

# THE MULTIUNIT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

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*In the multiunit elementary school, several factors can influence the effectiveness of the instructional leader's role. Indicated here are some of these key factors.*

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**W**ITHIN a traditionally organized elementary school, teachers work relatively independently of each other with self-contained groups of 25-30 students. Here the principal exercises instructional leadership in a number of settings including: one-to-one interaction with individual teachers; schoolwide faculty meetings; grade level meetings; curriculum council meetings; and specialized committee meetings. The impact of the principal's leadership performance on the instructional program can be viewed as the by-product of the principal's successful attempts in these settings to influence the nature of the instructional process.

The traditionally organized elementary school provides limited opportunities, however, for principals to exercise instructional leadership with teacher work groups on a systematic and continuous basis. Also, little opportunity is provided for teachers to formally share an instructional leadership role with the principal or for peer interaction and

cooperation among teachers to occur. For example, formal leadership roles for teachers are limited to chairing ad hoc committees and peer interaction and cooperation take place periodically in faculty and committee meetings and informal discussions in the faculty room.

## Multiunit Organizational Design

The Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning and the Institute for Development of Educational Activities have developed the Multiunit School (MUS) as an organizational framework to facilitate the adoption of Individually Guided Education (IGE). Presently, about 2000 elementary schools across the nation are implementing the MUS-IGE model.

The prototypic organizational design for a MUS of 600 elementary students consists of interlocking decision-making groups at instructional and administrative levels (see Figure 1). At the instructional level there are four Units, each with a unit leader—who also serves as a teacher—four classroom

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teachers and two paraprofessionals. The Units are responsible for the planning, delivery, coordination, evaluation, and improvement of instructional services for a common student group. The four Units are linked together at the administrative level through an Instructional Improvement Committee (IIC), which consists of the principal as chairperson and four unit leaders. The IIC has responsibility for planning, coordination, evaluation, and improvement of instruction on a schoolwide basis.

## A Changed Leadership Situation

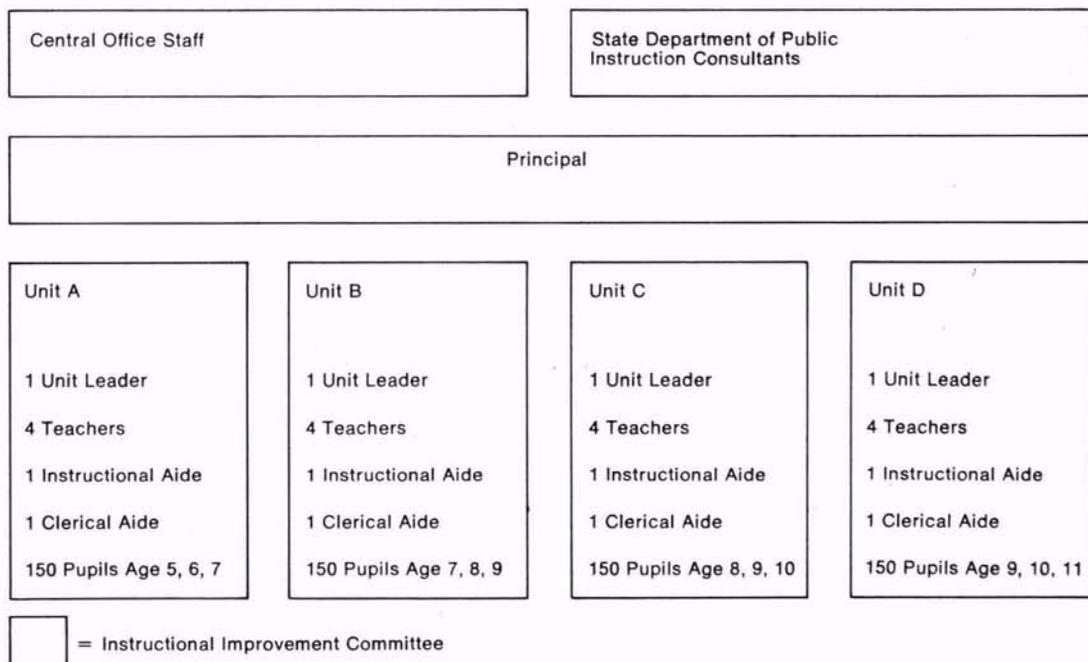
The MUS model has been described by its designers as "an invention of organizational arrangements that have emerged since 1965 from a synthesis of theory and practice regarding instructional programming for individual students, horizontal and vertical organization for instruction, role differentiation, shared decision making by groups, open

communication and administrative and instructional accountability."<sup>1</sup>

It is readily apparent that the MUS organizational design creates a new setting for principals and teachers to exercise instructional leadership and for teachers to interact with their peer group around the central concern of the school, instruction.

Fundamental changes in the leadership situation are presented by the MUS model. First, instructional services are delivered by continuous face-to-face decision-making groups which are influenced by formal leadership roles which are shared between the principal and unit leaders. Second, students' educational performance is linked to the coordinated instructional role performance of interdependent Unit members as compared

<sup>1</sup> Herbert J. Klausmeier *et al.* *Individually Guided Education and the Multiunit Elementary School: Guidelines for Implementation*. Madison: Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning, 1971. p. 4.



Source: *Individually Guided Education—Principal's Handbook*. An I/D/E/A/ In-service Training Program, 1971.

Figure 1. Organization of Multiunit School with 600 Pupils

to the independent performances of individual teachers in a traditional setting. Therefore, in order for instructional roles to be effectively performed, a high degree of interdependence, cooperation, communication, and coordination within and between Units is required.

## Leadership Effectiveness in a MUS Setting

The criteria for effectiveness as an instructional leader in a MUS setting is largely group centered—leadership effectiveness is measured by the results achieved by the group being led. Thus, principal and unit leader effectiveness as instructional leaders is determined by IIC and Unit results in terms of the number of, quality of, and efficiency in accomplishing instructional tasks.

With this concept of leadership effectiveness in mind, there are certain factors which principals and unit leaders should consider as they exercise their instructional leadership role within a MUS setting.

1. Task Structure—Small group research has shown that there is potential for greater group productivity when the group's task is specific and unambiguous.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, clear specification of the tasks to be performed by the IIC and Units is likely to positively influence group performance.

2. Leader-Member Relations—Research has also shown that where principals and unit leaders are liked, trusted, and supported by IIC and Unit members, IICs and Units are rated as being more productive.<sup>3</sup> Thus an important factor to consider in the selection and staff development of principals and unit leaders is their potential to establish positive leader-member relations through acquisition

<sup>2</sup> Fred E. Fiedler. *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony L. Singe. "A Study of the Relationship Between Work Group Performance and Leader Motivation, Leader Behavior, and Situational Favorableness: An Application of the Contingency Theory of Leadership Effectiveness to Group Supervision in Multiunit Elementary Schools." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1974.

of both human relations skills and technical competencies to do the job.

3. Shared Influence—As vertical and horizontal channels of influence are created within and between instructional and administrative levels of operation, principals, unit leaders, and teachers must accept and encourage mutual influence in arriving at decisions concerning the "what, how, where, when, by whom, and to whom" aspects of instruction. The one study that has examined this factor showed that where IICs and Units rated themselves as having a high degree of shared influence they were rated by supervisors as being more productive.<sup>4</sup>

4. Team Behavior—Since the accomplishment of IIC and Unit tasks requires a high degree of interdependence, coordination, and creative problem solving, it is essential that IIC and Unit members exhibit a high degree of common goal commitment, sharing, open communication, cooperation, peer support, decision involvement, and interpersonal compatibility. The studies that have examined these factors in MUS settings<sup>5</sup> and other settings<sup>6</sup> have found that

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Rensis Likert. *The Human Organization: Its Management and Value*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968.



Instructional leadership is exercised in a group situation in a MUS organization.

these factors are positively related to work group performance.

5. **Leader Behavior**—Principals and unit leaders must be able to exhibit behavior which emphasizes goal accomplishment; establishes methods of procedure, patterns of organization and communication; delineates relationships with and between team members; shows support, mutual trust, and warmth in relationships; and is receptive to team members' ideas. Studies have shown that these leader behaviors are related to work group performance in MUS<sup>7</sup> and other settings.<sup>8</sup>

### **Implications for Leadership Performance**

In performing instructional leadership responsibilities, principals and unit leaders should attempt to apply these concepts to their leadership situation. In addition, key areas of responsibility for instructional leadership should be identified and leadership performances of principals and unit leaders stated in terms of IIC and Unit task accomplishment. This is in keeping with the definition presented for leadership effectiveness. Presented here are eight key areas of instructional leadership based upon McIntyre's classification,<sup>9</sup> with illustrative leadership performances that can be used to guide discussions concerning the performance of principals and unit leaders as instructional leaders.

<sup>7</sup> Singe, *op. cit.*, and Kenneth B. Smith. *An Analysis of the Relationship Between Effectiveness of the Multiunit Elementary School's Instructional Improvement Committee and Interpersonal and Leader Behaviors*. Technical Report 230. Madison: Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning, 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Likert, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth E. McIntyre. "Administering and Improving the Instructional Program." In: Jack E. Culbertson, Curtis Henson, and Rich Morrison, editors. *Performance Objectives for School Principals*. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1974.

### **Development of School Goals and Objectives**

—The principal and unit leaders lead the IIC and Units respectively in identifying student needs related to school system goals and objectives and in establishing goals and objectives that are unique to the school unit.

—The principal and unit leaders articulate school goals and objectives to the Units, and unit leaders lead the Unit in specifying performance and process objectives for student groups under each school goal.

—The principal leads the IIC in reviewing objectives developed by each Unit, recommends modifications to eliminate gaps, duplication, and problems related to sequence, and approves a final plan for each Unit.

—The Unit leaders consult with unit members to establish personal performance objectives which are reviewed and approved by the principal.

—The Unit leaders lead the Unit in the development and implementation of instructional programs to accomplish Unit objectives.

### **Allocation of Staff Personnel**

—The principal leads the IIC in defining job requirements for each position in each Unit in terms of the instructional competencies needed to accomplish Unit objectives.

—The principal selects and assigns new staff or reassigns current staff to Unit positions so that needed instructional competencies will be optimized and balanced within and between Units, and interpersonal compatibility between members and with unit leaders is maintained.

—The principal recommends staff members for retention, promotion, or dismissal based upon evidence of competencies in contributing to the accomplishment of school, Unit, and personal objectives.

—The unit leader leads the Unit in the assignment of instructional responsibilities to staff which will optimize meeting individual and common student instructional needs.

### **Allocation of Time and Space**

—The principal leads the IIC in assessing changing needs of the Units for instructional time and space and develops a schedule that allocates time and space to optimize accomplishment of Unit objectives.

—The principal and unit leaders lead the IIC and Units respectively in the assignment of students to Units.

—The Unit leaders lead the Unit in the assignment of space and time for the instruction of students which will accommodate individual and common student instructional needs.

### **Development and Utilization of Materials, Equipment, and Facilities**

—The principal and unit leaders lead the IIC and Units respectively in assessing changing needs for materials, equipment, and facilities in light of expected instructional outcomes and areas of student performance in need of improvement and the principal incorporates these needs into annual budget requests for the school.

—The unit leaders lead the Units in the production of needed instructional materials which are not available commercially.

### **Coordination of Support Services**

—The principal leads the IIC in organizing and maintaining a system to coordinate instructional and non-instructional support services in the accomplishment of school and Unit objectives.

—The unit leaders involve support personnel in Unit problem solving sessions and develop strategies to remove constraints on student performance.

### **Development of School-Community Relations**

—The principal establishes and maintains communication with the community to assess educational needs, set educational goals, and identify perceived gaps in educational programming and reports the findings to staff and incorporates them in educational planning for the school.

—The principal leads the IIC and Units in developing community understanding and support of the school's instructional programs, and reports both problems and achievements concerning accomplishment of school goals and objectives.

—The principal and unit leaders lead the IIC and Units respectively in developing and maintaining adequate procedures for reporting students' progress to parents.

### **Development of In-Service Training Programs**

—The principal leads the IIC in establishing and implementing an in-service training program for staff which is based on an assessment of staff development needs which are related to accomplishing school, Unit, and personal objectives.

—The unit leaders advise and involve unit members in participating in in-service training offerings available through the district, internal sources, or sessions conducted by the principal, unit leaders, or other staff members.

### **Evaluation of Processes and Products of Instruction**

—The principal collects, organizes, analyzes, interprets, and reports data to unit leaders and teachers on their individual performances related to accomplishing Unit and personal objectives.

—The principal and unit leaders conduct self-evaluation sessions with the IIC and Units respectively to evaluate team effectiveness in accomplishing goals and objectives.

—The principal and unit leaders write schoolwide and Unit end-of-year evaluation reports describing both problems and achievements in accomplishing objectives.

With a clearer understanding of the instructional leadership role, factors that influence the leadership situation, and targets for leadership performance, those charged with instructional leadership responsibilities should be in a better position to have a positive impact on instructional programs in schools. □

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