

It's the Principal of the Thing!

By Arthur Woznicki

The following are suggestions to guide the reader. They are offered to encourage analysis and discussion of *It's the Principal of the Thing* with its primary focus on coaching, teaching and learning. Though the book features an elementary school, the contents of this work are equally applicable to secondary teaching, learning and coaching. The guidelines are for “before” or “after” reading the chapters and the intro.

Introduction

1. The public assumes that those criticizing our schools and offering remedies have solutions for improvement. What are their remedies?
2. Have you ever been encouraged to attend a program designed to train principals in specific classroom observation techniques?
3. “We” must teach our principals. Who is the “we”?
4. Why is the principal omitted in most proposals for improving our schools?
5. What is this book’s purpose?
6. Should 21st Century principals be managers or teachers of teachers?
7. If the latter, why? Should today’s principal be both?
8. After reading, *It's the Principal of the Thing*, does the author appear to be aware of the broad responsibilities of the principalship?
9. Does the author’s background inspire support for this “editorial” work?

Chapter 1: Does Certification = Qualification?

1. Be prepared to explain and discuss the differences between teacher certification and qualification.
2. Can the same question be raised regarding principals?
3. What are your thoughts regarding Harry Latter, Bill Higgins and Alicea Morea after reading this chapter?
4. Do you have a Harry Latter on your staff?
5. Are Harry’s apparent problems his fault? Explain.
6. Who shares the blame for Harry’s lack of classroom ability? List
7. What is the purpose of good classroom management for a new teacher?

Chapter 2: Change of Scenery

1. What are Harry’s motives for seeking a change of scenery?
2. Should Superintendent Bernard Green be concerned about whom Jennifer wants on her staff? Why or why not?
3. Is Old River anything like your community? Explain.

Chapter 3: The Maestro

1. Why does the author refer to Bernard Green as The Maestro?
2. What is the difference between a goal and an objective?
3. Does Dr. Green appear to be a leader or an autocrat? Explain
4. What are the elements of the principals' annual district-wide action plan?
5. Do you believe the annual action plan and its specific components will affect teacher competence?
6. What is the purpose of calling the supervisory function of the principal's job, "coaching"? Is it analogous to coaching in other fields? Explain.

Chapter 4: Harry's New Year

1. Is Harry' first day at Clarksdale a positive one? Why or why not?
2. Is there a carryover of old habits?
3. What words would you use to describe Harry's evening preparation?
4. What are the similarities in planning for elementary vis-à-vis secondary teaching? What are the differences?
5. Identify the examples of classroom management issues that will give Harry problems as he begins his new job.
6. List some signs of student boredom.
7. What is meant by, *He was expected to lead the students through the curriculum* in the second paragraph on page 42?

Supervisory tools for principals and classroom supervisors are constantly evolving. One very early instrument is *Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Though it is long-standing it is the major technique referred to throughout this book. Basically, if a teacher is using the Taxonomy as a teaching tool, it will assure that students are becoming self-learners. Also, it describes the various elements of teaching AND learning. There is a multitude of newer comprehensive supervision skill programs available to "coaches" that contain the essential elements of a sound instructional program. Their purpose is to use a teaching technique that moves students to independence.

See page 68 for a schematic on Bloom's Taxonomy.

Chapter 5: Management & Discipline

1. What subliminal message do students receive when the teacher sends someone to the principal's office?
2. Can good instruction be maintained without a classroom management plan?
3. Do you assist some on your staff with classroom discipline techniques? If not, why not? Isn't this a starting point for learning?
4. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that effective teaching is occurring in the classrooms?

5. On page 51, paragraph 2, Principal Jennifer Myers walks through Harry's classroom. What does she observe? How should she share her observations with Harry? How would you share them?
6. Can the coaching analogy (re: quarterback) on page 52 be used by principal and teacher effectively for instructional purposes?
7. Should a supervisor separate coaching from evaluation?
8. How would you describe Jennifer's technique as she works with Harry?
9. Note how Jennifer uses the plural possessive pronoun, "our" to imply partnership.
10. Define "taxonomy".
11. Note Jennifer's use of the "Monopoly" analogy to make a point.
12. Jennifer explains "patterned" behavior and how it generally applies to people including teachers and learners.

Chapter 6: Jennifer Myers

This chapter is designed to illustrate how this principal became an instructional expert and to show what qualities are inherent in such expertise. In a self-examination how do you compare to Jennifer?

Chapter 7: Observation of Behavior Patterns

1. How did Jennifer Myers combine her people observations with her research into teaching and learning?
2. Are there observable patterns in a teacher's method of instruction? If so, then one must assume they can be identified and changed. Do the observable patterns help or hinder good instruction?
3. Note the steps used in a teaching cycle.
4. The best way for a principal to protect his/her instructional time is to make it untouchable to the extent possible. Everyone, including the superintendent should be aware of that effort and attempt to honor it.

Chapter 8: Unanticipated Events

This chapter follows number 4 above; recognizing that events can intrude on one's best intentions. The principal must make every effort to commit to the "untouchable" time. This chapter suggests that events occur that are not controllable. In this book, does the author recognize the outside forces that impact the schools?

Chapter 9: The Litigation Invasion

Every professional working in public schools today is aware of litigious threats. With far too many attorneys licensed but unemployed across the country, the schools are the perfect foil for tons of new business. This chapter identifies some of the issues facing public educators, issues that take from valuable school time. Have you had any litigious situations in your school? How did you handle them?

Chapter 10: The Cassidy Attack

Chapter 10 describes a real incident in a public school in Connecticut. The people involved and the school have not been identified. Have you encountered a similar “attack”?

Chapter 11: Principal vs. CEO

At first glance this comparison might well draw a guffaw from CEO’s. But one cannot ignore the data presented here. Admittedly there is much about the principal’s job that CEO’s don’t know. Following your reading of this chapter, what do you think of the comparison?

Chapter 12: Harry’s Lesson Plan Ordeal

In this chapter, Harry is feeling the heat of one out of his element.

1. Name two problems that are hampering Harry’s ability to gain competence as a teacher.

Chapter 13: Lesson Plan Review

1. Note how Jennifer continues to refer to their partnership. This is important in an observation cycle. The “coach” and subject are working together to succeed. They exchange ideas about the teaching and learning process.
2. Jennifer attempts to keep Harry at ease. How?
3. Is knowledge, the lowest level of understanding according to Bloom, an effective focus for classroom teachers?

Note how one learns to objectively transcribe what is occurring in the classroom: use of one’s own shorthand; recording selected patterns; observing student behavior. These skills become routine with practice.

Chapter 14: Don't Just Drop In

Many critics assume that an observation of a planned lesson gets the teacher off the hook; it doesn't allow for spontaneity. There is ample time to plan the entire lesson and control it unnaturally. This chapter offers a rebuttal to that indictment and a rationale for the approach. What is your opinion?

Chapter 15: Jennifer Enters Room 9

1. What does the beginning of this chapter suggest regarding Harry's teaching ability?
2. Can you define what kind of lesson Harry is about to teach?

Chapter 16: Observation and Analysis

1. Is it appropriate to record subjective opinions while observing the teacher's lesson? Why or why not?
2. How important is mutual trust in a coaching model? Explain
3. Why doesn't Jennifer comment generally about the lesson when she first meets with Harry for their post observation discussion?
4. What are the 5 elements of a coaching/teaching cycle?
5. Take note of the patterns in the classroom data.
6. Why is it good practice to have the teacher be first to identify a pattern or patterns?
7. What is the intent of the post observation conference?
8. Did Harry make progress as a result of this coaching cycle? Is he anywhere near where he needs to be?
9. Is the summary a fair assessment? Does it appear to be helpful? How would you change it?

Chapter 18: Teaching AND Learning

1. Are teachers generally concerned with the learning patterns of their students or are they focused only on teaching? Expand your thoughts.
2. What is Jennifer's immediate problem with Harry?
3. Her concern is double-edged. She's worried that his students could lose a year of education. And she is fearful of intimidating Harry at this point in time. Have you encountered such a dilemma in your school? If so, how did you handle it?
4. Is there a time to cut bait with a teacher of Harry's ilk?
5. Descriptions and definitions are offered for the readers' use in this chapter.

Chapter 19: Harry's Counterpart

1. This is a comparison of Harry with a highly competent teacher on the Clarksdale staff.
2. As you read it, note the stark contrasts between Harry and Grace including the sophistication of Grace's lesson.

Chapter 20: Signs of Failure

1. Should a coach treat teachers' strengths and weaknesses the same way a classroom teacher does with his/her students? Explain.
2. How would you respond if your superintendent asked who are the teachers in your bottom quartile and what are you doing about them?
3. Who are in your top quartile and how are you making them better?
4. Have you felt the pressure of having to decide about keeping a teacher?
5. What did you do?
6. Will Harry ever be anything but a lecturer? e.g. "I have all this information. Now you tell me what I've 'taught' you?"

Chapter 21: Man Overboard

1. How do your teachers compare with the qualities listed in italics on page 222?
2. What can Jennifer do with the evolving conflict between Harry and her as described on page 228?

Chapter 22: Termination

1. This is a very difficult legal process even with a non-tenure teacher.
2. Clinical supervision is not intended to terminate but to improve.
3. Will termination cause mistrust by others on the staff?
4. Do teachers basically know when one of their colleagues is incompetent?
5. There is a major obstacle in ridding a school of an incompetent but it can be done if one records all that is done to help a teacher in trouble and what the coach did to help improve the teacher's effectiveness. Again, the coaching model is designed to improve and only rarely to dismiss.
6. Summarize the effort Jennifer put into Harry before her final and fatal decision.

Chapter 23: Tenure

Following are some long held thoughts about tenure and the difficult obstacle it presents when seeking to dismiss a teacher.

1. What procedures need to be followed when termination is the last option for a principal?
2. Record keeping and written summaries are the artillery necessary to win the battle.
3. Faced with specifics in writing, an incompetent tenure teacher will often throw in the towel.
4. Read page 240. A good page for discussion.
5. Also read the paragraph beginning, "Objective data are the only means by which....." on page 242.

Chapter 24: Monitoring Student Standards

1. What is the purpose of requiring teachers to have and use curriculum guides?
2. How do principals ensure that district guides are used effectively?

Chapter 25: Kids in Today's Pop culture

1. Are schools treatment centers as well as learning institutions? Explain.
2. How does this affect the schools' ability to provide comprehensive instruction to students?
3. How can this incredible societal responsibility be addressed and communicated to the public more effectively than it is being communicated presently? Who should be the one(s) to do this?
4. With the challenge to authority coming from all angles, can our schools hope to provide the quality education the public demands of them?
5. What negative influences do our students face when outside of school? List some and discuss.
6. Does this cultural onslaught absolve schools from their primary responsibility? Discuss.

Chapter 26: The Secret of Effective Schools

1. How will we find able candidates for today's principalship?
2. How do you measure-up when reading page 258?
3. Why do we not hear about principals when reading or listening to what's wrong with our schools? Is it because as students, today's adults seldom saw a principal in their classroom? Discuss
4. Is the role of the principal still seen as described in the last two paragraphs on page 258?

Chapter 27: Reflections

1. Why did the Old River Board of Education hire Bernard Green as its superintendent?
2. Should all teachers be expected to improve?
3. Will the “coaching model” in the hands of an instructional expert impact a school’s education program? Would this have a major influence on public education across the nation if principals took on a coaching role in all our schools?

Chapter 28: Training Old River’s Principals

This chapter offers one way to introduce the coaching concept to a staff. It specifically states expectations for a training program. It includes the development of a plan for providing workshop experiences to the supervisory staff of a district. Design a training workshop for coaches.

Chapter 29: Practicum

Here a comprehensive training program is described. It suggests the various segments of an active training program. The involvement of the participants is also described. This is a summer school where principals practice skill development.

Chapter 30: On-Site Training

In this chapter the reader will see that Old River principals begin to work their skills with some of their teachers in the fall following their summer school training; always being mindful that this is a coaching partnership for the sole purpose of improving instruction and recognizing that most professionals on any job can learn to do their job better with the help of an expert coach.

Chapter 31: Testing Myths

1. Testing is always controversial. What affects test results? List as many as come to mind.
2. How does a student’s environment affect test results? List
3. How do parents influence a child’s school tests? List
4. If teachers are competent, continually improving and effectively addressing the curriculum will test successes follow?
5. If the State and Nation are the authors of testing programs, are schools in danger of having a state/national curriculum? Discuss
6. Is this fair to students? Discuss

Chapter 32: A Billion Here: A Billion There

Since this book was published, wasting a billion dollars no longer seems to carry the force of horror it did at the time of publication. Unfortunately, the author has no idea how to describe a trillion so read on. The intent of this chapter is to emphasize the wasteful dollars spent since the 60's without even marginal results. The conclusion is that a new way to affect the improvement of our schools must be addressed. Discuss

Chapter 33: Remedies

Are these remedies comprehensive? Should some be removed? Some added? Offer your thoughts.