

STAFFING FOR VARIABILITY

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"WE ARE most interested in developing programs that will individualize the instruction of every student in our school system." Comments such as this are often made by leading school men when they sit down to discuss programs they are developing.

As national conferences are held and as emphasis is placed upon sharing of ideas, more and more school administrators and teachers are impressed with the results of individualized instruction and flexible scheduling and are eager to identify themselves with such programs. Moreover, parental and community acceptance and planning of school facilities are frequently cited as important products resulting from the planning of programs that allow for the individualization of instruction.

Does it simply take a program that is planned in such a way that individual students may seek out and find materials that will allow them to develop at their own rate of speed, building upon foundations they have previously developed, to do a good job of making instruction an individual matter? This is only half of the process! The teacher and his attitude, preparation and background must be proper to produce the

type of program that will actually allow for the individualization that each school superintendent, school principal, or teacher really desires for the students for whom he is responsible.

It is almost a cliché to say that we need an outstanding community that supports education and a good clientele made up of boys and girls of above average or at least average ability to insure that we have a good program. A second cliché is that we must have a good school building with built-in flexibility that allows for various sizes and groupings of youngsters with instructional materials readily available also to make the school program a success.

Few of us have questioned the importance of these two clichés, yet we seem to fail to recognize that, even though we have good students and good facilities, a program must also be implemented by the best possible personnel assigned to a classroom.

Where Does One Start?

The placement of teachers or administrators in a special assignment without giving consideration to more than just filling a position with a "warm body" is like creating a budget and then at-

tempting to build a school program to fit within that budget. Schools across the nation which have been successful in program development have learned that, first of all, programs must be carefully outlined, planned and developed, and then given to the fiscal department for the making of a budget that can buy that program.

The same situation must occur if we are to place teachers in classrooms to the greatest advantage. We must first of all carefully weigh each vacancy in terms of the type of students living in the area being served, the home backgrounds of boys and girls, the type of administrator directing the program, consultants that are available for use in a given situation, materials that are available for instructional purposes, and the type of building facilities available.

Once each position is ascertained in relation to these points, then the superintendent and his staff must search for the person who can best fill the position that is vacant. This necessary step makes the "individualizing of instruction" more an "individualizing of teacher assignment" than it heretofore has been in general practice.

What Has Happened?

During the past several years, school systems have been concerning themselves with increasing size in an attempt to get larger numbers of students together to insure that a broad specialized academic and vocational program may be developed. At the same time this was being done, schools were continuing to have an increasing concern for providing individualized instruction for their students.

As these two developments have gone

forward, the assignment of personnel has become increasingly difficult, due to the increase in staff size and needs. Constantly, personnel directors are saying, "We have to hire teachers as we find them to insure that we have enough personnel on hand to open the school each fall." This tendency has increased the placement of "warm body" teachers in classroom situations, giving little consideration to the teacher's actual individual potential in relation to his assignment.

The teachers, in reality, are the ones who are responsible for the implementation of any curriculum, regardless of whether it is flexible, inflexible, innovative or traditional. The simple dignity of a qualified professional person should not be allowed to be insulted after four or five years of training by placing him in a teaching position through impersonal and unplanned methods.

Staffing Policies

While working toward a school program that will foster and enhance variations among individuals and groups, it is important that the school exemplify its philosophy through definite staffing policies. The following preparation should be made by the administration when considering the individualizing of assignments long before assignments are even considered.

1. Each school should have a position description that fits the individual "school personality." The "school personality" includes the type of community, the socioeconomic backgrounds, the type of staff the building has—traditional, flexible or other—

age, and personal make-up of the staff. Consideration should be given to racial assignments, as well as equalization of male and female teachers.

Consideration should also be given to previous experiences of the teachers. The position description involving these and other "school personality" characteristics should be developed for every school in the system, whether it be a one-school system, or 100-school system. From this information, the personnel director, as well as interviewing personnel, will be better prepared to recommend individuals for assignments based on individual strengths.

2. What are the indicated strong points of the teacher as related by the college training institution, the individual in an interview situation, or by previous employer recommendations? Using this combined information, teachers may then be placed into categories that fit the previously developed job descriptions as outlined in point one above.

3. It is very important that a close working relationship be established with all persons involved in the selection and appointment of candidates to positions. Regardless of the size of the school corporation, it is important that the chairman of each department, the principal and vice principal, as well as the various consultative and supervisory personnel, have an opportunity to participate in selections when their given area of responsibility is involved. Far too often systems hide behind bigness and need for rapidity of selection to insure the filling of vacancies and forget the responsibility they have of making the new teacher a success by

placing him in the best possible working assignment.

4. Another factor that must be considered when we are determining the placement of teachers on an individualized basis is that every candidate should be required to visit the school system prior to employment. Schools may even be placed in the position of paying travel allowances for teachers being considered if they are interested in gaining the best possible candidates for every position. While the individual applicant should be interested enough in his placement and the personnel with whom he is going to work to make these travel arrangements himself, sometimes special circumstances arise in which such help may be required.

5. Staffing for variability does not close with the assignment of the candidate to a position. The school system is charged with the responsibility of utilizing the varied backgrounds of culture, social and professional preparation and varied experience in in-service education programs that will allow each teacher to become well adapted and better acquainted with his assignment. These in-service programs must allow for involvement of personnel, crossing over grade and building lines.

6. Staffing for variability also implies the attitude that the building principal and others with whom the new teacher works will recognize that the newly assigned educational partner will not be expected to assume the same responsibilities and have the same vigorous attitude toward programs that may have been "old hat" to members of the staff who have been in a given building for a long period of time.

A teacher should not be expected to accept assignments that will take him away from his classroom, either mentally, emotionally or physically, if we expect him to react as a competent individual in an assignment for which a job description has been filled perfectly. Regardless of how perfect an assignment is, a healthy mental attitude must be maintained by the teacher. Having complete understanding and support of fellow teachers and administrators is of utmost importance.

7. The individual staff also has a responsibility for helping the teacher recognize that his assignment is an important one and for assuring him that he has been carefully selected to fill a specific assignment. This can best be done by lending helping hands and giving a pat on the back for significant contributions in the classroom, on the playground, after school, or wherever such incidents occur.

8. Finally, the school must be constantly concerned with practical personnel policies and in-service programs that are directed toward human variability. This can best be done by carefully utilizing the many personal attributes of staff members. Teachers may be used in committee leadership positions, team leadership positions, and as resource people for other schools in a given community where the individual's talent is required.

One excellent method of making the variable resources of new teachers usable and available is to develop a list of the new teachers, their preparation, experience, background and any special assignments or services they might previously have rendered. By having this list made available system-

and community-wide, teachers may be used to a tremendous advantage by a given school system to bring depth and breadth to faculty meetings, PTA meetings, in-service programs, and various and sundry meetings held throughout the school system and community. This recognition is important to individuals and helps to develop personnel for leadership positions in the future.

9. Staffing for variability cannot be concerned alone with the selection of teachers. Such a discussion would be worthless unless we gave consideration to the selection of personnel who work in supervisory, consultative or administrative positions. It is imperative that carefully developed job descriptions be written for positions such as these, and that very careful selection procedures be used involving teachers as well as others of the professional staff in filling these vacancies. If the administrative staff, beginning with the superintendent, is not concerned with the attitude of individualizing staff placement, then little can be accomplished in relation to all of the points listed within the body of this article.

The cost for such a program as outlined may seem great, but the dividends returned through better instructional procedures and, in turn, better motivated children, will offset any costs involved.

Whatever can be done to make the teacher the best teacher for a "described position" in that community or school must have been done. Schools cannot afford to become so large that their teacher selection becomes impersonal and their staffing for variability becomes a forgotten practice. 3

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