PRINCIPAL SUCCESSION AND THE MICROPOLITICS

OF EDUCATORS IN SCHOOLS:

SOME INCIDENTAL RESULTS FROM A LARGER STUDY[1]

Matthew J. Meyer, *St. Francis Xavier University*,
and Robert B. Macmillan, *University of Western Ontario*,
with Shawn K. Northfield, *University of Nottingham*

Principal turnover has the potential to impact seriously school morale and values as teachers attempt to adjust to new administrators and their possible shifts in focus. In an era of mandated school improvement, teachers in schools with new administrators have to deal not only with changes in district, state and/or provincial policies, but also with adapting to the new principal. To understand the process of adaptation, this article presents an exploration of micro-politics between teachers and principals at the time of administrator succession and notions of the changing interplay between power and authority**.**

Background

Much research focuses on leadership values (Begley, 1999; Hargreaves, 2004; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005) but only recently, has such research been more finely focused on a leader's values perceptions during school principal succession. Our research focused on the impact of principal succession on teachers in 12 schools in Nova Scotia, Canada. We found that trust, morale, teacher efficacy, discretion, conscience and loyalty were all factors affected by principal turnover and each had positive and negative professional implications for teachers and their work

---

before, during, and after principal succession events. An additional phenomenon during a succession event that we explored further here was micropolitics; we have found that issues of power and control and the negotiation of influence play an important role in the development of relationships within a school community when a new principal assumes his or her position.

While the school improvement literature focuses on the crucial elements of time and school culture, less is written on the impact of principal turnover on school improvement, and on school culture. Our research is an attempt to understand what impact micropolitics has on principal turnover and on the process of value negotiation that becomes manifested in levels of trust and in shifts in school culture, in teacher morale and in teacher efficacy. Researchers such as Begley (2003), Leithwood (1999), Willower (1999), and Greenfield (2004) acknowledged that school leaders are challenged, both personally and professionally, during their entry into a leadership position. This is due to each leader's need to negotiate their role and to develop their understanding of the new context. New principals may experience conflict in attempts to bridge personal leadership styles with their predecessors' while teachers adjust to potential changes in values and to a new principal's perceptions of leadership. While governance protocols are not at issue, teachers' perceptions of the new principal and of the potential shifts in values become the matters affecting how well new principals assume their roles. Our study's goal was to look at succession through the eyes of over 100 teachers and administrators who were interviewed each year over a three year period. In this article, we compare and contrast the experience of participants in two of our target schools by focusing on the micropolitics that were a part of the new principal's assumption of authority and were in evidence through the development of decision making processes.

Much of our current insight into and understanding of micropolitics came from: Blase and Anderson (1995); a special issue of *School Leadership & Management* edited by Mawhinney (1999) which was entirely devoted to the study of micropolitics of schools; and Blase and Blase (2002). The operational definition we have used is derived from Blase (1991, p.11). Our definition is as follows:

> Micropolitics is the formal and informal use of legitimate and illegitimate power by the principal and teachers to further individual or group goals, with such goals based on values, beliefs, needs and ideologies. Shifts in balances of power can be created through collaborative efforts and may shift with time and circumstance.

In Year One of our project on principal turnover, we found that teachers' responses to our initial survey indicated experience with rapid principal turnover (defined as more than two events in six years) affects how teachers perceive the principal (Macmillan & Meyer, 2003). In our analysis of interview data, we found that both administrators and teaching staff were emotionally affected before, during and after succession events (Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2004). We also found that these school constituencies went through regular transitions and adaptation, the processes of which enabled us to identify stages through which trust developed (Macmillan, Meyer, & Northfield, 2005). In 2006, we investigated in detail two schools (located in different school districts) in order to determine the common value themes as perceived by both the teachers and administrators (Meyer, Macmillan, Northfield, & Foley 2006). In a similar way, we explored the indicators of morale, how these were manifested during succession, and to what extent they could be employed by principals during succession events (Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2009a). Most recently we have investigated how discretion and conscience affects the new principalship (Meyer, Macmillan, & Northfield, 2009). Throughout our previous research, we have become aware of the importance of micropolitics as a lens to help us to understand the process of how principals negotiate their entry and how

teachers attempt to mold or influence the new principal's administration. The previous

investigations identified components of the process, which we investigate further here.

Methodology and Research Design

This article is part of a larger, multi-year study examining principal succession and its

impact on teachers. We based our research on constructivist inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1989) that

used a mixed methods research approach (Reichardt & Cook, 1979), influenced by Brinberg and

McGrath's (1982) concept of research domains. We commenced with a survey targeted at every

junior and senior high school in the province of Nova Scotia which generated a data set that

contributed to the development of interview questions.

As its foundation, our project focused on the first 3 years of a new principal's tenure. The

first year period is usually considered as the *honeymoon* period in which a principal's leadership

style is reveled to his or her school's faculty. The negotiation of roles is the focus of the

relationship between principals and teachers (Macmillan, 2001). During the second year,

principals and teachers tend to explore the possibility of instituting initiatives and the fit between

the principal's practices and the school culture (Gordon & Rosen; 1981; Hart, 1993; Miskel &

Cosgrove, 1985; Normore, 2001; Weindling & Earley, 1987). By the third year, we assumed that

teachers and principals would have developed a working relationship, which may or may not be

comfortable. The participants were a sample from middle and secondary and schools in Nova

Scotia. We focused on this level for three reasons. First, due to the often balkanized nature of the

school culture in these schools (Hargreaves, 1994), a new principal's entry can potentially be

difficult. If the school is balkanized, then trust in the principal may be limited to and informed by

the individual teacher's group (Fukuyama, 1993). Second, Fullan (1999, 2001) stated that the

amount of time and the degree of energy required to institute school reform at the secondary level is at least twice that of elementary schools. While time is an important factor in every school, secondary teachers and principals do not have the luxury of being able to discuss at length their respective roles and their expectations of each other. From the outset, actions of the new principal are scrutinized as a means to understand how the individual will administer the school, and to what degree teachers can trust the principal. Third, while single succession events have the potential to disrupt the normal flow of events, relatively little is written to determine how successive succession events within a relatively short period of time, such as 7 years, might influence how teachers do their work. Because much of what teachers do is behind closed doors and largely done in professional solitude, they need to be able to understand and trust the administrative framework that supports their work.

To determine how teachers react to and make sense of administrators' actions, we interviewed a sample of approximately 100 teachers and principals in 12 schools. We secured 2 schools from each English school district in Nova Scotia. They were interviewed 3 times between 2003 and 2005. We focused on schools that had experienced more than one principal turnover event since 1996, the enactment of the *Nova Scotia Education Act* which amalgamated and realigned schools in the province from many school boards to 8. The 12 schools were from urban and rural settings and ranged in size from large (>1000) to small (<1000) institutions.

We had female and male teachers who were new (< 5 years experience), who were mid career (>5, <15), and senior teachers (>15). We wished to determine if the expectations and analysis of new principals' practices were dependent on experience. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and then coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994, Strauss, 1987). Triangulation, validity (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, Maxwell, 1996) and

contextual narrative concerns (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) were closely monitored (Lincoln, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 1998).

This article broadens our analysis of the data by focusing on the following research questions: (a) what are the micropolitics of a succession event? and (b) to what extent does context affect the micropolitics of entry? To answer these questions, we examined the answers to the following questions, which were based on several key factors: awareness of context, years of experience, entry procedures, decision making, perceived status of the participant and groups, principal's practices that built trust, experience, change initiatives, and morale. Each of these factors enabled us to examine how principals and teachers used micropolitics to shape the entry and administration of the principal. For the purposes of this article we use the term *status* in more of *power of influence* connotation than a social status connotation. We worked under the assumption, which was evidenced from the data, that many teachers see status in their school as the ability to either influence an administrator's decision or be requested to advise an administrator in a decision making event.

In our initial interviews, our participants described the entry process and their adaptation to the new circumstances. Over the subsequent 2 years, they described how they used their positions to negotiate and collaborate to achieve their agendas. In many respects, the process resembled a choreography of new dance partners learning each others' moves. We saw three patterns in the data. First, micropolitics played a significant role in the way teachers and the informal and formal groupings of teachers come to understand the principal. In some cases these groups used the opportunity to advocate for initiatives previously rejected. Those people who did not have positions of authority used whatever means they could to influence decisions, sometimes aligning themselves with a particular group and resenting others who gained

influence. Vice-principals and department heads used positional power to influence the principal's decisions and teachers' perceptions of the principal.

Second, depending on the principal and his/her vision for and knowledge of the school, lobbying for an initiative would be considered in light of the principal's own vision or if the principal wished to use the group to establish influence in the school. Principals who were particularly aware of context used micropolitics to gain influence and to build trust in their decisions among teachers. In one case, the principal focused on the mandate of the role and not on translating the mandate to suit the context to establish control. Teachers indicated that this principal had only superficial control and gave examples of this. Third, context influences the way principals and teachers interacted; some patterns of relationships among teachers and between teachers and the principal were culturally engrained.

Analysis

We did not ask any questions that identified micropolitics for two reasons. First, we assumed that by asking direct questions specifically identifying micropolitics as a focus, we would have influenced the way in which people responded and we were unsure whether the definitions provided would have been immediately understood; teachers don't usually think about the term "micropolitics," although they live it daily and can describe its characteristics in various ways. Second, because we were interested in the process of succession and its impact on teachers' work, we also assumed that responses to our questions would provide indicators of micropolitical and power relationships, particularly those questions that addressed the process of decision making, changes in influence or status, and shifts in vision or changes to initiatives. In our second year of interviews when participants knew us better and trusted that we would treat

their responses confidentially, we discovered that responses to our questions relating to changes

in one's influence and status did, indeed, provide indications of micropolitical processes. Using

NVivo7 software, among the nodes[2] set to categorize the interview data, we employed two that

were directly related to micropolitics — *"change in who has status"* and *"have you seen your*

influence change in any way" — to explore micropolitical processes that occurred after the

arrival of the new principal. The data collected under these nodes are the basis for the discussion

to follow under the headings: Change in Status; and In-Groups and Out-Groups.

Changes in Status

The most number of responses for this node fell into the "no change in status" category,

largely in response to participants' perceptions of their own status (15). We can describe these

changes using two headings: Higher in Status, and Decrease in Status and Influence. We provide

illustrations of these categories in the discussion below.

Higher in status. An illustration of the responses we classified in this category is given

below. When asked who was a member of either whether "in" or "out" group in his/her school,

this teacher described how status had changed for a colleague.

> R115TM101-02[3]: This is during the changeover and the fellow who is in guidance
> now … I guess as a staff, we view as being able to make or influence decision-
> making beyond his ability … There's a bit of tension between this staff and
> guidance/administration because of guidance's role with certain decisions.
>
> Interviewer: And what would those decisions be?
>
> R115TM101-02: Students taking courses.
>
> Interviewer: That they either should or shouldn't?

---

[2] In *Nvivo7 Software* a node is a data subset.
[3] Coding key as follows in sequential order: Uppercase letter= School Board; followed by school identification
number e.g. 115; then constituent category: T =teacher; VP= vice principal; P= Principal; F =female M=male;
participant identification number e.g. 105; and year of interview 01= year1, 02= year 2, 03=year 3.

> R115TM101-02: That they either should or should not be, in being told to take this course, when as a teacher, you know, the ability is or isn't there … that's the most recent one.

This teacher assumed that teachers had lost influence with the principal about the placement of students within courses. This individual suggested that teachers' knowledge of the student and of the requirements of subsequent courses was not valued, and that the guidance counselor who had gained in status had greater influence with the principal about course selection beyond his knowledge level. This evidence was used as an indicator that the guidance counselor's status had changed with the advent of the new principal and was perceived to have gained unwarranted influence in the decision making process in the school.

We had instances of principals working within the current power structures and who did not intend to shift the status of any teacher, although we did see signs that principals intended over the long term to shift the locus of power to other people. For example, teachers described the practices of one principal designed to keep teachers in the school: the new principal hired *locally,* or people who were from the area who would likely remain in this rural community rather than head to the local urban area. This practice could effectively shift status of groups by creating a new *in* group loyal to the principal.

> [The principal] said that he has made a conscious effort to hire people who are from close to here and willing to stay here. This has always been a school where teachers would come up here, get experience, and transfer back to the city.
> (V98 TF136-02)

While a seemingly good practice to ensure teachers stayed, this new group did not feel they had the sufficient status or the support to address a situation with the principal if some difficulty arose. The senior teachers were still very much in control.

> I think with teachers with seniority and a lot of years of experience, or at least I should say, teachers with permanent contracts, their voice is heard a lot more then

> the voices of teachers that are only term. We've discussed this in the staff room, actually because we have seen a difference in how, if I refer a student, I feel they're dealt with differently, than if a first-year teacher refers a student for the same thing ... But in the same time, I don't think some of those younger teachers have necessarily received the support they should have … They've openly said, you know, they don't' feel they're in a position to go and voice their opinion and to complain, whereas, if I didn't agree with something, I wouldn't hesitate to go into the office and say, "You know, I don't' agree with this decision you made. Let's talk about it." (V98TF30)

This passage highlights difference between the established groups who held influence and the new teachers who had not formed a cohesive group capable of influencing decisions within the school. The new principal listened to the senior teachers and maintained the status quo. The key to changes in status had to do with shifts in personnel, such that new people changed the power structures and the interpersonal relationships upon which such influence was built. For example, one teacher described the issue of changes in status this way.

> Status is such a … such a grey area, but I think in this school, you pretty well know who your leaders are and who your controllers are; who your cynics are and your naysayers [are] … I'd say, we've gotten a couple of really strong teachers here the last couple of years. [Over] the last year, and this year, we have 3 or 4 really strong teachers we got from other schools, not term teachers.
> (X47 TM77-02)

Teachers with permanent contracts had less to lose than their colleagues who just started into the profession. Their status was ensured after they had time to adjust to the new context.

> People who have been in the building for a few years. Once you have been here for 3 or 4 years, you kind of know the culture of the school and how things are going to go. If something new is brought on board then you can make a pretty good prediction about what is going to happen. (R115 TM104-02)

While the principal may have a hand in the hiring of teachers and attempted to shift the power structure, once teachers had contracts and had been in place for a few years, they began to shift their own status within the school. Our interpretation here suggests that unless the new principal

is able to make significant changes to the teaching staff, the likelihood of shifting status is

reduced.

> Maybe veteran teachers compared to new teachers where resistance to change.
> They may become a group trying to have their opinion enforced … a change in
> personnel is probably the key —like if teachers who retired or moved into another
> school. Because of that [change] you can sense that there is more of a team
> approach to certain issues. You are not getting that small group coming to be
> influential. (R115 VPM 106-02)

This last excerpt suggests that new principals can change the school culture by strategically

hiring, if such possibilities exist. This occurrence is less likely in school districts with declining

enrollments or with a relatively stable teaching population.

Some teachers proactively increased their influence and status once the new principal

arrived. One such method used was for teachers to indicate that they wanted to become involved

in administration. One teacher communicated his career interest in pursuing administration to the

principal resulted in him being treated differently by the principal.

> R115 TM 02: I think it is because I am interested in administration and [the
> principal] knows that. I think he has come to recognize that I am pretty efficient.
> When I decide to do something, I will do it and I will do it the best that I can and
> do it right and get it done. Not every body is like that...I don't know why other
> people can't get it done…

> Interviewer: So, it goes back to the managing people and situations.

> R115 TM 02:Yes. I also expressed some interest in getting some managerial
> administration experience. There are 2 or 3 people who have done that. Once in a
> while I get to come down. I don't think he would bring me down unless he felt
> that I could help them in the office to get things done and be trusted to keep
> confidences and be discrete.

> Interviewer: There is another professional skill set?

> R115 TM 02: For sure. That did not happen when he walked in the building and I
> introduced myself. That took some time.

> Interviewer: Then you expressed your interests, and….

R115 TM 02: Yes. [the principal] knows I am interested but, more importantly, because he trusts me to do stuff.

By openly discussing his aspirations and abilities with the new principal, this teacher did not wait for the principal to identify the strengths on the staff.

Decrease in Status and Influence. We did find instances of a perceived loss in status and influence, which appeared to be the result of personal connections and changes in direction brought about by a new principal. Illustrative of the loss of status, the following excerpt describes one teacher loss of status as a result of the vice-principal's ascension to the principalship. The previously high status he had enjoyed disappeared. When asked if he had experienced a change in status with the new principal, this teacher stated that

U15TM9-02: I had a negative status.

Interviewer**:** How do you define negative status?

U15TM9-02**:** I was a protégé of the former principal, I was hired by the former principal, I was taken under his wing. Everybody knew that I was [the former principal's] boy and there was no doubt about it. [He] took me under his wing and people made fun of it, but I used to sit on "his" lap. Quote unquote. I would go in and, they even say the way I used to say [the principal's name] would be like a child saying "dad." I miss him, because he was a father figure to me and he was an excellent principal to me. He was a mentor and I was a protégé of him. There were times that I, excuse the expression, pissed [the VP now Principal] off. There was a couple times that I did something that [the VP] told me to do and I said, "Yeah, well, guess what?" [The Principal] isn't going say anything to me and I went and did my own thing. Next thing you know, I'm in [principal's] office and he is saying, "You just can't do that anymore because [he's] the vice-principal." When [the VP became Principal] took over, I knew that I was I was on the short end of the stick. I knew that I had a negative relationship with the new principal. I was [the former principal's] boy and [he] was God.

From this excerpt, we note that personal relationships were an important factor in determining the influence this teacher had with the new administration. However, previously positive personal relationships could have a negative effect on status when expectations did not meet the practice of a new principal.

In this next excerpt, the new principal was a colleague who did not allow personal connections to influence her decisions. This resulted in her former colleagues feeling disconnected from the status that they had previously enjoyed, thus negatively influencing relationships and the school culture.

> [The principal] has some very close friends on staff, very close friends. And they found it much more difficult because she said "no". She has to say no to certain things, she just doesn't, one of her closest friends says, "We'll never be a top school. We just can't, because we'll be at each other's throats." That's too bad. (W3 TM55-02)

We also saw an instance where a change of direction or the implementation of new procedures left some previously influential teachers with diminished status. In this case, the principal readjusted his workload by adding another different person to his staff diminishing a previously used teacher.

> I was part of that core team. I noticed it sort of gone downhill because then, they have someone else doing more of that, so I find my status is lowering. It's the way it is … He wanted someone to take off the heavy workload for him, so they hired someone to take off the heavy workload for him, so they hired someone to do most of it, which is better for him. (Y129 TF90-02)

In Groups and Out Groups

We developed the *in and out group* node in which we collected responses which had a micropolitical basis, such as changes in group status and/or descriptions of the nature of the groups in each school. These groups assumed importance during principal succession because our data indicated that group dynamics and relationships influence how a new principal assumes authority in the new school. First, new principals indicated to us that they strive to attempt to foster teamwork amongst the staff as a means to build collaborative decision making

> My philosophy, and I'm kind of talking generalities here, is that there are decisions obviously that are administrative in nature and they have to be made by

13

myself or my administrative team. However, in my experience with working with people is that … they would be part of the decision-making process that they take more a responsibility … Whenever possible, I will ask for input from teachers and try to build a consensus. (R118PM4-02)

They recognized that some decisions had to fall within the purview of the principal and the administrative team, but they also recognized that collaboration increased teachers' ownership of decisions. Nevertheless, the nature of the groups and the degree to which the groups got along with each other influenced the implementation of collaborative practices.

Second, with succession events, especially in schools with difficult contextual considerations with new administrators, teachers often see the change in principal as a positive event and thus morale improves, especially during the honey-moon period. As the new administrator forges his or her leadership style, groups become important in the attempts by teachers to make their concerns and influence felt. To do this, they manipulate practices, information and structures to achieve an increase of influence, much as Hargreaves and Macmillan (1992) found in their research. However, such shifts do not result in a zero-sum result; someone or some group will likely see their influence wane.

Interviewer: Is there like an in-group and an out-group?

R115 TM 107 02: Oh, no question, no question …There are two groups. I've often wondered and it's probably because within their job, you get a lot of time to share personal experience with other people for months. Teaching, we always seem to have time, be it supervising together, be it in the cafeteria, or in the staff room. I think because of the time to share … you start sharing it with your group and not the entire group.

Interviewer: How does that get manifested between the in and out groups? And what does the in group do that the out group cannot do?

R115 TM 107 02: I think "in and out" is just a perspective … If I'm involved on the "in", whereas other are the "out", … I think what you're looking at is [a group] that runs the school … more than others …

Interviewer: Has the principal's ear or the vice-principal's ear?

> R115 TM 107 02: Yeah I would think there are some more so than others … A lot of it has to do with how much you do outside of your regular job. I think administrators always notice the people that do the little extra, be it extra work in coaching, advisory and stuff like that.

The efforts to shift influence can result in increased access to resources and in influence on decisions that affect the whole school. As with the individuals cited above, individuals used their time strategically to bring themselves to the notice of the principal and then used this notice to highlight the group.

> While some groups are the *winners* in the struggle to obtain influence, other groups experience a perceived loss of influence with the shifts, and even, at worst, an actual loss of resources and entitlement. This can lead to problems for the new principal if he or she is not aware of the potential areas of conflict as a result of the realignment of groups.

> R115 TM101 02: There's an in-group and an out-group, I'm in the out-group.

> Interviewer: How would you define the in group and the out group?

> R115 TM101 02: The in-group gets to go to all the in-services that are listed; they get positions of leadership. They seem to be all working on their master's for some reason or another. They're probably asked what they want to do and I see them moving about [or into] positions they really enjoy. So they must have some influence in that.

Whether the granting of influence is real or not, the perceptions of favoritism influences how other groups react to the principal.

> Some new principals appeared to recognize the existence of groups and each group's attempts to influence decisions. These principals had the difficult task of balancing these attempts with initiatives intended to build collaborative cultures.

> R118 TF 201-02: There's a group that certainly would try to have the ear of the principal, you know, I think he's [fair]. Try to be fair and to do hisown thing and not be overly influenced by a certain group … I think that's why [the Principal] was pulled into this staff anyway. It wasn't to handle discipline problems or students within the school. I think he was brought into manage the staff. That's

right. And then you know, I'd say that's probably where [it] is, not so much the student body as it is the staff. It's a big staff and people have power in number. So, even if you have a lot of people pressing you, it's just hard to, not just say, well "all right then", it's easier to agree than disagree.

If the new principal did not acknowledge the existence of these groups or did not handle the groups carefully, inter-group tensions could lead to uncomfortable power struggles and animosity among teachers and between groups.

R118 TM3 02: There is, I think, a belief that certain people have a little bit more— or certain aspects of our staff— special services, possibly might have a little bit more say with the principal. And that sometimes can cause a bit of animosity.

We found that the groups used four main strategies to gain influence. First, if the principal was regularly absent, which often happened in smaller school districts, groups filled the administrative vacuum by working to influence the vice-principals. Second, individual teachers used their length of tenure to influence the principal by providing insight into situations and into possible solutions to problems. These senior teachers subsequently appeared to use this influence to improve the status of their group. Third, proximity to the principal, in terms of delegated assumed trust and responsibility, increased a group's influence with the principal. Fourth, the structure of schools creates divisions with which teachers identify and use to curry influence with the new principal. Each of these strategies is described below.

Filling the vacuum. Although the principal may develop connections with various groups, the principal's presence dictates the degree to which these groups have influence. If possible, other groups may find ways to circumvent these patterns of influence by using other members of the administrative team to exert influence. This is particularly the case when the principal is oriented to activities outside of the school and the management of the school is left in the hands of the vice-principals.

U15TM9-02: The guidance office has the principal's ear. There's no doubt the guidance office has the principal's ear, but the staff doesn't see the principal. The staff goes to the vice-principal. So for instance, if we want anything, we being staff members, teachers, we'll go in and see the vice-principal. So, I'll go in and I'll say [the vice principal], "I've got a problem with a student … you got to talk to this guy'. Or, "[vice principal] we got a whole problem with students." Matter of fact, you'll notice at dinner time, we've got about 50 students who hang out right in front of the office … right after the bell. [the vice-principal] takes care of it now; he'll get out there and he'll get rid of it. The staff doesn't go to see [the principal].

Interviewer: Has this been a change?

U15TM9-02: Oh yeah, we used to go see [the Principal] But [he's] been so busy traveling to conferences and elsewhere - he hasn't been in the building in the last 6 to 8 weeks. So we've all just been used to going to [the vice principal].

In this instance, one group had influence with the principal, but due to the principal's absence, the *out* groups found ways to exert their influence through the vice-principals. This led them to have real power as long as the principal continued to delegate responsibility to the vice-principals. This outcome suggests that principals need to be present during the crucial early stages of their administration if they expect to be able to control the groups over the long term.

Length of tenure of a group's teachers. Groups comprised of senior teachers definitely talked about what ought to be done and attempted to influence the principal. Discussions about direction and initiatives were part of the early discussions groups had with the principal. Key here is how the principal responded and whether the ideas from the groups were self-serving or self-motivated.

U15TF17-02: I think there's an in group. But it's the kind of in group that you couldn't feel one bit. Even now, I'm just here the second year, but they could be in the office … going in and say, "Listen, what about?" It's not the kind of in group that you'd feel that they solve everything ... And I think a lot of that has to do with, they're teaching, some 20, 22 years. They know so much more about them and they know how much more that, you know, they dealt with them so many years that, but that doesn't bother me.

The *in* group referred to here appeared to have the best intentions for the school, but this was not always the case.

In more than one school, we heard references to the "old boys' club" who influenced the principal. The difficulty with these groups was their degree of entrenchment and their sense of entitlement. New principals often ran headlong into these groups with greater or lesser success in changing their attempts to assume control of the school. As one vice-principal put it,

> Z137VPM84-02: There was an old boy's club and there still is. One of the people who wanted to be principal had a fallout year and I didn't want him here. They were surprised that [the principal] got the job, but she is doing a great job.

In this school, the vice-principal was able to control how the old boys' club operated, but in another school, the male vice-principal was the leader. This second school had a group made up of senior teachers who controlled staff meetings and influenced the school's direction and seemed to be encouraged to do so by the male vice-principal. In our first year of the study, the principal had a very difficult time with this senior group, such that she resigned and left the community. When we returned in the second year of the study, the new principal had been the female vice-principal in the school and had her own group of loyal followers who acted as her power base. These groups came into conflict, with the principal eventually taking control of the school and reducing the influence of the Old Boys' Club.

We did find in at least one school that women formed the female equivalent of the old boys' club, and used their tenure in the school as the leverage to influence decisions and to bring pressure to bear on the principal.

> W3TM153-02: I have noticed over the years that there are a number of teachers here in this school who have been here for a long time and have through staff room debate felt the need to know everything that's going on in this school. There's probably, I would say, anywhere from 4 to 6, all women teachers, who are constantly commenting on whatever is being done around the school. And interestingly enough, they put a lot of force, I think a lot on the Principal. And he

18

had to deal with a lot of issues where they were wanting to know why he was doing whatever the case may be.

Through the attrition of retirement, transfer and promotion to administration, the teachers who were left believed they were entitled to their opinions about the school and its direction. In cases where schools had a number of principal succession events in a few years, this sense of entitlement appeared to be quite strong, and a force with which the new principal had to deal.

Proximity. Proximity worked in two ways. First, groups of teachers who had been friends with the principal prior to the individual entering administration often maintained that friendship and used it to influence the principal. Second, the groups with whom the principal worked most often, such as the guidance department, exerted greater influence than what some teachers felt was warranted.

As far back as 1962, Carlson recognized the difficulty. He found that "insider" appointments often experienced conflict with former colleagues when assuming the leadership of their organizations. Carlson found that new administrators have to reconcile what they know must be done with the expectations placed on them by these former colleagues. We found a similar situation in our study in those principals who had worked previously in their new school, or who had friends in the school also experienced pressures to act in particular ways consistent with the desires of their friends.

> V98 TM38-02): Well, many of the people that [the principal] were close friends with [him], and continue to be … if they [don't] have influence, they have his ear because they were friends, they're friends outside. They were friends long before he ever came into the office here. .. I suppose maybe [the guidance counselor] has influence because she's the guidance counselor. So I suppose her status has changed over the last, because he's relied a lot on her.

The difficulty here lies in the challenge of the principal finding and being able to balance personal friendships within a professional context with the needs (real or perceived) of the institution.

Groups who worked closely with the principal also exerted influence derived from their proximity to the principal. The group most often cited was the guidance department, as indicated in the instances outlined above. This need became problematic when the individuals were perceived by teachers to be making decisions in areas about which the guidance counselor was thought to have little knowledge.

Structures. As would normally be expected, new principals relied on their administrative team to provide insights and feedback about decisions. This formal leadership structure provided the lines of communication to the staff and the conduits necessary from the staff when issues arose in the school. Teachers recognized this structure and the influence that it had.

> Y 129 TF 90-02: We have here what's called an administrative team, so that's made up of department heads …They meet like every Tuesday with the principal. So they are sort of the influence makers, I guess you would say, of the school. I think it's whoever tends to be closer to him—probably in what meetings he's at, I think.

Committee structures also lent themselves to the creation of *in* and *out* groups. The perception by some teachers was that the initiation of change occurred in these committees, and those who sat on those committees were part of the influential group. Often, the new principal created the disparities by singling out individuals to participate in the development of initiatives.

> X47 76B 02: I think that these people who are doing the initiatives that we spoke about [events and academics] are listened to a lot more. To the extent that teachers get upset because they are praised and listened to and valued. We feel like [if] we haven't been asked [then] maybe we aren't as valued.

As a result of being singled out, these teachers were now viewed by others as part of the influential group, leaving others not so identified to be disgruntled.

As Hargreaves (1994) suggested, secondary schools are often balkanized, and we found the same, especially along division affiliation where groups of grade or subject teachers consider themselves as an *in* group even though their power and influence may not necessarily be real. This teacher is representative of a junior-senior secondary school.

> W3 TF148-02: I'm sure that if it [in vs. out groups] were from a senior high perspective they might say junior high has more input, but we've always been very strong and passionate about our work and the kids.

The same teacher knew that the principal recognized the structural divisions and appreciated how the principal attempted to address the issue.

> W3 TF148-02: The other day, we were put into groups. We weren't allowed to pick because we'd probably pick our own people right. And I worked with some senior high staff that I didn't' know well at all, new teachers here this year, and they started telling me some of their concerns and that's a legitimate concern, but it doesn't even cross my mind you know, that we have a pre-requisite for a math course like … so if I was given a list to put that on priorities, I'd probably put it number 10, well it's number 1 to them because it really affects their lives.

By this strategy, the principal began to break down the structural barriers to discussion of whole school problems and to begin to build a sense of appreciation in teachers for their colleagues' concerns.

As the above discussion indicates, we found that groups had specific ways to approach the principal and to exert their influence. These groups formed power bases with which the principal had to deal in order to be able to implement any changes. In some cases, the principal adroitly worked around and through the groups to achieve specific ends.

Conclusion and Indications

Earlier in this article we introduced our Blase and Blase (2002) inspired working definition for micropolitics:

> Micropolitics are the formal and informal use of legitimate and illegitimate power by the principal and teachers to further individual or group goals, with such goals based on values, beliefs, needs and ideologies. Shifts in balances of power can be created through collaborative efforts and may shift with time and circumstance.

Our participants suggested that the status of individuals did change with the arrival of the new principal, as did the some of the groups. We also found that the strategies that individuals and groups used to influence the new principal took several forms, both overt and covert. Teachers acknowledged that the existence of individual's status and the power of groups did affect how the principal was able to administer.

We had indications that principals recognized the existence of groups as power bases, and also worked to deal with them. Some groups were used to gain advice, while others were recognized as negative influences and marginalized. In some cases, the principal shifted power structures by identifying new leaders or by providing opportunities for previously antagonistic groups to work together. In other cases, the principal, for various reasons, did not shift the established power structures, causing the further entrenchment of individuals and groups, and maintaining of the status quo, however undesirable that might be.

Those interviewees who commented on their status in light of a succession event were keenly aware of each nuance of the principal's treatment of them or their groups. Identification of conflicts, strategies and tactics did not take much prompting from us and seemed to be a part of the discussion about the succession of the new principal. As we have suggested elsewhere in previous research (Meyer et al., 2009a, 2004, Macmillan et al., 2009, 2005) new principals' actions are under close scrutiny by teachers as they attempt to understand the implications of the new principal's administration. New principals must not ignore this scrutiny, but recognize the implications of privileging one person or group over another; the shifts in power could create conflict among staff members, which is neither desirable nor easily managed. Unconscious

actions, or an inadvertent, unfortunate statement could lead to conclusions about the new

principal that are inaccurate, but which could negatively flavor the individual's tenure. We

suggest that the attending to the underlying micropolitics of a school is key to whether a

principal is deemed successful or not.

References

Begley, P. (2003). In pursuit of authentic school leadership practices. In P. Begley & O. Johansson (Eds.), *The Ethical dimensions of school leadership* (pp. 1-11). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Begley, P. (1999). *Values and educational leadership.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Blase, J. (1991). *The politics of life in schools.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Blase, J., & Anderson, G. (1995). *The micropolitics of educational leadership: From control to empowerment.* New York: Cassell.

Blase, J., & Blase, J. (2002). The micropolitics of instructional supervision: A call for research. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 38*, 6-44.

Brinberg, D., & McGrath, J. (1982). A network of validity concepts within the research process. In D. Brinberg & L. Kidder (Eds.), *Forms of Validity in Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Carlson, R. (1962). *Executive succession and organizational change.* Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill.

Fukuyama, F. (1993). *Trust.* New York: Free Press.

Fullan, M. (1999). *Change forces: The sequel.* London: Falmer.

Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Gordon, G., & Rosen, N. (1981). Critical factors in leadership succession. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 27, 227-254.

Greenfield, W. (2004). Moral leadership in schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*, 174-195.

Hargreaves, A. (2004). Inclusive and exclusive educational change: emotional responses for teachers and implications for leadership. *School Leadership and Mangaement, 24*, 287-309.

Hargreaves, A., & Macmillan, R. (1992). Balkanized secondary schools and the malaise of modernity. In Hargreaves, A., Davis, J., Fullan, M., Wignall, R., Stager, M., & Macmillan, R. (Eds.), *Secondary school work cultures and educational change.* (pp.167-194). Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times.* London: Cassell.

Hart, A. (1993). *Principal succession*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J. (1998). Phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and interpretive practice. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp.137-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

LeCompte, M., & Schensul, J. (1999). *Analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data.* Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.

Leithwood, K. (1999). An organizational perspective on values for leaders in future schools. In P. Begley (Ed.), *Values and educational leadership* (pp.25-50). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Lincoln, Y. (1997). Self, subject, audience text: Living at the edge, writing in the margins. In W. Tierney & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Representation and the text*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Macmillan, R. (2001). Leadership succession, cultures of teaching and educational change. In N. Bascia & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), *The sharp edge of educational change* (pp. 52-71). London: Routledge-Falmer.

Macmillan, R., & Meyer, M.J. (2003, May). Principal turnover and its impact on teachers' work: A preliminary study. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Halifax.

Macmillan, R., Meyer, M.J., & Northfield. S. (2005). Trust and its role in principal succession: A preliminary examination of a continuum of trust. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *3*, 275-294.

Mawhinney, H. (Ed.). [Special issue]. *School Leadership and Management, 19*(2).

Maxwell, J. (1996). *Qualitative research design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Meyer, M.J., Macmillan, R., & Northfield. S. (2009a). Principal turnover and its impact on teacher morale. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 12,* 171-185.

Meyer, M.J., Macmillan, R.B., & Northfield. S. (2009). The use of conscience and discretion as constructs in principals' difficult or conflicted decision making dealings during principal succession events. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 3*, 20-36.

Meyer, M.J., Macmillan, R., Northfield. S., & Foley, M. (2006). Principal Turnover and the impact on teacher-principal relationships: Correlative emerging value issues. A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual meeting, San Francisco.

Meyer, M.J., Macmillan, R., & Northfield. S. (2004, May). Principal turnover and its impact on over and the Impact on Teacher-Principal Relationships: Year Two – Impact on Culture and Morale. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Winnipeg.

Miles, M., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oak, CA: Sage.

Miskel, C.,& Cosgrove, D. (1985). Leader succession in school settings. *Review of Educational Research*, *55*, 87-105.

Normore, A. (2001). *Recruitment, socialization, and accountability of administrators in two school districts*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ontario Institute for the Study of Education at the University of Toronto.

Reichardt, C., & Cook, T. (1979). *Qualitative methods in evaluation research.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Shapiro, J, & Stefkovich, J. *Ethical leadership and decision making in education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas* (2nd ed.)*.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wiersma, W., & Jurs, S. (2005). *Research methods in education: An introduction* (8th ed.)*.* Toronto: Pearson Education.

Willower, D. (1999). Values and valuation: A naturalistic inquiry. In P. Begley (Ed.), *Values and educational leadership* (pp.121-138)*.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Weindling, N., & Earley, P. (1987). *Secondary headship: The first years.* Windsor, UK: NFER-Nelson.