

Collective Action by Public School Teachers: A Study of Collective Action as a Method
of Enhancing Professional Status and Autonomy within Bureaucratic Organizations

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ABSTRACT

There is no clear agreement on the need for different levels of certification or different types of preparation for school administrators. If a unique set of skills, practices and behaviors can be identified for the elementary and secondary principal, preparation and certification programs could develop a knowledge base of leadership skills necessary for effective leadership at a specific school level. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to conduct a meta-ethnographic synthesis of leadership activities at the elementary and high school levels to determine if differences existed between the leadership activities of elementary and secondary principals.

A meta-ethnography was completed for each school level using ethnographies, 19 at the elementary level and 19 at the secondary level. Leadership activities revealed in these synthesis were organized into 13 categories for elementary principals and for high school principals. The syntheses of these two metaethnographies were validated through structured field interviews with five elementary principals and five high school principals.

This study had numerous findings. Among them are: (a) the basic structure of elementary and high schools remained relatively unchanged during the 20 year time period covered by this study, (b) elementary principals were more visible and accessible to students and teachers than high school principals, (c) elementary principals provided more direct instructional leadership than high school principals, (d) elementary principals focused on classroom innovations and improvements while high school principals focused on school restructuring.

The differences between principals' leadership activities are influenced more by conditions in schools (e.g., size, structure) rather than by the level of the school. Leadership activities are determined by school size, organizational patterns, size of staff, and school issues. Successful principals will be those who are aware that alternatives in school leadership are necessary given the increasing diversity of students and societal influences.

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