

# *Perceived Value Discrepancies of Teachers and Principals—A Threat to Creative Teaching*

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SECONDARY-SCHOOL principals often ignore what ought to be one of their primary functions—helping faculty members clarify and share their philosophies of education. Secondary-school principals have a strong influence upon the philosophy of education of their staff. Most principals are unaware of how this influence functions and, therefore, are not able to plan a constructive approach. This article will throw the light of research on such questions as the following:

How much support for his own values does the teacher perceive from his principal?

As the teacher gains experience, what happens to his perception of the principal's values?

What is the relation between perceived community support and the teacher's willingness to teach according to his ideals?

What are some of the bases for teacher clique formation?

How are the professional aspirations of the teacher related to his values?

Principals who are unconcerned about these problems have abdicated their responsibility for the improvement of instruction.

All good teachers are aware that teaching and learning are not synonymous. Teachers can neither learn for pupils nor make pupils learn. All a teacher can do is behave in such a way that the student is likely to learn. The only aspect of the teaching-learning situation which is under the direct control of the teacher is his own behavior, which will inevitably be directed at reaching his own goals for that particular situation. The teacher whose primary goal is to help students learn to perceive, clarify, and solve their "own" problems will behave quite differently from the teacher whose primary goal is to cover the material in the textbook. The teacher with an exaggerated need for affection from his students will behave still differently. Here is the important point, however. *Not a single one of these teachers will be able to devote his energies freely toward his*

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*primary goal if he feels that by so doing he will be alienated from and disvalued by his colleagues, principal, students, or students' parents.*

Recently I sat down with five bricklayers and their foreman. I asked them, "How do you judge whether or not a man is a good bricklayer?" After a short discussion they agreed that he must lay brick at the proper rate of speed (neither too slow nor too fast), lay them well, and be a reasonably "good guy." I asked them whether he had to enjoy his work, respect it, show high moral character, *etc.* I learned that these factors were irrelevant. At this point one of them said, "I wish Ernie were here," and the others smiled in agreement. It seems that Ernie was the "best bricklayer in the state" and because it was Monday and Ernie was absent it was almost certain that he was home sleeping off a drunk. If he were here "working off a drunk," he would have told me and everyone else where to go.

The next day I sat down with a group of high-school teachers and a principal and asked them, "How do you judge whether or not a man is a good teacher?" They found complete agreement on only one point. A teacher must know his subject matter. When I asked them what this meant, there was a considerable difference of opinion. There was some feeling that the teacher's attitudes toward adolescents, himself, his colleagues, and parents were important, but no teacher was able to define "the good high-school teacher" to the satisfaction of the rest.

*The fact that "teacher goodness lacks definition" is much more important than administrators realize.* Because there is a lack of objective criteria to judge teaching performance, a teacher is highly vulnerable to his guesses about how others evaluate him as a teacher.

Under the best of circumstances there is likely to be some difference of opinion in regard to ideal teacher values and behavior. Even where long-range goals are similar, teachers, principals, students, and parents may differ in their views of the best methods to reach these goals. Understanding each other's values will not eliminate these differences, but it will reduce any exaggerated differences perceived by the teacher.

To provide evidence for these matters, data were gathered from the principal and entire teaching staff of three secondary schools, and from 22 additional secondary-school principals in southeastern Michigan (Total N = 98). The experimenter met with the teachers on two occasions. They were assured that no feedback would

be given to school administrators, and then were asked to fill out a 16 item questionnaire entitled "Controversial Aspects of Teaching Performance." Each item dealt with teaching behavior. Seven choices were possible, with position #1 expressing the traditional or conservative teacher behavior and position #7 expressing the more progressive or liberal teacher behavior. The first item, for example, read as follows:

- A. A dull class has difficulty learning the same amount of material that a bright class can learn. Sometimes teachers or departments feel, however, that all classes must cover the *same* amount of material so that pupils may be prepared for advanced classes.

<i>Position (1)</i>	<i>Position (4)</i>	<i>Position (7)</i>
All classes, bright or dull, cover approximately the same amount of content.	Each class covers only as much material as it can decently handle.	Within any given class, assignments are differentiated so that both bright and dull students are working to capacity. Bright students cover more material at a greater depth.

After appropriate instructions, each teacher went through this questionnaire four times, with a different "set" each time, selecting: The position that most closely describes your *actual* performance in the classroom

The position that most closely describes your *ideal* performance in the classroom

The position that most closely describes your *ideal* performance in the eyes of the majority of the other teachers in this building

The position that most closely describes your *ideal* performance in the eyes of your principal

In the example above the mean response of the teachers was:

Actual performance .....	4.64
Ideal performance .....	6.33
Estimate of other teachers' ideals for you.....	5.28
Estimate of the principal's ideals for you.....	5.60

This tells us that on this item the mean response of the 76 teachers indicates a belief that their own ideals are very liberal, their own actual performance is slightly above the midpoint, and that they believe that other teachers and principals would like them to perform in a somewhat more liberal fashion than they do—but not in as liberal a fashion as they themselves would like to. Other items on the questionnaire dealt with such things as: teacher *versus* student-teacher planning; using one or two "tried and true" teaching methods *versus* a continual experimentation with new teaching

methods; avoiding *versus* accepting the function of counseling students in non-academic matters; having little *versus* much concern for the social structure of the classroom; never *versus* regularly using small group teaching methods; little *versus* much class use of community resources; emphasis upon the "right" answer *versus* emphasis upon methods of problem solving; dealing with symptoms *versus* dealing with the causes for misbehavior; and teacher evaluation *versus* evaluation by students and teacher.

The teachers were encouraged to give reasons why their teaching "fell short of their ideals." Here were the results:

Lack of time .....	72%
Lack of materials .....	51%
Too many pupils per class.....	45%
Lack of space.....	22%
An unsympathetic administration.....	16%
Inadequate teacher training.....	10%
Ill health .....	3%
Family trouble .....	3%

It is interesting to note that administrators have direct responsibility for the five highest ranked items.

The responses of the teachers in the three schools were very similar. Between school correlations of the mean scores for actual performance on the sixteen items were as follows: +.87, +.89, and +.86. There were only a few significant differences between the schools. The teachers in one school were perceived as having more liberal ideals than the teachers in the other two schools (4.53 as compared to 3.84 and 4.03) and the principal in one school was seen as less liberal than the principals in the other two schools (3.90 as compared to 4.62 and 4.60).

A teacher could receive social support if he felt that others shared either his teaching ideals or his teaching practices. Many of the 76 teachers involved in this study apparently are in a rather uncomfortable predicament, not because their values are really very different from those held by their colleagues, but because they believe their colleagues hold values rather strikingly dissimilar from their own. Seventy-six per cent of the time there was a discrepancy between teaching in a way that would be ideal in their own eyes and teaching in a way that they thought would be ideal in the eyes of their colleagues.

Table I depicts the response of a male science teacher with a master's degree and two years of experience. This teacher and many others incorrectly perceived their colleagues and principal as holding much less liberal views than their own. On all items except

H, J, K, and L, this teacher not only saw his colleagues' ideals as discrepant from his own, but also believed that his colleagues' ideals were completely outside the gamut covered by his own actual and ideal behaviors. An examination of all the responses ( $N = 1,216$ ) indicated that such a perception occurred more than 44 per cent of the time. Actually, the mean of other teachers' measured ideals was outside the gamut of ideal and actual behavior less than 20 per cent of the time.<sup>1</sup> More often than not, teachers guessed that their colleagues were less liberal than they actually were. At any rate, it is important to realize that almost half the time teachers felt that their colleagues would not place a very high value on either their actual or ideal behavior.

TABLE 1

Item	Perception of:				Actual Values	
	Actual Performance	Ideal Performance	Colleagues' Ideals for You	Principal's Ideals for You	Principal's Ideals	Colleagues' Ideals (Mean)
A	6	7	4	3	6	6.1
B	3	4	1	2	4	4.6
C	5	6	3	3	3	5.2
D	4	5	2	1	3	4.8
E	4	6	1	1	6	5.6
F	3	4	1	2	7	4.8
G	5	4	2	2	5	5.3
H	2	2	2	2	5	4.9
I	3	3	5	4	3	4.9
J	1	4	1	1	4	5.0
K	1	4	1	1	5	5.1
L	3	3	3	3	4	5.2
M	6	6	4	4	6	5.8
N	5	6	4	3	7	5.5
O	2	3	1	2	2	4.8
P	3	4	2	2	7	5.3

Discrepancy between perceived actual and ideal performance = 17

Discrepancy between perceived actual performance and perceived colleagues' ideals = 23

Discrepancy between own ideals and perceived colleagues' ideals = 38

Discrepancy between own ideals and colleagues' expressed ideals = 17.9

Discrepancy between own ideals and perceived ideals of principal = 37

Discrepancy between own ideals and principal's expressed ideals = 20

Perhaps it would be easier for a teacher to endure this discrepancy from his colleagues if he felt that he had solid support from his principal. Unfortunately, the teacher did not feel this way. Again, more than 44 per cent of the time they felt that their principals' ideals for them were not only different from, but that they

<sup>1</sup> Difference between 44% and 20%;  $T = 4.93$  significant  $< .0001$ .

also fell outside the gamut of their own ideal and actual behavior. Twelve out of the 76 teachers indicated that their teaching suffered as a result of "an unsympathetic administration." These twelve teachers felt that their principals' ideals for them fell outside the gamut of their own ideal and actual behavior 64 per cent of the time. This same response was given only 39 per cent of the time by teachers who did not perceive the administration as unsympathetic.

All this would seem to indicate that teachers and principals do not share common values in regard to teaching. This, however, is not the case. The values of teachers and principals are very close. The mean ideal of the teachers was 5.26 ( $N = 76$ ), the mean of the teachers' perceptions of the principals' ideals for them was 4.46 ( $N = 75$ ), and the actual mean of the principals' ideals for their teachers was 5.60 ( $N = 3$ ). Comparing each teacher's estimate of his principal's ideals for him with the principal's expressed ideals for him indicates that 56 per cent of the time teachers thought the principal less progressive and 16 per cent of the time they thought him more progressive than he actually was.<sup>2</sup>

A comparison of the mean ideals of the teachers ( $N = 76$ ) with the mean ideals of all the principals ( $N = 25$ ) on the sixteen items indicates that on four items they are almost the same, principals were slightly more progressive on three items, and somewhat less progressive on the other nine. On none of the sixteen items is the difference between teachers and principals significant.

Principals and teachers were asked to select the items they considered more important for good teaching. The rank-order correlation between principals' mean response ( $N = 25$ ) and teachers' mean response ( $N = 72$ ) was  $+.90$ . Teachers rated the following items as most important: rate of content average; development of critical thinking in students; and approach to discipline problems. Principals regarded the same three items as most important but reversed them in order.

Even though the professional ideals of teachers and principals were very similar, there may be a number of reasons why teachers in all three schools tended to see their principal as holding a much less liberal point of view than their own. Principals are normally the "gate-keepers." When the teacher is enthusiastic about taking his students on a field trip, it is often the principal who must raise objections. When the teacher may be excited about the possibility

<sup>2</sup>  $T = 6.44$  significant  $< .001$ .

of throwing away the text and experimenting with a new course of study, it is often the principal who reminds the teacher that he had better check with Mr. G., who teaches a more advanced course. Then too, principals represent authority figures, and not all of us are comfortable in their presence. Some of us tend to see all authority figures as threatening, even if we must give them certain attributes in order to make sure they become a threat.

When the teachers in this study were divided into groups on the basis of teaching experience, some large and surprising differences were found. Table 2 summarizes a few of these differences. As indicated by Table 2, when the teachers in this study were asked to report their actual and ideal performance in the classroom, those with ten or more years of experience saw themselves as more liberal. This seems to be a relatively pure factor, uncontaminated by differences in subject matter.

As teachers gained experience, they regarded their principal as holding more liberal ideals for their own behavior. The product-moment correlation between age and experience was .85 ( $N = 75$ ). Holding age constant, the correlation between years of teaching experience and the perception of the discrepancy between own teaching ideals and their principals' ideals for them was  $-.23$  (significance  $= .05$ ). Holding experience constant, the correlation between age and perception of the discrepancy between own teaching ideals and their principals' ideals for them was  $+.02$ .

Probably most of us believe the beginning teacher possesses a more liberal philosophy of education than his more experienced colleagues. Educators sometimes express the view that you can't teach old dogs new tricks. The data in this study indicate that the "old dogs" already know and practice some of these "new tricks." If future research substantiates these results, it might be more realistic to work for curricular change through the more experienced teachers, especially if the principal is going to furnish leadership.

There were no significant differences between the ideal teaching behavior expressed by members of different departments. As teachers perceived their actual performance in the classroom, however, differences did exist. Means were:

Mathematics	(N = 9)	3.61
Social studies	(N = 8)	3.88
Science	(N = 11)	4.02
Business	(N = 7)	4.23
English	(N = 14)	4.37
Shop, physical education, and driver education	(N = 16)	4.39
Home economics	(N = 4)	5.11

TABLE 2. Differential Responses of Teachers Based Upon Length of Teaching Experience

	Mean Values			Significance
	0-2 Years (N = 22)	3-9 Years (N = 29)	10+ Years (N = 25)	
Estimate of own actual performance.	4.04 ± .85	3.98 ± .88	4.66 ± .92*	*differs from each of the other groups <.001
Own ideal performance.....	5.22 ± 1.01(*)	5.09 ± 1.14*	5.55 ± .89*(*)	* <.01 (*) <.05
Estimate of principal's ideals for own performance.....	4.15 ± 1.07	4.25 ± 1.32	4.96 ± 1.00*	*differs from each of the other groups <.001
Discrepancy between own ideals and estimate of principal's ideals for own performance.....	1.80 ± .98	1.65 ± .95	1.15 ± .74*	*differs from each of the other groups <.001
Percentage of correct estimates of principal's ideals for own performance.....	12.5	22.31	22.37	



The difference between mathematics and English, for example, is significant at better than .01 ( $T = 4.18$ ). Caution is needed in interpreting these data. With small samples, and a large number of obtained measurements, not all "significant differences" may be significant.

Teachers were asked to respond to the following question on a 9-point scale with 1 being the worst school in the county, 5 being above average in the county, and 9 being the best school in the county: "How do you think the citizens of this community would rate this school?" The mean response for 76 teachers was 6.87. The standard deviation was 3.3, indicating a wide variability of response to this item. Teachers who felt a lack of community support responded to other items on the questionnaires in a manner significantly different from those who perceived that the community strongly supported their school.

There were 30 teachers who perceived their own ideal teaching performance as *more* progressive and their colleagues' ideals for them as *less* progressive than their actual performance. For these 30 teachers, there was a correlation of  $-.45$  between the discrepancy provided by their actual and ideal performance and perceived community support for the school (significance  $<.05$ ). One possible interpretation of this correlation is that, when teachers feel strong community support for their school, they may feel encouraged to use a teaching style closer to their own ideals than to the ideals they perceive their colleagues hold for them. This interpretation gains plausibility from the fact that the ten teachers who perceived the lowest community support had a total mean discrepancy between their actual and ideal performance of 27.1 while the thirteen teachers who perceived the highest community support had a total mean discrepancy of only 18.3 on this measure. Meanwhile, those who perceived low community support had a smaller discrepancy between their perceived actual performance and their colleagues' ideals for them than did those who perceived high community support ( $X^2 = 20.72$  significance  $<.01$ ).

It would seem that if administrators can help teachers perceive that the community supports the school, teachers may feel free to teach as they want to teach rather than as they believe others want them to teach.

The teachers in this study were asked to identify "those people whom you think of as belonging to your group." Within the three schools, 50 men chose 198 men and 21 women, while 25 women chose 67 women and 18 men. The cleavage between the sexes is

even more striking in the two smaller schools where 25 men chose 86 men and 6 women, and 14 women chose 35 women and 3 men. In this, and in an earlier study, there was a slight tendency for women with children of their own to form separate cliques from childless women.

Of the 76 teachers, 32 received 5 or more choices each, 10 received only one choice, and 7 received no choices. The subject matter one teaches provides a partial basis for clique formation. For example, instead of naming specific teachers as members of a school group, a teacher would sometimes specify "all the other science teachers." One's subject matter may also have something to do with how often one is chosen by other teachers. Forty-two English, social studies, science, and mathematics teachers received 4.69 mean choices, while 22 business, shop, driver education, and physical education teachers received 2.41 mean choices. The difference between these two means is significant at better than .05 ( $T = 2.11$ ). Within this rather small sample, the teachers in the "academic" areas were chosen as group members more than twice as often as those in the "non-academic" subjects.

Principals of small schools would do well to realize that there is likely to be a choice cleavage based on sex and should attempt to keep a reasonable balance of men and women on the staff so that choice is not too restricted.

Regardless of school size, it is likely that teachers in non-academic areas (with the exception of the home economist and her ubiquitous coffee pot) will be underchosen. Principals may find many ways to alleviate or prevent this.

There were some interesting relationships between the teachers' professional aspirations and their other responses to the questionnaire. Numbers in parentheses indicate the response to the following question: What would you like to be doing five or ten years from now?

- ( 6) A building principal or superintendent
- (14) Student guidance work
- (22) Teaching in a college
- (19) Teaching in a secondary school
- (13) Other.....

*(please specify)*

Those who aspired to college teaching perceived a large discrepancy between their own ideals and their principal's ideals for them. The difference between this group and all the other groups is significant at better than .05. However, most of those who aspired

to college teaching were rather inexperienced and, as pointed out earlier, with experience teachers begin to see more similarity between their own ideals and those of their principal. Examining the perceived discrepancy between own ideals and principals' ideals for those teachers with less than eight years of experience discloses that those who aspired to college teaching ( $N = 13$ ) had a total mean discrepancy score of 32.15 as compared to 19.80 for those who aspired to an administrative position ( $N = 5$ ). The difference between the first group and the other two groups is significant at better than .05.

Examining all of the responses to a variety of factors it appears that those teachers who aspire to college teaching are quite different from the other teachers. As they see themselves, they are more conservative in regard to actual teaching practices than other teachers (not statistically significant), and more conservative in regard to teaching ideals than any other group (difference between this group and those who aspire to guidance positions is significant at better than .05).

Those who aspired to an administrative position ( $N = 6$ ) seemed to fall close to the grand mean on most of the variables. Only one significant difference could be found. The members of this group perceived very little discrepancy (17.67) between their own ideals and those of their principal. For comparison, those who aspired to a college teaching position perceived a discrepancy of 29.38 on this measure. The difference between the two groups is significant at better than .01. It seems quite likely that those teachers who had administrative aspirations were already beginning to "identify" with the role of the principal.

Those who aspired to a position in student guidance ( $N = 14$ ) had the most liberal ideals. The difference between their ideals for classroom performance and those of the group that aspired to college teaching was significant at better than .01. Those who wished to become guidance counselors had the largest perceived discrepancy between their actual and ideal classroom performance and perceived a rather large discrepancy between their own ideals and those of their principal.

Those teachers who wished to continue teaching in the secondary school were close to the grand mean in their ideals for classroom performance and their (perceived) actual classroom performance was more progressive than any other group. As a result, they perceived a smaller discrepancy between actual and ideal classroom behavior than did any other group. They also perceived a smaller

discrepancy between their own ideals and those of their principal than did any other group.

Another measure was used in this study which seems worthy of mention. Each teacher was asked to give a (realistically) optimistic and pessimistic estimate of his classroom performance on twenty items. A large total discrepancy would indicate a teacher who lacks consistency in regard to his self-concept. Generally, a low score on this measure indicates a "healthier" self-concept than does a high score. Those who wished to continue teaching in the secondary school had a significantly "healthier" self-concept than those who aspired to a college teaching position, or those who wished to become guidance counselors (significant  $<.01$ ).

For each variable in this study, it appears that those who wish to continue as secondary teachers are found to have less conflict than those who wish to leave the secondary-school classroom. There is an interesting implication here for the secondary-school principal. If he can help teachers perceive less conflict between his own practices, ideals, and others ideals, he may not only help them become better teachers, but also make secondary-school teaching distinctively more attractive to them.

When secondary-school principals are expected to act as judge, prosecutor, and jailor; to order janitorial supplies, and keep coaches and parents happy at all times, perhaps it is expecting too much to hope that the principal will be concerned about teacher values. Let us hope not!

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#### TULSA GRADUATES DO WELL IN COLLEGE

Members of Tulsa Public Schools graduating class of 1960 set a high standard of performance in their freshman year at college. A survey shows 46 per cent of their grades were A's and B's, and less than 10 per cent failed or withdrew. A follow-up study begun on the 1960 class, will continue for five years to measure the students' progress through college. Last year a survey revealed that 51 per cent—1,419 students—of the 1960 high-school graduates went directly into college. This is the largest number of students Tulsa has ever sent directly to college from high school. A periodic check of students' grades is planned with registrars of the colleges and universities where the class members are enrolled.