

How Teachers Get Me into Their Classrooms

By offering teachers their services, principals can play a meaningful role in the classroom.

Strong forces conspire to keep administrators out of classrooms: office duties, school crises, unending paperwork. But only by being in the classroom can a principal know the quality of education students are receiving. And by visiting classrooms, the principal can help teachers teach and students learn.

Here are several ways the teachers in my school have learned to get me into their classrooms.

• **The teachers ask me for help correcting papers.** When correcting papers, I look for patterns: are students having trouble in a particular area or with a particular concept? There is no better way of evaluating task analysis than by checking papers. If students are doing too well or too poorly, then the level of difficulty needs to be adjusted.

• **They request my services as an aide.** Going into a classroom and working with a small group of students can be enlightening. Administrators will find students in a small group willing to talk. They will tell you all about their teacher and what they wish their teacher knew. This information is excellent feedback for the teacher.

Sometimes I offer my help informally. Once a lesson has been taught, I ask if there is a group that needs extra help. I then work with that group. When I come in to do a formal observation, even before I get ready to script, some of my teachers have learned to say, "Can you work with a few of these kids on this?" or "Could I have these kids read to you?" or "Could you help mastery check?"

• **They ask me to teach.** Teachers at my school are encouraged to sign me up to teach a class—any class—at

least once a month. My lessons range from kindergarten science to 6th grade math. This practice may seem radical to some administrators, but I've done it for four years and found it effective. To schedule these lessons, I tape a calendar to a table where all have access to it. All meetings and appointments are noted on the calendar so everyone can see when I am available to teach. When I teach, I always collect papers and return them, corrected, to the teacher. Sometimes I ask the teacher to stay and watch me teach. I may present a new approach that will stimulate the teacher to try a different way to get a particular objective across. By teaching classes, I keep my teaching skills current, interact with students, check background knowledge on topics already taught, and give teachers a chance to catch up on other tasks.

Also, when teaching I model the steps on which I will evaluate my teachers, following the clinical supervision model in effect in my district. This modeling gives credibility and reliability to any recommendations I might need to make during the formal evaluation process. When I teach, I also give the teacher the option of evaluating my approach and methods.

• **They tell me they are having difficulty with a topic.** "Can you come observe and then help?" This is a tough one for teachers—admitting they need help. Many good discussions come from "What about this?" or "Have you tried this?" or "Would this work?" The questions should be open-ended to promote discussion. Discussion should not necessarily be limited to the two staff members involved; others may have the same concerns

and questions. These topics can become the subject of a staff inservice or roundtable discussion.

• **They redeem coupons I give them.** These coupons are good for things like duty-free recess or one-half-day professional leave. The dates when teachers will cash in their coupons are prearranged with me; on those dates, I relieve the teachers in the classroom or on the playground. Being with students at recess allows me to interact with them socially.

• **They ask me to become a character from a story or historical event.** I've been everything from Magellan to a turkey. By taking part in their classroom activities, I become a member of their classroom community.

These are some of the ways I get invited into classrooms. There is a prerequisite: An administrator who wants to get into classrooms needs a secretary who can handle office routines efficiently and answer questions for parents and faculty, freeing up the administrator's time. To be effective, however, the secretary must have both the information and the authority necessary to do the job, and the administrator must provide that information and grant that authority.

My classroom visits keep me in touch with the front lines of schooling and remind me that the best principals clear the way for teachers to teach. When teachers feel comfortable enough to ask me to help in their classrooms, I feel I'm really doing my job. □

Stef Palaniuk is Principal of Ucon Elementary School, Route 8, Box 72A, Idaho Falls, ID 83402.

Copyright © 1988 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.