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## Classroom Discipline Management: A Multi-Frame Analysis

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School discipline is still one of the most serious problems that distorts the learning environment in schools. In recent reports, problems involving students' misbehaviors are increasing especially at the secondary level. Understanding and managing children's behavior has always been of interest to teacher educators, teachers and managers (Chaplain, 2003). Ensuring that students are behaving well in the classrooms is important because it serves as a means of preparing students to act as respectful and responsible citizens (Lewis, Romi, Qui & Katz, 2005).

For decades, researchers spent time and energy trying to identify the effective disciplinary strategies for correcting and preventing students' misbehaviors, yet research has produced disappointing results. Discipline is still the second most serious problem challenging the public schools in the annual Phi Delta Kappa pools of public attitudes toward public schools (Lowell & Gallup, 2002).

Discipline problems are listed as the major concern for teachers. In a 2006 survey of pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, conducted by the American Psychological Association, teachers identified help with classroom discipline management as their top need. Perhaps, more attention should be given to how teachers manage their students' behaviors.

There are many philosophical orientations toward discipline suggested for teachers in order to control pupils' behaviors in the classrooms and promote a positive environment for the students. Gaining a perspective on discipline may help the teacher "create orderliness to her behavior that students can understand, stop waffling, and be more effective in the use of classroom discipline" (Wolfgang, 2001).

The purpose of the study is to identify the perspectives and methods orienting the high school social studies teachers in central Pennsylvania to facilitate classroom discipline management and to ensure an effective atmosphere.

### *Theoretical Framework*

In order to identify the philosophical perspectives of discipline orienting the social studies high school teachers, three philosophical perspectives were employed. These different philosophies and their underlying models were described by

Wolfgang in his book *Solving Discipline and Classroom Management Problems: Methods and Models for Today's Teachers* (2001). Each philosophy with its discipline models embodies a set of assumptions in the use of classroom discipline. These three philosophies with their corresponding discipline models were used as a means of directing researchers' interpretations of the resulting data.

### *The relationship-listening perspective*

According to this philosophy, discipline behavior problems stem from conflict. Communication between the teachers and the students is the key to managing students' misbehaviors. It involves the use of minimum power and views the students as inherently good. It implies a view that the students are able to change their own misbehaviors and if the students are misbehaving, it is because they are suffering from the blockage of some inner need. Using supporting emotional techniques (The Rogerian Emotionally Supportive Model), e.g. critical listening, acknowledgement, door openers, active listening, problem solving, the peer mediation program and the transactional analysis, makes the student aware of his behavior and help him to talk out his emotional concern, This method of "talking it out" by the student would lead him to become more purposeful in his behavior.

### *The confronting-contracting philosophy*

This philosophy is found in Dreikarss' (1972) and Glasser's (1985) model of logical consequences. It represented a shift from a behavioral focus on discipline into a more humanistic approach (Hardin, 2008). It is based on the assumption that understanding why students misbehave (attention-seeking, revenge seeking, power-seeking, and failure avoiding) in a certain way is the first step to developing effective strategies to handle discipline problems. However, understanding the reasons or the goals for misbehavior does not negate the need for logical consequence of this behavior. The premise behind these logical consequences is not to control students' behavior but to assist students in taking responsibility for their actions. Based on this philosophy, the teacher confronts the student regarding his behavior and help the students develop self-discipline that gives the students the power to change and contract with the student to live up to mutual agreement for behavioral change (Wolfgang, 2001). Teachers do not have the right to threaten the students or banish them. Too often punishment will lead to the four R's of punishment: resentment, revenge, rebellion, and retreat. They have to attend to the psychological needs of the students to develop self-discipline and prevent misbehavior problems (Glasser, 1985). Teachers have to guide, motivate, and develop students' capacities and create warm and communal environments (Nelsen, 1987).

### *Rules and consequences philosophy*

Unlike the humanistic approach, rules and consequences philosophy is found in such models as the behavior analysis model, positive classroom discipline (Jones, 1987 and 2001) and assertive discipline (Lee and Canter, 1976). The rules and consequences perspective is the most powerful intervention techniques (Wolfgang, 2001). Unlike the humanistic approach, the rules and consequences approach is based on the belief that teachers impose their power and their will to deal with students' misbehaviors (Hardin, 2008). They should not "get bogged in the use of language and negotiation with students" (Wolfgang, 2001).

This philosophy is based on the premise that good and bad behaviors are learned and reinforced. Behavior that is followed by positive reinforcements tends to be repeated and behavior that is followed by negative reinforcement or punishment tends to be avoided (Campbell, 1999; Goldstein & Wolfgang, 2001; and Brooks, 2007). The rules and consequences orientation is based on the belief that each behavior is shaped or changed by the consequences of that behavior. Unlike the humanistic approach, the RC approach believes that it is much easier to change the observable behavior than changing the underlying causes.

Based on this philosophy, the teacher has to teach and the student has to obey. From the beginning of the semester, the teacher firmly and clearly expresses his rules (Hardin, 2008). The teacher conveys his discipline plan. He gives "warnings and then follows up with consequences, making it clear that student has chosen this negative consequence by his or her behavior" (Wolfgang, 2001). Strategies of this perspective include (limit setting, backup system, omission training, responsibility training (Jones, 1987), positive rein-

forcement, negative reinforcement and punishment, extinction, differential reinforcement, removal of desirable stimuli, and time out).

Despite the popularity of this approach, its effectiveness is not well reported. According to Duke (1980), the absence of these rules may produce better discipline environment. Some of these rules may prevent certain problems. Suspensions for example may serve as rewards for students who dislike schools (Duke, 1980). This approach may not be appropriate anymore, because it makes the teacher responsible for student behavior. Moreover, they have the effect of temporarily suppressing behavior but not preventing it (Baston, 1988).

#### *Multi-frame discipline view*

Our multi-frame models of discipline management is based on the assumption made by Quinn (1984) who argued that "effective management requires the ability to use different models, even when they are based on different and competing values." (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 512). Rarely would we find a practicing teacher who used only one model such as the rule and consequences model to manage his/her students' misbehaviors. According to Wolfgang (2001), teachers are more likely to design his own discipline and choose the methods that best fit his philosophy and the disciplinary problem. When building teaching experience, it becomes more increasingly apparent that there is no one size fits all model for discipline. What works for some does not always work for all the problems (Anne silver, 2008)? The multi-frame orientation of discipline may permit the teacher to be more effective in the way he or she manages the classroom discipline. Effective classroom discipline management requires the ability to use different models and methods.

The multi-framework management consisted of the following dimensions:

#### **Relationship- listening orientation**

- ⇒ Listener: listen to the students; employ supporting emotional techniques, e.g., critical listening, active listening, and problem solving to make the students aware of his misbehavior.
- ⇒ Motivate the student to talk out his concerns because this action would lead him to be purposeful in his behavior.

#### **Rules and consequences orientation**

- ⇒ Set the classroom rules and expectation/consequence firmly and clearly.
- ⇒ Consequences should be designed to meet the psychological needs of the students.

#### **Confronting-contracting orientation**

- ⇒ Understand the goals of the student's misbehavior.
- ⇒ Confront the student with his behavior to determine and understand the root causes.
- ⇒ Employ different supportive techniques (e.g., Class meetings) to help the students develop a self-discipline strategies for behavioral change.

#### *Method*

In order to explore this study's research problem, the researchers decided that the best design to conduct this study is a mixed-method design. Mixed methods research has been defined as "the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the process of research" (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 212). Mixed Methods research captures the best of quantitative and qualitative data to have a better understanding of the research problems than either method by itself (Creswell, 2008, p.552).

Based on Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), the best mixed methods design to use in order to address this study's purpose is the Explanatory Design. The Explanatory Design is well suited to this study in which the researcher uses qualitative data to explain the significant results of the quantitative component of

the study. The Explanatory Design is a two-phase mixed methods design starting with the collection and analysis of quantitative data. This first phase will be followed by a subsequent collection and analysis of quantitative data. The qualitative component of the study is designed to supplement the quantitative component. The two components are then integrated during the interpretation stage of the study. The overall purpose of the Explanatory Design is that "qualitative results help to explain, interpret, and examine the findings of the quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2002).

The quantitative component consisted of a questionnaire administered to a purposeful sample of 30 high school social studies teachers in public school districts in central Pennsylvania. The questionnaire consisted of 15 items developed by the researcher to examine the respondents' perceptions regarding classroom discipline management. It also included some items intended to collect demographic and professional information from the study's participants. The qualitative component of the study consisted of a content analysis of written disciplinary incidents the teachers encountered in their classrooms.

### *Quantitative investigation*

The quantitative component consisted of a questionnaire administered to a sample of high school teachers in public school districts in central Pennsylvania. The survey instrument was developed by the authors to identify the discipline orientations used by the teachers in central Pennsylvania. The survey contained 15 items with a five-point response scale. The survey was reviewed for content validity and approved by an expert panel. Since there are three constructs assessed using a summated likert score, it was important to examine the internal consistency of these scores. Cronbach's alpha provides a good indicator of internal consistency (Black, 1999). It is also a reasonable indicator of reliability for homogenous sections of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha of the results of the questionnaire was calculated using SPSS version 17.0. The standardized item alphas reveal that all survey questions had values above .7 which is identified as acceptable by Issac and Michael (1996).

### *Participants*

Maximum variety exemplification, which is one of the purposeful methods, is employed in the paper. We believe that the gender of the teachers, their experiences, and the settings of the schools that they work in have sufficient power to fulfill this variety.

A purposeful sample of 30 high teachers compromised the intended breadth of the participants for this study, 15 males and 15 females. According to Patton (1990), "the logic and power of purposeful sample lies in selecting rich cases for study in depth." (p. 169). The teachers were drawn from different schools and school enrollment sizes in the school years of 2010-2011. Ten of the teachers had 1-5 years of teaching experience, five had 6-9 years of experience, ten had 10-15 years of experience and finally five of them had 16 years of teaching experience or more.

### *Questions*

In order to understand the research problem, the quantitative component of the study attempts to answer the following questions;

1. What kind of discipline orientations were used by the high school social studies teachers to control their students' misbehaviors?
2. To what degree are there contextual differences in the discipline orientations?
3. Are male and female teachers different in how they manage their classroom discipline?

### *Results*

The correlation analysis revealed that the three discipline models are in fact highly correlated, (relationship - listening and contracting-contracting perspectives,  $r = .637$ ,  $p = .000$ ; relationship- listening and the rules perspectives,  $r = .637$ ,  $p = .000$ ; contracting and the rules-consequences perspectives,  $r = .562$ ,  $p = .001$ ), which suggest that the high school teachers, regardless of the school setting, used A multi-frame orientation

perspective in managing classroom discipline.

ANOVA analysis indicated that there were some mean contextual differences among the groups (rural vs. urban school settings), although these differences were not statistically significant (Philosophy1: relationship-listening,  $F_{2, 28} = .018$ ,  $p = .982$ ; Philosophy2: confronting-contracting,  $F_{2, 28} = 1.070$ ,  $p = .358$ ; Philosophy3: Rules and consequences,  $F_{2, 28} = .284$ ,  $p = .755$ ).

Finally, although many studies addressed the problem of classroom discipline management, few of them focused on gender and classroom discipline management. Our data shed light on one key question about gender and classroom discipline management: Are male and female teachers different in how they think about classroom discipline management?

Although female teachers employed the humanistic approach (Confronting- contracting orientation) to control students' misbehaviors in the classroom more than their male colleagues ( $t_{26} = 1.801$ ,  $p = .083$ ), the independent sample t-test showed that the differences between them were not statistically significant (Philosophy1: relationship- listening,  $t_{26} = .916$ ,  $p = .368$ ; Philosophy3: Rules and consequences,  $t_{26} = .414$ ,  $p = .682$ ).

### *Qualitative investigation*

The qualitative component of the study reported an examination of how high school social studies teachers frame their experiences. Which perspectives or philosophical orientations were included in the narrative reflections about their experiences? The participants were asked to provide written incidents that describe some disciplinary problems they encountered in their classrooms and the strategies they used to cope with these problems.

In order to identify which philosophical perspectives toward discipline used by the teachers is reported, the researcher used a coding system based on a criteria summarized in Table 1.

Philosophy	Philosophy related concepts	Philosophy related strategies
Relation- Listening Philosophy	Students can change their behavior; misbehaviors stem from conflict, Student's misbehavior stems from inner emotional turmoil, Use of minimal power	Communication; Peer mediation; Parent, child, and teacher interaction, engaging curriculum, involving student to work with others; Taking it out, Use of emotional supportive
Confronting-Contracting Philosophy	Student's personalities and goals of misbehavior are different, understanding the goals of the student's misbehavior, developing self-discipline	Democratic styles of teaching, no use of punishment and rewards; identify cause of misbehavior, developing student's capacity; class meetings, supportive positive relations, use of logical consequences; facing reality
Rules and Consequences Philosophy	Behaviors are learned and reinforced; teachers impose power; behaviors are changed by the consequences of that behavior; teachers expresses firmly his rules;	Limit setting; backup system; omission training; responsibility training; Positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement and punishment, extinction; differential reinforcement; removal of desirable stimuli; and time

Table 1: Criteria used for coding orientation responses



Table 2 shows which perspectives were employed by the high school social studies teachers in the four samples. The first is a sample of male high school teachers from urban school districts. The second is a sample of female high school teachers from the urban school districts. The third is a sample of the male high school teachers from the rural school districts. The fourth is a sample of female high school teachers from the rural school districts. The results in all four samples revealed that most of the incidents provided by the teachers described situations encompassing all three perspectives.

Perspective	Male teachers (urban)	Female teachers (urban)	Male teachers (rural)	Female teachers (rural)
Relation- Listening	35%	35%	72%	80%
Confronting-Contracting	40%	82%	52%	86%
Rules and Consequences	78%	55%	63%	62%

Table 2: Which perspectives did teachers use?

Regardless of the school context, the female teachers used the confronting-contracting approach more than their male colleagues to control the students' behaviors in the classrooms and promote a positive discipline environment for the students. They believe that teachers do not have the right to warn the students. They believe that understanding why the students misbehave should be the first step to handle any problem.

For the rules and consequences perspective only, there were no differences among the four different samples. All the teachers, regardless of the school's geographical context, prefer to establish and set their classroom rules and expectations firmly and clearly the first day. Next, the teacher confronts the students regarding their behaviors, determines root causes, and finally helps the students develop a self-discipline strategy to change their behaviors.

Although all four groups employ rules and the consequences perspective for controlling students' misbehaviors, the incidents from the two samples in the rural school setting involved the use of the relationship-listening perspective to manage student's behaviors. Teachers in the rural school setting believed that the communication between the teachers and the students is the key to solve disciplinary problems in the classrooms.

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

Wolfgang (2001) and Hardin (2008) described several perspective models orienting the teachers to help the students behave appropriately in the classroom. Hardin (2008) argued that these perspectives had been the most common approaches to the classrooms in the schools throughout the United States and continued to be used today. Teachers need to understand their models and know how effective they are in managing the student's behavior in the classroom.

The explanatory mixed methods design was used in order to better address the purpose of the study and understand the research problem. Following the qualitative component of the study, the researcher used accounts of incidents provided by high school teachers in both the rural and the urban school settings. The qualitative component was designed to supplement and explain the quantitative results.

The quantitative component of the study consisted of a survey administered to a sample of high school teachers in central Pennsylvania. The qualitative component consisted of written incidents provided

by the high school teachers. Both the qualitative and the quantitative were used to identify the models and perspectives orienting high school teachers to classroom discipline management.

The quantitative study showed that the three disciplinary models (the relationship-listening, the confronting- contracting, and the rules-consequences models) used by the teachers to ensure an effective atmosphere are in fact highly correlated. There is no one size fits all approach to classroom discipline. The qualitative investigation also revealed that the written incidents provided by the high school teachers describe situations encompassing all three perspectives. The teachers prefer a multi-discipline orientation to facilitate classroom discipline management. This is consistent with Wolfgang (2001) who argues that "rarely do we find a practicing teacher who is a purist, that he or she only uses one model." (p. 256). More likely, the teacher in practice chooses methods encompassing all three discipline orientations or philosophies that best fit his or her personality.

The independent t-test showed that the differences between the males and the female were not statistically different. However, the qualitative data produced results consistent with the quantitative results. They revealed that female teachers preferred to employ the humanistic model, the confronting- contracting perspective, to manage classroom discipline. They chose the model that best fits their natures and personalities. Nel Nodding (1984) stated that caring and concern is central to women's nature and psychological development. They refuse to threaten the students or banish them and they care about their students. They listen to their students and try to understand their problems, and finally they give them the power to change their behavior.

Finally, although the effectiveness of the rules-consequences approach is not well reported, both the quantitative and the qualitative results indicated that the most popular disciplinary model among the high school teachers is the rules perspective. Regardless of the school setting, the teachers prefer to set their disciplinary rules and consequences the first day of the class. In his study about the teacher's beliefs about discipline, Ryan (1975) found that eighty seven percent of high school teachers used the rules and consequences approach to manage the classroom discipline.

#### *Implications for practice*

If the subsequent studies confirm the effectiveness of the three-frame model, then it would be recommended that the three-frame model could be extremely beneficial to the teacher. It would also enhance their effectiveness in classroom discipline management.

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The conclusions included in this research brief do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Education Policy Studies, College of Education, or Penn State University. All errors are attributable solely to the author.

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## **The Challenges of Being a Principal and the Promise of Creating Turnaround Artists: Pennsylvania Paving the Path for the Future of Principal Preparation and Retention**

by  
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Arne Duncan, the Secretary of the United States Department of Education, has succinctly stated "There are no good schools without good principals. It simply does not happen" (2009, n.p.). This state-



ment sums up why many schools are struggling to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For the past several decades states, school districts, individual schools, and national entities have struggled to find ways to fix the ailing education system. When the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2001, it upped the ante for school administrators to show rapid results by meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. This new system of metrics and oversight added another layer of stress to an already challenging job.

Robert Rammer (2007) describes how public school systems and principals are contending with intense scrutiny that is "coupled with demands for accountability and increased student achievement" (p. 67). Much of this scrutiny can be attributed to the NCLB. Before 2001, the federal government paid little attention to the daily operations of public schools, but with the NCLB firmly in place, all public schools now must test students in core content areas in grades three through eight, and in grade ten (Rammer, 2007). NCLB dictates that each school must demonstrate yearly progress toward the national goal that "all students perform on standardized tests at a proficient or advanced level in the content areas by 2014" (Rammer, 2007, p. 67). States are tasked with creating grade-level benchmarks that their students must achieve. Schools that fail to meet the accountability standards of NCLB face harsh consequences, including the removal of the principal.

A number of school superintendents and school administrative leaders are deeply suspicious about the government's motivation in enacting the NCLB Act. A survey conducted in 2003 found that a full 31 percent of superintendents and 18 percent of principals say that the NCLB law represented "a disguised effort to attack and destroy public education," (Johnson, 2004, p. 28). This critique is echoed throughout school districts throughout the nation, yet the complaints appear to be falling upon deaf ears, and currently there is no end in sight to the policies generated in connection with the NCLB Act.

The NCLB Act and its accountability standards are just the tip of the iceberg of challenges that current-day principals are facing. School administrative leaders must contend with budgetary cuts, rapidly-changing student bodies, answering to multiple stakeholders, and contending with internal and external constituencies in an effort to provide the best education possible for their students.

This paper will describe the challenges that principals are now facing, especially in regard to state and national policies that define the parameters of their positions; discuss why principals are resigning, leaving the profession or changing schools at a rapid rate; critique past and current university-level principal preparation programs; and examine why much of the academic literature of the past decade has focused on recruitment and retention programs for new and incoming principals, rather than for principals who are already in the field.

Finally, this paper will take a positive turn to focus on the ways that some states, including Pennsylvania, are engaging in groundbreaking new programs that provide educational resources for current principals that allow them to improve their skill sets, learn new leadership techniques and provide them with evidence-based best practices that will enrich their job performance and, in turn, their students' academic experiences.

### *The Challenges Current Principals Face*

Arguably, being a principal in a K-12 setting is more complex and challenging than it ever has been in the past. Principals are expected to be visionaries, budgetary wizards, and "instructional leaders" who can effectively work with and appease multiple groups of stakeholders while still measuring up to government mandated standards.

Multiple studies have illustrated the fact that good school leadership is critical for providing a rigorous learning environment for students. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) contend that the effects of administrative leadership on student learning are second only to the effects of a quality curriculum and teachers' instruction (p. 1).

One study posits that in the past, principals were mostly responsible for "delivering curriculum and ensuring the right mix of teachers, as well as keeping students safe and the school orderly" (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 16). Now principals are expected to improve individual student learning, coach

teachers, create accelerated learning systems and handle all of the crises that crop up on a day to day basis (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010).

Principals are expected to answer to a wide variety of stakeholders, many of whom have highly-differing demands. These interested parties include teachers, students, and parents, and external entities such as accrediting agencies, foundations, school boards, and district and state leaders. Often, the demands, especially the ones related to federal, state, and local policies are at odds with one another. These conflicting regulations can be confounding in and of themselves, plus in some states the education codes can be about 3,500 pages long (Johnson, 2004). Two examples of mandates which educational leaders are forced to contend with are providing a report of each individual student's body mass index or creating a report about school bus drivers' work break schedules (Johnson, 2004, p. 25).

Leone, Warnimont, and Zimmerman (2009) describe some of the emerging trends that current-day principals are facing, including having increasingly diverse student bodies, contending with large gaps in socioeconomic classes in their schools, trying to keep up with rapid changes in technology, and being held accountable for measuring up to government standards. The racial and ethnic makeup of student populations is changing at a rapid pace. While diversity enriches the academic experience for all students, having rapid influxes of students who need to learn English can prove very taxing for school systems.

Economic challenges are a perennial problem for school administrators, but most leaders are adept at working within the budgetary constraints. Even so, between 2009 and 2010 principals from around the United States reported taking draconian budget cuts of 12.83% (Ginsberg & Multon, 2011, p. 45). Principals are accustomed to having to do more with less, but the last rounds of budget cuts have created situations where leaders have had to let staff go, a situation that often creates a level of distrust between teachers and administration (Ginsberg & Multon, 2011, p. 45).

### *Accountability*

Many researchers argue that the current situation of high-stakes testing, accountability programs on the national and state levels, coupled with growing taxpayer interest regarding the performance of schools in their districts have made the demands for accountability among principals greater than ever (Connelly and Tirozzi, 2010, Shipps, & Firestone 2003, Shipps, & White, 2009).

State departments of education are usually deeply focused on schools meeting the accountability standards that are created at the state level; meanwhile, the public is often concerned with other issues such as violence in schools, problems with bullying, and teachers meeting the emotional needs of their children (Catano & Stronge, 2007).

A full eighty eight percent of principals surveyed in 2003 stated that staying abreast of government mandates takes up too much of their time (Johnson, 2004, p. 25). The NCLB represents what 90% of principals call an "unfunded mandate" where they are expected to exhibit school improvements by having students pass standardized tests, yet there is no extra support of any kind to meet these lofty goals. Many school administrators resent the federal government's focus on standardized measurements and revile the fact that the government is willing to use heavy-handed and unfair sanctions for schools that fail to measure up to the national standard (Johnson, 2004, p. 26).

Principals are progressively becoming more and more hemmed in by the internal and external factors that affect their ability to make decisions, change policies, and create new visions for their schools. Principals must depend on having adequate human resources and structural support in order to manifest their visions for their schools (Marks & Nance, 2007). Marks and Nance (2007) describe how the multi-layered accountability contexts generated by "states, school districts, local boards, school councils, and parent associations—have the potential to support or constrain the influence of school principals" (p. 24). Even so, little research has focused on how these environmental stressors affect the abilities of principals to fulfill their roles as instructional and supervisory leaders (Firestone & Shipps, 2003).

Firestone and Shipps (2003) describe how the educational reform movement has created a “systemic dilemma,” which has the ability to reduce the authority of individual principals and frustrate them on a daily basis. Furthermore, having so many branches involved in policy making creates a situation where policies may be interpreted differently by various groups.

With all of this in mind, it should be no surprise that Johnson (2004) reports that a full 98% of school superintendents and 75% of principals surveyed stated that they have stressful jobs. A study conducted by Public Agenda, found that 70% of administrators used the word “stress” to describe their current situation and noted that the stress was negatively affecting their health and home lives (Ginsberg & Multon, 2011, p. 45).

### *Expectations & Idealized Visions*

The leadership standards that are used most often by states are the ones formulated by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (Roberts, 2009). Principals are expected to be educational leaders who foster the success of each student by creating, facilitating and implementing a shared vision of learning for the community. He or she is also tasked with creating a nurturing school culture that will be conducive for both staff and student growth. School administrators should position themselves as leaders who manage all aspects of the organization including operations and resources, while also working collaboratively with families and community members to provide an exceptional learning environment. Principals should focus on behaving in an ethical manner and being sensitive to diverse community interests, and responsive to issues arising from the social, political, and cultural contexts in which the administrator operates.

In the academic literature of the past decade there has been a trend toward conceptualizing “leadership by adjective” or “leadership by slogan” (Leithwood, 2007, p. 41). Some of the recent visions of leadership ideals have included “instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, constructivist leadership, servant leadership, cultural leadership and primal leadership” (p. 41).

While these leadership ideals may sound good on paper, living up to the visions embedded in these slogans can be a daunting task for any one individual.

Furthermore, in our individualistic American culture, people like to uphold and praise leaders for jobs well done or scorn them for their failures. Leaders do have some power in affecting changes, but the educational system, especially as it relates to “principal efficacy literature, problems associated with principal quality and retention, and professionalization movements” has become what Roach, Smith, and Boutin (2011) describe as a “rich, thick organizational field” (p. 72). This field can often resemble a quagmire, with principals being bogged down by the expectations placed upon them by policy makers, researchers, foundations, and other entities that believe they have a say in what unfolds in the field.

One contribution to the quagmire is Leone, Warnimont, and Zimmerman’s (2009) proposal that principals of the future will be required to serve dual roles as “bridges of knowledge and encouragement” and “navigators” who chart the course for schools by acting as agents of change who are capable of developing strong bonds with the community, and creating a brighter future for all (p. 89). The images of bridge and navigator bring to mind such a diverse set of qualities that it seems quite improbable that one person could possess all of them. A bridge is sturdy, reliable, solid, and static. It is designed to carry people over to the other side of some sort of barrier, be it a river or a gulley. Bridges can represent the pathway to a transformation or being transported to a new place. Navigators, on the other hand, are active, engaged, in charge, aware of their surroundings, and capable of readjusting their course to keep everyone on track. The challenges inherent in being both a bridge and a navigator would tend to frustrate even the most adept professionals.

In a 2007 article, Kenneth Leithwood proposes that rather than seeking leaders who possess inherent personality traits, the focus for good leadership should be on practices; namely practices that have empirical evidence to back up their efficacy. According to Leithwood (2007), exemplary practices can be culled from a number of sources including qualitative case studies, large-scale quantitative studies that focus on

the effects of good leadership, research regarding how leaders affect student learning, and research about why principals leave their positions (p. 43-45). Principal Royce Turner from the Jefferson Davis Middle School in Jacksonville, Florida concurs with Leithwood's findings about the importance of evidence-based practices, as evinced when he stated: "In this age of accountability, you can't rely on instincts. You need to have some sort of research based program or plan" in order to succeed (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 17).

### *Traditional Principal Preparation Programs*

With this outcry for research-based practices, programs, and plans, one would assume that we could turn to university-level principal preparation programs for the answers. Currently, there are 500+ principal preparation programs in the United States, each with certification requirements are remarkably similar from state to state (Roberts, 2009). Most states require a principal to have a teaching certificate, or to be eligible to earn one, or to have earned one in the past (Roberts, 2009). Nearly 90% of states require that a candidate who wishes to become a principal must have completed a preparation program that is approved by the state, while 75% require a candidate to hold a master's degree, with some specifying that the degree must be in the field of educational administration (Roberts, 2009). Nearly 70% of states require that a candidate for be a principal must pass a standardized assessment, which is most often the School Leadership Assessment (SLA) (Roberts, 2009).

An article entitled "Ready and able: Preparing principals to lead our schools" (2010) describes the path that most individuals take to become a school principal. Most earn a teaching degree, teach for a few years and decide to take evening courses to earn their administrator's degree or certificate, usually while remaining in their full time jobs as teachers (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 16). Once they have earned their degrees they will likely go through an interview process with a committee comprised of teachers, parents, and district staff. The system as it is today allows people to self-select for pursuing leadership positions.

Many educators, researchers, and experts have criticized the principal preparation programs for a variety of weaknesses and failings. In a 2008 article in *Education Week*, Pennsylvania Secretary of Education Gerald L. Zahorchak stated that Pennsylvania has historically had more than 40 educational institutions that offered courses to prepare people to become principals (p. 1). According to Zahorchak, many of these course offerings were "so vague that a professor could take a leadership class in virtually any direction" (2008, p. 1). The United States Department of Education makes a similar claim, stating that many principal preparation programs lack vision, coherence, and purpose (Principal Training and Preparation, 2010, p. 3).

Hughes and Moglia-Cannon (2010) contend that certification programs have remained stagnant and the curriculum largely unchanged over the years while the challenges that principals face are changing at an ever more rapid pace. They also contend that the preparation programs tend to use a "one size fits all" model, which is often a prototype that cannot be generalized to meet the needs of a wide variety of schools including those which have a large number of children who are learning English, low-performing math or literacy scores, students from impoverished backgrounds, and a great number of students with disabilities (Hughes and Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 17).

The solution to creating stronger principal preparation programs involves having the programs proactively wed practice with theory. Many graduate certificate programs focus on policy and theory rather than what principals will be facing on a day-to-day basis. Exemplary leadership preparation programs need to wed theory and practice, especially by offering long-term internships for people in the program (Orr & Orphanos 2011). The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) stresses the importance of heavily investing in "instruction-related professional learning for principals" that includes time for collective learning opportunities and "instruction-focused professional development" ("Three essentials," 2010, p. 2).

Once people graduate from preparation programs they may feel prepared for their new jobs, but at least a few will experience what Duke (1988) calls “reality shock” (p. 309). The term reality shock is often used to describe a situation that nurses experience when they realize that the career that they have worked toward for several years is extremely different from what they expected it to be. Often, this feeling of unpreparedness or “reality shock” causes nurses to leave the profession (Duke, 1998, p. 309). The same can be said for new principals who may not grasp the multitude of challenges that they will face in their new position.

To make matters worse, in many cases, the newest principal in a district is assigned to the “toughest, high-poverty school, or to the mammoth-sized high school” which sets the individual up for failure before she or he walks into the front door of the school (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 18).

### *Why Principals Change Schools, Resign & Retire*

Kenneth Leithwood (2007) states that having a principal step down from his or her positions is “one of the most common sources of schools failing to progress” (p. 45). Chapman (2005) explains that high turnover rates are not only costly in a monetary sense, but that “the loss of leadership experience, expertise, knowledge, and wisdom has the potential to impact adversely on school quality and student learning” (p. 5). These are alarming statements in a time when studies such as the one conducted by University of Texas-Austin professors Fuller and Young (2009) about principals in Texas found that only about 50% of newly hired principals in public schools stay in their positions for at least three years (“High Turnover,” n.p.).

Fuller and Young (2009) found that principals working in high-poverty schools usually leave their positions the soonest, and that the percentage of “economically disadvantaged students in a school is a major determinant in how long a newly hired principal will stay, with principals in high-poverty schools having shorter tenure and lower retention rates” (“High Turnover,” n.p.). A full 20% of newly hired principals who work in high-poverty and low-achieving schools leave their positions after one year (“High Turnover,” n.p.). This constant rate of turnover makes it all but impossible for struggling schools to advance and overcome the obstacles that they face.

In the era before NCLB, Daniel Duke (1988) wrote an article entitled “Why principals consider quitting” noting that principals were often frustrated from contending with bureaucratic rules and felt fatigued from the endless demands of the job (p. 308). Principals in the late 1980s also shared the following complaints:

They cared about the needs of others, but they felt overburdened by the weight of their responsibilities; they had diverse interests, but they were drained by competing demands; they enjoyed recognition, but they felt pressure from the high expectations placed on them; they knew that they had grown in some areas, but they felt that they had neglected others; and their achievements seemed only to bring more work (Duke, 1988, p. 308).

These concerns expressed in the late twentieth century about overwhelming responsibilities, pressure from high expectations, and having to answer to competing demands have only been exacerbated in the early twenty first century by the challenges of NCLB, a rapidly-diversifying student body, and seemingly endless spates of budget cuts.

A research brief issued by the Principals’ Partnership in 2005 provided a detailed list of many of the reasons school systems were having a difficult time retaining principals. Among the main reasons were:

Increased accountability expectations; diminished or static levels of resources to support reform efforts; greater administrator vulnerability to sanctions; the complex demands of government and the community; chronic stress (Principals’ Partnership, 2005, p. 1).

Salary considerations also affect principals’ decision to stay in their positions or move on to other careers. A Principals’ Partnership Research Brief (2005) states that a common complaint voiced by current



principals is that there is a “slight or negligible difference between teacher and administrator compensation when viewed on a *per diem* basis” (p. 1). Baker, Punswick, and Belt (2010) found that principals who earn higher salaries than their peers tend to stay in their positions for a longer time.

Many current principals are reaching retirement age. A 2008 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that most principals are past the age of 50 and that nearly 30 percent are 55 or older (Zahorchak, p. 1). There are also high turnover rates for principals in rural districts and high-need schools which means that the nation could soon be facing a “massive principal shortage” (Zahorchak, 2008, p. 1).

Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, Gerald L. Zahorchak (2008) argues that the most efficacious way to handle these issues is to help current principals “find success in their jobs” while also making the career choice more appealing to potential new principals (p. 1).

### *The Genius of Working with Present Principals*

In the earlier part of this decade, there was a broad movement toward providing an increased level of support to entry-level administrative professionals by providing them with mentors and ongoing professional development opportunities. Archer (2006) notes that many states began providing extra coaching and training for novice principals “in the hope of turning what’s often a sink-or-swim experience into one more likely to lead to improved school performance” (p. 10).

The notion of supporting entry-level principals with mentoring and professional development opportunities is a wise one, yet to only focus on newly-minted educational administrators overlooks the entirety of principals serving in the United States.

Currently, there are about 100,000 principals serving across the nation. If policy makers choose to focus solely on recruiting and retaining new hires, their policies will affect less than 5% of the schools per year (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 18). This is why legislators must focus their attention and discretionary dollars to providing current principals with the “tools they need to improve struggling schools and to make good schools even better” (Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010, p. 18).

A large body of academic literature speaks of the dangers of teachers working in silos and being isolated from their peers. The same holds true for principals who need support, encouragement, and fresh perspectives from colleagues in their field. A research briefing published in 2005 argued that principals would greatly benefit from having cohort groups that would offer opportunities for discussion, training and support and having formal and informal opportunities to network with other principals (Principals’ Partnership, p. 2).

An exciting intervention that is occurring in some states and has been adopted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania involves working with currently-sitting principals to help them expand their skills sets, develop new strategies, work in cohorts, and get hands-on experience in trying new methods to improve their schools.

The National Institute of School Leadership’s (NISL’s) Executive Development Program (EDP) was created to provide ongoing professional development opportunities to school leaders as a means to drive their schools to high performance (Nunnery, Yen & Ross, 2011, p. 2). This innovation program helps principals to envision themselves as “strategic thinkers, instructional leaders, and creators of a just, fair, and caring culture in which all students meet high standards” (Nunnery, et al., 2011, p. 2).

The NISL EDP helps principals to gain the tools, skills, and knowledge they require to move their schools in positive directions. The EDP has a cohesive and well-defined curriculum comprised of four courses including: *World-Class Schooling* (Principal as a Strategic Thinker and School Designer, Standards-Based Instruction), *Teaching and Learning*, *Developing Capacity and Commitment*, and *Driving for Results* (Nunnery, et al., 2011, p. 2). Participants in the program engage in highly interactive training sessions that allow them to work with a supportive cohort in a constructive environment.

Nunnery et al. have followed a cohort of principals from elementary, middle, and high schools who partook in the program's offerings from 2006 to 2009 and have found "significantly larger gains in the percentages of students achieving proficiency in reading and mathematics" (2011, p. 3).

Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, Gerald L. Zahorchak believes that leaders are made, not born and that the NISL EDP program helps groom currently-seated principals into outstanding leaders. Zahorchak has been a leader in moving the agenda forward in working with current principals to improve their schools' performances. In 2008, Zahorchak praised the United States Congress for their consideration in providing funding and support to "identify, reward, and train highly qualified principals" (p. 1). Zahorchak also pressured the Pennsylvania "legislators, state school chiefs, universities, school administrators and teachers" to come to the table to discuss the best methods for ensuring that "new requirements, standards, accountability measures, and best practices" are instituted statewide (2008, p. 1).

The NISL EDP program has made a profound difference in creating excellent professional development opportunities for principals. Principals desperately need integrated professional development programs throughout their careers, yet many do not have these opportunities. Hughes & Moglia-Cannon (2010) contend that in many states "most principals receive little or no integrated professional development driven by instructional best practices and systemic approaches after they become a principal" (p. 17). Providing excellent professional development resources to seasoned principals who have a keen awareness of their schools and their districts, who have experience working with the unique bureaucracy and red tape of their district, and who have a vision of what changes they would like to implement is a fiscally-wise strategy that has a positive impact on both teachers and students.

In organizations there is a dialectical relationship between stability and change; leaders need to be operating from a firm base if they want to enact changes that will be lasting. Zahorchak (2008) shares that principals who have engaged in the NISL training state that they have "moved from being managers" to becoming instructional leaders (p. 2). The difference between managers and leaders is enormous: managers focus on preserving the status quo while leaders put their energies toward making improvements (Leithwood, 2007). This is why it is wise to invest time, money, and other resources into retaining and re-training principals who are currently leading schools.

The positive results of the NISL EDP program will likely have a ripple effect with other states adopting the program over the next several years. This is a sanguine trend that might put a stop to the hemorrhaging loss of principals that has been occurring over the past decade. Stanching the wounds that have been inflicted by national policies such as NCLB requires principals banding together to create a new vision of what their jobs could be and what their schools can achieve.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has described many of the challenges that the nearly 100,000 principals who serve in schools across the United States are facing on a daily basis. The high levels of expectations, public and government scrutiny, rapidly shifting social and cultural environments, and budget cuts brought on by the Great Recession are making principals' jobs more arduous and overwhelming than at any time in recent history.

Fortunately, programs like the National Institute of School Leadership's Executive Development Program are promoting a sea change in the ways that districts and states envision and provide professional development opportunities for current principals.

Principals play enormously important roles in shaping the culture, environment, success, and trajectories of the schools and the districts in which they serve. Still, many become burnt out, disheartened, and overwhelmed which forces them to leave the profession to seek new positions or to retire entirely. By offering ongoing professional development options where school administrators can engage in highly interactive trainings with their peers, principals not only gain important skills but also achieve a sense of community and camaraderie with their peers that endures beyond the classroom setting.

Having a sense of peer support, knowing that one's state, district, and school are invested in one's success represents a morale booster for beleaguered principals. Even more importantly, learning critical skills, crucial leadership tactics, and strategic methods helps principals bring struggling schools achievement levels up and helps schools that are doing well reach higher levels of excellence.

Beleaguered school administrators from across the United States now have a fighting chance to find a sense of community, access a sense of empowerment, and garner the tools that they so desperately require in order to stay in their chosen profession and meet and exceed the expectations foisted upon them by multiple stakeholders with competing agendas.

Helping principals move from a managerial mindset to one of being an instructional leader is perhaps the finest outcome of the NISL EDP program. In a time when schools need visionary leaders who can implement strategic plans that will shape schools into places that provide the finest education for students from all backgrounds, having ongoing professional development opportunities can make a profound difference.

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