

MARGARET ANTHONY

In his article, "Shared Leadership—The Damn Thing Works,"¹ David Weingast gave a good introduction to shared leadership in the town of Mansfield, Connecticut. One might wonder after reading it, however, what the superintendent and administrators do besides play basketball and answer the school board's questions. I got the feeling the teachers do most of the work. As a principal in the Mansfield System, I have a few comments I'd like to add.

Shared leadership is more than giving teachers a voice in hiring, budgeting, and curriculum decisions. It's more than a system of organization called curriculum councils. It means believing that conflicts, differences of opinion, and varying teaching strategies and philosophies are healthy. It means creating and being able to live with diversity.

Weingast states, "... teachers perform capably in the screening and selection of staff. In most school systems these jobs absorb costly administrative time." If you use shared decision making to save money, you are using it for the wrong reason. I know of no hiring in the town during the last four years that has not involved an administrator.

The process is actually more costly; there are more people doing more work. Teachers are paid at a substitute teacher's salary when they work in the summer and on Saturdays or perform extra duties. This is a bargain, though, considering the amount of effort and the excellent product the system receives.

With shared decision making, the student and the parent along with the school staff have valid views and needs. Mansfield's schools have a Suzuki violin program because the superintendent shared leadership with the parents. Community members have served on nutrition and report card committees. In fact, the beauty of shared leadership is that wherever,

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An Inside View of Shared Leadership

"By merging the roles of teacher and administrator a stronger, more stable system can emerge."

whenever, and whoever wants to give leadership can.

The Reality

The principle disadvantage of shared decision making is that at times nothing is accomplished. Henrik Ibsen's comment on the value of committees is apt: "When the devil decided that nothing should be done, he decided to create the first committee." There are times in the process when the devil not only created the committee but was elected chairman. These times do not predominate but they do exist.

Leadership in Mansfield may come from students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and even the superintendent. Leadership is not structured in the traditional hierarchy of command, the pyramid of power with its pinnacle in the main office and its broad base resting in the powerless, voiceless teaching staff. Leadership is not permanently fixed, rigidly controlled, or jealously guarded. The entire staff is encouraged to contribute their best and indeed they do.

The Mansfield school system is no utopia. There are frustrations, time constraints, pressures, and annoyances, but there are also feelings of pride and cooperation.

Administrator: Puppeteer? Rubber Stamp?

There is a subtle line between leadership and manipulation. Does the leader decide what to do and wait for

Shared Leadership— "The Damn Thing Works"

David Weingast

The "damn thing" which is shared leadership has been the subject of much speculation and controversy in the past few years. It is a concept which has been defined in many ways and has been the subject of much debate. In this article, I will attempt to define shared leadership as it is practiced in the town of Mansfield, Connecticut. Shared leadership is a system of organization in which the roles of teacher and administrator are merged. It is a system in which the entire staff is encouraged to contribute their best and indeed they do. The system is not structured in the traditional hierarchy of command, the pyramid of power with its pinnacle in the main office and its broad base resting in the powerless, voiceless teaching staff. Leadership is not permanently fixed, rigidly controlled, or jealously guarded. The entire staff is encouraged to contribute their best and indeed they do. The Mansfield school system is no utopia. There are frustrations, time constraints, pressures, and annoyances, but there are also feelings of pride and cooperation.



The Nitty-Gritty

If shared decision making means more work, more time, and more effort, why would the staff want to get involved? Teachers are professionals and not only do they want a say in how children learn but also in how decisions are made. The staff then feels a greater ownership in ideas and policies. They begin to understand the problems of the system and see beyond the narrow confines of their own classrooms.

How will the staff manage their regular teaching duties and all these extras? The administrator must merge his or her traditional role with that of the teacher. Teachers must be given time to plan and meet. Administrators must be flexible in designing schedules and willing to release staff for professional visitations and conferences. At times the principal will have to cover a class. Designing the school calendar with time built in for professional development is vital. An early school closing twice a month also helps.

Payoff for the System

Joint problem solving and decision making leads to innovative ideas. Think how many more ideas and solutions can be generated by six minds instead of one. If the administration is open and willing to use staff strengths, the system gets more for its money. In the last analysis teachers and administrators are in business for one thing: educating children.

Weingast implied that the success of Mansfield's shared leadership is due mostly to superintendent Bruce Caldwell. I disagree. I have taught in a number of systems and have found in each community the same kind of hard working, dedicated staff and concerned parents and school boards. You do not have to be a semi-rural, sophisticated, small school system to have shared leadership work. All you need is leadership that works at sharing. ■

¹ David Weingast, "Shared Leadership—'The Damn Thing Works,'" *Educational Leadership* 37 (March 1980): 502-506.

It isn't easy and it doesn't save money— but it does work.

the committee to give his or her idea credibility? The person who shares leadership could be accused of being no more than a puppeteer pulling strings and manipulating the puppets if this leadership style is used only when it's convenient or inconsequential.

By merging the roles of teacher and administrator a stronger, more stable system can emerge. The administrator need not be relegated to the role of rubber stamp. Just as a good teacher facilitates learning, the administrator helps the staff learn how to solve problems, make decisions, implement programs, and design new systems. The administrator becomes a teacher of teachers.

The administrator understands the total system or the entire school's needs. He or she can help the committee or group modify and integrate their recommendations to better fit the system. As an educational leader, the administrator can help the staff see future trends and long-range goals and problems. Using shared leadership, the administrator is a tightrope walker balancing leading and following, taking and giving, listening and advocating.

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