

A Comparison of the Administrative Leadership of Principals in Graded and Nongraded Elementary Schools

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TYPICALLY, assessments of the efficacy of educational innovations focus on the significance of differences they produce in student performance. This is probably too narrow a view to take of their educational significance, since students are by no means the only participants in the educational process and innovations, to be effective, must make a difference with all participants in the educational process. In a recent investigation of the nongraded school, the influence of nongrading on principals was studied.¹ Specifically, the differences between principals of graded and nongraded schools in their (a) knowledge of the tenets of nongrading, (b) acceptance of these tenets, and (c) administrative performance were studied.

However, the participating schools differed in the extent to which nongrading had been incorporated into their instructional programs. Some schools had both graded and nongraded programs. Conceivably, this difference might exert an influence on principals, so these differences were reflected in the analysis of the data. Consequently three classifications for principals were used: principal of a school where all classes are graded; principal of a school where all classes are nongraded; and principal of a school with both graded and nongraded classes.

Next, two replications of the study were planned to test the stability of the findings. In three successive years, the data needed for the analysis were collected from the principals. In the interim, personnel changes occurred, but only data from principals participating in all three investigations were used.

Knowledge of the Tenets of Nongrading

Clearly, knowledge differences between principals of graded and nongraded schools are minimal and unpatterned and are easily attributable to chance fluctuations (Figure 1).

Though the differences in knowledge of the tenets of nongrading found among principals of graded and nongraded schools were marginal and statistically insignificant, perhaps the rate at which knowledge of these tenets is acquired differs. After all, principals of nongraded schools make numerous decisions directing the development of nongrading in their schools, and, presumably, these decisions are made after study of their relevance for the school's goal of nongrading instruction. Principals of graded schools, though, do not have opportunities to develop comparable background since the very na-

¹ William P. McLoughlin. *Evaluation of the Nongraded Primary*. New York: St. John's University Press, 1969.

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ture of the graded school and its administration virtually preclude such experiences. To test this speculation, the change scores of principals of graded and nongraded schools on the three administrations of the *Education Opinion Inventory*² were contrasted. The results of this analysis are found in Figure 2.

Clearly, the differences in change scores for principals of graded and nongraded schools are modest and meaningless. This manifestly precludes presuming that experience, alone, in administering a nongraded school makes one more conversant with the tenets of the nongraded school.

First Administration				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
School type	2	396.00	198.00	.249
Principals	15	1194.40	79.63	
Total	17	1590.40		

Second Administration				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
School type	2	214.10	107.05	1.470
Principals	14	1019.43	72.82	
Total	16	1233.53		

Third Administration				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
School type	2	355.05	177.52	1.052
Principals	11	1856.17	168.74	
Total	13	2211.22		

Figure 1. Comparisons of Knowledge About the Nongraded School Among Principals of Graded, Nongraded, and Mixed Schools

If successful nongraded instruction emanates from informed leadership, contemporary efforts at nongrading may be underpowered. Nowhere were indications found that principals of nongraded schools are more knowing of the teachings of the movement than are their colleagues administering graded instructional programs. Furthermore, time does little to alter this situation, and the gains in knowledge of these teachings made by principals of nongraded schools between administrations of the *Education Opinion Inventory* are virtually identical to those gains made by principals of

² The *Education Opinion Inventory* is a special measure developed by William P. McLoughlin to measure knowledge of the principles of the nongraded school movement.

First Administration				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
School type	2	27.24	13.62	248
Principals	14	769.23	54.95	
Total	16	796.47		

Second Administration				
Source	DF	SS	MS	F
School type	2	33.05	16.52	1.525
Principals	11	1191.83	108.35	
Total	13	1224.88		

Figure 2. Comparisons of Change Scores in Principals' Knowledge of the Nongraded School in Graded, Nongraded, and Mixed Schools

graded schools. Perhaps the reason the accomplishments of contemporary nongrading efforts are less than glowing is that "low-voltage" solutions are being supplied to the "high-powered" instructional problems of nongrading.

Acceptance of Nongrading

Like knowledge, the differences in acceptance of the tenets of the nongraded school among principals of graded and nongraded schools are minimal (Figure 3). No statistically significant differences were evident here either on any of the administrations of the *Education Opinion Inventory*.

As with the scores for knowledge of the tenets of the nongraded school movement, the significance in the differences in change scores in acceptance of these tenets for principals of graded and nongraded schools was tested for much the same reasons given earlier. The results were comparable; the differences in the change scores for principals of nongraded and graded schools do not show marked differences with time (Figure 4).

So, if the differences in the educational

	4.61 First Administration		3.00 Second Administration		3.25 Third Administration	
	Above	Below	Above	Below	Above	Below
Nongraded	3	4	4	3	2	3
Graded	1	2	1	1	1	1
Both	3	5	3	5	2	3
	Chi-Sq. .125		Chi-Sq. .135		Chi-Sq. 0	

Figure 3. Differences Between Principals of Graded and Nongraded Schools in Acceptance of the Teachings of the Nongraded School

	First Administration	Second Administration	Third Administration
Sum P +	69	38	46
Sum P -	57	40	32
N	16	12	12
T	67	38	32

Figure 4. Differences in Change Scores in Acceptance of the Teachings of the Nongraded School by Principals of Graded and Nongraded Schools

programs in graded and nongraded schools emanate from differences in the principals' knowledge and acceptance of the teachings of the nongraded school, these differences will be slight and negligible. Initially, and on subsequent measurements, no statistically significant differences were found in either the principal's knowledge or acceptance of the doctrines of the nongraded school for principals of graded and nongraded schools.

Administrative Performance

The principals' ratings on the *Principals' Interview Guide*³ were used in evaluating their administrative performance. The guide uses the five critical tasks of administration—involving people, making policy, determining role, setting goals, and appraising programs—and the principals' responses in each category were categorized as follows:

INVOLVING PEOPLE

- None. Tradition, previously established policies, or perceived dictates of higher authority (state education department, superintendent, school board, etc.) followed
- Principal decides what shall be done
- Committees are used

MAKING POLICY

- None made
- Graded school policy followed
- Nongraded school policy developed

DETERMINING ROLE

- No determination made
- Graded school roles used
- Nongraded school roles developed

SETTING GOALS

- No goals set
- Graded school goals followed
- Nongraded school goals developed

³The *Principals' Interview Guide* is a structured interview guide on the six dimensions of nongraded instruction by William P. McLoughlin for his evaluation of the nongraded school.

APPRAISING PROGRAM

- No appraisals made
- Appraisals based on intuition or anecdotal evidence
- Appraisal follows a specified plan for evaluation.

The number of replies analyzed, not the number of principals questioned, for each task is reported. Each principal was asked the same questions, in the same sequence; but since different numbers of schools are in each classification, the N's are, naturally, different.

The analysis of these data is found in Figure 5.

Based on the data in Figure 5, the following conclusions are offered:

1. *Involving People.* Few differences, initially or on subsequent administration, were found in the ways principals involve people in the school's operation. Generally, regardless of the school type, people are simply not involved. Where actions are required, the principal typically decides what shall be done. In schools that have both graded and nongraded classes, principals tend, though not strongly, to involve people in the school's operation, and there are indications this involvement increases over time.

2. *Making Policy.* Principals with nongraded, graded, or both type classes in their schools differ only slightly in their policy-making activities. Either minimal policy-making activities are undertaken or the policies developed for the graded school continue to guide the school. This is truer for graded and nongraded schools than schools with both graded and nongraded classes. The latter difference obtained only on initial inquiry. On follow-up investigations these differences disappear, and the principals in the three school types are virtually identical in their policy-making activities.

3. *Determining Role.* Here, too, the principals of schools with graded, nongraded, and both type classes tend to be more similar than different. Initially, determining role garnered considerable administrative attention, but on subsequent study, this was not

Program Operation	School type	First Administration				Second Administration			
		None	Principal's decision	Committee involved	N	None	Principal's decision	Committee involved	N
Involving people	Nongraded	66.67	18.59	14.74	156	74.18	6.04	19.78	182
	Graded	71.80	26.92	1.28	78	82.05	11.54	6.41	78
	Both	64.90	23.56	11.54	208	76.92	6.25	16.83	208
Making policy	Nongraded	65.86	14.63	19.51	246	70.03	9.41	20.56	287
	Graded	74.80	21.14	4.06	123	78.05	16.26	5.67	123
	Both	55.49	17.07	27.44	328	81.33	13.78	4.89	225
Determining role	Nongraded	34.73	52.08	13.19	144	66.67	17.26	16.07	158
	Graded	36.11	59.72	4.17	72	81.94	15.28	2.73	72
	Both	36.98	44.27	18.75	192	61.46	12.50	25.04	192
Setting goals	Nongraded	59.29	23.33	17.38	420	64.08	17.76	18.15	420
	Graded	60.95	30.00	9.05	210	62.86	28.57	8.57	210
	Both	58.75	14.46	26.79	560	47.68	15.71	36.61	560
Appraising programs	Nongraded	95.83	.52	3.65	192	90.18	2.68	7.14	224
	Graded	94.79	3.13	2.08	96	90.63	1.04	8.33	96
	Both	87.89	4.30	7.81	256	81.64	6.64	11.72	256

Figure 5. Comparison of Differences in Administrative Performance of Principals of Graded and Nongraded Schools

the case. Consistently, however, the actions taken in determining role tended to confirm the roles ascribed to people in graded schools rather than roles associated with nongraded schools. Principals of schools with both graded and nongraded classes differ more from this description than principals of schools where all classes are nongraded. The former tend to define roles more in keeping with the aims of nongraded instruction than the latter, and this tendency increases over time.

4. *Setting Goals.* The activities of principals on this task are parallel and consistent. By and large, school type is a reasonably poor discriminator, too; for the goals established, regardless of school type, are harmonious with the outcomes of graded school instruction. Goal-setting activities in schools with both type classes are manifestly different from those in schools that are either entirely graded or entirely nongraded. The principals of the former are increasingly involved with this task, and work rather consistently toward establishing goals that will meet the ends of the nongraded school.

5. *Appraising Programs.* The picture on appraisal is clear and discouraging. Prin-

cipals, regardless of school type, simply do not appraise the school's educational program and instructional offerings. Certainly, structured study of these activities is a lost or, at least, a neglected art. There is some sketchy evidence that principals of schools with both graded and nongraded classes appraise their programs somewhat more than other principals, and these appraisals tend to be structured. However, when one realizes that in many of these schools nongrading is a "pilot program," one wonders about the evidence which will be used to justify its continuance or discontinuance.

To determine if detail aids discernment, the principals' administrative performance in the three types of schools studied was broken out along program lines essential to nongrading. The paradigm for the analysis appears in Figure 6, and the conclusions reached follow.

Individual Differences. The basic differences in educational beliefs between graded and nongraded schools suggest that great differences should exist in the leadership which principals of nongraded schools give to provisions made for individual differences. This is manifestly so. Virtually without exception,

Program Operation	Administrative Function				
	Coordinating Administrative Structure and Function			Improving Educational Programs	
	Involving people	Making policy	Determining goals	Setting goals	Appraising programs
	NG/G/Both	NG/G/Both	NG/G/Both	NG/G/Both	NG/G/Both
Individual differences					
Pupil progress					
Evaluation					
Curriculum					
Instruction					
Organization for learning					

Figure 6. Paradigm for the Analysis of Administrative Function in Nongraded Schools

principals of graded schools do little or nothing to provide for individual differences. Yet having all or only some of the classes in a school nongraded has minimal influence on the performance of principals in this area. In either setting, leadership is provided. This is not evident with the two tasks central to providing for individual differences, making policy and determining role.

Furthermore, most actions of principals, particularly in the later stages of the program rather than the earlier stages, are consonant with the rubrics of the nongraded school movement. Not unexpectedly, the efficacy of these efforts goes unappraised, for here as elsewhere principals simply do not assess what schools are doing regardless of the type of program they are operating.

Pupil Progress. Next to individual differences, pupil progress is perhaps the educational function most closely associated with the nongraded school. Indeed, some schools call their programs continuous *pupil progress* plans rather than nongraded plans because it is more descriptive of their objectives. Unhappily, deeds do not match desires. Regardless of school type, the leadership given the cause of pupil progress by principals is virtually identical.

First, little is done, and the actions taken, by and large, are harmonious with the ends of the graded school's instructional

commitment more than with those of the nongraded school. The goals set, the policies made, and the roles determined are calculated to make efforts at having students of a common age master a common body of information more efficiently and effectively. Lamentably, the soundness of these efforts is not appraised in any of the organizational school types studied.

Schools with both graded and nongraded classes stray, a little, from this pattern. They work more at determining roles, making policies, and setting goals. Furthermore, these efforts are compatible with the ends of the nongraded school. Perhaps the very existence of contending educational viewpoints under a single roof has a salutary effect on the efforts made to nongrade a school.

In such a setting differences in policies, roles, and goals must be clear, sharp, and real for the guidance of teachers with nongraded classes.

Evaluation. Differences in administrative performance in evaluation are rare and erratic—so much so that distinct patterns for the performances of principals of any of the school types studied do not emerge. Their involvement is so limited that evaluation is virtually immune to their influence. This is equally true in schools where all classes are nongraded, where all classes are

graded, and where both graded and non-graded classes are found in the same school. Since evaluation is usually a thorny area at best, perhaps prudence dictates that one should "let sleeping dogs lie," and involvements here are avoided. When evaluations are made, they tend to confirm the educational beliefs of the graded school about students and learning rather than those of the nongraded school.

Curriculum. Differences in administrative performance among principals of graded, nongraded, and schools with both graded and nongraded classes are invisible and indeed nonexistent in their administration of curriculum. Virtually nothing is done. The curriculum changes made are superficial and supportive of the goals of the

graded more than the nongraded school. Furthermore, rather than pushing forward with curriculum revision which would truly make the school nongraded, the tendency is to stabilize on initial accomplishments or retrench on the effort to make the school's curriculum nongraded.

Instruction. The data on administrative performance and instructional practices are bewildering. Few genuine and persisting differences in the performances of principals of graded and nongraded schools are evident. In fact, for schools whose beliefs about instruction are presumably polarized, these similarities are alarming. It is only when a few actions taken by principals of schools with both graded and nongraded classes are contrasted with those of principals of graded

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and principals of nongraded schools that any differences, frail as they are, emerge. The pattern, for what it is worth, seems to be that when graded and nongraded classes are under the jurisdiction of one principal, he is considerably more involved in making policies, determining roles, and setting goals for the school's instructional program than are principals of schools where all classes are either graded or nongraded. Again, this dichotomous arrangement may serve to sharpen understandings about the things schools should be doing for children.

Inescapably, however, the conclusion forthcoming from these data is that principals generally have virtually ignored the leadership expected from them in molding the school's instructional program. Mainly, type of class organization notwithstanding, principals just are not involved in the school's instructional program. Perhaps they feel teachers are competent to make the decisions needed about instruction without their help and leadership. Or perhaps they are unsure of the shape the school's instructional program should assume, for when they act they tend to reiterate the beliefs associated with graded school instruction rather than to formulate a nongraded school instructional program.

Organization for Learning. Here differences in the administrative actions of principals of schools with graded and nongraded classes are pronounced. Schools where classes are nongraded, in whole or in part, find principals organizing for learning. Not so with graded schools. In the former, people are involved in making the policies, setting the goals, and determining the roles required by this organization. The principals of graded schools give custodial care to the organization inherited or mandated by a higher authority.

While differences in the appraisals made of these organizations can be found, they are less acute than those found in the other tasks of administration. This is especially true when introducing nongrading. With time, however, these differences tend to increase. This is understandable. In the

initial stages there is little to appraise; with time, opportunities for appraisal multiply. Perhaps, too, principals of graded schools feel no empathy for an organization for learning which they had little or no voice in establishing and developing, and feel little need to wonder how well it functions.

Differences in the administrative performances of principals of all nongraded schools and those with some graded and some nongraded classes are less apparent. They are greatest in the areas of determining role and setting goals. Here principals of schools with both graded and nongraded classes are more involved. In many of these schools, nongrading is a pilot project or experimental program. Obviously, people want to know the differences between it and the graded school program. This requires setting goals. Furthermore, since it is experimental its efficacy will be questioned, and the decision to continue or abandon it must ultimately be made. This requires appraisal.

Conclusions

Leadership differences among principals of graded, nongraded, and partially nongraded schools are so minute that generalizations based on them are hesitantly and conditionally offered. The differences between the two leadership groups appear to be related to *organization* rather than *instruction*. Unlike principals of graded schools, principals with nongraded programs molded the school's routines, procedures, and organization to include a setting conducive to nongrading. Yet, as with their colleagues in graded schools, direct involvement with instructional protocol was avoided. The root causes for this discrimination are probably unfathomable. Perhaps it is an ingenuous, though tacit, demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and principals in producing a nongraded instructional program. Doubtlessly this is necessary for successful nongrading; but ultimately, considerably more precision and discernment must be brought to this process if a common ground for discussing the direction and destiny of the program is to emerge. □

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