Using this guide

This discussion guide is intended to assist Kappan readers who want to use articles in staff meetings or university classroom discussions.

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OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE
Edward Bell (pseudonym for a real principal in 1967) learned how to be a principal through day-to-day experiences; today’s principals need to learn critical competencies in a deliberate and thoughtful way as they enter the profession and work to make schools successful.

KEY POINTS
- The authors compare and contrast the life of a principal (whose pseudonym is Edward Bell) in 1967 to the life of a principal today.
- Using a book written about Edward Bell, *The Man in the Principal’s Office* by Harry Wolcott (1973), they speculate about the competencies Bell demonstrated and whether these would be sufficient today.
- Quoting from the book, which recounts Bell’s life as a principal over two years, the authors determine that the principalship still requires adaptability and is more difficult and complex today.
- Bell would have to become “an inspiring agent of change, passionate leader, effective disciplinarian, organizational whiz, and compassionate mentor” in addition to being “a social architect, economic catalyst, servant, and moral agent.”
- Awakening 45 years later, perhaps in a failing school, Bell might have avoided micromanagement if he clearly understood what he could do, took ownership for his work, and was willing to work hard to craft relationships with staff.
- Bell tried to keep things uncontroversial and preserve some autonomy for himself and his school, tasks schools find harder because of intense public scrutiny.
- Today’s principals can succeed at these tasks if they harness the power of widespread communication about real data, especially about student results.
- Bell’s attention to relationships as mediator (rather than commander) would have served him well today as he worked with his school leadership and other teams.
- Bell attended to the needs of his teachers, “buffering [them] from external pressure, nurturing [them], and promoting teacher growth.”
- “A man . . . well ahead of his time,” Bell demonstrated leadership traits that are featured in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

DEEPEN YOUR THINKING
1. What do you remember about the first principal you had when you were a student?
2. How does that person compare to any of the principals you know today in terms of personal characteristics and style, professional knowledge, and skills?
3. How was the world different in 1967? How would conditions of the world in 1967 have influenced what a principal did then? How do conditions today influence what principals need to do?
4. Edward Bell expects to stay at his school, William Howard Taft Elementary School, until he retires. Is that the expectation of most principals today? Think about other aspects of the profession itself. Which are the same? Which have changed?

5. Bell did not seem to have “any grand design of his own” that he wanted to accomplish. To what extent is that true of most school administrators today?

6. How do school principals avoid becoming “overwhelmed in the face of all that is required”?

7. Bell wanted to keep controversy to a minimum, protect his staff from outside interference, and make as little fuss as possible. Are these aspirations possible today? Are they productive?

8. In your view, how has the principle and practice of shared leadership changed the principalship?

EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

With colleagues, think about how principals’ roles might change in a future school. First, think about what a future school might be like. Write individually in response to this prompt: The school of 2033 will... Share your ideas with each other. Then, consider the principals’ roles according to the discussion questions below.

Or, read these ideas from students who responded to an invitation from TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) about what they think the future of learning is (Wilson, 2013). Then, consider principals’ roles.

Adora Svitak, 15-year-old writer, teacher, and activist

“One of the most powerful shifts in the future of education will come from not only the tools at our disposal, but from an underutilized resource: the students whose voices have for too long been silent. We’re increasingly pushing for seats at the decision-making tables, empowering ourselves by shaping our own learning, and taking on activist roles both online and off. To me, this signals one of the most hopeful signs of the future of education — the shift from a top-down, learning-everything-from-the-authority-figure approach to an approach characterized by peer-to-peer learning, empowerment, and grassroots change.”

Kid President, 10-year-old inspiration machine

“My older brother and I believe kids and grown-ups can change the world. We’re on a mission with our web series, “Kid President,” to do just that. If every classroom in the world could be full of grown-ups and kids working together, we’d live in a happier world. Kids want to know about the world and about how they can make an impact. Kids also have ideas. It’d be awesome if teachers and students could work together and put these ideas into action. There should be lessons in things like compassion and creativity. If those two things were taught more in schools, we’d see some really cool things happen.”

Ying Ying Shang, 16-year-old blogger, teen adviser to the U.N. Foundation, and SPARK Movement activist

“For most of my life, the media has been a constant presence, whether it’s in the form of a TV droning in the background or the billboards that whiz by on the highway or the never-ending barrage of sounds and images on social media. That’s why I know the importance of learning media literacy early. It’s so important that the power of the media be recognized, both in its capacity for sexualization and distortion of reality, as well as its capacity to be harnessed for good.

Also, it seems inevitable that future educators will turn to online learning tools, replacing blackboards with smartboards and note packets with YouTube videos. In the wake of this shift, analysis and critical-thinking skills should be taught more than ever in classrooms.”

Thomas Suarez, 13-year-old app developer and founder of Carrot Corp., Inc.

“Yet the future of education should include programming as a major subject. The class will allow students to collaborate on code, teach each other, and communicate outside of the classroom using services such as Google+. This way, students will think more during other classes, be much more likely to get a job and, most important, have fun.”
How would the principalship be different if these were the futures of school?

1. What knowledge would principals need to have to be successful and help their schools be successful? (Killion, 2008, p. 197).
2. What attitudes would principals need?
3. What skills would principals need?
4. What aspirations would principals need for themselves and for teachers, students, and their schools?
5. What behaviors would they need?
6. How would these be different from what principals have today? How would they be different from what Edward Bell had in 1967?

References


OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE
Twenty-first century principals need to be learning leaders who know what students are learning and use this information as part of a formative assessment process to help teachers target their instruction more effectively.

KEY POINTS
- Principals who look at what students are learning, rather than observing what teachers are doing, can help teachers improve student achievement.
- This is part of the process of formative assessment which is “an active and intentional learning process that partners the teacher and the students to continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the express goal of improving student achievement” (Moss & Brookhart, 2009, p. 6).
- Analyzing professional learning experiences they conducted in Pennsylvania, the authors reflected on the results of classroom walk-throughs by principals.
- They discovered that principals needed to look at what students were learning in order to assess whether teachers had learning targets as well as how well students were meeting them.
- Observation of students is more than counting those “on task”; it means checking to see whether students understand and are meeting the learning target.
- It also means assessing students’ thinking as they are learning.
- Principals with descriptive information about students were able to give teachers helpful feedback that led to changes in instruction.
- Principals who saw themselves as learning leaders were able to help shift school culture to a learning culture rather than an evaluative (supervisory) culture.
- Principals need a “combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions” that allows them to become a learner.

DEEPEN YOUR THINKING

1. What subject(s) did/do you teach? To what extent are you comfortable with the content of your subject? Did/do you ever assume that students knew/know what you know? What happened/happens?
2. When you think of traditional formative assessment, what do you visualize? What is happening?
3. Traditionally, what does a principal have to do with formative assessment?
4. Have you participated in classroom walk-throughs, either as an observer or as a teacher being observed? How would you describe the experiences you had?
5. How do principals usually observe classrooms? What do they notice?
6. What do you think of when you think of the term learning targets?
7. How can principals tell if students know the learning targets and are making progress toward them?

8. What kind of feedback would help teachers make positive changes in their instruction: feedback about what students are doing or what they as teachers are doing? Both? Other?

9. The authors point out that “being a leading learner requires principals to have humility, value learning, understand how to learn, and to develop the skill of finding learning opportunities in their schools.” How would you advise principals to develop these attributes?

EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

The authors present some characteristics of formative assessment in their book *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom*. With colleagues, think about these characteristics in terms of whether they apply to both principals and teachers. For each characteristic, think of what a principal and teacher might do to determine how well students understand and are achieving learning targets as well as what they might do to use that information to enhance learning.

**Characteristics of formative assessment: Application to principals & teachers**

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<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Applies to principals?</th>
<th>Applies to teachers?</th>
<th>What principals might do</th>
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<td>Carried out while learning is in progress — day to day, minute by minute.</td>
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<td>Focused on the learning process and the learning progress.</td>
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<td>Viewed as an integral part of the teaching-learning process.</td>
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<td><strong>Collaborative</strong> — Teachers and students [and principals?] know where they are headed, understand the learning needs, and use assessment information as feedback to guide and adapt what they do to meet those needs.</td>
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<td><strong>Fluid</strong> — An ongoing process influenced by student need and teacher [and principal?] feedback.</td>
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<td>Teachers and students [and principals?] use the evidence they gather to make adjustments for continuous improvement.</td>
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Source: Moss, C.M. & Brookhart, S.M. (2009). *Advancing formative assessment in every classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Figure 1.1
OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLE

Today’s principals need to be savvy about managing school improvement through attention to rules, regulations, and routines as well as changing the culture and serving as an instructional leader.

KEY POINTS

- Principals can’t simply be instructional leaders; they must also effectively manage policies and procedures to ensure that schools improve.
- Through managerial leadership, principals must engage in “cage busting,” creatively working through rules, regulations, and routines in order to address “the five Cs — collaboration, consensus, capacity, coaching, and culture.”
- Examples of policies and procedures that need management include federal (such as Title I), state, and district requirements and regulations, contract provisions (such as grievance and due process), schedules, vendors, and many other “minimal norms” that require attention and paperwork.
- It’s not enough to tell principals to do more or better in terms of managerial leadership; they need to develop certain approaches to their tasks.
- For example, they need to make policy work for them by understanding it and how it can promote the learning they desire.
- They need to engage in creative problem solving; focus on solutions that will appeal to authorities; and “use talent, tools, time, and money wisely.”

DEEPEN YOUR THINKING

1. The author likens the task of principals who pay too little attention to the policies and procedures that govern schools to Sisyphus’ toil. What do you know about Sisyphus? How apt is the comparison in terms of principals’ work?
2. In your experiences as a student and educator, what have been the primary roles principals have played?
3. What roles do principals play today?
4. To what extent can principals improve schools through changing “culture, capacity building, coaching, and consensus”?
5. What does “cage busting” imply to you? What “cages” do principals live in?
6. What policies have worked well for school change? To what extent have they needed to be managed (i.e., required forms, paperwork, attention to procedures)?
7. What do you think of the author’s premise, “It’s not reform if it costs more”?
8. How can a principal do everything — managerial as well as instructional leadership — and help schools improve?
EXTEND YOUR THOUGHTS THROUGH ACTIVITIES FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Select as your artifact for this activity a piece of legislation, state board rule, or district policy. With colleagues discuss its intent and then how it affects a principal’s role in terms of both management and instructional leadership. Refer to the article for categories of management (such as contracts) and instructional leadership (such as collaboration). If you do not have a suitable artifact at hand, use the following description of legislation related to teacher evaluation.

SAMPLE ARTIFACT: TEACHER EVALUATION

*For all licensed personnel, principals, or designees are to:*

1. *Evaluate them using multiple fair, transparent, timely, rigorous, and valid methods, at least 50% of which evaluation is determined by the academic growth of their students;*
2. *Afford them a meaningful opportunity to improve their effectiveness; and*
3. *Provide them the means to share effective practices with other educators throughout the state.*

*Intent of the legislation:*

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Applications

This Professional Development Guide was created with the characteristics of adult learners in mind (Tallerico, 2005):

- Active engagement
- Integration of experience
- Choice and self-direction
- Relevance to current challenges
- Learning style variation

As you think about sharing this article with other adults, how could you fulfill the adult learning needs above?

This Professional Development Guide was created so that readers could apply what they have learned to work in classrooms (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001):

- Identifying Similarities and Differences
- Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition
- Nonlinguistic Representations
- Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback
- Cues, Questions, and Advance Organizers
- Summarizing and Note-Taking
- Homework and Practice
- Cooperative Learning
- Generating and Testing Hypotheses

As you think about sharing this article with classroom teachers, how could you use these strategies with them?

References


About the Author

Lois Brown Easton is a consultant, coach, and author with a particular interest in learning designs — for adults and for students. She retired as director of professional development at Eagle Rock School and Professional Development Center, Estes Park, Colo. From 1992 to 1994, she was director of Re:Learning Systems at the Education Commission of the States (ECS). Re:Learning was a partnership between the Coalition of Essential Schools and ECS. Before that, she served in the Arizona Department of Education in a variety of positions: English/language arts coordinator, director of curriculum and instruction, and director of curriculum and assessment planning.

A middle school English teacher for 15 years, Easton earned her Ph.D. at the University of Arizona. Easton has been a frequent presenter at conferences and a contributor to educational journals.

She was editor and contributor to Powerful Designs for Professional Learning (NSDC, 2004 & 2008). Her other books include:

- The Other Side of Curriculum: Lessons From Learners (Heinemann, 2002);
- Engaging the Disengaged: How Schools Can Help Struggling Students Succeed (Corwin, 2008);
- Protocols for Professional Learning (ASCD, 2009); and
- Professional Learning Communities by Design: Putting the Learning Back Into PLCs (Learning Forward and Corwin, 2011).

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