Problems of the Novice Principal[1]

Harvey B. Alvy[2] and Theodore Coladarci[3]

A taxonomy of major responsibility areas, component activities, and administrative processes was used as the framework for identifying problems encountered by novice principals. The population of 70 Montana elementary and secondary principals, completing their first or second year in the Spring of 1982, was mailed a questionnaire to identify problem areas with respect to (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) pupil personnel relations, (c) professional personnel relations, (d) school-community relations, (e) school-wide management, (f) financial management, (g) school-district collaboration, (h) facility management, and (i) administrative processes. Curriculum and instruction and professional personnel relations were found to be the two most difficult responsibility areas for novice principals. Further, novices spent considerably more of their time with professional and pupil personnel than in their preferred area of curriculum and instruction. Correlational analyses indicated a greater correspondence between actual versus ideal sources of help ($r = .93$) than between actual versus desired time priorities ($r = .68$). Novices hired from within the district and those with previous administrative experience reported more difficulty than novices hired from outside or those with no previous administrative experience. These results are discussed within the context of school effectiveness research.

INTRODUCTION

Empirical research on the socialization of principals is scarce [6; 9]. More specifically, there is little research on the problems encountered by principals during the first few years of their tenure. One of the few studies that speaks to novice-principal problems was conducted by Duke and his colleagues [6], who compared novice and veteran principals on their perceptions of their experiences as principals. Further, little research has focused on the rural principalship, even though most principalship settings can be characterized as being rural [10]. The present study, designed to increase our understanding of problems confronting novice principals, was conducted in a rural state. In this study, a novice principal was defined as one who was completing the first or second year of the principalship. Here we outline the background, methodology, and general results of this investigation. (See Alvy [1] for a more detailed treatment of this study.)

A taxonomy of the principalship, synthesized from a number of sources [2; 3; 7; 9; 12], was employed to provide the framework for studying novice principals. This taxonomy comprises (a) major responsibility areas, (b) component activities, and (c) administrative processes. The principalship can be characterized as comprising the following major responsibility areas: curriculum and instruction, pupil personnel relations, professional personnel relations, school-community relations, financial management, facility management, school-wide manage-

ment, and school-district collaboration. Within each major responsibility area are specific component activities representing competencies critical to effective principalship performance. For example, component activities such as promoting change, resolving interpersonal conflict, and teacher evaluation are part of the professional-personnel major responsibility area. Finally, administrative processes are methods or operations used to carry out major responsibilities and component activities [9]. Communicating, planning, and delegating, for example, are processes used by principals to accomplish curriculum-and-instruction responsibilities.

After reviewing the relevant literature in the fields of educational administration, organizational psychology, and organizational sociology (see Alvy [1]), we posed the following research questions: (a) What major responsibility areas, component activities, and administrative processes are problems for novice principals? (b) How do sources of help that are *actually* used by these new principals correspond to these principals' *desired* sources of help? (c) Similarly, how do principals' *actual* allocation of time among major responsibility areas correspond to these principals' *desired* allocation of time in this regard?

METHODOLOGY

In the Spring of 1982, all elementary and secondary principals in Montana completing their first or second year were mailed an instrument designed to address these

and other questions; sixty-nine of the seventy principals responded. This instrument comprised five major sections: (a) duties of the principalship, (b) administrative processes, (c) time rankings of major responsibility areas, (d) rankings of sources of help, and (e) demographic information.

In the first half of the instrument, principals were asked to indicate the degree of difficulty they experienced while carrying out specific duties and administrative processes. The duties (primarily component activities) were classified among the eight major responsibility areas listed above. A "problem" was defined as the perceived degree of difficulty experienced by the novice principal, assessed with a five-point Likert rating scale. In the second half of the instrument, principals were asked to rank-order major responsibility areas and sources of help. Principals were instructed to rank the top four major responsibility areas based on both actual and desired time-allocations. For example, to which responsibility area did principals devote the most time? Was this the same area to which they *desired* to devote the most time? Principals also were asked to rank the top four sources of help in the same fashion. That is, were principals obtaining assistance from the person from whom they most *desired* assistance?

The instrument was pilot tested to assess its validity and reliability, the results of which were reported by Alvy [1]. (A copy of the final questionnaire can be obtained from the first author.)

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

First, we provide a description of the principals participating in this study. Second, novices' problems are examined at the item, area, and total levels of analysis (to be discussed below). Finally, we explore the rankings of time allocation and sources of help. Because population data were obtained, all analyses were descriptive.

Approximately three-fourths of the principals were male. A majority were 30-39 years old (56%) and held masters degrees (86%). Approximately 45% of the principals administered elementary schools, 45% administered secondary schools, and the remaining 10% administered K-12 schools. Additionally, 84% of the novices administered fewer than 31 full-time teachers and fewer than 450 students; a majority, moreover, administered 20 or fewer teachers (54%) and 299 or fewer students (51%).

Males, in general, were hired as principals at a younger age than were females. Additionally, 10 males with 4 or fewer years of previous teaching experience were new principals; there were no female principals having 4 or fewer years of such experience. Almost two-thirds of the male principals had served as coaches while few females (12%) had served in this capacity. Moreover, no females administered K-12 schools; 7 males were employed in this context. Finally, while no females served in schools with fewer than 150 students, one-fourth of the males served in these smaller schools.

An area difficulty score (ADS) was computed by adding the individual item responses of each principal within a major responsibility or administrative process area. The degree-of-difficulty values for each item on the questionaire were modified so that 'none' (no difficulty) was equal to '0', 'minor' was equal to '1', and so on. Thus, the original 1-through-5 scale was converted to a 0-through-4 scale for analyses.

The ADS was calculated by adding the item responses and then dividing by the maximum sum possible; this value, in turn, was multiplied by 100. For example, the 15 duties in the curriculum-and-instruction area could result in a minimum ADS of 0 (i.e., $((15 \times 0)/(15 \times 4)) \times 100 = 0$), and a maximum ADS of 100 (i.e., $((15 \times 4)/(15 \times 4) \times 100 = 100$). The ADS, by combining items, provides a more comprehensive and reliable measure of perceived difficulty than that afforded by item-level data.

A total difficulty score (TDS) was computed to repre-

TABLE 1

Difficult Duties of New Principals

Duty	Percent[a]
1. Finding time to visit classrooms to help teachers improve instruction	71
2. Promoting change among experienced staff	66
3. Strengthening the school instructional program	63
4. Advocating the use of current educational findings	55
5. Encouraging teachers to provide instructional programs to meet individual student needs	54
6. Resolving interpersonal conflict	54
7. Providing opportunities for the professional growth of the staff	54
8. Dismissing incompetent staff	52
9. Effectively distributing time among various responsibilities	52
10. Maintaining an efficient and effective guidance program	50
11. Developing a staffing plan to achieve optimal curriculum goals	48
12. Evaluating teacher effectiveness	45
13. Evaluating the school instructional program	44
14. Building and/or maintaining morale	44
15. Preparing and administering the school budget within own building	42
16. Setting objectives — defining desired goals	41[b]
17. Working with the community in identifying program needs	41

Note: Duties were considered difficult if 40% or more of the population experienced moderate, considerable, or extreme difficulty.
[a]Figures in the percent column indicate percent of subjects experiencing moderate, considerable, or extreme difficulty.
[b]Difficulty 16 is an administrative process.

sent all duty and process difficulties reported by a principal. The TDS was calculated by adding the 76 item-responses of all major responsibility and administrative process areas and then dividing by the sum of the maximum possible (i.e., 76 × 4 = 304); this value, in turn, was multiplied by 100.

Item-Level Difficulty

Duties or process that presented at least a reasonable degree of difficulty for novice principals were identified. "Reasonably" difficult duties or processes were considered (arbitrarily) to be those for which more than 40% of the principals reported moderate, considerable, or extreme difficulty. Sixteen duties and one process were identified by this criterion (see Table 1).

Both the curriculum and instruction and the professional personnel areas accounted for 76% of novice-principal difficulties. In the curriculum and instruction area, the difficult duties related to improving the school-wide curriculum, and promoting and monitoring teacher effectiveness in the classroom. In the professional personnel area, duties concerning potential conflict and confrontation with staff were most difficult.

Area-Level Difficulty

Analyses involving area difficulty scores (ADSs) are reported in this section. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the major responsibility and administrative-process areas are presented in Table 2. The reliability of each major responsibility and administrative process area was assessed using coefficient alpha, a measure of internal consistency [4]. The reliabilities ranged from .61 to .89, indicating acceptable degrees of internal consistency (see Table 2).

The mean ADSs for the major responsibility areas and the process area were examined for their relative difficulty. The relationships between the ADSs and demographic variables were explored, as well (see Table 3). In examining ADSs with respect to a demographic variable (e.g., sex), a difference of 5 or more points was deemed a "considerable" difference for this study. (This discussion omits educational background as a variable, because of limited subgroup variability and demographic subgroups of three or fewer subjects.)

Curriculum and Instruction. Males, new to the principalship, experienced considerably more difficulty in this area than did females. This was the only major responsibility area for which a considerable sex difference was obtained.

These data also suggested that novice principals having previously held educational positions other than classroom teaching did *not* encounter fewer problems than did novices who previously had not held these positions. For example, former guidance counselors and former department heads experienced considerably more difficulty with curriculum and instruction than did principals without such previous experience. This outcome—which is a recurring result in the areas below—is puzzling insofar as one would assume that experience as a department head, probably including involvement in the curriculum and instruction area, would be relevant to the demands of the principalship and, consequently, would reduce the difficulties ultimately encountered by these individuals once they assumed the principalship (especially when compared to individuals not having had such experience). We will return to this topic in our discussion.

Finally, elementary principals, when compared to secondary and K-12 principals, experienced considerably less difficulty in this area.

Professional Personnel Relations. The difference between male and female ADSs was negligible. Thus, these data question an unqualified proposition that females experience professional-personnel problems because of a staff that historically is unaccustomed to female principals.

As was found in the curriculum and instruction area,

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics: Major Responsibility and Administrative Process Areas

Major Responsibility Areas	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Curriculum and Instruction	35.51	13.73	85								
(2) Professional Personnel	32.82	11.61	62	74							
(3) Pupil Personnel	20.92	13.04	52	50	81						
(4) School-Community Relations	28.05	14.77	35	56	53	82					
(5) School-wide Management	21.27	10.77	39	43	60	52	76				
(6) Financial Management	24.82	19.50	29	23	34	38	50	78			
(7) School-District Collaboration	19.84	14.62	10	16	46	34	46	29	61		
(8) Facility Management	21.01	13.90	34	30	49	48	54	47	35	62	
(9) Administrative Processes	27.84	11.67	62	73	64	47	54	29	36	41	89

Note. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used; decimals are omitted. Alpha Coefficients appear in the diagonal.

TABLE 3

Area Difficulty Scores[a]

Variables	n	Curriculum and Instruction		Professional Personnel		Pupil Personnel		School-Community Relations		School-wide Management	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Sex											
Male	52	37	15	33	13	22	13	28	14	22	11
Female	17	30	9	33	9	17	13	27	17	19	9
Age											
24 or younger	1	45	0	37	0	25	0	29	0	17	0
25-29	2	36	15	40	15	31	18	32	5	26	9
30-34	15	36	13	29	10	18	10	22	14	17	10
35-39	24	34	9	33	11	22	13	29	15	26	10
40-44	9	41	13	34	12	25	12	29	12	21	10
45-49	11	36	15	33	14	18	12	31	17	18	8
50-54	7	30	26	35	15	19	20	29	18	20	16
Educational Background											
B.A. or B.S.	2	43	21	21	6	14	7	23	3	13	18
M.A.	59	35	13	33	11	21	13	28	14	21	10
Ed. Spec. or 6th year	5	38	14	31	13	21	12	31	23	21	9
Ed.D. or Ph.D.	3	32	29	33	24	21	28	33	24	27	24
Teaching Experience (years)											
0-4	10	37	9	31	10	25	13	29	9	23	12
5-9	26	35	13	33	11	21	14	26	16	21	12
10-14	16	30	11	30	9	18	9	25	13	20	10
15-19	12	47	14	41	14	25	16	36	16	25	8
20 or more	5	25	15	23	13	14	8	25	19	13	8
Other Ed. Experiences											
Non-Department Heads	44	33	13	31	10	19	13	26	13	20	10
Former Department Heads	25	40	14	37	14	25	13	32	16	23	11
Non-Principals	49	35	13	32	11	20	13	26	15	21	11
Former Principals	20	37	15	35	12	23	12	33	14	22	10
Non-Counselors	55	34	15	32	12	21	13	27	14	20	11
Former Counselors	14	41	8	37	11	21	12	32	16	25	11
Non-Supervisors	60	36	14	33	11	21	13	29	15	21	11
Former Supervisors	9	35	14	32	13	19	14	21	15	22	10
Non-Coaches	34	34	15	33	12	19	15	28	16	22	11
Former Coaches	35	37	13	33	11	23	11	28	13	21	11
Principalship Experience											
1st year	34	35	13	32	11	22	12	27	12	22	8
2nd year	35	36	14	33	12	20	14	29	17	20	13
Previous District											
Outside	40	36	14	33	11	20	15	26	15	21	12
Inside	29	35	14	33	12	22	10	31	14	21	9
Grade Level											
Elementary	30	31	15	31	10	15	12	24	15	19	10
Secondary	32	39	12	35	12	26	10	33	13	24	9
K-12	7	40	11	30	14	22	18	23	16	20	17
Staff Size											
10 or fewer	3	37	9	30	18	28	17	24	4	17	16
11-20	34	36	12	31	11	21	14	26	15	22	11
21-30	21	32	16	33	11	18	13	29	14	21	12
31 or more	11	40	15	38	13	26	9	35	16	21	7
Enrollment											
Fewer than 150	13	36	12	31	14	22	16	27	17	21	13
150-299	22	37	11	31	10	21	11	29	11	22	10
300-449	23	32	17	33	11	18	14	25	16	21	12
450 or more	11	39	11	38	12	26	9	34	15	20	8
Population	69	36	14	33	12	21	13	28	15	21	11

[a]To conserve space, means and standard deviations have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

TABLE 3 Continued

Variables	n	Financial Management		School District Collaboration		Facility Management		Administrative Processes		Total Difficulty Score	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Sex											
Male	52	25	18	20	14	20	13	28	12	28	10
Female	17	25	24	18	17	23	15	27	12	26	8
Age											
24 or younger	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	26	0
25-29	2	44	0	25	18	17	12	38	16	34	11
30-34	15	15	15	20	13	19	16	24	10	25	8
35-39	24	26	15	23	15	20	13	30	13	29	8
40-44	9	28	22	19	16	26	9	31	7	30	8
45-49	11	30	29	17	18	25	15	27	12	28	11
50-54	7	26	19	18	12	18	18	22	14	25	16
Educational Background											
B.A. or B.S.	2	13	18	9	13	13	18	23	16	23	13
M.A.	59	25	20	20	14	21	14	29	12	28	9
Ed. Spec. or 6th year	5	21	14	17	21	22	9	24	7	27	7
Ed.D. or Ph.D.	3	27	25	29	22	17	17	22	21	28	22
Teaching Experience (years)											
0-4	10	24	16	23	17	17	12	28	11	29	7
5-9	26	24	19	19	11	20	14	28	12	27	9
10-14	16	20	16	18	14	19	14	26	11	25	8
15-19	12	34	27	23	18	27	9	34	11	35	9
20 or more	5	26	21	20	22	27	22	20	11	21	12
Other Ed. Experiences											
Non-Department Heads	44	23	17	18	14	19	12	27	12	26	8
Former Department Heads	25	29	24	23	15	25	16	30	11	31	11
Non-Principals	49	25	20	20	15	20	14	27	10	27	9
Former Principals	20	24	19	20	14	25	13	30	15	30	10
Non-Counselors	55	25	20	20	15	21	14	28	12	27	10
Former Counselors	14	24	20	17	15	20	12	26	8	30	8
Non-Supervisors	60	24	18	20	15	21	14	28	12	28	9
Former Supervisors	9	30	30	19	14	24	16	26	10	27	11
Non-Coaches	34	28	23	20	16	22	14	27	11	27	10
Former Coaches	35	22	16	19	13	20	14	29	13	28	10
Principalship Experience											
1st year	34	28	20	20	14	24	14	28	11	28	8
2nd year	35	21	18	20	15	18	14	28	12	27	11
Previous District											
Outside	40	23	20	19	15	20	14	28	12	27	10
Inside	29	27	19	21	14	23	13	27	11	28	9
Grade Level											
Elementary	30	25	21	18	15	18	14	25	11	25	9
Secondary	32	25	19	22	14	26	13	31	11	31	8
K-12	7	23	18	19	13	14	16	23	12	26	13
Staff Size											
10 or fewer	3	15	25	21	19	3	5	30	19	26	14
11-20	34	26	20	19	16	23	14	27	10	27	9
21-30	21	23	16	19	12	20	15	28	14	27	10
31 or more	11	26	23	24	15	23	9	31	9	32	9
Enrollment											
Fewer than 150	13	21	19	23	17	17	13	28	13	27	12
150-299	22	28	14	18	15	24	14	27	9	28	8
300-449	23	25	22	19	13	20	16	28	14	26	11
450 or more	11	24	25	22	16	22	9	31	9	31	8
Population	69	25	19	20	15	21	14	28	12	28	10

principals who taught for 15-19 years, former department heads, and former counselors experienced considerably more difficulty than did principals not having had previous experience in these areas. And novice principals having never worked in the district, interestingly, experienced less difficulty in the professional-personnel area than did "insiders." A certain intimacy with the context of the principalship—e.g., staff, students, community, school board—may have been a liability in terms of difficulties encountered when compared to the healthy distance typical of an outsider.

Pupil Personnel Relations. Males experienced more difficulty in this area than did females. Although not considerable, this difference was the second largest contrast between male and female ADSs.

Interestingly, and consistent with the results thus far, former assistant principals experienced more difficulty in this area than did those without prior experience in that position. Further, secondary principals and K-12 principals experienced considerably more difficulty in this area than did their elementary-school counterpart. Moreover, the considerable difference between the elementary and secondary ADSs was the largest disparity between these two grade levels.

School-Community Relations. A comparison of male and female ADSs disclosed a negligible difference in this area. And, as before, principals who taught for 15-19 years, former department heads, and former assistant principals experienced considerably more difficulty than did those without such experience. Novice principals hired from outside the district experienced less difficulty with professional personnel.

School-Wide Management. Males experienced no more difficulty in this area than did females. Again, principals who taught for 15-19 years and newcomers in secondary schools experienced more difficulty than did other subgroups.

Financial Management. The difference between the perceived difficulty of males and females was minimal. At the same time, principals without previous coaching experience encountered considerably more difficulty than did those with such experience. (This is the only major responsibility area for which a considerable difference was found related to coaching.)

This area, along with facility management (discussed below), was one of two areas for which a considerable difference between first- and second-year principals in ADSs was found: First-year principals experienced considerably more difficulty than did second-year principals. Interestingly, this area is the only one for which secondary principals did not experience more difficulty than did elementary principals.

School-District Collaboration. The difference between male and female ADSs, once more, was minimal. Although the difference is not as large as for other areas, novices from inside the district experienced more difficulty in this area than did outsiders.

Facility Management. Females experienced more difficulty in the facility management area than did males. The male ADS, though not considerably different from the female ADS, did represent the largest difference where males experienced *fewer* difficulties than did females. Former department heads and former assistent principals experienced considerably more difficulty than did principals without experience in these positions—the sixth responsibility area for which former department heads experienced considerably more difficulty than did principals who had not previously served as department heads.

First-year principals and those serving in secondary schools experienced considerably more difficulty in this area than did their respective demographic counterparts.

Administrative Processes. The difference between male and female ADSs was minimal. Novice principals who had taught for 15-19 years and newcomers in secondary schools experienced considerably more difficulty than did their respective demographic counterparts.

When examining these data, one should bear in mind that administrative processes are used to carry out individual responsibilities. Thus, if novices experienced problems with administrative processes, these problems should be reflected throughout the responsibility areas, as well. And this, in fact, was the case: Secondary principals and those who had taught from 15-19 years experienced more difficulty in six of eight and seven of eight major responsibility areas, respectively, than did their demographic counterparts. Further, the role of administrative processes in carrying out specific responsibilities of the principalship can be seen in the inter-area correlations presented in Table 2: The administrative-process area correlates more highly with remaining areas than does any other single area.

Total-Level Difficulty

The total difficulty score (TDS) is a composite measure of difficulty based on the responses to the 76 principalship duty and administrative-process items. As such, TDS findings are similar to those presented above. Results indicated that more difficulty was experienced by (a) males, (b) novices 40-44 years old, (c) novices who taught 15-19 years (considerable), (d) former department heads (considerable), assistant principals, guidance counselors, coaches, and non-curriculum supervisors, (e) first-year principals, (f) insiders, (g) secondary principals (considerable), (h) principals having 31 or more staff members, and (i) principals having 450 or more students. Once more, novices who taught for 15-19 years, former department heads, and secondary principals stand out as experiencing the most difficulty within their respective demographic categories.

Ranking of Major Responsibility Areas and Sources of Help

Here we report analyses pertaining to the actual- and desired-time rankings and the actual- and ideal-sources-of-help rankings provided by these principals. The degree of reported discrepancy between actual and desired time among responsibility areas and between actual and ideal

TABLE 4

Time Spent Among Major Responsibility Areas $(r = .68)$
$(N = 69)$

Rank[a]	Actual Time	Weighted Score	Rank	Desired Time	Weighted Score
1	Pupil Personnel	184	1	Curriculum and Instruction	206
2	Professional Personnel	150	2	Pupil Personnel	149
3	School-wide Management	104	3	Professional Personnel	143
4	Facility Management	88	4	School-wide Management	58
5	Curriculum and Instruction	87	5	School-Community Relations	43
6	Fiscal Management	35	6	Facility Management	34
7	School-Community Relations	26	7	Fiscal Management	13
8	School-District Collaboration	16	8	School-District Collaboration	4

[a]The rank is based on the sum of weighted scores computed from subject-selected rankings (i.e., 1st choice = 4 points, 2nd choice = 3 points, and so on).

sources of help is assumed to represent difficulty to the new principal.

A weighted total was computed for each responsibility area as follows. First, the factor of *4* was multipled by the number of principals who reported that a particular area was the one to which they devoted the "most time." The factor of *3* was multiplied by the number of principals who reported that an area was the one to which they devoted the "second most time," and so on. These products then were summed as the weighted total for the responsibility area. Thus, a large weighted total for a particular area represented an area to which principals generally found themselves devoting considerable time, relative to the other responsibility areas. This procedure also was employed to compute weighted totals for desired time rankings, as well as for the actual and desired sources-of-help rankings.

Major Responsibility Areas. The top four respon-

sibilities demanding the most time for these principals were: (a) pupil personnel, (b) professional personnel, (c) school-wide management, and (d) facility management (see Table 4). However, the top four areas in which these novice principals *desired* to spend their time were: (a) curriculum and instruction, (b) pupil personnel, (c) professional personnel, and (d) school-wide management. Although there was general agreement between the rankings of actual and desired allocation of time for these responsibility areas ($r = .68$ for the two sets of weighted totals, Table 4), a striking discrepancy between actual and desired time occurred in the area of curriculum and instruction: Novice principals wanted to spend considerably more time in this area than they found themselves able to do. With this area removed from the computations, in fact, the correlation between actual and desired time increases from $r = .68$ to $r = .93$. Further, curriculum and instruction emerged in subsequent analyses as the top area

TABLE 5

Sources of Help $(r = .93)$
$(N = 69)$

Rank[a]	Actual Sources of Help	Weighted Score	Rank	Ideal Sources of Help	Weighted Score
1	Superintendent	166	1	Superintendent	190
2	Other Principals	108	2	Teachers	121
3	Teachers	101	3	Other Principals	92
4	Secretaries	99	4	Secretaries	51
5	Guidance Counselors	47	5	Assistant Principals	49
6	Assistant Principals	35	6	Guidance Counselors	41
7	Local School Board	30	7	Parents	35
8	Assistant Superintendents	29	8	Local School Board	34
9	Students	22	9	Assistant Superintendents	28
10	Parents	16	10	Students	24
11	Office of Public Instruction	12	11	Office of Public Instruction	11

[a]The rank is based on the sum of weighted scores computed from subject-selected rankings (i.e., 1st choice = 4 points, 2nd choice = 3 points, and so on).

in which principals would like to devote the most attention regardless of sex, grade level, and experience (first- vs. second-year) — and for *no* group did this area place first in actual time.

Sources of Help. The top four actual sources of help used by these principals to cope with school-related problems were (a) the superintendent, (b) other principals, (c) teachers, and (d) secretaries (see Table 5). The top four ideal sources of help were (a) the superintendent, (b) teachers, (c) other principals, and (d) secretaries. Newcomers, thus, agreed that superintendents were and should be, their primary source of help. A strong relationship, moreover, was found across *all* sources of help ($r = .93$, see Table 5).

Interestingly, the largest discrepancy occurred with the secretary as a source: Principals found themselves relying on secretaries in this regard considerably more than they desired. The correlation between the two sets of weighted values (groups combined, Table 5) changes from $r = .93$ to $r = .97$ when the secretary is removed from the calculations.

From these data, one may conclude that principals, in large part, were satisfied with their sources of assistance. In sharp contrast were the results concerning actual and desired time spent on major responsibility areas. Thus, these principals encountered greater dissonance between how they would like to spend their administrative time and how they actually *do* spend this time, than they did in the sources of help they sought.

DISCUSSION

A recurring theme in these findings is the association between previous experience and subsequent difficulties encountered more difficulties in the principalship than the principal who had not had such experience. At first glance, this appears conterintuitive: One would assume that such experience would prepare, in part, the future principal for the demands of this position. It is possible, however, that by serving in these pre-principalship capacities, the individual, upon assuming the principalship, may approach this position in a qualitatively different fashion. By having acquired a feeling for educational leadership — however limited this feeling may be — this individual may have heightened sensitivity to the various facets of the principalship. Such experience may predispose these principals to acknowledge the complexities of the principalship, which could result in perceptions of greater difficulties encountered (as we found). In short, these principals may be experiencing more difficulties simply because they are conceptualizing the principalship differently. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to test this speculation.
simply because they are conceptualizing the principalship differently. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to test this speculation.

The advantage held by the outsider is a second recurring theme in our data: Novice principals who come from outside the district experienced fewer difficulties when compared to insiders. This is not surprising, if one assumes that the outsider, relative to the insider, generally is characterized by an objectivity and affective detachment that probably permits a more balanced consideration of administrative problems during these first years in the principalship. It might be true also that those potentially affected by the decisions made by the outsider *expect* decisions to be made in this fashion — an expectation that, in turn, is perceived by the novice. In short, perhaps the outsider enjoys a "reciprocal distance." Insiders, on the other hand, may perceive in others the expectation that the insider *should* consider certain aspects of the situation — precisely those that the outsider is expected to ignore — in making administrative decisions. This scenario, while mere speculation at this point, would produce the results we obtained in this study.

In our view, the most salient — and troubling — finding is that the area of curriculum and instruction presented the most difficulty for these novice principals. This was apparent from the area-difficulty means across the eight major responsibility areas. It also was apparent from the discrepancies between principals' actual time spent and desired time spent in these areas. This latter result is consistent with the observations provided by Duke et al. [6], who found that the most frequently reported unanticipated problem for their novice principals was "insufficient time" to devote to the demands of the principalship.

Although characterizations of the "effective" school remain tentative [8; 13; 14], the instructional leadership provided by the principal nonetheless has emerged from this research as a recurring theme [5]. Yet, novice principals in the present study indicated that their most difficult responsibility area was curriculum and instruction. And of the 76 principalship duties presented to these principals, four of the five most difficult duties were reported to be all in this domain (see Table 1): (a) finding time to visit classrooms to help teachers improve instruction, (b) strengthening the school instructional program, (c) advocating the use of current educational findings, and (d) encouraging teachers to provide instructional programs to meet individual student needs. In fact, roughly half of the 17 duties that were identified as being "reasonably" difficult (given our 40% criterion) pertained to the curriculum and instruction area (Table 1).

Clearly, novice principals were encountering the most difficulty in the very area that has been identified as one of the central characteristics of effective schools: The provision of instructional leadership by the principal. A long-term consequence of this experience early in one's career as principal may be the gradual decline in the principal's efforts — and ability — to play an active role in this important domain. Several of the principalship studies reviewed by Leithwood and Montgomery [11], in fact, reported that only half of the principals instructionally assisted teachers in any way. An illustrative study in this area of inquiry would be one that longitudinally examines principals' administrative efforts — and their consequences — in the area of curriculum and instruction. Such a study would contribute to our understanding of the factors that

govern whether a principal, over time, increasingly or decreasingly assumes the role of instructional leader.

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