

## Team Teaching: An Assessment

INTEREST in team teaching has grown rapidly since 1958. In that year the National Association of Secondary-School Principals devoted the January issue of *The Bulletin* to the work of its Commission on the Experimental Study of the Staff in the Secondary School (NASSP, 1958). In the two-year period preceding that issue (1955-57), not a single article on the subject of team teaching was listed in the *Education Index*. In the following two-year period, by contrast, the *Index* listed eight articles. Between July 1959 and June 1960, 35 articles appeared in published journals and, through June 1961, an additional 19 entries had been listed. No doubt the output will continue to mount, for everyone seems to want to jump on the bandwagon of "team teaching" (Bush).

At the moment, it appears likely that in hundreds of secondary schools and in many elementary schools the instructional staffs are doing something which they call team teaching. What types of team teaching are reported by school systems? What are characteristics of present developments? What advantages are claimed for team teaching, and what

problems are inherent in the structures already adopted?!

### Types of Team Teaching

The education profession has suffered for years because it has lacked precise terminology. Team teaching is another example—the term already has almost as many meanings as there are school systems doing something with it. At present, there appear to be at least the following five types of team teaching in various stages of development and/or experimentation. Variations from these types are, of course, myriad.

1. A *hierarchy of teaching assignments*. Several school systems (see Anderson, Johnson, Stone) have attempted to develop instructional teams which are based upon a specified hierarchy of teaching assignments. At the top of the hierarchy is a team leader who is a person with superior educational preparation, several years of teaching experience, and leadership qualities. The team leader often is given a lighter teaching load and a salary commensurate with the leadership responsibilities he is asked to assume. The team, in school systems developing hierarchal assignments, usually also consists of senior teachers (who receive extra pay, but not as much as that received by the team leader), regular teachers (often those

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without previous experience or those new to the system), part-time teaching assistants, and clerical aides. In order to cover the costs of the increased salaries for leadership and for clerical help, additional pupils are assigned to the team—usually at least one extra class section for three or four certified teachers.

2. *Coordinate- or co-teaching.* In school systems using this approach, teachers are assigned to a large group of pupils (usually a multiple of the number the teachers would have under more traditional assignments; e.g., two teachers to 60 youngsters, three teachers to 90) and they plan together *as peers* how best to provide for the pupils for whom they are responsible. As in the previously described "hierarchy" plan, sometimes instruction is provided to the entire group by one teacher. Sometimes one teacher works with most of the youngsters in the group while the other works with a small group of the gifted or with those needing remedial instruction. Sometimes each of the teachers has a "normal-sized" group of about 30 pupils each. Attempts are made in the planning to utilize to the fullest extent the strengths of each teacher. Such plans usually have been described as existing within established departments at secondary school levels or at grade levels in elementary schools.

3. *Team teaching across departmental lines.* In several junior and senior high schools attempts have been made to improve the program, and hopefully to improve learning, by devising schedules for instructional teams which provide a two- or three-period block of related content (e.g., American history, American literature). Students have, normally, one period with the social studies teacher, followed by one period with the English teacher (or the reverse). Often, when

desirable, the two groups are combined for the double period—as for a field trip, orientation to a new unit, lecture by an outstanding resource person, visual aids, and the like. The teachers have at least one free period at the same hour so that joint planning is possible.

4. *Part- or full-time helpers.* Many descriptions of team teaching indicate a fairly standard teaching role for the regularly certificated teacher, but seek to improve his teaching effectiveness by providing additional help of various kinds, including instructional secretaries, theme or paper correctors, laboratory assistants, learning materials coordinators, and audio-visual experts. To employ the additional personnel without substantial increases in instructional costs, teachers usually are asked to accept responsibility for a larger number of learners than normal (usually 35 to 40). The teacher retains active control of the planning and most instructional phases of teaching, utilizing the helpers on the team for particular tasks of a more routine nature.

5. *Trading groups.* In an informal way this method of capitalizing on the particular strengths of teachers has been utilized for years by elementary school teachers. The teachers have said, in essence, "If you'll take my art—you're good in it and I'm not—I'll take your music," or "If you'll take my science, I'll take your social studies." Until recently, such "trading" was rare at the secondary school level, but it may be growing now as a result of the staff utilization studies.

Several reports indicate that two or three teachers of a particular subject, such as general science, plan their work so that they trade groups for particular units of content. The trading is done, ostensibly, to make certain that the groups receive instruction from the best-

qualified teacher of the team, and also to ensure that the teachers have an opportunity to provide instruction geared to their own interests and competencies.

### An Assessment

Any attempt at assessment of educational practices is, of necessity, made from a value base. In most previously published reports, an attempt has been made to assess practices in team teaching by utilizing three types of data: achievement as measured by standardized or by locally-constructed tests, teacher opinions (sometimes buttressed by student and parent opinions), and per-pupil costs. The data collected and reported generally indicate: (a) Students do as well or perhaps a little better on standardized tests when taught by teaching teams of the various types described. Usually the obtained differences are not significant when fairly sophisticated statistical measures are employed to analyze the data. (b) Teachers, generally, are willing to continue the team approach, although there are numerous indications that not all teachers make good team members. Increasingly, reports indicate that differences among teachers need to be recognized equally as much as do variations among learners (see Hanvey and Tenenberg, Weiss). The reports seem to show a feeling of, "We are working on the frontier—trying to find a better way of proceeding," which undoubtedly has positive value for heightened morale. The increased workloads (meetings, meetings, meetings!) seem to have been shouldered with enthusiasm by the participants. In the long pull, better ways of equalizing instructional loads probably will need to be developed or morale may slip. (c) Students and their parents generally

favor what has been tried. Many learners are at first skeptical or negative, but as teachers gain confidence and competence in their changed roles, reports from them indicate positive support for the team approach. (d) Costs rise slightly. The extent of the increased costs usually is not specifically reported. Three ways of bearing the increased costs have been utilized: increased local appropriations, employing fewer qualified teachers and increasing the pupil-teacher ratio, and support from foundations. Many of the additional costs have been the result of improved instructional resources—books, films, overhead projectors, and the like.

While these criteria of achievement, opinion, and cost are measurable, to some extent at least, they do not necessarily provide good bases for assessment unless one subscribes to the following premises: (a) that education is best which results in highest achievement as measured by tests, standardized or otherwise; (b) that education is best which results in expressed teacher satisfaction with administrative practices (and perhaps student and parent approval also); (c) that education is best which increases present per-pupil costs only slightly and may in time tend to lower costs. These premises seem to be questionable as criteria for a profession to use in assessing the worth of an innovation.

The assessment which follows, also made from a value base, is developed to the extent possible on the following assumptions: (a) learning of high quality requires interaction between the teacher and the learner and between the learner and other learners; (b) learning of high quality is more likely to occur when teachers are patient, understanding, intellectually alert, and free to make decisions based upon their best profes-

sional judgment; (c) what is learned must be used (more functionally than on an examination) or before long it will not be known.

These assumptions obviously eliminate cost as a function of quality (although most administrators at present must consider the cost-quality factor) because the writer assumes that this nation can afford instruction of high quality for its children and youth. The assumptions also eliminate teacher opinions as expressed on questionnaires or verbally to members of the administrative and supervisory staffs. What is essential for effective learning is not necessarily highly correlated with what teachers prefer. To state the assumption another way, what teachers consider to be good teaching may not result in the most effective learning. The spotlight should be focused on the *learning process* rather than on teaching.

These assumptions also eliminate achievement as measured by tests. Teachers know what most achievement tests contain or are likely to contain. Using almost any organizational structure, they can, therefore, make sure that the learners make about average gains in achievement. Obviously, any structure which results in *marked* improvement on standardized tests should be seriously considered. Whether the instructional technique or structure should be adopted widely, even if better test results are obtained, is another matter—a matter for professional judgment. Students who score higher on standardized tests, in other words, are not necessarily better educated.

What assessment can be made of the various types of team teaching using the value assumption that good learning results from the interaction of learner and learners with patient, understanding,

intellectually alert, free teachers who see that what is learned is used? Nine "advantages" consistently reported for team teaching are given in italics below. In each instance, some comments based upon the value orientation of the writer follow in regular type.

*Few pupils are limited to the instructional competence of a single teacher at a grade level or in a department at the secondary level.* As a result, few teachers in this arrangement get to know individual pupils as well as in traditional arrangements. Interaction between the superior teachers and the learners (especially in the hierarchal plan) is minimal. Personal contacts of learners with teachers tend to be limited to teachers of lesser competence and experience.

*Persons most highly qualified provide instruction to large groups, thus saving much time for the total staff which can be used for more effective planning and for instruction in smaller-than-average groups.* Questions learners have during the lecture must be deferred until a later time. Moreover, what the teacher wants to teach is not necessarily what the pupil needs or wants to learn. The learner may, in fact, already know what is being presented to a large group. The same problem exists, of course, when teachers lecture to normal-sized groups. May there not be a better way to teach?

*In presentations to large groups, better use is made of visual aids because more time can be devoted to the preparation of needed materials by specially-qualified team members.* Substituting a picture of a magnet on an overhead projector as a lecturer explains how it works (as was shown recently in the television report, "The Influential Americans") may result in undesirable verbalization not sufficiently based on real,

firsthand experiences by the learners themselves. Skillful presentations do not necessarily result in effective learning experiences.

*More uniformity in instruction is achieved because all students are taught, both in the large groups and the small, by the same teachers. Sections pupils are assigned to thus make less difference than in traditionally organized schools.* Uniformity in instruction is not necessarily desirable. The degree of desirability depends largely upon how much flexibility is provided for the very bright students and the slow learners. Individualization of instruction, whether in traditional or team approaches to teaching, is a valid and desirable goal. To the degree that attention to individual differences is provided (this varies in different team teaching plans), the learning is likely to be effective.

*Less repetition is required of teachers, especially at the secondary level where several sections of the same class have been traditionally assigned.* Repeating a lecture to several sections of the same class probably is wasteful—but getting to know the pupil is *essential* for interaction. Almost all reports indicate that less discussion occurs as team teaching is undertaken. Perhaps more “ground” can be covered, but that is no guarantee that more learning has taken place.

*Teacher competencies are better utilized.* Instruction tends to become more formal, less spontaneous. In the hierarchal plan, young, inexperienced teachers undoubtedly have more opportunity to learn from team leaders, but the conception is supported that superior teachers lecture to large groups while teachers drawing lower salaries and with less teaching experience work with smaller groups. Learners, as a result, get individual help from teachers who probably

are least qualified to give it. These weaknesses, it should be noted, are not apparent in the coordinate and interdepartmental plans where teachers operate as peers.

*Better provisions are made for helpers—librarians, audio-visual experts, clerks, and the like—to do routine tasks.* A definite boon to the profession! The only problem which should be noted: effective coordination of such helpers takes time. In the opinion of this analyst, such help should and could be provided regardless of the structure for teaching developed by the school system.

*Group size is clearly related to function. Large groups are formed for activities which are effective with large groups, and vice versa.* This concept makes sense. In the judgment of this assessor, the “coordinate” and the “across departmental lines” teams have the greatest possibility of built-in flexibility at this point. The “hierarchal plan,” because of the specified roles, probably has the least likelihood of achieving flexibility in grouping.

*Of necessity, students assume more responsibility for their own learning. As more and more instruction is provided in large groups, a greater share of the school day is given to independent study on the part of learners.* If education is effective, the more mature the learner, the more able to guide and direct his own learning endeavors he should be. Generally, then, this claimed advantage of team teaching is desirable. Perhaps even a greater measure of independence could be achieved other ways, however.

## A Final Word

The worth of attempts at team teaching are not proven to date. The main value of the attempts which have been

made thus far undoubtedly lies in the staff growth which has occurred as a result of the experimentation.

Experimentation should be continued. Much more sophisticated research designs should be used, so that variables in the situations can be more carefully controlled. While team teaching is being tested more carefully, some school systems (perhaps the same ones) should also be testing other approaches to improvement of learning, such as: assigning not more than 20 pupils to a teacher, shortening the teacher-directed part of the school day and lengthening the pupil-directed portions of the day, utilizing more programmed materials as these become available, basing more instruction on the "workshop way of learning," orienting in-service education programs for teachers more toward intellectual growth, providing better learning materials centers and instructional secretaries at every school, and lengthening the school year for a larger number of teachers so that more time for planning and preparation is available.

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