

OVERVIEW

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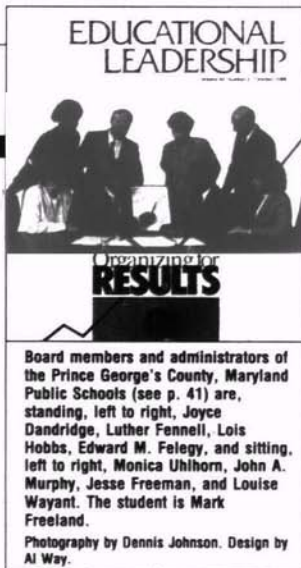
LEADERSHIP FOR WHAT?

In early June I attended a small conference in Brescia, Italy, for editors of journals dealing with "educational management," the term Europeans use for what Americans call "administration" or "leadership." As a small step toward more international cooperation, we agreed to establish an informal network for exchange of information about issues, trends, research findings, and so on.

Professor Cesare Scurati, who convened the meeting, edits *Dirigenti Scuola*, a journal whose focus—educational organization and management—is unusual in Italy. By tradition, head teachers (principals) have been appointed from the ranks with no formal training for their new responsibilities. Now, though, Italians are beginning to see a need to professionalize school leadership.

But what does that leadership entail: making the current system more efficient or redesigning it to be more effective? Although local customs vary, schools look much alike all over the world. The trappings of schooling—subjects, courses, textbooks, exams, separate classrooms run by individual teachers—are so firmly established that it may seem pointless to question them. Reformers, policymakers, and local administrators try to make this ponderous machinery responsive to changing conditions and public expectations; but it seldom works as well as it should. Schools have accomplished much, but we know from reports of National Assessment and studies of international achievement that large numbers of students in the U.S. and in other nations do not learn what school curriculums say they should.

The authors in this issue propose to change that. Robert Slavin (p. 31) maintains that improvement efforts must begin with systematic attention to research. Slavin has reviewed the studies on several aspects of elementary school organization and has come to some interesting conclusions. For example, he finds convincing evidence in favor of the plain old Joplin plan (Slavin 1988) but not



for mastery learning, at least not the Bloom model. He acknowledges that researchers disagree among themselves about these and other findings but worries that practitioners don't make good use of the knowledge we have.

Bill Spady (p. 4) also values research but puts his primary emphasis elsewhere. Everything about schools, he contends, must follow from *outcomes*.

Everything—organizational arrangements, time allocations, learning activities, assessment provisions—must be directly related to what students are supposed to be able to do. It's not a bizarre idea; we've all given it lip service, but putting it into practice is another matter—although courageous school leaders here and there (pp. 9, 10, 12) are making progress.

These issues do not apply just to the U.S. Every nation now has the urgent task of making the most of its valuable human resources. Here and abroad, the challenge to those of us who aspire to lead is to shape our organizations so as to get the results we seek. □

Reference

- Slavin, Robert E. (September 1988). "Synthesis of Research on Grouping in Elementary and Secondary Schools." *Educational Leadership* 46, 1: 67-77.



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