

What About Team Teaching?

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AMERICANS have always had a love affair with panacea pills for society's ills. Witness mandatory public school attendance, social welfare legislation, or even "the bomb" to stop all wars. Is it little wonder, then, that education should try to design its own panacea pills? One such pill may be team teaching. The questions at hand are: What is team teaching? How effective is it? Is it a cure-all for educators?

Toward a Definition of Team Teaching

Team teaching has meant different things to different people. Hillson and Hyman (1971) report that the term lacks a precise definition which is widely accepted. Although this may be true, the concept of team teaching has worked successfully for a long time, as exemplified by the coaching staffs of athletic teams and management training staffs for business and corporations. It would serve our purposes well to investigate several definitions of team teaching.

In a recent book (Vars, 1969), Tompkins discusses team teaching especially as it relates to the core curriculum. His broad definition of team teaching claims that it:

... means giving two or more teachers joint responsibility for the education of a group of pupils larger than what is generally considered a normal class size. Inherent in this concept is

the idea that there will be some type of differentiation in the functions of the various teachers, either as to subject matter specialization or methodology (p. 73).

Tompkins goes on to say that team teaching allows for new opportunities for teacher participation in cooperative planning, pupil placement, and instructional methodology. He emphasizes that the student group size and time arrangements may fluctuate according to the learning task, while at the same time not neglecting the importance of recognizing different competencies possessed by teachers on a team. He carefully avoids inclusion of such non-team teaching instances as two or more teachers rotating the instruction of a large group of students (called "turn teaching") and situations whereby one teacher gives a presentation to another teacher's class. It is important to note that Tompkins discusses many elements of team teaching that are implied but not stated in his definition.

A similar type of general definition of team teaching is given by Shaplin and Olds (1964). They state that:

Team teaching is a type of instructional organization, involving teaching personnel and the students assigned to them, in which two or

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more teachers are given responsibility, working together, for all or a significant part of the instruction of the same group of students (p. 15).

Shaplin and Olds neglect to include the team teaching feature of being able to organize students into groups of various sizes according to achievement, ability, and/or interests. On this issue, the authors opted to describe such possible organizational patterns but not include them in the definition. Moreover, they also avoid the inclusion of differentiated teacher roles within the team, the use of paraprofessionals on the team, the possible improvement of supervisory arrangements in teaching, and, finally, the use of new educational technology devices in teaching. These were analyzed but not incorporated in the definition as cited. Reasons given for not including those components included the fact that the wide diversity of team teaching experiments under way prohibits a concise analysis and that many experiments encourage unique elements in their situations that others lack. My own analysis reveals that the early publishing data may have been the cause of the hesitancy to delineate the components of team teaching in greater detail.

Olson's (1967) article on team teaching in Hillson and Hyman's (1971) book on change and innovation in public school systems is a report of the belief that team teaching may not be worth the time and effort. In this sober discussion of the situation, he defines team teaching as:

... an instructional situation where two or more teachers possessing complementary teaching skills cooperatively plan and implement the instruction for a single group of students using flexible scheduling and grouping techniques to meet the particular instructional needs of students (p. 16).

This definition is seen as an improvement over the others cited, principally due to its inclusion of more components of team teaching. Note Olson's components of cooperative planning of curriculum and instruction and the flexible grouping and scheduling techniques. Thus, his definition is more useful because it is more precise.

Given the fact that the preceding definitions of team teaching are too general to be useful, the question remains: "Can we precisely define team teaching?" I think so. The definition offered by Trump (1968) is seen as the best of many. He says that:

The term "team teaching" applies to an arrangement in which two or more teachers and their assistants, taking advantage of their respective competencies, plan, instruct, and evaluate in one or more subject areas a group of elementary or secondary students equivalent in size to two or more conventional classes, using a variety of technical aids to teaching and learning through large group instruction, small group discussions, and independent study (p. 318).

Trump's definition of team teaching is the most complete one offered. While the other authors mention some of the important aspects in the definition and then write about other important aspects further along in their books, Trump says it all in his definition. His inclusion of the term "assistants" is unique and vital to the team teaching concept. In fact, team teaching had its start with innovative approaches to utilize better the time and talent of professional educators, which included attempts at training paraprofessionals to carry on various nonprofessional chores.

The inclusion of large group instruction, small group discussions, and independent study is another vital segment of team teaching situations. Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, and Johansen (1969) agree with Trump on these components and offer guidelines for their use so that a variety of learning experiences can be provided the learners. They recommend that the students spend 40 percent of their time in large group instruction, 30 percent in small group discussions, and the remaining 30 percent in independent study. Through the use of flexible modular scheduling, these percentages of time can be worked into a viable school day schedule.

Johnson *et al.* (1969) also discuss two general methods of organizing the teaching team: hierarchical and collegial or equalitarian. They feel that, in order to be consistent with the aims and goals of the total school program, the use of the collegial or

equalitarian method with no formal organization of the team and, thus, sharing the leadership duties will provide the best possible instructional program. Such a procedure is in line with the philosophy of providing cooperative opportunities for the teaching staff which in turn offers the students a good model to see in action.

What Research Says

Research studies on the effects of team teaching at the secondary school level show interesting results. Zweibelson, Bahnmueller, and Lyman (1965) reported on a study of ninth grade social studies classes. Their report showed no significant difference in the achievement test scores between the team-taught and the traditionally-taught students; but they did find significant changes in attitudes regarding the school, teachers, and social studies itself. The team-taught group showed better attitudes, as defined by the researchers, at the conclusion of the study.

These findings are supported by a study done by Gamsky (1970). The purpose of this effort was to examine the effects of team teaching on achievement and selected attitudes of ninth grade students in English and world history after one year. The study showed that the team teaching approach, while not enhancing significant achievement test score gains after the one-year period, did have a significant impact on student attitudes toward teachers, interest in subject matter, sense of personal freedom, and self-reliance.

Different results were reported in research involving health classes (Schlaadt,

1969). Here the aim was to compare the effectiveness of team teaching and traditional teaching methods in increasing the health knowledge of 114 sophomore high school students. Several groups were analyzed, mostly classified by sex and mental ability as measured by a standard IQ test. The researcher reports that although the team-taught groups showed a greater increase in health knowledge when compared to the traditionally-taught groups, only the students identified as being of superior mental ability showed a statistically significant gain. Schlaadt concluded that the team teaching method was as effective as the traditional method for increasing health knowledge of sophomore students.

More significant results were reported by Georgiades and Bjelke (1971) in a study involving team teaching in a ninth grade, three-period English class. Here the team-taught groups showed significant achievement gains on several instruments when compared to the traditionally-taught groups. In addition, significant gains were made by high IQ students when compared with low IQ students, and significant gains were reported for girls involved in the study when compared with boys (pp. 146-47).

As mentioned earlier, some educational innovations are closely allied. Such is the case of team teaching and flexible modular scheduling. By using flexible modular scheduling techniques in preparing schedules for teachers, students, and facilities, the utilization of the team teaching concept may be implemented. The effective use of large group instruction, small group discussions,

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and independent study demands such flexibility. The main purpose of the modular schedule is to give teaching teams and students much freedom in the use of their time, the school's facilities, the size of groups, as well as the subject matter (Trump, 1968). In other words, as the school system moves toward individualized instruction in all subject areas, flexible modular schedules are seen as one more aid in achieving this goal.

Hopefully, the flexible modular scheduling approach will benefit the staff and students equally well. Saccani (1970), reporting a study of the effects of modular scheduling on the achievement test scores of ninth grade algebra students, showed that the experimental group using the modular schedule achieved as well as the control group using the traditional schedule. What is important though, in this study, is the fact that the modular schedule involved 225 minutes of class time per week, while the traditional schedule of class time was 250 minutes. Thus, a saving of 25 minutes per week of student's and teacher's time was realized. This time could be used for various activities, such as teacher preparation or individual student help.

Obviously team teaching is not a panacea pill for all of education's ills. The evidence points to the fact that significant gain in achievement test scores is not team teaching's main advantage. On this important issue, Georgiades (1968) concludes that "Greatly improved student performance as measured by standardized achievement tests is *not* the most important objective of team teaching. Teaching basic methods of inquiry and cultivating a desire to learn are much more significant" (italics in original, p. 342). We can conclude, then, that when team teaching is implemented in schools, as a *vital segment* of a larger program of curriculum innovations including flexible modular scheduling and differentiated staffing, there is a good chance that positive results will be obtained, especially in the affective domain, as has been pointed out in this article. For these reasons, schools should attempt to implement curricula through the use of teaching teams.

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