

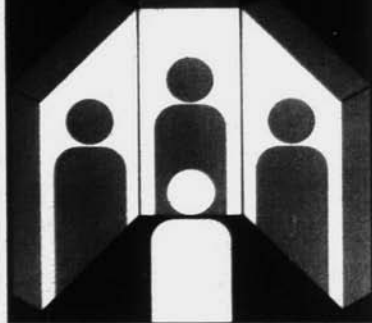
LEWIS A. RHODES

Making a Videotape, Part II

Last month's column shared learnings and perceptions generated during the development of ASCD's new videotape on principals' instructional leadership. This month, the release of another new tape, *School Improvement Through Staff Development*, provides a similar opportunity to share insights that developed as we tried to understand and resolve the communications problems that faced us.

The Principal as Instructional Leader:

Reflections on Effectiveness



Three conditions loomed as barriers to communicating this tape's basic message, which was articulated by one of the principals we interviewed: "If you want to improve the school, you'd better improve your staff... because, literally, your school is the staff."

First, many school people have experienced both inservice staff development and school improvement as fragmented, one-shot, and frequently unrelated efforts with little history of long-lasting effects.

Second, the historical separation of these two processes provided a chicken-or-egg dilemma. Would this be a tape about school improvement *or* staff development? Which would attract a wider audience to the dual message that long-lasting improvement is possible *only* through personal growth of the school's staff; and that staff development that is not related to overcoming the daily constraints on personal satisfaction and effectiveness has little enduring effect?

The final barrier came from the systematic nature of proposed solutions for improving both schools and their staffs. The steps or stages in *systematic* school improvement and staff development efforts all tend to look and sound alike, regardless of what we call them. Although the developers of each "new" model apply their own labels and acronyms, the models derive from a common logic of purposeful, human, problem-solving behavior:

- Figure out what's bothering you—diagnosis; assessments of needs, wants, concerns, problems, barriers, and so on.
- Explore various ways to deal with it and pick the most practical and

advantageous one—searching alternatives, goal-setting, and so on.

- Determine how to do it—planning.

- Take action—implementation, operation, management, and so on.

- Find out how well you're doing it and use the information to continually modify your actions—feedback, formative evaluation, maintenance, institutionalization.

How could we communicate that the long-lasting benefits of systematic processes are not in the individual steps or stages, but rather in their combined effect? In particular, they allow individuals to identify and orient their actions toward mutual purposes, and to establish nondependent relationships based on each person's contribution toward these same mutual goals.

School Improvement Through Staff Development addresses these communications constraints by focusing on the common *effects* of these systematic processes and steps. The experiences of teachers and administrators, in five schools currently involved in systematic staff development efforts focused on instructional improvement, provide the content that illuminates the process. The schools—Shearer Elementary (Napa, Calif.), Ulatis Elementary (Vacaville, Calif.), Holbrook Elementary (Hamtramck, Mich.), Hoover Middle (Kenmore, N.Y.), and Versailles High School (Versailles, Ohio)—represent different stages of the processes as well as different demographic situations.

Viewer feedback will tell us whether this approach communicates effectively. We still may be no closer to finding the "missing metaphor" discussed last month—a way to view and understand the daily reality of schools as a people-system—but, interestingly, another metaphor related to the purposes of

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this tape did emerge as we looked back on our experiences *after* completing the tape.

As we went from school to school one thing stood out. There are *sparks of caring and concern* glowing, in relative isolation, in classroom after classroom across America. Sometimes they burn out, or are stamped out, because there are few ways to provide both the fuel and oxygen they need to burst into flame.

In schools that are *systematically* trying to improve instruction through *direct instructional skills training*, we saw two things happen:

- The systematic nature of the process, which provides common direction and allows building staffs to participate in overcoming the barriers to

their own effectiveness, *opens the damper* and effectively *fans the spark* with trust, respect, and the ideas of others.

- The practical instructional skills (for example, many of the strategies involved in "Effective Schools" or "Madeline Hunter" type training) that are the focus of the training provide the *solid fuel* necessary to convert concern and caring into action—but not just any action. These teacher acts generate more immediate feedback about one's effect on children, thus providing the daily "fuel" of satisfaction and personal worth that keep the spark alive.

While this metaphor may have helped us better understand what we were seeing, hearing, and feeling in

the schools we visited, it is *not* part of the tape. Nevertheless, it may be what school improvement through staff development is all about. □

School Improvement Through Staff Development (35 minutes in length) was developed by Georgea Sparks and Dennis Sparks with the assistance of Ann Lieberman, Susan Loucks-Horsley, and Fred Wood. It is narrated by Dennis Sparks, Executive Secretary of the National Staff Development Council. The videotape may be ordered from ASCD for \$225 ASCD members, and \$260 nonmembers. (Please specify stock number 614-134 when ordering.)

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