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The Elementary Principal/Superintendent Relationship as Perceived by Teachers and Its Effects on the School: A Case Study Comparison

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Abstract

Despite more than a decade of research on bottom-up school change, the principal/ superintendent relationship continues to be studied primarily as a traditional flow of power from the top down. There is little research that considers the proposition that power vested in principals can be exercised upwardly within the school district hierarchy in the form of independence from and influence on the superintendent. Given the lack of research on these phenomena, it is not surprising that we could find no studies that explore the effects of hierarchical

independence and influence on school climate. The present study investigates both. Two schools form the basis of this comparative case study. The schools were chosen based on scores obtained through the *OCDQ* and *TAI* instruments. The first school is selected for its high scores on both instruments and the second school is selected based on average scores on the *OCDQ* and the *TAI*. Both schools are in the same school district and a brief description of that district begins the discussion. Individual case study findings as well as a comparison of the two case studies follow.

I. Hierarchical Independence and Influence

According to Hoy and Miskel (1991), principals use hierarchical independence and influence within the formal structure of the district to give, various resources for the school. Hoy and Miskel define hierarchical independence as, "the extent to which administrators demonstrate their autonomy from superiors" (p. 81). To illustrate, a principal exerts hierarchical independence from the superintendent when she decides to implement a major reform or instructional innovation, relying on her own expertise, knowledge, and ability to acquire resources rather than relying on guidance and resources from the superintendent or central office administrators (Fullan, Anderson, & Newton, 1986; Leithwood, 1988).

Hoy and Miskel (1991) describe hierarchical influence as the ability of the principal to gain positive benefits for the school from the superintendent. Adapting from the above illustration, hierarchical influence is used when a principal persuades the superintendent to support a unique school program or to provide additional resources to the school

Hierarchical independence and influence, though important, can be difficult for a principal to exercise. As middle level administrator in a hierarchical organization, a principal simultaneously occupies a subordinate and superordinate position. Consequently, a principal must balance often-competing demands and expectations from the superintendent and teachers. Moreover, while both the superintendent and teachers value independent and influential action on the part of the principal, they do so for different reasons.

For the superintendent, independence and influence are valued when problems are resolved at the school level or when external resources are secured with little encumbrance to the district (Crowson & Morris, 1984). Independent or influential action that is inconsistent with the expectations of the superintendent or that creates problems for central office is viewed with a less sanguine eye. Teachers, on the other hand, value independent and influential actions when these actions bring needed resources to the school, are consistent with the values held by the faculty (Porter & Lemon, 1988), or buffer the faculty from external demands and pressures

School Climate

We propose that teachers, as prime beneficiaries of a principal's upward exercise of power, are uniquely positioned to observe the effects of a principal's use of hierarchical independence and influence. As teachers observe this dynamic, according to Boyan (1988), their perceptions of school climate are affected. Although there is little

consensus concerning forces that mold school climate, variables that have been studied include principal leadership (Kottcamp, Mulhern, & Hoy, 1987; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995), teacher morale (Pallas, 1988), and academic emphasis (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Some researchers (Halpin, 1966; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990) describe school climate as ranging from open to closed. Schools with an open climate operate with few rules or regulations while schools with a closed climate are hampered with restrictive rules and regulations and close supervision (Hoy et al., 1990).

These studies and others (e.g., Boyan, 1988) suggest that school climate is a mediating factor in the academic achievement of students, adding to its importance as a focus of educational research. As noted, we base the definitions of our terms on Hoy and Miskel (1991). These authors defined school climate as the "relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants, affects their behavior, and is based on their collective perceptions of behavior in schools" (Hoy & Miskel, 1991, p. 221).

II. Limitations

In our study, we consider teachers' impressions of principals' exercise of hierarchical independence and influence, and examine the extent to which these impressions affect teachers' perceptions of school climate. At this point, it is necessary, to acknowledge some important limitations of our study. District size plays a role in shaping the relationship between the principal and superintendent. In small districts, because there are fewer levels of administration to separate a superintendent from principals (Crowson & Morris, 1985), the principal/superintendent relationship is more direct and interactions more frequent than in large districts. Large districts are characterized by many administrative levels between a principal and the superintendent, creating indirect and often impersonal communication between the two, thereby muting the relationship (Crowson & Morris, 1985; Boyan, 1988). In order to enhance the chances of finding an effect, if there is one, our study occurred in a small, rural district and is unlikely to generalize to large or urban districts.

Similarly, elementary schools, because they are smaller and structurally less complex than secondary schools, offer a better context for initial explorations of teachers' perceptions of the principal/superintendent relationship. Because our study occurred in at the elementary level, results may not generalize to secondary schools. Finally with regard to limitations, the linkage between teachers' perceptions of the principal/superintendent and their perceptions of school climate is indirect. Still, we assert that these perceptions are inherent in the complex reality of schools. Given the impact of school climate on student achievement, exploring the linkage between teachers' perceptions of the principal/superintendent relationship and school climate merits study.

III. Statement of Problem

The teacher perceived power vested in principals in the form of independence from and influence on the superintendent may relate to teachers' perceptions of school climate as well. Given the lack of research on these phenomena, we explore the effects of hierarchical independence and influence on school climate as perceived by teachers. This case study is an illustration of how this relationship is played out in practice. Determining how and why teachers value certain aspects of their principal's relationship with the superintendent allows knowledge to be gained about the functioning of schools

and how schools can become more effective.

IV. Method

Our study uses case analysis to compare a typical school ~with a positive outlier, a research design recommended by effective schools researchers (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). Results reported here are part of a larger study that took place in a southern state and investigated the effect of the hierarchical independence and influence on school climate. For the larger study, sample districts and schools were selected on that criterion that both the superintendent and the principals had been in their current position for at least 3 years. This criterion gave the principals and their respective superintendent a chance to develop a relationship before the study data were collected. As noted above, all participating schools were at the elementary level and were comprised of grades kindergarten through five.

To gather the data, all regular education teachers in these schools were asked to complete two questionnaires. To measure teachers' perceptions of principal hierarchical independence and influence, the *Teacher Attitude Inventory* (Glascook, 1996 [TAI]), was developed. A panel of six experts was used to analyze possible items for the *Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI)* survey developed. The experts are two professors in educational administration, one professor in educational research, two principals, and one 12-year veteran teacher. Each expert was told the purpose of the *TAI* survey and what each section is intended to measure. Modifications and changes were made to items based on the advice and opinions of these experts.

The *Teacher Attitude Inventory (TAI)* includes 14 statements that measure teachers' perceptions of the principal's level of independence from and influence with the superintendent. Independence is defined as "the extent to which administrators demonstrate their autonomy from superiors as they interact with teachers" (Hoy & Miskel, 1991). This independence from and influence with the superintendent is measured by a five point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", with a response option of "don't know" included. Scoring is completed by reverse coding negative questions for independence and influence, and the summing the seven item scores. Each set of scores is aggregated to the school level and the average is generated so that there is one score for each school.

To assess school climate, teachers completed the *Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire - Revised Elementary* (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottcamp, 1991 [OCDQ-RE]). The *OCDQ-RE* measures school climate using two components. One component, principal behavior is comprised of three dimensions, including directive, supportive, and restrictive. Hoy et al. (1991) report Cronbach's alphas of .95 to .80 for these dimensions. The second component of the *OCDQ-RE*, teacher behavior, also consists of three components, disengaged, collegial, and intimate. Cronbach's alpha for these dimensions range from .90 to .75 (Hoy et al, 1991). For each dimension in both components, scores fall into one of five categories ranging from very low through average to yew high.

The case studies reported here involve two schools that were selected using results from both questionnaires. As noted, one school was typical. In this school, teachers scored nearest the mean on both questionnaires. The other school, a positive outlier, was chosen because teachers scored farthest from the mean on both questionnaires. Serendipitously, both of these schools were located in the same district, permitting more meaningful comparisons.

To gather data, both schools were visited for two days each. During this time, the

principal and a random sample of teachers were interviewed. In addition, parents and ancillary personnel, such as the school nurse, were interviewed. A protocol explored the extent to which the superintendent played a role in the day-to-day life of the school; beliefs held by faculty and the principal about the relationship between the principal and superintendent; and the effect the relationship between the principal and superintendent had, respectively, on teachers and principal on a typical day. In addition, information was gathered. The researcher spent time observing and having casual interactions in the halls, cafeteria, and on the playground. Interviews were held for half an hour to an hour with individuals and taped. Classes were observed and children were engaged in casual conversation. The researcher kept a running record through tape recordings during all sessions and observations. Over 200 pages of transcribed notes and interviews were generated. In presenting the results, pseudonyms are used to ensure the confidentiality of participating schools and individuals.

V. Results

The case analyses reported below explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of principal hierarchical independence and influence and their perceptions of school climate. Findings for each school are presented separately, and include the results of the *TAI* (teacher perceptions of the principal's hierarchical independence and influence) and *OCDQ-RE* (teacher perceptions of school climate), a brief contextual description of the school and professional staff, the impressions of the teachers who were interviewed regarding (a) the principal's exercise of hierarchical independence and influence and (b) the school's climate. Our discussion of the results concludes with a comparison of the two schools in terms of teachers' perceptions of principal hierarchical independence and influence and their perceptions of school climate.

District Description

The two schools are in the same district as noted, hence, we begin with a description of the district. The Jackson County school district was once considered rural and poor, but now has a more exurban flavor and serves as a bedroom community for a nearby city. Over half of the population is high school graduates and nearly 10% have college degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). Of the 17,000 students who attend the 8 schools in Jackson County, 94% are European American, with 6% of the students describing themselves as African American or other.

Greenbriar Elementary (typical school)

The *TAI* score is 18.111 indicating that teachers have a neutral to positive perception of the principal/superintendent relationship. The Greenbriar Elementary scores in the average, low, and very low categories on the principal dimensions of supportive (495.258), directive (429.906) and restrictive (397.032) of the *OCDQ*. Scores are high in the collegial (586.357), very high in the intimate (609.299), and average in the disengaged (497.619) dimensions. These scores indicate a school in which teachers perceive moderate levels of principal positive or negative behaviors that impact their work life, teachers have good rapport with each other but teachers are somewhat disengaged from the workplace. This school is between the engaged and disengaged climates described in the typology of climate developed by Hoy, Tarter, and Kottcamp (1991). However, while teachers reported good rapport among themselves, on the

typology developed by Hoy et al. (1991), they tended toward disengagement from the workplace.

As mentioned previously, additional data were collected through interviews. At Greenbriar, interviews were conducted with the principal, 3 teachers, a student teacher, 3 parent aides, and the school nurse. As will be seen, these participants were uniformly positive about the principal.

The school itself serves children from the working class community that it is located. Brickwork on the 30-year old building has faded to a grayish red color and the window trim is dull with age. Once inside the building, an orientation toward neatness and cleanliness is evident. Splashes of color from student artwork adorning classroom doors brighten the faded pastels of the hallways. Classrooms are clean, though many are cluttered because there is not enough room to hold all the instructional materials, books, art supplies, and maps. One teacher explained, " With so many children, we have no room for instructional materials." The principal's office is small but professional in appearance. Walls display many citations and awards earned by the school. Like the classrooms, the principal's desk is cluttered as if too many things require her attention. In the cramped outer office, where the secretary sits, an up-to-date computer stands out against the other office equipment which old and worn.

Most of the 450 children who attend Greenbriar walk to school. School demographics reflect the district, with 94% of the students describing themselves as white, 6% as black, and 35% as eligible for free-or-reduced-price lunch. According to the Food and Nutrition Bureau of the state Department of Education (1995), Greenbriar is a low poverty school. As might be expected given the demographics, the students do reasonably well on standardized tests, performing above the district, state, and national median percentile for fourth graders on the California Achievement Test.

Also consistent with the demographics, children were well behaved and quietly involved themselves in their assignments. In one of the few instances when disciplinary action was required, two children were sent to stand in the hallway just outside the classroom door. The teacher of the offending students explained they had been removed for talking out of turn, noting, "Children are not allowed to disrupt classroom activities."

There appeared to be a genuine friendship among the teachers and between the faculty and the principal. One teacher noted that, "Many of the teachers and the principal play Keno once a week, and this year, as soon as school ends, several of the teachers and the principal are going on vacation together."

In addition, Greenbriar enjoyed strong parental support and many parent volunteers. During the 2 days of observation, 20 parents were observed assisting teachers in the classroom or with clerical chores, such as duplicating papers. These parents sincerely liked the teachers and the principal, and felt the school operated well. One commented, "The principal maintains discipline and the children know and follow the rules so this school runs really well."

Curiously, of all the people interviewed, the school nurse was the only one who mentioned the children's intellectual growth without prompting from the interviewer, noting "It is very important to give the children a chance to learn as much as possible." Neither the teachers nor the parent aides offered such statements. Moreover, when asked directly about the students' learning, teachers and parents unanimously responded "Discipline is very strict in the school and the principal does not allow children to interrupt the learning of others." The recurring theme that surfaced during the interviews was that discipline was the most important objective of the school. Asked if discipline was important of itself or as a prerequisite for learning, one teacher said "Discipline is just as important as knowledge."

The principal, Ms. Cook, like the faculty, is a white female. Now in her late fifties, Ms. Cook has been an educator in the district for over 20 years, the last 4 of which have been as principal at Greenbriar. She is professional in dress and demeanor with an air of strength about her; yet, she smiles easily. Ms. Cook was very open to questions and had no hesitancy in offering opinions about teachers, children, the school, parents, or the district staff. She was quite proud of the staff' rapport and mentioned the Keno nights and the upcoming vacation as evidence. This network of friendship was perhaps more important because of the contrast it offered to the prior principal. The prior principal was a male who the teachers viewed as authoritarian and unfriendly. Teachers seemed to appreciate that Ms. Cook went out of her way to establish good communication with them and to include them in group activities. Her more cordial demeanor did not hinder school operations, however. It was mentioned the children's intellectual growth without prompting from the interviewer, noting that "It is very important to give the children a chance to learn as much as possible." Neither the teachers nor the parent aides offered such statements. Moreover, when asked directly about the students' learning, teachers and parents unanimously responded "Discipline is very strict in the school and tile principal does not allow children to interrupt the learning of others." The recurring theme that surfaced during the interviews was that discipline was the most important objective of the school. Asked if discipline was important of itself or as a prerequisite for learning, one teacher said, "Discipline is just as important as knowledge."

As suggested above, Ms. Cook did not mention students' academic or social performance until ask specifically. Even then, she did not speak of test scores, though it will be remembered that the schools scored above the state and district average median percentile, and when pressed about student behavior, Ms. Cook stated firmly that children "are here to learn. No child can interfere with the learning others." It was as if the children were not the purpose of the school, but a separate entity, not integral to the functioning of the school.

The principal's view of the superintendent was fairly distant. She did not indicate any personal relationship or friendliness, but there was a sense of professional respect and loyalty. Ms. Cook is one of the district personnel who are aligned with the superintendent, as opposed to the more conservative members of the school board. According to Ms. Cook, she supported the superintendent because he established good procedures, tried to respond to individual school needs, and addressed problems quietly.

Ms. Cook's description of her relationship with the superintendent indicated limited interaction between them that might suggest a low level of principal influence with the superintendent. That type of interaction does not appear to exist between this principal and the superintendent. At the same time, Ms. Cook did not any negative feelings about

As to disciplinary actions, very little is observed. One incident occurred while the researcher was in the main/secretary's office. A child was sent to the office during the observation period for disciplinary reasons. The secretary seemed very familiar with the student, asking him "Why are you here this time? Sit down and the principal will see you when she has the time." At another point, two children were observed standing in the hallway, next to a classroom door. They had been removed from their classrooms for talking out of turn. As one teacher explained, "Children are not allowed to disrupt classroom activities."

School Climate.

The school was visited in the late spring of the year. End of the year activities,

such as special topics in classes where all curriculum needs have been met, assemblies, and parties have begun, yet there is a quiet, orderly feel to the school. Children are following an established routine, both as to activities and expected behavior. Before the first bell of the day, they are cheerful, talkative, and happy. Recess is physically active (running, climbing, and jumping) with the normal yelling, laughing, and small upsets that occur with children at play. End of the day activities are boisterous as the children become excited about going home.

The teachers appear calm, their demeanor, speech and body language indicate quiet confidence in the overall condition of the school. Those teachers interviewed stated that everything is in order and on schedule because the children cause no extreme difficulties, the curriculum is being completed on time and the paper work is complete.

Teachers are asked how they feel when contemplating the start of the day. One said, "Everything runs smoothly here, the children know the rules." Every teacher response given, whether about activities, climate or environment, expresses pleasure at the level of discipline in the school. It was the only response given related to the children. There was no bragging about the children's test scores, awards, and innovations in the classroom or a specific child who has excelled in some way. Teachers were also asked what they consider a good day at school. One stated that, "Any day is good when the children are quiet and everyone is in a good mood."

The parent aides indicate that they are pleased with the school. Discipline is maintained, their efforts as aides are appreciated and even the one teacher who is demanding is manageable. The school is functioning quietly.

As to whether the superintendent is active in the day-to-day operations of the school, the teachers responded that he is not considered an active part of the school. This situation indicates that the superintendent is not a close controller of the principal's activities, as far as the teachers are aware. Teachers did not offer any information about the principal's influence with the superintendent affecting the day-to-day operations of the school either. No connections appeared evident to the teachers interviewed that the principal/superintendent relationship played a role in shaping the climate of the school.

When interacting among themselves, the children laugh and talk with smiling faces and positive body language. In the classroom, their faces are mostly neutral and their bodies are slumped in their desks. No teacher was observed making classroom presentations with an excited voice or body language. The teachers appeared to be reciting lessons. There appears to be a missing connection between teachers and children, especially during class time.

Perceived Principal/Superintendent Relationship.

Teachers at GREENBRIAR base their opinions of the principal's relationship with the superintendent on two factors: resources provided to the school and the principal's support for the superintendent over the school board's conservative members. All teachers interviewed are aware of the discord between the superintendent and the board; they are aware also of the principal's loyalty to the superintendent. The principal has made her position clear in a staff meeting.

The teachers feel that the school is receiving adequate resources, yet they are aware of the district's financial difficulties. While the teachers want more supplies and desire more computer equipment, they seem satisfied that all that could be done is being done. The teachers state that the principal is doing her best in trying to get more from the superintendent, yet seem unaware of how she is doing this task. As to the superintendent's role in the school, it is viewed as distant at best, if not non-existent. Most teachers could not remember if the superintendent had come to the school during

the year. One teacher commented that, "He has more important things to do than come see us."

The principal's influence on the superintendent is viewed as difficult to ascertain by teachers. Teachers stated that, "Getting supplies are the only way we can tell if the principal can move the superintendent." Teachers do not perceive influence in any concrete fashion as a form of power on the part of the principal. The ability of the principal to influence the superintendent is seen as too invisible to teachers.

The concept of independence is easier for the teachers to discuss. The teachers interviewed believe that the principal is independent of the superintendent and makes most decisions herself. The teachers believe that the principal follows district guidelines and does not give the superintendent reasons to closely monitor the school or the principal. The teachers' point agrees with the research (Crowson & Morris, 1985) that describes principal strategies for maintaining or obtaining independence from the central office. Crowson and Morris (1985) describe principals being aware that the superintendent and central office will give greater latitude to principals who do not make trouble for the central office. This tacit understanding between principals and the central office is part of the informal method used to control district life.

Summary.

Greenbriar is an elementary school in a poor district, which has financial problems and leadership tensions as well. While there is a general awareness of the leadership tension, the awareness does not appear to cause great stress in the teachers or the school in general. The teachers appear to be able to isolate themselves from the district level tensions.

The school functions in a traditional manner, with discipline being the main objective of teachers, parents and principal. There is consensus among the adults that the school runs well. The teachers' comments appear to show a concentration on creating a pleasant work environment for themselves. The present principal has not been in place for a lengthy tenure so it would be of interest to follow this school and see if any changes develop which might demonstrate any awakening to potential problems.

Teachers appear to value their principal for sharing the same outlook on the mission of the school that is discipline above all else. The teachers also value personal friendships with the principal. There does not appear to be any overt awareness on the part of teachers about the principal/superintendent relationship.

Teachers do not indicate any belief that the principal is influential with the superintendent, rather the teachers appear to have no perceptions about that aspect of the relationship. The only indication that even hints at influence is that teachers feel an adequate amount of resources are available for the school. Independence is also rather vague for these teachers but somewhat stronger than influence. The teachers appear to believe that because there is no evidence of interference in school activities by the superintendent, the principal must be independent of the superintendent to a high degree. As with influence, the teachers show only vague interest or awareness in the principal/superintendent relationship. Rather, teachers appear to be centered on the relationships among themselves and with the principal only. The possibility of independence and influence being interwoven is not apparent.

Waterfall Elementary (high scoring school)

The *TAI* score is 23.737 indicating that the teachers have a positive perception of the principal/superintendent relationship. On the *OCDQ*, the high elementary school

Waterfall scores are in the very high category on the principal dimension of supportive (699.814), average in the directive dimension (510.938), and very low in the restrictive dimension (306.581). Scores are very high in the collegial (673.457) and intimate (672.570) dimensions and very low in the disengaged (355.079) dimension. This indicates a school in which teachers perceive high levels of principal positive behaviors and low levels of negative behavior which impacts teacher work life; teachers have good rapport with each other and are actively engaged in their work.

Waterfall is an elementary school, serving grades K-5 plus special education classes. There are 383 children and 26 faculty members. All the children are white as are the teachers (AFSR, 1994). Waterfall has 27.5% of their classes in the 1-20 range and the rest of the classes in the 21-26 range. Student attendance (96%) is also better than the district average (95.45%).

CRT results show the children to be scoring higher than the district and state average. Waterfall places fourth out of 18 district elementary schools on the CRT for grade three; and places fifth out of 18 district elementary schools on the CRT for grade five. CAT results for the fourth grade place fourth in the district in overall performance and well above the district, the state, and the national median percentile (PPDCR, 1994).

Waterfall is located in the rural, southern part of the district. The school is located in a curve of a secondary country road. Across the road from the school is a small hardware store. There are no neighborhoods, houses or commercial entities (other than the one mentioned) within half of a mile of the school. This part of the district consists of citizens who are considered to be poorer than the people in the northern two thirds of the district. Most of the population in the southern third is considered transient.

Waterfall is over thirty years old., simple in design and consists of two faded red brick buildings and a modular cafeteria. Since the building is on a curve of a secondary, rural road that has been the sight of several accidents, attempts have been made to reinforce the chain link fence surrounding the property. The front drive where buses and cars dropped off children has a courtyard appeal with three large trees shadowing the pavement and the front of the buildings. Artwork dots the classroom windowpanes.

The interior of the school is spotless. The janitor starts polishing the floor as soon as the children begin the first class. Children's artwork is arranged beside the classroom doors and the colors of the walls are pastel and cool to the eye. The school is well lit and not cluttered with boxes, supplies or equipment. The cafeteria is spotless with the chairs and tables wiped clean and ready for children. There is new equipment purchased recently visible in the kitchen area.

The classrooms have neat cupboards to store supplies and there appears to be plenty of space for the children to move comfortably. The desks are widely spaced and there appears to be plenty of room the children to move around comfortably. The building is relatively old but inside the classrooms the age does not seem apparent. Instead the materials and furniture appear sturdy, up to date and useful.

The children are transported to school by bus and car. The children are from agricultural and working class families with incomes averaging below \$30,000 (U.S. Census Bureau). Most of the children are dressed in clean but faded clothes with some of the clothes being too big or small. Thirty-four percent of the children qualified for the Breakfast program (Food and Nutrition Bureau, Louisiana Department of Education) putting Waterfall in the moderately poor category of schools. It should be noted that although there is a category break between the two schools, only one percentage point separates the schools in the measure of poverty.

Morning activities are boisterous (laughing and socializing loudly) and there are many interactions among teachers and children. These interactions include socializing

and movement around the hallways, asking questions of teachers, receiving reassurance from teachers as to the day's activity. The children are observed quietly working in classes, helping each other and asking questions of their teachers. The children have smiles and positive body language such as sitting up straight, leaning forward and actively seeking inclusion by raising their hands.

All 26 teachers are white females who are local residents except for four from a nearby city who drive in each day. Thirty-five percent of the teachers hold at least a Master's degree and one holds a Ph.D. This percentage places the school above the district average but below the state average (PPDCR, 1994). The principal strongly encourages, both verbally and with financial support, those teachers who wish to pursue professional development activities. Teachers are taking advantage of these opportunities.

Two-day visit, five teachers are interviewed. Two themes emerge in these discussions. One theme is that children are the first priority of teachers and the principal. Each teacher interviewed mentioned the children, learning and the social needs of the children as their main concern and interest. The second theme is the teachers' enthusiasm for working with children. The teachers are enthusiastic about the children, future professional development, the principal's role in the school and each other. One teacher, Teacher A, who moved to the school from a large, urban school district in Texas, is most enthusiastic. Teacher A readily shared her ideas about the children, the teachers and the principal. Teacher A feels the school functions well because "the principal's personality and friendliness directly influence the attitudes of both teachers and children."

Another interviewee, a third grade teacher, Teacher B, expressed her concerns about the children, stating, "These children often come from broken homes and many times they don't know where they will be sleeping that night. This school is their only stability." Teacher B is most concerned about the children as people and feels the atmosphere of the school helps these children cope with the stress they have at home. Teacher B stated that "children need a nurturing presence in their lives and unfortunately we are the only ones who give it to them sometimes".

A kindergarten teacher stated that the principal's willingness to approach the superintendent about new techniques for "hands on manipulatives" has improved the learning experience of her students. This kindergarten teacher feels that the principal has brought many new ideas to the school during the five years she has been there and also appreciates the principal's continued support for workshops and seminars. "The workshops are very important and when we go out of town for one, we try to save the money for travel so we can spend it on supplies for the children," she explained.

The principal is a white female in her late forties or early fifties. The principal had been a teacher in the district for almost twenty years before moving to WATERFALL three years previously. She is very open and friendly, offering to assist the researcher in any possible way. No visible sign of stress are evident in the teachers at these interruptions. The teachers act as if the interruption were a normal occurrence. The teachers have been prepared for the arrival of the researcher. The principal has given all the staff nametags, telling the researcher it will make the process friendlier.

The principal expressed pride about the school in three ways. First, the children are cared for both emotionally and physically and a good learning environment is provided for them. Second, the principal is proud of her teachers because they are willing to improve their professional skills and are actively pursuing further educational opportunities. The principal stated "I try to provide funds for any teacher who wants to attend workshops that improve their teaching and bring new techniques to the classroom." Third, the principal is impressed by the community dedication to the school.

An example of that dedication is the group of five women who run the library for the school. Not one of the five women has a child in the school, but they want to perform this service for their community. The principal stated "This community ownership of the school rubs off on the attitude of teachers and students alike."

The principal is also proud of the instructional choices made by the school staff. In the previous year, the principal offered the teachers a choice of either a librarian or physical education teacher for a new staff position. The teachers decided that the five women running the library performed well so they chose the physical education teacher. Two things are significant about this event. First, the principal did not make the choice, she allowed the teachers to make the choice. Second, the reason for the physical education choice was predicated on the rather poor physical condition and coordination of many of the children. In other words, the teachers make choices based on the immediate needs of the children. As the principal described it, "Teachers in this school care deeply for the children's well being, both mental and physical."

This principal has a professional and personal relationship with the superintendent. She taught his children and knows the superintendent as a parent. The principal is very active in the district, serving as president of the district principal's association and working closely with the central office to find resources for her school. The principal said, "I bother them to death and they give me some of what I want just to get rid of me."

School Climate

The school was visited in the spring of the year. The hallways are quiet and everyone, teachers and children alike, are busily engaged in learning activities. No discipline problems are noticed. A general atmosphere of cooperation exists.

When teachers were asked how they approach each day, one responded that, "coming to school is fun, I really get excited about seeing the children." All the comments were positive. The teachers feel relaxed and comfortable with their school. When asked what a good day at school is like, teachers offer smiles and say "A good day is when everyone learns." "When the children come to school and can learn because they are not hungry and home was quiet the night before." "When there is laughter and we get that a lot here."

One teacher offered her curriculum choices as an example of how the principal allows creativity in the classroom. At the end of the spring term, this teacher works with the children on a crafts approach to Louisiana culture. "I have the children make different types of maps using beans native to the state for materials. I bring in Cajun storytellers, singers, and even a politician or two to speak with the children." Her classroom hums along and buzzes with activities. The teacher moves from one group of children to another, offering comments and answering questions. As she tells the story, she smiles and her eyes twinkle, "The children can laugh, talk, and learn all at the same time."

WATERFALL teachers hold the same views as GREENBRIAR teachers about the superintendent. The teachers really only perceive the superintendent through the principal. The principal is perceived as funneling the superintendent input to the school and because the teachers feel supported in their efforts, the superintendent is perceived as having an indirectly positive effect on the school. The principal is perceived by the teachers as having a good relationship with the superintendent, both formal and informal. The formal relationship is demonstrated through the principal's high profile with the central office and her ability to receive what the teachers perceive as special attention for the school. The teachers believe that this situation is another demonstration

of the positive nature of their school.

Three themes emerge about climate based on observations and interviews. First, children are the focus of school activities and the principal and teachers work to give the school a conducive learning atmosphere. Second, the principal succeeds in building an air of professional energy about teacher growth because growth is viewed as important to enhance the abilities of teachers. Third, the principal creates an aura of efficiency and effectiveness by providing resources for the children and teachers. The teachers perceive their principal as having positive influence with the superintendent which has proven beneficial for their school by providing resources, including funds for professional growth and classroom needs such as the computer lab. The teachers also believe that positive results have grown from the principal's ability to act independently of the superintendent. This independence has been displayed by the principal being allowed to incorporate new curriculum designs in the classroom that are not necessarily in line with district policy. The teachers believe that the principal was able to accomplish this task because the superintendent gave her greater independence because of the superintendent's trust in the principal's abilities.

Perceived Principal/Superintendent Relationship

Teacher responses at WATERFALL demonstrate only vague awareness of the principal's relationship with the superintendent. The teachers know of the principal's previous history with the superintendent and that she is able to speak with the superintendent more often than would be generally expected. Teachers also know how hard the principal works to gain resources from the central office. Unlike GREENBRIAR teachers, these teachers do not mention the antagonism between the school board and the superintendent. Either it is removed from their immediate focus or the teachers do not think it appropriate for discussion.

Teachers explain that their school is receiving more resources than other schools in the district because of the efforts of the principal. One stated, "The principal is constantly thinking of new ways to move the superintendent toward new curriculum and innovative programs." A kindergarten teacher is particularly vocal on this issue. She said, "Without the principal's support I would never have gone to the workshops and learned about new ways to stimulate my slow learner." As stated in relationship to climate, the teachers feel that the principal is able to have great influence with the superintendent. The principal is also able to act independently because the superintendent trusts her judgment. For example, the principal is allowed to modify curriculum in the school rather than strictly follow district policy, as mention in the climate section.

As to a role for the superintendent in the school, the teachers do not see it as direct. His role, as explained by one teacher, "is to manage finances, talk to the board and provide the schools what they need." The superintendent's role is viewed as being indirect and funneled through the principal. The principal is the link between the school and the outside world. As with GREENBRIAR teachers, WATERFALL teachers are vague about many aspects of the principal/superintendent relationship.

However, WATERFALL teachers appear to view their principal as being very influential with the superintendent. The personal nature of the relationship is given as one reason for this success (Hart, 1993). WATERFALL teachers appear to be aware of and value the principal's hierarchical independence and influence. The teachers believe that the principal's ability to act independently is a sign of influence with the superintendent. The principal's independence is valued as a resource by the

WATERFALL teachers.

Summary

WATERFALL functions in a participative type of administration. The WATERFALL principal gives the teachers a great deal of autonomy and allows teachers to participate in school wide decisions. There is consensus among the WATERFALL teachers that the school is working well. One teacher said, "Things run smoothly here and the children are learning." Based on interviews, there is a united goal for WATERFALL and that goal is to help the children learn. Attaining this goal is being accomplished in three ways: teachers and the principal work to create a positive learning environment for the children; teachers are being encouraged to grow professionally for their personal benefit and the benefit of the children; and resources are found by the principal to enhance the learning environment.

This much can be deduced from the teachers remarks, the principal proves to be influential by providing resources for the benefit of the school. The principal is also able to act independently about such matters as curriculum. The principal is able to give the teachers latitude to try new curriculum approaches. The teachers view this as independence on the part of the principal as beneficial to the school. From the teachers' viewpoint both hierarchical independence and influence are perceived within the principal/superintendent relationship.

Comparison of Greenbriar and Waterfall Related to Principal/Superintendent Relationship and School Climate as Perceived by the Teachers

When comparing schools, it is important to ask the same types of questions and look for the same types of situations and information. True comparisons can then be made. Nuances and specific differences are discovered and play an important role. While no attempt was made to choose schools in the same district, the situation occurred and allowed the researcher to make more in depth comparisons since the schools share the same superintendent. There are differences in the *OCDQ* dimension and *TAI* scores (see Table 1) that offer a beginning point for a discussion of the two schools. The qualitative section on the present research offers greater insight into the differences recognized by the *OCDQ* and the *TAI*.

Table 1
Case Studies: Comparison of *OCDQ* and *TAI* Scores, Demographic Information, and Academic Tests Results Between the Greenbriar and Waterfall Elementary Schools

Item	Greenbriar	Waterfall
OCDQ dimension scores		
Supportive	495.3	699.8
Directive	429.9	510.9

Restrictive	397.0	306.6
Collegial	586.4	673.5
Intimate	609.3	672.6
Disengaged	497.6	355.1
TAI	18.1	23.7
Student Population	450	383
Faculty Size	32	26
Student Attendance	95.73	96%
Suspensions	4.43%	.69%
CRT-Grade 3 (Language/Mathematics)	96/97	98/100
CRT Scores-Grade 5 (Language/Mathematics)	84/91	94/98
CAT Scores-Grade 4 Median Percentile	69.5	72.7

Principal

Principals at the two schools differ in many ways. The two most important deal with the mission of the school and norms for the professional level of teachers. At GREENBRIAR, the mission is to maintain a quiet, well-disciplined student body that does not disrupt the teachers' work environment. The principal said, "No child is allowed to disrupt class." While at WATERFALL, the mission is to provide a nurturing learning environment for the children. This difference between the two principals' results in a teacher centered environment at GREENBRIAR and a child-centered environment at WATERFALL.

The second difference deals with the professional development of teachers. The principal or teachers at GREENBRIAR did not mention professional development and when asked, the principal replied, "the school year is too busy for the teachers already so I leave that decision up to individual teachers". At WATERFALL, the principal finds seminars, workshops and other opportunities for the teachers to grow professionally and publicizes these events to her teachers. The WATERFALL principal actively recruits teachers to attend the events and finds incentives, both financial (district and private) and emotional, to entice the teachers.

Another difference is worth noting. The WATERFALL principal has good rapport with the superintendent that appears to give her greater access and a greater willingness to interact with the central office for obtaining resources. This personal relationship between the principal and the superintendent appears to be a significant contributor to the principal's success in obtaining resources.

School Climate

In both schools, the teachers state that they are satisfied with the psychological feel of their school, yet there are telling differences. GREENBRIAR teachers appear satisfied with the status quo while WATERFALL teachers are eager to use new ideas and approaches to education. GREENBRIAR appears to be ruled by a need for discipline while WATERFALL appears to be ruled by the children's needs. It is as if GREENBRIAR principal, teachers and parents view the children only in terms of how the children affect the adults in the school. On the other hand, WATERFALL appears to be concerned with the children's needs before any others. At WATERFALL discipline is one of many tools helping to create a good learning environment for the children. Resources, new ideas, innovations in curriculum choices and nurturing of the whole child are just as important tools.

Perceived Principal/Superintendent Relationship

Neither GREENBRIAR nor WATERFALL teachers state any knowledge about the principal/ superintendent relationship beyond the principal's ability to garner resources for their school and act independently. GREENBRIAR teachers are aware of their principal's support for the superintendent over the school board but appear unaffected by the situation. WATERFALL teachers are aware of their principal's personal relationship with the superintendent and value that relationship in terms of influence (resource allocations) and independence (curriculum changes).

This finding moves in concert with those items on the *TAI* that deal with influence as the principal's ability to gather resources for the benefit the school. At the same time, the WATERFALL principal demonstrates independence in decision making about curriculum materials and new instructional approaches. WATERFALL teachers perceive both hierarchical independence and influence together.

VI. Conclusion

One theme emerges from these two case studies. GREENBRIAR and WATERFALL staffs view the missions of their school differently. At GREENBRIAR, the staff expresses their mission as a concern for their work environment and that the school maintains "good discipline." The mission at WATERFALL is to provide a good learning environment for the children. At GREENBRIAR learning is secondary to discipline and at WATERFALL learning is the number one priority. Climate is perceived differently because of the GREENBRIAR teachers differ in what they value from the WATERFALL teachers. The WATERFALL teachers value a climate that is conducive to learning and nurturing children; GREENBRIAR teachers value a climate that is conducive to a smooth working situation for them.

Specific to the present study, indications of hierarchical independence and influence are very different at the two schools. At GREENBRIAR, teachers appear to be

unaware of any direct relationship between their principal and the superintendent, other than the formal, organizational relationship. GREENBRIAR teachers do not voice any awareness of principal influence with the superintendent, other than receiving necessary resources at an adequate level. The principal at GREENBRIAR is considered to be in charge of the school and the superintendent is not seen as an interruptive force that indicates some independence on the part of the principal. That independence is not overtly displayed though; rather the teachers almost view the school as an island that is semi-detached from the rest of the world. The display of independence is an almost passive, caused more by circumstances than by action.

The climate of GREENBRIAR is good for teachers and principals, in their view. But that view is very narrow, as if the teachers and principal are wearing blinders. The teachers and principal do not consider the children in their scope of understanding what their school is. If the teachers are happy in their personal relationships with each other and the principal, then all must be well, according to the teachers. This finding places the teachers' perceptions of the principal/superintendent relationship and organizational climate in perspective. The principal/superintendent relationship and climate, when viewed in isolation, offer evidence about their possible connection. These two elements are not the only elements needed to form a good learning environment for children. Bossert (1982) and Duckworth (1984) both place the principal and climate in mediating positions, not major causality positions for student learning.

The missing component is the children. This development showcases the limitations of research that does not include the perceptions of all organizational groups. By leaving the children out, the research is limited in the ability to fully understand the true nature of the school climate. The teachers do believe that the principal directly affects the climate of their school. This is demonstrated through the comments about smooth operations and lack of problems with discipline at the school. The problem is not so much that the climate is disengaged or closed, rather the problems is at the mission level of organizations. These teachers and the principal are not motivated by children's needs, rather they are motivated by personal needs and there is no apparent dissatisfaction with that situation.

As to connections between hierarchical independence and influence and climate, the GREENBRIAR teachers appear to value the principal's independence and link it to the smooth running of the school. The smooth running appears is the GREENBRIAR teachers' perception of their school climate. The GREENBRIAR teachers are happy in their workplace and GREENBRIAR teachers have positive feelings about their school climate. This finding does not agree with the results of the quantitative study.

WATERFALL is a very different situation. WATERFALL teachers view their principal's relationship with the superintendent as dynamic, personal, and professional. WATERFALL teachers view the principal as actively seeking both independence and influence. Independence is represented through curriculum changes that are not in keeping with district requirements. Obtaining resources demonstrate influence in abundance in the teachers' view. The WATERFALL teachers believe that their school gets more materials and equipment and receive these resources quicker than other schools in the district. WATERFALL teachers attribute this situation directly to their principal's dynamic and multifaceted relationship with the superintendent. The relationship is seen as both personal and professional since the principal taught the superintendent's children.

The climate at WATERFALL is open, dynamic, and energetic. Teachers and principal alike are motivated by the children's needs. WATERFALL teachers actively examine new methods of instruction, new curricula, new resource materials, and share

with each other the children's successes. The WATERFALL principal actively encourages the professional growth of her teachers, both financially and emotionally. The WATERFALL teachers view the principal/ superintendent relationship as being one of the primary reasons for the principal's success in improving the school and creating the school's positive climate.

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