

Teacher Growth: The Field Services Cluster

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Teacher growth is not a commodity that can be delivered to the public schools on Monday morning. A field services cluster may help make such growth possible.

SOMEWHERE along the way, many teacher education institutions and the public schools stopped communicating. Operating in relative isolation, the two rarely cooperated in a meaningful way to produce teacher growth. Where cooperation has existed, it has usually been tied to the college or university campus. This is true because established professors have been reluctant to move into the field for the period of time necessary for substantial benefits to accrue to the public schools and because no effective vehicle has been developed to take advantage of alternatives. Presented here are a methodology for reopening communications and a model for a cooperative two-way delivery system known as a Field Services Cluster.¹

The Field Services Cluster operates as an ad hoc service vehicle and communications center. It is based on the premise that effective teacher growth and the improvement of education in general must take place in the field, within the milieu of classroom realities where total effort on the part of

university personnel, local teachers, parents, business people, and the community-at-large can be coordinated and maintained. Broadly, the Field Services Cluster has the goals of improving teacher competencies, identifying educational needs of children, testing innovative programs and approaches, and utilizing community resources in instruction. It differs from the Teacher Education Center concept in that it functions intensely on teacher growth and pupil performance at all levels rather than being a technical assistance group as are most Teacher Education Centers. It is a disposable organization, moving from school district to district as needs are identified.

At the close of operations in one community, the cluster disbands and re-forms in another area, somewhat altered by the loss or addition of personnel but maintaining its central thrust and responsibilities. The cluster is composed of three teams: the university team of 20-25 student interns, 3-5 graduate interns (master's and doctoral level), 2 field-based professors, and 2-3 field-centered professors; the community team made up of 20-25 community members (parents, business people, church leaders, and educational personnel) with the persuasive clout to bring about community support for

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the effort; and the school team made up of teachers from various curriculum areas responsible for the over-all coordination of services. The cluster takes a multi-optional, multi-functional approach to teacher growth. It functions as a delivery system for graduate and undergraduate studies, administrative and support services training, staff development, curriculum development, and consultation. The important difference here from past strategies is that the public schools and the community have equal responsibilities for teacher growth.

Of major importance to the operation of the center are the field-based professors. Living in the community and gaining intimate knowledge of local goals and aspirations, these professionals spend approximately one-third of their time in graduate and undergraduate class instruction, non-credit seminars, consultations, and spend the remaining two-thirds directly involved in the teacher's classroom doing demonstration teaching, research, and other staff development activities. Field-based professors in the Bacon County, Georgia, school system which operates a modified Field Services Cluster, contract with teachers for instructional improvement. In a five hour graduate class, the field-based professor agrees to spend three hours per week in the in-service teacher's classroom for every two hours per week

session the teacher spends in the professor's class. In this way, techniques and strategies discussed in class can be immediately implemented in the public school classroom. The field-centered professor spends less time in the cluster because of duties on campus but has similar responsibilities and plays an important role as a communications link between the cluster and campus. One outcome of this approach is that professors are seen as "real people" with some substantial contributions to make to the effort and with the human shortcomings inherent in all of us.

Added Continuity and Depth

Undergraduate and graduate interns add continuity and depth to the program. Teacher education institutions interested in involving interns in such a program might field-train preservice teachers either by creating an alternative teacher preparation program or by allowing students in the regular program to spend their senior year in the field. Necessary undergraduate courses can be offered on-site by the field-based professors, the field-centered professors, doctoral field interns, or through extension work. In either case courses carry resident credit. Before their student teaching assignments in the schools the interns serve as clerical

assistants, teacher aides, tutors, or in other positions while pursuing course requirements in the afternoons and evenings. Graduate interns, especially those at the doctoral level, carry some of the burden for undergraduate instruction while receiving relevant training in the schools. Those interns interested in educational administration might serve in positions from the superintendent's office to the building principal level. Other interns, interested in content area supervision or curriculum positions might train in these offices.



Field-based professors spend the majority of their time in public school classrooms.

Community coordination lies in the hands of the School-Community Council. Members might include local business people, church leaders, teachers, and parents. The council has important responsibilities in three areas: identification of existing community resources and direction for the program, assuring community support, and providing additional funds which can be gathered from local, state, and national agencies. Other responsibilities of the council include providing training facilities and working in liaison with the school team.

Whereas the School-Community Council has overall responsibilities for community coordination of the program, the school team handles the day-to-day operation of the program. It is important to remember that the effectiveness of the program lies in the hands of the teachers to whom services are directed. They identify the educational needs of children and serve as important gauges in the educational climate of target schools. Teachers may be grouped by curriculum areas to facilitate training services or serve on ad hoc committees for special needs. Whatever the design, it is important that they recognize from the beginning that they have responsibility for adding a teacher preservice, in-service training component to regular school functions.

Naturally, funding represents an essen-



The Human Resources Center in Alma, Georgia, houses offices for field-based staff and also provides classroom facilities. Field-based professors agree to spend three hours per week in the in-service teacher's classroom for every two hours per week spent in the professor's class.

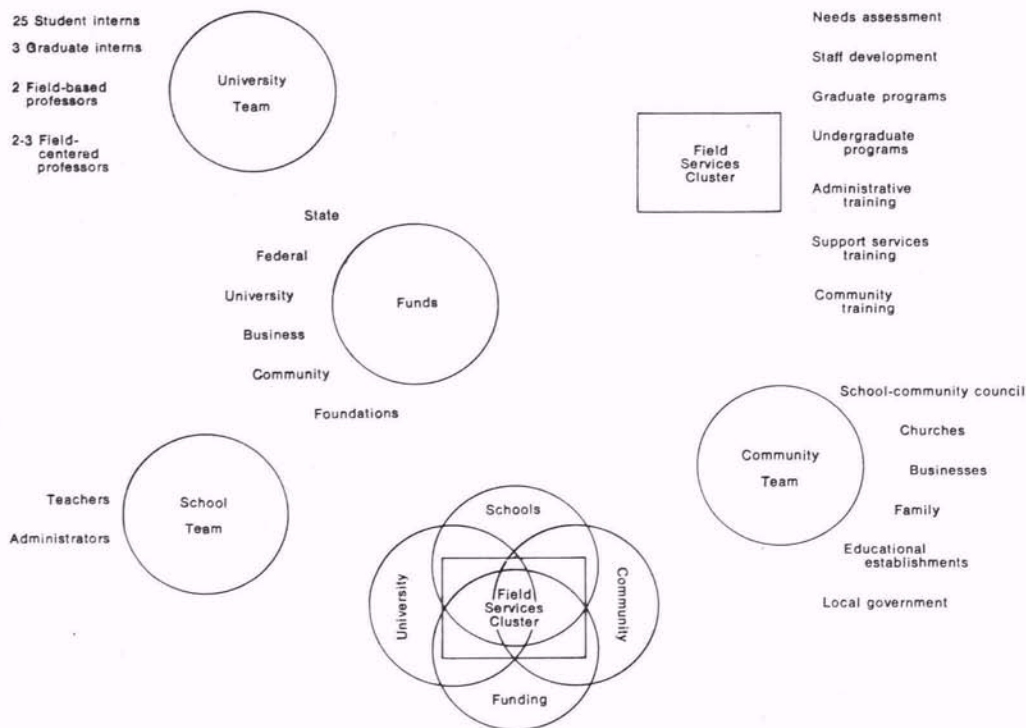


Figure 1. Component Parts of the Model

tial area of concern for anyone contemplating the Field Services Cluster approach to teacher growth. Possible sources include state funds allocated for teacher improvement or retraining, tuition and fees from local in-service programs when plowed back into the Field Services Cluster, federal funds such as Model Cities, Urban-Rural School Development Program (URSDP), corporations, and community business and philanthropic organizations. State legislatures, which have begun to show some appreciation for competency based teacher education and accountability might be approached. There also exists the possibility of arranging a field services consortium composed of several teacher training institutions in a geographical region. Consortia have the advantages of spreading costs, identifying various resources to meet local schools' needs, increasing the

possibility of accountability designs, and adding to the effectiveness of long-range planning. As a service vehicle, the Field Services Cluster spreads responsibility for teacher growth among the important triad of education: university, public school, and community.

The operation of a Field Services Cluster is not an easy task. It requires considerable interpersonal skill on the part of participants to resolve diverse viewpoints and bring about a unified thrust for educational improvement. Teacher growth is not a commodity that can be delivered to the public schools on Monday morning. It requires commitment, the type of commitment that is generated when a school and university work together in a cooperative rather than a superordinate-subordinate relationship. In the process everyone benefits. □

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