

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL IN DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION?

CHAIRMAN: *Nelson F. Hurley*, Principal, Parkville High School, Baltimore, Md.

DISCUSSANTS:

*John O. Fry*, Secondary Curriculum Consultant, Hamilton Public Schools, Hamilton, Ohio

*William Medley*, Principal, Winfield High School, Winfield, Kansas

*Clarence H. Ortt*, Principal, Winter Haven Senior High School, Winter Haven, Fla.

### Summary of the presentation made by KENT W. LEACH

IT IS quite easy to state that a principal should have a school which is administered democratically. It is a bit more difficult to realize what the expression "democratically" actually means and decidedly more difficult to arrive at "things actually proceeding democratically." Too few of us really take the time to ask ourselves what actually is meant by "a democratic school." Vague impressions come to mind, characterized by such expressions as, "that school is not democratic, the principal is a tyrant, hurling orders right and left." Or, "I certainly would like to teach in that school; no one bothers you—no staff meetings—you go your own way—it's really a democratic school."

Although the word democracy can be defined, I believe it is a word that more properly should be "felt" than defined. Any word which denotes a process touching so directly on one's life with other people becomes rather difficult to define. Each of us has a tendency to look upon democracy as that form of government which tends to produce the best kind of life for one's self and, of course, others. Too often, the word "others" is forgotten or at best is treated parenthetically. This results in many different concepts of democracy, simply because each of us has a different "mind-set" as to what constitutes the good life for one's self and others. One may insist that a certain school is democratic, while another person will be equally adamant in saying that this same school is not. Both individuals probably are partially correct and partially incorrect in the analysis.

What can the principal do to aid in having his school run democratically? In the first place, it should be stressed that it isn't just *his* school. Secondly, the expression "*run* democratically" has a connotation comparable to one's winding a clock to make it run. If one insists on this

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Kent W. Leach is Director of the Bureau of School Services, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

imagery, then he should remember that there are many stems to the watch and many people should have opportunities to participate in the winding.

An administrator can help to effect democratic procedures in a school by realizing that democracy is as much an attitude as it is a method, a process, or a structure. This attitude is characterized by a sincere belief that people shall have rights. They shall have a working environment enabling them to cultivate their own personalities and unique individualities. They shall have responsibilities in the process of working for the best interests of their pupils and colleagues. If such an attitude really permeates the entire faculty and student body, there will be a significant chance that there will exist a potential for a "democratic school."

Can such an attitude be attained and how does the principal go about developing and nurturing such an attitude? In short, what is his role? One of the most important things for the administrator to do is to initiate a "role analysis" involving himself, the faculty, and pupils. The administrator has rather definite ideas as to what constitute his duties, his responsibilities, and his obligations. Furthermore, he has, of sorts, a philosophy of life and of education; he also conceives of certain goals toward which he hopes the school can strive. Similarly, each faculty member has ideas as to what his own duties, responsibilities, and obligations are. In turn, each teacher has his own philosophy of life, his personal goals, and his own techniques and methodologies.

The principal can and should express to the staff members his sincere desire to learn from them their individual concepts as to what he (the principal) should be doing. In other words, what role does each staff member envision for the principal? Unsigned, written comments suggesting the many facets of the position of a typical principalship can lead to a rough approximation of teachers' concepts of the role that the principal should be playing. Organizing such information within general categories in the form of an over-all summary can then be used by the principal in an oral presentation to the staff when he compares the teachers' concepts of his role with the role that he pictures for himself. This should lead to a rather interesting and helpful discussion. Such an approach must also be done conversely; *i.e.*, the principal should compare his "role picture" of each staff member with that member's own "role concept." If the staff is large, perhaps a department could be substituted for the individual using comparable techniques.

The key idea in such a role analysis is "involvement"—involvement of administrator, staff, and, yes, pupil groups to a better understanding of what jobs are to be done and in what manner. Emanating from such discussions should come some basic "ground rules" or "bench marks" leading to a gradual development of policies—policies that will be understood better by more people. With more understanding, there is usually an accompanying increased degree of acceptance of methods and techniques

of action. With a higher degree of acceptance of methods and techniques of action there is frequently a greater chance for an accompanying healthy "general tone" in the entire school. One finds in most schools having an excellent "general tone" a good "democratic" environment existing.

Some would say that this is merely advocating a "team" approach to administrative action. This is true, to a degree. But it should be stressed that a team functions still better when it has a coach and a captain. The point is that each team member should understand fully the duties of coach and captain; and each in turn should understand the function of the team members individually and as a team.

There is a real temptation to admire the characteristics of a school administered by a benevolent dictator. After all, one might name schools where things get done, where objectives are accomplished, where orders are issued and carried out, and where the pupils apparently are scoring high on standardized tests. Such a situation is especially attractive now to many laymen who would have our schools emulate an efficient factory producing its quota of products for each day. But the main objective of our schools today should be and should continue to be to provide those experiences that will lead to the continuance of democracy, our way of life. If, then, the principal actually wants to know his role in democratic administration

1. He should be sold completely on the value of the democratic way of life. If he does not so believe, there is little chance of his assuming much of a role in developing democratic administration.

2. He should be ready to work *with* others and not *over* others.

3. He should be ready to face the fact that working *with* others demands much "give and take." This doesn't mean that he cannot be a leader or that *all* situations are solved by majority vote; but there will be times when different routes to goals may be suggested by his colleagues, or the student body, or the community.

4. He should be willing to initiate, encourage, and aid in the administration's, staff's, student body's, and community's understanding of the roles they play as groups and as individuals.

What, then, is the role, the actual role, of the principal? My answer is simply this—if the foregoing philosophy, attitude, method, and role analysis are carried out, the principal's role in democratic administration is to provide the *climate* for democracy to function in the school. It is a continuous job—one which never can be said to have been completed; but it is a satisfying one, a stimulating one, and an important one.

## Summary of the presentation made by PETER C. McCONARTY

A PRESENTATION relative to democratic administration logically sets out from an understanding of what is meant by these terms. For our purposes, we define democratic administration as that type of public-school administration which, subject to the final authority of the school principal, develops the school program and philosophy by the sharing of responsibility and initiative by all of the individual school community. There is inherent in this definition the sharing of the great possibilities of school administration among many persons other than those usually regarded as the administrative. In such a situation, teachers, pupils, custodians, and parents alike become, within clear bounds, co-administrators.

The role of the principal must originate in a realistic and intelligent philosophy on the part of the principal himself. Unless at the outset the principal understands and believes in democratic administration and believes that such administration is the most effective way in which to further the total education of his pupils, he is incapable of assuming such a role.

The many techniques of furthering democratic administration must be fully understood, but paramount at the beginning must be the conscious and definite realization that these techniques in themselves find limits of finality in the traditional and legal responsibilities which are reserved to the position of a school principal.

No individual can operate a school democratically. He can only encourage and organize others within the school family to share enthusiastically in a cooperative venture towards a better school.

In assuming such a role, the principal should seek the responsibility of assisting in the selection of teaching personnel. He must constantly seek to retain those teachers who are capable of sharing in a democratic administration. The neurotic, the easily frustrated, the unintelligent on the staff may be the greatest deterrent to successful democratic administration.

The principal must seek out those teachers who are qualified by intelligence, personality, and teaching excellence to become not only master teachers, but also teachers capable of investigating exhaustively all possibilities for school progress in a democratic, group-organized procedure. The teacher must be enthusiastic in his sharing in the democratic process, must accept, as the administrator does, a concern for the entire school program, and concurrently must realize that final decision in all matters remains in the principal's administrative area.

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Peter C. McConarty is Principal of the Oliver Ames High School in North Easton, Massachusetts.

Such staff thinking is the responsibility of the principal. This is his greatest and most challenging opportunity in his democratic role. This staff philosophy, an extension of the principal's own beliefs, may be developed in faculty meetings, by democratic methods of supervision in the classroom, by staff bulletins, by personal contact, and, above all, by example and an insistence that clarity, firmness, and continuity be the attributes of any opinion or decision which the principal may advance. The teacher must be convinced that the administrator is solely interested in a better school and that he sincerely wishes each teacher to help him toward that goal.

No democratic administration is possible without the understanding and support of the largest segment of the school, the student body. Pride in their school as something which belongs to the pupils and in the operation of which the pupils share is one of the goals of democratic administration.

The student council, honor societies, and all other organized student groups provide the media by which the principal's democratic philosophy may reach the student body. The principal must insist that these groups themselves operate in a democratic fashion and be so developed that they can be profitably involved in the solution of problems within the school. Many such problems will never be properly solved until the student bodies of our schools so advance in self and group discipline and understanding as to share in the solution of these problems.

The disciplinary function of the principal, perhaps the most commonly accepted link between administration and the student body, offers a fine opportunity for him to spread a philosophy of democratic administration. Each disciplinary decision, each opportunity to talk with individual pupils on specific problems must further the pupil's understanding of the democratic society in which he lives. The pupil must be made to realize that democracy exists in its truest sense only when each citizen abides by that society's rules and regulations.

In his relationship with adult school-connected organizations, with community groups, churches, the local press, and with his fellow administrators, the principal must aim toward the highest practice of the democratic ideal. He must be receptive to suggestion, available for interview, understanding of all aspects of any matter, and must be far above the extension of partisanship in any matter since he is, in many opinions, the school itself. What he does, says, and even thinks, is often construed as the philosophy of the school or the school system. Therein lies one of the great dangers of democratic supervision for the principal must, in such a circumstance, bear extremely heavy responsibility.

No area in our schools has been more misunderstood than the movement toward democratic administration. Such administration has been labelled as "progressive," and has supposedly become a *laissez-faire* situation in which teacher and pupil alike go their separate ways in "democratic" fashion, unfettered by authoritarianism or dictate.

We do not at this late date fully comprehend the total meaning of democracy in our national society. We have seen every possible abuse and extreme committed in the guise of democracy—the emphasis has been for too long on the “rights” rather than the greater burdens which such a system places upon the individual. The great importance of the principal’s role in democratic administration is that perhaps in such a role in our public schools may at last be fully developed the basic true concepts of democracy by which a nation may progress and prosper.

### WHAT EXTRA-CLASS ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM FOR JUNIOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS?

**CHAIRMAN:** *John M. Fletcher*, Principal, Hart Junior High School, Washington, D. C.

**DISCUSSANTS:**

*Glenn W. Moon*, Principal, Walter R. Dolan Junior High School, Stamford, Conn.

*Melvin Voxland*, Principal, Rochester Junior High School, Rochester, Minn.

*Kenneth D. Haun*, Principal, Stranahan Junior High School, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

### Summary of the presentation made by I. PAUL HANDWERK

EXTRACLAS activities are the added spices to the junior high-school program that makes it more meaningful to the boys and girls. These activities which include athletics, student council, assemblies, clubs, and social functions are an important part of the educational program of junior high-school youth as they provide learning experiences which cannot be offered effectively elsewhere in the program of the school.

Almost every boy and girl who enters junior high school looks forward to belonging to a group other than his immediate class section. This group may be the band, the glee club, the basketball team, or some other, but it is his hope that it will be his selection not his assignment.

Each school has the responsibility of determining what extraclass activities are to be included in its program. The variety of the offerings will depend upon the response of the individual faculty members to assume sponsorships of the different activities as well as the desire of the pupils to participate in extraclass activities.

The sponsor is the key person in the activity. He should not dominate the student organization by attempting to set the policy, nor restrict the

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I. Paul Handwerk is Principal of Northeast Junior High School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.