



Book Review: *It's the Principal of the Thing*

By Robert Rader
Executive Director, CABE

The principal of a school can make a significant difference in whether the school succeeds in raising student achievement. Research has pointed again and again to the critical roles that principals play.

Arthur E. Woznicki, former Director of k-12 Instruction in West Hartford and has, according to him, “supervised more than 40 principals over a span of 14 years.” He has now written *It's the Principal of the Thing!*, which discusses the crucial role of principals.

Woznicki believes that boards of education must put pressure on superintendents of schools to ensure that those hired as principals serve as real “teachers of teachers”. The best part of the book and, I believe, the most useful for boards, but especially for superintendents and principals or those who aspire to those roles, is his case study, in which a teacher with several years of experience leaves his district to start a new job in another one. The teacher is basically incompetent, not knowing much about how to teach students — he mostly seems to read to his fifth-grade class and his interaction with them is severely lacking — and he seems to have little interest in becoming a better teacher.

In the new district, he is supervised by a principal who impresses upon him the importance of understanding more about education theory and how children learn. The principal is more of a coach than a “manager” and the importance of helping the teacher understand that they *both* need to succeed in their roles is stressed.

The principal discusses *Bloom's Taxonomy*, which provides “the six steps to learning that each child should experience during the learning process”, as well as books such as Howard Gardner's books on Multiple Intelligences. She, eventually with prodding by the superintendent, takes the teacher (and the reader) through pre- and post-observation meetings, observations, evaluations and other parts of the supervision process.

Woznicki portrays the principal observing (and recording) the teacher in class in a non-judgmental

manner and then helping the teacher see the good and the bad in what happened in the classroom. Obviously, the expectation is that the teacher will build on good work and cast aside the bad habits of the past.

Whether the teacher makes it in the new district or not is answered in the end. By the time one reads what happens, it is apparent that a principal must spend great amounts of time coaching, evaluating and teaching teachers is a critical part of ensuring that schools succeed.

Unfortunately, the book also contains a lot of preaching by Woznicki, attacking “nasty and mean-spirited parents”; most parents (“Parents today are more likely to believe their children than their children's teachers”); the media (“ceaselessly attacking the public schools”); lawyers (“whose goal is often to intimidate teachers and principals with legal hammers”); and even some television shows (for being “tawdry, crude and disgusting”). He states that “For the last forty-years home support for schools has continued to wane”.

No research, footnotes or references back up these statements and they take up way too much of the book. Certainly, Woznicki, whose points about the role of the principal are dead on, has the right to voice his opinions and the truth is that I agreed with a number of his comments. Without support for these statements, however, it is almost as though Woznicki wrote two separate books—one on the principalship and one on his opinions about public education and the state of our society.

The importance of principals and their supervision of teachers remain keys to student success. Certainly, it is critical to the work of school boards and superintendents that the role of principals gets the attention it deserves.

If *It's the Principal of the Thing!* encourages more focus on this subject and helps show how the teacher of teachers must lead, it is worth the read.

The book can be purchased at www.bbotw.com or Amazon.com. Any bookstore should also be able to get it, using the ISBN number, 0-74143769-4.