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**Pedagogic Obsolescence: A curtain call for school principalship**

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***Abstract***

This summary of a literature review is the first stage of research on the topic of principals' pedagogic obsolescence, and it examines the dearth of material that is available on this important topic.

In the last 50 years the role of the school principal has changed from being mainly a teaching role to that of a full-time administrator in most large schools. This change in role has been influenced in British and Australian schools by an ideologically driven phenomenon that is now known as the *intensification of work*, which resulted from the introduction of the ideology of *New Public Management*, which has changed the way that governments provide public services, and consequently the work expectations of principals changed at the same time. Loder and Spillane (2005) referred to this growing dissonance between the principals' pedagogic and administrative leadership expectations as *role discontinuity*, which has been a neglected issue for those who study school leadership.

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Pedagogic obsolescence is a phenomenon that is looming larger in the lives of Australian school principals. In the education community there appears to be a perception that accountability, and school administration are becoming more demanding than teaching and learning.

### ***Instructional and Pedagogic Leadership***

While the concept of instructional leadership appears to be flawed and narrow (MacNeill, Cavanagh, Dellar, & Silcox, 2004; MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox, 2003; MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox, 2005), in an historical sense, it shows an important link between the school effectiveness movement of the 1970s and 80s, and views of modern school leadership (Sheppard, 1996). Instructional leadership was predicated on principals having the skills and ability to be directly involved in teaching and learning. The philosophy and expectations of instructional leadership came to dominate American educational administrative thought in the 1990s (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001; Hill, 2001, 2002; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; Schlechty, 2001).

In Australia, there is an expectation that principals give attention to both instructional and non-instructional tasks, and balancing the administrative role with the curriculum/instructional role remains one of their greatest challenges. Murphy and Hallinger (1992) questioned the notion of balancing, and considered that it was impossible for one person to give adequate attention to both roles. As a result, they suggested the need for empowering others to assume and exercise leadership roles. In addition, they required leadership to be viewed in terms of what it enables others to do rather than prescribing what others should do. Rutherford (2006, p. 60), supporting Murphy and Hallinger, also observed "... as the function of education becomes too complex for one individual to oversee, it is time to begin looking for new leadership structures that can effectively meet the complex demands of education in the new millennium". With regard to instructional leadership, Lashway (1995) noted that while earlier work had identified the characteristics of instructional leadership (focus on instruction and principal leadership), facilitative instructional leadership that empowered others seemed a more effective approach for engaging staff in improving student learning. Lashway supported this thesis:

Instructional leadership of the 1980s was principal-centered, often accompanied by images of heroic leaders single-handedly keeping the school on track.... However, a growing number of researchers say that instructional leadership is distributed across the school community, with principals, superintendents, teachers, and policy makers having complementary responsibilities (Lashway, 2002 p. 3).

In asking teachers about principals' instructional leadership, Blase and Blase (2000) found that "... talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth are the two major dimensions of effective instructional leadership". The principals' roles in this process becomes problematic when the principals do not have pedagogic credibility or the time to engage teachers in dialogue about teaching and learning. Fink and Resnick (2001, p. 599) posit that principals become removed from the instructional aspect of teaching when their knowledge and skills were outdated:

Principals' time is filled by the many demands of administrative functions. Like most people, they also tend to gravitate toward doing what they know

how to do. Unsure of what to look for or how to intervene when they visit classrooms, principals tend to visit rarely, perhaps only to make formal evaluations. With their knowledge of teaching growing dated they delegate questions of instruction and professional development to others.

Alig-Mielcarek and Hoy (2005, p. 51) acknowledge that instructional leaders need to resist the pressures of administration and get into classrooms, but complicating this situation, growing teacher empowerment has pushed the principals further out of the instructional leadership loop in the United States (Fink & Resnick, 2001). The temporal problems experienced in instructional leadership and the pedagogic de-skilling of principals also occurs in Australian schools.

### ***New Public Management (NPM), the Intensification of Work, and Accountabalism***

The call for principals to re-engage in instructional leadership is audacious and timely. The problem for principals is that the encroaching administrative component of their jobs and stereotypical expectations, accompanied by a raft of personal and professional expectations are re-enforcing the drive toward pedagogic obsolescence. Ever increasing demands for accountability, especially in government schools, has meant that principals prioritise aspects of their role that have mandated timelines and requirements. In the United States, Weinberger (2007) has termed rabid accountability, *accountabalism*. Weinberger claimed that such accountability in schools was akin to a society devouring its children. Gronn (2003a, 2003b) identified a key phenomenon of NPM as “the intensification of work,” which has affected the work of both teachers and principals. New Public Management (NPM) (Fink, 2005; Gronn, 2003a, 2003b; Moos, 1999; Sachs, 2003, Wittmann, 2006) was part of the managerialist reforms that accompanied the introduction of the so-called economic rationalist approach to government (Pusey, 1992), that heavily influenced government policies in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result of this ideological change, government services and administration were redesigned and this impacted on schools, especially government funded public schools. Hood (as cited in Moos, 1999, p. 44) identified seven principles of New Public Management in England including: active, visible management; set goals and targets; resources linked to performance and results; a move towards smaller units of operation; decentralised budgets; competition; a business oriented management style; and an emphasis on doing more for less. A similar situation has been identified in Australia (Burke, 1997).

Because of principals’ increased administrative and budgetary powers in the New Public Management model, Berg (as cited in Moos, 1999, p.51) reported that in the United Kingdom head teachers would not play a role in teachers’ curriculum decisions or methods of teaching. Western Australia witnessed a similar situation as a result of the state Labor Government’s 1987 reforms (*Better Schools*) in which the Education Department and its schools were expected to become more responsive to government directions. This move was resisted by the traditionalists who saw the British model of an independent public service as superior to the American model of governance, where elected governments and their agencies are political in nature and are removed at a change of government.

The pressures of New Public Management reform on principals’ perceptions of their roles were profound. By necessity, principals became more preoccupied with issues of accountability and were drawn away from the practicalities of teaching and

learning in classrooms. Since principals' time is finite and they constantly have to juggle a range of conflicting demands, and Cotton (2003, p. 63) observed that principals were "drowning in a sea of administrivia" while also facing an increase in time spent dealing with student behaviour management. Indeed, the MetLife (2003, p. 36) examination of school leadership ranked financial issues as the greatest challenge for principals, which supported the belief that managerialist pressures impact heavily on principals in the contemporary climate. With potential sanctions in place, most principals will ensure that the accountability aspects of the role are attended to, even at the risk of ignoring the key purpose of schooling, students' learning. Prior to further exploring this phenomenon, it is worthwhile focussing on the pedagogic leadership role of principals.

### ***Leading Pedagogy***

Pedagogic leadership focuses on changing the school's culture in relation to teaching and learning, and it is broader than the instructional leadership promoted in American schools. Pedagogic leadership takes the broad view of teaching and learning that acknowledges the relational basis of learning and accepts that the culture and context of classroom influence students' learning.

"Pedagogy is a planned action, designed by human agency that acknowledges the social, political, and moral context of the learning act, which directly results in the acquisition of new knowledge, beliefs or skills for the learner" (MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox, 2005).

Pedagogic leadership is defined as a mutually transformative, learning relationship that improves teachers and principals' repertoires of pedagogic practices within a culture of school improvement, which results in improved student learning (MacNeill, 2007). This definition subscribes to a collegial model of teacher and principals' pedagogic learning, and anything less than a statement of mutual transformative learning misrepresents the nature of pedagogic learning in schools. Pedagogic leadership is based on the belief that school principals have a direct role in influencing teachers' pedagogic practices, and they should remain *head teachers*.

Pedagogic leadership is about principals' pedagogic presence in classrooms and pedagogic credibility. Wortham (as cited in Blankstein, 2004, p. 70) made the point that while establishing the school's learning culture, as principal, she spent up to 50% of her time in classrooms, which is quite different from Wolcott's (1973, p. 89) experience of Downey, Steffy, English, Frase and Poston (2004). In establishing a school's pedagogic culture, it appears that school leaders spend more time in the initial stages of establishing the pedagogic culture than when it is up and running, so the stage of development should be considered when making judgements about principals' pedagogic roles.

In the United States, Resnick and Glennan (2002, p. 162) noted that principals have had a diminishing influence on teachers' pedagogic practices:

Meanwhile, district administrators, from principals to central office staff, spend relatively little time in classrooms and even less time analyzing instruction with teachers. They may arrange time for teachers' meetings and professional development, but they rarely provide intellectual leadership for growth in teaching skill.

This view was supported by Downey, Steffy, English, Frase and Poston (2004, p. 99) who studied the amount of time principals spent in classrooms:

We know from research that most principals spend from 10 to 80 percent of their time in and around the office area. An additional 23 to 40 percent is spent in hallways and on the playground. About 11 percent is spent off campus, and only about 2.5 to 10 percent is spent in classrooms.

The tension between competing roles had much earlier been identified by Murphy and Hallinger (1992) who asserted it that it was impossible for one person to give adequate attention to the multiplicity of roles inherent in the principalship. The authors suggested the need for empowering others to assume and exercise leadership roles. In addition, they had suggested that leadership to be viewed in terms of what it enables others to do rather than prescribing what others should do.

Principal leadership of teacher learning is also diminished when principals do not have pedagogic credibility - the capacity to meaningfully engage teachers in dialogue about teaching and learning. Fink and Resnick (2001, p. 599) posit that principals become removed from the instructional leadership when their knowledge and skills are outdated:

Principals' time is filled by the many demands of administrative functions. Like most people, they also tend to gravitate toward doing what they know how to do. Unsure of what to look for or how to intervene when they visit classrooms, principals tend to visit rarely, perhaps only to make formal evaluations. With their knowledge of teaching growing dated they delegate questions of instruction and professional development to others.

This situation can be further exacerbated when teachers have a greater sense of empowerment through increased professional confidence and less reliance on guidance from the principal (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

Shulman (2004, pp. 219-248) in the 1980s identified seven components of teachers' knowledge bases- content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, curricular knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of the educational context and knowledge of educational goals. In England, Turner-Bisset (2001), some 15 years later, re-analysed Shulman's work and identified 12 knowledge bases for teaching (see Table 1) but Shulman's conceptual framework still retains a high degree of utility.

High schools are a special case in point, and if a principal has not had training, or experience in a specific subject, then his/her observations of teachers are limited to comments about students' motivation, students' behaviour, and the teachers motivation and ability to maintain the students' interest. Using Shulman's model as a basis, principals should be able to comment on five of the seven components with a high degree of validity.

Table 1  
*The Knowledge Bases of Teaching*

<b>The Knowledge Bases of Teaching</b>	
<b>Shulman</b>	<b>Bisset-Turner</b>
Content knowledge	Substantive subject knowledge
	Syntactic subject knowledge
	Beliefs about the subject
Curricular knowledge	Curriculum knowledge
Pedagogic knowledge	General pedagogic knowledge
	Knowledge/models of teaching
	Knowledge of learners
Knowledge of learners	Knowledge of learners- cognitive
	Knowledge of learners- empirical
	Knowledge of self
Knowledge of the educational context	Knowledge of the educational contexts
Knowledge of educational goals	Knowledge of educational ends
Pedagogic content knowledge	Pedagogic content knowledge

In examining the roles of school principals, it is useful therefore to differentiate between hands-on, demonstrative, pedagogic leadership (Type 1 pedagogic leadership), and a more facilitative pedagogic leadership, in which the principal has the capacity to recognise the effectiveness of lessons and is then able to organise appropriate support or recognition (Type 2 pedagogic leadership). Type 1 pedagogic leadership in high schools is not common and most principals would fit a variation on the Type 2 pedagogic leadership model. The move between Type 1 and 2 pedagogic leadership is a critical stage in principals' job perceptions. Loder and Spillane (2005) refer to this experience, and the move between teacher and administrator as *role discontinuity* (see below).

The negative influences on effective principal pedagogic leadership can be viewed as pedagogic obsolescence within the principalship – the notion that principal school leadership is being pushed so far away from leading the school pedagogy that in time, principal pedagogic leadership could well become insignificant.

A major counterbalance to pedagogic change is structural change, and Elmore, Peterson and McCarthey (1996, p. 7) warned that externally driven structural change in schools is often "... to appease certain key political constituencies" but at the school level "... transformation of teaching practice is fundamentally a problem of enhancing individual knowledge and skill, not a problem of organizational structure; getting the structure right depends on first understanding that problem of knowledge and skills" (Elmore, Peterson and McCarthey, 1996, p. 240). In an Australian context, Rowe (2004, p. 19) strongly supported the findings of Elmore, Peterson and McCarthey. Associated with the raft of structural change issues is the regulatory context in which the school staff members operate. In all schools the principal's role is clearly defined and this definition forms a critical component of the principal's performance management. To a large degree the parameters of the principal's role is defined in terms of key areas of accountability, which often includes budgetary management, human resource management, and students' learning outcomes.

Budgetary issues are regarded as of primary importance because responsibility for failures in this area often results in sackings, while it is rare for a principal to be dismissed because the standard of students' learning is poor.

### ***The Dimensions of Pedagogic Leadership***

In MacNeill's (2007) model of pedagogic leadership, 11 dimensions of pedagogic leadership were identified in an extensive literature review and then substantiated in a mixed methods research design conducted in Western Australian schools. The 11 dimensions are:

- **Direction setting**

1. Discharging a moral obligation to students and society
2. Establishing a shared vision and sense of mission
3. Gaining commitment by expecting high standards from staff and students

- **Developing people**

4. Facilitating the engagement and empowerment of staff
5. Establishing multiple, collaborative leadership roles

- **Re-designing the organisation**

6. Leading change
7. Balancing administrative roles with pedagogic roles
8. Developing relationships and a sense of community
9. Applying a re-culturing approach to school improvement

- **Leading the pedagogic program**

10. Developing expert knowledge about pedagogy and schooling
11. Creating and sharing knowledge throughout the school

In the qualitative phase of the research, the purpose sample of teachers who had been selected because of their whole-school experiences of pedagogic leadership made the point that their principals were actively involved in teachers' pedagogic practices (MacNeill & Cavanagh, 2006). The interview transcripts showed that the 11 dimensions are inter-twined and it is difficult to pull out a dimension of pedagogic leadership that is more important than the others, because all the dimensions are mutually inter-dependent. However, the dimension that is seen as significant by teachers, related to principals who can positively balance the administrative and pedagogic roles. Al Edney (pseudonym) described how his principal achieved a high degree of credibility in sceptical teachers' eyes as he implemented whole school pedagogic change:

... he was trying to encourage senior teachers to take the next step with their pedagogy. They challenged him to lead negotiated curriculum with the students in their classes. He did this through open discussions with the students using a placemat/think-pair-share strategy.

The physical presence of principals in classrooms is seen as one strategy that can underwrite meaningful pedagogic discussion between teachers and principals.

The qualitative phase of the research extracted data from teachers' responses (422) to the Teacher Survey of Principal Leadership Dispositions (TSPLD) and interestingly, this sample described what happens in primary schools, not specifically identified because of their whole-school pedagogic changes. The means of the teachers' responses in the quantitative phase of the research (Table 2, below) show

strong support for the items in this dimensions, with the exception of Item 21. The means of Items 2, 41 and 42 lie between *agree* (3) and *strongly agree* (4).

Table 2  
*The Support for Dimension 7, Expressed as a Mean of the Four Point Likert Scale on the TSPLD*

Items	Description	Mean
2	Is available and accessible to teachers requiring support	3.4
21	Observes individual teachers at work in their classroom	2.6
41	Convenes meetings to discuss how student progress will be assessed and be reported	3.3
42	Convenes meetings to ensure the school's instructional program is sequential and balanced	3.1

A critical item of this dimension (Item 21): *Observes individual teachers at work in their classroom*, generated different responses. The 413 teachers who responded to this question were almost equally divided (2.5 is the theoretical mean) by what they had observed in their schools, with almost half agreeing, and half disagreeing. The mean for this item lay between agree and disagree. This meant that in this sample, almost half of the principals did not observe teachers' pedagogic practices in classrooms, which contrasted sharply with the teachers' observations in the qualitative phase of the research.

### ***Distributed Leadership***

Principal engagement in school pedagogy can be hampered by the lack of in-depth knowledge about the curriculum in particular discipline areas. For example, Goddard (2003) noted the disdain of a high school physics teacher after the principal with a background in English described his lessons as boring. The degree of subject specialisation in high schools effectively excludes other subject specialists from making more than general comments about other teachers' lessons. This criticism lies in differentiation between teachers' pedagogic knowledge-bases. Rutherford (2006, p. 60) observed "... as the function of education becomes too complex for one individual to oversee, it is time to begin looking for new leadership structures that can effectively meet the complex demands of education in the new millennium".

Multiple levels of leadership have existed for as long as people have lived in groups. The early literature recognised that most groups have more than one leader and it recognised both formal and informal leaders. In education there has been a move away from the managerialist ideology promoting the heroic principal, single handedly bringing about important changes in schools. Elmore (2000, p. 15) defined distributed leadership in terms of expertise:

Distributed leadership, then, means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture.

With different pedagogic expertise and the administrative press squeezing principals out of teaching, distributed leadership has developed an imperative quality in schools. Leithwood and Jantzi (as cited in Harris & Muijs, 2005, p. 39), argued that

teacher leadership is more important for student learning than principal leadership: “The study concluded that distributing a larger proportion of current leadership activity to teachers would have a positive influence on teacher effectiveness and student engagement”.

Distributed leadership, particularly distributed pedagogic leadership, is predicated, in part, on the development of principals’ pedagogic obsolescence.

### ***Role Discontinuity***

In Western Australia, all principals started as teachers at the commencement of their careers. Most of the newly appointed principals are promoted because they are very good teachers, and in the small country schools, with a staff of newly graduated teachers, they still teach and give helpful advice to their teaching staff. A typical career trajectory has a middle aged, non-teaching principal ensconced in a city or large regional centre school, with an equally middle-aged, experienced teaching staff. The day-to-day rigors of teaching have been replaced with sole responsibility for the school’s finances, school operations, staff performance, and oversight of community relations. The nature of sole responsibility in schools means that the buck stops with the principal, and in a complex organisation like a school, the principal is spread thinly across a range of key areas.

Loder and Spillane (2005) refer to the move between teacher and administrators’ roles as *role discontinuity*. It is argued that the skills and knowledge of a teacher have little relevance to the skills and knowledge required of a school principal. For example, it is highly problematic that the principal may have learnt financial management on the job, without proper instruction or accreditation. Typically the teacher will progress from being responsible for one project cost centre to overseeing a whole budget on achieving principal status. The effects of role discontinuity are exacerbated because of the lack of formal qualification and training for the components of the new role. Role discontinuity leaves principals stranded between to role of teaching (for which they were trained) and the role of principal that they have learnt by observation and situated learning (Clarke, Wildy & Pepper, 2007).

### ***Conclusion***

This paper has examined the literature on the complexity of the principal’s role from multiple perspectives and has canvassed the proposition that the current approach to resolving this complexity is resulting in an imbalance within the role--an imbalance that threatens to make the principals’ leadership of pedagogy obsolete. The “use it, or lose it” rule also applies to pedagogic leadership. In learning areas that have experienced substantial change in recent times, it is important that principals stay up-to-date. In schools, real credibility is won when teachers recognise that principals are also good teachers and they would not ask staff to do what they cannot do themselves.

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