

David G. Marshall

It's good to be a teacher

What follows is not so light-hearted that it couldn't happen. A Utopia for school principals, Marshall seems to say, is just over the horizon. And it follows, as the night the day, that having little left to do they then could really get in on the act and help their teachers. Would that be a Utopia for teachers? (Well, of course.)

As far as Harvey Mathews was concerned, the biggest challenge of 30 degree-below mornings was surviving the walk from his allotted parking stall to the front door of Fletcher Barnbridge Junior High. Heated sidewalks had reduced the chance of a slip and related injuries, but no amount of technology had yet been able to control Arctic weather fronts. As he ran the gauntlet of a 2500 watt windchill, he appreciated the fact that he didn't have to remove his gloves to perform the first of his duties as school principal.

"Good morning, Horace," Harvey greeted the front door of the school. "Activate school opening procedures."

Recognizing his voice, Horace immediately unlocked the front door as well as the other school entrances designated as appropriate for use at this time of year. At the same time, Horace turned on all of the necessary school lights (his all-night task of rotating light-use finished) turned up the heat by 5 degrees C, started quietly playing some Debussy over the school's P.A. system, and started the coffee in the staffroom.

During the day, Horace would monitor corridor traffic, keeping track of the frequency of use of rooms, gym facilities, audio-visual equipment, and other physical resources of the school. Occasionally,

he would automatically turn the lights down, or perhaps reduce the heat to a certain part of the school that wasn't being used.

Although monitoring the flow of people all day was a little boring at times, Horace had had his exciting moments. Like the time he sensed some unusual activity under a first floor stairwell and passed this information on to Millicent in the offices. She, in turn, suggested that Harvey, the principal, investigate, and in doing so Harvey was able to break up a rather vicious fight before it got out of hand. Horace had also been instrumental in reducing vandalism at night. Not very much happened at the school, day or night, that he wasn't aware of.

Meanwhile, Harvey entered the school and continued down the corridor to his office.

"Hello, Millicent," Harvey offered as he entered his office. "Messages please." Also recognizing his voice, Millicent awoke, and in her characteristically monotonous tone, a voice that reminded Harvey of the speaking style of some of his university professors, proffered the information that Harvey had requested.

"Bussing: É22 is stalled on Highway 3 - have sent info to divisional office - alternate bus on the way - 18 students will be late for homeroom - notes to this effect have been placed in appropriate teachers' boxes.

"Teacher illness: Mary O'Neill called in sick - list of available supplies is on your morning printout - on the basis of past performance and suitability for Mary O'Neill's class profile, I would recommend substitute É6, with É4 as a second choice.

"Horace has indicated that the thermostat in Room 12 is broken - have sent this info to divisional service department - we are 4th on the list for service - e.t.a. of repairman 10.05 a.m. List of student absences - those who have missed more than 6 days this term - is on morning printout. Have placed the information on guidance counsellor's printout as well.

"There was a message from divisional office for a principal's meeting this afternoon at 2.30 - indicated that you would be busy on a É4 priority meeting at that time - division office requested a É2 priority for their meeting - have rescheduled your meeting with science teachers for tomorrow at 3.00 - have informed same."

"Thank you, Millicent," Harvey replied, as he retrieved his unsweetened, slightly whitened coffee from the coffee machine that

David G. Marshall

Horace had put into action. "Give me a printout on my revised schedule for today."

Harvey thought for a moment and then continued: "Also, send out to all parents the standard letter regarding our plans for an open house sometime next month. At the same time give me a projection of attendance at an open house for each of Wednesday and Thursday nights. I'd also like a list of all students, and their subject teachers, who are in a failing position in their course work as of yesterday. Compare this number with divisional statistics you can get from the central office computer.

"We also have a new student starting today in Level 5 - he's from Pinewood School - request his data file from the Pinewood office computer and do a profile match to see in which homeroom and with which teachers he should be placed.

"Oh - and one more thing," Harvey continued. "There is some scuttlebut around the division that Ridgeway school is going to be closed and their French Immersion program combined with regular programs in our school. The Ridgeway profile should be available from either theirs or the divisional computer. Do a simulation based on 1, 3 and 5 year projections, and provide me with an analysis of the sociological, psychological, climatic, and organizational implications of this proposal for our school. Give me a printout of your analysis and store the analysis for my retrieval only."

Harvey went to his desk, and while waiting for Millicent's analysis of the simulation, worked on some ideas he had for improving the social studies curriculum. He had noticed in a computer knowledge update on social studies the results of some recent research in politicization that intrigued him, and he wanted to work with his social studies people on some directions in this area.

"Teachers and students arrive in 30 minutes," he thought. "Time enough for me to go over Millicent's analysis before spending the morning helping one of the newer teachers with a perplexing instructional difficulty she has."

Harvey couldn't help smiling about the prospects of being able to spend a morning actually helping a teacher. Since Millicent took over the evaluation of teachers for promotion, tenure, and so on, he had been able to spend his time on instructional improvement. In the old days they used to distinguish between these as summative and formative evaluation, and the ability of a principal to help teachers (that is, formative evaluation) had been greatly hampered by the fact that he or she also had to do the summative evaluation. Ever since the school board and the teachers' union had agreed on the measurable indicators of teacher performance, Millicent had handled the summative evaluation in a fair and neutral way, to everyone's

satisfaction. Except those who got a bad report of course. But then, how can you argue with a computer?

At any rate, all Harvey had to do now was worry about making his instructional team better, and Millicent was instructed not to take into consideration any of his discussions with teachers when she generated their performance probability score.

In the stillness of the pre-student morning hours, Harvey felt satisfied.

"It's good to be a teacher," he mused, as Millicent's analysis started to appear on his desk-top printer.