The worklife of the assistant principal

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Keywords *Schools, Leadership, Education, Management*

Abstract *Literature and research have substantiated a noticeable trend in the recognition of the important role the assistant principal plays in schools. Despite this awareness, the knowledge base remains inadequate to meet the needs in understanding this vital role in educational administration. Given this void, this article reviews literature on multiple dimensions of the worklives of assistant principals and analyzes survey data from 125 assistant principals in Maine to ascertain how assistant principals allocate their time, at what roles and activities they feel successful, and the relationship between perceived success and quality of worklife ratings. The findings highlight the importance of understanding functions of the role and adequate teaching experience before assuming the role. They also raise concerns about the minimal amount of time assistant principals allocate to instructional leadership and professional development, and the extent to which serving as an assistant principal prepares one for the principalship.*

Introduction

During the past three decades, the assistant principal has gone from being regarded merely as someone to take some of the burden off the principal to an integral and indispensable part of the aggregate referred to as educational leadership. Furthermore, the assistant principalship is the most common entry-level position for administrative careers (Austin and Brown, 1970; Marshall, 1992; NASSP, 1991). However, the principalship and the assistant principalship are undergoing changes that have created questions and concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of effective school leaders (Parra and Daresh, 1997; Golden, 1997). Therefore, examining the worklife of the most frequent candidate for the principalship, the assistant principal, may help shed light on the reasons for this concern and thereby provide valuable insight for improving the education system.

While the principal of the school remains constantly in the community limelight, it is often the assistant who interacts more with students. He/she is often more visible to students than the principal, and therefore often more influential in the students' day to day school life (Glanz, 1994; Marshall, 1992). Correlative to these trends in thought, literature and research have substantiated a noticeable trend in the recognition of the important role the assistant principal plays in schools. Despite this awareness, the knowledge base remains inadequate to meet the needs in understanding this vital role in educational administration. Hartzell (1993, p. 707) refers to the assistant principal as the "neglected actor in practitioner literature". Marshall (1992, p. 3) states, "Little attention has been granted to the training and selection, job

satisfaction, and motivation of assistant principals. As assistant principals deal with numerous duties during the course of a single day, how do they derive meaning and purpose from their work?" Greenfield (1985, p. 23) concludes that the research "has added little to the knowledge base informing the practice of educational administration". "Now it is time to identify how assistant principals' work fits into the ongoing function of schooling, how assistant principals actually carry out their work, and what satisfies and frustrates them" (Marshall, 1992, p. 88).

With these voids in mind, the purpose of this paper is threefold. The paper begins with a review of the literature on the worklife of the assistant principal organized around four themes:

(1) allocation of time during the work day;

(2) organizational context and organizational socialization;

(3) association with others in the organization, particularly the principal; and

(4) job satisfaction.

These components contribute individually and collectively to the worklife of the assistant principal. Next, we analyze survey data from 125 assistant principals in Maine to ascertain how assistant principals allocate their time, at what roles and activities they feel successful, and the relationship between perceived success and quality of worklife ratings. Finally, we discuss the implications of these findings for policy and practice.

The assistant principalship: what have we learned?
Allocation of time
How do assistant principals spend their time? In order to understand the worklife of the assistant principal, it is important to have a clear picture of what activities consume his/her time. Austin and Brown (1970, p. 76) concluded, "The assistant principal is primarily concerned with people and their relationships as established, stressed, and threatened within the milieu of the school". They rated pupil discipline as the number one time-consuming activity. Pellicer *et al.* (1987) used Austin and Brown's survey instrument in order to create a longitudinal comparison. When comparing the 1987 results to the 1970 results, more similarities than differences emerged. Over the years, for the most part, time spent on different activities has appeared to remain constant, although the 1987 survey showed assistants having increased their time allotment for teacher evaluation and teacher selection.

McDonald (1981) used Mintzberg's (1973) framework to document extensive observational records of five assistant principals in one urban school district on the West Coast. She presented a composite "worktime" accounting broken down in percentages. Her findings showed the prime purpose for interacting with others was to convey, receive, review, or exchange information. She expanded on Austin and Brown's conclusion that the assistant's time is spent

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primarily interacting with people as opposed to time spent, for example, on program development or curricular issues.

In a more recent review of literature regarding how assistants spend their time, Scoggins and Bishop (1993) synthesized the work of 26 authors. "While there is no conclusive evidence that there is a set of duties and responsibilities for the assistant principal, these authors (e.g. Mitchell, 1980; Miller and Lieberman, 1982; Reed and Himmler, 1985; Greenfield, 1985; Marshall and Greenfield, 1985; Pellicer and Stevenson, 1991; Marshall, 1992) reported 20 duties common to the assistant principal. These duties include discipline, attendance, student activities, staff support and evaluation, building supervision, guidance, co-curricular activities, athletics, community agencies, master schedules, fill in for principal, building operations, budget, reports, transportation, curriculum, communications, cafeteria, school calendar, and lock and lockers" (Scoggins and Bishop, 1993, p. 40). Discipline was rated as the most common duty performed, with attendance being cited as second most common by about one-half of the authors. Discipline and attendance were followed by student activities, staff support, and building supervision as third, fourth and fifth most common responsibilities, respectively.

Organizational context and organizational socialization
Prior to the mid-1980s, most research on the assistant principalship was descriptive, examining what activities filled the assistant's workday. The mid-1980s brought the inception of exploring the assistant principal's role conceptually within the educational organization. Researchers began to express opinions that a "more fruitful way of understanding the role of the assistant principal is to examine the functioning of assistant principals as participants in the complex organization called school" (Marshall, 1992, p. 37). Greenfield (1984) opened up the discussion on organizational context and socialization. He called for research that clarified what assistant principals do, as well as asking questions about the context within which they perform their duties. Moreover, he expressed the need to begin examining the organizational context within which assistant principals are socialized in administration.

Marshall and Mitchell (1991) presented a blend of theories connecting language and values with micro-political conflicts, thereby identifying several unspoken but prevalent "rules" in the assistant principal's organizational life. Ten assumptive rules, which the authors labeled assumptive worlds, emerged. Collectively, these rules can be summarized by saying that "asserting one's own personal and professional values or aligning with unfavored factions in conflicts is a violation of the expected patterns of behavior of assistant principals" (Marshall and Mitchell, 1991, p. 410). They concluded that assumptive worlds function to constrain initiative and value choices. Furthermore, these can function as barriers to organizational change and school reform. The authors warned, "Good-faith efforts are under way, from legislatures, professors, national policy boards and professional associations, to enhance the skills and leadership of school administrators. However, no such

efforts can succeed when they ignore the potent political parameters embedded in fledgling administrators' assumptive worlds" (Marshall and Mitchell, 1991, p. 413).

When considering the career orientation aspect of the assistant principal's worklife, there are several noteworthy influential factors. Marshall *et al.* (1990) developed a career typology based on "research [that] examined what took place in assistant principals' socialization. The typology assumed that the assistant principalship is a testing and opportunity position for both the candidate and the organization" (Marshall *et al.*, 1990, p. 2). The typology identified six assistant principal career patterns: upwardly mobile, career, plateaued, shafted, considering leaving, and downwardly mobile. Four factors that influence these career patterns also emerged from the data: the influence of the organization, the site level, the principal, and one's personal responses to these influences on the individual career.

Reed and Connors (1982) and Reed and Himmler (1985) conducted in-depth studies investigating the nature of high school assistant principals' work. They employed a conceptual framework that divided school functions into two categories: stabilizing and transforming. Reed and Himmler (1985, p. 61), in addition to looking at the tasks assistant principals perform, set out to "discover the outlines of a grounded theory relating to the nature of the work associated with the secondary assistant principalship and the school as an organization". They expanded on the arguments of Mitchell and Spady (1977) who contend that "schools maintain organizational stability in two important ways. One way is through regulating student behavior; the other is by encouraging students to assume traditional organizational values" (as cited by Reed and Himmler, 1985, p. 65). This argument suggests that student transformational activities and organizational stabilizing activities can and do work in opposition to one another. They further contend that while teachers have the primary responsibility for the activities that are transformational, it is administrators, and particularly the assistant principal, who have responsibility for promoting organizational stability. For example, in this conceptual framework, discipline is viewed as a remediation employed in response to disruptions to the organization's regularities. The theoretical notion of the assistant principal's role evolving around the promotion of organizational stability is echoed in subsequent literature (e.g. Marshall, 1992, Hartzell *et al.*, 1995). These studies moved the exploration regarding assistant principal to a level of considering, not only tasks performed, but also the functional role within the context of educational organizations.

Hartzell (1990) and Hartzell *et al.* (1995) narrowed the organizational context and socialization of assistant principals by examining the worklives of individuals in their first year in the role. From this work, four themes emerge:

(1) most beginning assistant principals do not understand the nature of the assistant principalship;

(2) new assistant principals often lack needed skills;

(3) the assistant principalship does not prepare the assistant for the principalship; and

(4) becoming an assistant principal brings professional and personal changes (Hartzell *et al.*, 1995).

In addition, Hartzell (1991) described the socialization issues surrounding assistant principal transfers. Focusing on the theory of work transition, he discusses the implications for the assistant who is an "experienced newcomer". "Veteran assistant principals who change jobs may encounter an entirely different set of stress-inducing factors than do new assistant principals" (Hartzell, 1991, p. 75). The implications within this context are vast, particularly in school districts that adhere to the policy of regularly moving assistants to different schools.

Hierarchy

The organizational hierarchy in which the assistant principal functions contributes in many ways to paradoxically simplify and/or complicate the assistant principal's job. Even though the assistant principal is literally the assistant to the principal, their jobs differ greatly simply because they are on different levels of the organization's authority structure. "[T]he hierarchical level of a job has a defining influence on its nature, significantly affecting attitudes, behaviors, and leadership practices" (Pavett and Lau, 1983; Pelz, 1951; Yukl, 1994, all as cited by Hartzell *et al.*, 1995, p. 153).

The hierarchical relationship that has the greatest impact on the assistant principal is his or her relationship with the principal (Gorton, 1987; Kaplan and Owings, 1999; Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd, 1991). Gorton (1987, p. 3) found that "the principal is the key to improving the assistant principalship ... [N]ational studies and reports can be helpful, but no other entity has a greater impact on the fortunes of an assistant principal in a specific school than the principal of that school". Because of statements of belief such as the one presented above, education has begun to turn to the principal as key player in re-defining the assistant's role to one that is grounded in the concepts of team leadership.

Tanner and Dennard (1995, p. 172) asked the important question as to whether or not principals and their assistants act on potentially false assumptions regarding the other. "For example, are principals and assistant principals handling leadership roles as the other assumes they would be handled?". The objective of their nationwide study was to determine the styles of leadership exhibited by the principal and assistant principal of curriculum as perceived by each other. Their rationale rested on the assumption that if a gap does, in fact, exist, "we may identify and design learning experiences to minimize the differences. For example, if the assistant and the principal perceived that the principal permits subordinates to function within limits defined by the superior, then clearly freedom exists for the subordinates ... If the assistant principal for instruction perceives the principal to be relationship oriented but functions as a task-oriented person, then these behavior patterns

may cause problems. Minimizing these differences would therefore improve the quality of educational leadership" (Tanner and Dennard, 1995, p. 176). They found that both groups perceived each other to be oriented less toward "relationship" and more toward "task". However, they found that assistant principals saw themselves as more relationship oriented than did their principals. In parallel, they also found that principals perceived themselves to be more relationship oriented than did their assistants. They conclude, "If perceptions of others are more important than one's own perception, then we have discovered a problem area where both assistant principals and principals may improve. Both leader groups need to know about this gap" (Tanner and Dennard, 1995, p. 182).

Mentoring was explored as a tool for strengthening the team leadership practice. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) believe that the relationship between the principal and assistant principal is a social contract that benefits individuals on many levels. They espouse that since no suitable alternative to the assistant principalship has yet surfaced, and it appears that the assistant principalship is a necessary position in education, it is time to focus on the evolving nature of the relationship between the assistant and the principal. "The relationship of the future suggests commitment to professional development and to the educational profession as a whole. In essence, the principal has a strong responsibility to serve as a mentor for the assistant principal" (Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd, 1991, p. 67).

Hartzell *et al.* (1995), also supporting a strong working relationship between principal and assistant, took a different approach by suggesting that the assistant principal must also assert initiative in promoting his/her influence in building a strong relationship with the principal. They present a list of several ways to approach this assertion and conclude, "Building influence with the principal is a laborious, time consuming, and ceaseless undertaking, but it is absolutely essential if you are to be as effective and influential as you can be. Some people resent having to do so many things outside their job descriptions, actually in addition to their job descriptions, to manage their relationship with the principal. These people fail to realize that these activities are investments ... If you view yourself in the final analysis as responsible for what you achieve, then you know that you need to establish good working relationships with everyone on whom you depend, including the principal" (Hartzell *et al.*, 1995, p. 23).

The relationship an assistant has with the teachers in the school is also key to the role. It is here that assistants experience strong role conflict. Assistants usually come to their profession from teacher rank and arrive with the expectation of being an advocate for teachers. Unfortunately, their advocacy ideals often fade as they meet the ambiguous challenges of their role that often sets them at odds with teachers' concerns (Reed and Himmler, 1985; Hartzell, 1995). "It is very difficult, for example, to simultaneously be a sounding board or confidant for employees and still be responsible for their evaluation" (Hartzell *et al.*, 1995, p. 161).

Another area of the assistant's job that causes conflict with teachers is that of discipline. "Simultaneously charged with maintaining order and being student advocates, AP's are supposed to administer justice and back teachers. These actions are most often identical, but not always, and each side in a conflict expects full support ... Trying to administer justice and support a teacher whose actions are indefensible can put an AP in an impossible situation" (Hartzell *et al.*, 1995, p. 58).

Assistant principals who have had the opportunity to work with teachers on curricular issues find satisfaction in this part of their role. Although formal job descriptions often include instructional leadership duties, actual work in this area is yet uncommon for assistants, in spite of the fact that assistant principals would like to be more involved in curricular and instructional issues than they currently are (Gross, 1987; Celikten, 1998; Oprey, 1999).

Another important relationship assistant principals have is with the other assistant(s) in their building. This relationship is reported as a positive one (Hartzell *et al.*, 1995). They concluded, "Peers help new AP's make sense of their responsibilities and relationships through mentoring, memorable messages, explanations, deliberate demonstrations, and even bad examples ... Newcomers also gain valuable organizational knowledge simply by observing how their peers operate" (Hartzell *et al.*, 1995, p. 122). A downfall in the peer relationship, as reported by Hartzell *et al.* (1995) was the sometimes seasoned but cynical assistant principal whose jaded attitudes were less than inspiring to their peers.

While it is evident that assistant principals are connected hierarchically to the district office, the dearth of literature regarding this relationship would indicate that a direct relationship is virtually non-existent. It appears that the assistant's relationship with the principal is the intermediary relationship between the assistant principal and the central office (Hartzell, 1995).

Job satisfaction
In response to the Austin and Brown (1970) study, Croft and Morton (1977) explored assistant principals' satisfaction with various facets of duties and responsibilities. Through a study combining use of Herzberg's motivator and hygiene factors with regard to satisfaction at work (Herzberg, 1973, as cited in Croft and Morton, 1977) and criteria-based theory of March and Simon (as cited in Croft and Morton, 1977), the authors discovered a significant relationship between job satisfaction and career stability, as well as a subtle shift toward greater job satisfaction than was determined in the Austin and Brown study. Suther (1989) also used Herzberg's theory and found that assistant principals believed that motivator factors had a greater influence on their job attitude than did hygiene factors. There was only a "most limited" relationship between background/school variables and perceptions of the influence of the hygiene/ motivator factors on job attitude.

Contrary to this finding, Densberger (1981) utilized the job satisfaction scale (Johnson, 1955, as cited by Densberger (1981)) and found significant differences

in levels of job satisfaction attributed to demographics including sex, age, marital status, graduate degrees in educational administration, location of school (urban, suburban, small city, rural), socio-economic background of students, type of school (public or private), job description, and size of the school. He also found salary, length of contract year, and long-range professional goals of the assistant principal to be predictors of job satisfaction.

Drake (1995) studied perceived deficiencies in fulfillment of the psychological needs of security, social needs, esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization through use of the Porter need satisfaction questionnaire with inclusion of major areas of assistant principal duties as determined by Austin and Brown (1970), Black (1980), and Norton and Kriekard (1987). Social needs depended on the school level at which the assistant principals worked. Secondary level assistant principals perceived more deficiency than did elementary assistants. Social needs, autonomy, and self-actualization depended on the primary role they fulfilled in their assistant principalship. Those who identified their primary role as being involved in educational program improvement and leadership perceived fewer deficiencies in social, autonomy, and self-actualization needs than those whose primary role had to do with student services/activities, community relations, and social management activities. Esteem could not be attributed to demographics or role identification of the assistant principal. In summarizing his findings, Drake (1995) states, "One would conclude that there is something about the job itself in which assistant principals are not finding fulfillment. There are also indications that the perceived deficiencies in need fulfillment may be contributing to a sense of alienation in assistant principals".

Assistant principal job burnout was examined by Blanchard (1990). She found that significant relationships existed between the emotional exhaustion subscale and the variables of role conflict, role ambiguity, and the negative aspects of school reform. Higher levels of depersonalization were associated with high levels of role conflict. Assistant principals with more years of teaching experience reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion.

Calabrese and Adams (1987) did a comparative analysis of alienation among secondary school administrators in which they studied 2,300 secondary school administrators. As operationalized by the authors, alienation occurs when the worker loses control over the means and end results of their work. They found that assistant principals have less power and have higher levels of alienation than principals.

Edison (1992) and Forcella (1991) looked at the differences in job satisfaction between career/non-career (i.e. career stable/career mobile) assistant principals. Edison (1992) found that regardless of whether they are considered career or non-career, assistant principals were equally satisfied with their jobs and had similar levels of self-efficacy. Forcella (1991) concluded that career stable assistants displayed significantly higher levels of general job satisfaction and significantly lower levels of role ambiguity and role conflict. Significant

associations for both groups were found between role ambiguity, role conflict, and general job satisfaction.

Marshall's (1993) monograph, *The Unsung Role of the Career Assistant Principal*, explored a two-part question: "What motivates the person who is comfortable staying in the assistant principalship? And, how do these career assistant principals find support and make meaning of their lives and their work?" (Marshall, 1993, p. 2). She based the study on a previously developed theory (Marshall *et al.*, 1990) that "people make career choices after sorting through a complex set of considerations about themselves as persons and comparing those values and realities with a range of signals, norms, requirements, and realities in the environment of their career" (Marshall, 1993, p. 3), and career socialization theory. The career assistant principal "is the person who finds satisfaction in the assistant principalship and will probably stay in the position until retirement" (Marshall, 1993, p. 4).

Based on this study, Marshall drew several conclusions. With regard to site-based policies, she states, "The most critical policies are those that are played out at the school site. A good relationship with one's principal and a smoothly functioning administrative team can make all the difference in the world, not just to the individuals involved, but to the school as a whole" (Marshall, 1993, p. 37). In reference to issues at the district level, she concludes that assistant principals like a predictable environment and that much of their job satisfaction is tied to their ability to keep the environment at the school stable and predictable. Additionally, she states that assistant principals like to be left alone. "When asked about how district policies and their principal help them in their career, assistant principals frequently replied, 'By leaving me alone to do my job!'" (Marshall, 1993, p. 39). Assistant principals viewed time away from school for conferences, etc., as meaningful district support. With regard to salary and benefits, Marshall concludes, "Salary increases do matter. All the intrinsic rewards derived by inventive and self-sustaining career assistant principals cannot make them forget salary schedules" (Marshall, 1993, p. 40). Their comparison groups were the principals and teachers in their own district, not assistant principals in other states or districts. With regard to training, internships, and staff development, she states, "Training targeted to assistant principal tasks, while rare, is the most meaningful for career assistant principals. None reported having internships focusing on the assistant principal position" (Marshall, 1993, p. 42). Concerning who provides help and support to assistant principals, she determined that principals are the individuals within the district who provide the most support for assistants. Assistant principals saw meaningful support in the form of efforts made by principals in teaming, advising, supporting, and allowing flexibility.

The aspects of the assistant principalship that were considered particularly detrimental to job satisfaction of career assistant principals were "Four administrators doing the work of ten; managing year-round schools on a ten-month contract; and cutting personnel, clerical workers, and custodians. This list illustrates how policy changes ... could make the career assistant

principal position intolerable. The intensity and stress of the job cannot be borne without breaks" (Marshall, 1993, p. 44-5). Assistants also had mixed feelings about restructuring and site-based management policies, feeling that these things often throw their role into turmoil, particularly when they are left out of the loop for policy making. Assistants would like to be more involved in instructional supervision. Additionally, they would like a change in perception that views them as more of an associate with, rather than assistant to, the principal.

Taken individually and collectively, the components of the assistant principal's worklife are intertwined and complex. Combine this complexity with the controversies about how the role of the assistant principal should evolve in the current wave of school reform and we are faced with yet more questions desperately needing to be addressed.

Research questions
The yet unmet needs regarding understanding the assistant principalship grants merit to the primary questions on which this study is based. First, how do assistant principals spend their time, and does personal background influence how they enact their roles? Second, at what activities do assistant principals feel successful and what factors predict such feelings? Finally, how do assistant principals describe their worklives, and what is the relationship between perceived success and quality of worklife ratings?

Methods
Data collection
In May 1997, a survey was distributed, anonymously, to the assistant principals of all public and approved private schools in Maine serving students between kindergarten and grade 12. Mailing lists were generated from the *Maine Educational Directory* and by the Maine Principals' Association. A follow-up mailing reminder was sent in June. Of the 300 assistant principal surveys mailed, 125 (42 percent) were returned complete. Completed surveys were entered into an SPSS database by the Center for Educational Research at the University of Maine.

The sample
The characteristics of the respondents (see Table I) mirror the demographic background of the population of all assistant principals in Maine by gender and formal education level. The allocation of assistant principals by the grade structures of their schools also reflects the distribution in the population of Maine assistant principals, which lends further support to the population validity of the sample. However, Maine students and schools are not representative of the USA as a whole. The generalizability of this study is limited to assistant principals of schools with high achievement scores and high levels of teacher involvement (relative to the USA as a whole) in decision

Variable	N	Percentage	Mean	SD
Gender				
Female	43	36.4		
Male	75	63.6		
Age				
21-30	3	2.5		
31-40	33	28.0		
41-50	56	47.5		
50 or >	26	22.0		
Highest education				
Bachelors +	16	13.6		
Masters	38	32.2		
Masters +	56	47.5		
CAS		4.2		
Doctorate	3	2.5		
Years in administration			7.75	6.62
Years teaching experience			13.07	7.35
Student enrollment			552.2	266.0

Table I.
Assistant principal
backgrounds

making and professional activity (Carnegie Institute for the Study of Teaching, 1990).

Variables and measures
Assistant principals were asked to indicate:

- How frequently they engage in 41 assistant principal activities (1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = very often).
- How clear expectations of these functions are (1 = not at all clear, 2 = vague, 3 = fairly clear, 4 = very clear).
- How much success they have with these activities (1 = none, 2 = very little, 3 = moderate, 4 = a great deal).

The 41 activities clustered into the following seven scales representing major roles of assistant principals:

(1) Instructional leadership (five items, $\alpha = 0.72$, e.g. curriculum development activities).

(2) Personnel management (12 items, $\alpha = 0.85$, e.g. coordinating staff efforts on a daily basis).

(3) Interactions with the education hierarchy (five items, $\alpha = 0.61$, e.g. district administrative team meetings).

(4) Professional development (three items, $\alpha = 0.63$, e.g. professional reading).

(5) Resource management (five items, $\alpha = 0.70$, e.g. monitoring condition of the building).

(6) Public relations (four items, $\alpha = 0.61$, e.g. meeting with parent/citizen groups).

(7) Student management (six items, $\alpha = 0.58$, e.g. direct supervision of students).

Assistant principals were also asked to rate their level of agreement with 28 items describing their worklife (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). These items clustered into the following five indicators:

(1) Professional commitment (nine items, $\alpha = 0.84$, e.g., I think the stress and challenges of being a principal are well worth it).

(2) Community support (two items, $\alpha = 0.76$, e.g. parents are supportive of the school).

(3) Sense of efficacy (seven items, $\alpha = 0.61$, I have enough training as a principal to deal with almost any learning problem).

(4) Goal congruence (seven items, $\alpha = 0.76$).

(5) Balance between personal and professional lives (two items, $\alpha = 0.74$, e.g. I find it easy to balance my commitments to job and family).

Please refer to the Appendix for a complete list of variables and the individual items comprising them.

School background variables included total student enrollment, percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch, and school level (e.g. elementary). Personal characteristics included gender, education level, age, and experience.

Data analysis
Descriptive and multivariate statistics were utilized to explore the patterns of involvement and success, and how they relate to the worklife of assistant principals in this study. The results of these analyses follow.

Results
How do assistant principals spend their time?
Not surprisingly, assistant principals in Maine reported devoting their largest portion of time to student management ($M = 3.37$). In other words, they frequently spend time resolving student problems and contacting parents and teachers regarding their students. This finding echoes numerous studies that have identified responsibility for student discipline as the one consistent fixture of the role of assistant principals (e.g. Hartzell, 1995; Pellicer *et al.*, 1987; Reed and Himmler, 1985). In addition to discipline, they also spend significant amounts of time on student management by organizing and supervising co-curricular activities.

The next highest means for allotment of time were time spent interacting with the education hierarchy (2.67) and personnel management (2.66). The

common thread in these two measures is the time assistant principals dedicate to relations with education personnel. Maine assistants spend less time acting in roles involving public relations (2.61), which entails interacting with non-educators and the external community. Relatively lower amounts of time also were allocated to professional development (2.61). Moreover, those assistant principals who participate in the fewest professional development programs for administrators are also less likely to engage in professional reading, in-service programs for instructional personnel, and meetings/courses for professional growth ($t = 0.351$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, assistant principals in Maine spend the least time on instructional leadership (2.43) and resource management (2.34). The latter is clearly an area in which principals maintain control.

The influence of personal background. While this sample of assistant principals is spending an overwhelming amount of time on student management, there are subgroups who are devoting considerably more time to instructional leadership, personnel management, professional development, and public relations. The largest differences were found between gender. Specifically, females ($M = 2.95$) report significantly higher engagement in professional development activities than males ($M = 2.41$) ($t = 4.349$, $p < 0.000$), as well as more involvement as instructional leaders (2.69 vs 2.28) ($t = 3.313$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, females are more likely to be involved with personnel management, such as scheduling classes, running faculty meetings, and regularly coordinating staff efforts compared to males (2.53) ($t = 2.845$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, females ($M = 2.77$) were found to be more active in public relations activities than males ($M = 2.52$) ($t = 2.020$, $p < 0.05$). Contrary to participation in the above activities, females ($M = 3.23$) report significantly less involvement in regular student management than males ($M = 3.45$) ($t = -2.821$, $p < 0.01$). Since female assistant principals in this sample have more teaching experience than males (14.6 vs 12.6 years), ANCOVAs were run with years teaching experience as a covariate to determine if these allocation of time differences still held between gender. All differences remained significant. Moreover, there were no differences in hours worked by gender. Male and female assistant principals work an average of 55 hours per week.

To analyze the influence of previous teaching experience on how assistant principals enact their roles, the sample was divided into three groups:

(1) five or fewer years of teaching experience;

(2) six to ten years experience; and

(3) greater than ten years teaching experience.

ANOVAs revealed that assistant principals with five or fewer years of teaching experience spend less time as an instructional leader than those with greater than ten years of teaching experience (2.07 vs 2.53, $F = 5.24$, $p = 0.007$). In addition, assistant principals with five or fewer years of experience (2.44) report understanding the role of instructional leadership less than teachers with both six to ten (3.07) and greater than ten years experience (2.85) ($F = 4.08$, $p = 0.02$).

Finally, assistant principals with six to ten years of experience (2.78) and greater than ten years of experience (2.74) report more success in the instructional leadership role than those with five or fewer years of teaching experience (2.29) ($F = 3.98$, $p = 0.02$). Thus, it appears that assistant principals on the fast track, those who assume the role after teaching for five or fewer years, have less ability to understand, enact, and be successful at instructional leadership than assistant principals who attain the role with more years of teaching experience. Interestingly, despite these differences by teaching experience, no differences were found between age. In other words, those entering the education profession at more mature ages do not allocate their time differently once they assume an assistant principalship.

Contrary to teaching experience, additional years of experience as an administrator does not result in more time devoted to or success at instructional leadership. In fact, the only reported significant difference between those with four or fewer years of administrative experience (2.48), five to ten years of administrative experience (2.81), and greater than ten years of administrative experience (2.76) is that the least experienced group spends less time on personnel management ($F = 3.68$, $p = 0.029$). Therefore, it appears that spending more time in the role exerts little influence on how assistant principals spend their time, the degree to which they understand aspects of the role, and feelings of success with various functions. When looking at years of experience as an assistant principal at the same school, those with greater than six years of experience spend more time on personnel management, public relations, and resource management than those with fewer years of experience in the same position. Ironically, this group of more seasoned assistant principals may be the least likely to be promoted.

At what activities do assistant principals feel successful?
Interestingly, the assistant principals rank ordered their success at each role in the exact order that they ranked time allocated to those roles (see Table II). In other words, they spend more time at the tasks they believe they do well, or they justify their time spent by perceiving greater success in areas in which they invest more heavily. Accordingly, they reported the greatest success with student management (3.40) and the least with professional

Role	Frequency of involvement	Clarity of role	Success
Student management	3.37	3.45	3.40
Interactions with education hierarchy	2.67	3.00	2.98
Personnel management	2.66	3.30	2.91
Public relations	2.61	2.93	2.90
Professional development	2.61	2.89	2.82
Resource management	2.43	2.85	2.66
Instructional leadership	2.32	2.83	2.66

Table II.
Descriptive statistics
for frequency of
involvement, clarity of
expectations and
success

development (2.82), instructional leadership (2.67), and resource management (2.66) (1 = none, 2 = very little, 3 = moderate, 4 = a great deal). The overall correlation between involvement and success with the role was 0.720, while the correlation between clarity of the role and success was even higher at 0.771. Thus, assistant principals report high levels of roles that are clear to them. Moreover, they allocate less time to those roles that are less clear (r = 0.452). As reported in Table II, the roles that are less clear are professional development, resource management, and instructional leadership.

As was the case with frequency of involvement, clear differences were found in reported success between gender. Specifically, female assistant principals reported greater success than males with instructional leadership (2.92 vs 2.54, t = 2.81, p = 0.006), public relations (3.08 vs. 2.80, t = 2.41, p = 0.018), professional development (3.05 vs 2.69, t = 2.90, p = 0.005), and personnel management (3.15 vs. 2.78, t = 2.87, p = 0.005). These findings are consistent with those who contend that female school leaders are more collaborative and focused on teaching and learning.

Unfortunately, those assistant principals with higher formal levels of education and those who have participated in greater numbers of professional development activities did not report higher levels of success at any of the roles assessed. Moreover, when asked to what degree various experiences contributed to their success as an administrator, they rated graduate training in educational leadership (2.73), a principal internship (2.01), professional readings (2.53), and attending professional development conferences/seminars (2.66) significantly lower than experience as a teacher (3.40) and experience in management (2.96) (1 = very little, 2 = some, 3 = substantially, 4 = a great deal). When asked to rate how various individuals and groups have influenced their work as an assistant principal, they rated universities/professors (2.51) less helpful than everyone but the local school board (2.77). Interestingly, they rated secretaries (1.54) the most helpful (1 = provided sustained help to me, 2 = often been helpful when I needed it, 3 = negligible influence on my work, 4 = made my work more difficult). While these findings lend support to those who claim that graduate training in educational administration does not lead to school improvement (Haller *et al.*, 1997), it also is important to note that approximately 50 percent of these assistant principals participated in three or fewer professional development programs over the past two years, and 13.6 percent participated in none.

What is the relationship between perceived success and quality of worklife ratings?
The vast majority of assistant principals described their worklife in positive ways. Surprisingly, given their low levels of professional development and emphasis on student development, the most favorable attitudes were linked to efficacy (3.17) (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). In other words, they tend to agree that they are making a positive

difference for students at their school and that they have enough training/ experience as an administrator to deal with almost any learning problem. When looking at bivariate correlations, efficacy was unrelated to time spent on student management ($r = 0.127$). On the contrary, time spent on instructional leadership ($r = 0.377^{**}$) and professional development (0.429^{**}) were positively correlated with sense of efficacy.

Maine assistant principals also reported high levels of community support (3.09), goal congruence (2.79), and professional commitment (2.98). Only 9.3 percent said they would not go into public education if they had the decision again, while only 6.0 percent indicated they would not choose to be an administrator again. These low percentages raise the question of what is so rewarding about student management, the most time-consuming activity of these assistant principals? Time spent on student management is not significantly correlated with commitment ($r = 0.166$). On the contrary, time allocated to instructional leadership ($r = 0.497^{**}$), professional development ($r = 0.429^{**}$), public relations ($r = 0.400^{**}$), and personnel management ($r = 0.382^{**}$) are positively related to commitment. In other words, assistant principals who allocate more time to working with adults and focus on teaching and learning are feeling greater rewards than those primarily managing students. However, the majority of assistant principals are in this latter category, and while their commitment levels are not as high, they appear willing to stay in educational administration, hoping to one day attain a principalship. While concerns about quality may still exist, there appears to be a sufficient quantity of educators in Maine aspiring to the principalship, mitigating concerns some are espousing about principal supply. The larger issue may be whether their experiences as assistant principals are helping to prepare them for the principalship.

The only worklife indicator that received low ratings was balance (2.16). In other words, these assistant principals, who reported working an average of 55 hours per week, find it difficult to balance their personal and professional lives. Given societal expectations of the role of mother, women described the balance challenge as significantly more difficult than their male counterparts. Surprisingly, the only significant correlation between balance and the role assessed in this study was with interaction with the education hierarchy ($r = -0.12^{*}$). This finding may be attributable to an underlying dilemma. In other words, those assistant principals who have the most difficulty balancing their professional and personal lives are also the ones who spend the most time interacting with the education hierarchy (e.g. completing required reports, attending administrative meetings ...). Perhaps assistants are spending personal time doing paperwork that they are unable to complete during the scheduled workday. It is likely that during regular school hours they are delegated time-consuming responsibilities from which principals want to buffer themselves.

Conclusions

At an aggregate level, the emerging picture is that the assistant principal's job is one that centers around management of people, particularly students. Reacting to needs and solving problems supersede attending to the proactive goals of curriculum planning, instructional supervision, resource allocation, and professional development. In this era of increasing accountability, many are calling for additional and stronger sources of instructional leadership. It is hoped that this need might be filled by the assistant principal (e.g. Kaplan and Owings, 1999; Golanda, 1991). The patterns described herein should be viewed with concern, especially since assistants also reported less clear understanding of the instructional leadership role relative to the managerial roles in which they spend most of their time. Furthermore, prior research revealed strong evidence that these patterns are constant over time, meaning that as the educational environment changes, the assistant principal's role remains the same – steeped in student management.

Consistent with prior research, findings revealed gender differences concerning assistant principals' time spent on certain tasks. Females were found to spend more time on instructional leadership, professional development, personnel management, and public relations activities compared to males. In other words, female assistant principals are more involved and visible in affairs directly associated with the program of the school than are male assistant principals. This is not surprising, considering women in leadership roles act in a more personalized, democratic and participative style, whereas males are more structured, directive and autocratic (Lee et al., 1993). Moreover, this finding supports the notion that women and men leaders perceive the world differently as a result of differing experiences. Gilligan (1982) described these differing worldviews by saying, "women operate in a 'web,' suggesting interconnectedness, collaborative nature, and entrapment; men, on the other hand, operate on a 'ladder,' suggesting achievement orientation, hierarchical thinking, and escape." Again, this reflects females' orientation to prioritize and focus their efforts toward the school's core technology rather than management.

There appears to be a disconnect between the relevance of formal training and professional development for assistant principals in Maine and their organizational role. This gap between training and practice echoes Marshall's (1993) conclusion that training targeted to assistant principals' work is rare if not completely lacking in most training and professional development programs. This calls attention to university preparation programs' lack of focus on the assistant principalship (Gorton and Kattman, 1985) and district socialization and professional development initiatives which divests from the assistant's role (Marshall and Mitchell, 1991). As a result, assistant principals' understanding and clarity of their role remains problematic. Collectively, the findings regarding how assistant principals spend their time suggest that the

assistant principalship does not appear to serve as an appropriate training ground for the principalship.

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Appendix. Scale

Interactions with the education hierarchy ($\alpha = 0.61$):
  District administrative team meetings
  Consulting with superiors
  Dealing with state/community agencies
  Meeting with school board
  Completing required reports

Instructional Leadership ($\alpha = 0.72$):
  Curriculum development activities
  Selection of texts and instructional materials
  Encouraging student learning
  Curriculum evaluation activities
  Meetings for long term planning

Personnel management ($\alpha = 0.85$):
  Orientation of employees
  Supervision/evaluation of teachers
  Supervision/evaluation of support personnel
  Social activities with staff
  Schedule/assignment of work for all personnel
  Recruitment of support personnel
  Scheduling classes
  Running faculty meetings
  Responding to the needs of teachers

Responding to the needs of support personnel
Recruitment of instructional personnel
Coordinating staff efforts on a daily basis

Professional development ($\alpha = 0.63$):
    Professional reading
    In-service programs for instructional personnel
    Meetings/courses for professional growth

Public Relations ($\alpha = 0.61$):
    Responding to parent/community inquiries
    Meeting with parent/citizen groups
    Recruiting parent volunteers
    Preparing written information about the school and events

Resource management ($\alpha = 0.70$):
    Budget preparation
    Monitoring condition of equipment
    Fundraisers for the school
    Purchasing/accounting
    Monitoring condition of the building

Student management ($\alpha = 0.58$):
    Direct supervision of students
    Resolving student problems
    Organizing co-curricular activities
    Contact with parent regarding child
    Consulting with teachers about specific students
    Supervising co-curricular activities

Professional commitment ($\alpha = 0.84$):
    I enjoy being a principal
    My work is energizing and rewarding
    I think the stress and challenges of being a principal are well worth it
    I would like to be a principal at this school for many years
    * I think about staying home from school because I am just too tired to go
    * If I could get a higher paying job, I would leave the principalship in a minute
    I have as much enthusiasm as I did when I first became a principal
    * I often wonder if the long hours involved in the job are worth it

Goal congruence ($\alpha = 0.76$)
    * Priorities change too frequently and are sometimes hard to keep track of
    There is a shared vision for this school
    * I spend a lot of time responding to conflicting expectations for this school
    At this school, there is widespread agreement regarding the goals we want to achieve with
        our students
    Teachers at this school have high standards for all students
    This school has explicit goals for student performance
    Most teachers at this school have values and philosophies of education similar to my own

Sense of efficacy ($\alpha = 0.61$)
    I have enough training/experience as a principal to deal with almost any learning problem
    * The hours students spend in school have little influence compared to their home
        environment

When all factors are considered, principals are a powerful influence on student achievement
* School rules and policies hinder me from the job I am trying to do
I am making a positive difference for students at this school
I feel as though I am making progress at my school
I am confident in my ability to be an effective school leader

Balance between personal and professional lives ($\alpha = 0.74$)
* Because of the long hours required by the role, I have little time left for myself
I find it easy to balance my commitments to job and family

Community support ($\alpha = 0.76$)
Parents are supportive of the school
The community takes a lot of pride in the school