

# Providing TIME for Teachers

**This article points to the very urgent need for teachers to have, during their busy days, some time apart from pupils. It shows how some systems are providing this time that is so necessary if teachers are to function as creative professional persons.**

**T**EACHERS need time apart from pupils. They need time for working with community agencies, parents, curriculum revision committees and on many miscellaneous duties. In addition to the time needed for these activities, teachers also need time for relaxation. Such relaxation is often necessary if teachers are to be the creative persons essential for a creative profession. Can teachers who are required to remain with pupils constantly throughout the school day be expected to approach their jobs experimentally?

Teachers spend more time today working on school related activities outside of the classroom than they did in the past. Many elementary teachers have found, at the same time, that the movement toward the self-contained classroom pattern of organization does not leave them any time within the school day when they can be away from pupils.

Is too much being expected of teachers? Can the out-of-school activities considered today to be a part of the job of teaching continue to be expanded without providing some time within the school day when teachers are freed

from the responsibility of a classroom of pupils? There is no doubt that involvement in out-of-school activities is an integral part of the job of teaching. A recent ruling of the Supreme Court, Kings County, New York, stated: ". . . The day in which the concept was held that teaching duty was limited to classroom instruction has long since passed. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

With an ever increasing number of out-of-classroom activities competing for the time of an elementary teacher, elementary faculty groups are facing the alternatives of:

1. Reducing the amount of teacher involvement in out-of-school activities, such as work with parents, community agencies and curriculum committees; or
2. Retreating from the self-contained classroom organizational pattern in the elementary school; or
3. Finding ways to provide for the continuity of learning afforded by the self-contained classroom; yet, provide teachers with time apart from students within the normal school day.

To accept either of the first two alternatives would mean a rejection of

<sup>1</sup> Parrish *et al.* v. Moss *et al.*, 106 N.Y.S. 2d, 577, p. 584 (1951).

much we know about conditions which contribute to a good learning environment. To work for ways of providing each elementary teacher with some time apart from pupils is the task which faculty groups must face.

In this article there are illustrations of how faculty groups are resolving this problem area. The illustrations cited do not necessarily represent the best ways; however, it is hoped that these will stimulate other groups to seek possible solutions in their own schools. Satisfactory practices must be worked out in each school. There is rarely a situation in which there is a "one best way." Conditions which make particular practices exceptionally suitable in one school may be such that the same practices would be unsuitable in another school.

### Current Practices

In order to identify ways in which faculty groups are working to provide time for teachers for individual or group work and relaxation, a survey was made of 313 elementary schools.<sup>2</sup> In these schools, groups are currently considering ways for alleviating their time problems. A number of practices now in use were identified.

Certain practices required additional expenditures of funds. These involved employing non-certified personnel, "floating" teachers and regularly scheduled substitutes. Others, requiring no additional funds, were those involving the use of parents, older students, principals and vice principals and grouping

<sup>2</sup>Rodney V. Tillman, "Ways of Providing Time for Elementary Teachers Within the Normal School Day." Unpublished Doctor of Education report, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1955.

arrangements worked out by the faculties. Many schools dismissed pupils on a regular schedule to allow teachers time to participate in curriculum planning activities. Brief descriptions and illustrations of these practices are given in the following paragraphs.

In one system, adults, usually mothers living near the elementary schools, are employed to come in for playground supervision during the noon hour. This affords teachers time for group meetings when necessary and some time apart from the students each day. In another school, an especially capable bus driver is employed to assist in playground instruction throughout the day. (The Cooperative Study for the Better Utilization of Teacher Competencies, made possible by The Fund for the Advancement of Education, is currently concerned with the use of non-certified personnel.)

The practice of hiring additional classroom teachers, frequently referred to as "floating" teachers, started in several areas as a result of an inadequate supply of substitute teachers. In other areas, it started as a means for keeping a supply of unassigned teachers on hand at all times. This was a necessity to keep up with the influx in school enrollments resulting from surging population. In a number of schools this practice was found to be such an effective way for providing classroom teachers with many kinds of assistance that "floating" teachers have now become a regular part of the personnel employed in these schools.

In considering the practice of providing regularly employed substitutes, one teacher who was interviewed reported:

We have a group of four undergraduate, experienced, older teachers who come every Wednesday and take our rooms for one and one-half hours while four classroom teachers plan together. Then these rotating substitutes go to other rooms so other groups of teachers can get together and plan.

In many of the schools contacted, parents were used to provide time for teachers to be apart from pupils. The interviews held regarding this arrangement revealed that parents had been used because funds to provide teachers with the assistance they needed were inadequate. Several educators stressed the importance of involving parents in planning the activities to be under way during the time they are to work with the pupils.

Older students used are upper elementary pupils, secondary students and college students. An example of the use of upper elementary students was given by an educator who stated:

Sixth grade students give the teachers a ten minute coffee break in the morning. In this situation, each sixth grade student is encouraged to be a specialist in some area and then, on a rotating basis, the sixth grade students go to the rooms and carry on an activity related to their specialty while teachers have time for coffee, informal discussions, or a brief time apart from students to use as desired.

High school students used in this situation included:

1. Those enrolled in classes which require that a certain amount of time be spent in the elementary classroom, and
2. Those who are members of Future Teachers of America organizations and volunteer certain amounts of time for working with elementary schools, and
3. Those interested in teaching, but who are not members of the Future Teachers of America organization and not receiving credit for the work.

In some situations there are provisions for making two-way benefits of this practice. Here, however, it is often difficult for the classroom teacher to spend the time desired working and conferring with the high school students.

College students from several teacher training institutions near elementary schools were reported to assist elementary teachers. These college students were in teacher preparation programs, but were not enrolled in student-teaching at the time.

Practices receiving the least attention of all were those related to arrangements which can be worked out among the faculty members themselves so that a portion of time can be provided for each teacher. A few persons did report arrangements for regularly splitting up classes and sending students to other classrooms, and for receiving assistance from special teachers—art, music, physical education, etc.—in working with a class or several classes at the same time. Several thought the factor most inhibiting effective grouping arrangements is the adherence to rigid class and grade levels. Limited arrangements for grouping exist in a school where teachers talk of “me and my class” rather than about the total school.

Principals and vice principals participated in classroom activities in a number of elementary schools to allow teachers time apart from pupils. Most of the elementary principals who

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participated in this activity felt it was a very important one for them. Their only regret seemed to be that the time they could spend in this way was so limited.

Dismissal of students to provide teachers time for participation in curriculum planning is a widely followed practice. Several persons interviewed raised the question: "What happens to the students when they are dismissed?" They thought decisions regarding the use of this method should be made after considering this question. Several educators emphasized that parents need to know what teachers are doing during periods when pupils are dismissed. Conversations with several persons from schools where this practice is used frequently revealed that there had been no instances of unfavorable community reaction.

An overwhelming majority of teachers, administrators and supervisors commented favorably on the use of the various practices. Statements made by these educators included:

Parents enjoy the experiences of working with pupils and ask to be called again.

The parents who helped in the rooms feel more a part of the school since this experience. They also have a better understanding of the problems teachers face.

Both parents and teachers approve plan (use of parents) 100%.

Children love for the older students to come to their rooms.

Teachers feel the whole experience has been a good one.

While parents and elementary pupils were not contacted directly to report their reactions to the various practices, the opinions which the educators believed the parents and pupils to have were most favorable. Their comments indicate:

1. That bringing parents into the classrooms seems to develop deeper understandings of the mutual interests of the teachers and parents in the pupils, and

2. That pupils welcome the enriched and wide variety of experiences which are made possible through the use of the practices.

It is hoped that this article has suggested some "starting points" for elementary school faculties interested in working on the problems of providing periods of time for teachers to be apart from pupils. It must be recognized, however, that there are many factors which affect the implementation of the described practices. Many local factors must be considered before the use of any practice is initiated. Successful use of a practice in one locality does not always insure success in another situation.

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