

these two pieces of information you can infer that both Mercury and Pluto are smaller than the other seven planets.

While inferencing seems to be a necessary and automatic part of comprehension for sophisticated readers, children often do not make inferences automatically. Comments such as, "I can't find that answer" and "It didn't say that anywhere" are commonplace indicators of children's apparent belief that if it doesn't say it in so many words, it doesn't say it. This lack of automatic inferencing results in greatly reduced comprehension since much of comprehension depends on inference.

Administrators, supervisors, and teachers interested in classroom-tested strategies that improve student ability to make inferences should read the

Journal of Reading Behavior (1983, Volume 3). Two articles in this volume report on successful inference training and summarize earlier efforts in this area. A report by Carr, Dewitz, and Patberg (pp. 1-18) reveals that students who are shown the relationships of key vocabulary in a structured overview before reading, who complete cloze activities that require them to integrate text information, and who complete a checklist reminding them how to integrate this information, improve their inferential comprehension ability. A report by Raphael and McKinney (pp. 67-86) shows that children trained to identify types of questions—Right There (literal), Think and Search (inferential), and On My Own (from prior knowledge store)—improved their ability to answer inferential questions. Both studies used middle-grade students and showed that the largest

gains were made by students of average or below-average ability. Cited in the literature is an earlier study by Hansen and Pearson in which 2nd graders learned to make inferences by writing on strips of paper information from their prior knowledge stores and from the text and weaving them together.

Inferencing—reading between the lines—is now better understood from both a theoretical and classroom practical standpoint. Strategies that are theoretically sound and empirically tested now exist and can be used to help children at all grade levels integrate information and make inferences. Once these and other similar strategies become a part of daily classroom instruction, our children can become better comprehenders and better thinkers. □

The Principalship

ROLAND S. BARTH

The Leader as Learner

If only the principal will grow, the school will grow. To change something, someone has to change first. People changing is a most important—and most perilous—enterprise. One of the principal's most difficult tasks is promoting the professional development of staff members. But people changing is even more important and perilous when the people to change are principals.

As learners, principals have a bad reputation. Many in my own school community wondered whether I was educable. Parents, teachers, students, central office personnel, and even oth-

er principals had their doubts. My involvement in the Harvard Principals' Center has reinforced my beliefs about how difficult it is for principals to become learners as well as leaders.

Principals as Reluctant Learners

The first obstacle, of course, is time. More is expected of me with less. If I stay to participate in a teacher's math workshop, the schedules for next semester and the parent phone messages will go unattended. Of course, saying "I don't have time" is another way of saying other things are more important, and perhaps more comfort-

able, for us. Time is precious and demands are many. The leader's learning takes a back seat.

A second impediment is our experience as learners. Few principals come to learning activities without baggage from prior activities. District inservice and university course work have left most of us, at best, unsatisfied and, at worst, painfully scarred. Principals run things, and most run them well. People who run things don't like to be themselves run—especially badly. One reason principals resist opportunities for learning is that they have been there before and have found what's there lacking. Few retain much

confidence that learning opportunities will be interesting and helpful in running a school.

Third, for a principal to be a learner is believed to be sacrilegious. The purpose of schools is to promote *student* learning. To take \$100 from the school budget to join the Principals' Center is tantamount to taking bread from the mouths of babes. Think what the school could do with \$100. Teacher aides, books, magic markers. And think of what I might be doing for the school if I spent those two hours in my office rather than attending a workshop. Principals are public servants. Our place is to serve, not to be served.

Another serious impediment to the principal as learner is that by engaging publicly in learning we openly admit imperfection. One principal told me that when he left his district to come to a Harvard Summer Institute, another principal said to him, only half in jest, "I'm glad the superintendent chose the one who needed help the most." The world expects principals to know how to do it. We often pretend we do. A few even believe it. To become a learner is to admit that the screening committee and the superintendent who selected us made a mistake.

It is also *inappropriate* for the principal to be a learner. Staff development always begins one rung on the ladder below the staff developer. Teachers want children to learn but see their own learning as less necessary. Principals want teachers to learn but don't feel that a math workshop is appropriate for them. Superintendents want principals to shape up, but few engage seriously in their own professional development. And so it goes. The moral order of the school universe places the principal in authority as knower. There is little place for the principal as learner.

Finally, if we engage in a learning experience and if we learn some-

thing—a new way of thinking about curriculum, a new interpersonal skill, a new idea about improving school climate—then we have to *do* something with the fruit of our learning. Our reward for learning is additional work. Some principals contemplating joining the Harvard Center hesitate because they fear membership will further deplete their time and energy. Paradoxically, professional development can be both energy and time depleting *and* energy and time replenishing.

A Community of Learners

It is difficult for the leader to become a learner. Yet, I am more convinced each day that being a learner, a life-long adult learner, is the most important characteristic of a school leader. Learning is not just another item on the long list of critical characteristics—it belongs at the top of the list.

Why at the top of the list? Many of the characteristics—the skills we recognize and that research suggests are important for effective principals—are *learned* skills. A principal can learn how to continuously monitor performance of pupils, to convey high expectations to teachers and pupils, and to orchestrate a safe, orderly environment.

And learning is replenishing. We deplore teachers who do more of the same next September as they did this September and last September. It's equally unfortunate for principals to do so. After several years we tend to switch onto automatic pilot in PTA meetings, teacher evaluation sessions, and parent conferences. That's a sign of clinical death. Not only do teachers and students suffer, the principal suffers. Learning is an antidote to routinization.

There is a practical reason for the leader becoming a learner. With the

rediscovery of the importance of the principal come a lot of people who want to change, fix, remediate, and staff-develop principals. All too many superintendents, state departments, and universities believe principals grow and come alive as learners only when a gun is held to the back of the head and a carrot dangled in front. The assumption is that learning must be externally initiated. To the extent we are willing to take ownership for our own learning, others won't. And to the extent we exercise ownership of our own learning, we will probably learn more and enjoy it more. These are good reasons to elevate our learning to the top of the list.

The leader as learner is critical because there is a striking connection between learning and collegiality. The most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of staff development, comes not from listening to the good words of others but from sharing what we know with others. Learning comes more from giving than from receiving. By reflecting on what we do, by giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge we make meaning, we learn.

The most powerful reason for principals to be learners as well as leaders comes from the extraordinary influence of modeling behavior. Do as I *do* as well as I say is a winning formula. Teachers show an uncanny interest in principals' learning. One member of the Principals' Center reported, "My staff this year is enrolling in record numbers in the local staff development programs. Whether this is a re-

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flection of my own participation in the Center and to my own new commitment to learning, I'm not sure. I think it is." I think so, too. In many schools, the more important you are, the further you are removed from learning. But when the leader is learner—when the principal's learning is continuous, sustained, visible, and exciting—a crucial and very different message is telegraphed to the school: this school is a community of learners; learning is its most important characteristic; and the principal is the *head* learner.

The resistance to the leader becoming learner belongs on the current agenda of school reform, and the power of the leader as learner in improving schools rests squarely on the extent to which we proudly and openly find ways of inventing, owning, sustaining, displaying, and celebrating our own learning. □

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message is unsettling. We need Ross Perots in every state. We need their intelligence and drive, and we need their influence. We even need their perspective and criticism. But before we can work in harmony with them, we need their respect most of all.

How can we join forces with such determined reformers? If we are seen as obstacles to change, is it because we understand subtleties of education that political and business leaders do not grasp, or is it because we have failed to explain and use the growing body of knowledge on successful change? One thing is clear: if we don't act to improve our schools, somebody else will.

Ron Brandt



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