Philip Lambert

Team Teaching for the Elementary School

What occurs when two or more teachers have responsibility for a group at a given time?

AMONG current developments in education, there is one which today is causing interest and excitement, as well as some negative reactions. This development is *team teaching*. Though many experiments with instructional teams have been made in junior high and high schools, the team teaching plan seems to have equal if not greater relevance to the needs and objectives of the elementary school.

The basic principle behind team teaching is not new, but older than formal education itself. The family unit, made up of many cooperatng members—parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, older brothers and sisters—was in the teaching business long before the first school was built. Today, children continue to learn basic skills from the members of their families most interested or best qualified to teach them. Team instruction, too, is based upon the idea that every teacher excels in some, but not all, of the abilities and techniques that are necessary for the education of a single child. Ideally, these special abilities should be used to the fullest extent, so that each child will get the best possible education his school can offer in every area.

The present system of elementary school organization, however, attempts to give every teacher the same number of pupils, the same time schedule and curriculum, and the same responsibility, regardless of his or her special training, experience, skill, or capacity for taking responsibility. In addition, many elementary school teachers are overwhelmed with nonprofessional duties. Up to 40 percent of their time is spent in keeping attendance, collecting milk money, typing stencils, correcting routine tests, supervising playground and lunchroom activities, etc. Although most elementary teachers are sold on the educational importance of these tasks, actually how educational are they? This use of professional personnel for routine work that could be done at far lower cost by a secretary or a student aide is a waste of our limited teaching resources. It is as if qualified doctors were required by law to spend from two to three hours a day taking temperatures, filling in charts, and sending out bills.

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In its simplest form, team teaching occurs whenever more than one teacher have responsibility for the same group of children at a given time—for example, whenever a certified teacher is assisted by a student teacher. In a more complex form the instructional team is a group of teachers of different experience and abilities aided by various nonprofessionals. The team may have from three to six or more members and be responsible for an elementary school class of as many as 150 or more children. The class may be all of the same grade level or of varying grade levels.

There is no typical instructional team. Let us look, however, at one team that might be assigned to a class of about 125 children ranging in age from five to eight years. At its head is the team chairman—an outstanding and experienced teacher who, let us say, is especially strong in the fields of language arts and social studies. He is assisted by two other fully licensed teachers: one has had several years of experience and some special preparation in the teaching of primary math and science, while the other, who has just received his credentials, is especially interested in arts and crafts. There are also two teaching interns who are completing their college or university preparation, and an instructional secretary, perhaps a mother, who serves as a part-time teachers' aide. The salaries of these last three staff members added together come to less than that of two fully qualified teachers. Since the team chairman receives an increased salary in recognition of his special responsibilities, the cost of the whole team is approximately the same as that of the teachers who would have been assigned to the same number of children under the present system.

Team teaching should not be confused with the departmentalized plan in which each teacher is responsible primarily for one subject area. The members of an instructional team, though they are all specially competent in certain areas, have their primary responsibility towards all the children in their large class. For example, if one teacher presents a science demonstration to the large class, the other teachers assist the demonstration teacher during the presentation. Therefore, when the groups break down into small work groups, each teacher has heard and participated in the demonstration from the beginning. This enables them to be effective small group leaders.

More than a dozen communities in the country have initiated team teaching in the elementary school. In most instances the experiments are in a developmental stage, and the staff members involved are not ready to evaluate their efforts completely at this time. However, both the Franklin school in Lexington, Massachusetts, in cooperation with Harvard University, and the Washington school in Madison, Wisconsin, in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin, are developing experimental designs to compare team teaching with present methods of teaching. This serious effort is taking place despite the fact that some researchers believe there are too many variables to make it possible to set up a completely valid experimental situation, in which only one aspect of team teaching would be tested at a time.

Preliminary results from the Franklin school have been inconclusive. However, the staff has reported that pupil achievement and adjustment remained the same notwithstanding the unsettled conditions of experimentation. The Washington school has begun a five-year project de-

signed to answer such questions as these: What effect does team teaching have on pupil achievement in the various subject areas? What changes took place in children's perception of authority figures under team teaching conditions?

Informal evaluation seems to show that team teaching works in a variety of situations.

What Problems Are Solved?

Let us look now at some typical everyday problems of elementary education and see how team teaching might help to solve these:

1. Ricky has just had a fight in the play yard; he is now crying uncontrollably in the hall as class begins. What was the fight about? Who started it? What should be done? A few minutes' attention from someone who can learn the answers to these questions and who knows Ricky would probably clear up the matter. But Ricky's teacher cannot leave the rest of the class even for a few minutes. She will have to send him to the principal's office, even though this may make him more disturbed. With an instructional team, someone who is familiar with both the child and the immediate situation is always available to help.

2. Mrs. McKay, a third grade teacher, has been ill off and on for several weeks. What effect will this have on the lives of the children in her class? Under the present system, each time she is absent a substitute will be sent in, and the chances are that each time it will be a different substitute who is completely unfamiliar with the children, the lesson plan, and perhaps even the school building and personnel. She will not know that David has trouble with division, or that Susy will quiet down if she does not sit by Jane. She does not know whose turn it is to take attendance, what to do with the two turtles that have been brought to school, or where the nurse's office is. Probably she will be able to do little more than baby sit with the children until Mrs. McKay is well enough to continue their education.

The team system does away with this problem. In an emergency, any one of the other team members can pitch in and the instructional program can continue unimpeded. If a substitute is assigned to the class, there will always be someone available to answer her questions and tell her whatever she needs to know.

3. Sally just cannot get along with her teacher, Miss Grey. Sally has never been a disciplinary problem before, but she is lively and boisterous, and Miss Grey, though an excellent teacher, is a quiet, reserved kind of person. An experienced principal knows that all teachers cannot work effectively with all children. Should he move Sally to another room? Even if the child is not upset by this change, the principal may have to spend weeks reassuring Miss Grey that it was not her fault that she couldn't help Sally adjust and that she is not a failure as a teacher. If Miss Grey is part of an instructional team, however, this situation need not arise. An ideal teaching team will be made up of teachers with varying personality types, and it should contain someone who will find Sally easy to teach. Others may have special ability when it comes to dealing with the slow child, the shy child, etc.

4. Peter is an exceptionally bright boy who is considerably ahead of most of his classmates academically. However, he is rather small for his age and not unusually mature emotionally. Should he be moved ahead into a class with

larger and older children, or should he stay where he is, with less and less interest in what is going on in class? Under the present system there is seldom any really satisfactory solution. But in the type of team teaching plan in which children of different ages are grouped together, Peter will be able to work at the level of his ability and still continue to play with friends of his own size and age. Even if the class does not include older children, its large size means that it is more likely to contain enough other bright children so that special rapid-progress groups can be set up.

5. Mr. Johnson, one of four sixth grade teachers in a large elementary school, is an enthusiastic amateur scientist and has taken a course in elementary science teaching. Under the present system, only the 30 children who have the luck to be assigned to Mr. Johnson's class each year will be able to profit from his interest and preparation. Team teaching is still too new to have definitely established the best patterns of organization for all content areas. It has been shown, however, that subjects like science and social studies are particularly well suited to large-group teaching and the use of visual aids. In a team teaching setup, Mr. Johnson can make the introductory science presentations to a group of 120 children. He will also be available to help the other members of his team in planning follow-up work for smaller groups.

These are only a few examples of how team teaching might help a school to carry out some of the practical objectives of elementary education. A good team teaching program has other important advantages. It presents exceptional opportunities for the preservice education (and financial support) of undergraduate student teachers and also of students who already hold an A.B. degree but must take certain courses in order to earn a teaching certificate. For the qualified teacher, it provides an opportunity to move ahead in the profession without leaving the classroom where his ability and experience can be of most use. Team teaching also gives staff members a chance to work together on a common task, to share their ideas and their problems. They will be able to see good teaching practices in action and to learn new techniques. Some teachers today tend to look upon supervision as a threat to their autonomy. Perhaps the supervisor is seen as an investigator from outside from whom all problems must be concealed, rather than as someone who can give help in solving problems. In team teaching, the supervisor is regarded as a team member who shares both the work and responsibility.

Are there disadvantages in team teaching? In the beginning, the fears most often expressed were that the children would feel lonely or lost in such big groups, that they would be confused by the continual changing of rooms and teachers, and that they would miss having one person to relate to (or cling to). In practice, these fears have proved to be more or less unfounded.

The real problems of team teaching have centered around such matters as organization, curriculum planning, budgeting, and school architecture. Team teaching is still in an experimental stage today, and setting up a good instructional team requires a great deal of skilled organizational work. Many observers have remarked on the vast amounts of time that are spent in discussion and planning. Though an established team teaching program should cost no more than the present system, getting one started is expensive in terms of money as well as

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provided for any teacher at any grade level. Part One then outlines health instruction for each grade, and Part Two presents detailed health information for teachers and many teaching suggestions. Elaborate resources are identified—books, articles, films, filmstrips, pictures and recordings. There are many suggestions for evaluation and several illustrative test forms.

The guide is a distinctly scholarly work. It is comprehensive and is skillfully organized. It shows good use of color and illustration.

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Team Teaching

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time. New curriculum materials suitable for large-group instruction must be found or created, rooms rearranged and refurnished, audio-visual and clerical aids purchased, etc.[1]

For these reasons, many school systems will move slowly in setting up instructional teams, in spite of all their apparent advantages. Nevertheless, it seems certain that team teaching is going to play a more and more important role in the future of American education. How can it lose, after all, when the children are behind it? Most of the children who have experienced team teaching have been enthusiastic. They seem to adjust quickly to the idea of having several teachers instead of one. They make more friends and join more activities. Most of all, they find school more interesting. With team teaching, the old-fashioned picture of the hopelessly bored child, forced to sit and squirm day after day in a certain seat in a certain room, listening to the droning voice of the same teacher, becomes a thing of the past.

[1] For some recent descriptions of team teaching plans in practice, see: Robert H. Anderson, "Three Examples of Team Teaching in Action," *The Nation's Schools*, 65: 62-67, May 1960; Robert S. Gilchrist, "Promising Practices in Education, II," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1960, p. 269-74; and Liz Wilson, "150 Mittens," *Mark* (Mark Publications, 64 Wall St., Norwalk, Conn.), April 23, 1960, p. 5-8.

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