Letters

A Criticism from "the Trenches"

Gene Geisert's article "Participatory Management: Panacea or Hoax?" (November 1988) should have been subtitled "Or the Reaction of the Dinosaurs to Becoming Extinct." Geisert is about to be dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st century—directly from the 19th century and the factory style top-to-bottom management systems he cares so much about.

During the post-War era, Geisert and his cohorts created neat little niches for themselves: paneled offices, secretarial pools, and coffeepots perking into their short afternoons—none of which has anything to do with education. But whenever anyone sniffed close enough to expose their racket, all Geisert had to do (he's still doing it) was label them union "radicals," and their opposition vanished. Meanwhile, "in the trenches," real teachers who teach real students (in spite of, not because of, the daily administrations of Geisert et al.) gathered empirical data that is turning Geisert's cozy world upside down.

Please do not stop printing articles by Geisert and his friends. I like my classroom better than his make-believe corporate boardroom, and I find his archaic arguments amusing.

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Geisert Replies

The angry tone of Robert Liftig's letter sheds little light on the question of participatory management and its impact on districts that allow themselves to be beguiled into ascribing to its tenets. As for being dragged "kicking and screaming into the 21st century," I was unaware that decisions by committee are an innovation of the coming century.

Most teachers do not want to make management decisions, and they most certainly do not want to serve on more committees. In my experience, teachers want responsible leadership, support (both moral and material), input on decisions that will affect them, and time to teach. As a result, most "good" principals and supervisors have already empowered the teachers with whom they work. Indeed, it is hard to see how as professional educators, teachers could reasonably be denied input into educational decisions. But should the voice be that of teachers as individual professionals or of teachers as trade unionists? Should it be merely advisory, or should it come in the form of demands? And should one argue such demands and settle on their merits or put them forward as chips on the bargaining table, possibly to be withdrawn later in exchange for higher salaries, shorter hours, or improved fringe benefits?

Perhaps Lee Shulman ("A Union of Insufficiencies: Strategies for Teacher Assessment in a Period of Educational Reform," November 1988) said it best: "Teachers require enablement as much as empowerment. They deserve conditions that would enable them to develop their talents and capacities and to exercise them in the interests of children" (p. 39).

One question then remains: Will boards of education and school administrators continue to bargain away the right to manage their districts for the sake of a more participatory relationship with unionized teachers? I certainly hope not! Ten years of research clearly indicates that the presence of an appropriate and effective instructional leader is pivotal to improving school effectiveness. Replacing principals and supervisors with lead teachers will not lead to improved schools.

Linda Tinelli Sheive's "New Roles for Administrators in Rochester" (November 1988) tells us what is happening with "their" effective leaders. "With shared governance, an administrator can," she quotes, "give up authority, give up stress, and get shared ownership" (p. 55). No thanks!

Union leaders created adversary bargaining. If they are now serious about wanting to lessen the antagonistic relationship that exists between school board members, administrators, and teachers, why not give up adversarial bargaining in favor of a new (noncontractual) professional relationship?

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Editor's note. The following information should have accompanied Paul Burke's "Letter" ("How Much Math Do All Students *Need*?") in the March 1989 issue: Burke had surveyed a number of successful adults to find what math they actually use. They use arithmetic, percents, simple statistics, logic, and computers, but not the other topics that math organizations want to require, not even much algebra or geometry. Details are available from Paul Burke, 1101 Third St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20024.

What Do You Think?

We welcome your comments on articles in *Educational Leadership*. Please send letters to: Executive Editor, ASCD, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1403. Letters selected for publication may be edited for brevity and clarity.

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