

Professional Development for New Assistant Principals

The Calgary, Alberta, Board of Education offers new assistant principals a training program composed of inservice, mentorship, and observation.

When the capabilities of principals and their assistants complement each other, the resulting unity, cohesiveness, and blending of philosophies contribute to stronger school leadership. But how well equipped are new assistant principals to carry out their roles?

What Goodlad (1983) said of principals may well have greater truth for their assistants: "Most new principals are plucked out of the classroom in June and plunged into the new job soon after. Little in the first area of experience prepares them for the second." To equip assistant principals to fulfill their roles and contribute to school effectiveness, the Calgary Board of Education piloted a professional development program that complements on-site apprenticeship training and bridges the gap between the previous and new roles.

We limit program participants to 10 to 15 to foster a collegial atmosphere and provide a low-risk forum for mutual problem solving and development of leadership skills. Although enrollment is voluntary, once in the program, participants must attend all sessions unless school circumstances prevent it. The program's facilitator is a central services person who is knowledgeable about organizational development theory and practice, group process and planning tech-

niques, and the district's programs and their interactive nature (e.g., TESA, Learning Styles, Cooperative Learning, Effective Schools Practices, Madeline Hunter's techniques, etc.).

The program has three components: inservice, mentorship, and observation.

Inservice Component

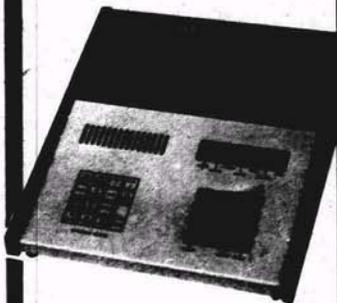
Assistant principals meet one day a month for seven months to develop and examine concepts, topics, and skills pertinent to their roles. Our inservice approach is based on research about adult learners and effective inservice training. For example,



Mentorship is an important part of training for new assistant principals. Here, mentor shares with protégé his words of experience and encouragement, which bolster her sense of competence and self-confidence.

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the finding that it is important for adults to help plan their own learning (Brundage and MacKeracher 1980, Barth 1985) resulted in participants determining half the content during the first session through goal- and priority-setting activities. We based the remaining content on instructional leadership theory and Calgary Board of Education expectations.

Because there is a dearth of information available on inservice training for assistant principals, we relied on content recommended for principals. For example, Cawelti (1982) suggests a typical "set of skills needed by contemporary school administrators." These include training in leader behaviors, management, instructional leadership, and traditional (generic) administrative course topics.

In addition to these leadership skills, the Calgary Board of Education (1983) expects principals to:

- have a strong, research-based view of teaching and learning,

- have a clearly-thought-out sense of what schools can and should do,

- obtain consensus and commitment of both staff and community about the school's direction, and

- enhance staff development by systematically helping all members develop their talents.

Mentorship Component

We included a mentorship element in our program because researchers (Alleman 1984, Brundage and MacKeracher 1980, Bova 1984) have found that several benefits result when assistant principals have on- or off-site mentors. Their competence increases in the profession's technical aspects and political workings. Their sense of competence and self-confidence is bolstered because of their mentors' trust and encouragement. They are able to overcome the shock of reality when they find a discrepancy between what they *think* the job is about and what it *really* is about.



An academy participant takes notes on an assistant principal's style of conducting a parent-teacher conference.

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"Mentors share knowledge and experience, model the assistant principal's role in action, and are on call for questions."

The mentor concept, as we use it, is similar to peer coaching. In fact, we match protégés to mentors in the same types of schools. Mentors share knowledge and experience, model the assistant principal's role in action, and are on call for questions. A participant commented that having a mentor meant that "help was there at all times, just a phone call away."

In addition to being observed by their protégés, mentors are observed by four other participants, two at his or her level (elementary, junior high, or senior high) and one at each of the other two.

Observation Component

Each participant observes five experienced assistant principals in action—his or her mentor, two others at the same level of schooling, and one at each of the other levels—in order to see a variety of skills and styles modeled. Observations are scheduled during the second through the sixth in-service days for 90 minutes each. Although pre- and postconferences are held, mentors carry on as usual in order to model management of routine activities as well as crises.

The Calgary Board of Education program offers new assistant principals the expertise of veterans and enables

them to support, assist, and learn from each other during the crucial first year in their new role. □

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