

The Teacher

PATRICIA M. DOMBART

Welcome to Lonesome Dove

For a short time a couple of years ago, I became enamored of the ideas expressed in *The Search for Excellence* and *Corporate Culture*. Concepts such as *shared values*, *worker involvement*, and *commitment to quality* were heady stimulants. For a time I had hopes that the school culture would be tapped, that teachers, like Honda workers, would come together to discuss how we could improve our products. But my hopes were never high. I doubted that people who do not even sit together at staff meetings could easily be molded into quality teams. Experience had taught me that the world of school is not a corporate world and such culture as exists is based upon the shared value of separateness.

The school is a world of individualists. Teachers have more in common with the cowboys in *Lonesome Dove* than with the team workers of G.E. The ultimate schoolhouse unit is the classroom and its individual teacher. We've all learned to be entrepreneurs, to negotiate somehow the deal that best allows us to teach our students and to attempt to satisfy our own needs. Some of us work on getting advanced classes, some on avoiding cafeteria supervision, some on teaching the same thing year after year. Our strategies differ, but our intents are the same. In a work setting in which there is no reward given for superior performance, we maneuver to secure advantages. And when conditions don't even allow for that, our traditional nonrallying cry is, "Well, I'll just go in my room, shut my door, and do my own thing." So much for educational quality circles.

Yet this surface separateness is, to a degree, illusory, a phenomenon created by the conditions of the workplace rather than the intents of the workers. Teachers do have shared val-

ues, values based upon two forces: idealism and cynicism.

Teachers, even the most disgruntled, derive the most satisfaction in their work from reaching a student. We treasure that magic teaching moment when it is apparent that we have communicated learning. We value instruction. So any attempt to galvanize teachers should appeal to this idealism. Show us you value instruction: don't interrupt our classes at whim, curtail pull-out programs, don't schedule irrelevant assemblies. Involve us in projects truly aimed at improving instruction, not merely in streamlining procedures. Commit to projects for the long term, not just long enough to make central office think something is being done.

And, please, take into account our healthy cynicism. Willa Cather wrote, "No one can build his security on the

nobleness of another person." Don't expect us to be continually noble. When you seek change, show us what's in it for us. It is rather naive to expect that teachers have the natures of saints and martyrs, that we will rush to become part of projects which require increased time and effort and yet offer no concrete return. It is much wiser to treat us like ordinary human beings who perform better when given some reward for our efforts.

I believe that most teachers would respond positively to the building leader sensitive enough to take into account our idealism and cynicism and daring enough to forge a shared culture. Most of us would be glad to stop being lonesome. □

Patricia M. Dombart is an English teacher at Butler Senior High School, 106 Crosslands Rd., Butler, PA 16001.

IN THE APRIL ISSUE . . .

"Restructuring: What Is It?"

Educational Leadership doesn't provide one definitive answer to this timely question. Rather we present numerous provocative answers gleaned from the efforts of disparate districts and schools to reorganize, coordinate, and improve their programs, including:

- John O'Neil's comprehensive report on restructuring, researched and written especially for *Educational Leadership*,
- Ron Brandt's exciting conversation with Al Shanker, restructuring advocate,
- Westerberg and Brickley's firsthand report on their Colorado high school's efforts to restructure,
- two down-to-earth descriptions of the real-life problems involved in trying to change decision making at the school level,
- articles on accountability, multiple intelligences, tracking, and teacher professionalism.

Plus a thoughtful analysis by Gary Phillips and Chester Finn of the plans for state-by-state test score comparisons.

Plus a useful summary of the research on class size by Glen Robinson, with implications for decision makers.

COMING IN MAY: "Building a Culture for Change"—the insightful ideas and hard work of people like you who use their creative dissatisfactions to foster growth and improvement in their schools.

Copyright © 1990 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.