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THE ROLE OF THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL
IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Thurl J. Williamson

Master's Paper

E.I.S.C.

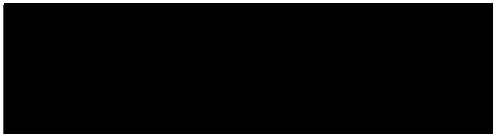


July, 1957

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL
IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
(Education 560)

by

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B.S. in Ed., Eastern Illinois State College, 1955

Submitted to the Department of
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requirements for the degree of
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Adviser



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE EARLY PRINCIPALSHIP IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. . . .	1
Head Teachers Became the First Principals.	1
Qualifications and Duties of Early Principals. . . .	1
II. THE ELEMENTARY TEACHING PRINCIPAL OF TODAY.	5
The Need for Good Principals in the Elementary Schools.	5
Qualifications of the Elementary Principal of Today.	6
Should the Principal Teach?.	8
Summary.	13
III. THE FUTURE OF THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	15
The Principal Will be an Instructional Leader. . .	15
The Principalship Will Be a Full-Time Job. . . .	17
Summary.	19
Bibliography.	20

PREFACE

The last few years have brought about changes in our elementary schools. Our people, once a rural and small town people, are concentrating themselves in larger towns and cities. The suburban areas are experiencing the most rapid growth. The one-room country school, which was formerly the community center for the rural people, is practically non-existent. Larger schools are being built to house children in the congested areas; the need seems to exceed continually the supply of buildings. Under reorganization, a broader curriculum has replaced the three R's, requiring more teachers and administrators.

What is the place of the elementary teaching principal in this changed school system? What is expected of him? What qualifications are desirable to make him competent for his task? Is he a teacher, or is he an administrator? Can he efficiently and economically fulfill the dual situation of a teaching principal?

This study was made in an attempt to learn the opinions of some people in the education field relative to the above questions.

THE EARLY PRINCIPALSHIP IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Head Teachers Became First Principals.--The history of the elementary school principal covers a relatively short period of time in the history of our nation, its beginning dating back little more than a century. The early American school in the one room log cabin had one teacher whose duty was to instruct and supervise the learning of all the children of all the people. The teacher was usually a man, since the patrons believed in stern discipline in the school, and a sturdy stalwart man who kept good order was considered a good teacher primarily on that basis. As populations increased in the school districts, these schools became two-teacher schools, three-teacher schools, four-teacher schools, et cetera, with one of the teachers acting as head teacher or principal teacher, hence the name principal came to be applied to that teacher.¹ Jacobson and Reavis² state that by 1830 superintendents began turning to head teachers in the local schools as the persons best qualified to carry out their policies.

Qualifications and Duties of the Early Principals.--The heads of these early elementary schools were invariably regarded as teachers and not as administrative officers. Administrative acts were performed as incidental to their duties as instructors. Their chief administrative duty was

1. F. W. Hubbard, "Are Principals a Vanishing Race?" National Elementary Principal, October 1953, p.27.

2. Paul B. Jacobson and William C. Reavis, Duties of School Principals, Prentice-Hall, New York, 1941, p. 756.

maintenance of order and discipline in the school building and on the school grounds. As larger school enrollments developed and small buildings gave way to eight and twelve room schools with a teacher for each room, it became necessary for head teachers to have some release from teaching time for the performance of their managerial duties. This resulted in a need by the head teacher for some space other than the classroom. The waste space formerly used for storage of personal belongings now assumed a new role in the school building. It tended to become a clearing room for the internal affairs of the school. This development of the school office took place slowly.³

From the time of the establishment of the principalship in its earliest form, the school principal was expected to assume responsibility for the guidance of his pupils. If a pupil became a problem for a teacher in management or control, it was the duty of the principal to give assistance to the teacher in bringing the pupil into line with the purposes of the school; if a pupil encountered difficulties in learning which hindered his progress and baffled his teacher, it was also the duty of the principal to do what he could to resolve the difficulties for both teacher and pupil. Thus from the inception of the school principalship, teachers, pupils, and parents have looked to the principal for guidance in solving the problems of management and learning in local schools. The teacher, who knew the subject matter and had acquired the reputation of being able successfully to manage unruly pupils and to pacify angry parents, possessed the requisite of the head master or principal. Such persons became our first principals when

3 · Ibid., p. 179.

local schools increased in enrollment to the point where two or more classrooms had to be provided. The early principal was given authority for the admission of pupils to school. He was responsible for their classification, promotion, conduct to and from school, general management on the school ground, and discipline during school hours in classrooms other than his own when assistance was requested by teachers under his supervision.⁴

School boards were often very specific in the duties expected of their principals in the performance of the duties. According to Jacobson, Reavis, and Logsdon, Cincinnati schools in 1839 gave these duties for principal teachers:

- (1) to function as head of the school charged to his care;
- (2) to regulate the classes and courses of instruction of all pupils, whether they occupied his room or the room of other teachers;
- (3) to discover any defects in the school and apply remedies;
- (4) to make defects known to the visitor or trustee of the ward, or district, if he were unable to remedy conditions;
- (5) to give necessary instruction to his assistants;
- (6) to classify pupils;
- (7) to safeguard schoolhouses and furniture;
- (8) to keep the school clean;
- (9) to instruct assistants;
- (10) to refrain from impairing the standing of assistants, especially in the eyes of their pupils; and
- (11) to require the co-operation of his assistants.⁵

Jacobson, Reavis, and Logsdon state that by the middle of the nineteenth century the status of the principalship in large cities was as follows:

- (1) a teaching male principal was the controlling head of the school;
- (2) female and primary departments had women principals

4. Ibid., pp. 109-110.

5. Paul B. Jacobson, William C. Reavis, and James D. Logsdon, The Effective School Principal, Prentice-Hall, New York, 1954, p. 570.

under the direction of the male principal; and (3) the principal had prescribed duties which were largely disciplinary, routine administrative acts, and supervising the grading of pupils in the various rooms.⁶

In order to carry out their duties efficiently, the principals were frequently released from teaching part of the time. As early as 1857 the principals in some of the schools in Boston were relieved of their duties for part of each day, and in other schools one or two half days a week were set aside for inspection and examination of classes other than their own.⁷

During the last half of the nineteenth century the prestige of the principalship was greatly enhanced. In the large cities the principal gained the right to decide which pupils should be promoted. Orders to teachers from the central office were sent through his hands. He gained the right to have a part in the transfer and assignment of teachers. He was expected to enforce standards which would safeguard the health and morals of the pupils, to rate and supervise the janitors, and to requisition both educational and maintenance supplies and equipment. By the year 1900 the principal in city systems was clearly recognized as the administrative head of the school.⁸

6. Ibid., p. 571.

7. Ibid., p. 571.

8. Ibid., pp. 571,572.

II

THE ELEMENTARY TEACHING PRINCIPAL OF TODAY

The Need for Good Principals in the Elementary Schools.--The elementary school principalship is fast becoming an important element of our educational system both from the standpoint of numbers and the influence exerted upon the children, teachers, and parents in our communities.

It was estimated in 1936 that there were 3,000 city superintendents, 3,000 county superintendents, 16,000 high school principals, 1,700 college and university presidents, and 21,000 elementary school principals in our country. Of 27,000,000 students attending elementary and secondary schools and colleges in 1936, 21,000,000, or more than three-fourths, were in elementary schools. Of 900,000 teachers, two-thirds were employed in elementary schools.⁹

The elementary principal studies child development at close range. His school can become a laboratory for testing instructional material and techniques.

Since all the children of all the people are in his schools, he is apt to be more intimately connected with home and community institutions than are most other school officials and can, therefore, serve as interpreter of the aspirations of the people for their children. Furthermore, he sees daily the work of the teachers in his school, discusses their problems with them, and has an opportunity to evaluate the different types of preparation they represent. His advice, therefore, is important on the kinds and amount of training requisite to success in teaching elementary school children.¹⁰

9. Bess Goodykoontz, Elementary School Principal, United States Office of Education, Washington, D.C., 1938, Bulletin No.8, p.1.

10. Ibid., p. 1.

Qualifications of the Elementary Principal of Today.--We are beginning to realize we need the best personnel obtainable to serve as principals of our elementary schools. The principal is the representative of the school superintendent. He is a professional leader of teachers, pupils, and patrons of his school. The ability to work with others is essential. He must be a superior organizer and a skilled administrator. He needs to be a wise and discreet executive who handles parents with tact, firmness, and skill. He must possess the ability to make decisions promptly and correctly. He should delegate such responsibilities as he can; the others he will cheerfully assume and effectively discharge. It is requisite that he be a good business manager for such activities as lunch room, school store, et cetera. To be a good principal he shall have demonstrated his own competence to teach if he is to recognize a good classroom. He will need to recognize acceptable forms of teaching other than particular ones of which he is master. Good health is a most valuable asset--free from physical deformities and defects in speech and hearing. Certainly the principal should be a normal individual. For example, the male principal should not be effeminate. Nor should he be seriously underweight or overweight. He should possess intelligence of a high order, be broad minded and open minded. Personal charm is extremely desirable. A good sense of humor and an even temper will make him a better principal. He will do well to encourage his teachers to experiment within limits which the educational service approves.¹¹

Elementary principals have been recruited chiefly from the teaching ranks after long experience. This pattern is familiar in the

11. Jacobson, Reavis, and Logsdon, op. cit., pp. 579-581.

schools: teacher to building principal to superintendent. The elementary school principalship is often a stepping stone to the junior high school principalship, since forty per cent of junior high school principals have been elementary principals immediately preceding their present positions.¹²

The first requisite for a young man seeking a career in school principalship is the bachelor's degree from an institution of recognized standing, with a broad basic training rather than specialization in some narrow field of knowledge. In addition, some classroom teaching experience is of great value so he will know teaching problems at first hand. He should demonstrate his ability as a superior teacher before seeking a principalship. Further training useful to him is at least a year of graduate study in educational administration for the unit of the school system in which he plans to work. It is valuable also to serve a semester of internship as assistant to an outstanding principal. Surely he will wish to increase his professional training by taking summer training from time to time.¹³

Despite the fact that professional training is now generally required of persons selected for the school principalship, many principals in service acquired their positions because of other qualifications. Some have come to their positions because of special ability in handling unruly pupils and trouble-making parents. Others have secured appointment as a result of long service in the local school system or through powerful political support. A few may have had the position thrust

12. Jacobson and Beavis, op. cit., p. 768.

13. Ibid., p. 777.

upon them in a local emergency. Such persons can scarcely be regarded as professional leaders in school and community. Generally speaking, such persons seldom rise above the level of office managers.¹⁴

Professionally trained principals seek, of course, to understand the traditions of their offices, but they do not hesitate to break managerial customs even of long standing, and attempt to create new traditions which can be justified by current needs. Tradition as such is no adequate ground for adhering to office practices long ago outmoded or for declining to adopt new practices not yet sanctioned by local mores.¹⁵

It is commonly accepted that full responsibility for a school rests with the principal, and as an administrator, the principal has the opportunity to bring material resources, local talent, professional talent, and professional service to the school's activities to broaden the training and development of his students. The principal's professional interest in all children's work, a kindly remark colored with genuine understanding of the child's particular developmental needs, and a challenging request for more contributions will do much to stimulate the pupils in his school.¹⁶

Should the Principal Teach?---For the principal who is required to spend part of his time in teaching, the problem of finding time to perform

14. Ibid., p. 189.

15. Ibid., p. 190.

16. Ethel D. Latta, "The Principal and the Art Program," National Elementary Principal, April 1951, p. 78.

supervisory duties and at the same time meet the daily needs specified by law, state regulations, and local rules, as well as routine administrative and clerical duties essential to the operation of the schools, becomes a very perplexing task. Since 57.5 per cent of the elementary school principals and 26.6 per cent of the high school principals must teach at least part of the time, it is apparent that these principals are confronted with a greater task of preparing a time budget for the demands made upon them than those principals who are not required to teach. In schools in large cities, this situation has gradually led to the release of most principals from teaching duties, the release being granted usually on the ground that the time of the principal is needed for matters of greater importance to the school than teaching. Since the act of teaching may be much more successfully performed by a teacher with special training for specific task than by a principal who is compelled to divide his attention between the duties of administration and teaching, superintendents of city school systems generally seek to have their principals relieved from teaching in order that full time may be given to administration. The intention of superintendents in advocating the changing of principals from teaching to non-teaching status has been to provide a supervisory leadership in the local schools that cannot be furnished by the central office. The assumption of most superintendents, when they recommend that a principal be relieved of teaching, is that as a result of the freedom thus obtained, the principal will devote all or much of the time to important professional duties formerly neglected.¹⁷

17. Jacobson and Reavis, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

The teaching principal of today's elementary school is in a sense a legacy from somewhat primitive school conditions. Like the old one room log cabin school teacher, the modern teaching principal is both teacher and principal. He is expected to instruct and supervise--to do all the things laid down by modern educational theories. In many ways, it is the most trying position in our modern schools, but it has both the satisfaction of the classroom teacher, working in close contact with his class, and the pleasure of the principal, aiding the whole operation of his school.

No one knows how many teaching principals there are in the United States. One problem of determining numbers lies, of course, in the definition of teaching principal. The teacher in the one-teacher school is usually both an instructor and an administrator; in a two-teacher school, one may be the head teacher, or principal. As we go on up the line to three-teacher, four-teacher, and larger schools, there is no infallible rule that tells us that now we have reached the teaching principal level. In its studies of salaries in the urban systems, National Education Association Research Division has arbitrarily defined teaching principal as one who gives less than half of his time to supervision, that is, 51 per cent or more given to classroom teaching duties. On the basis of replies received by the research, it is possible to estimate the total number of teaching and full time principals in the urban school systems of our country. The following table contains some figures showing some changes in the number of teaching

and full time principals as estimated by the findings from the research:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Teaching</u>	<u>Supervising</u>
1932-1933	7,682	7,449
1942-1943	7,040	8,542
1952-1953	4,923	14,651

In light of the above figures it appears that the teaching principalship is on its way out.¹⁸

Hubbard¹⁹ further cites that a breakdown of the figures by population groups shows that nearly one-third of the teaching principal positions have disappeared in the larger metropolitan centers during the past twenty years. In the smaller places, between 2,500 and 5,000 population, two-thirds of the teaching principals have gone during the same period. In these smaller places some of the losses may have been caused by consolidating and enlarging the administrative units. By way of contrast in urban districts, the full-time principalship is on the increase. During the past two decades the number of teaching principals has decreased by almost one-half; the number of full-time principals has nearly doubled.

He thinks that at least three factors are operating to decrease the number of teaching elementary school principals, one major influence is the general movement toward larger school districts. As districts are consolidated and reorganized, it is possible to set up larger school units which necessarily must be placed under the direction

18. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 27.

19. Ibid., p. 28.

of someone freed from full-time teaching. Of major importance in larger urban areas has been the realization by superintendents of the potential role of the principal. For some time, superintendents have wanted to increase the supervisory leadership of principals to improve instructional leadership formerly provided by the central office. The third factor which has made a decline in the number of teaching principals and an increase of full-time principals has been the efforts of the principals themselves. Principals have recognized the need for greater freedom from teaching duties so they could help the classroom teachers with their problems.

Smith thinks that the practice of employing elementary school principals who spend a considerable part of the day teaching is questionable. However, it is quite common in small towns. There the practice is encouraged regardless of whether the principal's classes necessarily receive less attention than the other classes because of the pressure of his administrative duties, or whether the principal performs his primary function, that of stimulation and guidance for the growth of his teachers. He says:

No two full-time jobs were ever accomplished successfully at the same time, and no one will deny that teaching is a full-time profession. It is the belief that a position as principal of a school, no matter what its size, will more than occupy the time of any person if he performs his function properly.

If a school is so small that it does not seem to rate the service of a full-time supervising principal, then it probably would be wiser to have a principal supervise two or more small schools. The ideal way, of course, would be to build a community school large enough to justify the presence of a supervising principal.

The reason for the employment of a teaching principal today is usually a financial one. It appears more economical to employ a principal, who will also teach, than to hire a principal and a teacher separately. Regardless of the size of a town, the cost

of education today makes the operations of its school system big business, and it is interesting to note that other big businesses resort to no such false economy. It should be appreciated that a teaching principal, even though he may possess the necessary qualifications, cannot perform the principal's function and teach a classroom of pupils as well as a good teacher.²⁰

On the other hand, Johnston believes that principals ought to teach, in addition to performing their administrative duties. He gives the following reasons for his opinion:

(1) the principal will come to know and understand more clearly the problems of the classroom teacher if he is one of the teachers; (2) he will come to know and better understand the children who make up his present school population; (3) teaching will give him the opportunity to experiment himself with those methods and ideas about which he talks so glibly, and to see if they fit the present case; (4) the principal should be a master teacher of the school, and lead other teachers by his examples; (5) by accepting the responsibilities of the classroom, he will be forced to come out of his office and enter the fray, accepting the daily combat of the classroom.²¹

Summary.--From the information obtained from this study it appears that there is general agreement that those principals who have had some teaching experience usually make better principals. Experience as a teacher causes a principal to be more sympathetic toward the classroom problems of his teachers and to have a better understanding of children through the close contact experienced in working with them in the classrooms.

Most of the sources consulted think it is best for principals not to do teaching in addition to performing their duties as principals.

20. Maurice F. Smith, "The Teaching Principal Is a False Economy," Nation's Schools, March, 1951, pp. 37-38.

21. Joseph F. Johnston, "Principals Ought to Teach, Too," American School Board Journal, April, 1955, pp. 33-39.

Teaching and the principalship are two separate and highly specialized jobs, each of them worthy of full time service. A few people think the principal should teach some classes, thereby keeping him in close contact with students, and current problems of instructions.

The writer feels that the individual situation and personnel involved often are important factors to be considered. The size of the school, the clerical help available, the principal's ability to budget his time and to delegate duties to other personnel of the school are some points to take into account. The writer thinks that if the principal is a good teacher, enjoys teaching, and can do classroom teaching without neglecting his principal's duties, he may be of great value to his school as a part time teacher. On the other hand, if the additional duties resulting from teaching cause him to fail in fulfilling his duties as a principal, he should not teach. Since he is the leader of his school, his principal's work should occupy first place in his duty to his teachers, his student body, and the community served by his school.

III

THE FUTURE OF THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Principal Will Be an Instructional Leader.--The elementary school principal is becoming an instructional leader as well as an administrative and supervisory leader. In the past, he prided himself on the mechanical smoothness with which his school operated. The efficient running of the school still necessarily involves the principal's attention to many details. However, careful planning and organizing of work will prevent his enslavement to detail. More and more the principal's attention will be given to the instructional program in his school. The principal will be concerned with a program that will provide for the individual needs of the children and also be tailor-made to fit the local situation.²²

The principal can be of special service as an instructional leader in another very useful way.

When a teacher finds a child that needs individual remedial work and the school district cannot provide special remedial teachers, the principal will endeavor to help by teaching the child himself. Though the busy life of a principal will prevent him from helping a large number of children in this manner, he will find that teaching even a small number each year will have a far-reaching effect upon the child, the parent, and the teacher. He will inspire his teachers not through fear of him or their ultimate dismissal but through his daily living example of rendering service. Together the teacher and the principal will work to achieve the continual raising of the instructional level of their school, an aim that they both wish to see achieved.²³

22. Mary F. Mitchell, "The Principal As an Instructional Leader," National Elementary Principal, December, 1950, p. 11.

23. Elva Dittman, "The Modern Role of the Elementary Principal," Educational Forum, May 1952, p. 429.

The principal of the future must be far-seeing and open-minded, ever alert to good new ideas to improve the instruction in his school.

The good principal will spend more and more time working with the teachers at their jobs. The best way to help teachers is by experiencing good teaching. . . .When a person becomes a principal, he should try to do more of the desirable things in the more desirable ways which he as a teacher has observed. . . . Many outstanding principals have developed on the job. . . . It is said that some people have twenty years of experience; others have one year of experience twenty times. The difference lies in the mind set of the individual.²⁴

More and more, the principal will grow into the leader of the team of pupils, parents, teachers, and community because of the very nature of his position in his school community. Such items as the need for secretarial assistance, time free from teaching, expense accounts, et cetera, will take on a new meaning. The importance of these factors to the development of a good school will depend on the professional status of the individual who is filling the principal's chair at the time--in other words, what use he is ready to make of them. Some principals, unfortunately, have degenerated into mere handlers of office routines despite the fact that they have been given assistants to whom they could, if they chose, delegate the routine matters. In fact, some principals become so engrossed in routine matters that their ability to teach is often questioned by their staff.

The principal will be charged with the responsibility for the program in his school. The old line administrative organization will be replaced by the principal of the local school autonomy. All personnel, other than the personnel within the school itself, such as directors of art, music, physical education, yes, even the

24. W. George Hayward, "The Preparation We Need," National Elementary Principal, May, 1953, p. 10.

superintendent will be thought of as resource people who come to help the principal and teachers. They will be responsible to the principal when they come to his building. The superintendent, although assuming full responsibility for the total instruction program, will delegate as much of that responsibility to the school principal as possible, and he will have faith that the principal and staff of parents will make wise decisions, decisions in the interest of the total community served by the school. Thus the principal will be the one who sets the tone for the entire school community. He will work with all partners in the enterprise, namely, parents, non-parents, teachers, and pupils.²⁵

The improvement of the instructional program will be the primary task of the principal. He will see the need for faith in classroom teachers to do a good job. Teachers in his school will be free to do almost anything they think is good for the youngsters under their supervision at the time. The elementary principal will urge teachers to experiment, to study research, and to become truly creative.

The Principalship Will be a Full-Time Job.--The elementary principalship will become a full-time job, twelve months of the year. Plans will be made with the teachers well in advance for the school year. His professional training will be M. A. in elementary administration and beyond. He will possess

(1) a sound philosophy of education; (2) a knowledge of child psychology; (3) a conviction that the roots of his school program are in the total community he serves; (4) an ability to inspire creative teachers; and (5) an ability to conduct a school democratically.

The quality of the school program will come to depend more and more on his vision and ingenuity. Because he will be assuming the role of integration, he will have greater influence on the school program than any other member of the total professional staff. When the

25. Ibid., p. 11.

program has reached this status, the principal will have been relieved of direct teaching responsibilities and of routine office work in order that he may be able to assume this far more important total job of human engineering.²⁶

At the 1953 annual meeting of National Elementary Principals at Atlantic City, Group 15 made the following recommendation for elementary principals:

- (1) principals of three to seven-teacher schools should be released from teaching for one-half day daily, with a full time clerk;
- (2) principals in eight to twelve-teacher schools should be non-teaching with a clerk for one-half day daily; and
- (3) principals in a school with thirteen or more teachers should be non-teaching with a full-time clerk.

This group further concluded that the responsibilities of the teaching principal are determined in part by the particular county or district administrator, and the teaching principal is not expected to be solely responsible for classroom supervision.²⁷

Clearly, the future of the teaching principal lies in the close association with all who believe in elementary education--parents, non-parents, teachers, teaching principals, and full-time principals. By progress in developing the theory of the principalship, by raising the quality of their preparation and practices, and by persistent effort, supervising principals have raised their positions to high professional levels in the field of educational supervision and administration.

26. Gordon G. Humbert, "The Future of the Elementary Principalship," National Elementary Principal, December, 1950, pp. 34-36.

27. National Elementary Principals Annual Meeting, "Problems of the Teaching Principal," National Elementary Principal, May, 1953, p. 36.

The same road lies ahead for teaching principals, and their nearest and most helpful neighbors are the supervising* principals.²⁸

Summary.--From facts and opinions taken from this study, and from observation during thirty years of teaching and administration in elementary schools, the writer feels that teaching principals in most elementary schools will soon be replaced by full-time principals who can give full time to administration and supervisory work in their schools. Some of the factors which are causing this change are:

- (1) the reorganization of schools into larger units;
- (2) the growing trend toward specialization in education;
- (3) the enlarging and enrichment of the school curriculum;
- (4) the demand from the community for more of the principal's time for community activities;
- (5) the growth of public relations programs in which the principal is a key figure;
- (6) the enlightenment of school boards concerning educational trends; and
- (7) the education of the public toward better financial support of the schools.

In small schools and in some other situations, as an economy measure it may seem wise to retain teaching principals for a while. These cases will be the exceptions rather than the rule and are a problem for local administration.

The change in the status of the elementary teaching principal does not mean necessarily that his position as principal will be made easier and his duties will be lessened, but rather that the principal will be better able to make his proper contribution to his school and community.

*Supervising principal here denotes superintendent.

28. Hubbard, op. cit., p. 28.

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