

**Textbook Leadership?
An Analysis of Leading Books
Used in Principal Preparation**

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Executive Summary

In an era of accountability, where school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matter more than ever. Amidst the efforts to prepare principals for this new world, little scholarly attention has been paid to the content of what principals are actually reading in the course of their studies or whether their texts are preparing them for the rigors of accountable management. We examined 11 of the 13 educational administration texts most frequently assigned in a sample of 210 core syllabi from a national sample of 31 programs. We tracked the attention devoted to a number of concepts central to school leadership. The texts were sorted into three broad categories: specialized texts, general texts, and foundational texts. We found that:

- Somewhat surprisingly, educational accountability was mentioned only about five times per 100 pages. Of those mentions, 57% were neutral, 23% were negative, and less than 1% included guidance on its use or implementation. Overall, less than one page per 1,000 in the texts included guidance on its use or implementation.
- On the whole, the texts tended to be positive or neutral about the value of data collection and analysis. References to the value of data were positive 50% of the time, neutral 48%, and negative just 2%. Discussions of “data” were much more likely than those of accountability to include suggestions for effective use, though it was still the case that only 30% of discussion included any direction regarding its use.
- Teacher termination and dismissal were mentioned only three times per 100 pages of text. When these terms were discussed, 94% of the time the tone was neutral and professional. However, there was not a single case in which removing ineffective faculty was depicted as potentially positive for a school.
- The term “efficiency” appeared six times per 100 pages. Of those mentions, 38% cast efficiency in a positive light, 49% discussed it neutrally, and 13% were critical. Less than one page out of 100 offered prescriptions or suggestions for promoting efficiency.
- While some critiques suggest that education school curricula are ideologically progressive or liberal, examination of these texts found that the notions “diversity” and “multicultural” appeared only infrequently. Variations on the term “diversity” appeared just four times per 100 pages and those on the term “multicultural” surfaced less than once per 100 pages.

On balance, the texts endorse the value of data and the appropriateness of focusing on student achievement but are much more skeptical when it comes to using results to make tough decisions. The texts focus heavily on school culture while devoting limited attention to utilizing accountability, terminating poor performers, or promoting efficiency. We propose three suggestions for ensuring that principals are exposed to the full array of essential skills: authors broadening discussion in existing texts, publishers issuing new texts, and faculty taking steps to assign texts on tough-minded management. Ultimately, unless efforts to refashion programs, internships, and courses of study are coupled with efforts to ensure that principals are learning the skills they need, it is not at all clear that these ambitious reforms will produce more effective principals.

Introduction

In an era of accountability and decentralization, in which school leaders are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results and use data to drive decisions, the skill and knowledge of principals matter more than ever. School improvement rests to an unprecedented degree on the quality of school leadership, which elevates the importance of how we train and teach aspiring principals.

An array of scholars has asked whether traditional approaches to preparing and licensing principals are sufficient for this changing world (Elmore 2000; Fordham Foundation 2003; Hess 2003; Murphy 2001; Tucker 2003). Principals themselves are among the first to suggest that they might be more effectively prepared, with just 4% reporting that graduate school studies did more to prepare them for their position than on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues. In fact, 67% of principals asserted that “typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school districts” (Farkas et al. 2003: 39).

A recent study by Arthur Levine, President of Teachers College at Columbia University, has helped to crystallize many of these concerns. Based on a survey of practicing principals and education school faculty, as well as case studies of school leadership programs, Levine concluded that “the majority of [educational administration] programs range from inadequate to appalling” (2005: 23). In light of the Levine analysis, and given the increasing demands on school leaders, the question of what candidates are actually reading and learning in principal preparation has taken on new significance.

In response to such concerns, providers of principal preparation have advocated a variety of new approaches. Leaders of the University Council for Education

Administration have asserted that “in order to move forward—in order to build programs that support leadership for learning—we must rethink and revise our practice in several areas” (Young and Kochan 2004: 121). Reforms have included modified education school programs, new state-run principal academies, and changes in state licensure statutes (Jackson & Kelley 2002; Hale & Moorman 2002; SREB 2003). Though the substance of these reforms is a matter of debate (Hess & Kelly 2005a), changes in delivery, content, and course sequencing are proceeding.

Amidst this activity, however, little scholarly attention has been paid to the content of what principals actually read in the course of their studies. What material are programs teaching? Are principals being prepared for the challenges they will face? This study asks: What are candidates reading in texts assigned in principal preparation programs? If one believes that the content learned in a course of studies matters, as we do, the question of what aspiring principals are being asked to read in graduate school is an important one. Absent data on what principals are learning and reading in the context of their preparation, debates about preparation and licensure must rely more on faith than on fact.

Three questions guided this study. The first two address the degree to which administrative preparation texts are preparing principals for this new world of school leadership. First, we were interested in the degree to which the texts emphasize performance, achievement, and accountability rather than inputs or school culture. Much of the recent research on school leadership highlights the importance of monitoring and reporting student achievement and of effective data management in school improvement. For instance, a 2003 review of the research on principal effectiveness by the Association

for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) emphasized the importance of “monitoring student progress and reporting findings” and “use of student data for program improvement” (Cotton 2003: 38-39).

Second, we explained the degree to which texts cover important management skills like the evaluation of personnel, the use of incentives, and removing ineffective educators. The new pressures to improve school performance, as well as the concrete requirements of The No Child Left Behind Act’s Highly Qualified Teacher provision, highlight the importance of effective personnel management. Though this is a sensitive area, a 2004 ASCD primer points out that accountable management requires “the identification and documentation of inadequate performance and, ultimately, the reassignment or removal of educators and leaders who fail to meet... standards” (Reeves 2004: 86).

The third, more minor, question deals with the oft-voiced critique that schools of education promote progressive or “politically correct” values. Critics have suggested that education schools frequently approach teacher preparation in an ideological fashion, promoting progressivism and multiculturalism (Steiner & Rozen 2004). Do texts evince such a bias in the case of administrator preparation?

In order to examine these three overarching questions, we looked at the attention that widely assigned texts pay to an array of management and leadership concepts deemed critical in the new educational environment. Concepts studied include accountability, personnel management, data, efficiency, and school culture. These topics obviously do not cover the full spectrum of skills an aspiring principal would ideally master. Moreover, this list is heavier on management skills and lighter on some elements

of “instructional leadership” than some experts would prefer. Our interest here, however, is primarily in the degree to which principals are being taught the kinds of management concepts that are increasingly relevant in the world of contemporary schooling. We also investigate how particular concepts are treated, especially whether they are discussed in a dispassionate, positive, or negative light. Finally, the study considers the conservative critique of education schools by examining how much attention these texts devote to the terms “multiculturalism” and “diversity.”

Existing Research

Discussion regarding principal preparation tends to focus on two questions: what does one need to know to be an effective school leader and what are existing training programs actually teaching? Here we focus on the second question, which has been the subject of little systematic research. Educational administration scholars have termed the body of research on administrator preparation “scant” (Lashway 2003). The existing scholarship on administrator preparation—especially with regard to the texts used—consists primarily of essays or anecdotal examination of selected cases.¹

The most recent look at educational administration textbooks is Thomas Glass’s (2004) survey of the profession’s history by examining 14 of the most popular texts of the past twenty years. Glass reviewed 14 “general” textbooks from the 1985-2000 period (one of which is included in the present study) and anecdotally characterized the amount of time they spend on theory and practice. While providing an insightful picture of the evolution of the field of educational administration, the analysis did not seek to systematically examine how these textbooks treat the different skills and knowledge

¹ A 2004 review of the literature found that just 81 empirical studies on any facet of administrator preparation were published in academic journals of any kind and 19 examined any issue relating to the curriculum of administrator preparation (Murphy and Vriesenga 2004)

thought to be crucial to the principalship. Glass charted the transformation of educational administration from its beginnings as an offshoot of the scientific management movement to the specialization that prevails today. His analysis pointed out that the “general textbook” has fallen out of favor in educational administration and that the most recent generation of textbooks are typically more specialized and shorter than their predecessors, while offering a blend of theory, practice, and research.

Earlier efforts to examine the most popular educational administration readings include Fero’s (1991) survey of recommended reading according to 275 educational administration department chairs. The Fero study found very little consistency across respondents, but did identify 22 titles that were recommended for educational administration students. Again, the analysis did not include an examination of the content of the recommended texts.

Other recent studies of administrator preparation textbooks have looked at particular skills and content areas, but most have focused on one facet of administrator preparation. Lee (1998) conducted a content analysis of public administration textbooks and found that the subject of public relations was being reintroduced to the books after a long absence. White and Daniel (1999) looked at the various approaches to instructional supervision in 12 supervision textbooks and found that evaluation-based theory was used more often than clinical theory. English (2002) and Thrupp (2003) have critiqued the inclusion of particular concepts and authors in educational administration books. Ranis (2003) examined how preparation programs can promote research literacy in school leadership in part by looking at three popular educational research texts. Ranis collected data on how many chapters and pages discussed the general field of educational research

and found that the research texts included concrete examples of existing educational research, that quantitative methods outweighed qualitative ones, and that all of the texts spent one quarter to one third of their time on the elements of research design.

In short, little is known about what principal candidates are asked to read in their preparation courses and the actual content of those readings. Only a handful of existing studies discuss the texts used in administrator preparation, and none of them represent systematic and comprehensive looks at the books commonly assigned in a broad swath of programs. No prior effort has sought to assess how frequently key management concepts were addressed in the texts or how those concepts were depicted.²

Methods

We examined 11 of the 13 most frequently assigned texts, based on an analysis of 210 core course syllabi collected from a structured sample of 31 principal preparation programs (Hess & Kelly 2005b). Data collection, coding, and analysis took place between February and December 2004.

In early 2004, The US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) listed 496 administrator preparation programs in the United States. The 31 programs studied included 13 of the nation's top 20 educational administration programs (as reported by *U.S. News and World Report* in 2004), 11 of the 20 largest programs (as reported by the US Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System in 2003), and seven other, more "typical" programs. Over the course of eight months, by contacting faculty at each institution at least eight times, we collected at least four "core" course syllabi amenable to systematic

² Similar studies have been conducted in other fields, however, including knowledge management in MBA texts, ethics content in accounting books, and research methods in psychology primers (Stephens and O'Hara 1998; Jackson et. al, 2001; Bracken and Urbancic 1999).

coding from these programs. Ultimately, the analysis included 84 syllabi from the elite programs, 78 from the largest programs, and 48 from the more “typical” programs.

The 210 syllabi yielded a total of 1,851 readings. This total included books, journal articles, edited volume chapters, newspaper articles, and law cases. Only “required readings” were included in the sample; “recommended readings,” “suggested readings,” or “supplemental readings” were excluded.³ The present analysis focused only upon assigned books—not upon other kinds of readings. Forty-three percent of the assigned readings from the sample were books (or sections of books). A book was deemed to have been assigned if students in the course were assigned all or part of it as a required reading.

Striking is the lack of consistency with regard to which readings were assigned. Even the most frequently assigned title appeared only eight times out of 1,851 readings.⁴ The results reflect the specialization that has characterized educational administration over the last decade, with texts on particular topics like school law, school finance, human resource administration, or organizational behavior constituting the majority of assigned texts. As educational leadership expert Tom Glass (2004: 7) has pointed out, the decline of general education administration scholars has “resulted in a plethora of specialized textbooks featuring a narrow focus on just one area of school administration.”

The selection of books for analysis was straightforward. Seventeen volumes were assigned at least four times. Three of these titles were school law textbooks that focused upon case law and did not address school management, leadership, or administration.

³ For books that have been reissued, any edition of a particular book was counted as one observation of that single title. Therefore, totals for each title may include observations of multiple editions.

⁴ This result is consistent with an earlier effort to identify the top ten educational administration textbooks. A survey of 275 department chairs revealed very little agreement among education administration scholars as to the most important titles (Fero 1991).

Similarly, while Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* was assigned four times, the volume was omitted because the text does not address questions of school management, leadership, or administration. Of the remaining 13 volumes, we examined all seven of the volumes that were assigned more than four times. We also randomly selected for study four of the six texts that were assigned four times.

The books we examined are displayed in Table 1. The 11 texts were sorted into three categories for purposes of reporting results: specialized textbooks, general textbooks, and foundational texts. We defined a text as "specialized" if it deals with one particular area of educational administration, like human resource administration, school and community relations, or teacher evaluation. General textbooks attempt to cover the many different facets of a principal's job in one volume. Foundational texts do not focus on concrete skills and knowledge per se, instead focusing on the philosophy of educational administration.

Table 1: Texts Analyzed

Author/Editor	Title	Publisher	Year	Times Assigned	Text Type
Bolman, L. and Deal, T.	<i>Reframing Organizations</i>	Jossey-Bass	1997/2003	8	General
Glickman, C., Gordon, S., Ross-Gordon, J.	<i>Supervision and Instructional Leadership: A Developmental Approach</i>	Allyn and Bacon	2003	8	General
Various Authors	<i>The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership</i>	Jossey-Bass	2000	7	Foundational
Bagin, D. & Gallagher, D.	<i>The School and Community Relations</i>	Allyn and Bacon	2001	6	Specialized
Rebore, R.	<i>Human Resource Administration in Education: A Management Approach</i>	Allyn and Bacon	2001	6	Specialized
Odden, A. & Picus, L.	<i>School Finance: A Policy Perspective</i>	McGraw-Hill	2000	5	Specialized
Hoy, W. and Miskel, C.	<i>Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice</i>	McGraw-Hill	2005	5	General
Bransford, J., Brown, A., and Cocking, R. (eds)	<i>How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School</i>	National Academy Press	2000	4	General
Danielson, C. and McGreal, T.	<i>Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice</i>	ASCD	2000	4	Specialized
Fullan, M.	<i>The What's Worth Fighting For Series</i>	Teachers College Press	1996	4	Foundational
Peterson, K. and Deal, T.	<i>Shaping School Culture: The Heart of School Leadership</i>	Jossey-Bass	1999	4	Foundational

Some scholars and practitioners may question whether these titles constitute a representative sample of the literature on educational administration. While such queries are reasonable, the fact remains that these are the volumes that were most commonly assigned in core courses in a national cross-section of preparation programs. These books reflect what professors are actually asking their students to read. If students are reading texts with particular emphases or areas of focus, this study will merely reflect that.

We did not assess the narrative style, research base, or factual accuracy of texts. Rather, we documented how frequently and in what context these texts addressed a particular set of key concepts. In addition, in light of persistent critiques that rely more upon anecdote than systematic evidence, we examined the validity of one of the most common attacks on education schools: that they spend an inordinate amount of time teaching ideologically loaded concepts.

The initial round of coding entailed a raw concept count designed to determine the frequency with which various topics are addressed in the most commonly read preparation texts. The following concepts were tabulated: “resources,” “accountability,” “data,” “efficiency,” “compensation/salary,” “termination/dismissal,”⁵ “evaluation,” “performance” and “achievement,” “culture,” “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and “values.” In coding, all forms of these terms were included (i.e. “evaluation” includes “evaluate,” “evaluated,” “evaluative”). We did not rely upon text indexes in determining usage, but read each page in each text during the coding process.

In the second round of coding, we selected out a subset of these important concepts in order to analyze the context in which each topic was broached. The following topics were selected for closer scrutiny: “accountability,” “data,” “efficiency,” “termination/dismissal,” and “resources.” For accountability, data, and efficiency, we examined each mention of each concept to determine whether the topic was discussed negatively, neutrally, positively, or in a positive fashion accompanied by guidance on how to use the concept as a management tool. This determination was based both on the

⁵ The count of references to “compensation/salary” also included the terms “pay” and “bonus.” Similarly, the count for “termination/dismissal” included the terms “fire” and “layoff.”

specific sentence in which the term was mentioned and in the context of the paragraph in which it was discussed.

For instance, we coded a discussion suggesting that accountability leads to “less professionalization” (Hoy & Miskel 2005: 113) as a negative reference to accountability. When authors alluded to a term without necessarily highlighting its importance or offering prescriptions, it was coded as neutral. A statement like, “Successful principals also focused teaching and learning on the success for all students through . . . use of data” (Marsh 2000: 141) in the *Jossey-Bass Reader* was coded as a “positive” mention of data that failed to give instructions on how best to implement the concept in question. Finally, positive mentions that included advice or prescriptions on how best to use a key concept included statements like, “If the intent were to reach certain objectives at the lowest possible cost, then a budget can also serve as an instrument for pursuing efficiency” (Odden & Picus 2004: 251).

In the cases of teacher termination and of resources, we took a slightly different approach. For teacher termination, given the extreme sensitivity of this particular question and its relevance to ensuring teacher quality, we distinguished between references which mentioned dismissal as “positive,” those regarding it as “necessary at times,” those neutral on its use, and those that regarded it only as a “last resort.” In the case of “resources,” the three categories were “referenced as low or not sufficient,” “explanation as to how best to allocate,” or “neutral/descriptive.”

Findings

Table 2: Relative Frequency of Key Concepts (frequency per 100 pages)

Key Terms	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Performance/ Achievement	52.17	45.72	26.76	44.34
Evaluation	27.10	63.31	6.20	37.87
Culture	30.84	4.83	73.80	28.77
Data	16.09	23.66	4.23	16.82
Values	16.84	1.93	42.68	15.91
Resources	14.59	19.94	9.15	15.90
Compensation	4.27	33.45	0.99	15.70
Efficiency	8.01	5.59	2.39	5.86
Accountability	9.06	3.24	2.96	5.41
Termination/ Dismissal	0.60	6.69	0.42	3.09

Table 2 illustrates the frequency with which ten selected terms were discussed across the 11 volumes' 3,451 pages. Of the ten, "performance" and/or "achievement" were the most commonly cited terms, appearing 44.3 times per 100 pages. The next most commonly mentioned terms were "evaluation," at 37.9 times per 100 pages, and "culture," at 28.8. Mentioned less frequently were "efficiency," "accountability," and "termination" or "dismissal," all of which were mentioned fewer than six times per 100 pages.

The texts appear to reflect the current consensus regarding the importance of school performance and outcomes rather than the traditional emphasis on inputs and resources. Across all three categories of texts, authors devoted significantly more attention to "achievement" and "performance" than to "resources." The terms "accountability" and "efficiency" were largely absent, though they received somewhat more attention in the general texts than in the other volumes.

These aggregate figures, however, obscure the variation evident across the three different categories of texts. The foundational texts, in particular, were characterized by a relative inattention to many elements of management and an emphasis on softer qualities, particularly “culture.” In the foundational texts, accountability and efficiency together were only mentioned about five times per 100 pages, or about one-half as often as “resources” and less than one-fourteenth as often as “culture.”

The results for the foundational texts, however, were due in large part to the Deal and Peterson foundational volume, *Shaping School Culture: The Heart of School Leadership*, which mentions “culture” 273 times in just 142 pages—or nearly twice per page. Peterson and Deal argue that culture deserves this kind of attention, explaining, “Too often, the technical side of leadership eclipses available time and willingness for its much-needed cultural aspects. As a result schools become sterile, incapable of touching the hearts of students and teachers” (Peterson & Deal, 99). Even when this title is omitted from the foundational sample, however, culture still appeared about 35 times every 100 pages, or about seven times more often than it did in the specialized texts.

The topics that received the least amount of attention are those that dealt with thorny personnel management issues like compensation and termination or dismissal. Again, there was variation between the three categories. Discussions of termination were almost non-existent in general and foundational texts, occurring less than once per 100 pages. In specialized texts, however, termination came up almost seven times every 100 pages. This disparity is almost entirely due to the inclusion among the specialized texts of the Rebores volume on human resources administration. Indeed, if Rebores is

removed, the issue of termination was almost uniformly absent in all of the texts analyzed.

With regard to “compensation,” general texts discussed it only 4.3 times every 100 pages and foundation texts less than once per 100 pages, while the specialized texts discussed it 33 times per 100 pages. Again, this is largely due to the inclusion of Rebores. The lack of attention to these issues in nearly all texts may be natural given the existing confines of traditional public school management; firing a teacher is extremely difficult and expensive to carry out. Nonetheless, this inattention may leave new principals unable to take advantage of new opportunities as they arise.

How Do Texts Discuss Accountability?

While the raw counts suggest how frequently various concepts are addressed, these numbers obviously tell only a sketchy tale. A more significant issue is the context and tone in which the texts discuss the various topics.

Table 3 documents the context and tone used to discuss accountability. Given its prominence in educational governance today, the lack of attention devoted to accountability comes as something of a surprise. Accountability was mentioned only about five times per 100 pages of text. Of those mentions, about 57% were neutral, 20% were positive in some fashion, and 23% were negative or hostile. In other words, readers only encountered accountability rarely, and when they did, 80% of the discussion was neutral or skeptical. Readers encountered just one page out of 100 that made positive mention of accountability. Even more significant, less than one page in 1,000 discussed accountability and offered guidance on using or implementing accountability.

Table 3: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Accountability

Context of Accountability	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Positively; necessary component	1.42	0.83	0.85	1.06
Positively; explains how to implement or use	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.03
Neutral	5.69	1.79	0.70	3.06
Negative or skeptical	1.95	0.55	1.41	1.26

The skeptical discussions of accountability often revealed concern about its effect on teachers and schools. For example, Hoy and Miskel (2005: 101) see the push for increased accountability as one of the “countervailing forces for increased centralization” that have “already muted” the movement toward a more decentralized, professional, and autonomous system.

There were important distinctions among the three categories of texts. The foundational texts, including the widely assigned Jossey-Bass reader, were predominately critical of accountability. In those volumes, where accountability was mentioned just 21 times in 710 pages, 48% of mentions were critical, while just 23% were neutral and 29% positive. General texts discussed accountability in neutral terms about two-thirds of the time, though they tended to be more critical than positive when editorializing. The specialized texts were the only volumes that were more positive than negative when discussing accountability, with 55% of discussion neutral, 28% positive, and 17% negative.

Ultimately, the evidence raises questions about whether principals are receiving the exposure, useful guidance, or balanced assessments of accountability to prepare them for the rigors of public education today.

How do Texts Discuss Data?

Educational leadership experts have pointed out the importance of data management in driving school improvement and student achievement. As Carolyn Kelley and Kent Peterson point out, “new high-stakes tests and the detailed reporting of student scores require a more advanced notion of instructional leadership that involves complex analysis of data.” (Kelley and Peterson 2002: 256).

Table 4 shows how texts are approaching the topic of “data.” On the whole, the texts tended to be neutral or positive about the value of data collection and analysis for school leaders.

Table 4: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Data

Context of Data	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Useful in managing	2.10	4.07	1.41	2.77
Useful in managing; prescriptions offered	7.93 ⁶	5.93	0.42	5.58
Neutral or descriptive	5.54	13.59	1.83	8.12
Marginally useful or useless	0.52	0.07	0.56	0.34

In the 3,451 pages coded, “data” was mentioned with some frequency, about 16.8 times per 100 pages. The mentions were positive 50% of the time, neutral 48%, and

⁶ Note: all 106 instances of this category were in the *SuperVision* text.

negative just 2%. Clearly, the texts regarded “data” more warmly than the concept of “accountability.” Moreover, the discussions of “data” were more likely than those of accountability to include suggestions for effective use, though it was still the case that only 30% of discussion included any direction regarding its use.

For instance, the Bagin and Gallagher (2001) specialized text on school and community relations highlights the importance of data in gaining an accurate picture of the school community, suggesting, “Age data should be broken down into convenient classifications and the implications carefully studied” (17). Meanwhile, skepticism about data was often related to its usage. The foundational Jossey-Bass *Reader on Educational Leadership* observes, “Some people like to begin with the hard-and-fast data: academic achievement scores, attendance records, number of disciplinary actions, student surveys. We suggest that it is more important to return to your mission statement and core virtues, to reflect on where your school is and where it is heading as a community” (Ryan & Bohlin 2000: 335).

The foundational texts discussed “data” less often and less favorably than other texts, while the specialized texts devoted the most attention and were the most favorable. Among general texts, the presence of prescriptions was due entirely to the inclusion of the Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon text *SuperVision*, which routinely offers prescriptions such as, “Data-collection methods might include review of school records and student products, classroom observations, interviews and surveys”(2003: 298). Indeed, once *SuperVision* is removed from the general text sample, the general texts did not offer *any* prescriptions on how to use data, though they still discussed data in a generally positive light. The foundational texts were not only the least likely to discuss

data at all, they were also the texts most likely to discuss data in a negative light and the least likely to offer suggestions for how leaders might find data useful.

How Do Texts Discuss Teacher Termination?

We examined whether the most commonly assigned texts addressed tough-minded personnel management concepts like compensation and termination of employees. Though such topics are often deemed antithetical to school collegiality, principals are under increasing demands to drive school improvement by increasing teacher quality. A recent Public Agenda survey of school administrators revealed that 78 percent of superintendents and 57 percent of principals believe that “principals are evaluated according to their ability to judge and improve teacher quality” (Farkas 2003: 21). An important task of human resources management in any sector is removing poor performers and working to reward effective employees. Given the legal, procedural, and interpersonal difficulties that attend efforts to remove teachers, it would seem appropriate that preparation address how, why, and when to do so.

Table 6: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Teacher Termination

Context of Termination/Dismissal	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Positive for Organization	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Necessary at times	0.37	3.52	0.42	1.69
Neutral	0.15	2.76	0.28	1.26
Use only as last resort, if ever	0.07	0.41	0.14	0.23

As mentioned earlier, teacher termination and dismissal were mentioned only 3.1 times per 100 pages of text. On the infrequent occasions when the issues were broached, the discussion tended to be neutral and professional (see Table 6). Overall, 94% of the

discussion was either neutral or acknowledged that termination could be necessary at times. This Rebores (2004) quote illustrates a typical discussion of termination: “If the inappropriate behavior continues . . . the supervisor must continue with progressive discipline involving demotion, a pay cut, and finally, dismissal” (197). There were no cases in which removing ineffective faculty was depicted as positive for the organization, while 6% of discussion suggested that termination should be regarded as an absolute last resort or avoided altogether.

In contrast, it is instructive to look at how termination is viewed in other sectors. As Jack Welch, the legendary CEO of General Electric, has argued, “Making these judgments is not easy, and they are not always precise...but...This is how great organizations are built. Year after year, differentiation raises the bar higher and higher and increases the overall caliber of the organization” (2001: 158). While the Welch model is clearly not feasible for today’s school principals, and may well be inappropriate for public education, it is a reasonable and potentially illuminating perspective. In fact, the management literature is replete with authors like Jim Collins and Peter Drucker who forthrightly discuss the importance of removing unproductive personnel. This point of view, however, is utterly absent in these widely assigned principal preparation texts.

Overall, termination and dismissal received remarkably little attention. Both the foundational and general texts referenced dismissal less than once per 100 pages, while the concept’s relative prevalence among the specialized texts was due largely to the Rebores volume.

How Do Texts Discuss Efficiency?

In recent years, education reformers have become increasingly vocal in demanding that schools be held accountable for student achievement and also for the responsible and efficient allocation of resources. Recent scholarship has raised serious questions about the efficiency of resource utilization in large urban districts (Ouchi 2003; Segal 2004). This research has fueled calls for more attention to measuring performance and productivity. In turn, some educational authorities have long been critical of such reforms and efforts to enhance “efficiency,” regarding such proposals as schemes to import a “corporate” model of management into education (Sergiovanni 2000). In fact, “efficiency” is sometimes derided as a concept that is alien to the culture of public schooling (Saltman 2005). Given these tensions, how do principal preparation texts treat the subject of “efficiency”? Table 7 illustrates that efficiency was generally treated in a neutral or positive light on the infrequent occasions when it was discussed at all.

Table 7: The Context in Which Texts Discuss Efficiency

Context of Efficiency	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Mentioned positively	1.95	2.00	0.28	1.63
Mentioned positively; prescriptions offered	0.52	0.62	0.56	0.57
Neutral	4.34	2.48	0.99	2.89
Mentioned negatively	1.20	0.48	0.56	0.77

Across all 11 texts studied, the term “efficiency” appeared 5.9 times per 100 pages. Efficiency was mentioned in a positive light about 38% of the time it was raised,

neutrally 49% of the time, and negatively 13% of the time. As in the case of accountability, few mentions offered prescriptions or suggestions for promoting efficiency.

The specialized texts were generally more positive about efficiency than were other texts, with nearly 50% of all references framed positively and fewer than 10% in negative terms. Bagin and Gallagher (2001: 47) call for “good planning” as a way “of determining where to go and how to get there in the most efficient and effective manner possible.” Both general and foundational texts were moderately more positive than negative with regards to efficiency, with 36% of mentions in foundational texts positive and 24% negative. When the foundational texts discussed efficiency negatively, they usually alluded to the fact that “efficiency” may be antithetical to teaching and learning. For instance, Fullan (1996: 18) argues, “There is also a sense in which teaching is deeply moral, irreducible to efficient techniques and learned behaviour.”

How Do Texts Discuss Resources?

The subject of resources looms in debates over leadership. Some observers fret that schools lack necessary resources—making the job of principal an impossible one. Others have argued that schools have the resources they need to accomplish their mission and that principals are responsible for seeing that those resources are spent wisely. Table 8 shows that the topic of “resources” was discussed with some frequency—about 16 times per 100 pages. The tenor of this discussion tended to be neutral, with only about 13% of mentions arguing that school resources are insufficient.

Table 8: The Context in Which Resources Are Discussed

Context of Resources	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Referenced as low or never enough	3.44	1.31	2.54	2.37
Neutral	9.28	10.69	5.21	9.04
Prescriptions on allocation	1.87	7.45	1.41	4.09

On the whole, the availability of “resources” was mentioned 15.9 times per 100 text pages. Fifty-seven percent of these references were neutral, 26% focused on prescriptions regarding how to use resources wisely, and 15% of mentions asserted that schools have insufficient resources.

The specialized texts were particularly focused on providing guidance, with 38% of discussion focused on prescription and another 55% on neutral or descriptive discussion. Odden and Picus (2004: 50-51) offer the following, evenhanded account of the school spending debate: “We side with those who conclude that the research suggests that there is a positive connection between resources and student achievement . . . But we also conclude that the money-results connections are not at all that strong, and we show in Chapter 10 that there are numerous ways to use money more effectively.”

Prescriptions for allocating resources were offered about a quarter of the time the topic of resources was raised. However, the vast majority of the guidance was provided by discussion in the specialized texts. Both the general texts and foundational texts were almost twice as likely to assert that schools lack necessary resources as to discuss how resources might be used effectively. For example, if readers consult the index in Bolman

and Deal’s general text *Reframing Organizations* (2000: 479) to locate pages which discuss “resources,” they are redirected to “*See Scarce resources.*”

Do the Texts Reveal an Ideological Bias?

Some critics have suggested that schools of education reflect a “left-leaning” bias that denigrates concepts like testing, accountability, and data and that places undue emphasis on concepts like culture and diversity. While it is not the central thrust of our analysis, we briefly consider the degree to which the implied bias is manifest in the texts studied.

Table 9: The Discussion of Diversity and Multiculturalism

“Politically Correct” Concepts	General Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,336 pages	Specialized Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 1,405 pages	Foundational Texts (frequency per 100 pages) N: 710 pages	Overall (frequency per 100 pages) N: 3,451 pages
Diversity	4.49	1.10	10.42	4.29
Multicultural(ism)	0.25	0.34	1.27	0.49

In fact, a cursory examination suggests that the themes conventionally imagined to signal an explicit progressive bias were largely absent. The term “diversity” appeared just 4.3 times per 100 pages and the term “multicultural” appeared less than once per 100 pages. In general, values, culture, and diversity were relatively prominent in the foundational texts, but were noticeably less visible in the general texts and especially in the specialized texts.

There is little evidence that these texts demonstrated an effort to promote notions of multiculturalism or diversity. Moreover, when these concepts did surface, the discussions were less normative or agenda-driven than some critiques might suggest.

The Hoy and Miskel (2005: 356) text, for example, warns school leaders that “Given the growing diversity and other changes of school contexts (e.g. in economic wealth,

ethnicity and gender in administrative positions, and with at-risk children), the challenge of communicating accurately and clearly will surely increase.” Similarly, Bagin and Gallagher (2001: 156) assert that “Multiethnic diversity exists in most communities. . . . School administrators need to understand this and develop a communication plan.”

Conclusions

The most widely used texts in a sample of 210 principal preparation syllabi focus on school culture and broad-brush discussions of student achievement while devoting far less attention to the skills that enable managers to thrive in the accountable, increasingly flexible world of schooling. At the same time, countering the fears of the most vocal critics, there is no evidence that the texts promote an ideological agenda by emphasizing concepts like multiculturalism or diversity.

The texts do reflect the contemporary focus on school performance and outcomes rather than inputs and resources. On balance, the authors are broadly supportive of the managerial use of data, though they evince significant skepticism when it comes to using results to make tough decisions. There is concern that the texts devoted limited attention to issues like promoting efficiency or productivity, terminating poor performers, or making use of data.

The specialized texts appear to do a reasonable job of walking readers through contemporary management challenges in areas like accountability or human resources. Texts by authors like Rebores and Odden and Picus offer concrete prescriptions for real-world problems. While it may be natural that foundational and general texts are less relevant to the daily workings of school management, it seems they could do much more to help aspiring principals confront uncomfortable realities. For instance, general texts

spend more than five times as much space bemoaning the lack of educational resources as they devoted to any aspect of removing ineffective teachers. In truth, even in the specialized texts, which exhibit a franker approach to personnel management, authors shy away from blunt discussion of why, when, or how principals might use evaluation to light a fire under teachers. In their book on teacher evaluation, for example, Danielson and McGreal (2000: 29) assert: “The first presumption, that of competence, states that unless notified to the contrary, the teacher’s [tenured] performance is at least at a satisfactory level. It conveys the notion that the job (and therefore the livelihood) of a teacher is never in question.”

Granted, there is much more to school leadership than accountability, personnel management, efficiency, and knowing how to use data. Less tangible elements of successful management are often equally important to organizational effectiveness. As Peterson and Deal (1999: 140) rightly point out, “Clear goals, rational structures, high standards, and accountability are only part of why a business succeeds. The real lesson is how business leaders are able to . . . build a common spirit and cohesive culture.” Nonetheless, goals, structures, and accountability are useful tools, and it is unclear where aspiring principals will learn these if not in the course of their administrative training. The concern is that principals are not being sufficiently exposed to the full range of management practices necessary to thrive in contemporary schooling.

There are three ways in which preparation programs might more effectively acquaint aspiring principals with the demands of modern school leadership. One is for authors of widely used texts to do a better a job of devoting more attention to issues like accountability, personnel management, and compensation and to discuss the elements of

“tough-minded” management at greater length and in more depth. However, authors will write what they wish, and it is not necessary or particularly likely that the widely read authorities will opt to make such changes. A second option is for publishing companies to recognize the need and potential market and publish and promote new texts that will provide alternative takes on key leadership questions. This seems a sensible and desirable course, though one that will depend on the market calculations of publishers—and one that will take time in any event.

That brings us to the third possibility, which is that faculty begin to alter the content of instruction by taking steps to ensure that key management concepts are addressed and treated in a balanced, constructive fashion. As we have observed, specialized texts currently tend to do the best job of addressing hard truths in a useful fashion. However, increasing the use of specialized texts poses a limited and problematic response, since overview classes are an inevitable component of any preparation program and will tend to employ general and foundational texts. Moreover, survey courses constitute a candidate’s introduction to the field and can establish a tone that colors subsequent studies. For these reasons, fundamentally rethinking the content of preparation needs to entail reading assignments that provide a fuller, richer introduction to management. Based on existing syllabi, it is not clear whether the problem is that such texts are not widely assigned or that they do not currently exist.

As we seek to prepare aspiring principals for 21st century schools, it is vital that we seek to ensure that they are encountering the ideas and analysis that will prepare them to succeed. Part of principal preparation redesign necessarily requires identifying and assigning the books and readings that will do so. The question of what candidates read is

easily overlooked amidst grander proposals to refashion programs, internships, and courses of study. Unless these larger changes are coupled with attention to instructional content, however, it is not at all clear that these ambitious reforms will do much to produce more effective principals.

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