

THE

CONSULTANT-TEACHER

TRANSACTION

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DICTIONARY definitions make a trite opening, but the title of this piece seems to require a few.

A *consultant* is one who gives professional advice. In practice, school consultants do much more than that, but serious thought must be given to limited and limiting "service" suggested by the definition.

Teacher, of course, is an omnibus which carries more and more kinds of people. The dictionary is of little use as we consider changing roles and status of teachers.

Relations between teachers and consultants become vivid as we read definitions of *transact*: to drive through, to make a business deal, to negotiate or transfer, to comply or concede in a matter of principle. But then comes the definition from philosophy: "an activity involving two parties mutually affecting or reciprocally influencing one another." I think this means interaction among professional peers which produces positive outcomes. When consultants and teachers honestly pool their

problems and their skills no one needs to play the "You tell me what to do and I'll be happy to do it" game, nor the one called "In a democratic way I'll take you up on that."

Whether out-of-classroom personnel are called consultants or supervisors, coordinators or resource teachers, directors or department heads, there still seems to be more than a hint of we-they, superior-inferior, expert-less expert.

This may be one reason for current proposals to reduce or eliminate district consultant services. State legislatures and other lay groups worried about rising costs of education see such a move as providing additional funds for smaller classes, new buildings or more learning materials.

The American Federation of Teachers is not enthusiastic about supervisors, and many building principals would add personnel to their schools rather than to centralized staff. Two educators at Stanford University have proposed that classroom teachers assume full respon-

sibility for improving classroom instruction (1).

Reciprocal Learning

Perhaps a sense of self-preservation keeps me from joining any movement to eliminate this segment of the profession. Yet it really is much more than that. I believe that when consultants and teachers plan and work and evaluate together, when they *transact* for the improvement of instruction, when they want to learn from each other, then a little piece of the educational world becomes a better place for students to live.

Learning to function in new situations will be the key to survival, not only for consultants, but for all educators. No one needs to be convinced that pressures from within and from outside the profession are opening classroom doors wider and wider to let in new ideas and new people, professional and nonprofessional. A teacher no longer gives a solo performance on the classroom stage. "The team" is no longer one teacher working occasionally with one consultant or observed now and then by one principal. And in many situations, the team's captain is a teacher and there are several new players.

The consultants who understand reciprocal learning, who prize individuality, whose commitment to education is firm, who can tolerate the ambiguity of rapid change, will be valued members of these new work groups. They will continue their traditional tasks of coordination and facilitation, but they also will become synthesizers and catalysts.

And what about these new work groups? The traditional "school family" of teachers, principal, counselor, secre-

tary, nurse, librarian and maintenance staff is expanding. From the Neighborhood Youth Corps come high school students to work with all staff members. College students are tutoring and working in library and recreation programs; those preparing to teach are spending more time observing in the school and community and beginning to teach.

Parent aides no longer work only in private schools or comfortable neighborhoods; they now add contributions to their own "poor" schools.

In many communities former teachers are being coaxed from the kitchen into part-time teaching. And new summer programs are coming so fast that it is impossible to follow all of the developments.

All of this reflects lay, professional and governmental concern for the best possible education for all children and youth. Yet the speed of change can negate the goal unless we can plan and evaluate astutely. Expedient organization for an expanded school staff can produce a result as isolated from the mainstream as the closed-door classroom.

I see the competent consultant in another role, though not a new one. This is acting as liaison with other schools, other districts, and national developments. He will still transact with individuals and small groups, but he also will be an educational scanner.

As dramatic as this expansion is, there is another movement which may be even more revolutionary. This involves teachers taking the initiative in launching serious studies of differentiation which go far beyond salary increases. Many snort, "Merit pay!" and leave any group talking along these lines, but

some are staying to push their thinking past traditional education-plus-years-of-experience formulas.

Teacher Categories

As I listen and read I find four possible categories of fully credentialed teachers.

First are the part-time teachers, not ready to resume interrupted careers but wanting to keep up with educational practices and to be socially useful. As they return they will face such problems as staff acceptance, fitting a part-time assignment into the total school curriculum and selecting limited professional growth activities.

Faculties and consultants will have rich opportunities for mutual learning if we listen to the part-time teachers and provide jobs for these women.

The second group has always been with us—beginning teachers. Yet they are now beginning to speak a little louder and tell us that we are not doing all we can to assure an adequate induction into the profession (2).

If we take this job seriously we will all learn a lot about teacher dropouts. We will discover the potency of such simple things as providing a time and place for beginning teachers to talk with each other—no observers and no reports. We will learn the subtlety of some hazing systems. We will be forced to dredge up our own memories of the frustrations and excitement of moving from college student to teacher.

We will see that beginners meet teachers with one or two years of experience. One young teacher recently said to me that she finds anyone who has taught more than four years cannot remember what it is like to begin!

Here a consultant who understands the need for affiliation can work to help beginners survive entry into their chosen profession (3).

The third category is new—that of limited-responsibility teacher. This might be a teacher working a full day for full salary who undertakes other professional responsibilities on a limited basis. Mothers of young children come first to mind as people who might elect this category, but others might be teachers working on graduate programs or serving as officers of professional associations, to mention only a few possibilities. Professional growth will be continued but on less than a full scale. This will mean careful selection of activities which do most for the teacher and these choices might well be discussed with a consultant or principal. Otherwise, requests for assistance from out-of-classroom personnel will follow current good practices.

This category would create still another, currently designated as career teacher. This role is not defined and more appropriate labels may develop along with clear definitions (4).

This will be a competent, mature, growing teacher selected by the best criteria and procedures which can be developed in his district. Selection may even take place while he is preparing to teach and include new kinds of internships and residencies.

The career teacher will be able to manage a complex organization for teaching and learning. He will also be a contributing member of his staff, his community and the teaching profession.

He will develop several specialties in subject matter, learning strategies, curriculum development, classroom re-

search or any area relevant to his teaching. He will be able to assess himself and confident to discuss his strengths and needs with others in planning his own professional growth.

His school year will be longer than that of his students and teachers in other categories, and his salary will be comparable with that of a principal or consultant.

Some problems are apparent if a plan like this were carried out and one can be sure that many other problems would develop. Yet as this district and that work with the idea, as patterns more viable than simple merit pay develop, career status will become available to qualified teachers, perhaps sooner than now seems possible.

Will these teachers want consultants working with them? Certainly they will be able to answer the question with more confidence and sophistication than most consultants are accustomed to. This answer will be *yes* if consultants can work in a mutually productive relationship; *no* if the consultant is threatened or dogmatic.

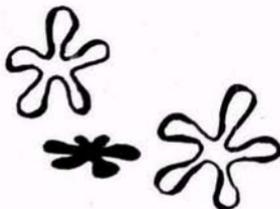
It seems likely that subject matter specialists, educational generalists, experts in learning theory and other consultant personnel will be busy for some time, but new perceptions and perspectives must match the demands of teach-

ers who will become increasingly expert. Will they be centralized or attached to school staffs? How will they work with specialists from universities and research centers? What new functions and organizations will develop for optimum staff utilization?

I believe that time is running out for consultants who see teachers as they once saw their students; who hope to change teachers without changing themselves. But those who can *transact* are already deeply involved in the baffling, frustrating and promising educational venture of working faster than we ever thought we could toward the great goals of our profession.

References

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