

Trends

The Principalship

JOANNE YATVIN

A Lesson for Principals

I recently spent a week visiting my son, an assistant public defender in Philadelphia. Since I had never been in that city before, I made sure I saw Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, the Franklin Museum, and other historic sites. In addition, I got an unexpected lesson in education.

Early Monday morning, my son took me to court with him. For five long hours I sat on a hard bench in a shabby municipal courtroom while 17 sets of complainants and defendants were called before the judge and attorneys recounted the circumstances that had brought them there. To my surprise most of the cases were rather "uncriminal." That is, people did not start out with the idea of committing a crime, but through immoderation, hot tempers, unrestrained impulses, listening to bad advice, and various other varieties of foolishness, they had managed to get themselves arrested—some for very serious crimes.

In one case a street brawl had erupted over the ownership of a pair of

sunglasses. In another a teenaged mother of three, browsing through a variety store, had shoplifted baby items that she couldn't afford. In a third, a man who had made two payments on a taxicab was accused of car theft when his third check bounced and he refused to return the cab to its original owner. A longstanding neighborhood feud flared up into a knife fight after an exchange of shoves on the sidewalk. And so on.

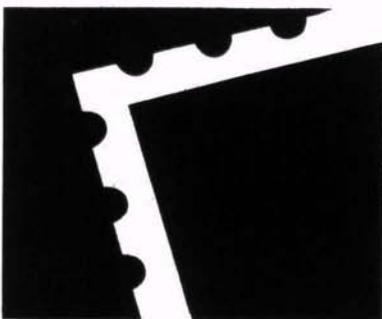
As I listened to the series of calamities and the explanations offered by defendants and witnesses, I noticed their resemblance to the scenes played out in my office after a playground fight or vandalism in the bathroom. I saw the same looks of injured innocence and heard the same denials of responsibility: "Well, I only hit him once." "I didn't want to do it, but she told me to." But in these cases *laus*—not school rules—had been broken, and the punishments were more inconvenient than staying after school.

When children do not evolve into useful members of society, the home,

the church, and the community—as well as the school—have failed. But the similarities between the courtroom and the principal's office were so strong at that moment that I could not help feeling the powerful effects of school failure in those people's lives. I was reminded that schools have a dual purpose: to impart both academic and social learning. It is not enough for us to develop students' minds; we must help them develop conscience, compassion, duty, peaceableness, and self-esteem. In the widespread concern for academic excellence, we may lose sight of the social side of education, which deserves our attention and support every bit as much as academics. What difference will a foreign language or three years of science make for individuals who haven't learned the basics of responsible behavior?

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Letters



Improving Schools

I would like to clarify that Wayne State University is not the only institution responsible for developing the six-step process described in "School Improvement Through Staff Development" (Sparks and others, March 1985, pp. 59-61). Other institutions involved in developing and refining the process are the Taylor School District and East-

ern Michigan University. My coauthors and I did not intend to imply that Wayne State was solely responsible for creating the process.

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