

The Principalship

JOANNE YATVIN

Leading Through Partnerships

When I started out in school administration in the mid-'70s, principals were called "middle managers," but I was idealistic and arrogant enough to insist that I was an "instructional leader." Now that that term has become common currency in the profession, I am beginning to think it does not accurately describe the role academically oriented principals really play.

Looking back, I find that I was least successful when I tried to march ahead of the troops, shouting, "Follow me!" Usually they did, but with little enthusiasm and no clear idea of where we were all headed. The worst times were when I was charged with implementing programs that had been designed and packaged somewhere else. They always lost vitality in translation, weakening as they went from the creator to the marketer to me to the teachers to the kids. Moreover, because they did not grow naturally out of what was already going on in classrooms, they required too many changes too quickly from teachers, producing more anxiety than satisfaction. Even something originally wonderful, like James Moffett's *Interaction*, sank like a stone at our school in less than a year.

But nearly as bad were the times when I tried to carry out my own bright ideas. A plan for a schoolwide

resource teacher put an unfair burden on some classroom teachers; a pull-out program for gifted children created a false student elite and locked teachers out of the fun of working with their brightest students; a recreational reading program that proved sound and workable for awhile died on the vine when I wasn't at the school for a year to keep it going.

On the other hand, I have been most successful when I fostered "educational partnerships," situations where teachers and I work together to make something happen. Often, they begin when one or more teachers have an idea, see a need, or feel a dissatisfaction and bring me in to help. For example, our literature-based reading program originated with two teachers and later spread throughout the school. My role was to allocate money for paperbacks and time for planning, defend the program at the district level, write about it, do a research study, and release originators from school to do workshops whenever there was an opportunity. Now, other schools in the district and teachers all over the country are adopting our reading list, structure, and methods.

Other partnerships grow from nothing more than a shared desire for change, and I am as much a creator of programs as their financial backer. This is true of our current gifted pro-

gram, which was designed, changed, added to, and supported by a seven-person steering committee of which I am an active member.

Noting the emphasis on running a school through partnerships, a cynical reader might wonder if principals shouldn't go back to being managers and let the teachers work on curriculum. After all, they're better at it, and somebody is needed in the office. I would argue that even as partner, the principal plays a unique and necessary role. If programs are to grow strong and last, if the school is to be a purposeful and cohesive unit, some central force is needed. Working in partnerships, principals can do three things that teachers cannot do: (1) they can provide the resources that turn ideas into realities; (2) they can use their authority to advocate, defend, legitimize, and disseminate programs; (3) they can use their broader perspective to see how a program fits into the school as a whole. Because they are on the front line, not sitting in the office poring over attendance reports, they can make things happen. Maybe, after all, that's what leadership means. □

Joanne Yatvin is principal of Crestwood School, 5930 Old Sauk Rd., Madison, WI 53705.

Reading and Writing

PATRICIA M. CUNNINGHAM

They Can All Learn to Read and Write

Why don't some children learn to read and write? What can you do with children who come to school without an

understanding of the concepts essential to reading and writing? How do you motivate children to be literate, if literacy is not a high priority in their out-of-school environment? How can

you involve parents in their children's learning?

These questions, asked daily in public school lounges, administrative board rooms, and university education

classes, prompted a small group of teachers and administrators in High Point, North Carolina, to seek answers. After working with demonstration classes for four years, the teachers still have many questions, but increasing numbers of teacher volunteers in the program and a persuasive body of data strongly support what is going on. Here is a glimpse of what happens in these High Point classrooms where all children learn to read and write.

Many children come to kindergarten lacking the language concepts essential to learning to read. Children in the demonstration classes learn these concepts as many other children have learned them at home. The children are exposed daily to real experiences from which concepts are built: new people, animals, and unfamiliar things. In and of themselves, however, these experiences do not prepare children for literacy. Language must accompany these experiences, and this language must be oral and written; that is, the children must talk with one another and with the teacher about what they have experienced. They can then record their ideas in the language of their experience, supplementing what they have learned firsthand with easy-to-read books, encyclopedias, and other references on the topics.

In addition to learning about their world, the children learn about themselves and each other. Teachers keep experience charts for each child, recording what the child likes to eat and to play. For their part, children create word banks, beginning with the names of classmates that they have learned to chant, read, and write. They add other words from the language experience charts as they learn them. Some children read a great deal and have 100 or more words in their banks, whereas

other children only gradually develop reading and writing readiness skills. Every child, however, leaves kindergarten with some charts, books, and words he or she can read. No formal reading groups are taught, but everyone learns to read.

The 1st grade begins in much the same way as kindergarten ended. There is a lot going on: oral and written language in the form of charts, books, and references is a major part of every day's work. Gradually, children learn to write their own stories and reports, getting help from the ever-growing word wall, which displays the words they need most frequently. Even after the children begin reading groups and instruction from basal readers, the language experience, writing, and research continue, such that children devote three days each week to basal instruction and two days to "integrated days."

On integrated days, children read, write, and do math related to science or social studies topics. Teachers also relate art, music, and sometimes physical education to each unit. At the end of the 1st grade, each child can read the stories and reports that she or he has written. Although some may read above grade level and others below, all children are reading and writing.

In the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades, children continue the pattern of three days of basal instruction and two days of integrated unit instruction. Teachers emphasize research, writing, and reporting, both in the whole class and in small groups. Little by little, students learn to research and write on their own, taking pride in learning new concepts and in being able to talk, read, and write about them.

High Point demonstration classrooms are busy places where teachers

and children work hard. They also learn to work and study independently and to take responsibility for their learning. The classrooms have the same number of children per teacher and work under the same budgetary constraints as other classrooms. Yet even children whose older brothers and sisters have not learned to read and write well learn here.

What makes High Point teachers successful? The simple answer is that they put into practice many truths we all know. We know that no one method will teach all children; thus, the teachers use basal instruction and writing and lots of independent-level reading. We know that reading comprehension develops on a foundation of language comprehension and knowledge; thus, classrooms must be places where children learn concepts and the language to talk, read, and write about them. We know that children will be motivated to become literate when they read and write about what is important to them. And we know that parents will help when they see that their help makes a difference to their children. Thus at High Point, parent volunteers come in often, and because they are needed, they keep coming back.

Teaching all children to read and write is simple to describe but not easy to do. Teachers *can* do it, however, and children *will learn*.

Patricia M. Cunningham is associate professor, Department of Education, Wake Forest University, Box 7266, Reynolda Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27109.

For more information on this program or to see for yourself, contact W. G. Anderson, superintendent of curriculum, High Point Schools, Box 789, High Point, NC 27261.

Mathematics

STEPHEN S. WILLOUGHBY

Can Computers Save Education?

Shortly after the advent of talking mo-

tion pictures, some educators discovered that students learned more from a movie than from a class taught by

their teacher. The natural inference was that a teacher could be replaced by a 16-mm sound projector and 180

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