

Teacher

Perceptions of School Leaders and their Work: Swedish-Australian Comparisons

The role of school principals as leaders has long been recognised as significant in the effective organisation and management of schools. This role has become even more important given the changes that have taken place in educational systems both in Australia (Beare & Millikan, 1991; Eltis, 1992; Sharpe, 1992) and in other Western countries (Berg & Nytell, 1991; Berg, 1992). The functions for which school leaders are now responsible have broadened to include the professional development of staff, aspects of financial budgeting and management and a range of entrepreneurial activities in the wider community.

The study reported here was part of an international research program currently being undertaken in Sweden (Berg & Nytell, 1991), North America (Parkay, 1991), Sri Lanka and Australia. As part of this project in 1990 over 2000 teachers in Sweden completed a questionnaire designed to identify their perceptions of a school principal's leadership, organisation and management. With minor modifications this same questionnaire was completed by 184 teachers in seven Sydney schools. In the Sydney sample there were two Government primary schools (Years K-6), one Catholic boys' secondary school (Years 7-12), one independent co-educational secondary school (Years 7-12), one Anglican girls' school (Years K-12), one independent girls' school (Years K-12), and one Protestant co-educational school (Years K-12). during 1991 so in no way can the sample be considered representative of all schools. However, it does comprise an interesting variety of schools selected from across the spectrum. Currently, the study is being replicated in a further seven schools in order to redress the imbalance by including some Government secondary schools as well as additional primary schools. in Sydney

The Nature and Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire, in addition to identifying some variables such as sex, age, position in the school and length of teaching experience, focussed upon factors which influenced their own teaching, the frequency and nature of their professional contact with the principal, and their perceptions of the ways in which the principal performed and should perform their duties. Most of the items on the questionnaire provide a range of alternatives from which teachers were asked to choose. Some items required the ranking of variables, others required an indication of agreement or disagreement with a particular statement.

The Respondents

Factors Influencing Teaching

What the Principal Should Do

Working Profile of the Principal

Principal's Judgments of Teachers

Teacher Contacts with Principals

Level of Confidence in the Principal

Conclusions

AARE Paper First draft

The Swedish sample consisted of 68% female and 32% male while the Sydney sample was almost the opposite of this with only 31% female. Although the Sydney sample does not reflect the gender composition of the total teaching service it is probably biased in this way because of the small sample size and the predominance of secondary schools within it. The average age of the Swedish teachers was 43 years and most were aged between 40 and 50 years. The majority of respondents were class or subject teachers. Seventy-seven percent of these worked in the compulsory school system, while the

remainder worked within voluntary school forms, sixth form/high school and adult educational institutions.

The Sydney sample was comprised of 60% of teachers aged 40 or less all of whom were teaching in the school sector of the education system. Sixty-three percent of these had been in their present school for 5 years or less, 25% for between six and ten years, and 12 for more than ten years. Many more of the Sydney sample held executive positions in the schools, such as Deputy Principal, Executive Teacher, Head Teacher or Subject Coordinator, or Leading Teacher. A striking feature of the analysis was that, notwithstanding the rather non-proportional character of the Sydney sample, there were few differences of any importance between individual schools, and the results were very similar to those of the much more representative Swedish study. Evidently attitudes and problems in the area of school leadership and management have a great deal in common.

In an attempt to determine those elements which teachers perceived as having an important effect upon their own teaching a list of factors was presented and respondents were asked to identify the most important three.

Table 1, below indicates the results. It can be noted that the data are not completely comparable because the Sydney research group (which included the two principal Swedish researchers) decided to respecify the categories "Own initiative" and "Course plans" as "Teacher's own resources", and add "Directives from coordinator" and "External examinations", two categories reflecting differences in the educational systems in Sweden and New South Wales.

Table 1 Factors governing own teaching

	Sweden	Sydney
Own initiative	65%	*
Composition of class	56%	61%

Curriculum guidelines	51%	60%
Student initiatives	32%	25%
Teaching materials	28%	19%
Course plans	22%	*
Working team's ideas	19%	31%
Conference decisions	4%	*
Established school rules	2%	4%
Directives from principal	0%	3%
Teacher's own resources	*	36%
External examinations	*	11%
Directives from coordinator	*	7%
Other factors	4%	*

Taking this into account, a broadly similar pattern appeared, with emphasis being placed upon the composition of the class, curriculum guidelines and teacher's own resources. The main difference was an apparent greater reliance in Sydney on school-level collegial decision-making ("Working team's ideas"). Apart from this the respondents demonstrated that it is the immediate context of the classroom and the subject(s) they are teaching together with their own expertise and resources which have the greatest impact upon their own teaching.

Teachers were asked about what they thought the principal have as a major focus of their work. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Teachers' views of principals' operational direction
(The table shows the proportion of teachers agreeing with statements)

	Sweden	Sydney
Principals should not teach	13%	18%
Teachers should be responsible for content, principal for organisation		83%
Principal should have major responsibility for school development	83%	57%

Although it can be seen that the patterns are broadly similar, but the Sydney teachers did not perceive such a strongly demarcated role for principals as did their colleagues in Sweden. This may be explained, in part, by the current emphasis on participatory decision making in New South Wales schools and their organizational structure.

Sweden The negligible impact of principal's directives and established school rules upon teaching demonstrates the professional responsibilities placed upon teachers for their own classrooms and teaching. Even those persons to whom Sydney teachers were directly answerable, their coordinators, were perceived as having minimal impact upon teaching. f the much more representative S, The next table,

Table 3, offers a more detailed comparison between the views expressed in the Swedish and Sydney surveys on the work of school principals. Respondents were asked to rank-order the amount of time they perceived the principal was spending on different aspects of the role, and the amount of time they thought the principal should spend.

Table 3 Working profile of the principal
(Mean ranking)

	Sweden		Sydney	
	Actual	Desired	Actual	Desired
Teaching content	5.12 (6)	4.50 (6)	6.88 (8)	6.09 (8)
Student welfare	3.66 (3)	3.07 (3)	4.09 (4)	3.20 (3)
Administrative routines	1.70 (1)	3.87 (4)	3.54 (2)	5.38 (6)
Financial administration	2.17 (2)	3.92 (5)	4.16 (5)	5.81 (7)
Personnel welfare	4.62 (5)	2.43 (1)	4.92 (6)	3.15 (2)
Professional developmt.	3.73 (4)	2.97 (2)	5.75 (7)	4.54 (4)
School development	*		*	2.62 (1) 2.61 (1)
Parent concerns		*	*	3.83 (3) 5.01 (5)

The interpretation of this table is made a little more complex by the fact that the Sydney survey used an additional two categories, school development and parent concerns. The decision to include the additional categories was justified by the data: as will be seen, school development was ranked first in both actual and desired importance, and parent concerns was ranked above at least half of the Swedish categories. When this difference is taken into account, however, there is a remarkably close correspondence between the data from the two surveys. Teaching content was ranked last in both categories in both studies: the principal's involvement was seen as neither occurring nor desired. Students welfare was seen as appropriately important in both studies; in both studies administrative routines and financial matters were seen as taking a lot - and too much - of the principal's time.

It is of interest to note that in an associated study in which principals were interviewed they agreed that they spent too much time on financial matters but did not agree that they spent too much time on administrative routines. Similarly principals were perceived by teachers as spending little time on staff welfare, and needing to spend more, whereas the principal's own perception were of spending a great deal of time on these matters. Several principals pointed out that, although much of their time was taken up with personal and professional support of staff, this could rarely if ever be made public, and many colleagues who did not require support wer simply unaware of the time commitment of the principal. eIn an attempt to determine the degree of confidence that teachers had in their principal's professional judgments` of them respondents were asked whether they thought the principal made fair, unfair or no judgments of them. The "Don't know" and "No judgment" categories have been pooled in the data because it was thought that the "No judgment" category may not have represented anything other than ignorance. Certainly a much higher proportion in the Swedish data reported "No judgment", but whether this shows a greater naivity among Swedish teachers or a different view in

Sweden of the responsibility of principals it is difficult to say.

Table 4 Teachers' views of principal's judgments of them

	Sweden	Sydney
Fair	27%	53%
Don't know/none	71%	39%
Unfair	2%	8%

A reassuring result was that over half of the Sydney respondents did have confidence in the principal's judgments of them and both in Sweden and Sydney a quite small proportion thought that principals made unfair judgments of them. Although this proportion could be further reduced, particularly in the Sydney sample, the considerable proportion of teachers who did not know whether principals made fair or unfair judgments on them or thought that principals made no judgments of them is cause for concern. Given the devolution of responsibility to the school level and the responsibility of principals to appraise their staff and to provide professional development opportunities for teachers it seems essential that greater efforts are made to make staff aware of what they are doing.

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in both Sweden and Sydney The comments made in the previous section could lead one to assume that principals have little contact with teachers. This, however, is not the case. In response to a question about the content of personal communications between teachers and principal over the preceding week 84% of the Sydney sample and 72% of the Swedish sample indicated that they had spoken to this principal during this time. In relation to the content of this communication respondents in the Sydney sample reported, in general, more communication with the principal, but the difference was almost entirely attributable to a much higher level of personal/informal chat. The stereotype of Australians as an informal lot who are suspicious of status-differences may receive a little further support from this finding.

Table 5 Subject of conversation with principal

	Sweden	Sydney
Student welfare	55%	43%
Administrative routines	43%	41%
Working environment	31%	23%
Professional development	31%	22%
Work allocation	27%	10%
Teaching content	27%	30%
Staff welfare	21%	25%
Private matters/informal	21%	65%
Financial administration	19%	14%

It is interesting to note that in both samples student welfare matters were of considerable importance in teacher/principal conversations as were discussions of administrative matters. Less communication in the Sydney study was about work allocation: this may be because Australian schools - or at least secondary schools and independent schools - usually have a Director of Studies or subject coordinator who takes responsibility for work allocations.

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Working Performance Respondents were asked about their level of confidence in the principal's overall working performance. Teachers in both Sweden and Sydney reported a high degree of confidence in the work of the principal, illustrated by Table 6.

Table 6 Confidence in principal's work performance

	Sweden	Sydney
Yes	71%	79%
Uncertain	25%	11%
No	4%	8%

The proportion of teachers in both studies reporting confidence in the principal's work performance is reassuring, but not surprising, because many staff members would move (or be caused to move) elsewhere if they lacked this confidence.

The relatively high proportion of respondents, particularly in Sweden, who are uncertain about their level of confidence in the principal's work performance indicates a general lack of understanding in what it is the principal does in a school.

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERS AND THEIR WORK: SWEDISH-SYDNEY COMPARISONS

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include the professional developing some variables such as gender, age, position in the school performed and should perform

32 teachers Teachers' Perceptions of Their Influencing

In the previous section it was noted that teachers did not perceive that principals had much impact upon what happened in the classroom. This raises the question of what teachers think principals should do within the school. Teachers were asked lesson The small proportion of teachers in both studies who thought that principals should not teach suggests that in most cases principals can develop professional credibility among their staff by

demonstrating that they are effective classroom practitioners. Sydney principals, more so than principals in Sweden, were perceived as having very little direct influence upon what happened in classrooms and upon the way in which teachers conducted their lessons. The majority of teachers seemed to think that principals should be involved in classroom teaching, at least to some degree. Teachers in the Sydney sample indicated that schools should be operated on the basis of all staff having some say into the overall organisation of the school and to school development. Swedish teachers seemed to be satisfied that the principal should take major responsibility for these aspects of school work. Teachers expressed differences between what they perceived as the relative emphasis principals placed on certain roles and what was desirable. This was particularly noticeable in the areas of administrative routines and financial administration where it was thought principals should spend less time, and personnel welfare and professional development where principals should spend more time. The proportion of teachers who did not know of their principals judgments of their professional work or believed they made no judgment was higher in Sweden than Sydney, although in both studies the proportion was considerable. This is a factor which could cause concern as principal appraisal of staff gains support within the educational systems. The relatively low proportion of teachers reporting unfair judgments is comforting.

Overall, there is a remarkable similarity between the response patterns found in the Sydney study and those from Sweden. Principals were perceived as having very little direct influence upon what happened in classrooms and upon the way in which teachers conducted their lessons. The majority of teachers seemed to think that principals should be involved in classroom teaching, at least to some degree. Teachers in the Sydney sample indicated that schools should be operated on the basis of all staff having some say into the overall organisation of the school and to school development. Swedish teachers seemed to be satisfied that the principal should take major responsibility for these aspects of school work.

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In the Sydney sample a higher level of teacher/principal conversation focused upon private matters and were of an informal nature was reported, however, student welfare and administrative routines rated high in both studies. Work allocation was not a popular topic of conversation among the Sydney sample, probably reflecting a difference in the organisational structure of schools. Both studies reported a high level of teacher confidence in the way in which the principal worked in the school.

Reference

- Beare & Millikan (1991)
- Berg (1992)
- Berg & Nytell (1991)
- Eltis (1992)
- Parkay (1991)
- Sharpe (1992)
- Nytell, U. (1991) Working conditions for school leaders (principals) in Sweden. Paper presented at AERA Annual Meeting, Chicago.

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undertaken in Sweden, North America

The total research program is investigating, through in-depth interview,

the self-expectations of principals-as-leaders and their perceptions of the expectations of them as leaders by other school staff. The principals expectations and perceptions are then contrasted with those of the teachers in the school, who are surveyed by means of a questionnaire.

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While, however, state primary and secondary .The emphasis on state schools in this second phase of the project is designed to offset the previous emphasis on non-state schools.

and small size in the sample change in the collection of data The Swedish sample appeared to see that it was their own initiative that was the most dominant factor influencing their teaching. The Sydney sample perceived it was factors external to them that were most important, i.e. the composition of the class and the curriculum guidelines. This emphasis on teachers' own initiative by the Swedish sample contrasts also with the degree of school-level, collegial decision making ('working team's ideas') of the Sydney teachers. These differences and resources should his/her and school, and maybe should, This notion, similar to Sergiovanni's concept of 'instructional leadership', does not necessarily translate as the principal teaching an ongoing class. For many reasons this may be impossible. What is more likely, and certainly evident in some of the most recent research in the project, is that the principal works with teachers in a collaborative planning and teaching program as part of the teacher's professional self development. Some support for such actions by principals comes from the responses in Table 3., undertaken by the same researchers, as Table 3 shows, when they should be spending more. These researchers judged it, i.e. it is asserted that principals, explicitly or implicitly, are constantly making judgments of staff, as Table 5 demonstrates. Staff welfare matters, however, were perceived to be less important, although in the Sydney study this may be masked by the emphasis on private matters that may also constitute elements of staff welfare. Another interesting difference is the greater emphasis on discussions of aspects of the work environment by Swedish teachers. Given current restructuring and the move to school-centred education in New South Wales this lack of emphasis may be redressed. It may also indicate a reserved judgment by Swedish teachers in a time of change. In his/her, and in other Western countries