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George Bolz

Ours Is a Singing School

WE HAVE a singing school. Music literally floats throughout the building.

How did this happen? Of course it did not happen accidentally. Let me describe how a school, an ordinary school, became a musical school where teachers and children daily experience the thrill, an almost scintillating perception of real

music enjoyment. Within a span of one year our school attitude changed from that of apathy towards music to that of a group of music lovers.

This all began early in the school year as the principal and the district's new music consultant discussed how the consultant might work as a resource per-

*A skilled consultant brings
the joy of participation in music
to teachers, pupils and parents.*

son with the main purpose of being available to teachers on an "on call" basis. We wished to create an atmosphere of teamwork between the consultant and teachers and break the stereotype "supervisor" concept which teachers had.

The intent was to have teachers request help from the consultant when he came to the building. Somehow, though, requests for music consultant help were quite meager—that is, until the teachers began to prepare an all-school Christmas festival in which each class presented an appropriate part of the program. Individual teacher requests for consultant help increased markedly then. Direct help was offered in procuring music scores for several teachers, conducting autoharp instruction, and accompanying classes on the piano. Even with this special service by the consultant, he still did not feel a sense of belonging or purpose in the school.

Then, recognizing a teacher desire for improvement in the over-all music program of the school, the principal suggested that the consultant offer technical music instruction to the faculty with particular attention to the mechanics of music—note value, sight reading, and rote singing. At this point the consultant recommended a Gestalt approach to music in-service training. The essence was to demonstrate the *joy of music*, an approach which succeeded in changing our school through the

teacher growth, thus creating an environment for music appreciation. Releasing the teaching and learning potentials of each faculty member as a person was the goal. Note the difference in the two proposals—the principal favored, an intensive, introductory music course, while the consultant was able to see more value in an approach based upon a recognition of teacher acceptance. To the delight of the principal, the ensuing months fully demonstrated the marked value of the consultant's approach which was utilized in in-service meetings. Real music-making began to blossom in our school in many ways.

Work With Teachers

Beginning in February, the consultant conducted weekly workshops for the entire staff; subsequently principal and consultant, in recognizing the wide range of individual differences among the teachers, decided to have two weekly workshops for a six weeks period. One group, for teachers more proficient in music, provided an opportunity for the consultant to expand his offering. Instrumental song enrichment, creative interpretive movement to music, and two part music were experienced by this group of teachers.

For the other, less secure group the consultant directed his effort toward enabling these teachers to acquire familiarity with the simpler rudiments of music making. Recorders (flute-like instrument) were obtained for the teachers who learned to play a group of melodies. Many new songs were taught with autoharp accompaniment. One teacher who deprecated his musical aptitude

George Bolz is principal, Paddison School, Norwalk, California.

listened in a somewhat withdrawn manner to the singing of a Spanish song by the consultant. Because of this teacher's Spanish background, the consultant requested his aid in pronouncing the text. Once involved, the teacher was led more and more into a successful music experience until, before the session ended, this teacher sang and led the song for the group. We were delighted when, the next day, we could hear his children joyfully singing this Spanish song. Although the foregoing may sound coincidental it lends insight into the consultant's willingness to involve individual teachers all the way. He made certain that each teacher achieved a "real-response" to at least some part of the meeting.

An expanding enthusiasm for these sessions, which were held an hour before school, was shown by teachers who attended not one, but both group meetings. A particular strength of the consultant was the manner in which he involved teachers of varied abilities. Two members of the staff, each of whom possessed a master's degree in music, assumed active roles in helping the groups largely because their talents were recognized in a positive manner by the consultant. Both teachers contributed wholeheartedly toward the success of this school learning venture without taking any time from their classroom work. Before and after school hours, these new "resource" teachers helped other teachers willingly with the autoharp, two and three part music, and piano accompaniments.

By his recognition of these teachers the consultant led all the teachers to a broader vision, a concept and practice of how groups can grow and acquire cohesiveness through an individual sharing of talents. Of course this meant ad-

ditional work for these teachers; however, both were gratified to witness music growth and development throughout the school. Appreciation from their colleagues served as an ample reward. One felt the school changing in concept from an institution composed of classroom "islands of learning" to a concept of one large family where all shared and helped one another toward a richer life.

Careful scrutiny of the manner employed by the consultant in teacher involvement revealed his genuine concern for people. Included in the consultant's working practices were his genuine fondness for each teacher and a sincere desire to help each achieve growth not only in music but as a person. A high moral regard with a firm belief in the democratic process marked each teacher's contact with the consultant. He believed in them and their ability so strongly that they found it easy to reflect this confidence to their children. By building people through his supportive relationships the consultant thus also helped children indirectly. The children benefited through the teachers' improvement and enthusiasm.

Patience and Skill

Equipped with an extensive background in professional preparation and achievement in his field, the music consultant always presented himself to teachers as a person who was their friend and coworker. Clearly discernible in the consultant was his basic philosophy about people, a belief that people have worth, dignity and ability. No artificial subject matter goals were established by the consultant, who realized that teacher growth would be gradual and would proceed as teachers changed their concept of themselves. Developing

a feeling of competency in teachers was his primary purpose which was accomplished as judged from the single criterion—teachers' acceptance, response, then initiative. This spirit of competency in a difficult area of the curriculum began slowly to permeate the school.

Patience was an important factor observed in the consultant's manner. Knowing that growth would be gradual, he realized that numerous avenues for learning would need to be explored. Some stimulus was sought which would go beyond teacher workshops to affecting the work with boys and girls. Children also needed this "real-response" to music making. A six weeks' schedule was arranged whereby four groups of four classes each met with the consultant and teachers in the school auditorium twice weekly. During these sessions the consultant involved the teachers directly by having them participate with the children, work with voice parts, sing harmony parts, and furnish rhythmic accompaniments to some songs. Everybody made music—it was grand. An advantage in the daily classroom follow-up of these sessions accrued in that the youngsters had a strong desire now to make music.

Then, because the entire school was making music, resources were needed constantly in each classroom. Teachers began to recognize and utilize the special music abilities of individual youngsters. Children were sent to help other classes.

Although our consultant visualized continuing staff growth as a major outcome to be desired, he avoided the promulgation of uniform standards. Seeking to foster individual growth in music skills he realized that growth would result only when individuals were inspired to achieve. Teachers and children

began to exhibit traits of humility, kindness, and wholehearted concern for others. Children who used to be rather unruly and unaware of good school conduct changed as they realized self-worth and pride in being a member of the school music family.

During the sessions with the groups of four classes, the high standards that were obtained seemed to have been motivated by the desire of the children to learn more music. The children's conduct in the sessions, in their walking to and from the meeting room, was exemplary. A desire to seize the opportunity was evident in the children's manner. Real learning was taking place. The consultant set a pace that was maintained because enthusiasm and interest continued at a high level.

Inwardly each child was identifying himself with this new element and dimension in the school. Daily singing led by their teachers in the classroom became a high point of the day's work. With an attitude like this toward music, the entire curriculum was infused with new meaning. Boys and girls were achieving more of their potential in the creative realm which permeated other school activities.

After the music consultant had worked with the teachers and children for four weeks, the principal asked them all to share their new learnings with the parents. Accordingly, all children were given an opportunity to participate in a school chorus. Three hundred children responded and this choral group presented songs for the parents in a packed auditorium after only three practice sessions. During the program the preschool children in the audience joined in the singing because they had learned the songs at home from their older brothers and sisters. The teachers played several

numbers on the recorder and although they were still somewhat unsure of themselves in music-making, their children encouraged them with expressions of confidence. The children cheered them on.

The principal and faculty realized what had taken place in one semester. A "singing school" had emerged through the efforts of the new music consultant and the faculty. The concept of a "singing school" is an ideal, a worthy goal to be desired; therefore, when it came to fruition we knew instinctively that our consultant had succeeded in building people—teachers, boys and girls. Endowed with modesty and imbued with a zeal to help others our consultant shied away from the accolades offered by teachers and children. Our consultant had gained acceptance. His purpose in the school was meaningful. Our consultant had transformed a school and in the process had become inextricably a pervasive influence in the lives of teachers, boys and girls.

The principal wrote these comments for the faculty bulletin: "The music consultant's contagious enthusiasm, good will and skill have permeated our group and demonstrated to us how music can be enjoyed while we learn with the youngsters. In every attempt to convey appreciation to him for his hard work, he modestly comments, 'The faculty cooperated in a wonderful way.' The consultant and you teachers have made our school a singing school."

Just before the program, the consultant wrote: "I have looked forward to our weekly staff get-togethers and our rehearsals with a great deal of pleasure. I know our program will be a grand success—due to the extra effort and time you have so freely given toward mak-

ing this the fine experience it should be. Your warmth and enthusiasm have made me feel a part of the family—the wonderful family of students and teachers at Little Lake School."

Numerous outcomes were derived from the music consultant's work with groups of teachers. Three fourth grade teachers planned an hour period on Friday afternoons for music enrichment. All the children in these three classes and a class for the mentally retarded children were given opportunity to participate in one of four teacher-led interest groups centered around dancing, singing, rhythm instruments, and creative art. Beyond the enjoyment of this special activity could be seen direct participation by the mentally retarded children with the other children in aesthetic appreciation.

Much of the success of this consultant seems to have come through a broad understanding of life and people together with a knowledge of good educational practices. His sensitivity to people as individuals, his ability to identify with any group as individuals and his contagious love of teaching made each meeting with him somewhat of an adventure in understanding one's self a little better and in building a self respect for each person as a guide toward richer living. His main purpose seemed to be building people rather than bringing an understanding of music to us. We grew musically—and with rather dramatic results at times.

We have a singing school, yet we have more than that. Through music, we have rediscovered our worth as individuals. Our defenses are down and we find teaching school now an adventure in learning to live more fully.

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