

# LEADERSHIP

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## OVERVIEW

### RESTRUCTURING: WHERE IS IT?

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At a wedding I attended last fall I talked with a career social studies teacher from rural Pennsylvania. He reads *Educational Leadership* occasionally, but sees no signs in his school of most of the things we write about. Teaching strategies, curriculum renewal, peer coaching are outside his experience. Devoted but discouraged, he has little reason for optimism.

When we began planning this issue, we expected to call it "What Progress in Restructuring Schools?" As we checked with prospective authors and read manuscripts sent for our consideration, we began to wonder. If restructuring implies swift, radical reorganization, where is it taking place? If it doesn't mean that, what is it? When principals like Barry Raebek (p. 18) and Tim Westerberg (p. 28) shut off the bells, is that restructuring? When teachers grope for ways to participate in mundane decisions such as who writes the minutes of meetings (p. 61), is that restructuring?

Those familiar with the gloomy recitals of what young people don't know, the unflattering portraits of typical classroom routine (Goodlad 1984, Sizer 1984), and the stacks of commission reports urging immediate action are rightly impatient with modest changes. Time is running out; will anything really substantial happen and, if so, how?

Leaders like Raebek and Westerberg have already done much more than shut off the bells, and they are determined to do even more. They will not be satisfied until their schools are thoroughly redesigned. Many other educators feel the same. But even the most zealous face restrictions and expectations that, like the hundreds of tiny ropes binding Gulliver, hold them in place.

We could move more quickly if we had wider agreement about the kinds of changes needed. Because in a democratic society people can't be expected to think alike, that probably won't happen. Each of us has a different notion of what restructuring means; there is no official definition.

Still, as John O'Neil (p. 4) shows in his introductory article, several elements are common to most restructuring agendas. For example, Arthur Wise (p. 57) points out that while many things must be changed, at the heart of the matter is the condition of the teaching profession: the

ways educators are selected, educated, and rewarded. Albert Shanker (p. 11) wholeheartedly agrees.

These and other aspects of restructuring are on the agenda of the nation's governors, who apparently remain determined not only to work for improvement in their own states but to cooperate with one another. What's more, they believe they have the support of corporation executives and influential members of the general public.

But practicing educators often have different priorities from those of political leaders. Of course they want more respect for themselves and their profession, and of course we must respond to unprecedented international competition. Their primary concern, though, is the quality of life of the children they know personally. In their view, good schools are good for their *students*. If some schools need restructuring, it is because they are not the best places for the young people who attend them.

Schools in school systems like those of Winona, Minnesota (p. 72), and Johnson City, New York (p. 67), have achieved remarkable progress. But when educators compare even these models of excellence with our visions of what might be, we feel thwarted.

At such times we can take heart from the example of Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in South African prisons never doubting that someday he would dismantle apartheid. Or Vaclav Havel, who last winter went from outcast playwright to president of Czechoslovakia.

Awed by such persistence, we are mindful of countless educators who show similar determination. They too have a vision, and they too persevere. Like the teacher from Pennsylvania, they believe that young people are a nation's most precious resource. Like him, they are confident that any society claiming to put human values first must eventually commit to developing that resource to the fullest. Restructuring will naturally follow. □

#### References

- Goodlad, J. I. (1984). *A Place Called School*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sizer, T. R. (1984). *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American School*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

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