

Staff Utilization To Improve Learning

*Three guidelines assist
in organizing the staff
to improve learning.*

THE function of the professional staff of a school system is to provide the most effective learning experiences for its students. In contrast to the studies of personnel utilization which search for methods of reducing the number of professional staff members, this article will consider ways to organize and utilize a staff that will increase each child's learning.

When prime consideration is given to the learner and his learning, three guidelines emerge: (a) staff utilization should provide individualized instruction for each child; (b) staff services should help the teacher be more effective in working with his pupils; and (c) staff structure should recognize the professional stature of the teacher.

Individualized Instruction

Staff utilization should provide individualized instruction for each child. To aim that each pupil learn to the limit of his ability is not to suggest that each child be tutored. For example, appro-

priate learning experiences may include the use of electronic communication media with large groups, discussion sessions in small groups, and differentiated projects for individuals. The guideline, however, remains constant—each experience constitutes, at the time it is used, the most effective instrument of learning for each of the individual pupils involved.

Unfortunately, many of the present proposals for staff utilization either ignore or greatly minimize the importance of this guideline. Some who advocate these innovations apparently assume that all pupils are alike, or that all are alike except for the top few—the gifted. Thus they fail to see the need to provide varied programs which meet the needs of different students.

One support for the first guideline is that traditionally our society has stressed the value of an education for

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all. The Rockefeller Report, *The Pursuit of Excellence*, points out this interest in individuals. "A concern for the realization of individual potentialities is deeply rooted in our moral heritage, our political philosophy, and the texture of our daily customs."¹ The report goes on to stress the necessity of a quality education for all. "Our kind of society calls for the maximum development of individual potentialities *at all levels*."²

A second source of support for the first guideline is to be found in child growth and development studies. Daniel Prescott has summarized much of this research in his list of six important determinants in a child's ability to learn: (a) organic factors, (b) the climate of love, (c) cultural background, (d) peer-group relations, (e) self-developmental factors, (f) self-adjustment factors.³ The consideration of these determinants of learning demonstrates the great range of abilities within each classroom which must be provided for in any effective plan of staff utilization.

Several experimental programs are now being conducted in an effort to discover more effective ways to utilize the staff. These studies are of two general types: those designed to relieve teachers by the use of nonprofessional personnel, and those seeking better ways to utilize the individual competencies of present staff members.

Studies of the first type, which attempt to relieve some of the demands on professional personnel, include such varied

¹ Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc. *The Pursuit of Excellence, Education and the Future of America*, Panel Report V of the Special Studies Project. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1958. p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³ Daniel A. Prescott. *Factors That Influence Learning*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958.

approaches as: the use of teacher aides at Bay City, Michigan; the use of trained engineers and research scientists as laboratory assistants in Roseville, Minnesota; and the use of a secretary for each five or six teachers in the Peabody College Study. To measure these studies against the first guideline would require a detailed analysis of each. However, an innovation would seem to be in accord with the guideline if the use of non-professional personnel increases the amount of time a teacher has for working with individual students, without requiring an untrained person to take over professional responsibilities. In those instances when the aide is used only so that the teacher may deal with a greater number of pupils, and therefore pay less attention to individual differences, the practice is not consistent with the first guideline.

In studies of the second type, which provide for a new utilization of the particular talents of teachers, the specific plan and its effect on the learner must again be considered in applying the first guideline. For example, the plan of a school within a school described by Arthur Nagle of Allentown, Pennsylvania, is apparently consistent with this guideline.⁴ In his plan a team of three, four or five secondary school teachers forms a small autonomous unit and operates as a school within a school. This organization provides for considerable planning among staff members and for large blocks of time for classes. This plan should increase teacher understanding of pupils and provide for greater attention to individual differences.

The use of automatic and electronic teaching devices may affect staff utiliza-

⁴ Arthur J. Nagle. "The Team Concept in Organizing a Secondary School Program." *N.A.S.S.P. Bulletin*, April 1959. p. 86-87.

tion. Any consideration of these teaching aids should be related to the first guideline. For example, use of television to present certain types of material to large groups of children may have advantages if it makes it possible for the teacher to give needed attention to individuals within the group. Similarly, teaching machines, various visual aids, and recordings may make it possible for the teacher to increase pupil achievement. Curriculum workers should be creative in discovering how new mechanical devices can help the teacher provide a more effective program of individualized instruction.

Services to the Teacher

Staff services should help the teacher be more effective in working with his pupils. Despite a variety of proposals for utilization of staff and the introduction of new teaching aids, no one has seriously recommended the elimination of the teacher. Therefore, if we are to organize our staff to improve the quality of instruction we must examine ways of bringing help to the teacher.

The professional nonteaching staff for a school system should be developed by examining the kinds of help teachers need to do their most effective work. Such an analysis would identify at least three different types of help: assistance in programs of curriculum improvement, assistance in work with individual pupils, and assistance in providing for the coordination of various services.

As part of the need for assistance in curriculum improvement, many teachers desire direct help in improving their instructional techniques. For several years the Minneapolis Public Schools have provided this type of service to new teachers in the elementary schools. Each

new teacher has the personal direct assistance of a teacher of the same grade level who has been released from classroom duties. This individual, known as a helping teacher, has no administrative responsibility for the new teacher. The helping teacher is available to assist the new teacher on any professional problem, to aid him in planning learning experiences, to provide demonstration teaching with the new teacher's class, and to plan meetings where the new teachers can discuss their mutual problems. New teachers have been most appreciative of this service, and a recent survey of all teachers showed a desire on the part of many experienced teachers to have the same kind of help.

Teachers also need assistance in another aspect of curriculum improvement. Effective programs recognize the desirability of having the professional staff work together in considering the objectives of education, in developing appropriate guidelines for subject content and methods of instruction, in developing effective means of measuring the results of teaching, and in identifying appropriate learning materials. To conduct this work successfully, teachers need the assistance of curriculum consultants who will coordinate the work of the staff and see that the decisions made by the group are carried out.

Teachers need help as they work with individual children. If education is to help each child develop to the limit of his ability, teachers need assistance in determining each pupil's potential and in measuring the extent to which he has reached this potential. The importance of knowing a pupil's intelligence quotient has long been accepted by teachers. The value of providing the teacher with additional information about each child is being recognized. For example,

Symonds has suggested, "... teachers need to be helped in their assessment or diagnosis of the emotional stability of a child. It is as important for a teacher to know the anxiety level of a child with regard to learning tasks as it is to know his I.Q. I foresee schools of the future giving children tests to determine their anxiety level which will be on a par with tests of intellectual level."⁵

And if the child fails to reach his potential, what then? First, the teacher needs to understand the basic causes for the child's failure to achieve. Next, he needs suggestions as to what he can do within the classroom to improve the quality of learning for the child. Possibly the teacher will need help in placing the child in a special class, or in gaining assistance from the parents or from community agencies in removing some of the child's blocks to learning.

In addition to assistance in curriculum improvement programs, and in work with individual pupils, teachers need an effective and productive environment in which to work. The necessary services should be coordinated to provide an efficient school plant equipped with the best available aids, and building responsibilities should be organized to create the optimum morale for teachers. Professional personnel need the kind of coordination and encouragement that will make possible their working together creatively as they share ideas and develop plans for curriculum improvement; they need the kind of leadership that develops a climate conducive to the professional growth of the staff.

Staff structure should recognize the professional stature of the teacher. A

⁵ Percival M. Symonds. *What Education Has To Learn from Psychology*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1958. p. 71-72.

first step in developing this structure is to decide what competencies within the professional nonteaching staff will provide the desired help to teachers.

Most staffs include curriculum resource people who are experts at teaching in a certain grade level or in teaching a certain subject. The instructional program will also be improved by the services of a child psychologist, a school nurse, and a school social worker. In actual practice, however, providing professional workers from several disciplines may work a hardship on the teacher, since he must confer with so many different individuals to understand a single child. In the secondary schools this problem is somewhat resolved through the use of the counselor. In some Minneapolis public schools the functions of the school nurse and the social worker are performed by one individual in order to reduce the number of people with whom the teacher must confer. This experiment has had an enthusiastic response from teachers. Several other school systems are instituting counselors in the elementary schools to coordinate these services.

Many other competencies could be added to the foregoing list. However, the key in following the third guideline is that the principal recognize the professional responsibility of the teacher and the total staff to provide the teachers with the most effective help. A school system may have all of the needed competencies on its staff and still provide a minimum of help to the classroom teacher. In order for the staff to be effective, proper relationships between service personnel and classroom teachers and among various members of the service personnel staff must be established. This relationship depends upon some basic attitudes toward the teacher and teach-

ing. All nonteaching staff members should recognize teachers as mature, responsible, professional co-workers doing the important work of teaching boys and girls. Personnel on the school staff, other than teachers, are there for the express purpose of helping the teacher be more effective. They should constantly be evaluating their worth by asking themselves the question, "How have I helped teachers do a better job?" This statement of relationship does not minimize the importance of nonteaching personnel; rather, it is through allowing the creative talents of teachers to be released that the position of a staff consultant reaches its maximum worth.

Studies in industry show that in general a complex administrative structure seems to contribute to poor morale on the part of the staff. Accordingly, industries have been moving in the direction of a decentralized type of organization. Harold F. Smiddy, vice president, General Electric Corporation, has indicated some of the basic principles behind a decentralized organization.⁶ Some of these principles seem to be applicable to school systems; for example, authority to make decisions should be placed as close as possible to where the action occurs; real authority must be delegated; there should be faith that men in decentralized jobs will make sound decisions in a majority of cases; the organization must believe that an aggregate of many individually sound decisions is better for business than one centralized plan; the main role for members of service components is to provide help and advice so that operating managers can

⁶Harold F. Smiddy. "Advantages of Decentralization in Achieving the Objectives of Large Organizations." *Strengthening Structural and Operational Patterns in Large School Systems*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1958. p. 67-73. (Mimeographed.)

make correct decisions; responsibility commensurate with decision making authority must be accepted and exercised at the local level.

This trend toward decentralization is also apparent in school organizations. The project for Cooperative Development of Public School Administration in a recent publication, *Your School and Staffing*, has listed the following guideline: "The administrative staff should be organized to provide individual persons on a staff and individual units in a school system with as much freedom for individual initiative as is consistent with efficient operation and prudential controls."⁷ Thus the effect is to reduce the number of levels of authority within a school system and to place much greater responsibility for decision making with the local school principal and faculty. This does not minimize the contribution of other professional personnel; the principal, for example, should seek the advice and counsel of others as a basis for faculty decisions. The relationship becomes one of a professional person providing advice rather than of a supervisor dictating policy.

The manner of operation of members of the school staff is more important to the success of the educational program than is the organization of the staff. Although a discussion of democratic administration is beyond the scope of this article, the importance of a cooperative approach to school administration must be emphasized.

In summary, the staff should be organized and utilized to promote effective learning of each individual child. To do this, services that will be of maxi-

⁷Cooperative Development of Public School Administration. *Modern Practices and Concepts of Staffing Schools*. New York: C.D.P.S.A., 1956. p. 17.

imum assistance to teachers must be provided.

These services should be organized in such way that they will be of greatest benefit to the classroom teacher. The provision of the best services, organized in the most effective manner, is not enough to guarantee a good program of education. In addition, the work-

ing relationships within the school system must be based on respect for the worth of each individual member of the school staff and on an appreciation of his professional competence. Only in such an atmosphere can the creative talent of the teacher be utilized to provide the best possible program of education for each boy and girl.

School Organization

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cipals in terms of first, second, and third choices. The list comprised management and operational functions; instructional program responsibilities; staff and community relationships; special educational services; and pupil accounting procedures.

In compiling the results to this question all answers were weighted on a first, second, and third choice scale. The results show that Improvement of Instruction remains the number one problem for principals, with a total weight of 5619 responses. The second most pressing problem is Provision for Exceptional Children, with a total weighted response of 3753. In third place is the problem of Obtaining Adequate Physical Facilities, with a weighted response of 1482. Fourth is Programs of Special Education, with 1474. Fifth on this list is the Recruitment of Teachers, with a total weighted response of 1082.

An analysis of these returns shows that the perennial problem of relating the efforts of the school administrator to the improvement of instruction persists. This is not a new thought, for traditionally and historically the principal has always borne this responsibility. Yet, here is timely evidence to re-establish the validity of the need. As a matter of fact, too, it is significant to realize that four of

the first five topics on this list of problems for principals relate directly to the instructional program. In these days of pressures and demands, perhaps it is not amiss to conclude that school administrators can be most responsive to needs and urgencies by becoming more closely involved and identified with their programs of classroom teaching.

Yes, we should look at the organization of our schools. We need to determine if administrative organization is a factor which is impeding free expression of educational opportunity for children. But, in so doing, we should not make a fetish of the structural pattern, in the misguided faith that organization in itself guarantees the educational quality we are seeking. Administrative procedures can do much to aid a good program but they alone cannot solve the problem.

The rightful place of inquiry lies in the classroom. What is being done to relate the teaching process and materials to the educational needs of children is the proper point of emphasis. Through the exemplification of leadership qualities, by directing his efforts and attentions to the instructional program, and by increasing his own skills and sensitivities in the supervision of instruction, the school administrator may play a key role in improving the quality of the school.

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