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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a case study that explored the micropolitical strategies used by a principal to influence teachers in a school-based decision making context. The selected suburban school was located in the south-central area of Texas and had utilized school-based management for five months. The principal was recommended as effective in facilitating participative decision making. Data were collected through extensive interviews and participant observation. Findings indicate that the principal influenced teachers through the manipulation of teacher suggestions, the use of voting techniques, the planting of information, the exchange of principal favor and support for desired teacher behaviors, and the use of expert knowledge. This paper hopes to contribute to an understanding of the political nature of principal-teacher relationships, and to address other educational administration issues, such as professional role expectations, role transitions, and role strain. Contains 42 references. (LMI)

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THE POLITICS OF THE PRINCIPAL:  
INFLUENCING TEACHERS' SCHOOL BASED  
DECISION MAKING

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Abstract

The data discussed in this paper were drawn from a qualitative case study that examined the micropolitical strategies that were used by an elementary school principal to influence his teachers' school based (i.e., shared) decision making. The following question guided the research: What strategies do school principals use to influence teachers' school based decision making? Data were collected through participant observation and open-ended interviews, and analyzed according to a constant comparative framework. The generated categories are described and analyzed within the framework of existing micropolitical studies of the principal-teacher relationship. The purposes of the research reported in this paper were: (1) to contribute to an understanding of the political nature of principal-teacher relationship, and (2) to use this understanding as a foundation for addressing important educational administration issues such as: professional role expectations, role transitions, and role strain (e.g., stress) that result from changing school initiatives such as shared decision making.

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THE POLITICS OF THE PRINCIPAL:  
INFLUENCING TEACHERS' SCHOOL BASED  
DECISION MAKING

### Background

This paper presents an exploratory study of the principal's political influence toward teachers in regard to school based or shared decision making. The principal-teacher relationship has been the subject of much discussion in both micropolitical and other related (i.e., non-micropolitical) literature. Micropolitical literature reveals several key points about the principal-teacher relationship: (1) principals develop a political perspective toward teachers in order to achieve their own personal and professional goals, (2) principals utilize goal directed, political influence strategies to achieve their personal and professional goals, and (3) the principal's political perspective has political consequences, either negative or positive, for teachers (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1990; 1991).

The principal's political perspective has been reported to have either negative or positive consequences for teachers depending upon the strategy (i.e., line of action) of political influence used by the principal. For example, according to micropolitical literature, the consequences of the principal's use of such political strategies as authoritarianism, control of decision making, and coercion have been found to cause decreases in teacher motivation,

risk taking, and commitment (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1987). Other literature (i.e., non-micropolitical) support these findings. For instance, the principal's use of authoritarianism and control of decision making was found to result in a reduction in teacher loyalty (Johnson & Venable, 1986), increases in teachers' perceptions of school conflict (Muth, 1973), decreases in school effectiveness (Kshensky & Muth, 1989), and the emergence of defensive teaching (McNeil, 1986).

In contrast to the possible negative effects of certain principal strategies, micropolitical research has revealed that principal strategies such as participation, extending autonomy, collaboration, open-door policy, open discussion, shared decision making, shared goal setting, consultations, and expressed moral commitment to children, result in positive consequences for teachers (Blase, 1988; Greenfield, 1991). Other literature (i.e., non-micropolitical) also link select principal strategies to positive consequences for teachers. For example, principal strategies such as support (Brady, 1985; Hoy & Brown, 1986), vision (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986), power sharing (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), praise (Hanson, 1976), assignment of administrative responsibilities, and equitable distribution of resources (Johnson, 1984) have been found to have positive consequences for teachers. Furthermore, Johnston and Venable (1986) linked principals use of participatory decision making to greater teacher loyalty to principals.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Using qualitative methods of participant observation and open-ended interviews, this study takes a preliminary look at the influence of the principal on teachers' school based decision making. The following question guided the research: What strategies do school principals use to influence teachers' school based decision making? The purposes of the research reported in this paper were: (1) to contribute to an understanding of the political nature of principal-teacher relationship, and (2) to use this understanding as a foundation for addressing important educational administration issues such as: professional role expectations, role transitions, and role strain (e.g., stress) that result from changing school initiatives such as shared decision making.

## FRAMEWORK

### Micropolitics

Micropolitics provided the conceptual foundation for the study. Micropolitics describes the ways in which individuals attempt to influence others in order to attain desired goals or outcomes. Specifically, this study sought to discover the micropolitics of the principal--the ways in which an elementary school principal attempted to influence his teachers in order to attain his desired school based decision goals and outcomes.

A definition of micropolitics, developed and based on work done in the field of micropolitics (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ball, 1987; Blase, 1988, 1990, 1991; Pfeffer, 1981) follows:

Micropolitics is the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part, political strategies result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. (Blase, 1991, p. 11)

Additionally, Blase (1991) explained, "although such strategies are consciously motivated, any strategy, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political significance in a given situation" (p. 11). Furthermore, both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are a part of the realm of micropolitics.

In addition, two other terms used within this paper should be defined: strategies and school based decision making. The term 'strategies' refers to the formal or informal 'lines of action' (i.e., behaviors) taken by the principal based on his intention and goal directed behavior (Blase, 1991; Lofland, 1976). The term 'school based decision making' refers to a participatory process whereby school members have equal input into school decision making.

## METHODS

### Principal Selection

The selection of the principal was based on the potential of both the principal and the school site to providing data directly related to the research topic, that being the examination of the principal's political strategies of influence upon teacher decision making. For the purposes of the study, it was important (1) to select a school involved in a participatory process whereby individuals at the school site were said to have equal input into decision making, and (2) to select a principal that was willing to participate in the research process. To accomplish this, a nomination process was used to identify the principal and the school that would be used as the research site. Superintendents, school board members, and educational service center staff (within a regional area) were asked to nominate effective principals whose schools were using a form of participatory decision making. Based on the list of nominees, a principal was identified according to the largest number of recommendations, and a willingness of the principal to participate in the research. The principal selected--a male, elementary, public school principal--had 13 years of service as a school principal as well as 21 years of total experience in education. The school campus, a suburban campus, located in the south-central part of Texas had 35 full time teachers and was described as a site-based management school.

Restructuring was said to be taking place in this school. For the most part, this meant that the school was characterized by "shared decision making; decentralized, school-based management processes; and greater professional autonomy expressed in redefined roles, rules, relationships, and responsibilities" (Bredeson, 1993, p. 40). The school had officially become 'site-based' approximately 5 months prior to the beginning of this study.

### Theoretical Framework

Research was collected at the school for a period of three months. Procedures for data collection and analysis were grounded in symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interaction theory emphasizes the interpretations and meanings that individuals construct in their particular social settings (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). The individual is seen as a social product who is influenced by others but who also maintains distance from others and is able to initiative individual action (Blumer, 1969, Mead, 1934). This study draws on the framework of symbolic interactionism to locate and analyze the processes through which the principal created meanings and developed strategies toward teachers on the basis of these meanings. Thus, the aim of data collection from a symbolic interactionist perspective was to collect descriptive data relevant to understanding meanings from the principal's perspective. Coding, from a symbolic interactionistic

perspective ,was then utilized to produce categories and conceptual understandings inductively from the data.

### Data Collection

One of the best ways to discover the strategies that principals use to influence teacher decision making is simply to ask the principal and then to observe his answers as they are applied to the context of teacher decision making. For this reason, the research design combined the qualitative methods of un-structured and semi-structured interviews with participant observation. All interviews were audio taped and subsequently transcribed. Field notes from participant observations were also written up.

### Analysis

Conceptual and descriptive data, discovered in interview and fieldnote transcriptions, were coded according to the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). The four stages of the constant comparative method utilized during this study included: (1) locating and comparing incidents (i.e., units of data) in the data, (2) developing categories from the incidents, (3) delimiting the data (i.e., reduction of nonrelevant incidents), and (4) presentation of theoretical findings. Through utilizing the constant comparative method, five major categories or strategies of principal influence upon teacher decision making were discovered.

These five strategies are used to organize the descriptive data that summarizes the research findings.

## FINDINGS

### Overview of the Findings

Five major strategies of principal influence on teacher decision making were coded in the data. The principal was found to influence teacher decisions through (1) the manipulation of teacher suggestions, (2) the use of voting techniques, (3) the planting of information, (4) exchange, and (5) the use of expert knowledge. These strategies are now described, defined and discussed below. Furthermore, the strategies are placed within a larger context of literature with regard to the principal-teacher relationship.

### The Strategies of the Principal: Influencing Teachers' School Based Decision Making

#### The Manipulation of Teacher Suggestions

Manipulation of teacher suggestions was a strategy of influence used by the principal. While the principal stated that he "believed wholeheartedly in participatory decision making," he manipulated teacher suggestions "into or out of" the way. For example, the principal stated,

"We are in the process of developing our yearly strategic plan. . .we are doing this in the participatory mode. Prior to the final meeting where we determine this years strategic goal, the

teachers were provided opportunities to brainstorm and respond either verbally or in writing to me about the goal they wanted to work on for next year. They {teachers} came up with some decisions and suggestions that I could see they thought were important, but they weren't important to me. I was thinking more in terms of academics. . . (he shakes his head as if he can't believe it) and they {teachers} bring up the parking lot. The teachers came up with this long list of these problems they think {emphasis added} we have to deal with. . . they wanted to make fighting, parking, and traffic our main goal for the year."

As revealed from the above quote, the principal sought to determine the yearly strategic goal for his campus in a participatory manner. Participatory, according to the principal meant providing teachers with opportunities to make decisions as to what the yearly strategic goal for the school should be. However, the principal disagreed with the majority of the teacher decisions. As a result, the principal devised a way of manipulating the teachers' decisions so as to focus on his own goal preference.

To influence the teachers' decision making process, the principal stated that he "purposely manipulated the teachers' decisions into two separate lists." He explained,

"I took all the teacher suggestions and I put them on lists. I made one list I called the short-term list and put all those problems like the parking lot, traffic problems, and fighting after school in it. . . which may not be short-term but, ah, anyway, they

were items we could maybe address. Then I made a long-term list that I put learning and academic issues on."

The principal created the two separate lists so as to (1) omit teacher decisions that he disagreed with, and (2) promote the decision outcomes that he favored. Interestingly enough, the principal regarded many of his teacher's suggestions, that resulted from the participatory decision making process, as "not significant." These 'not significant' items were placed on the short-term list. The principal acknowledged that the parking lot and fighting were problems, but indicated that they were "not that big of a problem." He felt that the teachers should have focused only on student academic goals.

Through his manipulation strategy, the principal virtually eliminated all suggestions that he disapproved of by placing them on the short-term list. He explained the short-term list to the teachers by saying, "These items {suggestions on the short-term list} are ongoing problems that we will work on throughout the year so it is not necessary to select these for our strategic goal." The short-term list was subsequently removed from consideration and the focus of the year's strategic goal choice came to center on the long-term list. The long-term list, which also included areas that the principal had suggested and added, was then used to further direct teacher decisions toward the principal's preferred decision outcomes. Having

removed the short-term list from consideration, the principal now prepared for what he called a 'participatory vote' using voting techniques he called *fist-a-five* and *spend-a-buck*.

While not mentioned specifically in micropolitical literature, the principal's strategy of 'manipulating teacher suggestions' was found to closely compare to principal authoritarianism (Blase, 1991b). According to Blase, authoritarianism is a principal strategy that focuses on controlling teachers' involvement in decisions making. Blase (1991b), in his large scale study of teachers' perceptions of principal politics (i.e., n=770) found the principal to utilize authoritarianism to "present evidence in such a way that no point of view other than his own was acceptable" (p. 37). Furthermore, regarding the principal's use of authoritarianism, teachers were quoted as saying, "when he {the principal} presents proposals for change he has already made up his mind" (p. 37). In other words, the decision for change had already been decided by the principal, teacher involvement in the decision was pseudo-participation.

### The Use of Voting Techniques

The use of voting techniques was another strategy the principal used to influence teacher decision making. According to the principal, voting techniques "inform him as to where his teachers stand on a decision" so that he can focus his influence on teachers who would block his

preferred decision outcomes. A voting technique, referred to as *fist-a-five* by the principal, was used to choose the strategic goal from the long term list. In describing *fist-a-five* as an influence strategy, the principal explained,

"I call out a choice from the long term list. The teachers hold up five fingers if they are in agreement with the decision or choice being represented. If they hold up four fingers, it's a strong commitment but not a total commitment. If a teacher holds up three fingers, she is neutral. She really doesn't feel strongly about it, but is not opposed to it {the decision}. A show of two fingers means that the teacher is slightly opposed to the decision, and one index finger means that the teacher is strongly opposed to the decision. If a teacher holds up a fist, I know she is going to try and block the decision. I then go through the process of, 'well, what's your problem? How can we change this? How can we narrow it down? What do we need to leave out?' So that eventually I get most of the hands holding threes, fours, or fives and I know that my teachers are going to support the area that I am, or that we need to be working on."

Thus, as a voting technique, *fist-a-five* is utilized by the principal to identify teachers who do not support his favored decision outcomes. Teachers identified as such are then singled out and made to verbally defend their decisions, seemingly to the point of harassment. According to the principal, this strategy usually provides him the support he needs to achieve his favored decision outcome.

According to the principal, he uses other voting techniques in a similar manner to influence teacher decision making. He explained,

*"Spend-a-buck is another voting process that I use. Spend-a-buck is a charting process where I give the teachers several dots to spend. They each have four dots to spend or place next to the decisions {on the chart} they prefer. They can spend the dots all in one place, or however they want to divide it up."*

Again, the principal stated that teachers were questioned according to their decision choices (i.e., as represented by the placement of the dots). In other words, teachers were singled out and asked to reconsider their vote when their decision choices did not support the principal's interests.

The principal in the present study used voting techniques as micropolitical strategies to control the content of school-based discussions and decision making. Likewise, Blase (1990) and Ball (1987) found principals to use micropolitical strategies in order to control the content and process of discussions. For example Blase (1990) found that "principals created pseudo opportunities for the participation of teachers in decisions, and, teachers insisted, such opportunities were constructed to give the impression that collaborative relationships were present in schools" (p. 738). Moreover, teachers in Blase's study stated that their contributions were either ignored or overruled by their

principal. In a similar finding, Ball (1987) reveals that teacher "participation can be reduced to an appearance of participation, without access to 'actual' decision making" (p.125). In his study of British headmasters, Ball found the headmaster (i.e., principal) to "present a potentially controversial issue as unproblematic" and then, when the principal's interpretation of the issue was challenged to divert discussion by effectively excluding the challenger from the meeting or withdrawing the issue from the discussion (p. 111).

### Planting Information

A third strategy of influence used by the principal in the present study was the planting of information. The data reveal that the principal spent a great deal of time influencing teachers by "planting information" about the decisions he wanted teachers to support. According to the principal, planting information was accomplished by dropping numerous hints about the decisions he wanted teachers to advocate. He explained, "I prod them {teachers}, hint around long enough and they {teachers} finally get close to the decisions I want. {As a result} I get them to buy into whatever it is that I want them to do." The principal further elucidated,

"Before I asked them {teachers} to come up with suggestions for the strategic plan, I went over all the test data from last year. I said, 'Okay,

here's where we were really strong and here's where we had problems.' I was trying to plant information to give them some information to think about--to provide them {teachers} with some problem areas that we {the school} need to look at. I also went over information from state and national sources that indicated that these {the principal selected problem areas} are the directions that education is going into. I mentioned such areas as problem solving and critical thinking. I wanted to plant information for them {teachers} to think about."

As revealed from his quote, the principal saw to it that teachers had access to information that would sway them toward his goal preferences. However, as an implication to this strategy of influence, the principal took great care "to make it appear that the teachers came up with the decision" so that teachers would support it fully. He explained,

"I plant a lot of information in a certain area because I want that area seriously considered. However, I want them {teachers} to see it on their own. I make sure that they have ample opportunity to see it. I have to be careful though, because if I tell them, 'this is not what we need to work on (he pauses and seems to be reflecting for a moment) then they won't buy into it {the principal's preferred decision outcome}, so I think what I try to do is let them get to participate and buy into the idea. If their opinions are not valued, they might as well not participate. I did this even before the district went to this process {site-based management}."

In the above interview excerpt, the principal acknowledged his goal in planting information. According to the principal, he planted information so as to get teachers to identify decisions areas that he preferred, but to do so in such a way that teachers thought they had come up with the idea. Furthermore, the principal explained that by identifying decision areas on their own, teachers gained ownership in the decision and were more likely to defend the decision and support it over time.

Blase (1991b) found principals' to utilize a strategy referred to as "suggestion" to influence teachers. 'Suggestion' as a micropolitical strategy closely compares to the strategy of 'planting information' used by the principal in the present study. According to Blase (1991b), the use of suggestion as a micropolitical strategy relied heavily on interpersonal diplomacy and informal conversation between the teacher and the principal. Blase's (1991b) large scale study (n=902 teachers) found that principals' spend a great deal of time influencing teachers through suggestion (i.e., providing alternatives, options, advice, and input).

### Exchange

Exchange was the fourth strategy used by the principal to influence teacher decision making. By definition, exchange is a form of political influence that occurs when both the teacher(s) and the principal attempt

to maximize gains and minimize the cost of social interaction in order to obtain desired outcomes (Anderson, 1991). In the present study, the desired outcome for the principal was to achieve the strategic objective of his choice for the school year. In exchange, the principal offered teachers, who backed his preferred decision outcomes, favor and support. The two exchange strategies of favor and support are described and discussed below.

*Favor: The Delegation of Responsibility*

The data reveal that the principal exchanged favor (i.e., a show of favoritism) for teacher loyalty and support. Favoritism was accomplished through the delegation of responsibility to select teachers who in turn supported and were loyal to the principal's preferred decision outcomes. Favoritism, through the principal's public recognition of the teacher as a 'chosen leader', supplied the favored teacher(s) with a position of status in the principal's eyes, in the eyes of teaching peers, and community. In addition, the chosen teacher was given administrative power and responsibility. According to the principal, administrative power and responsibility included representing the principal at school or in off-site school meetings, handling discipline, and evaluating peers. Furthermore, as a consequence of these administrative powers and responsibilities, the teacher's instructional work load was decreased. In exchange for this favor, the selected teacher was said to promote the

principal's preferred decision outcomes. In addition, the teacher often acted as an intermediary between the principal and the teaching staff by supplying the principal with information concerning teacher opinions and concerns.

According to the principal, he selects certain teachers to delegate responsibility to that "buy into" and are willing to help him initiate and promote the decision outcomes that he prefers. For example, he states,

"There is a teacher that I have named as an administrative assistant. . . .She has an opportunity to see and do some of the things that an administrator does. In exchange, she fills me in on things. I let her help when I am out of the building. It is a big advantage to have someone capable of doing the same things as I do because I can go some place to a meeting and feel secure that she is in the building handling things the way I would."

As evidenced by the above quote, the principal delegated a position of favor to the teacher. A high profile position, complete with the formal authority and the power to participate in select administrative tasks. In exchange, the principal further stated that he expected the teacher (1) to keep him informed about situations that might affect his preferred decision outcomes, and (2) to intervene with other staff and community members on behalf of the principal and his preferred decision outcomes.

### Support

In addition to delegated responsibility, the principal provided special support to teachers who, in turn, promoted his preferred decision making outcomes. Through this reciprocal exchange relationship, the principal provided three main areas of support to select teachers: (1) parental support, (2) classroom support, and (3) principal availability and accessibility support.

According to the principal, parental support included making parents use the chain of command. He explained,

"Parents come to me with a teacher problem, and I won't speak with them about it unless they have gone to the teacher first, and in most cases they have not gone to the teacher. . .they had rather come to the principal, the person with authority and get the teacher in trouble. . .I force them to go to the teacher, one on one and to settle their differences. I want them to go to the teacher and resolve it with her first. I will also back a teacher, even if she is wrong. As a result, the teachers are loyal to me, especially concerning pivotal decision making outcomes."

As evidenced by the above interview excerpt, the principal provided support to teachers in the form of protection from parents. In return the principal expected teachers to promote his preferred decision outcomes. In addition to protection from parents, the principal stated that he provided classroom support to select teachers by "lending a hand to support their classroom activities." Classroom

support, according to the principal, included giving approval for teacher requisitioned supplies, and "keeping distractions out of the classroom." According to the principal, "elementary teachers just want to go into their classrooms and be left alone." In addition, the principal felt that keeping distractions out of the classroom created an environment of protection and respect for the teacher's contribution in the classroom.

Furthermore, the principal supported teachers, who promoted his preferred decision outcomes, by making himself available and accessible to those teachers. The principal explained his availability and accessibility this way:

"With these teachers {teachers who promote his preferred decision outcomes}, there is a tremendous amount of come in and talk to me communication. An open door. I am available and accessible to these teachers. I listen, hear their problems and their ideas. I use their input. I, of course, must be available and assessable to a certain degree to all my teachers, but it happens to a greater degree with these teachers."

As evidenced by the above principal interview quote, the principal was available and accessible to a greater extent to teachers who promoted his preferred decision making outcomes. The principal found availability and accessibility to be essential to the success of his political personality.

In summary, exchange was found to be the fourth strategy used by the principal to influence teacher decision making. In exchange for promoting his preferred decision outcomes, the principal offered teachers favor and support. Favor or favoritism was accomplished through the delegation of responsibility granted to select teachers. Support was accomplished through three main areas: support of the teacher in the form of protection from parental problems, classroom support, and principal availability and accessibility support.

Exchange has been found frequently in micropolitical literature (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Blase, 1989; 1991b). According to Bacharach and Lawler (1980), in order for exchange to work, dependence must be present. Dependence implies that an actor's outcomes are determined by and dependent on the interrelationship between his or her behavior and the behavior of others. In the case of the present study, the principal's decision making preferences were determined by and dependent on the interrelationship between his behavior and the behavior of the teachers. For example, the principal depended on teachers to promote his decision making preferences. The teachers, in turn, were said to depend on the principal for favor and support. Thus, favor and support, as revealed in this study, were used as bargaining chips for principal-teacher exchange.

According to micropolitical literature, exchange is viewed by teachers as unfair (e.g., preferential) use of authority (Blase, 1988). Furthermore, teachers state that exchange produces negative and protective types of behaviors in teachers who are not recipients of it. For example, according to teachers, favoritism as a strategy of principal influence results in a decrease in motivation, morale, sense of control, work effort, and perception of the status of teaching for teachers (Blase, 1988).

### Use of Expert Knowledge

The use of expert knowledge was the last strategy of influence discovered in the data. According to the principal, expert knowledge was specialized knowledge that he had (i.e., derived from training, research, and experience) that teachers did not have access to. The principal stated that his "primary responsibility was to have expert knowledge on the latest research concerning schools." He referred to himself as "a teacher of teachers" and explained that "in order to influence my teachers, I have to have knowledge of the latest teaching technique or research." As a political strategy of influence, the principal stated that he used expert knowledge to explain and rationalize his decisions to his teachers. He stated:

"Sometimes I have to make a decision based on my expertise. I try to tell the teachers why I made the decision, not just I did it but here's my

rationale. . . it {the decision} had to be made and hopefully we can all live with it. . . I can say, 'I don't like this' - - in this way it sounds like the decision was required and that we have to live with it and must make the best of it. I try to motivate the teachers to make them understand that what I am trying to do is based on the very best knowledge--expert knowledge."

As revealed in the above principal quote, the principal utilized expert knowledge to influence teachers. According to the principal, having access to specialized knowledge that other did not have access to was powerful.

Mechanic (1972) also found access to expert information to be a base for power in organizations. According to Mechanic (1972), to the extent that an organizational member (i.e., principal) has important expert knowledge not available to other organizational members (i.e., teachers), he is likely to have power over them. Furthermore, Mechanic (1972) states that "experts have tremendous potentialities for power by withholding information, providing incorrect information, and so on, and to the extent that experts are dissatisfied, the probability of organizational sabotage increases" (p. 359). Expert knowledge, as a political strategy, has also been reported by Isherwood (1973). Isherwood found principals' use of expertise to be positively related to teacher loyalty and satisfaction and negatively related to teacher feelings of powerlessness.

## Summary

The data of this study revealed five major strategies of principal influence upon teacher decision making. The principal was found to influence teacher decisions through (1) the manipulation of teacher suggestions, (2) the use of voting techniques, (3) the planting of information, (4) exchange, and (5) the use of expert knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

### The Strategies of the Principal: Why Principals Influence Teachers

While it is important to understand how principals influence teachers, it is equally important to understand why principal's influence teachers. As evidenced by the strategies of influence reported in this study, the principal went to great effort to control teacher decision making. However, the principal also went to great effort to 'cover' his control of teacher decision making. Why? Three possible explanations are found in the literature and confirmed by the present research. Explanations include: role expectations, role transitions, and role strain.

### Role Expectations

The principal of the present study was found to use political strategies of influence in order to meet (or to make the appearance of meeting) differing role expectations. The

literature reveals that principals are often 'caught in the middle' of differing role expectations (Bredeson, 1993, Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992; O'Hair, 1993). Such differing role expectations emerge from such diverse groups as teachers, students, parents, community members, central office, school board, state agencies, and from within the profession itself.

For example, in the present study the principal was expected to comply to a state legislative mandate that 'all schools would be governed through procedures of site-based management'. As a result, the principal was expected to implement shared decision making in his school. When discussing shared decision making, the principal states, "I try to let my teachers make decisions and I try not to decide all things myself." On the other hand, the principal was expected to comply with district central office mandates that often contradicted site-based management decisions (e.g., teachers preference to focus on the parking lot and fighting rather than on student academic achievement). At this point the principal states, "Let me decide on my campus what I need. . . and what my priorities are."

Accompanying differing role expectations comes differing measures of accountability. Being held accountable strikes a deep cord with principals. According to the principal in the present study, he was accountable for the academic achievement of the students in his school. If the teachers, through shared decision making, chose to

focus on something other than an academic goal, then he would override their decisions. He explained his actions this way, "You have to realize, we {principals} are held accountable for and evaluated according to the academic well being of the students in this school. Our jobs are on the line." In a study with similar findings, a principal was recorded as saying, "If teachers are given the authority to make decisions, they must be held accountable for the results. . .the theory of if something goes wrong, hang the coach, should not apply" (Hallinger, Murphy, & Hausman, 1992).

### Role Transition

According to Bredeson (1993), "role transition includes those change events for individuals and roles they occupy, which are affected by three conditions: the amount of discontinuity between two sets of role expectations, the degree to which the position (role) holder has control over the transition, and the extent to which the role transition is normatively governed, such as in ceremonial rites of passage" (p. 37). As previously noted, the principal in the present study was experiencing discontinuity between three sets of role expectations (i.e., teacher expectations and central office expectations) that resulted from the shared decision making process (i.e., a legislative expectation). As the principal's control over decision making decreased, his political strategies of

influence increased. In other words, the principal developed and used strategies of influence in order to retain control over the decision making process. Yet, by the principal's own admission, it was becoming increasingly difficult to "balance expectations and control decision making." According to Duttweiler and Mutchler (1990), principals are experiencing difficulty "accepting changing roles and responsibilities, fearing the loss of power, lacking skills, lacking trust, and being afraid of the risks." In discussing the role transition required for shared decision making, the principal of the present study had this to say:

"I don't know that a bureaucracy such as education will ever be able to truly go to shared decision making or sight based decision making. In the mean time, my role has been to pay very little attention to it, to do it very quickly and to get rid of it, not to labor over it. I used to labor over things to make sure I was doing it all correctly and decided that it wasn't worth it. Shared decision making, in some ways, is similar. You have to go through the motions but you have to learn to modify things.

Thus, the principal acknowledges his concern in dealing with yet another administrative role transition - that of shared decision making. The principal further discusses a type of pseudo role transition, where he goes through the motions of the role transition (i.e., shared decision making) without actually institutionalizing the role.

## Role Strain

As principals attempt to make the transition into new roles, role strain and the accompanying symptoms emerge (Bredeson, 1993; O'Hair, 1994). According to Bredeson (1993), "role strain is a subjective state experienced by the role holder characterized by acute cognitive and affective disturbance such as discomfort, anxiety, perplexity, and uneasiness" (p. 37). According to the principal, ever-changing school initiatives and legislative mandates had caused him professional role strain characterized by feelings of "burn out." Burn out was evidenced by the principal in the present study when he stated,

"I am required to do so many different tasks, expected to fill so many roles--by teachers, parents, students, the central office, school board, legislative mandates, etc. And you have mounds of paper work to fill out for each role you play. You get burned out. A lot of it doesn't even make good sense. For instance, I honestly and literally fill out thousands and thousands of pages of paperwork on all my teachers and send it to the central office. . .most of it goes in files and I am sure it is never looked at. We have reports that we send in and I don't see how they could ever be looked at. It is easy to burn out."

Burn out, according to the principal was the result of differing role expectations and the accompanying paper work that tied to each role. In order to manage the burn out, the principal was found to use political strategies of

influence. For example, the principal noted that when new educational reforms occurred, he "waits to see what is going to happen." He strategically stalled, modified or postponed action until seeing if the reform was going to last and according to the principal, "they usually don't."

### Limitations of the Present Study

On the basis of the principal's dialogue and practice, I presented the strategies that one principal used to influence teacher decision making. Because my objective was to probe deeply into the principal's perspective and to develop rich descriptions of his influence strategies, I chose a small sample with which I could work intensively and in-depth. I readily acknowledge the limitations that accompany the choices I made in conducting this study -- particularly those that accompany the small sample size. The reader must cautiously and reflectively consider the applicability of the findings (e.g., the principal's influence strategies) within the context of these limitations.

Furthermore, missing from this research is the teachers perspective. In other micropolitical studies, teachers have been found to experience such profound negative outcomes as feelings of anger, depression, and a sense of resignation when dealing with control-oriented principals (Blase, forthcoming). Blase concluded from his studies of the principal teacher political relationship that "although principals typically did not exceed the limits of

positional authority, their actions often had devastating effects on teachers because such actions violated organizational and professional values and norms" (p. 6).

### IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

Most political acts in schools are viewed as simply part of the everyday routine (Marshall, 1991). However, we so often forget to explore the cornerstone of the political process--the covert or hidden political motives behind the routine. A micropolitical perspective of leadership can be used in order to understand the hidden political motives that permeate life in schools or as Blase (1991) states, "to understand the woof and warp of the fabric of day-to-day life in schools" (p. 1).

University preparation programs should include opportunities for practicing and potential principals to develop an awareness of the micropolitical perspective within the context of the school setting. A relationship between micropolitical knowledge and skill in dealing with the routine functions of school administration strongly suggest its relevance to administrator training (Lindle, 1991). Lindle found that educational administration students in clinical internship programs valued the micropolitical approach over a traditional administrative approach. In addition, students found the micropolitical

perspective to be critically important to their work as they expanded their evolving and deeply embedded knowledge base about schools as political organizations (Blase, forthcoming; National Policy Board for Educational Leadership, 1992).

Blase (forthcoming), reports that educational administration students, who on completion of a course in micropolitics, testified that the micropolitical perspective provided "fresh and provocative ways to understand life in schools. . . and helped them to improve their ability to influence others, to construct effective ways to respond to the influence of others, to anticipate the consequences of political interactions, and to analyze the political structure of schools (p. 15)." In addition, students (practicing administrators) reported that they benefited from examining how their political style affects teachers and influences important organizational processes such as decision making. As a result of examining their political style, principals, such as the one described in the present study, could determine how they unconsciously and inadvertently affect others.

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