

Voices

The Coordinator

JOAN TETEL-HANKS

Turf and Territory

Last year I experienced the sense of triumph that comes from adding a long-awaited new program. But I soon found myself doing a lot of troubleshooting over issues of turf and territory, resistance to change, and misconceptions about the unknown. By 1987, in this lovely college town of Chapel Hill with its long established commitment to the arts, we had been able to fund a creative movement program with a certified dance educator half time in each elementary school. (We had decided very early to use the term *creative movement* instead of *dance*, so that no religious groups with edicts against dancing would prohibit the children of its members from participation in this program.)

Months in advance I had approached, collectively and individually, the six principals, who ran the gamut from being strong, knowledgeable supporters of the arts to being skeptical about the importance of the arts in school programs. In a year when another new program (foreign language) was also being added to each school, when physical space was at a premium due to greatly increased enrollments, and when the required curriculum at each grade level was getting more and more extensive, all agreed to support the new program. I felt jubilant about this accomplishment.

Clearly, one of the big obstacles to the creative movement program was the scarcity of time during the school day. But I felt I had found the perfect solution for that problem: the state requires one half hour per day of physical education for all students, but only once or twice a week are the students with the physical education teacher for that half hour. I pointed out to the principals that on one of those remaining days, each class could have creative movement with the cre-

ative movement teacher. The classroom teacher or assistant would be relieved of planning and supervising that half hour, the kids would get their physical activity in the form of a valuable, sequentially developed creative movement program, and not one minute would be taken from other curriculum time. Brilliant! No argument from the principals.

We had hired three excellent certified dance teachers well versed in creative movement methodology, who began meeting regularly to develop their curriculum, even before they were on the payroll. I was certain I was making all the right moves. However, although I had conferred with the physical education coordinator before I had even written an implementation plan, I soon learned that the physical education teachers were unhappy. Dance had always been a part of the physical education program. Why was it necessary to hire dance specialists to teach it? More important, it looked as if physical education time was being usurped. Half an hour a day was to be set aside for *physical education*, not creative movement. Who was to say when this new program would take over two days a week, then three?

Furthermore, creative movement teachers had time built into their schedules to serve as resource people to classroom teachers, to offer special sessions on dance history, aesthetics, criticism. Physical education teachers met with classes all day, without that kind of "special" time. Nothing appeared to be fair.

Quickly I phoned the physical education coordinator and said, "How about our getting together to talk? Let's do it over a drink, away from your office and mine." This strategy—getting away from your territory—can be beneficial when misunderstandings must be corrected, hurt feelings as-

suaged, complaints and problems heard, conflicts brought to resolution, or new ideas tried out for feedback.

On this particular late afternoon, the drinks we shared were nothing stronger than iced tea. The main point is that we met, we talked frankly and long, and we finally hit, head on, the issue of turf.

We clarified the differences between creative movement and physical education, listened very carefully to one another, and emerged with far clearer understandings of both programs, their differences, and their relationships to each other. Most important, we established a renewed agreement to work together, to communicate immediately whenever necessary, to trust one another, and to respect one another's turf. We also agreed to share the results of this meeting with our respective teachers. The fears of the physical education teachers were based on perceptions, which were misconceptions to me, but reality to them until they could be disproved, improved, or corrected. That afternoon we began to do some of each.

Today the physical education and creative movement teachers are willing to take a little, give a little, working side by side as dedicated, cooperative, high-energy educators. They share collegial respect for one another, and they grapple with similar issues and questions revolving about what is needed to help each child realize her or his full potential.

And I am wiser—but not at all sadder—about starting something new and the dynamics at work for and against innovation and change. □

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