

# Preface



*Being a principal is primarily a thinking, walking, and talking job.*

—Neil McNiell and Ray Boyd,  
Australian school principals

**I**n the spring of 1987, Fenwick English asked our mutual friend and colleague Larry Frase if he would be interested in writing a book on Management by Wandering Around (MBWA). As superintendent of a small school district near Tucson, Arizona, he didn't know where he was going to find the time to complete such a project or even if he knew enough to fill a book. He wondered, how much can you say about wandering around? But the offer came at the right time. Larry had been considering hanging up his superintendent spurs and pursuing his original professional goal of joining the faculty at San Diego State University. So Larry decided to accept Fenwick's challenge, and in August of 1987, he went to work on the original best-selling version of this book. It was titled, simply, *School Management by Wandering Around*.

After giving the potential contents of the book much thought, Larry realized that many of the administrative practices he had instituted in his school district—for example, the superintendent being in the schools once a week, the principals spending 40 percent of the school day in classrooms, the teachers maintaining a focus on curriculum and instruction, and the entire leadership team giving sincere attention to the mental health and professional readiness of staff—all were integral to the MBWA philosophy. However, he found the number of actual research studies on MBWA extremely sparse. When he looked for research to support the MBWA idea, he actually found only three studies that analyzed practices resembling MBWA. Consequently, Larry relied heavily on the empirical observations of very successful professional school administrators as well as his own practical experience—a decision that rendered the original book particularly valuable for real-world administrators learning to cope with the myriad problems of the modern school. This book preserves this worthy characteristic while at the same time bringing other aspects of MBWA preparation up to date.

The first edition of *School Management by Wandering Around* was printed in 1990, and much to the publisher's and Larry's surprise, it was a big success. Larry began the task of

updating the first edition but passed away suddenly before he could finish the job. We decided to pick up where Larry left off for two reasons: First, Larry was a loyal friend and colleague with a missionary's zeal for reforming the way schools are run. Second, and equally important, the fundamental concepts developed in the book are more important now than ever.

The *good* news is that researchers have now produced numerous well-constructed research studies on MBWA or closely related topics—and all indicate that MBWA promotes desirable outcomes (see Chapter 5). We now have strong evidence that being out and about in classrooms is highly related to such sought-after outcomes as improved student discipline, higher teacher efficacy, higher teacher-perceived effectiveness of the school, higher opinions of teacher evaluation and professional development, and higher student achievement. The list goes on, as you will find in the ensuing chapters.

When Larry was writing the first edition, his coauthor Bob Hetzel asked, “And what are principals supposed to do while wandering?” A darn good question, and we have answered it! We have included a brand-new section on “walk-through” classroom observation techniques, including descriptions of some of the most successful walk-through models. These powerful strategies have caught on nationally and internationally. This book gives principals the tools to get into classrooms and focus their attention on the “right stuff”—the curriculum. School leadership is an art, and we should not apologize for the passion, ardor, and other personal qualities of great school administrators. We believe Aristotle was right when he declared that poetry is truer than history.

The figures and tables from this book are also available online at [www.corwin.com/wandering](http://www.corwin.com/wandering) for downloading and use with individuals and school learning teams.

In writing this book, we have made an effort to present practical approaches to the school administrator's job. We do this by guiding the reader through strategies for dealing with the nitty-gritty of school leadership, beginning with a definition

of School Management by Wandering Around and a description of its potential for building great leaders and effective school organizations. Building on the strong research and practice base, we provide a well-defined system of “what to do” in classroom walk-throughs. In addition, we present practical discussions of the applications of this powerful leadership style, ranging widely from such topics as developing meeting agenda to supervising instruction, and from dealing with marginal teachers to creating safe campuses. In short, this book presents the best of MBWA research and the related administrative practices that have emerged over the past few decades.

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