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PREVIEW

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**Comparing the perceptions of public and Catholic elementary  
school principals about the relative importance and amounts of  
time spent on various administrative functions**

**Lemmer, James L., Ed.D.**

**The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1991**

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PREVIEW

**COMPARING THE PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC AND CATHOLIC  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ABOUT THE RELATIVE  
IMPORTANCE AND AMOUNTS OF TIME SPENT ON  
VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS**

**by**

**James L. Lemmer**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Presented to the Faculty of**

**The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of Doctor of Education**

**Major: Interdepartmental Area of Administration,  
Curriculum, and Instruction**

**Under the Supervision of Professor Donald F. Uerling**

**Lincoln, Nebraska**

**December, 1991**

DISSERTATION TITLE

COMPARING THE PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC AND CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PRINCIPALS ABOUT THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE AND AMOUNTS OF TIME  
SPENT ON VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS

BY

James L. Lemmer

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**COMPARING THE PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC AND CATHOLIC  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ABOUT THE RELATIVE  
IMPORTANCE OF AND TIME SPENT ON VARIOUS  
ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS**

James L. Lemmer

University of Nebraska, 1991

Adviser: Donald F. Uerling

The primary purposes of this study were two-fold: (1) to ascertain the perceptions of elementary school principals about the relative importance of their school management functions and instructional leadership functions and the relative amount of time they actually spend on each kind of function; (2) to determine whether there were differences in the perceptions of public school principals and Catholic school principals about these matters. A secondary purpose was to find whether these perceptions differed according to the principal's gender, experience, and academic preparation.

The study was accomplished by surveying public elementary school principals and Catholic elementary school principals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The survey instrument was developed by the researcher. Subjects were asked to indicate on a Likert-type scale their perceptions about "importance of" and "time spent on" each of 67 administrative tasks or activities that were organized into nine general categories: Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction, Home-School-Community Relations, Professional Development, Staff Personnel, School Finance and Business Management, Pupil Personnel, Program Development, School Plant Management, and Transportation Management. A mean score was calculated for each category.

From most to least important, the rankings were: Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction; Home-School-Community Relations; Professional Development; Staff Personnel; School Finance and Business Management; Pupil Personnel; Program Development; School Plant Management; and Transportation Management.

From most to least time spent, the rankings were: Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction; Home-School-Community Relations; Pupil Personnel; School Finance and Business Management; Program Development; Professional Development; Staff Personnel; School Plant Management; and Transportation Management.

Between public school principals and Catholic school principals, differences in perceived "importance of" were found for Program Development, Staff Personnel, and School Finance and Business Management, and differences in perceived "time spent on" were found for School Finance and Business Management and Program Development.

Based on gender, experience, and academic preparation, no differences were found in perceptions about either "importance of" or "time spent on" any category.



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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Context of the Problem

The American public school principalship has increasingly become a focal point for school critics, university researchers, teacher groups, and central office administrators bent on understanding and improving the quality of educational programs in our nation's schools. Principals must deal with a broad range of issues across a number of areas, including student discipline, problems of personnel administration, and increasing numbers of state and federal policy mandates, while at the same time maintaining a "smooth-running" educational program that serves the needs of a school community that has become less and less homogeneous in respect to students' abilities and parents' aspirations for themselves and their children. Principals daily face pressures of competing expectations about what their role should be, and even the best have a difficult time maintaining an appropriate balance between the tasks of managing a smooth-running school and serving as a catalyst for and facilitator of instructional improvement.<sup>1</sup>

#### Principal as Educational Leader

Current literature conclusively states that the principal should be an educational leader. Movement from the rather general position of being an educational leader to the more specific role of elementary principal creates the dilemma of whether principals are school managers or instructional leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Blumberg and W. Greenfield, The Effective Principal: Perspectives on School Leadership (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1980), 9.

The obvious resolution to this dilemma is for the elementary principal to assume both roles with the question becoming one of emphasis and of establishing priorities.

The role of the elementary school principal has been and is still in a period of transition. An early example of this transition was when the role of the principal changed from head teacher to manager of a complex organization.

Recent research has consistently emphasized the impact that the principal has on the success or failure of the school. The principal has been and continues to be the pivotal actor in the process of managing American schools. The principal occupies a key position that bridges the gap between context and school, policy and program, and means and ends.<sup>2</sup>

The literature shows the significance of the elementary school in introducing the basics and establishing the proper foundations in assuring future academic success. One rarely finds an effective school without an effective principal. An effective principal must be willing to take risks, make informed choices that judiciously use the human and technical resources available, and clearly understand and be able to use the vast opportunities for change inherent in the instructional process. Clark and others emphasized "that effective leaders did more; they framed goals and objectives, set standards of performance, created a productive working environment, and obtained needed support."<sup>3</sup> Research concerning effective schools have highlighted the important leadership role of school principals. Many of these studies and commentaries support the thesis that effective schools are headed by strong

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<sup>2</sup> David C. Dwyer, "Understanding the Principal's Contribution to Instruction," Peabody Journal of Education 63 (Fall 1986): 16.

<sup>3</sup> David Clark et al., "Factors Associated With Success in Urban Elementary Schools," Phi Delta Kappan 61 (March 1980): 468.



instructional leaders who know how to manage people and resources effectively, and who help to create an atmosphere conducive to learning.<sup>4</sup> As Klopf et al stated,

an effective school is seen as an optimum learning environment -- one that nurtures the cognitive, affective, social, and aesthetic development of its children and youth. The goal of the principal should be to develop such an environment. The role of the principal encompasses all the functions essential to achieving this goal.<sup>5</sup>

With the elementary principals being recognized as the academic leaders in the elementary school, it is crucial that they have a clearly formulated perception of what their functions are at the building level. With an understanding of the characteristics of the two roles (instructional leader and school manager), or a combination of the two, the principal may then establish priorities on what major functions are important and necessary to accomplish for effective academic leadership. The elementary principal should be cognizant that there will be role conflicts as a result of not having adequate time to perform functions that in many instances are held to be important. There also will be functions that will not clearly and neatly align themselves with either the instructional leader or school manager role. Although others should have input into role definitions, principals themselves should be the central and dominant group in determining their proper roles. When role expectations are in conflict, principals themselves can best determine which position is correct.<sup>6</sup> As

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<sup>4</sup> Bernard Masse, "The Principal: Directing External Influences for Leadership," Clearing House 58 (January 1985): 203.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon J. Klopf et al., "The Essentials of Effectiveness: A Job Description for Principals," Principal 61 (March 1982): 35.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin D. Cullers, "The Principalsip: A Role in Transition," Clearing House 50 (December 1976): 181.

elementary principals learn to better determine what their roles are in the educational process, they will be able to establish job descriptions that are more indicative of what they do. Elementary principals are expected to perform a variety of functions and it is important that they are cognizant of what these functions are and how their time is spent performing these functions. What elementary school principals perceive to be the relative importance of their school management functions and instructional leadership functions is a question that all principals must answer.

For elementary principals to develop an awareness of what their functions are and then to allocate adequate time to perform these functions can become an exercise in administrative futility. A survey of elementary principals, replicating a study conducted of secondary principals by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1987), might produce similar results regarding time allocation. In the 1987 study (a replication of a 1977 NASSP study), secondary principals were asked to rank order various areas of responsibility based on "how they spend their time" compared to "how they should spend their time." Results of the study indicated that principals spend relatively more of their time on school management, personnel and student activities and relatively less time on community relations, planning, and professional development. In contrast, these principals believed, however, that they should spend relatively more time on program development, personnel, and school management and relatively less time on professional development, student behavior, and working with the district office.

According to Pellicer et al., the discrepancies between how high school principals spend their time and how they should spend their time that were reported in 1977 still exist. For example, respondents indicated less time spent on program development and planning and more time spent on student

behavior and working with the district office. Apparently, the daily demands of the job supercede the preconceived goals and expectations principals develop for meeting their job assignments and responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> What elementary school principals perceive to be the relative amounts of time they actually spend on school management functions and instructional leadership would also be significantly influenced by these daily demands.

### Catholic School Principals

The responsibility of educating our youth is shared by both our public schools and private schools. In the opinion of the researcher, the role and functions of elementary principals in Catholic elementary schools are different from that of their counterparts in public schools if for no other reason than because of the nature of the differences in mission between public and Catholic education. The public schools are governed, according to the American democratic process, by elected or appointed boards and officials whose authority is derived from the citizenry and state statutes. On the other hand, Catholic schools, while subject to secular authority to a limited extent, are managed as part of the Catholic Church and its mission. In the opinion of the researcher, Catholic school principals, not being as restricted by statutes as their counterparts in the public schools, will have a different perception about the relative importance of school management functions and instructional leadership functions. This in turn will have an effect on what each group of principals ideally wants to be doing as well as what they are actually doing.

Differences in the internal structure of the public and Catholic schools tend to affect the actual amount of time that each of these groups of principals is able to devote to each of these perceived roles and functions. It is common in

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<sup>7</sup> Leonard O. Pellicer et al., "High School Leaders and Their Schools," National Association of Secondary School Principals (1988): 17.

Catholic schools to have only one administrator, whereas the public schools often have an administrative staff of more than one. This results in a greater degree of specialization in the public schools and a more generalized role on the part of administrators in Catholic settings. In the view of the researcher, Catholic school principals assume a more generalized role than the public school principals, which may result in a difference in the perceptions of public school principals and Catholic school principals about the relative importance of school management functions and instructional leadership functions. Any such differences in perceptions may not be necessarily a result of choice, but may be a result of the different settings in which they find themselves.

#### School Manager and Instructional Leader

Elementary principals perform the dual role of being school managers and instructional leaders. Instructional leadership encompasses those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning. School management, on the other hand, would be concerned with the physical plant, budgeting, and the school in general to assure that everything is functioning properly. The perceived administrative functions would be those activities that the principal would perform to help assure success in their respective roles. Based on the tasks to be performed, there would be some administrative functions that would be performed by principals in their role as instructional leaders, whereas there are other administrative functions that would be performed by principals in their role as school managers. Some administrative functions would be performed by all principals regardless of their role. For purposes of this study, the administrative functions refer to the areas of curriculum development, instructional improvement, personnel management, school finance and business management, school plant management, transportation management, pupil personnel, home-and-community relations,

and professional development. There are undoubtedly other administrative functions whose duties will fall outside the above list of nine administrative functions, however, a large majority of the principal's time will be involved in these functions.

### Statement of the Problem

Elementary school principals should establish priorities regarding their school management functions and instructional leadership functions and the relative amount of time they actually spent on each kind of function. Part of the difficulty is that principals serve as both school managers and instructional leaders. Principals must do both; it is just a question of priorities or emphasis. Recognizing that it is important to have skills in both school management and instructional leadership, one of the problems becomes to what extent the principal should assume the role of one at the expense of the other. The two roles must be combined at which time the problem then becomes whether or not the two roles should receive equal time and emphasis and if not which one should be predominate.

The researcher has had experience in both public and Catholic schools. It seems to the researcher that in contrast to public school principals, principals in Catholic schools may have more latitude to make personnel and other administrative decisions and hence view these aspects of their jobs as more important than their public school counterparts. The jobs of principals in public schools involve more support and interaction from higher levels of authority. An example of this would be the school board's authority in the areas of personnel hiring and budget control. This could partly explain some of the differences in the perceptions of public school principals and Catholic school principals regarding importance of and actual time spent on various administrative functions.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) to ascertain the perceptions of elementary school principals about the relative importance of their school management functions and instructional leadership functions and the relative amount of time they actually spent on each kind of function; (2) to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the perceptions of public school principals and Catholic school principals about these matters. A secondary purpose was to find whether there were differences in these perceptions depending on the principal's gender, experience, and academic preparation.

#### Procedural Statement

To accomplish the purpose of this study, four research questions were addressed and four research hypotheses were tested. A sample of public and Catholic elementary principals was surveyed regarding the perceived importance of and the amount of time spent on selected administrative functions.

#### Research Questions

The research questions addressed were the following:

1. What do elementary school principals perceive to be the relative importance of their school management functions and instructional leadership functions?
2. What do elementary school principals perceive to be the relative amounts of time they actually spent on school management functions and instructional leadership functions?
3. Do elementary school principals perceive the relative importance of school management functions and instructional leadership functions differently by gender, previous administrative experience, and academic preparation?

4. Do elementary school principals perceive the relative amounts of time actually spent on school management functions and instructional leadership functions differently by gender, previous administrative experience, and academic preparation?

Each of these questions was answered by finding the mean scores for each of the two kinds of functions.

### Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested were the following:

1. There is a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the perceptions of public school principals and those of Catholic school principals about the relative importance of school management functions and instructional leadership functions.

2. There is a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the perceptions of public school principals and those of Catholic school principals about the relative amounts of time actually spent on school management functions and instructional leadership functions.

3. There is a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the perceptions of principals about the relative importance of school management functions and instructional leadership functions as a result of differences in gender, previous administrative experience, and academic preparation.

4. There is a statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the perceptions of principals about the relative amounts of time actually spent on school management functions and instructional leadership functions as a result of differences in gender, previous administrative experience, and academic preparation.

Each of these hypotheses was tested by using the independent measures  $t$  statistic to determine whether there were significant differences

between the mean scores for each of the two kinds of functions with the level of significance to be tested being  $p < .05$ .

### Definitions

When the following terms were used in this study, their meanings were as defined below:

Perceptions. Based on the individual's experience and insight, perceptions are what he/she comprehends or believes to be true.

Elementary principal. Individuals in charge of the respective K-8 (Catholic) or K-6 (public) elementary buildings.

Administrative roles. Seen as the part played by the elementary principal in the educational process. Two types of roles referred to are instructional leader and school manager.

Instructional leader. One of the two major roles of the elementary principal. Encompasses those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning.

School manager. One of the two major roles of the elementary principal. Managers are more concerned with the physical plant, budgeting, and the school in general to assure that everything is functioning properly.

Administrative functions. An action contributing to a larger action; actions that take place to fulfill or accomplish the administrative role. For purposes of this study, administrative functions were classified into nine categories: curriculum development, instructional improvement, personnel management, school finance and business management, school plant management, transportation management, pupil personnel, home-school-community relations, professional development.

Academic preparation. Is the professional degree attained, which for the purposes of this study, would be bachelors, masters, specialist, or doctorate.