Micro Resource Units Aid Substitute Teachers

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THE New Orleans Public School System, New Orleans, Louisiana, during the summer and fall of the 1969-70 school year conducted a special program. The purpose of this program was to create a corps of well-prepared day-by-day elementary grade substitute teachers for the public school system. This particular project was carried out under Title V, B2, of the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA); however, the basic ideas and modes of work used here could be adapted to other schools.

In New Orleans a one-month summer institute was held to initiate the plan for 41 substitute teachers. The participants in the program were assured of daily employment either as teachers, assistants to teachers, or office workers. The substitute teachers had to agree to accept assignments every day they were physically able to work. The substitutes who completed the month of intensive training became members of the "Relief Teacher Corps." The title "Relief Teacher" distinguishes them from substitute teachers who have not had this special involvement.

A common vehicle of teaching in the elementary school is the unit approach. The coordinator of the project originated the term "micro resource unit." All persons participating in the project understood that they would be expected to develop a unit of study. This micro unit approach means that the Relief Teachers have prepared and are well versed in a major topic, theme, or problem for development in the classroom. The micro units offered significant instruction for one to several days or longer if the situation should require it. Since the Relief Teacher's length of service in a particular classroom is limited, the term "micro resource unit" more appropriately describes the preparation required of Relief Teachers. The Relief Teachers also agreed to prepare visual displays in the form of kits which they would carry with them wherever they were assigned.

The Relief Teachers are expected to use the regular classroom teacher's plans if they are available. The micro resource units and kits were incorporated in Relief Teachers' instruction for the following purposes: (a) days when no plans were available, (b) occasions when books or supplies were not available to carry out the regular teacher's plans, (c) time when the regular teacher's plans were not sufficient or clear enough, and (d) as enrichment teaching.

Advance Planning

The Relief Teacher Training Institute dealt with a core of topics and problems which should aid the Relief Teachers in achieving greater teaching success. The Relief Teachers met with administrative,

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supervisory, guidance, and teaching personnel. During the four-week institute period, the Relief Teachers learned to develop rationales for curriculum and materials in the enrichment of language arts, science, mathematics, social studies, and the arts. The study of children of elementary age was emphasized in addition to areas of curriculum. Relief Teachers studied grade level concepts and understandings of children so that the proper approaches and materials would be employed for the various elementary grades. The aids and materials used in the resource units were designed in variation to meet the learning needs of the lower and upper elementary grades.

Relief Teachers are faced with groups of students whose needs and backgrounds are not known. Advance planning by the use of micro resource units gives Relief Teachers added confidence in approaching new classes, makes their teaching more dynamic, and makes the learning experiences more valuable to the students.

How do Relief Teachers identify and select significant micro resource units of study? The answer to this question is relative to the conditions under which the teacher is employed—mainly age-grade level. The following criteria should provide some direction for such selection:

1. Is the topic, theme, or problem appropriate to the development of micro resource units?
   a. Is the range of instruction sufficient to meet the varying abilities of children in different schools and communities?
   b. Will the teaching and learning result in possible new and expanded interests on the part of the pupils?

2. Does the topic, theme, or problem touch the lives of the sophisticated children of today?
   a. Is the material to be presented current and relevant?
   b. What will be the impact of the teaching and learning on the child?

3. Is the topic, theme, or problem intellectually challenging to the children?
   a. Will it stimulate critical or creative thinking?
   b. Will it open opportunities for formulating ideas and making generalizations?

Micro resource units included the following elements: statement of purpose related to a central topic, theme, or problem; an initiation; outline of content or subject matter basic to the area of study; direct and related experiences; summarizing experiences; evaluation; and a collection of instructional resources including appropriate teaching aids and materials to accompany the units.

The Relief Teachers are now teaching their units in grades one through six. The following list provides an indication of the micro resource unit curricular area selections by Relief Teachers and the topics of their micro resource units: Science, "Inventions"; Social Studies, "Economics and Money Exchange"; Health and Safety, "Prevention of Accidents"; Language Arts, "Communication by Written Language"; "Music, Sing Along."

During the first semester of the 1969-70 school year, Relief Teachers had the advantage of being guided in their work with constructive criticism by the coordinator of the program and by elementary school principals where the Relief Teachers were employed.

At mid-year evaluation, Relief Teachers and principals on the whole reported the program successful. Relief Teachers are employing the units 1.5 days out of a five-day work week. On these days the Relief Teachers are relying on their units and kits approximately 50 percent of the time. Motivation and interest in learning were observed and reported to be very high in children when the micro resource unit was being employed as the instructional guide.