



PRINCIPALS FOR OUR CHANGING SCHOOLS

THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL BASE

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PREFACE

NEW CHALLENGES

The knowledge and skill base of a profession should provide a platform for practice. It also must address core professional responsibilities so that persons qualifying for practice can fulfill the essential tasks of the profession in various contexts.

The educational administration profession has found it difficult to develop a knowledge base that adequately meets these specifications. Paula F. Silver (1983), in the monograph *Professionalism in Educational Administration*, describes the field in these terms:

In the service professions, ... scholarship is almost exclusively of the applied research type and is conducted for purposes of developing techniques for solving particular problems encountered in practice. Practicing professionals can turn to the published literature in their respective fields and find the current knowledge about most problems they encounter because that knowledge is codified with reference to classes of practical problems. In educational administration, practitioners do not resort to the literature in the field because they know they will not find there current knowledge about how to solve the problems they are facing. (p.11)

Why is most of the literature of limited value to practicing elementary and secondary school administrators? Patrick B. Forsyth suggests that this is because the professional knowledge base of the school administrator differs from the academic knowledge base of those in universities who conduct research and produce scholarship on schools and

school administration. Forsyth believes that claims for a knowledge base in educational administration primarily represent the expertise of these individuals. Their knowledge, however, is organized chiefly by the methods and concepts of the academic disciplines, rather than by applied professional practice. Although the educational administration field relies on a number of disciplines for concepts and methods, it depends upon practice in school settings for focus and relevance. As John Dewey has noted, educational practices form the final test of conclusions.

Recently, some progressive departments of educational administration have responded to Silver and other observers by developing preparation programs for principals and superintendents that incorporate school/university partnerships, clinical activities, and field work. Individual professors also are formulating and applying new curricula based upon problems of practice. These significant advances are sometimes offset by the tendency to focus on technical strategies (e.g., Total Quality Management or School-Based Management) or on specific competencies for individual tasks rather than on the broad knowledge and skills contemporary principals must possess for successful practice.

If principals are to fulfill their school's responsibility for meeting the educational and developmental needs of their students, they must continually initiate action and respond to problems. These initiatives and responses are often complex, ranging from implementing new state or federal legislation to resolving explosive family conflicts. Clearly, technical skill alone is insufficient; so, too, is a complete reliance on content knowledge. The heart of professional practice lies between these two poles.

New principal preparation programs must address the troublesome "clinical gap" that exists between classroom and practice, and between subject content and specific technique. To close this gap, a new starting point is required. Accordingly, the search for a knowledge and skills base should begin with the work of principals in contemporary schools. That work must first be defined and organized into identifiable, rational building blocks that are skill-rich and knowledge-rich. Next, the connections between knowledge and skills should be recognized in the many

problems principals respond to and in the many tasks they initiate.

The principalship, like any professional knowledge base, does not represent simply a body of subject content. It consists of knowledge and skills organized in a useful way, preferably into work-relevant patterns that make expert knowledge functional. The professional preparation of principals, therefore, should instruct candidates broadly yet provide them—through classroom format, clinical practice, and field experience—with the practical knowledge and skills they need to address the daily challenges they will face. This approach does not preclude inquiry; rather, it channels it in beneficial directions.

Given the changing nature of the school environment, it is impossible to prepare inexperienced principals for every problem they will encounter or every initiative they will take. Therefore, priority in preparation programs should be given to generalizable knowledge and skills that address new situations and traditional patterns. For example, key interpersonal skills like oral expression or motivating others, and core functional skills like problem analysis and data-based decision making, work to a principal's advantage in solving unanticipated problems or in reversing negative developments.

The arena in which today's principals work is constantly being reshaped by societal forces and conditions. Static patterns are out; so, too, is the notion that solving today's problems automatically prepares candidates for future challenges. Accordingly, the preparation of school leaders should focus on the development of a broadly applicable knowledge and skills base that is timeless and that emphasizes knowledge and skill development rather than particular problems of practice.

NEW DIRECTIONS

John Gardner points out that institutions and professions, like human beings, require occasional renewal to avoid going to seed. The genesis of *Principals for Our Changing Schools: The Knowledge and Skill Base* was a conviction by the 10

sponsors of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration that most preparation programs for school leaders reflect a shopworn theoretical base and fail to recognize changing job requirements. These programs need a serious overhaul.

To recast preparation programs for the principalship in a more contemporary mold, the tasks of today's principals first needed to be understood better. Thus, a project was launched to segment the principalship like letters in an alphabet. Each letter, or current task, was analyzed and then placed into a revised alphabet that also incorporated emerging responsibilities caused by changing social conditions. The revised alphabet, which included the knowledge and skills essential to the tasks, allowed the building of new paragraphs to describe the contemporary principalship. This valuable exercise allowed the Policy Board to grasp the entire knowledge and skill base in a manageable way. Further, it gave the Policy Board a new perspective for analyzing the principalship on a task-by-task basis and for identifying the core knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish each task.

One clear outcome of this process was the emergence of professional skills—in addition to content knowledge—as essential to a successful principalship. The professional repertoire of principals requires *knowing how* to act as well as simply *knowing about* concepts.

All professions, be they medicine, architecture, or engineering, are composites of knowledge and skill. Unfortunately, for decades, departments of educational administration have focused on content because of university pressures to emulate the arts and sciences. This emphasis has caused a "skills phobia" to dominate the field. In addition, teaching professional skills can be costly and requires different expertise. Architecture and medicine bridge the clinical gap with apprenticeships and teaching hospitals. For preparing principals, the solution lies in simulations, scenarios and case studies, interactive media, practice in safe environments, mentorships, and field experience—all of which address to some degree the problems experienced by practitioners.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL BASE

This publication describes a new knowledge and skill base for the principalship and, thereby, overcomes the inadequacies of traditional preparation programs, including weak theory/practice connections. The strategy used to form a new knowledge and skills base involved viewing the principalship from two perspectives: inductive and deductive. By conducting two processes—an inductive task analysis and a deductive theoretical analysis—and integrating the results, a "bird's eye" view and a "worm's eye" view of the principalship were achieved.

The outcome constitutes the core of what principals must know and be able to do professionally. As developed by the National Policy Board, these essential knowledge and skills encompass 21 "domains," which were defined in *Principals for Our Changing Schools: Preparation and Certification* (1990). Eleven of these are process or skill oriented; 10 are more content focused; most, however, synthesize knowledge and skill. The content-rich and process-rich domains impact one another in practice. In sum, they constitute the essential repertoire of knowledge and skills required of principals for practice.

The 21 domains are a typology or convenient classification system. They are categories to better examine, understand, and prepare for the principalship. They are not discrete from one another, however. Because human behavior comes in "bunches" rather than neat packages, the domains must be viewed as overlapping pieces of a complex puzzle. Without these pieces, it is difficult to visualize the entire picture. -

The domains also may be viewed as converging streams of behavior that spill over onto one another's banks but that all contribute to the total reservoir of knowledge and skills required of today's principals. Their inclusion reflects a relationship to one or more central tasks of the principalship.

Another characteristic of the domains is their variability. Some are broad; others are narrow. Some are more central to student-adult relationships; others involve adults only.

While not equals, each *is* related and contributes to the sum of a principal's professional knowledge and skills.

The domains are intended to be substantive rather than technical and can be applied—in groups or separately—to a wide variety of problems rather than to single issues. Their intent is not to train technicians who follow set formulae, but to develop professionals with a repertoire of understandings and skills to address routine or emergent problems of practice. For example, a principal facing a specific first amendment fracas (e.g., the student newspaper deciding to survey the use of condoms among the student body and to publish the results) would tap several domains, including "Legal and Regulatory Applications," "Public Relations," "Philosophical and Cultural Values," "Oral and Nonverbal Expression," "Written Expression," "Problem Analysis," and "Leadership."

In sum, *Principals for Our Changing Schools: The Knowledge and Skill Base* describes the foundation blocks of a preparation program for elementary, middle, and high school principals. Although it focuses on the core, or key, knowledge and skills for each domain, it does not attempt to define their individual breadth—any one domain, if examined in greater depth, would produce a major work. This publication's intent, therefore, is to define the center lane in a broad road, to identify the essential knowledge and skills for successful practice, and to encourage others to build on this work according to individual and institutional preferences and state licensing requirements.

USING THE DOMAINS

How can this publication be applied to pre-service education and the professional development of principals and assistant principals? How can it be used for state licensure or certification? First, it should be viewed as a point of departure, not a point of arrival. Its loose-leaf form encourages users to add to or subtract from it, and to merge or dissect its pieces according to group purposes and needs. After all, events move rapidly in educational administration, requiring frequent revisions of practice and licensure. Professional requirements also tend to be situational. This

publication is intended to be a flexible and reliable resource document for all user groups. It should be adaptable to local or regional requirements, however idiosyncratic.

Given its flexible design, *Principals for Our Changing Schools: The Knowledge and Skill Base* also may serve as the template for preparation, inservice, or certification programs. To the question, "Can I formulate a preparation or certification program based on the domains?" the answer is "Yes." Although the domains are not intended as separate courses, they can be tapped as strands of a cross-disciplinary program, or for a problems-of-practice approach. The purpose of problem-based learning is to acquire an integrated body of content related to a general problem and to develop skills to solve it. Whether using this or an integrated studies approach, the domains serve as a comprehensive knowledge and skills resource base.

Principals looking for professional development activities, and state bodies desiring to strengthen certification requirements, should find the publication useful as well. For practicing administrators, the interpersonal skill and instructional program domains may be especially helpful, filling gaps in earlier preparation. The National Policy Board also encourages state certification bodies to consider the domains as a comprehensive framework for a two-level performance-based approach to certification involving entry licensure and advanced professional certification. The advanced level could be required within three or four years of initial entry to the field. Some states (e.g., Tennessee and Florida) currently use a two-tier licensure program for principals.

A central advantage of an entry level/advanced level certification plan is that more rigorous professional standards can be accommodated within a single comprehensive framework. Some knowledge and skills would be required for initial licensure; the balance would be required for continued practice.

Whether for preservice, inservice, or certification, planning groups can use the 21 domains to develop materials and strengthen outcomes. Other knowledge or skill areas may be added, but they comprise the most comprehensive description currently available of the core knowledge and

skills required for the principalship. While plans for any endeavor should be considered carefully before acting, General George C. Marshall has observed that a good plan today is worth more than a perfect plan tomorrow. The domains offer a good plan for the 1990s.

DEVELOPMENTAL DESIGN

The design process for the domains is described in the earlier publication, *Principals for Our Changing Schools: Preparation and Certification* (1990, pp. 17-19, 35). Briefly, it includes:

- conducting a task analysis of the principalship;
- convening focus groups to identify the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the tasks;
- identifying the knowledge and skills theoretically essential to the principalship, utilizing a conceptual model developed at the Texas A&M Principals Center;
- integrating the outcomes of the two approaches; one inductive and task driven, and the other deductive and theory driven, to develop an initial list of 19 performance domains;
- distributing the initial list of domains to a national Jury of 50 prominent educators and nominated principals, superintendents, and professors for their comment;
- consolidating the recommendations of the Jury of 50 to revise the domains; and
- redistributing the revised domains to the Jury, receiving more comment, and making adjustments.

The final 21 domains, organized under four broad themes, blend the traditional content-driven curricula with leadership, management, and process skills to create a new framework for preparing and certifying principals.

Following publication of these materials, writing teams were appointed to develop each of the 21 domains. The teams included principals and academicians working together, with instructions to follow a specific process in formulating the statement of core knowledge and skills for each domain. A schematic of the process is outlined on the next page.
