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TEAM TEACHING

A Term Paper
Presented to
Mr. T. O. Watson
Ouachita Baptist University

In Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Course
Honors Special Studies in Education

by
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May, 1969

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TEAM TEACHING

One of the new concepts which has come to the forefront in our dynamic educational world is team teaching. In this paper, the general objectives will be to provide a working definition of what team teaching is, to show how it works, and to find what the advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement are.

Dr. Ira J. Singer, Director of Curriculum Research for the Board of Cooperative Educational Services in New York, and the country's most noted consultant on team teaching, gives this definition for team teaching:

"Team teaching may be defined as an arrangement whereby two or more teachers, with or without teacher aides, cooperatively plan, instruct, and evaluate one or more class groups in an appropriate instructional space and given length of time, so as to take advantage of the special competencies of the team members."¹

There are, of course, many viewpoints as to exactly what team teaching actually includes, but one of the similarities is that teachers are brought into a close working relationship for the joint instruction of the same group

¹David W. Beggs, (ed.), Team Teaching: Bold New Ventures (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 16.

of students. Thus, the team teachers must share instructional tasks and goals; they must plan together, assign appropriate tasks to individual team members, see each other teach, have access to each other's classrooms, join together in the evaluation of instruction, share information about the students for whom they are jointly responsible, and hold discussions based on common observations, of teaching and the effects of teaching.²

In most successful team teaching ventures, working relationships are necessarily will defined. The responsibilities are formalized and team members are restricted from returning to the self-contained-classroom idea and schedule as well.

As one may note in the definition, a third characteristic of teaching teams is that they are composed of two or more teachers. Because the team must have joint instructional responsibilities, more than one professionally qualified member is necessary. Teacher aides may assist, but will not, with a teacher, constitute a real teaching team.

In the last part of the definition of team teaching, mention is made of taking "advantage of the special competencies of the team members." Thus, it has become generally accepted that team teaching includes some large-group instruction in order to avoid the repetition of lessons by different teachers and to provide

²Judson T. Shaplin and Henry F. Olds, Jr. (eds.), Team Teaching (New York: Harper and Row, Pub., 1964), p.9.

the opportunity for the most talented and specialized teachers to influence a larger number of students.³

There are, it must be repeated, few team teaching plans exactly alike. However, three major types are emerging across our country. These types, or patterns, of team teaching might be called the single-discipline team, the interdisciplinary team, and the school-within-a-school team.⁴

The single discipline team usually consists of two or three teachers from the same department, teaming together to instruct a common set of students. For example, the teachers of two social studies classes might team during one period of the day so that each teacher may handle the phase of the course he is best suited to teach.⁵

The interdisciplinary block of time team consists of teachers from different subject areas given a common time period to use as the team sees fit for the instruction of a common set of students in classes of flexible size. When the block of time is assigned

³Ibid., p. 13.

⁴Beggs, op. cit., p. 16.

⁵Ibid., p. 17.

(for example, to a math/science team), the teachers on the team must assume responsibility for scheduling study activities within the block.

When the same body of students is taught by teachers from all disciplines over a long period of time (say, two to four years), this is called the school-within-a-school team. It is hoped, by this method, that a closer relationship between teacher and pupil in all the disciplines may be reached. Teams participating in this project usually consist of a group of five to six teachers given a small body of about 150 students for a period of time longer than one or two semesters. Students go to classes of differing and changing sizes and schedule. Team members are given several periods each week to part in team conferences during the school day. In this particular pattern, counseling and guidance functions are very important parts of the team operation.⁶

The short sketch of what team teaching really is, outlined above, sounds promising. However, there are many disadvantages which may be discussed. Perhaps one of the first of these problems that should be mentioned is that there is often not enough time allowed from the teaching schedule to effectively outline

⁶Ibid., p. 20.

what approach and methods the team hopes to use collectively, The problem of the lack of time to plan programs and, indeed, sometimes even to execute instructional plans, too often is acute. More time is needed for this and for analysis and evaluation of the teaching-learning process.⁷

Having the proper type and amount of space is a problem that may be hard to solve, thus making the program less efficient. The new use of building space is almost a corollary to team teaching as we understand it. To be "short-circuited" in the use of building space is frustrating. "Plastic instruction in an unbending container is difficult."⁸

Negative, sometimes destructive behavior comes about when teachers, ill-suited to co-operative efforts are thrown into constant professional contact with one another. Disagreements, if frequent enough, rupture the team process and children are the big losers. The lack of role definitions and specifically defined duties can lead to great frustration for the teachers. It can also cause the disintegration of communication both within a team and throughout the school. Perhaps one answer to this problem would be team training. This can

⁷William Goldstein, "Problems in Team Teaching," The Clearinghouse, 42:84, October, 1967.

⁸Ibid., p. 85.

eliminate much of the friction that may otherwise develop in a team teaching environment.⁹ This training may take the form of pre-school seminars, college courses, or in-training programs.

A big item in the line of practicality is that team teaching costs money; it does not save it. If team teaching is to succeed, it must be given more than enough funds. Without enough support financially, the team teaching program will fall by the wayside.

Aside from these disadvantages, there are many obvious advantages in this approach to teaching. The first of these is that teachers work together in planning the curriculum material, so that each subject area is well integrated and balanced. Team teaching provides an organizational vehicle for specialization in teaching. A team for an elementary school may consist of teachers in complementary skills, such as an expert in reading, one in social studies, and one in mathematics and science.

Team teaching also provides a way of organizing for the improvement of supervised teaching. In using this method, veteran teachers can be made responsible for less experienced teachers. Less expert teachers

⁹William Hard, "How to Field A Winning Teaching Team," The Grade Teacher, 83: 175, May, 1966.

can study under the leaders and assume more responsibility and heavier teaching loads as they grow into the job.¹⁰ In addition to this, the exchange of ideas between teachers is put on a professional basis, so that it is well understood that the job of evaluating each other's performance is not a personally damaging thing.

Because the teaching team may be a large enough unit to guarantee efficient use of its own audio-visual and other mechanical helps to instruction. Tape recorders, projectors, and teaching machines can be assigned permanently to teams. This material and equipment are centralized so that they are handy when needed for the whole team.¹¹

Perhaps the most important advantage of team teaching is that each teacher views two or more grades and, in so doing, gains a deeper understanding of the needs and requirements for individualized teaching. As a corollary to this, it may be said that every child is observed by several teachers.¹²

A summary of the objectives of team teaching would probably be the most effective means by which we could see the total aim, hence the real strength, of the

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¹⁰ Chaplin, op. cit., p. 19.

¹¹ Hard, op. cit., p. 176.

¹² Ibid.

program. Dr. Singer has listed these in a book called Team Teaching: Bold New Venture, edited by Dr. D. W. Beggs, and they are listed here.

1. to develop creativity, adaptability, responsibility, and habits of inquiry in students.
2. to make more intelligent use of teachers' specialized talents, interests, training, time, and energy.
3. To improve the quality of teaching through the in-service nature of the team design.
4. to provide a program of student grouping which permits instruction to be more effectively geared to individual student ability.
5. to provide realistic treatment of individual differences to supplement the identifying and diagnosing of these differences.
6. to provide time and facilities during the school day for teachers to prepare lessons, develop imaginative materials and keep abreast of new developments.
7. To provide students with group experiences prerequisite to successful citizenship in a democratic society.¹³

Teaching in teams has become a real answer for the needs of the students and special abilities of teachers. However, such a program must be well-planned and initiated before it can rise above possible disadvantages to become an important step to a better quality of instruction for all pupils.

¹³Beggs, op. cit., p. 27.

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