

The Teaching Principal

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The purpose of this study was to assess and describe some of the characteristics and perceptions of contemporary teaching principals. The subjects were 55 of 70 (79%) teaching principals in Nebraska during 1986–1987 who responded to one of two survey mailings. The respondents administered schools with an average enrollment of 163 students and had been in their current positions for an average of 10 years. Their dual role was accepted because of increased income, enjoyment of teaching, entry level administrative opportunity, challenge of the dual role, school system's need and enjoyment of both teaching and administration. They taught an average of two hours per day. The primary advantage of the dual role was knowing students better. The primary disadvantage of the dual role was a lack of time. The respondents suggested how to prepare for a teaching principalship and discussed the future of the position.

INTRODUCTION

The term principal appeared as early as 1838 in the Common School Report of Cincinnati and Horace Mann referred to a "male principal" in his annual report of 1841 (Pierce, 1935). Historically, the positions of head teacher and principal teacher preceded the development of the role of principal. In many places, particularly rural areas, teaching principals continue to administer schools. This study was designed to assess and describe the work role of contemporary teaching principals.

Two factors led to the development of the teaching principal role, increased number of students and the introduction of grading in the schools (Pierce, 1935). Initially, the teaching principal only had a small number of teachers to direct and only simple administrative duties to perform. A large share of time was spent in teaching (Pierce, 1935).

The introduction of supervision of instruction as an additional administrative task led to the gradual elimination of the teaching component of the principalship. The principal in a non-teaching role became a general trend in large cities subsequent to 1860 (Pierce, 1935). However, in the latter part of the twentieth century, teaching principals continue to administer many schools.

Historical reports of the early development of the head teacher role, the principal teacher, and full-time principal are numerous (Clapp, Chase & Merriman, 1929; Cubberley, 1909; Cubberley, 1919; Morrison, 1943; Page & Page, 1983; Pierce, 1935; and Reisner, 1930). We also have available firsthand reports by individuals who administer more than one school (Denneberg, 1984; Dunn, 1986) and a report by individuals sharing a principalship (Gordon & Meadows, 1986). However, research studies reporting the characteristics and perceptions of current teaching principals are not available.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to assess the characteristics and perceptions of contemporary teaching principals. Nine specific research questions were addressed:

1. What were the characteristics of the schools administered by teaching principals?
2. What previous administrative experiences did the teaching principals have?
3. What reasons did the teaching principals give for accepting the dual position?
4. What was the extent of their teaching responsibilities?
5. What were the advantages of being a teaching principal?
6. What were the disadvantages of being a teaching principal?
7. What suggestions did the teaching principals have for others preparing for the dual role?
8. What was the origin of the teaching principalship in the school district?
9. What is the future for the teaching principalship in the school district?

PROCEDURES

The subjects of the study were the 70 teaching principals identified through the directory of the Nebraska Department of Education for 1986–1987.

A survey instrument was developed by the author and reviewed by three professors of educational administration and two teaching principals. A revised instrument was pilot tested with 13 subjects, additional adjustments were made, and the final survey instrument was then prepared.

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After two mailings, 55 of the 70 subjects (79%) had responded. Telephone calls were made to five randomly selected nonrespondents to ascertain nonresponse bias; none was found.

RESULTS

The teaching principals in this study administered schools that included grades: K-6 (29%), 7-12 (49%), and K-12 (22%). The average number of students in these schools was 163 with a range of 50 to 402 students.

The Teaching Principals

Of those who responded to the survey instrument, 29% had previously held administrative positions without teaching responsibilities. The average time spent in principalships without teaching responsibilities was 5 years with a range of 1 year to 14 years.

Twenty-seven percent of the respondents had been teaching principals in other districts before the current teaching principalship. In the current teaching principalship the average tenure in the position was 10 years with a range of 1 to 29 years.

Eight reasons for accepting the position of teaching principal were identified. Increased income and enjoyment of teaching were listed most frequently. Each of these reasons was given by eight respondents. The opportunity to have an entry-level administrative position and the challenge of the dual role were reasons given by seven respondents. The school system's need to fill the dual role was the reason given by six respondents. Five individuals had accepted a teaching principalship because they enjoyed both positions. Two individuals had accepted the position because they enjoyed the principal role. Two individuals had accepted the position because they had no choice.

The teaching principals taught an average of two hours per day with a range of one to four hours. Thirty-five percent of the respondents taught one subject; 39% taught two subjects; 24% taught three subjects; and, 2% taught more than four subjects. The respondents taught 22 different subjects. The subjects and the number of respondents teaching each are presented as Table 1. The respondents taught 24 different grade arrangements. These are presented as Table 2.

Thirty-eight percent (N=55) indicated that they also served as athletic director; 36% reported coaching responsibilities; 26% indicated that they supervised activities.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The primary advantage of being a teaching principal, according to 76% of the respondents, was knowing students better. Other advantages cited were credibility, camaraderie, maintaining teaching skills, awareness of classroom activities, rapport with parents, and enjoying the position.

TABLE 1
Subjects Taught By Teaching Principals

Subjects Taught	Number of Times Cited
Social Studies	20
Math	19
Science	8
Typing/Business	8
Physical Education	6
Music	5
American History	4
Spanish	4
Computer, Driver Education, English, or Reading	3 (each)
Language, Physics, or Weight Training	2 (each)
Agriculture, Grammar, Health, Penmanship, Photography, Spelling, or Welding	1 (each)

TABLE 2
Grade(s) Taught by Teaching Principals

Grade(s) Taught	Number of Times Cited
9 - 12	11
11 - 12	6
5 - 6	5
10	4
12	4
7 - 8	3
7 - 12	2
8	2
9	2
K; 1 - 12; 5; 5, 6, 8; 5 - 12; 6; 7; 7 - 10; 7, 11; 8, 10, 11; 8, 11, 12; 9, 10, 11; 9, 12; 10 - 11; or 11	1 (each)

Eighty percent of the respondents would recommend the position to others. Twenty-two percent expect to remain in the position for more than ten years; 29% expect to remain in the position for more than five years; 15% expect to remain for five years; 16% expect to remain for two years; and, 18% expect to remain for one year.

The primary disadvantage of being a teaching principal, according to 73% of the respondents, was a lack of time. Other disadvantages cited were: frequent interruptions; too many meetings; inadequate time to resolve teacher problems; insufficient opportunity to complete teaching evaluations and to handle discipline problems; jobs interfering with each other; pressures of the dual role; and, teachers feeling ignored.

The teaching principals were asked if they left their teaching responsibilities to deal with administrative issues. Ninety-three percent indicated that they were asked to

leave their teaching, this averaged two times per week with a range of less than one time to five times per week.

The respondents ranked a list of reasons for leaving their teaching duties. Answering telephone calls was the primary reason identified. Handling disciplinary issues and responding to parental and teacher needs were ranked second and third.

In their absence, 46% reported that a substitute was never hired; 36% reported that a substitute was sometimes hired; and 18% reported that a substitute was always hired.

Preparing for the Teaching Principalship

Recommendations for preparing for a teaching principalship included: learning to budget time, learning to organize, developing good teaching skills, learning to delegate, learning to prioritize activities and be flexible, being selective about scheduling teaching times, completing an internship, and being prepared to spend long hours on the job. These teaching principals would seek further preparation in areas such as time management, teacher evaluation, organizational skills, curriculum, and managing the dual responsibilities of teacher and administrator. The respondents noted the following as critical to their success in the dual role: delegating, time management, and organizational skills. Not permitting interruptions in teaching time, preparing to teach, and scheduling class time conveniently were also noted as means of making the dual roles manageable. Having a good secretary was also frequently cited as integral to managing the dual roles.

Origin and Future of the Teaching Principalship

When asked how the teaching principalship had developed in the school district, the response given most frequently was that the position had always existed. Forty percent of the respondents indicated the position had always been a dual role. Other responses included: the position developed because of declining enrollments; financial conditions led to combining positions; the principal role was added to teaching responsibilities to meet accreditation requirements; and, the combination was due to a district reduction in force.

When asked about the future of the teaching principalship in the school district, 63% said the position will stay the same. Twenty percent report the position will be solely an administrative position in the future. Declining enrollment and costs will lead to the end of the position according to 10%. Seven percent felt the position will become two positions in the future.

Discussion

The teaching principalship appears to be a persistent feature of the small school. Although historically the decline of these positions can be traced from the mid-

1800s (Pierce, 1935), 63% of the teaching principals in this study expect the position to remain in the future.

The teaching principals in this study appear to be satisfied with the dual role. Eighty percent would recommend the position to others.

Time constraints were cited as the chief disadvantage of the teaching principalship. However, a study conducted by the Educational Research Service surveyed nearly a thousand school principals in 1984 and found that insufficient time was a concern for the vast majority of them also (Duke, 1987). Perhaps all professionals would cite time constraints as a major concern.

Teaching principalships and multiple building principalships may increase as declining enrollments and financial constraints become greater problems (Conley, 1963; Dunn, 1986; Gordon & Meadows, 1986). Just as increasing enrollments caused the reduction of teaching responsibilities in the 1800s, decreasing enrollments may precipitate the addition of teaching responsibilities to the principalship.

Teaching principalships will continue to be of interest to the education profession because of those who persist in advocating that administrators should teach (Duke, 1987; Tursman, 1984). Faculty who are responsible for preparing school administrators, particularly in rural states, might consider these findings as they develop the best possible experiences for their students.

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