Dimensions of teacher in-service training for school improvement

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Abstract
Examines relationships between the role of elementary school principals in teacher in-service activities and what principals acquire in administrator in-service training; and what principals do in regard to teacher follow-up activities in the classrooms. Using interview and observation techniques, relationships are found which reflect successful efforts extended towards school improvement.

When calls are made on schools and school districts to engage in major improvements, one activity which becomes a central component of the response is in-service training for educational personnel. In this regard, teacher in-service training has been the mainstay set of activities run by or at least shaped by the school principal. Because of the individuality of each school principal and the specific set of circumstances of each school and its environment, the character of in-service activities in each school has more or less school-specific.

In this paper we summarize parts of a study (Botello, 1997) which described and examined teacher in-service activities in three elementary schools in Central California. The segment of the study which is covered in this paper constitutes the following two specific characteristics of the in-service endeavor:

1. the relationship between the role of the principal in teacher in-service activities and the nature of the activities which took place in a prior administrator in-service training which the principal attended; and
2. the relationship between the role of the principal in teacher in-service activities and the nature of the follow-up activities in the classrooms in the school.

Despite the importance of the principal in-service – teacher in-service – teacher follow-up relationship, this linkage has not previously been studied systematically. In this study, the first dimension mentioned above is investigated in the part which considers the selection of the three principals (described in detail in the methodology section). The second dimension mentioned above is examined via the four following research questions:

1. What do principals do as instructional leaders in staff in-service training which is designed to facilitate and support school-wide instructional improvement?
2. What perceptions do principals have about number 1 above?
3. What do teachers do in the classrooms as a result of number 1 above?
4. What perceptions do teachers have about number 3 above?

Selected pertinent literature
Representative studies on the principal's role in school improvement
It has been at least two decades since researchers and writers began systematically seeking ways to understand the role and effectiveness of the school principal in bringing about change in the school. The dominant theme of societal demands on schools in the 1980s was "effectiveness". Study after study looked at schools with students scoring high on achievement tests and examined behaviors of the principals which were assumed to bring about - at least in part - these high scores. For example, Lipham (1981) lists the following behaviors: commitment to improvement, participation in classroom activities, monitoring classroom time, engagement in effective instructional improvement, and having positive attitudes. Based on a comprehensive study conducted at about the same time, Bossert et al. (1982) classify the effectiveness-related behaviors which they found in instructional organization actions, school climate actions and principal management actions. Hallinger and Murphy (1986) offer the following eight specific effectiveness-related behaviors: framing and communicating school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating curriculum, developing high standards and expectations, monitoring student progress, promoting professional development of teachers, protecting instructional time and developing incentives for students and teachers.

In the early 1990s, several writers linked the survival of the school to what the principal might or might not do (e.g. Barth, 1988, 1990; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1991; Seashore-Louis and Miles, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990, 1992). This linkage implies that the need for the principal to engage in bringing about change is mandatory. The definitions of school-wide improvement in the 1990s have become more complex. Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991) and Fullan (1993), for example, call on schools to adopt a "moral purpose of creating a vision and making a difference". Barth (1990) calls for shared leadership within the school in order to also share the responsibility. Seashore-Louis and
In-service training for school principals

The literature pertaining to administrator in-service training is relatively recent (e.g. Daresh, 1988; Daresh and Playko, 1992; Fullan et al., 1990; Hallinger and Wimpelberg, 1989; Johnson, 1986; Martin and Johnson, 1989). A good portion of this literature is prescriptive.

For example, in California, in 1983 the legislature passed a major school reform act, Senate Bill (SB) 813. Its requirements include the strengthening of instructional leadership skills in school administrators in order to improve services offered to public school students. The intentions of this legislative proposal are as follows:

The legislature intends that the administrator support and development activities funded by this article will lead to direct improvements in services to California public school pupils. (Article 3. Administrator Training and Evaluation, Section 44681, California Education Code).

In 1984, the California Department of Education created what would eventually be called the California Leadership Academy (CSLA). The purpose of CSLA is to provide site and central district administrators with ongoing opportunities to improve their management and leadership skills. The stated main objective of CSLA is:

- to help practicing administrators and teachers in leadership positions strengthen their instructional leadership skills and focus their actions on the issues and strategies critical to increasing the achievement of all students in California (CSLA Overview, 1993).

Since its creation, school districts in California have been releasing school principals to attend the Academy. The impact of this in-service training on the principals has varied with the strength of their desire to launch a major school improvement effort and with their capacity to implement such an effort.

Most of the writers in the 1990s suggest that for the principal to enhance the possibilities of bringing about significant changes in the school, s/he needs to acquire new (additional) knowledge and skills himself/herself. Apparently, the in-service format has been the most popular. Daresh (1988) looked at 56 studies focusing on in-service work for principals over a ten-year period. In looking at the content of the in-service programs, their procedures, their development, evaluation and validation, and their effects on administrators, teachers and others, he concludes that:

- Very few research reports have been published about principal in-service.
- Most of the work that is published focuses on problem solving rather than on theory building.
- Very little of the work entails on-site and naturalistic data gathering.

A later report (Daresh and Playko, 1992) concludes that:

- Effectiveness of principal in-service training is a function of the needs of the participants (e.g. time management, locally mandated programs).
- There is no interest in principal in-service training in learning additional conceptual skills.
- There is a relationship between the principal’s background and the desired principal in-service content.

According to Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991), “The preparation and professional development of administrators have evolved from the university-based educational administration tradition to a variety of forms that tend to cluster around the restructuring themes” (p. 336). This expansion in continuing professional development, Fullan notes, intensified in the 1980s when 24 states enacted legislation for in-service training for school administrators, establishing leadership academies and administrative training centers. According to Fullan, although many of these new programs appear to incorporate new designs, including research findings, school-based and district case studies, and support among the participants, the programs often fail to live up to their promise. The author cites a host of
studies which claim that the ineffectiveness of professional development is due primarily to the lack of “program follow-up”.

For example, Hallinger and Wimpelberg (1989) observe that although professional development programs for school administrators are beginning to address relevant issues, the infrequency of substantive program follow-up in the forms of coaching, on-site technical assistance and support is lacking. Martin and Johnson (1989) observe (in their study of Colorado’s administrator staff development programs) an absence of subsequent observations, coaching, surveys, analyses, or technical assistance (p. 10). Little et al. (1987) studied the California School Leadership Academy and note that a lack of follow-up resulted in the relative ineffectiveness of this program.

Fullan asserts that effective professional development programs must assist leaders with the management of “sophisticated, persistent, and continuous improvement processes ... (school administrators) are being asked to lead restructuring efforts involving radical change and associated complexities” (Fullan and Steigelbauer, 1991, p. 337). Although Fullan believes we have a long way to go in linking leadership programs to follow-up and improvement on the job, he does offer six recommendations for a model administrator professional development program.

First, he suggests that these leadership programs be built on the principles of collegiality and professional exchange. They must provide principals with mentors and other development support. Secondly, the programs must be instructionally focused. While Little et al. (1987) found that staff development activities have “maintained a tradition of separating the training of teachers from administrators” (p. 97), Fullan recommends the establishment of “collaborative work cultures” (Fullan et al., 1990). Third, the new staff development programs must include the preparation of school boards, district superintendents, and other district administrators to support site administrators in their work with teachers and the implementation of program changes. Fourth, universities must adapt their programs in support of the new leadership training programs. Fifth, leadership training programs must recognize and address the shortage of women and ethnic minorities in leadership roles through equal opportunities for promotion. Sixth, Fullan stresses the professional partnership (teacher, principal, superintendent) aspect of effective professional development. He believes that the effective professional development program recognizes the “intimate interrelatedness” of the educational professions (Fullan and Steigelbauer, 1991, p. 339).

Martin and Johnson (1989) call for more sophisticated methods of demonstrating the value and impact of training programs for school administrators. The authors acknowledge the proliferation of administrator development programs as well as the controversy surrounding the effectiveness of these programs: “During this age of educational accountability and decreasing resources, it is imperative that all programs designed to increase student learning be appraised for their effects. Efforts which have little impact should be discarded, while those demonstrating success should be studied, replicated, and disseminated” (p. 1). To assess effectiveness, the authors offer four “targets” for the evaluation of administrator staff development:

1. Administrator reactions: obtaining useful feedback from participants to guide future program development.
2. Administrator learning: self-reporting of gains or pre-post testing to access growth.
3. Administrator performance improvement: measuring the extent to which administrators applied what was learned to their on-the-job behavior.
4. Organizational improvement: assessing the extent to which the administrator staff development program affected or improved the organizational or work environment. Martin and Johnson (1989) acknowledge that this last assessment is the most difficult and challenging type of evaluation.

A study by Johnson (1986) sought to determine the extent of use of these foregoing targets of evaluation by Oregon school districts when assessing the effectiveness of their administrator staff development programs. The results of this study are noteworthy. Although 92 percent of the school districts funded and required administrator development programs, only 46 percent were even using measures of participant reaction and less than 22 percent were attempting to measure the effects of the training on job performance. Furthermore, while 82 percent of the districts expressed overall satisfaction with their staff development programs, few were able to demonstrate that any administrator or organizational improvement had occurred (Johnson, 1986).

From the above, it is apparent that professional in-service training for school administrators has received mixed reviews. However, according to Daresh (1988) and Daresh and Playko (1992), ongoing principal in-service training must be a regular part of what goes on in a school system. For this to occur,
districts must value and convey the idea that growth and continued learning are viewed as expectations of professional performance for administrators, as well as teachers. The value of professional development, according to Daresh, will increase if it is linked more directly to district and school priorities. Moreover, administrator in-service programs should be based on the specific goals, needs and interests of the participants.

**Methodology**

The parameters pertinent to the study of linkages between principal in-service training, teacher in-service training and follow-up activities were framed as follows:

1. Principals who attended administrative in-service training and who already integrated knowledge and skills acquired there into their work in school were selected for this study.
2. All other data pertinent to teacher in-service training and follow-up were gathered in the selected schools.

**Sample of schools**

The purpose of this study was to examine what principals do in teacher in-service activities after they themselves have experienced in-service activities designed to clarify the principal's role in school-wide improvement. The study also sought to learn about how principals perceive their role in the in-service activities, what kinds of follow-up activities occur and what perceptions teachers have of the follow-up activities.

Ten school administrators were identified in one county in Central California who had participated in the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA) within the past five years. Their course of study included the following modules:

- taking stock of yourself as an instructional leader;
- constructing a thinking, meaning-centered curriculum;
- building a vision upon the principles of powerful learning;
- leading successful change efforts in school;
- creating successful schools through professional development;
- shaping school's culture to improve student learning.

Of these ten individuals, three were selected for the study because they possessed the following characteristics:

- Each was currently serving as an elementary school principal.
- Each had served in this position for at least three years and none had plans to relocate or retire.
- The three administrators included both male and female.
- Each led in the development of a written master plan for school-wide improvement and also the implementation of new instructional-curricular goals during the past three years. Although these goals were ongoing, each principal anticipated the adoption of additional goals during the 1996-1997 school year.
- Each required their teaching staff to read and discuss *It's Elementary – Task Force Report* (1992) as a part of staff development. Additionally, each utilized the report as a central focus for ongoing staff development as it pertained to restructuring the curriculum and improving instructional processes.
- Each of the three principals served in a different type of district: one urban, one small town, and one rural.
- Each expressed enthusiasm and a willingness to participate in this research study.

These three elementary principals were asked to comment on specific issues, components or programs aimed at school-wide improvement and their own leadership activities or actions which facilitated that improvement. The principals individually generated a set of common characteristics and criteria to describe their school improvement endeavors:

- Each had successfully formulated mission or vision statements with their staffs, which included a general definition of instructional goals.
- Each believed that teaching practices based on constructivist theory will improve student learning. Therefore, each encouraged their teaching staffs to implement instructional strategies which reflected student engagement in the learning process.
- Each had established procedures for acquiring and providing materials or resources to assist their teaching staff in accomplishing instructional goals.
- Each had worked with their teaching staffs to establish and develop portfolio systems for the collection and assessment of student work.
- Each had guided the formulation of school improvement objectives which centered on improving the instructional core of their schools.
- Each attempted to align staff development programs and agendas with the instructional goals and objectives established through staff.
• Each had designed, developed and facilitated student recognition and award programs.
• Each involved the teaching staff and parent community in shared decision-making processes which support the school's instructional core.
• Each attempted to spend portions of the school day in classrooms working with teachers and students to guide and facilitate instructional improvement.
• Each expressed a belief that they could positively impact the instructional program at their schools through effective leadership.

Data sources and collection procedures
A case study approach was used to examine the four research questions (e.g. Merriam, 1988; Seashore-Louis and Miles, 1990; Smith and Andrews, 1989). Data were gathered from multiple sources using a variety of data-gathering techniques. Actual behaviors of principals in instructional and staff events were observed every two months (for a total of three times) during the second half of the 1995-96 school year. Data for the observations were recorded in a journal and included a description of the setting, the participants and the activities interactions (Merriam, 1988). All actions of the principal, related staff interactions and some non-verbal incidences were recorded.

As to the second research question (namely principals' perceptions about their behaviors designed to improve the school), the data were gathered in several personal interviews with each principal during the first half of the 1995-96 school year. There were three or four interviews with each principal. Each interview was largely unstructured and only three specific areas were planned ahead of time: the principal's role in assuring that teachers are informed about the new teaching methodologies; the expectations for implementing these methodologies; and the monitoring of the implementation. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data about what actually happens in the classroom setting were collected through observations which were recorded. Each principal chose two primary grade teachers and two intermediate grade teachers who in his/her opinion, were striving to fulfill the school goals. Once these teachers agreed to be observed, three observations were made during the school year in each of their classrooms. The three foci of the observations were on:

1. Teachers' support and supervision of students engaged in cooperative group activities and in hands-on projects;
2. Teachers' facilitation of open dialogue, questioning and problem solving; and
3. Teacher method for determining student progress.

The fourth research question dealt with perceptions of teachers about the principals' effect and influence on classroom activities. At the end of the school year, an interview was held with each of the teachers to ascertain information about the above. These interviews were quite structured. For example, teachers were asked about the frequency of their using the innovative teaching methodologies, the students' performance as a result of these methodologies, and what the principal did to enhance shared purpose, collegiality, continuous improvement and supportive working conditions.

Altogether, then, four types of data sources were used in this study: observations of individual principals and teachers in the classroom and interviews with individual principals and individual teachers. The repeated interviews with each principal and the repeated observations of each teacher raised the level of the trustworthiness, reliability and internal validity of the findings.

For all cases, a detailed content analysis of the gathered information was conducted. The findings are presented below for each research question. The analysis of the findings pertain to both individual findings and to the entire set of findings.

Findings
Oceanview Elementary (School A), the only elementary school in the district, serves 350 K-5 students. Approximately three-quarters of the students are white and come from upper-middle income families. The rest are Hispanic and come from low-middle income families. Halcyon Elementary (School B) was the first school in the district. It is now one of six K-6 elementary schools and two junior high schools. It houses 560 students. Of the students 87 percent are white. A majority of these students come from middle-class income homes. The rest are Hispanic (10 percent) and African American (3 percent) who come from poor families. The school has the highest percentage in the district of families receiving government assistance. Mountain Star Elementary (School C) originally housed the entire K-8 population of the city. It is now home to 400 K-6 students. About 78 percent of the students come from white middle-income families, 12 percent from low- and middle-income Native American families and the rest are Hispanic (7 percent) and
African American (4 percent) who come from poor families.
The rest of this section highlights findings by each of the four research questions.

Principals' involvement in instruction/staff in-service events
The following events were observed during the 1995-96 school year:

School A:
- Staff Development Day - January
- School Site Council Meeting - March
- Staff Development Day - March

School B:
- Staff Development Day - January
- Staff Development Day - March
- School Site Council Meeting - January
- Staff Development Day - March

School C:
- Intermediate Grades Articulation Meeting - April
- Primary Grades Articulation Meeting - April
- Staff Development Day - May

Each principal chose his/her own time, format, role and specific activities for his/her respective school-wide instruction/staff event. Teachers played a role in planning and presenting goal-specific topics at the majority of the in-services days. Specific examples follow.

**Principal A, January Staff Development Day**
Teachers were asked to write down their philosophies about teaching reading. The principal then discussed sharing philosophies and collegiality and shared her philosophy, which entailed the need to reach each student and the obligation to also reach the developmentally slower student. An invited county office of education trainer distributed handouts about effective teaching of reading. Teachers discussed the conceptual implications of the material. After the principal concluded this half of the day with “all teachers must be reading teachers,” the principal initiated a discussion about the new maths program. As can be surmised, the principal had planned most of the day’s activities.

**Principal A, March Staff Development Day**
A mentor teacher presented a video of a language acquisition development program. The program’s usefulness was discussed. A team of teachers who had attended a maths workshop presented a proposed maths curriculum structure. Another team of teachers did the same with a special education curriculum. The second half of the day was devoted to grade-level meetings and collaborative planning. The entire day had been planned by the principal together with the participating teachers.

**Principal B, January Staff Development Day**
In the first staff development day in January in school B the principal and the fine arts specialists reviewed the school’s fine arts objectives. The teachers were then asked to form grade-level groups and consider strategies for teaching activities using the fine arts curriculum. The next topic involved information pertaining to portfolios, including methods of assessing students’ work. Teachers again met in grade-level groups to review the latter, more complicated tasks. The principal and the participating teachers had planned the day together.

**Principal B, School Monthly (March) School Site Council Meeting**
The meeting constituted a follow-up on the January staff development day. Parents reacted to the work done by the teachers with the fine arts curriculum. The principal then led a planning session on further staff development days (e.g. topics – at-risk students, technology). The principal had planned the meeting.

**Principal B, March Staff Development Day**
The principal led discussions on at-risk students and on how to spend an additional $20,000 which the district office had allocated. Teachers were concerned about at-risk students. Definitions were offered. Attributes were described. The district coordinator and a school counselor were invited to serve as resource people. As to the use of $20,000, the principal suggested the possibility of hiring a reading specialist. The principal had planned the day’s activities.

**Principal C, April Intermediate Grades Articulation Meeting and April Primary Grades Articulation Meeting**
Prior to the intermediate grades articulation meeting and the primary grades articulation meeting in April, the principal had spoken with each teacher regarding grade-level assignments. The focus in both April meetings was on team teaching. The principal facilitated these meetings by building upon
what existed the year before and finding ways to improve. A particular issue in the primary group was team teaching using the new maths curriculum.

Principal C, May Staff Development Day
The principal provided leadership in several instructional areas. The notions of school missions, visions and change were first taken up conceptually and then discussed in practical terms. Breaking into small groups, teachers shared their feelings about the relationship of their school to the school district in these areas. Next, the principal introduced a short story and a game where decision making was required. Teachers worked again in small groups and displayed a high level of self-efficacy.

Principals’ perceptions about their activities
The following is a summary of the overall findings of what perceptions principals expressed about their involvement in the teacher in-service training activities designed to facilitate school-wide improvement. Most of the data described here were gathered from the interviews with the individual principals and from the opinions the principals expressed during their involvement in the in-service events which were observed.

Principal A viewed all of her important leadership activities designed to facilitate school-wide improvement as guided by goals which are set every year. During the study’s duration she saw herself working particularly hard on: implementing the procedures for using the technology plan, the science plan and the maths plan; assessing the reading/language arts program and reporting about it to the school board; and revising the student portfolio formats. The principal suggested that any visitor to the school in the past three years would have found the school undergoing constant, comprehensive and wide-spread change. She also reported that she depends greatly on her teachers.

For Principal B, the most important dimensions of leading school-wide improvement seemed to be a public recognition of the strength of the teaching staff, his role as a “positive force” and acknowledgment of as many good things “out there” as possible. The principal reported corresponding incidences of: relying on his teachers’ judgment to invest in expanding the visual and performing arts program, providing support for a newly adopted hands-on science curriculum, and spending countless hours on the playground in order to get to know students and be accessible to them. Principal B was not totally happy with some of the district’s policies associated with curricular initiatives. He would rather they were developed first at the school site.

Principal C perceived her leadership contributions to school-wide improvement in five major ways. The first was the initiation and maintenance of systematic monitoring of teachers in their accomplishment of instructional goals. The second focused on developing and enforcing a school-wide student discipline plan. A third was reestablishing a chain of command in which the teachers feel accountable to the principal and not to the district superintendent. Fourth, Principal C also viewed increased staff collegiality as a very important area of leadership activities and, finally, she considered bringing the school and the diverse community in contact with each other as an important leadership activity.

Resultant teachers’ activities in the classroom
The majority of the activities observed in the two first-grade classrooms and the two fourth-grade classrooms in School A involved maths lessons. In one of the first-grade classes the lessons involved addition, subtraction and counting of groups of tens using real objects and then writing down the corresponding number. In the fourth-grades, maths was taught in a hands-on fashion while dealing with practical problems. Other lessons in the two fourth-grade classes were devoted to language arts and arts in one class and to social manners and interpersonal relations in the second class.

In School B two first-grade teachers and two fifth-grade teachers were observed. One first-grade teacher was observed teaching one art lesson and two science lessons with an emphasis on tools. The art lesson involved learning about a famous painter, replicating one of his works through a structured drawing and sharing the product with the entire class. The “tools” lesson involved learning about their use and classifying them (e.g. cord in the blinds – pulley; pencil sharpener – gear).

The two fifth-grade lessons observed in School B involved “projects”. The first two lessons in one fifth-grade class included art, math, writing and computer work. The lessons were highly student centered. The third lesson in this fifth-grade class involved sharing results of a homework assignment in maths with the entire class and learning new material of math. All three of the other fifth-grade lessons focused on science. Here, too, the lessons involved hands-on projects (e.g. complex circuit, lighthouse, electrical quiz
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Two first-grade teachers and two fifth-grade teachers were observed in School C. One first-grade teacher focused on nouns and adjectives in the first lesson and graphics in the second and third lessons. Lessons used students as leaders of activities and as voting participants in decision-making. The other first-grade teacher taught, respectively, math, reading and building with clay. In all of the lessons there was heavy student involvement. The first lesson in one fifth-grade class focused on writing about self. The other two lessons involved studying the states in groups, using a variety of activities. The second fifth-grade teacher taught, respectively, science, social science and graphing techniques. Most of the lessons were taught in small groups.

Teachers’ perceptions about their activities
The following lists key items each teacher mentioned as having been covered in in-service activities and which contributed significantly to the improvement of learning in their individual classrooms:

School A
First-grade 1 – allowing students to work in pairs or threes
– using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress

First-grade 2 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– allowing students to work in pairs or threes

Fourth-grade 1 – providing a comfortable, happy and safe environment
– allowing experimentation with process

Fourth-grade 2 – allowing students to work in pairs or threes
– conducting interview assessment during student work time

School B
First-grade 1 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– providing for hands-on experimental learning

First-grade 2 – teaching in small groups
– planning well

Fifth-grade 1 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– augmenting (rather than replacing) one’s curriculum with district’s suggestions

Fifth-grade 2 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– conducting interview assessments during student work time
– teaching in small groups
– providing for hands-on experimental learning

School C
First-grade 1 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– conducting interview assessment during student work time

First-grade 2 – teaching in small groups
– providing for hands-on experimental learning

Fifth-grade 1 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– teaching in small groups
– augmenting (rather than replacing) one’s curriculum with district’s suggestions

Fifth-grade 2 – using a portfolio system to collect student work and assessing it for progress
– conducting interview assessments during student work time

It should be noted that in all of the above cases, teaching procedures rather than curriculum content were mentioned.

Discussion
The overall findings in this study support the hypothesis that the four pertinent phenomena are interrelated. The relationship is depicted in Table I. The roles of the three principals in their teacher in-service training were easily identifiable. On several occasions prior to and during the sessions teachers provided leadership. On some occasions an invited outside presenter provided leadership. In all of these cases the principals did not think that they should engage in these activities themselves. But, in most cases, the principals were found to be heavily involved in the planning of the nine school-wide events which were observed in the study. For example, principal A played an active role in discussions about philosophy of teaching and teacher collegiality, conceptual implications of teaching reading, language arts and maths curricula, the language acquisition program and special education curriculum. Principal B focused on the
fine arts curriculum, student assessment, at-risk students, technology and remedial reading. Principal C emphasized team teaching, the maths curriculum and the school vision and mission. In all cases much of the work was done in small groups and then results of the discussion were shared with the group as a whole. While there was only some overlap among the principals in content (e.g. math) there was complete similarity in the behavior of principals: quite assertive and active. Most of the principals’ initiatives found in this study were also found spelled out in writing as detailed plans. That material is available in the school district offices and in the California School Leadership Academy (CSLA).

While the staff development activities were viewed by the three principals as only one of several sets of experiences designed for improvement, all three principals had reason to consider staff development days as extremely important. They each highlighted what for them were important purposes and contents of these days. Principal A, for example, saw the annual establishment of school goals as central. Principal B believed that the recognition of the strength of teachers is a necessary component of a staff development day. The third principal saw the interaction between the teachers and the principal and among teachers themselves as important. It can be deduced, from the amount of time and effort that the principals devoted to the staff development days, that these administrators believe in their efficacy for school improvement.

The visits in the classrooms in the three schools were planned in such a way that the observer would have the opportunity to see lessons focusing on material discussed in staff development days. The intention here was not to test the closeness between what the principal or someone else recommended to do and what was actually done, but rather the comfort level which the teacher appeared to have while teaching the lessons. Also of interest was the comfort which the students seemed to have in learning. The rationale was that an informed, reflective and well-prepared teacher will feel comfortable and so will his/her students. Given the criteria stated above, the observer saw 12 such comfortable situations focusing on a variety of subject matter, at the various grade levels in the three schools. In many of the observations the observer noted excellent teaching and organizational techniques. For example, some teachers taught in small groups and permitted students to work in pairs and threes. Others took great care to construct a student portfolio. All of these techniques had been introduced in the staff development days.

Below is a rank ordered list (ten items) of factors mentioned by the 12 teachers which they believed they now use in class as a result of work done in staff development days (in parenthesis is the number of teachers mentioning each item):

1. Using a portfolio system to collect student work which is then assessed for progress (7)
2. Allowing students to work in pairs (4)
3. Teaching in small groups (3)
4. Conducting interview assessment during student work time (3)
5. Providing for hands-on experimental learning (3)
6. Providing for task-based projects (1)
7. Allowing experimentation with process (1)
8. Planning well (1)
9. Providing a comfortable, happy and safe environment (1)
10. Augmenting (rather than replacing) one’s curriculum with district’s suggestions (1)

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it would probably not be difficult to persuade readers of the usefulness and efficacy of the ten items mentioned above.

### Implications

This research describes activities and perceptions of in-service training designed to improve schools. The research conceptualizes
how experiences in principal in-service sessions relate to teacher in-service work and to classroom implementation. This study also supports the argument that in-service activities for school personnel are quite significant in school improvement. Clearly, follow-up activities are crucial to the ultimate success of any in-service training.

From a practical perspective, this research implies that effective school leaders:

- use knowledge and skills which they acquire in their own in-service activities to improve their in-service leadership responsibilities and their effectiveness in enhancing teachers’ efforts to improve student achievement;

- consider teacher development activities a valuable opportunity to initiate change as a function of the school’s needs;

- are aware of what they choose to do in staff development work and why as well as what they expect to achieve as a result of this work; and

- are successful in convincing teachers to acquire additional knowledge and skills in staff development days and implement changes in their respective classrooms as a result of this training.

Repeated visits in the classrooms and discussions with teachers revealed a high degree of attempted implementation of changes proposed in the teacher in-service development days. Teachers intimated that the principals were heavily involved in the implementation in individual classrooms. This certainly implies that effective instructional leadership for school-wide improvement requires follow-up work on the part of the principal with individual teachers.

Much remains to be done in research work which focuses on the role of the principal in school-wide improvement as it relates to the principal’s own in-service work and his/her involvement in the teachers’ in-service activities. For example, once they have been on the job for a while, what do principals still need to learn? Whatever they lack, can it be taught in in-service work? How central are the school district’s expectations in shaping the nature of the principal’s in-service work and the teachers in-service training? With regard to teacher in-service training, how autonomous is the principal in deciding the content of their activities (autonomy from school district, autonomy from teachers)? Most important, perhaps—what are the most effective ways to involve teachers in planning and executing teacher in-service days so that a balance is achieved between doing what the principal believes should be done and granting a sense of genuine autonomy to the teachers?

The linkage between how teachers perceive the in-service activities and what they do in the classrooms rests largely on the teachers themselves. What the existing and the possible specific roles of the principal in this regard are, is still an open question. The data collection techniques used in this study (e.g. observations, interviews) will not suffice to answer this question. More comprehensive questionnaires will have to be developed which would further clarify how principals and teachers see the principal’s roles in follow-up activities.

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