Using ethnographic data, this study explores the behavior of urban principals at work. The event analysis summary (appended) was based on Mintzberg's classification of on-the-job characteristics and role behavior and then modified to reflect the data obtained. "Key incidents" rather than case studies serve as the basis for organizing descriptive analysis. The ethnographic method is revealed to provide insights into the underlying relationships of surface events when a subject's presentation of self ceases to become a performance, when someone breaks a norm and others react, or when a portion of the observed structure changes or malfunctions. In the progress of the study, the researchers discovered new dimensions being added to the principal's role as a result of unionization and community group pressure. In addition, the researchers found that the implementation of legislation concerning desegregation and handicapped children, the institution of a mastery learning-based curriculum, and the centralization of school administration have significantly altered the principal's role and behavior. Plans for further research include an analysis of principals' views of their new roles and the skills and increased paperwork required of them.
Analyzing Ethnographic Data -- Strategies and Results

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A paper presented to the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association (AERA), Boston, Massachusetts (April 1980)
This paper presents three approaches to the analysis of ethnographic data within the context of a study of urban school principals. A profile of on-the-job behavior by principals, is developed through a complex category form constructed for use in a comprehensive analysis of field events. Case examples provide prototypes of the boundary-spanning function of the principalship and are designed to sharpen our understanding of schools as organizations. Finally, a new dimension of the role of principal is developed through an analysis of steps in its appearance across sites.

1. Early Stages of Data Analysis

When we first entered the field in Spring 1977, we knew that one day we would struggle to interpret the thousands of observational events collected during our study of urban principals. In the early days, however, our energies were directed toward funding the project, securing access to a wide range of research sites, establishing protocols for data collection and getting the sites working. Because daily behaviors of urban principals were largely uncharted in the literature, our field work soon yielded images of the working life of principals that we shared with our advisory boards and at professional meetings. In this early stage of analysis we organized data samples around focal issues to try out categories of analysis, to see how our data fit current administrative theory, to examine more closely some early impressions about the data, to work up some case studies, and to follow the trail of policy implementation over time and across sites. These early cuts at our data helped us to understand the kind of information we were gathering and to gain a close familiarity with our field notes.
A. Data Reduction Instrument

In January 1979 we began to plan a system of data reduction as the first step toward comprehensive analysis of all field notes. Miles (December, 1979) describes the purpose of this step:

Data reduction is a form of preliminary analysis, which refines, iterates, and revises frameworks, suggests new leads for further data collection, and makes data more available for final assembly into case studies and cross-site analysis. (p. 593).

Our aim was to produce a profile of the daily life of principals that would summarize our field data. We based our first instrument on Mintzberg's (1973) categories that classify the on-the-job "characteristics" and "role" behavior of managers.

A protocol for event analysis that used these categories was constructed, and each team member tried to apply it to a set of field notes. During discussions that ensued, many dissatisfactions with the original instrument were unearthed. In particular, we wanted the analysis to remain more closely grounded to our data and we wanted additional categories included because they pertained to patterns within the job that we wanted to study. A new instrument was developed after much discussion among the senior researchers and with the project's advisory boards. Five changes were made in the revised form (See Appendix A, B, and C).

1. We added a category called "subject of event." In this category we planned to enter a phrase that briefly described the content of each event. We felt that these descriptions would provide a bridge between the summary data and the raw field notes. In particular, we thought that we would use this category to locate case examples of principals' behavior that we would use to illustrate summary reports.
2. We wanted to look more closely at the principals' observed tendency to abandon a planned schedule in order to respond spontaneously to unanticipated events. The addition of category #8 allows the coder to indicate whether an event is on the principal's prepared schedule or spontaneous in origin. We were interested in learning the ratio of scheduled to spontaneous activity and the kind of work accomplished in each mode. This information should give insight into the action orientation of managers (Mintzberg, 1973) and principals (Wolcott, 1973).

3. We wanted to look more closely at the relationship between the principals' action orientation and planning activity by principals. We became aware that planning often takes place on the go and that individual events may be part of an interrupted sequence of events that build toward an intended outcome. Our first strategy was to attempt to trace such interrupted sequences in each field protocol. This was not possible, however, because one day's observation seldom contained all steps in such a sequence. We settled, therefore, for the coder's estimate of whether events appeared to have an "extended purpose." We intended to use these indications as signals of interrupted sequence.

4. Another way we planned to examine the principal's planning activity was to pointedly examine whether specific events generated a product. The addition of category #11 allows the coder to identify those events that are linked to an identifiable product.

5. An area of increasing interest to the research team has been the role of principal in maintaining a high degree of stability in the school environment. Wilson (1973) has observed that the actions of persons fulfilling administrative roles are "principally, though not uniquely, determined by the requirements of organizational maintenance and enhancement." (p. 13.) Wolcott (1973, 1977), particularly, has drawn attention to the "variety-reducing" behavior of the principal and the emphasis placed upon keeping things 'manageable' in
the midst of pressures for change (1977, pp. 536-537). Sarason (1971) portrays a principalship role that is generally immersed in a "school culture" that places a premium upon matters of good order and efficient housekeeping. Rogers (1968) suggests that the actions of principals to maintain order and the stability of their own environment occasionally work at cross-purposes with the policies of the larger organization (Rogers 1968, pp. 305-313).

In order to summarize events related to the maintenance function of principals' behavior, category #13 was added. Events that helped to maintain stability in the school could be identified by the coder, as could events that enhanced the school by improving and enriching the status quo. These classifications would allow examination of the kinds of events that were linked primarily to school maintenance and to identify the form that building activities take in principals' behavior.

B. Site Analysis

Through a series of team meetings, we sought to examine some of the affective dimensions of our field work. One purpose was to air the fieldworker's feelings about the subjects and sites and to examine these feelings in light of the impressions of other researchers' reading of field notes. The research staff prepared for these meetings by reading the field notes that had been written up on the site to be discussed. The researcher who worked the site then led discussion by sharing impressions about the site and presenting problems in site development. The impressions gathered by the researcher on-site were then compared with the impressions gathered by the other researchers by reading the field notes. These sessions were helpful in identifying some of the subjective assumptions that were guiding the write-ups from each site. The researcher was able to identify some assumptions that were not supported by field data. On occasion plans were made to field test some original impressions (see Morris and Hurwitz, 1980).
II. Case Examples

Ethnographic data is uniquely appropriate for use in constructing realistic descriptions of daily life in schools. We plan to approach this use of our data through reports of "key incidents" (Erickson, 1977, p. 61), rather than through case studies that use geographic sites as a basis for organizing descriptive analysis. Examples selected from our full body of data will provide documentation of patterns of behavior in the principals' daily lives. Key examples will be presented and explicated in detail when they demonstrate organizational elements of schools that shape principals' decision-making behavior.

It is important to clarify the practical value that these kinds of examples will have to the professional training and development of school principals. It is not our intention to offer case models that offer recommended solutions to frequently encountered problems. Our case examples are intended to assist principals in sharpening their observational and tactical skills. The painter who studies another's work has a similar purpose. The artist's goal is not to paint like the others, but to tap into the perceptual and technical skills of another artist in order to expand one's knowledge of painting. Likewise, the military commander frequently studies past battles and great commanders. The purpose is not to match military action to typical combat situations. The purpose is to expand one's experience with combat through the experience of others.

This approach to the training of school administrators is consistent with the on-the-job learning that is typical of the administrator's role. Case examples should enrich the practitioner's framework for analysis and decision-making. This framework is not likely to be constructed from the results of published experimental studies or survey research. It is likely to be built from one's own experience and the experiences that others have shared. Dell Hymes describes this resource in the following way (1977, pp. 174-5):

Much of what we know, in anthropology and in personal life, is known by means of narratives, anecdotes, first-hand reports, telling observations. In the vital decisions and directions of our lives we willy-nilly rely on what we know by such means.
Recognizing that most administrators navigate by the seat of the pants, the purpose of the case example is to build, beyond the immediate experience of a single administrator, a more informed, perceptive and attuned basis for the impulse that underlies administrative action. Reports that describe the on-the-job decision-making by principals address other principals at the level where decision-making happens.

The ethnographic method also uniquely provides opportunities that the researcher can use to discover relationships between what principals do and the organizational structure of schools. Although these insights are often intuitive, the ethnographic method itself is designed to facilitate such creative leaps. The fieldworker begins by studying what subjects do. Initially, one concentrates on recording the intricate details of surface events. This is, however, a first step in the intuitive process, and correspondingly a first step in the intuitive dimension of data analysis and creative insight.

Insights into the underlying relationships of surface events are not achieved by grouping or manipulating them systematically. The detailed account of daily events forms a preparatory backdrop against which the researcher hopes to detect glimpses of the organizational framework that occasionally penetrate the surface. These glimpses would be meaningless or unavailable to a person who lacks the grounding of extensive field experience with daily surface events.

In some cases an opportunity develops when a subject's presentation of self is pierced for a few moments -- providing a glimpse beneath appearances. Such a moment is described by Berreman (p. 301):

Some of the most revealing instances of social interaction occurred between people who were apparently oblivious to the fact that the ethnographer was present. Frequently this was a temporary lapse. A performance for the ethnographer would be abandoned as tension, conviviality, concentration on a topic of conversation, or some other intensification of interaction occurred among the erstwhile performers. Such instances of preoccupation with one another were conspicuous by the fact that attitudes were expressed or information divulged that would normally be suppressed. The breach in the performance
would sometimes be followed immediately or after some time by embarrassment, apology, or anxious efforts to counteract its presumed effect on the ethnographer's view of the village or those involved in the incident. Minor instances of the same phenomenon were frequent sources of insights into the functioning of the society, and sources of confirmation or contradiction of informants' data.

However, not all insights into the underlying structure of surface events are inspired by a revealing slip in the ethnographer's presence.

Insight into the meaning and relationship of events can become known to the ethnographer much as they become known to any novice in an organization. One observes the members and tries to infer the norms that their behaviors reflect. Often one learns a norm when someone breaks it and the others react. Mentors teach the novice how to behave appropriately, guide their early steps and offer interpretations of events. Learning to behave appropriately is important to the ethnographer if one is to gain a wide access to the full range of site behavior. The researcher who can be introspective about what one has learned indirectly about behavioral norms at a site can get in touch with knowledge about the group that members share but do not articulate or verbalize.

A third opportunity to learn about the organization of surface events can occur when a portion of the structure changes or malfunctions. Subjects reveal their assumptions about how the organization works as they respond to the aberration. Outrage, counter attacks, reconnaissance, and coping strategies can reveal previously obscured conventions and elements of organizational structure.

Insights into the organizational dynamics of schools prove to be an essential element in understanding the decision-making process followed by principals. One of the subjects in this study complained that existing research on school administration fails to convey the sense of adrenaline rushing through veins that accompanies the decision-making process. The heightened sense of energy, often mixed with anxiety, to which he referred may be derived, in part,
from the pressure one feels when one sees events in the context of the organization's structure and attendant meanings.

A parent who appears suddenly to complain to the principal that a teacher "hit my kid in the face with a ruler" is an immediate challenge for the principal who must address the charges and the parent's anger. But the significance of the charges within the organizational context add considerable pressure to the event. Such a charge could blow up into a community-school confrontation. Principals who cannot control and channel their parents' groups are seldom rescued by the central administration. Furthermore, the community group that is out of control can ruin the principal's reputation with the downtown office. If the principal overreacts to these possibilities by acting too harshly against the teacher, the teacher may seek union support. A union grievance may also damage the principal's reputation with the central office. Because a principal knows these things about the organization, these considerations will guide decisions, actions and behavior with the parent and teacher. Adrenaline flows as the principal steers through dangerous waters, aware that the event can spread beyond the boundaries of the moment into other units of the organization.

The principal views events with an eye to how and where they may leak into other parts of the school system. At times they act to limit the event, to prevent its spread into new domains. In other circumstances, they may channel its flow into other parts of the organization in order to produce there some desired effect. The subjects of this study spent much energy anticipating, analyzing and controlling the boundaries of events. Their decisions regarding events were molded by their understanding of the school system and its organizational dynamics.

The boundary-spanning framework principals use to interpret events, and within which they decide what action to take, is an essential element in understanding the decision-making of middle managers. Policies that are developed in central administrative units spread outward toward the school units. The
principal often adjusts new directives to fit into the school's operational norms before they enter the school. Events that take place in the school unit are monitored by the principal to control their potential for washing into other units in the system. As middle manager, the principal is more than a conduit of organizational information. Principals mold and define the boundaries of information and events. The success of a principal's decision-making depends on the principal's understanding of the organization and of the choices available for appropriate action. Case examples can illustrate organizational dynamics that are reflected in the decision-making behavior of principals.

III. Serendipity

In ethnographic research serendipity refers to fortuitous discoveries that occur when the researcher finds something valuable in a place unexpected. Ethnographers prefer to cast a wide net when observing and collecting records because they believe that one never knows how important something may turn out to be, and one never knows where one will stumble on something valuable. We have reason to suspect that while this study was in progress a new dimension to the principal's role was born.

In their oral history of the principalship, our research subjects referred to two new dimensions to the urban principal's role that have emerged since the mid-sixties. One was added in the late 1960's when the teachers union became a powerful force within the school system and the principal's relationship with faculty changed. The union contract redefined this relationship in a legalistic mode. A second change is said to have taken place in the early 1970's during a time when community groups pressured schools for a greater say in school governance. The principal's role as liaison to the community was intensified. Principals still talk about their fellows who were run out of the their schools by mobilized community groups. There is a sense of survivorship among those who adjusted to these new dimensions in their role. Today the skills pertaining to union relations and community
participation are widely shared by our subjects. But most remember the years when it was not clear how to behave, what would work and what was appropriate. They were on their own to find out, to keep their school intact and to survive.

During the three years we have spent in the field, a new wave of change has struck the schools and we believe that it has brought with it a new dimension in the role of principal. There is a set of events in the field notes where the principals seem to be struggling with this role and developing new skills to carry it out. The changes are related to a series of new programs that have been introduced into the school system in the past three years. Each program is designed to implement a major policy shift, most of which have their origins in federal policy and funding for educational programs. In Fall 1977, principals and faculty were reassigned to schools on a mass basis throughout the system in order to meet federal guidelines for a racially integrated faculty and school administration. A curriculum and teaching system based on the mastery learning concept has been introduced and adopted for all elementary schools to teach reading and math. A system for referring, diagnosing, servicing and re-evaluating special education students has been developed and introduced in every school as part of a plan to implement Public Law 94-142. A voluntary student desegregation plan was introduced which made extensive use of the magnet school concept and reallocated enrichment and special learning programs throughout the system to promote the transfer of pupils. Each of these programs reflects a general trend toward centralized decision-making and resource allocation.

New governance procedures highlight the shift in many decision-making functions from the school unit to the central offices of the school system. Whereas in the past, principals could remove unwanted faculty and hire preferred faculty by using an administrative transfer process, this practice has nearly disappeared and all faculty placement has been assumed by the Office of Personnel. Whereas the community played a major role in selecting school principals during the early 1970's, the use of administrative assignment of principals to schools
and the system's guidelines for maintaining an integrated principalship have reduced the community's role in the selection process. Whereas teachers used to have a free hand in assigning grades to students and principals were in control of student promotion to the next grade level, new guidelines tie the grade that teachers can give to student performance on criterion referenced tests and a promotion policy has been adopted that ties high school entry to student scores on national achievement tests. Special education services have been pulled out of neighborhood district offices and centralized into four regional offices.

This shift to centralize the school administration has effected the role of principal in two ways:

1. Principals have been responsible for implementing these changes at the school level and their evaluation by their superiors has come to be based on how well they accomplish the results that the policies are supposed to effect. For example, their yearly evaluation criteria has been expanded to include the extent to which their faculty is racially integrated. The central office has issued each elementary school target levels for student academic achievement and principals are being evaluated according to whether students in their schools achieve these levels.

2. In order to make decisions at the central level, central office staff needs accurate field based information on which to base their decisions and for use in setting target goals. The more decision-making has been centralized, the more data has been requested of schools for use by the central office. The principal has been responsible for collecting these data at the school level and sending it to the appropriate unit.

Our subjects have continually complained about the increase in paperwork required by the central office during the past three years. The following written reports were requested between September 1979 and January 1980.

a. each student in the school was to be classified in one of five racial groups and school totals were to be forwarded to the central office.
b. all students who came from a home where another language than English was spoken were to be identified, the language group indicated and the child's English language proficiency tested and graded at an A, B or C level.

c. each student receiving special education services was to have an individualized service program prepared, files and endorsements have multiple copies, a copy of each is to go to the central office.

d. the forms to be used to purchase supplies were changed, items had to be re-ordered on the new forms.

e. all materials purchased during the past ten years with federal funds were to be inventoried and lists sent to the central office.

f. principals were to prepare proposals for new, unique programs that might attract students from beyond the immediate neighborhood.

g. principals were to prepare proposals for new, unique programs that might attract students to their neighborhood schools.

h. principals were asked to complete forms which evaluated the performance of supplemental staff such as CETA aides and non-quota faculty.

i. monthly reports were required of principals to convey the principal's activities and program development plans.

j. principals were required to set objectives for their school for the year and to set measurable goals that would serve as performance criteria.

These new responsibilities were often in conflict with the firmly established function of principal as providing for the survival, stability and growth of school programs. We observed principals fail to implement programs that they felt would be too disruptive to their school's organization. We observed principals hesitate to provide accurate information about their school because they feared it would be used centrally to pull out staff, cut back programs or possibly even lead to closing the school. We observed principals try to shape the material they provided to their school's advantage. To counter these measures, the central office began to index survey results with other regularly reported school data (i.e. the total number of students reported class by class on the racial/ethnic survey had to correspond to the total number of students reported on the most recent monthly report of membership).

An interesting outcome of the new role dimension was that principals came to be in a unique position for seeing how the new procedures worked, in practice, and whether they were accomplishing their goals or creating new, unanticipated
problems. They were also able to speculate how the unanticipated problems might be addressed within the framework of the new policy. There was a gap, however, between this kind of information that the principals wanted to share with the central office and the kind of information and cooperation that the central office wanted from the principals.

The Chicago Principals' Association instituted a regular meeting schedule with the Superintendent of Schools for the purpose of sharing with him the kind of information that they felt he should know about how his policies were working at the school level. These "roundtables" included a dozen or so principals and the superintendent. When one of the subjects of the research was invited to an early roundtable, the researcher requested permission to attend as well. The principal agreed, but wanted to check with the Association. The Association initially agreed, but wanted to check with the Superintendent. The Superintendent agreed, but then the Association changed its mind. The researcher was told that because principals seldom get to address the superintendent in this manner, the presence of an observer might inhibit one of the principals that was not accustomed to the research format. Reports from the subject about the meeting indicated that the principals used the time to tell the Superintendent things that they thought had did not know about the practical application of some new policies.

The fact that the researcher was excluded from the meeting is taken to represent a general discomfort that principals feel about their performance in the new role dimension. Principals continue to experiment with ways to introduce central policies at the unit level, handle the greater volume of paperwork, change or mediate aspects of central procedures that are disruptive at the unit level, and play a meaningful role in the formation and evaluation of central policy.
Further work in the analysis of field data is planned to pursue this issue. The plans include the following:

a. Review data to learn the affective dimensions of the role change for subjects. What are their feelings about the new role?

b. Review data to learn how individual principals are integrating this new dimension into their previously held picture of the principalship.

c. Examine data to identify emerging skills that pertain to the new role dimension. Are principals communicating with one another about these skills?

d. Examine the written reports required of principals during the past three years. Use this paperwork as an unobtrusive measure of the growth of the new dimension and the kind of demands placed on the principal.

e. Examine written documents pertaining to new policies and programs and compare these formal statements with principals' perceptions of them as recorded in the field data.

f. Calculate the number of minutes spent by each subject over time on work pertaining to the new role dimension.

These steps should provide further insight into the nature of change within schools and, in particular, how changes in role are manifest in organizational behavior.
Notes

1. All papers that have been presented by the group members at professional associations:


2. The "Characteristics" of the manager's job include who the manager speaks with (by role), whether the medium of communication is verbal, written or visual, where the manager interacts with others, and who initiates the interaction.

The "Role" of manager is categorized according to the following role functions: Figurehead, Leader, Liaison, Monitor, Disseminator, Speaker, Entrepreneur, Disturbance Handler, Resource Allocator and Negotiator.

3. Anthropologists have long understood the value of following group norms for successful field work. A favorite tale is of a fieldworker who arrived at a village in a remote area and was asked to sit and talk. As he did, he looked up to recognize the shrunken head of a former fieldworker by its flowing red hair and beard. Shaken, he asked what the man had done to end up so. "Bad manners," was the reply.
References


Dell H. Hymes, "Qualitative/Quantitative Research Methodologies in Education: A Linguistic Perspective," Anthropology and Education Quarterly, pp. 165-175, Vol. 8, No. 3.

## Appendix A

### Column 1 - Event Number
(An event within an event will be numbered with a letter suffix, e.g., "3a.")

### Column 2 - Principal Interacting With
- DS - District Superintendent
- ASP - Assistant Principal
- AT - Adjustment Teacher
- SW - Social Worker
- COU - Counselor
- F - Faculty
- FTB - FTB Student
- S - Student
- OP - Other Principals
- CL - Clerk
- PA - Parent, Guardian or Student's Sibling
- COF - Community Officials, Police
- PO - Politicians
- N - Nurse
- SE - Security
- COS - Central Office Staff
- BE - Building Engineers
- O - Other (specify)
- TA - Aide

### Column 3 - Race of Person(s) Principal Interacting With:
- BM - Black male
- BF - Black female
- WM - White male
- WF - White female

### Column 4 - Medium of Communication
- VFTF - Verbal Face-to-Face
- VTEL - Verbal Telephone
- WRI - Written
- VI - Visual

### Column 5 - Subject of Event

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### Column 6 - Locus of Event
- I.o. - inner office
- o.a.o. - other administrative office
- o.o. - outer office
- c - corridor
- CR - Classroom
- LR - Lunchroom
- SR - Social Room
- FL - Faculty Lounge, Restroom
- DPS - Outside Playground or Field
- OSG - Outside of School Grounds (specify)
- gym - gymnasium
- AUD - Auditorium

### Column 7 - Event Initiated By:
- Same as Column 2

### Column 8 - Scheduled or Spontaneous
- Sch - Scheduled
- Spo - Spontaneous

### Column 9 - Duration (in minutes)

### Column 10 - Evidence of Extended Purpose
(If event shows evidence of extended purpose, indicate by an "X.")

### Column 11 - Outcome
- Yes
- No

### Column 12 - Mintzberg Role
- Fig - Figurehead
- Ldr - Leader
- Lia - Liaison
- Mon - Monitor
- Diss - Disseminator
- Spk - Spokesman
- Ent - Entrepreneur
- DH - Disturbance Handler
- RA - Resource Allocator
- Neg - Negotiator

### Column 13 - Stability/Security or Educational Enhancement
- Stb - Stability
- Enh - Enhancement
### EVENT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

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<td>Duration (in min.)</td>
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| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| Event # | Race | Medium of Communication | Subject of Event | Locus | Event Initiated By | Scheduled or Spontaneous | Duration (in min.) | Evidence of Extended Purpose | Outcome | Mintzberg Role | Stability or Enhancement | **P.** |