with, the research base itself is small. Little original research has been conducted. In addition, most studies have investigated schools at a single point in time. Even the case studies typically do not take place over a period of time greater than one school year. Few researchers have looked at the process by which principals promote change in student achievement (Taylor, 1986). Thus, the role of the principal as instructional leader is oversimplified and our understanding of how to create effective schools, and more specifically, of the principal's role in promoting school improvement is limited (Cotton & Savard, 1980; Cuban, 1984; Kroeze, 1984).

A third limitation of research on effective principal leadership concerns the population of schools that has been investigated and the outcomes used to assess organizational effectiveness (Farrar, Neufeld, &

Miles, 1983; Rowan, Bossert, & Dwyer, 1983). Almost all of the effective schools studies have investigated low-income, urban, elementary schools and used student achievement on standardized tests as the sole criterion for assessing effectiveness. Even if we accept principal leadership as a causal factor, it is still unclear whether those leadership behaviors that are "effective" in this specific population of schools will have a similar impact in other types of schools (e.g., high schools; see Firestone & Herriott, 1982). There is even less certainty that leadership behaviors designed to promote student achievement will also contribute to the realization of other organizational goals (e.g., non-cognitive student outcomes; see Blust, Coldiron, & Lark, 1984) or other dimensions of organizational effectiveness (e.g., innovation; see Murphy, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1983). Thus, prescriptions to "make your school more effective" that are based upon these findings may lack validity in schools that pursue different goals, accept the notion that effectiveness is a multidimensional construct, or that vary in the population of students served (Hoy & Ferguson, 1985).

Finally, instructional leadership is seldom defined in concrete terms (Hoy & Ferguson, 1985; Jordan, 1986; Persell, Cookson, & Lyons, 1982; Yukl, 1982). In only a few studies is this domain of leadership operationalized in terms of specific policies, practices and behaviors initiated by the principal (see for example Dwyer et al., 1983; Hallinger, 1983; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a; 1985b; Jackson, 1982; O'Day, 1984; Russell et al., 1985). The lack of operational definitions makes it difficult to compare findings across studies. It also leaves an important question unanswered: what should a principal do in order to be an instructional leader?

These limitations of the research base make it difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of principal instructional leadership. The first two limitations serve as a caution to those who would cast the principal in the role of the white knight, heralding in an era of radically improved schools. Despite renewed optimism concerning the potential impact of principals, several influential researchers have argued for the specification of a less heroic role for school administrators in recognition of the many organizational constraints under which they operate (Bridges, 1977; 1979; Cuban, 1984; March, 1978; Rowan, Dwyer, & Bossert, 1982; Weick, 1982). The third and fourth limitations discussed above provide the basis for the remainder of this chapter in which we explore the relationship between the organizational and social context of the school and principal instructional leadership behavior.

Organizational Context and Instructional Leadership

The literature on organizational leadership focuses attention on three broad categories of factors--personal, organizational, and environmental--that influence principal behavior (see especially Bossert et al., 1922). In this article we focus on the two "contextual variables" in the Bossert framework (for a discussion of personal characteristics see Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980 and Greenfeld, 1982). We begin with a review of organizational factors. In the next section we review environmental factors under the topic of school social context.

Several organizational variables have been studied sufficiently so that preliminary proposition can be generated concerning their impact on principal leadership. These include the nature of the district context and three school level variables -- the complexity of the instructional technology employed by the school, staff composition, and school level. We

note in advance that the presentation of these variables as discrete entities with independent effects on principal behavior may give a distorted view of organizational leadership. In reality, these factors interact with each other to create an overall context within which principals act.

District Context

The role of the district office in promoting instructional improvement has received rather limited attention from researchers (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1975; Bridges, 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; Hart & Ogawa, 1984; Murphy & Hallinger, in press b). Thus, relatively little is known about the impact of the district context on school level effects in general (Herriott & Muse, 1982) or principal leadership specifically. Recent attempts to apply the effective schools findings at the district level, however, suggest that the district administration does have a role in both providing and promoting instructional leadership (Cuban, 1984; Murphy & Hallinger, in press c; Rowan, 1983).

The district context influences principals in at least three complementary ways. First, district support is often linked with successful efforts to implement innovations in schools (Berman, 1984; Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984; Finn, 1983; Fullan, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983a). Actors at the school site seek signals from the district office to assess the commitment of the superintendent and district staff to the implementation of particular innovations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). It is logical to conclude that principals are more likely to engage in instructional leadership behavior under conditions of district support than in it absence.

District support can take the form of additional resources, staff training, technical assistance, better information, or increased authority.

One resource that principals need to fulfill their instructional leadership responsibilities is time. The district can address the problem of scarce time by adopting policies that delineate the job priorities of the principal. Similarly, the district can increase the efficiency of principal time by providing coordinated assistance for commonly occurring teaching problems (Bridges, 1984). Principals often will need additional skills in order to effectively carry out their instructional leadership responsibilities (Alvy & Coladarci, 1985; Champagne, Morgan, Rawlings, & Swany, 1984; Peterson & Finn, 1985). The district can encourage professional development and other instructional leadership training for principals. District staff can provide technical assistance by aiding principals in establishing standards and expectations, the analysis and interpretation of test scores, and the coordination and control of curriculum and instruction. Districts can also make better information available to principals through the administration of annual community opinion surveys. Recent findings further suggest principals may need additional authority if they are to be held accountable for school improvement (Bridges, 1984). In particular, principals may need greater authority in the selection of staff (Teddlie, Falkowski, Stringfield, Dessalie, & Garvue, 1984).

A second strategy districts can use to promote principal instructional leadership is to change the district culture and make excellence in teaching a top priority (Bridges 1984). Numerous descriptive accounts of superintendent job behavior convey the impression that curriculum and instruction occupy a relatively low priority at the top of the organization (Duignan, 1980; English, 1980; Hannaway & Sproull, 1978-79; Larson, Bussom, & Vicars, 1981; Pitner & Ogawa, 1980; Willower & Fraser, 1979-80). This

norm is reflected in the work activity of principals. They too spend most of their workday on managerial tasks that are only tangentially related to instruction (California, 1984; Hanson, 1981; Little & Bird, 1984; Martin & Willower, 1981; Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie, & Hurwitz, 1984; Peterson, 1977-78; Willis, 1980). The superintendent can begin to change the district context for instructional improvement by providing symbolic leadership, modelling the type of behavior most highly valued by the organization. District goals, standards, policies, reward systems, and superintendent behavior communicate district expectations and priorities with respect to the job role of the principal. Preliminary reports indicate that comprehensive attempts by superintendents to change the district context can have effects at the school site (Hallinger & Murphy, 1982; McCormack-Larkin & Kritek, 1982).

The third way in which the district context can influence the instructional leadership of principals is through the manipulation of formal and informal controls. In general, district administrators have exercised little control over principals, particularly in the areas of curriculum and instruction (Deal & Celotti, 1980; Hannaway & Sproull, 1978-79; Morris et al., 1984; Peterson, 1985; Rowan, 1983). Tentative results, however, suggest that districts can bring about district-wide instructional improvement through increased coordination and control of principals (Murphy, Hallinger & Peterson, in press; Murphy, Hallinger, Peterson, & Lotto, in press; Rosenholtz, 1985). Superintendents hold principals accountable for spending more time on the tasks associated with instructional leadership. Systematic assessment of principal instructional leadership is one way of communicating accountability (Bridges, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a; Murphy, Hallinger, & Peterson, 1984).

Despite the small direct effects of school district organization on student achievement (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1975; Hart & Ogawa, 1984), there is little doubt that the expectations of the superintendent and district context shape the leadership behavior of principals (Crowson & Morris, 1984; Vann, 1979) and teachers (Schwille, 1986). As noted elsewhere, however, the process of translating findings concerning effective schools into district programs is complex and not without potentially negative consequences (Cuban 1984). Current efforts to implement instructional management programs at the district level will provide needed information regarding specific ways in which variations in district organization affect the work of principals.

Clarity and Complexity of Instructional Technology

The technology of an organization is the process which it employs in order to accomplish its goals. In education, the technology designed to produce student learning is the curriculum and instruction to which students are exposed. Organizational theorists maintain that two aspects of an organization's technology - clarity and complexity - have an impact on the behavior of managers (Thompson, 1967). In educational organizations, these two characteristics of the instructional technology influence the degree to which managers coordinate and control the work of teachers (Cohen & Miller, 1980; Hannaway & Sproull, 1978-79; March, 1978; Peterson, 1985).

Clarity refers to the extent to which the instructional process is understood and can be specified. Schools vary in the clarity of the instructional technologies they employ. Traditionally, most schools have utilized an unclear technology (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; March, 1978; Weick, 1982). Individual teachers employ instructional strategies with which they are most familiar and comfortable. They also implement their

own conception of the curriculum, including making molar decisions about what subjects or curriculum units are taught and sub-molar decisions about instructional emphasis provided to the various skill areas of a particular subject (Berliner, 1983; Freeman et al., 1983). This has often resulted in the use of a wide variety of instructional strategies within any particular school, reflecting the belief that no one method of teaching is more effective than another.

Two relatively recent developments have made it possible for schools to utilize instructional technologies characterized by higher degrees of clarity. First, research on effective instruction has found that, under certain conditions, teaching models that emphasize interactive instruction by the teacher result in greater gains in student achievement (Brophy & Good, 1986; Good, Grouws, & Ebmeier, 1983; Murphy, Weil, & McGreal, 1986; Rosenshine, 1983). The use of interactive teaching models enhances the clarity of instruction and increases student engagement and learning. Another finding with similar implications concerns curricular coordination. Coordination of curricular objectives with materials and test instruments also results in increased student achievement (Cooley & Leinhardt, 1980; Eubanks & Levine, 1983; Harnisch, 1983; Wellisch et al., 1978). These findings suggest that technical clarity may increase when a school staff uses a coordinated approach to teaching a particular subject, adopts a preferred model of instruction, specifies and teaches the components of the curriculum, or uses a shared language about teaching and learning (see Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1985).

The clarity of the school's technology creates a context for principal leadership. In situations characterized by greater clarity, closer supervision is possible and may have positive results. The more directive

instructional leadership oftentimes exercised by principals in effective schools is, to some degree, made possible by the greater clarity of the technology used in these schools. Effective urban elementary schools tend to emphasize a limited number of learning outcomes, break the curriculum down into a set of common instructional objectives, coordinate those objectives with testing, and use a somewhat more uniform approach to instruction (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985c). For example, the staff in an effective school might participate in a schoolwide staff development program on a model of direct instruction. Once they have been trained in this instructional approach, the principal is able to specify the components of a quality instructional lesson which can be analyzed in classroom observations. The specification of a method of instruction and delineation of curricular objectives add clarity to the school's instructional technology. This makes it possible for the principal to provide more valid assessments of classroom instruction and student learning (Bridges, 1984).

In cases where the instructional technology is more nebulous, highly directive instructional leadership behavior can be counterproductive (Davis & Stackhouse, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1975). Close supervision of instruction in the absence of a clear understanding, language, or policy concerning the components of the curriculum or effective classroom instruction may result in high levels of administrator - staff conflict (Cuban, 1984). In such contexts principals often emphasize indirect types of instructional leadership behavior. These include symbolic, facilitative, and political strategies (Cunningham, 1985; Deal & Celotti, 1980; Duckworth, 1981; Duke, 1986; Firestone & Wilson, 1985; March, 1978; Peters, 1978; Weick, 1982).

Technical complexity refers to the degree to which the instructional processes of the school require interdependence and coordination among the teaching staff. The complexity of the instructional technology utilized by schools varies. For example, the departmentalized curricular organization of secondary schools is more highly differentiated than the traditional form of elementary school organization. Similarly, schools that participate in categorically funded programs exhibit greater complexity. These schools must adopt specific instructional, monitoring and reporting procedures not required of other schools. Instructional techniques such as team teaching also result in greater complexity as teachers are more interdependent than their counterparts in traditionally organized schools.

In each of these examples, the increased complexity of the school's technology affects the principal's instructional leadership role. Evidence from several studies suggests that increased complexity necessitates increased coordination on the part of the principal (Cohen & Miller, 1980; Kroeze, 1984; Wellishch et al., 1978). Both the repertoire and frequency of coordinating behaviors appear to increase in schools that utilize more complex methods of organizing and delivering instruction (Cohen, Miller, Bredo, & Duckworth, 1977; Deal & Celotti, 1980; Duckworth, 1981; Wellisch et al., 1978). Interestingly, in educational organizations increased technical complexity is not necessarily accompanied by increased control on the part of principals (Cohen et al., 1977; Cohen & Miller, 1980).

These findings suggest that the nature of the instructional technology employed by the school affects the instructional leadership role of the principal. More specifically, the degree to which principals control instruction is affected by the clarity of the school's curricular and instructional processes. In general, a high degree of principal control

over instructional processes seems less appropriate in contexts characterized by wide diversity of instructional goals and methods.

The principal's role in coordinating the school's program is also tempered by the complexity of the instructional technology. In general, increased complexity demands greater coordination. It is important to note, however, that there are at least three routes by which the principal can increase coordination. First, the principal can assume a more active and central role in curricular coordination. This seems to be strategy employed in instructionally effective elementary schools (Bossert et al., 1982; Murphy, Weil, Hallinger & Mitman, 1985; Wellisch et al., 1978). Second, the principal can delegate authority to assistant principals, department heads, special program coordinators, or grade leaders (DeBevoise, 1984; Gersten & Carnine, 1981; Hord, Hall, & Stiegelbauer, 1983; Jordan, 1986; Sergiovanni, 1984). Here the principal maintains responsibility for coordinating the overall educational program but is less directly involved in carrying out the routine tasks. Third, the principal can increase coordination by offering additional opportunities for staff interaction in professional activities such as staff development and curricular planning (Cohen et al., 1977; Lambert & Lambert, 1982; Little, 1982; Roseholtz, 1985). The effectiveness of a particular strategy will depend on the nature of the school's instructional program as well as on other contextual variables such as school size, school level, and staff composition.

Staff Composition

The primary assumption underlying contingency models of leadership is that no one style of leadership is appropriate to all situations or contexts. To be effective, leaders must adapt their behavior to the character-

istics of subordinates and to the specific organizational context (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). In schools, the staff characteristics that most directly influence the leadership behavior of principals include structural factors, personal characteristics, and organizational attitudes.

Structural factors describe the average and distribution of characteristics of faculty members as a group, such as age, educational level, years of experience, and staff stability. Although there are few clear-cut prescriptions, it has been suggested that these structural conditions influence how principals coordinate and control the work of teachers. In their observational study of five principals, Dwyer and his colleagues (1983) found that the two principals who were least intrusive in the teaching - learning process supervised the most experienced staffs. Those principals with more directive leadership styles had either less mature staffs or lower levels of staff stability. This research and other studies of organizational control in schools (Cohen et al., 1977) suggest a working hypothesis. As teaching staffs mature and stabilize, the leadership strategies of principals should shift from formal directive approaches to more informal indirect leaderships styles.

A commonly studied personal characteristic of teachers is intelligence, generally measured by scores on standardized tests. Researchers have noted that verbal ability is the only personal characteristic of teachers that is consistently and positively related to student achievement (Bridge, Judd, & Mook, 1979). Although research on the relationship between teacher intelligence and principal leadership style is limited, the available evidence argues for differing approaches to leadership based upon teacher intellectual ability. For example, Glickman (1985) argues that principals should vary their leadership style when supervising teachers with differing

abilities to think abstractly. He suggests that less directive supervisory styles are appropriate with teachers who possess higher abstract thinking skills. Teachers with less abstract thinking ability, may require more directive supervisory behavior (Glickman, 1981).

Since the earliest formulations of situational models of leadership organizational theorists have argued that leadership style should vary with the organizational attitudes of staff. When staff commitment to the organization is either relatively high or low, directive types of leadership are appropriate. When the supportiveness of the staff towards the manager is moderate, less directive, more personalized leadership activity appears to be more effective (Fiedler & Chemers, 1974). Again, looking at the implications of teacher commitment for instructional leadership, developmental supervision advocates suggest the following: where commitment is weak, more control needs to be exercised by the principal. Where such commitment is high, less directive, more collaborative behavior may be appropriate (Glickman, 1981).

School Level

School level is a prominent yet poorly understood characteristic of American public schools (Firestone & Herriott, 1982). Educators tend to underestimate the impact of differences between elementary and secondary school organization on school leadership. This inattention is reflected in the structure of school improvement programs, few of which make allowances for the level of schooling (Farrar, Neufeld, & Miles, 1983).

There is, however, growing concern over the tendency to generalize findings on principals gleaned from studies of elementary schools to their counterparts in secondary schools. One cause for concern derives from the

paucity of systematic studies of secondary school principals in general and high school instructional leadership in particular (Mazzarella, 1985). Few findings on the impact of elementary school principals have been validated at the high school level. This lack of data is particularly troubling in light of evidence that different strategies and activities appear to characterize successful school improvement programs at the elementary and secondary levels (Berman, 1984).

A second concern arises from studies that examine differences in the organizational characteristics of elementary and secondary schools (see especially Firestone, 1984; Herriott & Firestone, 1984; Lezotte, Hathaway, Miller, Passalacqua, & Brookover, 1980). Secondary schools differ from elementary schools in several important respects, including goal structure, administrative organization, student and faculty characteristics, curricular organization and delivery, and linkages to parents and the community. Although the empirical evidence remains thin, initial conclusions drawn from analyses of these organizational differences suggest that prescriptions for strong instructional leadership derived from elementary school studies may simply not apply at the secondary level (Firestone & Herriott, 1982; Mazzarella, 1985; Purkey & Smith, 1983b).

This inference does not mean that instructional leadership is unimportant in junior and senior high schools. There is evidence that strong administrative leadership does contribute to secondary school success (Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston & Smith, 1979). Instructional leadership in secondary schools may, however, differ in two related ways. First, secondary school principals do not rely on the same type of direct leadership activity utilized by their peers at the elementary level. In high schools, the larger staff and student populations, the multi-leveled

organizational structure, and the specialized subject area knowledge of teachers all limit the principal's ability to be personally involved in all aspects of instructional management. Instead, the principal relies more on indirect, facilitative, and symbolic modes of expression, providing direct intervention in selected situations (Bridges, 1984; Firestone & Herriott, 1982; Firestone & Wilson, 1985).

The second difference was suggested earlier in our discussion of technical complexity. The secondary school principal often exercises instructional leadership by delegating certain instructional leadership functions to vice principals, deans, and department heads (Gersten & Carnine, 1981; Hord, Hall, & Stiegelbauer, 1983). Curriculum coordination, instructional supervision, and monitoring of student progress must be accomplished partly through the work of other administrative staff. Thus at the secondary level, the principal must ensure that the critical instructional leadership functions are performed even in the absence of direct leadership.

School Social Context and Instructional Leadership

Thus far we have examined the impact of several organizational variables on principal instructional leadership. In this section we look more closely at ways in which the social context of schools influences the instructional leadership behavior of principals. The term social context refers to the socio-economic status (SES) of the student and community population served by the school. Common indices used to determine the nature of the school social context include the occupational status, educational attainment and income level of parents, the percentage of students from families receiving aid to families with dependent children (AFDC), and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches. Social context is relevant to

understanding the organization and management of schools because these measures of student socio-economic status correlate highly with measures of student achievement and educational attainment (Bridge, Judd, & Mook, 1979; Coleman et al., 1966). Students from lower class backgrounds typically achieve less in school and do not advance as far in the educational system as their counterparts with middle and upper class backgrounds (Levine, 1979).

Explanations for the relative lack of success of students from low income backgrounds center on at least three factors. First, students from low income families receive fewer educational opportunities in the home. They are exposed to fewer educational materials and have fewer opportunities to partake of cultural activities which support the body of knowledge taught in schools. Second, the community context does not emphasize academic success and places a lower value on educational attainment. Third, the home, school, and community communicate relatively low expectations of the student with respect to academic achievement. Both the structure of the school program and the behaviors school staff and parents communicate the message that the failure of students to perform well academically in school is acceptable, if not expected (Murphy, Hallinger, & Lotto, 1986; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). In higher SES communities, student achievement and attainment in school is expected and reinforced to a greater extent in both the school and community.

These findings led to the national effort to raise the achievement levels of lower SES students, particularly those from urban backgrounds. The effective schools studies have identified characteristics of schools in which students from poor, urban backgrounds succeed. These studies consistently find that instructionally effective schools provide a climate of

high expectations for student achievement (Brookover et al., 1978; 1982). The curricular structure, academic policies and staff practices in these schools communicate the message that student mastery of a substantial body of academic skills is expected. Principal instructional leadership is thought to be a key to the success of these schools serving the urban poor (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980).

Instructional leadership in these effective schools is comprised of three dimensions of principal job behavior: defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger, 1983). Each dimension is comprised of more specific job functions which the principal must carry out as the instructional leader (See Hallinger, 1983 and Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a for detailed descriptions of this framework). These dimensions of instructional leadership are being emphasized in many school improvement and principal training programs (Murphy & Hallinger, in press a).

As we noted earlier, however, the fact that these findings result primarily from research in low-income, urban, elementary schools leaves their applicability to middle and upper income schools in question. Additional studies have begun to examine the characteristics of schools that are successful at teaching students from middle and upper income communities. This research suggests that social context influences several school effectiveness factors, including principal instructional leadership (Andrews, Soder, & Jacoby, 1986; Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985c; 1986; Miller & Sayre, 1986; Teddlie et al., 1984).

In this section we examine ways in which principal instructional leadership varies in different social contexts. The primary source for many of our comments is a study of effective California elementary schools

of varying socio-economic status (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b; 1985c; 1986); findings from related studies are also discussed. We organize this discussion of principal instructional leadership and school social context in terms of the three dimensions of instructional leadership noted above.

Defining the School Mission

The importance of developing a clear organizational mission has been substantiated by research on effective schools (Purkey & Smith, 1983b) and organizational cultures (Deal & Kennedy. 1982). A clear mission provides a framework of underlying values for organizational activities. The mission serves as a source of identification and motivation for members, bonding them to the organization. It guides the activities of semi-autonomous workers, such as teachers. A mission may be written or unwritten; its power derives not from its form, but rather from the awareness and acceptance of the organization's members.

Effective schools maintain a clear academic mission and focus (Lezotte et al., 1980; Purkey & Smith, 1983b). Unlike schools more generally, instructionally effective schools consciously commit their resources to a limited set of cognitive goals. There is also a higher degree of consensus among the staff as to the means that will be used to pursue those goals. In effective schools the mission also serves a socialization function. As new members enter the organization, they are socialized to a school-wide philosophy that assumes a high degree of coordination and consistency in the policies and practices of teachers (Murphy & Hallinger, in press b; Rosenholtz, 1985).

As a result of these findings, most school improvement programs encourage principals to develop explicit school-wide academic goals as an initial step in the school improvement process (Lezotte & Bancroft, 1985; Murphy,

Hallinger, & Mesa, 1985). It is further suggested that these goals be selected from a limited number of options. On the surface, this appears to be reasonable. There is evidence, however, which indicates a need for caution before developing a uniform mix of goals for all schools. A substantial body of research concludes that an organization's mission must conform to the demands of its environment (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Emery & Trist, 1965; Thompson & McEwen, 1958; Weick, 1982). Educational organizations are particularly sensitive to the numerous, shifting preferences of their constitutents (March, 1978; Weick, 1982). Thus, it is important that these preferences be reflected in the school's mission.

Social class has a significant effect on the educational expectations and preferences of parents. Parents of different social classes prefer schools to address different educational goals. Parents in lower class communities often prefer an emphasis on social and vocational goals, while those in wealthier communities prefer schools to concentrate on the development of intellectual skills (Hills, 1961; McDill et al., 1969). These varying preferences influence the goals that schools actually pursue and the corresponding structure of their educational programs (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Hills, 1961; Levine, 1979; McDill et al., 1969; Wayson, 1966).

The effective schools research suggests that effective low-SES schools, in a sense, emulate higher-SES schools by giving greater weight to the pursuit of academic goals. The emphasis on academics translates into school policies and practices which reflect high expectations and promote higher achievement (Murphy, Weil, Hallinger, & Mitman, 1982). Despite this similarity, there are still differences between successful lower-and-higher-SES schools in the nature of their mission. The differences appear to lie primarily in the breadth of mission. the degree of goal consensus

among staff, and the extent to which the mission is explicitly defined. These differences have implications for the principal's role in developing a mission suitable to the school's social context.

Effective low income schools focus on a highly limited mission: improving instruction in basic reading and mathematics skills (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Venezky & Winfield, 1979; Weber, 1971). They often translate their mission into a few explicitly stated, school-wide academic goals (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Glenn & McLean, 1981; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b). A critical feature of this goal orientation is the delimitation of a few priorities which supercede all others.

A clear academic mission is also an important ingredient for success in schools serving middle and high SES students. Although these schools operate in an environment of higher academic expectations, this does not ensure the existence of a clear mission. Numerous environmental pressures expand and dilute the mission of all public schools, regardless of the social context. As Boyer (1983) and Goodlad (1984) have noted, the American public "wants it all" when it comes to schooling. Thus, even schools in wealthier communities often find it difficult to limit their mission to the pursuit of academic goals.

Evidence from the California effective school study, however, indicates that successful schools in wealthy communities do maintain an academically oriented mission (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b; 1986). The staff in these elementary schools described their mission as "promoting academic learning" or "emphasizing a traditional curriculum" (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b). Although this suggests a sense of educational purpose similar to that found in effective low income schools, the mission in these higher-SES schools addressed a broader array of intellectual skills. Mastery of basic

cognitive skills was viewed as important, but was almost accepted as a given. Thus, these schools emphasized the development of a more varied set of academic and intellectual skills than in the effective low income schools. This broader mission was reflected in the schools' curricular and instructional programs.

Social context also seems to affect the degree of goal awareness needed to bring about school improvement. In low income schools a high degree of awareness of the school's mission and the means for attaining that mission is important (Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b; Purkey & Smith, 1983b). Thus, it is not surprising to find that effective low SES schools often translate the mission into discrete measurable goals (Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Glen & McLean, 1981; Weber, 1971). The process of defining the mission in terms of explicit goals provides an opportunity for the staff to have input as to the substance of the school's mission. This can add to the staff's awareness of and sense of commitment to the mission. The definition of goals also provides explicit criteria for making resource allocation decisions and as performance standards against which to measure school progress (Brookover et al., 1982; Rowan, 1983; Wellisch et al., 1978.

It is important to note, however, that the explicit definition of school goals does not guarantee the development of a clear mission (Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b). Many schools, particularly ones serving low income students, are required to develop measureable goals as a condition for participation in special federal and state compensatory education programs. Yet, the laundry list of goals that results from such participation seldom reflects or generates a schoolwide mission. Too often, these goals lie unused in the principal's file cabinet.

It is in developing, communicating, implementing and sustaining the mission that the principal plays a key role as instructional leader. The principal must ensure that schoolwide policies and practices, as well as the job behavior of the administrative staff, reinforce the values inherent in the school's mission (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b).

We noted that successful higher-SES schools pursue a more broadly defined mission than effective low income schools. It also seems that school success in higher SES social contexts requires less consensus concerning the actual content of the mission and the specific means for achieving it (Estler, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985b; 1986). This is reflected in the finding that effective upper income schools are also less likely to translate their mission into specific goals and objectives. Therefore, although instructional effectiveness in wealthier social contexts seems related to an academic focus, it is still unclear how that mission is developed. It may be that the principal plays a less formal, but just as important, mission-building role in these schools. Additional empirical research is needed to understand the process by which higher-SES schools develop a clear academic mission

We conclude that the social context does influence the nature of the school mission. The principal's leadership role in developing the school's mission and in defining schoolwide goals also appears to vary according to the social context of the school. Whereas we noted that instructionally effective low SES schools are characterized by strong administrative involvement in goal development, principals in successful high-SES schools appear to exert less authority in this area.

This finding presents somewhat of a paradox in light of earlier studies of social contexts and school goals. Our discussion suggests that effective low income schools succeed, in part, by focusing on an academic mission, rather than on the social and vocational goals often preferred by low income communities. While we might expect this discontinuity between school and community values to result in conflict, this does not appear to happen. Preliminary evidence suggests the opposite. Academic success in low income schools breeds pride in the community and higher academic expectations among parents. This begins a process of mutual support and reinforcement. Thus, our earlier discussion in which we viewed low-SES schools as emulating the academic orientation more prevalent in high wealth contexts may begin a process of transforming the school social context

Managing the Instructional Program

This dimension refers to the principal's role in managing instruction and coordinating the school's curriculum. Supervision is the job function most commonly associated with the principal's instructional leadership role. Instructional leadership involves close attention to this function regardless of the school's social context. Principal's in effective schools have a high degree of credibility with teachers in the areas of curriculum and instruction and are frequent visitors to classrooms (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; High & Achilles, 1986; New York State, 1974; Venezky & Winsfield, 1979; Wellisch et al., 1978; Weber, 1971). Beyond this general similarity, however, the supervisory style used by principals does appear to be influenced by the social context.

In effective low-SES schools principals play a highly directive role in the selection, development and implementation of curriculum and instructional programs (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985c; Venezky & Winfield, 1979;

Weber, 1973). They have a clear vision of how the school should be organized and tend to exercise relatively tight control over classroom instruction. They are forceful in establishing high expectations and standards for staff and students, and in holding themselves and staff accountable for student achievement. Teachers describe these principals as being a major factor in the school's success, the key to turning the school around (Brookover et al., 1982; Clark, Lotto, & McCarthy, 1980; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Rutter et al., 1980).

In contrast, principals in successful high SES schools exercise less direct control over classroom instruction. They orchestrate more from the background, allowing teachers greater autonomy with respect to instructional decision-making. These principals maintain a close watch over student outcomes, but tend to exert control over classroom instruction only when results fall below expected levels. Although teachers describe these principals as strong instructional leaders and as important actors, they do not identify them as "the key" to school success (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985c; 1986; Teddlie et al., 1984).

The different content of the mission in effective higher-and-lower-SES schools is reflected in the principal's role as curriculum coordinator. As noted earlier, effective low-SES schools focus on a limited set of learning objectives in order to achieve a high level of instructional effectiveness. The principal ensures that students are exposed to material that addresses the objectives on which they will be tested (Cooley & Leinhardt, 1980; Venezky & Winfield, 1979; Wellisch et al., 1978). The principal also maintains continuity between the regular program and the special compensatory education classes. Successful high-SES schools offer a broader set of curricular offerings, but participate in fewer compensatory education

programs. The principal still assumes an active role in coordinating the curriculum, but is less directive in the implementation of the curriculum in classrooms (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

Thus, the instructional management role of principals appears to vary in specific ways according to the social context of the school. The preliminary research in this area suggests that principals in effective low-SES schools exercise a more directive supervisory role than principals in wealthier school contexts. Explanations for this variation in instructional leadership behavior suggest the school context as a possible causal factor.

In many cases principals enter low-SES schools with a mandate to implement change. Dissatisfaction with student achievement and school climate is often apparent and the focus of discussion. This is less likely to be the case in wealthier school contexts in which student achievement may be lower than desired, but is still above the "red zone." Thus, low-SES schools probably represent a more congenial context for strong leadership than higher-SES schools. Both formal and informal norms within the schools allow the principal in a low-SES school to assume greater authority than the principal in a higher-SES context (Rowan & Denk, 1984).

Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate

The third instructional leadership dimension concerns the principal's role in establishing a climate of high expectations for student achievement. The finding that effective low-SES schools hold high expectations for their students is perhaps the most widely publicized finding from the effective schools literature (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Purkey & Smith, 1983b; Rutter et al., 1979). Several recent studies indicate that, despite this finding, social context influences both the nature and source of a school's academic expectations.

In effective low-SES schools, the principal and teachers hold high, but reasonable, present expectations for their students. They expect all of their students to master basic reading and math skills. They do not, however, expect as much from their students as staff in schools serving students in wealthier communities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Miller & Sayre, 1986; Teddlie et al., 1984). As we have already noted in our discussion of school goals and instructional management, principals in effective low-SES schools attempt to do a few things very well. These schools do not, however, attempt to convey the same breadth or depth of knowledge that is addressed in effective high-SES schools.

The source of expectations also seems to differ. Whereas principals in successful high-SES schools sustain the high expectations that prevail in the community context, principals in effective low-SES schools must build high expectations without the benefit of continuing community input. Parents in poor communities are less well schooled and are often only tangentially involved in the life of their schools (Hills, 1961; McDill et al., 1969; Wayson, 1966). In a low-SES school, the principal often becomes the key actor in developing and sustaining high expectations on the part of school staff (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). The principal must ensure that the climate of low expectations that often prevails in the school's environment is halted at the school's doors. In part, this involves accepting responsibility for the achievement of students since there is little likelihood of student success if the school staff does not push students to achieve (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Brookover et al., 1982). Thus the principal's role is in part to act as a buffer, filtering out messages of failure while promoting the belief that students can learn.

The picture differs dramatically in schools located in high SES communities. Principals and teachers in these schools identify parents as the primary source of the school's expectations (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). There is an implicit assumption among teachers in such communities that the children of professional parents will succeed in school. Teachers feel tangible pressure in this regard, noting that parents are vociferous if their child's progress does not meet their expectations. In these schools, the principal plays the role of a sustainer and translater of community expectations, rather than a builder. Since high expectations already exist, the principal's tasks are to ensure that the expectations are clear and consistent, and to translate the high expectations into appropriate school policies and programs (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Murphy et al., 1982; Rowan & Denk, 1984; Teddlie et al., 1984). They act as mediators of expectations. In contrast to their peers in low SES schools, they focus more attention on their role as boundary spanners than their role as buffers.

The expectations of a school can also be viewed through the type of reward system used to reinforce student achievement. Evidence from the California study suggests that principals in effective low-SES schools develop more elaborate and unified systems of student rewards and recognition than their counterparts in high-SES schools. Teachers in effective low-SES schools reward students more frequently and rely more heavily on tangible public rewards for student accomplishments. Principals in these schools make frequent use of assemblies, honor rolls, and public lists to recognize students for academic achievement, academic improvement, citizenship, and attendance (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

In contrast, the effective upper income schools in this study offered few tangible school or classroom rewards for students. The principals also maintained looser linkages between classroom and school reward systems. The teachers often spoke of tangible rewards for achievement with disdain; one teacher typified this norm when she remarked, "we're not an M & M school." This reflected the expectation that students in high wealth communities should be able to succeed without frequent or tangible rewards. These teachers felt that reasonable amounts of verbal praise, good grades, and the intrinsic satisfaction of learning should be sufficiently motivating and rewarding for students.

These differences in the structure of schoolwide reward systems can be traced back to variations in the social context. Students in low income schools generally have fewer of the prerequisite skills necessary for academic success, and in many cases place a lower value on schooling. In such cases the principal must take systematic measures to reward and publicly recognize students for the behavior that the school seeks to promote. Students in wealthier communities generally come to school with a higher level of readiness skills, a more positive academic orientation, and higher parental expectations. This combination of factors leads the school staff to hold higher expectations and enables students to experience success in school more quickly. Learning becomes rewarding and less dependent upon frequent extrinsic rewards. Thus, the principal in a high-SES context may need to resort to fewer concrete rewards in order to promote high expectations than the principal in a lower-SES context.

A discussion of the impact of social context on school learning climate would be incomplete without attending to the principal's role in linking the school and the community. Parental involvement in schools

varies greatly in different social contexts (Becker & Epstein, 1982; McDill et al., 1969). In general, parents in wealthier communities are more involved in the school program than parents in poorer communities. The pattern of low levels of parental involvement is even found in the studies of effective low income schools. Despite this finding, many school effectiveness researchers advocate strengthening ties between the home and school in school improvement efforts (Brookover et al., 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983b; Teddlie et al., 1984). Additional information from the California study sheds some light on the role of the principal in linking the home and school (Halliger & Murphy, 1985c; 1986).

In the high-SES schools, principals involved parents in many aspects of the educational program and obtained their support in a variety of ways. Parents contributed their time as office and classroom aides, their money to support expansion of the school's programs, their labor to build fixtures in classrooms, their expertise to raise additional funds for the school program, and their energy to assist in organizing school-wide festivals. In the wealthy communities, a critical aspect of the principal's leadership role entailed mediating parental expectations of the school. These principals acted as boundary spanners, linking the community and the school. They were constantly seeking efficient ways to involve a population that took great interest in the school and that had substantial resources to offer. A significant portion of the principals' time was devoted to integrating the parents into the school in an effective manner.

In the effective low-SES schools, the principals expended relatively little energy involving parents in the life of the school. Typically, there was a history of limited parental interest in the school and school staff had come to expect little from the community in terms of substantive

support. The sporadic efforts of staff to involve parents and the lower expectations of parent support reflected the notion of a trade-off among limited resources. The teachers felt that the energy needed to obtain and sustain parent involvement would be better spent working with the children. In these schools the principals acted as buffers, carefully controlling access to the school and filtering outside influences which might dilute its effectiveness. Thus, the school was rather isolated from the community, particularly during the early stages of the improvement process. As the school began to improve principals began to encourage higher levels of interaction between the school and community.

These observations, though tentative, suggest that the principal's role in developing a positive learning climate in schools is highly sensitive to the nature of the social context. Probably the most interesting implication with respect to this dimension of instructional leadership concerns the manner in which schools react to the expectations of the social context. Principals must be acutely conscious of the types of expectations that the school fosters. In contexts where high expectations do not prevail in the community, a greater burden falls on the principal and teachers to create those within the school. In school contexts where high expectations already exist the principal must ensure that those expectations are sustained by the school. In both cases, the school needs to translate high expectations into educational programs that are appropriate for the particular educational context.

Conclusion

In this article we examined a variety of ways in which the organizational and social contexts of the schools influence the instructional leadership role of the principal. The genesis of this effort was a concern

over the uniform application of findings from studies of principal effectiveness conducted in low-income, urban elementary schools to principals in other school contexts. Our analysis leads us to conclude that instructional leadership is not a simple, one dimensional construct. Our findings support researchers who argue that principal leadership is context dependent rather than uniform in nature. More specifically the results support the proposition that principals must consider the organizational context in which they work in developing an appropriate style of instructional leadership.

The factors considered in this article interact in the actual school setting to create a context for principal action. Thus, the nature of the school's technology, the type of district support, the characteristics of the teaching staff, the school level, and the social context combine to form a school culture. The findings reviewed here represent a starting point for the development of contingency models that can be used in the study of instructional leadership and school change.

Notes

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