

## The Supervisor

ANNE MEEK

### An Acceptable Metaphor

Richard and I sat down at a table in the back of his 4th grade classroom in that welcome disorderly quiet after the students leave and before the custodian comes in to sweep up. He was in the frame of mind sensible people assume for going to the dentist or hearing the diagnosis from the brain surgeon. I was embarrassed; I had in my hands a copy of the memo from his final evaluation conference of the previous May, and I didn't know whether he knew I had actually written the recommendations on the memo.

Richard's principal had not asked my help in the formal evaluation of the past year, only in sifting through his file in May and relating the data of the reports to the terminology of the state list of teaching competencies as the basis for recycling him through evaluation. She had been determined to "improve" him, determined in a manner so unyielding as to make me wonder. What is this fervor for a hard line? Does the number of teachers you fire yield an index of instructional leadership advocated by William Bennett or Lamar Alexander or somebody?

Relieved that the principal was absent from this meeting, I laid the paper on the table; and we looked over the outlined areas for improvement: management, instructional methods, planning. Richard recounted his troubles of the past year, including a difficult group of students, the principal "after" him, and his feelings of injustice that he had to conform to the Tennessee Instructional Model (T.I.M.) as the prescribed model of teaching when it simply did not reflect his style. When I asked about this year's class, he smiled broadly and gave a glowing report about cooperative, industrious children.

"Well," I posed, "what are we to do about your use of T.I.M.? You are being reevaluated, and this is serious." Richard protested the model again, its recipe approach, its mindless steps, its lack of judgment and creativity. True, the last time I had observed Richard's teaching, he had been directing a class play from the basal reader, complete with improvised set and stage movement, not a prototype lesson for direct instruction. A sensitive and artistic man, Richard had got his back up over the implication that he didn't know how to teach.

"But wait a minute," I said, "no one in our system or the state department expects you to use T.I.M. for every lesson you teach. In fact, you only *have* to use it three times a year, the three times you are observed."

He looked unconvinced. For him it was a matter of principle. I pulled out my trump card, the only one I had.

"You're a performer, Richard," I began. "You sing, you conduct singing, you direct your own community choir."

### Richard described his feelings of injustice that he had to conform to the Tennessee Instructional Model.

He nodded. I went on, "You're a performer. T.I.M. is just one more strategy in your repertoire. It's not the only strategy, it's not even your favorite strategy, but you can do it, because you're a performer, a pro. It's just a new arrangement of stuff you already know, like a new arrangement of music you already know."

His face began to brighten. I went on, "This year does not have to feel bad for you. This year can feel good, because this can be the year that you showcase Richard Graves. You can choose how to showcase yourself because you're a performer, and it's your time to shine."

Now he was with me. This was a metaphor he could accept to go along with the re-evaluation he couldn't refuse.

The rest was easy. I would arrange consultation with a well-respected school psychologist with expertise in management. He would rehearse T.I.M. to ensure good marks during formal observations, and he would make his lesson plans complete and thoughtful. Last, I suggested special planning prior to each preconference with the principal or me to point out any rough spots, which he could then smooth out before the observation. During the year our cordial relationship warmed up to the chumminess of conspirators.

The good news is that it worked. At the end of the year, Richard had mastered what had seemed an alien strategy, had received good marks on his observation reports, and had saved his job. It's hard to say who was prouder, Richard or me. □

**Anne Meek** is Managing Editor of *Educational Leadership* and former Elementary Supervisor, Knox County Schools, Knoxville, Tennessee.

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